

**CHALLENGING THE NATIONAL HISTORY:
COMPETING DISCOURSES ABOUT A CONFERENCE**

By

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Submitted to
Central European University
Nationalism Studies Program

In Partial Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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Budapest, Hungary
2006

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to my supervisor Selim Deringil for his suggestions and criticisms, to Ayse Caglar for giving me the initial inspiration for this thesis and to Vangelis Kechriotis for increasing my interest in nationalism studies. I would also like to express my gratitude to my interviewees for sparing their time and their consideration without which this thesis would not be written the way it is.

A huge thank you is reserved for my family and my friends , those I have met in Budapest, Istanbul and Ankara for believing in me and giving their supports throughout my studies and thesis writing period. Thank you Hulya for bringing me to my senses and helping me to get out of my blue moods, Tomek for the challenging questions and the company during the long nights of studying, both of you for the support and friendship which kept me going. Thank you Nadia for your care, Hilal, Elina, Apostolis, Claudia, Varthan for sharing the dorm life and for the lively conversations and for the nice coffee/tea breaks. Thank you Gizem, Behiye, Dilek for your valuable support from Istanbul; Sezen, Deniz, Ozan and Yaman from Ankara, since all of you have trusted me and helped me in your own ways.

Special thanks to my family; my sister, my father, my uncle and my grandmother for their love.

I am also thankful to those people whose names are not mentioned here, who have helped me to be who I am and thus become the author of this thesis.

Lastly, thank you to those who would like to share their comments about this thesis with me :
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INTRODUCTION

“For nationalists themselves, the role of the past is clear and unproblematic. The nation was always there, indeed it is part of the natural order, even when it was submerged in the hearts of its members. The task of the nationalist is simply to remind his or her compatriots of their glorious past, so that they can recreate and relive those glories.”¹

As Smith points out, from the perspective of the nationalist, history has a vital role to play in terms of providing the necessary link between the past, present and the future of the nation which ‘naturally’ existed from the time immemorial. Thus, history serves as a book of guidance from which the glories of the past of the nation can be derived to tailor the future of the nation or to warn the future generations about the enemies of the nation. Since it is the duty of the nationalist discourse to build this relationship between the past and the present, nationalism offers a framework through which this politicized relationship would be imagined/ interpreted/ invented. Consequently, it is necessary to analyze the narration of the past in relation to its connection to nationalism as a political doctrine which brings the dimension of history writing as nation building.

This dimension is not only important to explain the emergence of nationalist historiography but also the creation of the foundational myths and taboos one of which has only recently been challenged , in the context of Turkey, by a conference held in September 2005 with the title of ‘Ottoman Armenians during the Decline of the Empire: Issues of Scientific Responsibility and Democracy’². In this respect, an analysis of the discussions regarding this conference, which in itself can be considered as a turning point in ending a taboo, is very important to see the complex relationship of nationalism and history in general and the dynamics

¹Anthony D. Smith. ‘Gastronomy or geology? The role of nationalism in the reconstruction of nations.’ *Nations and Nationalism* 1, no. 1 (1994) p.18

of Turkish nationalism in particular since it has gone far beyond discussing a politicized historical issue and situated in the center of the debates about democratization and statist ideology.

In the Turkish experience, state building and nation building emerge simultaneously starting from the late nineteenth century, reaching its peak with the enthusiastic efforts of the ruling elite after the establishment of the Turkish Republic. In this case this reciprocal relationship between the state and nationalism tends to evolve around the birth of nation-state albeit with different faces under different circumstances. One of these different faces reveals itself in the form of evaluation and narration of the national/official history written under the guidance of the ideology of the state, thus the creation of nationalist ‘master narrative’. In this context Turkish nationalism is a good case study for the idea of constructing a ‘shared history’ which has become one of the common denominators of the state and nation building projects. Thus, this historical discourse in terms of its creation/ reproduction and dissemination is inseparable from the project of nation-state building.

The creation of this ‘master narrative’ has served as a tool for the legitimization of the constant references to ‘external and internal enemies’ that urges the members of the nation to be unity with the state as well as a tool used for the legitimization against the ancient regime of the Ottoman Empire. In this master narrative, Turks as a nation is distinguished by virtue of emphasizing the difference of the Republican period from the Ottoman times ‘along the similar Jacobin lines that the French revolutionaries followed in creating the Frenchmen’.³ It has been part of the social engineering project to create a certain image of the Turk and explain its historical roots.

² ‘İmparatorluğun Son Dönemi’nde Osmanlı Ermenileri: Bilimsel Sorumluluk ve Demokrasi Sorunları’

This master narrative of the Early Republican period is closely related to the foundational myths of the Republic, the influence of which can still be seen in the contemporary discourse of Turkish politics and national historiography. Myths of foundation according to Schöpflin refers to ‘ the implicit , sometimes explicit message, is that afterwards every thing will be different (‘better’) and that the newly founded system has dispensed with whatever made the old reprehensible’⁴ (thus deserved to be blamed). Thus, one of the main themes in the discourse of the Early Republican period in terms of the foundational myths was what is called ‘Sevres syndrome’ by many scholars such as Baskin Oran and Dietrich Jung. It mainly refers to a sense of being besieged and the fear of the plot against Turkey by the external powers for partition/division of Turkey just like the Treaty of Sevres suggested in 1920 which can be summarized by the phrase of ‘they want to divide us’, ‘they’ generally being the Christian West.

In contemporary Turkey, this reference to the secret aims to divide Turkey seems to come into surface at times of either external pressure threatening to change the status quo, the internal discussions about minority rights or contested parts of Turkish national history such as the Armenian issue which refers to the discussions of genocide for the events of 1915. According to Tanıl Bora this recurring theme of Sevres syndrome is a feature of what he calls ‘national conservatism’⁵ but it can be seen as part of the Turkish conservatism in general putting together neo-conservatism, Kemalist conservatism and religious conservatism. Since change in Turkey is generally associated with Westernization, this myth fits in the critical and/or skeptical stances

³ Ayşe Kadioglu. ‘Paradox of Turkish nationalism and the construction of official identity’ in *Turkey: Identity, Democracy, Politics* , Sylvia Kedourie (ed.) (London: Frank Cass,1998) p.189

⁴ George Schöpflin. ‘The Functions of Myth and Taxonomy of Myths’, *Myths and Nationhood*, (London : C. Hurst, 1997)p.33

⁵ Tanıl Bora. *Milliyetçiliğin Kara Baharı* (Dark Spring of Nationalism) (Ankara: Birikim, 1995) p.76

very well. It seems especially true for the periods of crisis in which a form of radical change is on the horizon of public discussion such as integration to European Union.

The reconstruction of the past from the perspective of nationalism to be able to provide an explanation to the problems of the present by using the foundational myths of the nation (like the usage of Sevres syndrome in terms of threat coming form the West to oppose change or explain a crisis in the society) is a very important point to understand the link between history and nationalism in general and the changes in the discourse of Turkish nationalism in particular. The literature on Turkish nationalism starts to focus on the impact of the changing environment, namely globalization and EU, as can be seen from the works of Baskin Oran or Tanil Bora. However, there is very little attention paid to the link between the challenge of EU in terms of change such as the infamous Copenhagen criteria and the challenges of revisionist historiography, both of which started to have an effect on the transformation of the discourse of Turkish nationalism(s). Moreover, in the literature concerning contemporary Turkish nationalism, the analysis of the conference has not been done yet. Therefore, I would like to focus on the relationship between history and nationalism in this new environment and how a taboo about the official national historiography has been challenged by analyzing the discussions about the conference titled ‘Ottoman Armenians during the Decline of the Empire: Issues of Scientific Responsibility and Democracy’ which was held on 24-25 September 2005.

Till then, there has been a monolithic position taken in Turkey with a couple of dissenting voices of Turkish scholars living abroad such as Taner Akçam or Fikret Adanır. It is not wrong to say that any kind of talk about an Armenian genocide has been perceived generally as a threat by the Turkish state and the Turkish society to divide Turkey in line with the ‘Sevres Syndrome’. Since it has been highlighted by the discourses of the politicians, comments in the media and

constant references in the education system (like the classes on history or national security) the reference to the external enemies that try to use an ungrounded historical accusations to weaken the position of Turkey has been taken for granted by the general public.

Further more, from the perspective of the state of Turkey, the ‘sensitivity’ of the issue is also related to the claims of what has been referred in Turkey as 3-T⁶; the recognition [of the genocide], the compensation [for the losses of the Armenians during the events] and the land [referred as Western Armenia, today’s Eastern Turkey] pushed by mainly the Armenian nationalists and the Armenians in the Diaspora. The land claims of the Armenian nationalists, lobbying activities of the Armenian Diaspora and the demand of the Armenian state from Turkey to recognize the events as genocide (resulting in the current situation of closed borders between the two countries) seem to fit in very well to the framework of an external enemy trying to divide Turkey. On the other hand, since the Armenian national identity is very much based on the recognition of the events as genocide⁷, the tendency of the Turkish nationalists to totally disregard the events was also feeding the anti-Turkish sentiments in Armenian nationalism as Halil Berktaş suggests.⁸

Within this overall context, the question of Armenian genocide has become more than a politicized historical debate. Therefore, I will not deal with the historical nature of the events or the specific contents of the discussions of the concept of genocide since I want to put emphasis on contemporary Turkish nationalism and the impact of the conference upon the discussions of democratization in Turkey because the positions taken and the claims made regarding the issue

⁶ (Tanıma, Tazminat ve Toprak) Baskın Oran, interview by Ertugrul Mavioglu, published in the daily newspaper *Radikal*, 14 February 2006

⁷ Rifat Bali. Arus Yumul. Foti Benlisoy. ‘Yahudi, Ermeni ve Rum toplumlarında Milliyetçilik’ *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce-Milliyetçilik* (Political Thought in Modern Turkey-Nationalism) (vol. IV) (Istanbul: İletişim,2000) p.921

⁸ Halil Berktaş, interview by DidemTurkoglu, 20 April 2006, Istanbul

itself and the conference that I focus signifies the changing/unchanging discourses in a political climate in which nationalism plays an important role. Moreover, it can also be argued that the role played by nationalism in this discussion leads to the redefinition of certain aspects of itself. For example, the different sides taken regarding the conference show us an interesting and maybe unintended alliance with a certain branch of Turkish left with the ultra-nationalists in which Euro-skepticism and the anti-imperialism discourse has been formulated in the framework of ‘Sevres Syndrome’ both of which represents a redefinition of Turkish nationalism.

In the examples provided by the representations in the media the lines of opponents and supporters were drawn. On the one side of the discussion there are those supporting the status quo, the fascists, the ‘demagogy block’ while on the other side there are ‘the responsible intellectuals’. In the reverse case, the discussions were presented as the ‘traitors or the so-called intellectuals’ versus ‘defenders of the truth as the loyal members of the nation’, Thus, the discussions about the Armenian issue referred to as “the last taboo” by some of the participants of the conference becomes a symbol of a deeper discussion concerning change in Turkey. It’s not only about challenging the official historical discourse about the events but it’s also about challenging the mentality of a status quo resisting to democratic change. As Vangelis Kechriotis suggests “ It was a conference about the Turkey of today and tomorrow, able to face the past, without neuroses or panic, of the peoples and history it has inherited”⁹

In this regard, another policy decision on the part of the organizers was to restrict the participants to citizens of the Turkish Republic. This position was adopted, not as a deliberate stance to exclude foreign scholars, but more from a sincere conviction on the part of the

⁹ Vangelis Kechriotis. ‘The Jurists, the Laws, and the Outlaws: Thoughts from Turkey on a Conference that Finally Took Place’
(http://www.greekworks.com/content/index.php/weblog/extended/the_jurists_the_laws_and_the_outlaws_thoughts_from_Turkey_on_a_conference_t)

organizers that this was a matter that had to be settled first and foremost at home¹⁰. The decision not to invite the representatives of the Turkish official position later led to a widespread criticism that the conference was “one sided” which will be a recurring theme in the discussion on the media as I will discuss in the third chapter. The position of the organizers in regards to these criticisms was that any academic conference organizing committee is at liberty to invite whom they wish. Another concern regarding the issue of the closeness of the conference to the public in general and the advocates of the official line was the possibility of a disruption or sabotage of the conference which aims to create an atmosphere of dialogue. Nevertheless, although there were a series of security measures taken there were repeated attempts to disrupt the proceedings on the part of provocateurs who had managed to get into the conference venue which proved that these concerns were well-founded.

Having said the background and considering the importance and the dynamics of the discussions regarding the conference, in my thesis, my main focus is firstly, the formation and the reproduction of the nationalist discourse, secondly the dynamics from which this discourse has been driven and finally how it has been contested. To be more specific, my research question composes of three sub-questions:

- 1) why the relation between a specific interpretation of history and nationalism has been constructed
- 2) what kind of an impact it has made about understanding Turkish nationalism in general
- 3) how the recent changes and challenges can be interpreted i.e. emergence of an alternative discourse

¹⁰ Selim Deringil , interview by Didem Turkoglu, 24 April 2006, Istanbul

To answer these questions in my thesis I am having certain assumptions about nationalism. Firstly, following Anderson's argument about the nature of nationalism, history writing is political.¹¹ Secondly, since nationalism is a political ideology as Breuille argues¹², it can be studied as a political discourse. In this discourse the grand narrative of the nation (which would have a hegemonic claim to form the collective memory if we can claim as such) does not need historically validated truths and it also incorporates myths. Thirdly, nation building can be seen as a continuous reinterpretation and reconstruction of the past just like Smith suggests¹³.

In the light of these assumptions I treat 'national history' as part of political discourse of nationalism in which there is a constant process of competition for reinterpretation. In this light I will try to give a special importance of media since the competition of domination would take place there to win the public. The coverage in the media can shed some light to the role played by the historical narrative in the reconstruction and reproduction of a nationalist discourse in different ways. Consequently, I would like to make a thematic discourse analysis of column writers writing in seven prominent newspapers in Turkey so I am going to analyze 127 articles published in these newspapers with a special focus on the last two weeks of May and September 2005. Moreover, to be able to understand the internal dynamics of the discussion I would like to analyze eight in-depth interviews¹⁴ I have conducted with the participants of the conference. In doing so, I want to make a more balanced analysis of the discourses produced which are reflected in the newspapers and in the interviews I have conducted by combining my research on secondary sources.

¹¹ Benedict Anderson, 'Western Nationalism and Eastern Nationalism', *New Left Review*, 9, May-June 2001

¹² John Breuille. *Nationalism and the State*, 2nd ed., (Manchester : Manchester University Press 1994)

¹³ Anthony D. Smith. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1988)

¹⁴ Interviews are conducted with Hrant Dink, Cemil Kocak, Murat Belge, Vangelis Kechriotis, Edhem Eldem, Halil Berktaş, Selim Deringil, Aksin Somel (ordered according to the dates of the interviews)

To be able to explain the formation and reproduction of the nationalist discourse in terms of its understanding of history, the dynamics form which this discourse is driven and the way it has been challenged in the context of the recent discussions in Turkey, I want to take three steps each of which is formed into a chapter. In the first chapter, I combine different theories and interpretations of history-nation relationship with specific reference to the historical context Turkish nationalism. Having provided the necessary background, in the second chapter I discuss how the official history has been challenged in the example of the conference by analyzing the setting and the position of the conference in the creation of an alternative discourse while taking previously invented national myths and created and contested ‘collective memory’ into account. Finally, in the third chapter in light of my arguments in the previous chapters I analyze the discourses of the column writers as examples of reproduction of the discourses.

CHAPTER 1

TURKISH NATIONALISM AND HISTORY WRITING

Historical Context and Theoretical Framework

Benedict Anderson points out the relationship of nationalism with the construction of the past with an interesting example. When our parents show us the photographs of our babyhood we believe in them although we do not have the memory of them. In the same way, although there are the traces of the past around us like monuments, written records etc., the past is external to us since we do not have a personal memory of it. Still, we need them as a source of anchor (most probably offered by the nationalist history lessons); in his words “this means that our relationship to the past is today far more political, ideological, contested, fragmentary and even opportunistic than in ages gone by.”¹⁵ Our relationship with the past in this context is a part of imagining our community of nation. To be able to understand the how this imagination has taken place in the case of Turkey and how it affects the contemporary link between nationalism and history , it is necessary to provide the historical framework. Consequently, in this chapter I will discuss the historical context of Turkish nationalism and national historiography from the theoretical perspectives of nation-building and myth-making.

Turkish nationalism emerged under the realm of the Ottoman Empire under the guidance of the intellectuals who were somewhat attached to the state structure either as the opposing elites or the ruling elites. Although the nationalist discourse was formulated as a reaction to the changing socio-political situation in the surrounding environment, Turkish nationalism had also been considered as a defensive political option for the survival of the state to ensure the loyalty of the population in the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, in this case it can be argued that the state

¹⁵ Benedict Anderson, ‘Western Nationalism and Eastern Nationalism’, *New Left Review* , 9, May-June 2001, p.38

(not the nation-state) predates the nation and has been an important factor in the formulation of nationalism.(On the other hand the creation of a nation-state and the corresponding ‘nation’ would take place simultaneously after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey.)

The intellectuals of the late Ottoman period such as Ziya Gökalp and Yusuf Akçura have played important roles in the formulation of the Turkish nationalism , especially one of its braches, Turkism. The survival of the state in Gökalp’s point of view was directly linked to Turkism, Islamism and Modernism/Westernization which are very much compatible to each other. Niyazi Berkes refers the basic premises of his perspective ‘As the ultimate reality of contemporary society is the nation, and as national ideals are ultimate forces orienting the behavior of the individuals, so the most urgent task for the Turks consisted of awakening as a nation in order to adapt themselves to the conditions of contemporary civilization’¹⁶.

In this respect, there are two important aspects of the heritage that should be taken into account. In the Early Republican period, the idea of the primacy of the state which would be coupled with the statism of 1930s and the position of the elites as the guardians of the state who were perceived as the ones to introduce the necessary means to ensure its survival. Starting from the late Ottoman period order and progress were considered necessary for the survival of the state. Consequently, what Akman calls the ‘catching up’ with the West in which ‘the state’s traditional role as the guardian of a perennial and just social order waned during the

¹⁶ Niyazi Berkes (ed.), *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization: Selected Essays of Ziya Gokalp* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1959), p.20. cited in Ayse Kadioglu, "The Paradox of Turkish Nationalism and the Construction of Official Identity," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 32, no. 2 (April 1996)

modernization era, its centrality was renewed as the agent of order-in-progress¹⁷ has been highlighted even more so as to the central driving motive and legitimization

The birth of the modern state cannot be considered as the natural outcome of the war of independence. Şerif Mardin points out the existence of two different groups within the resistance movement: one of them being Muslim and provincial and the other secular and centralist movement, as he puts it. “The representatives of towns and provinces were, by and large, fighting to repel the infidel, the secular officers and bureaucrats to vanquish the invader and create a new Turkey.”¹⁸ The creation of this new state was in a sense closely related to the creation of the new nation by defining and enforcing the idea of the Turkish nation destroying the previous loyalties. The introduction of the idea of the citizenship together with the idea of membership to the ‘nation’ paved the way to redefine the relationship between the state and the society, the first signals of which were given in the last decades of the Ottoman Empire.

However, “if ‘Turkishness’ was to be made the base of the new, Kemalist nationalism, an explanation had to be provided of who the Turks were, from whither they came, and in what sense they showed a cultural unity”¹⁹ At this point, the agenda set by the ruling elites who were legitimizing the political power they have been using through the discourse of nationalism, would create and use the institutions of the state to spread the ideology to larger masses. The policies employed to create the ‘cultural unity’ can be exemplified in two important dimensions: national history and the national language. The choices made in both of the areas highlight the idea of modernization by creating new links between the ‘nation’ and the ‘state’. In highlighting

¹⁷ Ayhan Akman, ‘Modernist nationalism: statism and national identity in Turkey’, *Nationalities Papers* vol.32, no.1, march 2004 p.34

¹⁸ Şerif Mardin, . ‘Patriotism and Nationalism in Turkey’, in *Nationality, Patriotism and Nationalism in Liberal Democratic Societies*, Roger Michener (ed.). St.Paul: Paragon House, 1993, p.214

¹⁹ *ibid*, p.215

Akman's words again, 'nationalism was a means to achieve modernization; modernization was a means to save the state'.²⁰

Consequently, different understandings of Turkish nationalism interpret the Ottoman heritage in quite different ways according to the requirements of 'present' and the perceived future. Büşra Ersanlı²¹ looking at the 'official history' of the Kemalist era shows how search for legitimization can affect history writing. This search brings the elites of the Early Republican period back to the pre-Ottoman period, back to Central Asia. This trend was in fact in line with the other Balkans states emerging out of the Ottoman Empire, showing us the influence of political ideologies on history at a time when the romantic nationalism was the rule of the game.

Within the context of discourses of national history in the Balkans the questions of 'who we are and where we came from,' 'who came first', 'who has a right of existence as a nation on the given territory' and 'which civilization the nation belongs to' have been very important and the answers given to these questions were crucial to understand the nationalist projects. An interesting comparative case would be that of Greece in which Constantinople and Anatolia have been contested. The two origins of 'Greeks', ancient Greece and Byzantium Empire would serve as legitimating force in terms of the 'superiority of civilization', ancientness and right of existence especially if put in the context of 'Megali Idea' which has been seen as a major threat by the Turkish side. Thus the new historical narrative answers both the perceived threat of claims of Balkan states and the justification for the break with the 'ancient regime' of Ottoman Empire.

²⁰ Ayhan Akman, 'Modernist Nationalism: Statism and National Identity in Turkey', *Nationalities Papers* vol.32, no.1, march 2004p.39

²¹ Büşra Ersanlı. 'The Ottoman Empire in the Historiography of the Kemalist Era: A Theory of Fatal Decline', in Fikret Adanir. Suraiya Faroqhi (eds.) *The Ottomans and the Balkans: A Discussion of Historiography* (Leiden: Brill Press, 2002),pp.115-154

Since it is the duty of the nationalist discourse to built this relationship between the past and the present , nationalism offers a framework through which this politicized relationship has been imagined/interpreted/invented. Therefore, it is also possible to look at nationalism as a political discourse. According to Breuilly²² a nationalist argument as a political doctrine would use three important premises. Firstly, the nation has a unique character which has been reflected in the myths and national histories. Secondly, since the interest of the nation is above every thing, the theme of sacrifice would be used to ensure the loyalties of the members. Thirdly, the issue of sovereignty would be very important because it is assumed that nation should be as independent as possible. In this case this reciprocal relationship between the state and nationalism seems to evolve around the birth of nation-state albeit with different faces under different circumstances. One of these different faces reveals itself in the form of evaluation and narration of the national/official history written under the guidance of the ideology of the state.

In the Early Republican era, the Ottoman Empire (being the ancient regime) was considered either as alien and non-Turkish or just as a product of the long line of Turkic states. In the same manner the decline paradigm fits in the purposes of the new nation state which is depicted as born out of the ashes of the decayed Empire. In this respect, the perception of the Ottoman Empire plays a pivotal role in terms of situating not only the foundation of the nation-state but also the positioning of the official national ideology since the process of foundation is crucial in the nationalist mythology and national history. What has happened in the Turkish example is while breaking the historical continuity, the new Early Republican nationalist ideology claimed an alternative way to connect to the past of the nation in the years to come.

In the case of Turkey where the state-society connection was largely maintained through nationalism from the beginning, the nationalist arguments of the political power centers

²² John Breuilly. *Nationalism and the State*, 2nd ed., (Manchester : Manchester University Press 1994)p. 2

would contain direct references to the ‘history’. In the Early Republican period the crucial pillars of the Turkish nation defined by Mustafa Kemal as follows: These are the historical and natural facts regarding the basis of the Turkish nation: a) political unity; b) linguistic unity; c) territorial unity; d) unity of lineage and roots; e) shared history; f) shared morality.²³

Actually it can be considered as common to put such a heavy emphasis on ‘shared history’ (the content of which would be provided officially) in the projects of nation building.

Nevertheless, the manner through which they have been written and the perspectives and myths they have incorporated and above all, the way they have been transferred make an important impact on the characteristics attributed to Turkishness and consequently the discussion about the ‘Armenian issue’ which I will elaborate in the second chapter.

“ After 1923, the new Republic was eager to create a nation without nostalgia for the past and to foster a secular Turkish political identity, regionalism, or other ‘divisive’ ties.”²⁴ In this respect, the claim of the Republican mentality to create a radical break with the past can be said to have caused an alienation with the Ottoman past but at the same time because of the continuity between the Empire and the Republic the discourse would be reformulated according to the different understandings of the Turkish nation.

To be able to understand these tendencies one of the main driving forces of Turkish nationalism ,of the Republican period should be highlighted ,namely the creation of a new collective memory of self esteem²⁵ to get rid of the traumatic traces of the final decade of the Ottoman Empire This need of construction reflects itself most clearly in the policies of national history and national language with an interesting dilemma which has been inherent in Turkish

²³ Nurhan Tezcan. *Atatürk'un Yazdığı Yurttaşlık Bilgileri* (Information On Citizenship Written by Atatürk), (Istanbul: Çağdas,1989) p.14

²⁴ Kemak Karpat.(ed.) *Ottoman Past and Today's Turkey*, (Leiden: Brill,2000) p.xvi

nationalism. As part of the dilemma between civic and ethnic nationalism this effort of proving distinctiveness results in ‘ a rather curious creation since it simultaneously invites and rejects ethnic, racial, religious and topographic connotations’²⁶. As a response to both of these dilemmas, the ‘Turkish history thesis’ was put forward by Afet Inan (seen as a very prominent figure for the ultra-nationalist wing of today) in the first history congress by presenting the Turks as the first and the foremost cultivators of civilization all over the world from the prehistoric times. Moreover, all the others who developed a civilization of their own, in fact, were enlightened after the Turkish invasion, or were founded initially by the Turks. Maksudyan discusses this discourse as a legitimizing force for what she calls racist nationalism.²⁷ Although Maksudyan’s account provide important insights for the emergence of Turkish nationalism, she downplays the varieties and different understandings within the same discourse by reducing it to racism. As suggested by Canefe, to be able to understand these tendencies one should not underestimate the main driving force of Turkish nationalism , i.e. the ‘popular acceptance of the construct of the proud and self-assured Turk at the expense of all other identities that flourished and found currency during the Ottoman reign’²⁸ By looking at the ethno-symbolic and mythical characteristics of this new image she tries to understand the process of exclusion and inclusion of the national identity building. Thus, it would be this new image of ‘Turk’ that would define the terms of the historical/collective memory to a certain extent.

How ever hard the Republican elites tried to create a radical break with the Ottoman past, it was still very much alive in the memories especially if we consider the fact that the Turkish war

²⁵ Nergis Canefe, ‘Turkish Nationalism and Ethno-Symbolic Analysis: The Rules of Exception’, *Nations and Nationalism* 8 (2),2002, p.137

²⁶ ibid

²⁷ Nazan Maksudyan. *Gauging Turkisness: Anthropology as Science-fiction in Legitimizing Racist Nationalism (1925-1939)*(İstanbul: Boğaziçi university,2003) M.A.thesis p.65

²⁸ Nergis Canefe, ‘Turkish nationalism and ethno-symbolic analysis: the rules of exception’, *Nations and Nationalism* 8 (2),2002, p.137

of independence was a continuation of the First World War. Taner Akçam claims that an important aspect of creating the break with the past was erasing the collective memory. Consequently, ‘the ensuing emptiness of memory, like a blank page, was filled with the foundational ideology of the new Turkish state’²⁹. However, he does not find this project successful since he claims that the roots of Turkey’s current problems regarding nationalism are derived from its Ottoman inheritance. He provides an interesting framework to combine Turkish nationalism, Armenian genocide and the heritage of the Ottoman Empire. However, he seems to underplay the impact of the Early Republican period and the consequent changes in the political and the intellectual environment which has influenced the contemporary discourse of Turkish nationalism.

Having analyzed the influence of nationalism on history, the question asked by Smith is quite important. “But does nationalism writes its history as it pleases or is it also constrained by tradition and the ‘past’ which it records?”³⁰ As I have suggested above, an important component of the answer can be found in terms of the role of the myths in the process of nation-building. “Myth is one of the ways in which collectivities- in this context, more specifically nation- establish and determine the foundations of their own being, their own system of morality and values.”³¹

As suggested by Schöpflin, the myths would be about perceptions and not about historically validated truths. At the same time they play an important role in the maintenance and narration of memory together with the possibilities of forgetting. Since they do not flow up in the air, they can be controlled by the political and intellectual elites who are able to ‘gain the ear

²⁹ Taner Akçam. *From Empire to Republic : Turkish nationalism and the Armenian genocide*, London ; New York : Zed Books ; New York, NY : Distributed in the USA by Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p.22

³⁰ Anthony D. Smith. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing,1988 p.177

³¹ George Schöpflin. *Nations, Identity, Power: The New Politics of Europe* , (London: Hurst&Company,2000) p.80

of the society'³². I believe not only in terms of providing a pool for nationalist discourse and national history but also the issue of control and competition of myths make 'myths' all the more important in terms of national/official history writing. Another contribution of his theory is considering myths as means of standardization and storage of information since they play a crucial role in building and maintenance of national identities. Moreover, both Smith and Schöpflin offer a wide range of taxonomies that are very useful especially to analyze the underlying myths of national narratives in a comparative and structural way.³³

Having been one of the most important foundational myths of Turkey, what is been coined as 'Sevres syndrome' plays a crucial role as claimed by Jung³⁴. Again, there is reference to the Ottoman heritage and its impact on the mentality of the elites of the Early Republican era especially in terms of conspiracy and betrayal which has led to perception of permanent danger. Thus, as also argued by Keyder, Turkish nationalism placed special emphasis on the vulnerability of the new community, or its precarious viability in the face of hostile external forces.³⁵ What is important here is the contemporary reinterpretation of the 'Sevres syndrome' to fit into the changing political circumstances especially as a new umbrella for Euro-skepticism.

At the level of the problematic relationship of Turkish Republic with its Ottoman heritage lies the question of whether it is a mere transformation of the Empire into a nation-state or it has been founded after the collapse of the empire upon new grounds. This problem leads to 'primacy of survival of the state as a major preoccupation that has been inherited from the

³² *ibid*

³³ George Schöpflin. 'The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths', *Myths and Nationhood* London : C. Hurst, 1997pp.28-35 And Anthony D. Smith. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing,1988, pp.192-200

³⁴ Dietrich Jung, Wolfango Piccoli. *Turkey at the Crossroads: Ottoman Legacies and a Greater Middle East*, London ; New York : Zed Books ; New York : Distributed in the USA exclusively by Palgrave, 2001

³⁵ Çağlar Keyder. 'Whither the Project of Modernity? Turkey in the 1990s' in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, Sibel Bozdoğan, Reşat Kasaba(eds.), Seattle : University of Washington Press, 1997,p. 45-46

Ottoman elite'³⁶ This understanding has been one of the main pillars of Turkish nationalism which can be formulated under the title of 'Sevres syndrome' with underlying themes of victimization, siege, isolation, betrayal and martyrdom. In other words, what Sevres syndrome includes is the sense of being besieged and the fear of the plot against Turkey by the external powers for partition/division Turkey just like the treaty suggested in 1920.

The First World War ended for the Ottoman Empire with the armistice agreement of Mondros in 30 October 1918. The infamous 7th article stated that "In the event of a situation threatening their security, the Entente Powers have the right to occupy any area of strategic importance". Using this article some of the provinces of Anatolia and the capital, Istanbul, were occupied. Then in 10 August 1920 came the Sevres Peace Treaty which confirmed the de facto partitioning of Anatolia between the Allied powers and created Armenia, Kurdistan and Pontus Greek State under Allied mandate. Although the treaty had been accepted by the Sublime Porte, it has been rejected by the Ankara government and with the start of the independence war the treaty has never been put into action and finally replaced by the Lausanne Treaty in 1923.

This phase of the history has attracted special attention as a crucial turning point in the transformation from the Ottoman Empire into the Republic of Turkey.

According to national history, the Ottoman state has fallen victim to destructive projects of all the major powers of Europe: its former subjects have –under the influence of foreign provocation-usurped the tolerance of the Empire; the newly founded states-though very weak by themselves-have appropriated Ottoman lands with the help of powerful states; this 'malevolent alliance' has been able to defeat and deceive the empire.³⁷

However, the mentality of this newly established state despite its own claims of rupture incorporates it as a trauma while the focus of the national history has been shifted from the

³⁶ Tanıl Bora, 'Turkish National Identity: Turkish Nationalism and Balkan Problem' *The Balkans and the New World Order*. Conference held at Marmara University 1993 p.102

³⁷ *ibid*

Ottoman history to the pre-Ottoman Turkish history. Gradually, the Ottoman past has returned back to some extent as a part of the national history with the oppositional elites after the 1950s. This could be related to the rise of new nationalism in which the Muslim identity is more incorporated unlike the secular emphasis of the Kemalist perspective. On the one hand, the Turkist emphasis on Central Asia seems to have coincided with the Republican ideology while the conservative Islamist approach sees it as ‘the disavowal of the Ottoman past as well as the problem of detachment from Islam.’³⁸ However, interestingly enough not only these two interpretations but also most of the alternative interpretations that emerged in the 1990s share this mentality of betrayal and being besieged while adopting them to the new environment.

What Akçam has referred as the foundational ideology of the new Turkish state, could be framed as the Kemalist ideology which turned into an official nationalism or Atatürk nationalism in the contemporary political discourse. According to Tanıl Bora, the inherent paradox of this ideology has been the tension between the so-called French-style conception of nationalism and the German style.³⁹ “The official ideology may well be in line with nationalism based on the principle of citizenship; but in foreign disputes, in ‘national causes; and even, for instance, in the domain of popular culture such as international sports competitions, an ethnicist, ‘essentialist, ‘aggressive language of nationalism can easily make itself felt.”⁴⁰ This tension can be argued for most of the cases of nationalism since it is hard to find a pure civic nationalism even in Western Europe. However, what makes it interesting is the fact that this tension that he refers to provides a fertile ground for the emergence of different Turkish nationalisms with varying degrees of ethnic and civic elements.

³⁸ Ibid, P.114

³⁹ Tanıl Bora. ‘Nationalist Discourses in Turkey’ *the South Atlantic Quarterly*, 102:2/3, summer 2003,p.437

⁴⁰ ibid

An interesting point is the fact that the period covered by Turkish national history classes even in the high school level mostly ends with 1930s with a brief mentioning of the WWII which helps reproducing the ‘national memory’ very much centered on the Early Republican period. For example, in the last year of the high school the mandatory history class is named Revolutionary History of Republic of Turkey and Atatürkism. In a text book⁴¹ under the title of ‘internal and external threats Turkey has faced’ one of the elements that created such a threat is presented as the geo-political importance of Turkey.

Western states thought that they have achieved their aims after the collapse of the Ottoman state in the end of the WWI. Entente states tried to implement the secret treaties they have made among each other and started to share our beautiful homeland. (...) A bad final was waiting the world’s oldest and biggest nation which has lived freely and independently for centuries. (...) It was necessary for Turkish nation, not to fall into the situation of 1918, to be strengthened in every area and to feed national solidarity and unity. [emphasis added]

As can be seen from the above quotation the themes of ancientness and pride is very much in line with the Balkan nationalisms. Even if Turkish elite has inherited this feeling of constant threat, still, the attitude to distance the Republic from the Empire has lead to a tendency to disregard Balkans although not forgetting the ‘betrayal’. At the same time it also implies that Ottoman state was also the state of the Turkish nation. In this sense the extreme position of totally disregarding Ottoman history has been dropped from the agenda.

Thus, the image tried to be drawn by the Early Republican elites has not been the only image although it has had a hegemonic position. As Calhoun suggests ‘at the level of practical activity, there are many diverse nationalisms’.⁴² At the same time that does not mean that there has been an official history that constructs the ‘collective memory’. “The historical view of the past is of course, not always unified, and one can find even among the elite contrasting versions of the same event, yet the tendency is usually to efface differences and to

⁴¹ Ahmet Bekir Palazoğlu. Osman Bircan. *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti İnkılap Tarihi ve Atatürkçülük 2* (Revolutionary History of the Republic of Turkey and Atatürkism 2) (Ankara: Bem Koza, 1996)p. 198-199

create a single coherent historical narrative that would contribute to the homogenization of society.”⁴³

Smith explains nation building in terms of continuous re-interpretations, rediscoveries and reconstructions in which each generation creates its own interpretation according to the motivations of dominant social groups and institutions with references to the myths, memories and symbols of the past. Therefore, this interaction and the process of nation building would never be completed since the negotiation and competition over the boundaries and contents of the ‘nation’ would continue together with the perceived interests and ideals.⁴⁴ I think this perspective explains why histories are still important for the nation states although the influence of romantic nationalism lost its hegemonic power. However, to be able to understand their current function in this continuous process of reinterpretation we should once more look at the link between ‘collective memory’ and myths as resources for national identity discourses.

Avner Ben-Amos, following the argument of Pierre Nora about the difference of memory and history, tries to combine their intersection in ‘collective memory’. He defines it as ‘the memory of a certain group-an elite, who develops the rules that distinguish between what can become history and what should remain mere memory, that is between the official memory of a society and the unreliable, disparate and conflicting visions of its past’.⁴⁵ By introducing this definition he is very much aware of the existence of different interpretations of the past, sometimes in a conflicting manner, to create a single coherent narrative for the homogenization

⁴² Umut Özkırmılı. *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*, (New York : Palgrave, 2000), p. 225

⁴³ Avner Ben-Amos. ‘Uses of the Past: Patriotism Between History and Memory’ in *Patriotism in the Lives of Individuals and Nations*, Daniel Bar-Tal, Ervin Staub(eds.), (Chicago : Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1997),p.130

⁴⁴ Anthony D. Smith. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing,1988 p206

⁴⁵ Avner Ben-Amos. ‘Uses of the Past: Patriotism Between History and Memory’ in *Patriotism in the Lives of Individuals and Nations*, Daniel Bar-Tal, Ervin Staub(eds.), Chicago : Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1997 p.130

of the society.⁴⁶ However, one must be cautious about the usage of memory as has been discussed by Kervin Lee-Klein⁴⁷ since the term has been used in different contexts vis-à-vis history. The author concludes that rise of the term ‘memory’ can be associated with the rise of post-modernism seeing historical consciousness as an oppressive fiction. Therefore, there is a certain tendency to treat the concept of ‘memory’ as an alternative to historical discourse. Considering these problems in mind, I would like to use ‘collective memory’ in terms of the historical memory of the ‘nation’ which would be closely related to the official interpretation of the history (even if he situates them between the official and unofficial interpretations) disseminating through the institutions of the nation state i.e. schools or the mass media.

Taking the different roles played by myths, collective memory and national histories into consideration to explain the history-nation relationship, I treated nationalism as part of a political discourse which has a certain hegemonic claim in the formation of national identities through which we attach ourselves to the imagined community of ‘nation’ in the historical context of Turkish nationalism. Having done so, in the next chapters I will build on this background in analyzing how this hegemonic claim of the relationship between history and nation has been challenged through the debates about official history in the case of a conference.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷ Kerwin Lee Klein. ‘On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse’ *Representations* no.69, special issue: Grounds for Remembering, winter, 2000

CHAPTER 2

OFFICIAL HISTORY: A CONTINUOUS DEBATE

Writing history is as important as making history. (Kemal Atatürk)

“The discourse of history as well as of myth is simultaneously a discourse of identity; it consists of attributing a meaningful past to a structures present”⁴⁸, Friedman says. This understanding of discursive history writing gives birth to new perspectives concerning the national histories and nationalist historiographies among which a critical reassessment under the banner of revisionism. An exemplary and widely discussed case was the conference titled ‘Ottoman Armenians during the Decline of the Empire: Issues of Scientific Responsibility and Democracy’⁴⁹. It has lead to a polarization between the official discourse and an alternative discourse which has started to make its voice heard with the public attention given to the conference. In this debate regarding the official discourse, the links between history writing, nationalism, impact of the state and the elites on collective memory have to be analyzed together with the question of where the society stands. However, before this analysis, it is necessary to understand the specific context it emerges together with the actors.

Before the conference, the discussions in the official line refers to the case of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire with a special emphasis on whether what has happened in 1915 can be called genocide. As a reaction to the ‘accusations’, the official Turkish stance interprets it as a result of the preventive measures of military security at war time which resulted in relocation of the Armenian population that was collaborating with the Russian troops. There was no plan of

⁴⁸ Cited in M. Zafer Cetin. ‘Tales of the Past, Present, and Future: Mythmaking and Nationalist Discourse in Turkish Politics’ *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol.24, no.2, October 2004 p. 348

extermination and the state tried to protect its subjects although there had been losses due to war time scarcity and epidemics as can be seen in the Ottoman archives. In this understanding, the emergence of the issue in the international public opinion is due to the efforts of the Armenian Diaspora. Since they seek the same status of national recognition with Jews, ‘genocide’ has been tried to be imposed retrospectively upon an irrelevant case. Moreover, it has become such a hot issue only because those who do not want Turkey in the EU are trying to prevent her membership by putting artificial obstacles.

After 1980s in line with the trend of revisionism in Ottoman historiography, the criticisms of the statist cultural policies in Turkey have started to refer ‘Turkish history thesis’ of 1930s as the starting point of the official thesis⁵⁰. Even if the popularity of ‘Turkish history thesis’ was limited to the inter-war period due to its racist connotations which does not fit post-WWII environment, the presence of an official history remained with modifications. The main problem of the thesis has been seen (by these revisionist scholars) as the interference of politicians to history, in other words politicization of history writing for the purposes of creating a national identity. The common denominator for this revisionist movement was to question the ‘politically correct history’ of the official nationalism in terms of the depiction of the Ottoman past and ‘selective explanation of Turkish nation-building’⁵¹.

On the other hand the position of the revisionist historians remained marginal to make alter the power of this ‘grand narrative’ of the Turkish nation. With the collapse of USSR a possible to move to get rid of the one sided interpretation emphasizing Turkishness as the main

⁴⁹ ‘İmparatorluğun Son Dönemi’nde Osmanlı Ermenileri: Bilimsel Sorumluluk ve Demokrasi Sorunları’

⁵⁰ Büşra Ersanlı. ‘Bir aidiyet Fermani: Türk Tarih Tezi’ in *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce-Milliyetçilik* (Political Thought in Modern Turkey-Nationalism) (vol. IV) Istanbul: İletişim,2000p.809

⁵¹ Ayla Göl. ‘The Turkish nationalism and ‘Othering’ Armenians’, *Nations and Nationalism* 11(1),2005 p.122

pillar of history was postponed⁵² due to the a new wave of nationalism in Turkey which sees the emergence of independent Turkic states in the Central Asia providing a strategic opportunity for Turkishness. This period also coincides to, as Tanıl Bora puts it⁵³, the optimist discourse of making 21st century the century of Turkey, the dominance of which fades away in the mid1990s. Nevertheless, the emergence of new Turkic states has contributed to the emphasis of Turkishness in the textbooks. Thus, it is possible to speak about a polarization between the hardliner revisionists and the nationalists, the extremes of which argue either “only we know” or “love or leave” in a very exclusivist manner⁵⁴. Nevertheless, even if nationalism is quite strong in Turkey, Büşra Ersanlı argues that ‘the continuity of the success of the historical thesis of Republic of Turkey depends on the rhetorical pressure of the state’ which remains on the surface.⁵⁵

Even if the debate seems to concern the field of history, because of its relation to current politics and the foundational myths of the Republic, which I will discuss later in this chapter, multiple actors with different positions have been involved.

Actors in the Discussions about the Conference

The actors who are involved in the discussions can be categorized as follows:

- 1- Actors with formal political authority; MPs, leaders of political parties, ministers, prime minister.
- 2- Actors not in the position of formal political authority but recognized as influential opinion makers like journalists, column writers.

⁵² ibid

⁵³ Tanıl Bora. *Milliyetçiliğin Kara Baharı* (Dark Spring of Nationalism)Istanbul: Birikim, 1995

⁵⁴Büşra Ersanlı. ‘Bir aidiyet Fermanı: Türk Tarih Tezi’ in *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce-Milliyetçilik*(Political Thought in Modern Turkey-Nationalism) (vol. IV) Istanbul: İletisim,2000. p.810

⁵⁵ ibid

- 3- Actors, who are perceived as possessing professional authority on the subject matter, like academics and diplomats. However, a distinction should be made here in terms of different camps. I will categorize them , for the purpose of simplification, as those who are following the official line and those who are supporting an alternative line of discourse.
 - a) Alternative line: this group is composed of academics mostly those who have involved in the conference, working on different subjects (in terms of time period , academic interest and discipline) Their audience had been so far more limited to the circles of academic interest.
 - b) Official line: this group can be considered as more heterogeneous compared to the other one. There are those who possess some kind of formal authority linking them to state structure like diplomats or historians like Yusuf Halaçoğlu as the head of Turkish Historical Society and İlber Ortaylı as the head of Topkapı museum. On the other hand there are also those whose audience can be said to be more popular, in terms of those writing popular history. Finally a third group under this heading can also be summarized as academics.
- 4- NGOs which have different degrees of involvement in terms of declarations and protests
- 5- EU representatives who can be considered as outsiders to the discussions but their remarks have made an important impact on the discussions.
- 6- Actors who are neither politically active nor participated in the scholarly discussions, can be coined as the general Turkish public which has been targeted through the discussions.

In this chapter I will focus on the third group whereas my focus will shift to first and the second group in the chapter three⁵⁶. Consequently, to be able to understand the dynamics of emergence of an alternative discourse I have conducted eight in-depth interviews especially focusing on the members of the organizing committee of the conference about Ottoman Armenians. Since they start with the critique of the official line of national historiography, their perspective may also provide some insights about the official discourse itself. I should note that even if I have labeled their discourse as the alternative discourse, the degree of unity among their discourses varies. Their discourses converge in terms of criticizing the official national historiography to defend the ‘moral responsibility’ of history as a discipline, while they diverge in their perspectives regarding the relationship between the power elites, society and history such as the position of the collective memory. However, before going further into this analysis, it is noteworthy to understand why this conference has been perceived so important.

Challenging the Official Discourse: A Conference

To be able to understand the importance of the conference, first the question of why the ‘Armenian issue’ is important has to be answered. Halil Bertkay⁵⁷ points out six different aspects⁵⁸. Concerning the events of 1915-16 themselves there are two important elements, the scale of the events and the involvement of the Ottoman state. From the point of view of

⁵⁶ I will try to reflect the positions of all the actors I have pointed above, however my emphasis would be more on the interaction of the first, second and third group especially in the discursive level and the possible impact on the sixth group through out my thesis. However, before I continue, I should also note that I do not want to reduce the overall relationship to a top-to-down manner between the elites and the rest of the society. In this respect popular interpretations of Turkish nationalism are also crucial which may have an impact on the official discourse and how it formulate itself.

⁵⁷ Professor in arts and social sciences faculty of Sabanci University, in the conference presented an a paper titled “Resmî söylem ne diyor ?” (What does the Official discourse say?)

⁵⁸ Halil Bertkay, interview by Didem Turkoglu, 20 April 2006, Istanbul

historiography the issue is important in terms of the break between the memory and history with the creation of a new national identity, national history in which the foundational myths play an important role. As I have argued in the first chapter the foundational myths of the Early Republican period has been very much related to the evaluation of the heritage of the Ottoman Empire. In this sense, even if there is a discursive break with the past, from the perspective of territory, society and the cadres of the state there is a continuity that this new narrative had to deal with. Consequently, the silences in the national historiography coincides with the myth of the purity of the nation what Berktaş refers as ‘immaculate conception’ in nationalism. It emphasizes the purity of the revolution focusing on the almost sacred personality of Atatürk and the rightfulness of the struggle against the imperial forces that wanted to divide us. Another case that increased the importance of the issue is the terrorist activities of ASALA in 1970s, namely the assassinations of the Turkish diplomats which according to Berktaş caused a ‘trauma resulting from facing the reality after the previous period of oblivion’.

However, the most important element that contributed to the importance of the issue from the perspective of contemporary Turkish politics is the position of the power elites. Since the foundational myths are recontextualized for the preservation of the status quo, they are very much related to the contemporary dynamics of politics and legitimization. Berktaş suggests that any kind of desacralization of these myths leads to a loss in the power of the elites whose existence is tied to the continuation of the status quo. This desacralization will lead to further democratization which in turn will destroy their hegemony. Moreover, the official discourse constructs its image with the claim of ‘absolute truth’ which should be shared by all the members of the Turkish society. As I have discussed in the introduction, the position of the Armenian

nationalists in terms of demanding not only the recognition of the events as genocide but also land and reparation has served as an important tool that confirmed the perceived threat formulated by the statist perspective in the public opinion. In this context, as Etienne Copeaux suggests⁵⁹ the issues labeled as ‘national cause’⁶⁰ (one of which seems to be the ‘Armenian issue’ due to the perceived threat) are not open to discussion and the attempts to propose some change in the issues will be directly labeled as treason.

Even if the producers of this alternative discourse, the organizers and the participants of the conference, are accused of treason, from their perspective it was an issue of moral and scientific responsibility, honesty and struggle for the freedom of speech as the title of the conference itself suggests. Since it was a voice raised to criticize the society they live in to make it better, it can be perceived as a patriotic act which is quite ironic when the accusations are considered. Thus it is noteworthy to mention the aim of the conference was summarized by the organizers in the letter of invitation as follows:

The organizers of the conference express the common denominator of this new formation as the cognition of a moral responsibility. It is not only a responsibility from the perspective of scientific truth or world citizenship but also a responsibility towards our country, our society and our democracy. The rise of divergent, critical and alternative voices is in the best interest of Turkey since it will show the richness of Turkish society in terms of the plurality of opinions.⁶¹

In this context it should be noted that the conference has created a serious challenge to the official discourse not only because the participants and the organizers were Turkish citizens but also they were prominent Turkish journalists, scholars of history and sociology whose voice

⁵⁹ Etienne Copeaux. ‘Turk Milliyetçiliği: Sozcukler, Tarih, Isaretler’ (Turkish Nationalism: Words, History, Signs) in *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce-Milliyetçilik* (vol. IV) Istanbul: İletişim,2002. p.45

⁶⁰ Milli dava

⁶¹ "Konferans düzenleyicileri, bu yeni oluşumun ortak paydasını, vicdani bir sorumluluğun idraki olarak ifade ediyorlar. Bu, yalnız bilimsel gerçek açısından veya dünya vatandaşlığı nezdinde bir sorumluluk değil, ülkemize, toplumumuza, demokrasimize karşı da bir sorumluluktur. Farklı, eleştirel ve alternatif seslerin yükselmesi, Türkiye

cannot be underestimated easily with the generic label of traitors. Moreover, the attempts to prevent the conference from taking place has only contributed to a rise in the public attention which has already exposed to news regarding the 90th anniversary of the events throughout the world. The attempts for the recognition of the events as genocide by the Armenians in the parliaments of Europe and Northern America has lead a series of diplomatic responses from Turkey which were reflected in the Turkish media together with a shift in the official position of Turkey which was discussed in the parliament on 13 April 2005.⁶² Since one of the newly adopted lines was the argument of leaving the issue to the historians, which supposedly judge who is right in a ‘scientific and unbiased way’ (compared to the ‘unfair’ political decisions taken in various parliaments to recognize the events as genocide) this conference perceived to be a bigger threat. It has been considered as a breaking point of ‘the last taboo’ by the organizers and the participants while it has been considered as a treacherous blow to the Turkish nation/history from inside leading to a serious of reactionary conferences in which the official discourse was underlined. However, as has been rightly pointed out by Selim Deringil⁶³ these reactionary conferences⁶⁴ have targeted the domestic market and mostly served the purpose of ‘refreshing the beliefs’⁶⁵ to the official discourse. Since the conference itself has had a large coverage in the media and attracted the public attention, a struggle for being the possessor of ‘truth’ has started in which the dissemination of the discourses and the role of the collective memory, if exists in this context, becomes important issues.

toplumunun aslında ne kadar zengin bir düşünce çoğulluğuna sahip olduğunu göstermek, gene en fazla Türkiye'nin yararına olacaktır." (<http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2005/05/20/siyaset/siy02.html>)

⁶² See chronology in the appendix.

⁶³ Professor of History and head of the History department of Bogazici University, in the conference presented a paper titled “Ermeni meselesi ve Arşiv : “Belgenin boğazına sarılmak” (Armenian question and the Archive: Seizing the Document by the Neck), interview with Selim Deringil, 24 April 2006, Istanbul

⁶⁴ For the dates and the titles of the conferences see ‘chronology’ in the appendix

Collective Memory

Halbwachs⁶⁶ makes a distinction between the collective and historical memories of a nation while the latter tries to construct a unified and valid history of the nation, the former is pluralistic due to being part of the identity of a social group.

In times of radical social changes the universalizing tendencies of the historical memory and the particularity of the group-specific collective memory come into conflict; the shattering of paradigms that were generally held to be valid increases the hunger and the need for new interpretations of events, and at the same time alternative interpretations compete for the position of 'valid' history.⁶⁷

Following this explanation, the lines drawn in terms of challenging the historical memory is rather problematic due to the definition of collective memory since the challenge comes mainly from professional historians⁶⁸. On the other hand, it can be said that the link between official ideology/discourse and collective memory is crucial in terms of understanding the link between the producers of this discourse and the rest of the society since it is an important factor for the internalization of the discourse. However, if it is based on the definition I have mentioned in the first chapter, collective memory as the historical memory of the 'nation', the question remains whether we can talk about the existence of a collective memory in Turkey. If so, who are the actors involved in the creation of its content and what role it plays in my case study are important questions. In the interviews I have conducted there is a wide range of point of views

⁶⁵ Referred as 'İman tazelemek' by Selim Deringil at the interview

⁶⁶ Ruth Wodak ,Andras Kovacs. 'Foreword' in *NATO, Neutrality and National Identity-The Case of Austria and Hungary* (Wien: Böhlau, 2003)P.13

⁶⁷ ibid

⁶⁸ In this definition, they can be considered as a social group to a certain extent and the motivation for the shattering of paradigms can be related to an accelerated openness of the Turkish society as a result of globalization and European Union integration process. However, I refrain from labeling their perspective as collective memory because their point of view can be considered more as revisionist history or alternative history challenging the national/official history.

regarding the concept of collective memory, however, they share certain key concepts such as democracy, social engineering, subconsciousness of the society, erasure, oblivion and so on.

Hrant Dink⁶⁹ points out two important aspects of the question: ‘who are the members of the collectivity in this collective memory’ and the issue of freedom regarding its content. Since Dink thinks that Turkey is trying to forge a collective memory out of discourses rather than lived experiences with the image of Turk in the center, some segments of the society in Turkey is automatically excluded and thus this collectivity will never include all. A question can be asked about the position of Armenian citizens of Turkey vis-à-vis this collective memory and the debates about the genocide itself. A dilemma should be highlighted in this case ; they are perceived as either an enemy of the Turkish state or the enemy of the Armenian nation⁷⁰. Their identity make them excellent candidates to be described as enemies if they were to argue for genocide, on the other hand their silence would be regarded as treasons to the Armenian nation the identity of which has been centered on genocide. Since Armenians were marginal in terms of population and presence in the political arena⁷¹ there is a triangle of different positions between state of Turkey, Armenians living outside Turkey (Diaspora and Armenia)and the position of Armenian minority in Turkey in terms of the political debate. Being an Armenian citizen of Turkey, Dink asks the question : “If Turk sees his heroism in his victory over the war against Armenians in the east, how can I be part of it? What kind of a collective memory can I have as a Turk but when I say *Türkiyelilik*⁷² , it is as much as you”⁷³

⁶⁹ Editor of *Agos* a bilingual (Armenian-Turkish) weekly newspaper, in the conference he presented a paper titled “Dünyada ve Türkiye’de Ermeni kimliğinin yeni cümleleri”(The new sentences of Armenian identity in Turkey and in the world) , Hrant Dink, interview by Didem Turkoglu, 10 April 2006, Istanbul

⁷⁰ Rifat Balı. Arus Yumul. Foti Benlisoy. ‘Yahudi, Ermeni ve Rum toplumlarında Milliyetçilik’ *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce-Milliyetçilik* (Political Thought in Modern Turkey-Nationalism) (vol. IV) (Istanbul: İletisim,2000)

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² *Türkiyeli*(being from Turkey), is a special terms started to be used instead of Turkish by some ,mostly liberal,circles which means a citizen of Turkey. The main of the creation of such a term was to recognize the ethnic diversity of the society. However, it has faced serious reactions and criticisms, one of which was the claim that the

Secondly, regarding the issue of freedom and collective memory he argues that “ To be able to talk about a collective memory one should be able to talk about the freedom of he individual memory. However, in the case of Turkey, individual memories are blocked due to the erasure of the historical consciousness for the sake of creating a new nation”⁷⁴ thus, in this context, this blockage of the collective memory by what can be labeled as social engineering, brings forth a very close relationship between the state and the society. Moreover, the society itself is not an actor in this creation/reproduction. This approach seems to have an explanatory power if we consider the projects of nation-state building of the Early Republican Era which have been discussed in the previous chapter. In the following decades, freedom of speech becomes crucial in a seemingly more democratic environment in Turkey after transforming into a multi party system. At this point we can say that the hegemonic ideology has to ensure its power through its control over the collective memory is possible only by limiting the freedom of speech. “Freedom of speech becomes a problem only when those whom the state could not block their thoughts start to speak. Then, you have to punish the freedom of speech.”⁷⁵ The level of internalization of the official ideology in the society and the role of education and mass media are as important as the freedom of speech because it would be wrong to take Turkish political scene as stagnant with the unquestioned authority of the statist perspective⁷⁶ since it has started to be challenged especially in the last decade.

term Turkish does not refer to an ethnic group but it is the inclusive term for the citizens of Turkey . Following this argument the main criticism regarding the usage of *Türkiyeli* was to degrade Turkishness to a sub-category of ethnicities. However, I should also note that according to the research conducted by Umut Özkırımlı when the question of the self-definition is posed to the interviewees *Türkiyeli* has been chosen third in rank with 21.7% (while nationalist 24.9% and patriot 24.5 were top two) Umut Özkırımlı, 'Türkiye'de Milliyetçilik' (Nationalism in Turkey), unpublished research report, 2006

⁷³ Hrant Dink, interview by Didem Turkoglu, 10 April 2006, Istanbul

⁷⁴ *ibid*

⁷⁵ *ibid*

⁷⁶ Turkey has witnessed a wave of change in the other taboos such as Cyprus, Kurdish question etc. in which there has been important struggles experienced for improvement of the freedom of speech while some parts of the

Edhem Eldem⁷⁷, on the other hand, disagrees in terms of the manipulative dominance of the official discourse while he agrees with Dink in the inappropriateness of using the concept of ‘collective memory’. According to him, since Turkey has a short term memory, even the manipulative official discourse won’t be able to take a stronghold. Thus, rather than the collective memory, he thinks that it is better to talk about collective beliefs or public opinion. In this respect, the most important actor in terms of the formation of this ‘collective belief’ or ‘public opinion’ is the media (unlike Dink’s perspective which gives primacy to the state as an actor) “Media doesn’t only instigate what’s already been there but it gives what should be there as well.”⁷⁸ Consequently, the dynamics of this discourse lie in the present rather than the past. I believe that this is a very important argument that provides room for explaining change in Turkey but at the same time it presupposes media independent of the official ideology created by the power elites. Therefore, it doesn’t explain the correspondence of the official discourse with the discourse of the media in the previous decades. Again, the society itself is not considered to be an important actor, since it highlights the position of the ‘middle level elites’.

Having mentioned these two positions of opposition to the usage of ‘collective memory’ in the Turkish context, now I would like to shift to those who think that we can use ‘collective memory’ as a concept but who again disagree on the content or the actors. An interesting perspective is suggested by Murat Belge⁷⁹ in terms of the relationship between collective memory and history. He believes that both the scientific history writing and the partisan history

criminal law remains open to be exploited to be used against the further improvement of the freedom of speech. It is also understandable for Hrant Dink to put such an emphasis on the state, freedom of speech and laws in Turkey if we consider that in October 2005, he was convicted for insulting Turkish national identity and given a six-month suspended sentence, which means he will not be forced to serve prison time unless he repeats the offense.

⁷⁷ Professor of History at Bogazici University, in the conference presented a paper titled “1896 İstanbul Ermeni olayları” (1896 Armenian events in Istanbul)

⁷⁸ Edhem Eldem, interview by Didem Turkoglu, 13 April 2006, Istanbul

writing are intertwined within the collective memory. In this process “the society is just an audience in a boxing match. It is used to see the brutal power winning. It never enters the boxing ring itself.”⁸⁰ Therefore, one can conclude that collective memory seems to be the boxing ring in which elites are boxing in the name of ‘scientific history writing’ and ‘partisan history writing’ while the audience is silently watching. Consequently, the final version of the collective memory will be decided by the winner of the match. In other words, in his perspective the collective memory is struggle between the elites, the decisions concerning what to remember and what to forget is dependent upon of the power of the competing elites. Therefore, even though we can use the term of collective memory it is hard to distinguish the position of history since both of the versions are intertwined.

On another level, some scholars such as Halil Berktaş, Aksin Somel and Cemil Kocak in agreement with the existence of a collective memory argue that it has been in fact destroyed or undermined by the official ideology, thus the boxing ring in Belge’s analogy gives room to only one boxer to practice while the audience has a feeling that there is something wrong with the situation but can not easily pin point where. Cemil Kocak⁸¹ while defining national history as dependent on current political juncture sees collective memory outside the official perspective due to remembrance. Interestingly enough two of the scholars I have mentioned above, Aksin Somel and Halil Berktaş refers to consciousness and subconsciousness of memory that play

⁷⁹ Head of the department of comparative literature in Bilgi University, column writer in *Radikal*, in the conference presented a paper titled “Demokrasi açısından Ermeni sorunu”(Armenian question from the perspective of democracy)

⁸⁰ Murat Belge, interview by Didem Turkoglu 12 April 2006, Istanbul

⁸¹ Professor in Arts and Social Sciences Faculty of Sabanci University, in the conference presented an a paper titled “Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa’yı nasıl bilirsiniz ?” (how do you know the ‘special organization?’), Cemil Kocak, interview by Didem Turkoglu , 11 April 2006, Istanbul

important role to understand the mentality of the society. Aksin Somel⁸² suggests that “ Even if the consciousness of the past has been erased with the destruction of the collective memory, the events has passed to our subconsciousness which continue to disturb us.” This perspective very much coincides with the perspective of Halil Berktaş⁸³ who argues that the event has been sent to the subconsciousness of the society as well. However, in his case this destruction was not stemming from an imposition but has been done in a more spontaneous way.

As I have discussed above, there are important disagreements in terms of the definition and the existence of the concept of collective memory together with the disagreement concerning the actors shaping it. Nevertheless, in all accounts there is the need for the elites of the society to take action to destroy the illusion or to fulfill their duty of morality and democracy. However different their positions may have been, they seem to agree on the fact that it is an important concept to explain the position of the official discourse and the alternative discourse, the reactions that were targeted against them (even its non-existence is quite telling from the perspective of these scholars) and the importance of the issue. It is especially significant in reference to what can be labeled as professional or scientific history versus national/official history with reference to myths and taboos. Taner Akçam refers to a ‘collective subconsciousness’⁸⁴ which can be seen as a reason for the existence of taboos in Turkish national history. This, according to him, is related to Turkey’s inability to digest the problematic aspects associated with the transition from Empire to Republic. Thus, as a self defense there is an argument of ‘unfair accusations’ which is interpreted in the nationalist discourse as questioning

⁸² Professor in Arts and Social Sciences faculty of Sabanci University, in the conference presented an a paper titled “Ermeni okulları ve Abdülhamid rejimi (1876-1908)” (Armenian schools and Regime of Abdulhamid 1876-1908), Aksin Somel , interview by Didem Turkoglu, 25 April 2006, Istanbul

⁸³ Professor in Arts and Social Sciences faculty of Sabanci University, in the conference presented an a paper titled “Resmî söylem ne diyor ?” (What does the Official discourse say?), Halil Berktaş, interview by Didem Turkoglu, 20 April 2006, Istanbul

of the four thousand glorious Turkish history while attributing Turkish nation a crime which it is not capable of committing⁸⁵ due to its purity.

From another perspective, the idea of the purity of the nation very much forms the basis of the foundational myth of the Republic and its interpretation of Turkish nationalism. Since, in this case, there is a close connection between a taboo and a foundational myth, this ‘collective subconsciousness’ should be very deeply buried if it ever exists. As Schöpflin suggests “ The exclusion of certain events from public consciousness, the consequent refusal to acknowledge that these events took place, which makes memory morally suspect, can all be derived from the myth.”⁸⁶ Thus, the resistance of the official discourse, supported by the fact that the issue can be considered as a taboo and is strongly attached to the foundational myths, seems to be quite strong but nevertheless, it has to face the challenge enabled by the changing environment.

WIND OF CHANGE (?)

“Current historical revisions and controversies should thus be interpreted against the backdrop of specific crisis of national identities, and accumulatively as indications of the crisis of national identity as such in the era of globalization”⁸⁷. As Uri Ram goes on discussing how these revisionist histories can indeed shed some light on the ‘present’ rather than the ‘past’, the emergence of an alternative discourse can be seen in the framework of change. Not only its emergence is a product of changing environment but also it contributes to change itself. First of all, by challenging the official discourse itself, it manages to raise some question marks in the

⁸⁴Taner Akçam. *From Empire to Republic : Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide*, London ; New York Zed Books ; New York, NY : Distributed in the USA by Palgrave Macmillan, 2004,p.218

⁸⁵ Ibid,p.237

⁸⁶ George Schöpflin. *Nations,Identity,Power : The New Politics of Europe* (London: Hurst &Company,2000) p.87

⁸⁷ Uri Ram. ‘From nation-state to nation----state: nation, history and identity struggles in Jewish Israel’ in *The challenge of Post-Zionism*, Ephraim Nimni (ed.) (London : Zed Books, 2003).p.22

society which in the long run may lead to the destruction of the hegemony of the official discourse. Secondly, to be able to preserve its hegemony on the 'valid' historical truths, the official discourse itself has to change and adjust to the new situation while trying to answer the questions posed against itself.

Impact of EU

The prospective membership to European Union has been considered to be an important anchor for the democratization process in Turkey. Although we can talk about a strong commitment of Turkish governments in the last decade to enter EU, within the framework of 'reaching the level of contemporary civilization' and Westernization, the roots of which go back to the last century of the Ottoman Empire, there is also a critical and even skeptical stand taken against EU. One of the main points of references as I have discussed before has been composed of an anti-imperialist discourse which is quite common in the cases that are labeled as third world nationalisms. Akman uses the term 'modernist nationalism' for the modernist identity project arising from 'the non-European world when there is no prolonged and severe colonial domination to generate an acute dilemma of choosing between modernization and cultural authenticity'.⁸⁸ The crucial aspect within this modernist project would be the internalization of the West not only in terms of the practical reforms but also in terms of a more fundamental change in the form of ideology which proclaims 'the categories of its identity structure as universal and progressive'.

Integration to the European Union which has been perceived as the final stage of modernization/westernization has been one of the most important points of reference in the discussions not only because it has been considered as directly linked to democratization but also

⁸⁸Ayhan Akman, 'Modernist nationalism: statism and national identity in Turkey', *Nationalities Papers* vol.32, no.1, march 2004,p.24

because of the timing of the conference. On the 3rd of October the decision on the terms of membership talks with Turkey was to be decided. Therefore, the impact of the comments coming from Europe had even bigger impact on the discussions. Moreover, it was also one of the peak times of the discussions about under which terms Turkey should push for the membership, in other words ‘how much can and should Turkey bow to the demands of the EU’ and how much interference is acceptable.

Representative of the European Commission Kretschmer after referring to the coming report on the progress of Turkey that they are noting the events [postponement of the conference after the discussions in the parliament] which are themselves not in compliance with the spirit of liberal democracy, has pointed out that even if the Armenian issue itself is not a criteria for membership of Turkey to EU, it is on the political agenda of the various member countries which have to ratify the membership agreement of Turkey⁸⁹. Another signal came from Joost Lagendijk who is co-chairman of EC-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Commission when he pointed out that “this event [postponement] will be interpreted as a proof that there is no freedom of speech and thought no freedom of science in Turkey and it will create an image of Turkey as the country of taboos which will put those working for the membership of Turkey in a harder position”⁹⁰

These two remarks together with the comments on the Western media made an important impact on the Turkish media and more importantly the position of the government which was very much tied to a successful result on 3rd of October. Thus, there is a significant pressure which has led to an alliance between the government, YÖK (the Higher Education Council which declared that the conference was not scientific previously) and pro-EU circles when the court decision to ban the conference was taken in September. As I will discuss in the third

⁸⁹ <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2005/05/28/yazar/idiz.html>

⁹⁰ <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=153876>

chapter, the support for the conference in the name of democracy and image of Turkey has been very much connected to the prospective membership to EU. However, this impact has not been interpreted as positive in all the circles since it has been shown as a proof of the threat against the nation, a threat against the sovereignty of Turkey by the opposing camp. Tanıl Bora explains it in terms of understanding of democratization through the relationship of modernization and national ideology. He suggests that the process of democracy has been constraint by the primacy of the national sovereignty⁹¹. In the scene of Turkish politics national sovereignty has always been perceived as one of the most essential and sacred codes of the nation state. Therefore, it is quite easy to use it as a strong argument that will fit in the discourse of anti-imperialist, anti-European Union block. This block is in itself a part of the ‘national conservatism’ which aims to prevent extreme Westernization. The roots of this conservative block can be dated back to the Ottoman Empire in the context of post-Tanzimat period in which the question of what to take from the West and what to conserve were in the center of the debates⁹².

All in all, as an old theme in Turkish politics, one of the dynamics of the debate is linked to the debates of Westernization/modernization/democratization not only in terms of the processes themselves but also through the presence/influence of EU as the new component. It has been an important point of reference to the question of national historiography in terms of the freedom of science and the freedom of speech that are associated with the level of Western civilization together with the larger context of democracy. Interestingly enough, as I have tried to explain above, from the perspective of Turkish nationalism both for the conservative nationalism and ‘pro-Western nationalism’⁹³ it is a important point of reference. On the one

⁹¹ Tanıl Bora. *Milliyetçiliğin Kara Baharı* (Dark Spring of Nationalism) (Ankara: Birikim, 1995) p.15

⁹² Tanıl Bora. *Türk Sağının Üç Hali: Milliyetçilik, Muhafazakarlık, İslamcılık*. (The three phases of Turkish Right: Nationalism, Conservatism, Islamism.) (İstanbul: Birikim yayınları, 1998)

⁹³ Tanıl Bora. *Milliyetçiliğin Kara Baharı* (Dark Spring of Nationalism) (Ankara: Birikim, 1995)p.78

hand, according to Tanıl Bora, nationalism has not only been considered as part of being a rightful member to the ‘family of humanity’ but also to the ‘contemporary civilization’.⁹⁴ This ambiguous understanding, then, means that all attempts of modernization could be nationalist and vice versa. (Since achieving the project modernity would also fulfil the mission of putting the Turkish nation to the place it deserves). On the other hand, to keep the danger of extreme Westernization of losing distinctiveness and national sovereignty, anti-EU conservatism will be opposing it.

Reactions to the Challenge

Olick and Levy claim that ‘taboos involve moral principles and definitional claims that are beyond debate, not because no alternative exist, but because these issues are not decided by the rational argument’⁹⁵. However, in the most of the cases when these deeply rooted taboos of the national identity are supported by strong myths, then a possible challenge can face two different types of reactions. One is related to the nature of taboo which will end once the salience is broken and the issue is started to be discussed in the public. The other one is related to combination of the taboo with the myths of the nation which is harder to overcome because it has defensive mechanisms to rational arguments or challenges since they have a claim of the status of the absolute truth, thus, irrespective of the facts myths prevail over them in a discussion. One of the such defensive mechanisms as I have discussed above is the usage of the generic label of ‘traitor’ while another one was to label the content of the conference as a mere propagation of the genocide claims of the Armenians, which were also reflect by some of the column writers

⁹⁴ Tanıl Bora. *Türk Sağının Üç Hali: Milliyetçilik, Muhafazakarlık, İslamcılık*. (The three phases of Turkish Right: Nationalism, Conservatism, Islamism.) (İstanbul: Birikim yayınları, 1998) p.25

⁹⁵ Jeffrey K. Olick; Daniel Levy. ‘Collective Memory and Cultural Constraints: Holocaust Myth and Rationality in German Politics’ *American Sociological Review* vol.62 no.6 dec.1997, p.924

whom I will discuss in the third chapter. This attempt of labeling the content was also reflected in the court decision that ruled in favor of the appeal of the Association of the Union of Jurists to stop the conference by asking for due investigation of the funding and the academic credentials of the participants. It is especially interesting if the fact that only the three of participants in the conference actually declared that the 1915 events were genocide out of sixty seven participants⁹⁶.

Moreover, in the Turkish context the defense mechanism of the foundational myth of the purity of the Turkish revolution is supported by another defensive mechanism, namely another myth, Sevres syndrome which I have discussed before. A part from being a preservation strategy, which ‘seeks to uphold a threatened national identity to support and reproduce it’⁹⁷ it is also recontextualized⁹⁸ to fit in the contemporary needs. However, while pointing out the way the taboos and myths function, I do not want to fall into a dichotomous analysis of the state versus society since the interaction of the myths and taboos are more complex than to allow such binary descriptions. Thus, at this point it is noteworthy to discuss some characteristics of Turkish political culture and some of the actors in the sphere of what is called civil society to be able to understand a certain taboo, ‘Armenian issue’. As it has been described by the alternative perspective, this taboo has been supported by the foundational myths that are recontextualized and embedded to the Turkish political scene.

At this level it is important to look at the relationship between the first group and the fourth group I have briefly mentioned before. Political parties and NGOs that support some political line were involved in the discussions. There are multiple actors in the scene which

⁹⁶ For the full list of the participants, organizers and the papers see conference program in the appendix.

⁹⁷ Ruth Wodak, Andras Kovacs. ‘Foreword’ in *NATO, Neutrality and National Identity-The Case of Austria and Hungary* (Wien: Böhlau, 2003)p.15

⁹⁸ *Ibid*,p.13

reflect the close tie between history writing and nationalism since they considered a historical discussion as an insult to Turkish nation. One such case was the Association of the Union of Jurists⁹⁹ that applied to the court to prevent the conference which resulted in the infamous court decision to ban two of the universities involved in the organization. They were the people who have sued Orhan Pamuk , as well, to defend Turkish nation against the crimes committed such as Kemal Kerinçsiz who in the case of the conference has argued that a state university should consider the ‘public good’¹⁰⁰, how ever it has been defined. Another interesting case has been the position of ASAM (Centre for Euroasian Strategic Research) and related to this institution IKSA (Research Institute Of Crimes Against Humanity) which specifically puts its aim as the following:

The main aim is to make scientific research on genocide, massacre, forced migration and other crimes against humanity focusing on the Turks and the Ottomans together with the Armenian question , Armenians of Diaspora and Armenia ; to publish the researches and organize meetings on these issues.¹⁰¹

Moreover, in 2001 it has created another institute in its body, the institute for Armenian Research. It has been one of the think-tanks for the development and elaboration of the official line¹⁰² and the members of which actively participated in the series of reactionary conferences.

One of the such conferences has been organized by *Bagimsiz Toplumsal Hareket Dernegi* (Association of Independent Social Movement)¹⁰³ with the title of “Conference on the Reality of

⁹⁹ Hukukçular Birliği Derneği

¹⁰⁰ http://www.bbc.co.uk/turkish/europe/story/2005/09/050922_solicitors-reaction.shtml

¹⁰¹ <http://www.eraren.org/tr/tanimim.asp>

¹⁰² headed by Gündüz Aktan a retired ambassador

¹⁰³ The aim of the association has been stated as assemble those who are loyal to the principles of Atatürk, national values and democratic Republic under one roof without any discrimination based on political affiliation, ethnicity, belief and socio-economic status and making them to act together. “We believe that political currents of foreign origin have created meaningless discrimination among our people. BHT refutes all these currents and does need to define itself with the concepts like right or left. For us, above all the political affiliations comes ‘ideological independence’ which is the foundational philosophy of our Republic and our only guides are the principles and reforms of Atatürk”

(<http://www.bth.org.tr>)

‘Armenian Question’¹⁰⁴ at Bilgi University on 15 April 2006. The position of the conference was made clear in the handouts the organizers have distributed before the beginning of the conference which states that ‘ Defense of the Fatherland is not Genocide’ The speakers were composed of Gündüz Aktan (chairman of ASAM), Yusuf (chairman of Turkish Historical Society) and Aygun Attar (head of the History department at Dumlupinar University). Gündüz Aktan, while refuting the applicability of the 1948 UN convention on genocide to the Armenian case and offering to go to the Conciliation Court at Lahey with Armenia to settle the issue has pointed two interesting aspects of the official discourse I have discussed in the earlier parts of this chapter.

A part of the speech of Gündüz Aktan was devoted to answer the criticisms raised in the conference on Ottoman Armenians in September 2005 such as the concept of the official thesis. “What has been said to be the official thesis is in fact agreed by 99% of the Turkish academia and media and almost 100% of Turkish society. Can this be called official thesis? Official thesis is a thesis, the defense of which is demanded by the state; however, in this case one can only call it as the national thesis.” I should also note that the usage of national in this context does not refer to nationalism as an ideology but it is in line with the understanding of official nationalism in which the terms is some what ‘naturalized’¹⁰⁵ to come to mean a moral value. The same line of defense was also present in the speech of Yusuf Halaçoğlu but this time there is also a personal justification. “I am a Turkish citizen and my identity is known. However, the most important identity is the identity of being a scholar. Therefore, I am not a person that defends the

¹⁰⁴ ‘Ermeni Sorunu’ Gercegi Konferansi

¹⁰⁵ Etienne Copeaux. ‘Türk Milliyetçiliği: Sözcükler, Tarih, İşaretler’ (Turkish Nationalism: Words, History, Signs) in *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce-Milliyetçilik* (Political Thought in Modern Turkey-Nationalism) (vol. IV) Istanbul: İletişim,2002. p.45

official thesis. Actually, it is hard to say that Turkey has an official thesis” His justification is especially interesting when his perspective of how he puts limits for the scholars¹⁰⁶ :

The acceptance of the events at that time as genocide necessitates the acceptance of these people as monsters and leads us to accuse them which we have no right to. It also enforces the contemporary generations to accept that their ancestors had committed murder which creates a psychological trauma. We never accept this, it is impossible. Today, we have no right to judge them, nobody in the world has. No person living in Turkey can attach the name of murderer to them.¹⁰⁷

While positioning themselves vis-à-vis the criticisms raised by the alternative approach, the content of the papers presented in these conferences does not seem to have changed much. Compared to the interviews they have given before the conference in September 2005, the most significant change is the justification of their position by refuting the usage of the concept of the ‘official thesis’. This, in itself may have been a minor change but at the same it signifies that the official thesis has to meet the challenges somewhat by trying to answer the criticisms raised by the alternative discourse.

(Re)Production of the Discourses

In this chapter I have tried to analyze the emergence of the discourses, their dynamics and actors with a special emphasis on the actors who are perceived as possessing professional authority on the subject matter. However, the production and/or reproduction of these discourses are not limited to these actors. Actors with the political authority and the actors that lack the formal political authority but who have the power to shape the public opinion are also crucial to be able analyze the reproduction and the dissemination of these discourses.

¹⁰⁶ Yusuf Halacoglu, interview by Ertugrul Mavioglu, published in the daily newspaper *Radikal*, 13 February 2006

¹⁰⁷ O tarihteki bir olayın soykırım olarak kabul edilmesi, hakkımız olmadığı halde, o insanların canavar olduğunu kabul etmemize ve onları suçlamamıza yol açar. Bugünkü nesilleri de atalarının böyle bir cinayeti işlediklerini kabule zorlar ki o da psikolojik travmalar yaratır. Bunu asla kabul etmeyiz, mümkün değil. Bugün bizim onları yargılama hakkımız yoktur, dünyada kimsenin yoktur. Türkiye'de yaşayan bir insan onlara cani sıfatını yükleyemez.

Calhoun suggests that it is at this point that the link between the nationalist discourse and the media is to be made since nationalism as a political ideology offers a prism through which information can be processed. It is only after this process of filtering, the knowledge provided by ideology can be created. Having provided the framework of the discourses in the second chapter, in the third chapter I would like to analyze the representations of these discourses in the media in connection to the discourses of the politicians .

CHAPTER 3

REPRODUCTION OF THE DISCOURSES: VOICES RISING FROM THE COLUMNS

Discourse and Nationalism

Weiss and Wodak argue that discourse ‘constitutes situations, objects of knowledge and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people’.¹⁰⁸ Thus, it is essential for the construction and reproduction of ideologies as claiming to poses power of knowledge. If we follow the line of Breuilly that I have discussed in the first chapter in the construction and reproduction of the idea of uniqueness through national histories, the discourse of nationalism plays an important role. This linkage can be made through the projects of nation-building, the ideology of which will be reproduced by the elites to come (albeit according to their own needs). Consequently, in this chapter I will highlight the position of the political elites and the elites of the media, especially column writers, to analyze main themes of this reproduction in the discussions regarding the conference as my case study.

¹⁰⁸ Waheed Samy, “Perspectives on 9/11: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Ideologies, Opinions, and Attitudes in Arab Media” (PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2004). p.5

Trying to keep the background I have discussed in the second chapter, I will try to make an analysis of the discourses presented in the main stream media through the column writers. I will look at the top five in terms of widest circulation¹⁰⁹ together with three more¹¹⁰ in which some of their column writers, I believe, have made an important impact in the discussion in terms of their discourses and ideological stance. In this respect, I will focus on a time period of two weeks mainly, the last weeks of May and September 2005 when the issue has been discussed widely due to the debates in the parliament , the decision of postponement by the hosting university and later due to the court decision to ban the conference to take place in two of the organizing universities. Another reason for choosing this time period has been to follow the link between the discourse of the political elite and the media elite (if we can label the column writers as such) Consequently, this analysis can shed some light on the reproduction and presentation of the discourses of both the official and the alternative perspectives.

As Van Dijk suggests¹¹¹, elites have a crucial role in creating and disseminating this ideology mainly because of their privileged status in terms of gathering the attention of the public through their access to media in contemporary societies (its effect can also be backed up by the education system especially when the discourse of these elites are maintaining the status quo, in line with the official discourse). Nationalism can be reproduced by the power elites or can be reproduced through popular culture but nevertheless it has certain functions; differentiation, continuity and legitimization¹¹². Moreover, this reproduction through media , the power of which was growing after 1980s due to privatization in Turkey , have the leading role

¹⁰⁹ Posta, Zaman, Hürriyet, Sabah, Milliyet. (source: <http://www.dorduncukuvvetmedya.com/article.php?sid=5914>)

¹¹⁰ Vatan, Cumhuriyet, Radikal

¹¹¹ Van Dijk, Ideology: a multidisciplinary approach,1998,p.173-174 cited in Waheed Samy, "Perspectives on 9/11: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Ideologies, Opinions, and Attitudes in Arab Media" (PhD Dissertation,University of Michigan, 2004).

¹¹² Umut Ozkirimli. 'Türkiye'de Gayriresmi ve popüler milliyetçilik' in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce-Milliyetçilik* (vol. IV) İstanbul: İletisim,2002,p.711

according to Umut Ozkirimli¹¹³. It can be argued that it draws a picture of a nationalizing nation. Even if the phase of nation-building had been passed there is a constant need for representation, reconstruction and finally reproduction. Looking at the political discourses of the mainstream parties in Turkey, one can also say that nationalism is present as a strong component of political discourses irrespective of their ideological stance. Thus, Ozkirimli rightly points out a conclusion that the system is itself nationalist to a certain extent and reproduction of nationalism only functions to make it even more popular¹¹⁴.

In this respect the relationship between the political elites and the media elites, such as journalists is important. Van Dijk explains this relationship in terms of reproduction of ideology through discourses in the media. “The journalists ‘activate’ knowledge that the readers are expected to know, they determine what can be presupposed or left implicit, and what needs to be imparted as new knowledge”¹¹⁵.

To be able to explain the interaction between the second group (opinion makers without formal authority) and the sixth group (general public) within a framework of nationalism, it is crucial to look at the process of dissemination of ideology. If we accept that media is the most important tool of the ‘middle-level intellectuals’¹¹⁶ for the hegemonic ideology to be disseminated in the society than it becomes important to look at the position of the intellectuals in the media as opinion makers. However, I believe that it is useful to make a differentiation between different roles of different types of media. Martin Shaw¹¹⁷ points out that in crisis

¹¹³ Ibid,p.715

¹¹⁴ P.716

¹¹⁵ Waheed Samy, “Perspectives on 9/11: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Ideologies, Opinions, and Attitudes in Arab Media” (PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2004). ,p.14

¹¹⁶ The intellectuals who are providing a bridge between the creators of the hegemonic ideology and the society according to Y. Dogan Cetinkaya. ‘Orta Katman Aydinlar ve Turk Milliyetçiliginin Kitlesellesmesi’ *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce-Milliyetçilik* (vol. IV) Istanbul: İletişim,2002) p.92

¹¹⁷ In Dusan Reljic. *Killing Screens: Media in Times of Conflict*, London : Central European Review,2001 pp.13-80

situations¹¹⁸ the primary source of news is television but it is the newspapers that has a greater effect on crystallizing attitudes. Thus in this case, column writers can be said to have greater impact in terms of the public opinion. However, before moving to the analysis of the column writers, to provide the link between the discourse of the politicians and the column writers, it is necessary to mention how the discussions have started to take place in the media and the parliament.

Discussions about the Conference: initial stage

Three weeks before the conference a discussion started¹¹⁹ in the newspapers due to a debate between İlber Ortaylı (a historian and general director of Topkapı museum) and Murat Belge (column writer in *Radikal*, literature professor and one of the organizers of the conference)¹²⁰ This debate has triggered some reactions and discussions in the newspapers but I believe the turning point of the debate in terms of public attention was when the conference has been discussed in the parliament.

The discussion of the conference started in the National Assembly on May 24th with the remarks of Şükrü Elekdağ , MP from the oppositional party CHP, claiming that “Under the guise

¹¹⁸ if we can look at the tension of the discussion about the conference as a crisis in which the official discourse has been in clash with the alternative discourse.

¹¹⁹ Vangelis Kechriotis. ‘The Historian, the Philologist, the Minister and the Traitors: thoughts from Turkey on a Historical Conference’ (http://www.greekworks.com/content/index.php/weblog/extended/the_historian_the_philologist_the_minister_and_the_traitors_thoughts_from_t/)

¹²⁰The debate goes on till the original date of the conference. For example, on 21 May 2005 in the newspaper *Milliyet* Ortaylı states that those who are invited to the conference are indeed from the same team and in this light the issue can not be discussed in a healthy way and he adds that since Gunduz Aktan is not invited the judicial aspects will be discussed by the philologist Murat Belge [supporting the accusations of one-sidedness of the conference while the degrading the academic authority of the participants] (<http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2005/05/21/siyaset/siy03.html>) while in the same article Sukru Elekdağ the MP from CHP claims that in the conference the aim is to disseminate the unreal claims of the Armenian propagation which

of science, Armenian thesis will be propagated. It is sorrowful that Boğaziçi University would be used for this treacherous project.”¹²¹ Following these remarks Ramazan Toprak from AKP took a step further and called for “all healthy nationalist elements to do their duty and come to protest in front of Boğaziçi University.”¹²² He continued his speech with the following: “I want this conference which reflects the understanding of those who advocate mandate, to be pursuit. Turkish nation will never forgive those who lie to their own history.”¹²³

However, even harsher criticism came from the Spokesperson of the Government, the Minister of Justice, Cemil Cicek whose speech has been discussed widely afterwards. He claimed that the MPs were reflecting the feeling of the nation and states the following:

There is no nation whose hand is cleaner [from blood], whose consciousness is clearer [from the burden of faults/ crimes] and whose forehead is more unblemished [by the shame] compared to Turkish nation. While the government and the opposition, the state and the nation are working together to stave off the claims of the so called Armenian genocide, what is the meaning of stabbing these efforts from the back? (...) By this act, they have stabbed us in the back. (...) We have to end this period of irresponsibility, treason and propagating against the nation while holding its identity card.¹²⁴

will become starting points of discussion in the parliament as well. The following day Belge replied to the accusations of Ortaylı by claiming that he is making demagogy.

¹²¹ From *Radikal* 25 May 2005

¹²² Both Elekdag and Toprak were the pioneers of the proposals given by their parties to discuss the Armenian issue which turned into a joint discussion in the parliament on 13th of April which prepared the ground for the context of the discussions in the parliament regarding the conference (see chronology)

¹²³ "Ermenistan'da Türk tezlerini savunacak bir kongre düzenlense, sonu cezaevi olurdu. YÖK kılını kıpırdatmıyor. Resmi tezi mahkûm eden bir sonuç çıkarsa adli, siyasi organları tüm Türk halkını göreve çağırıyorum. Mandacılığı savunanların anlayışını yansıtan bu konferansın çok iyi takip edilmesini istiyorum. Türk milleti kendi tarihine yalan atanları asla affetmeyecek."

¹²⁴ "Türk milleti kadar eli temiz, vicdanı temiz, alnı ak bir millet daha yoktur. Sözde Ermeni soykırımını iddialarını bertaraf etmek için muhalefetle iktidar, devlet, millet birlikte çalışırken, bu çabaları arkadan hançerlemek ne anlama geliyor? Siz falanca ülkelerin parlamentolarını nasıl ikna edeceksiniz bu durumda? Bize diyecekler ki siz gidin, Boğaz'a bakarak bunları söyleyen Boğaziçi Üniversitesi'ni ikna edin. Bu hareketle arkadan hançerlemişlerdir bizi. Üniversiteler özerktir ama özerklik sorumsuzluk değildir. Bu büyük sorumsuzluk ve ciddiyetsizliktir. Bazı cemiyetlerimiz, derneklerimiz 'Özgürlük yok' diyor. Türkiye'de milleti arkadan hançerleme, iftira etme özgürlüğü var. Keşke Adalet Bakanı olarak dava açma yetkimi devretmeseydim. Şimdi YÖK, Boğaziçi Üniversitesi ne yapacak, merak ediyorum. Bu ciddiyetsizlik, bu sorumsuzluk, bu milletin nüfus cüzdanını taşıyıp bu milletin aleyhine propaganda yapma ve ihanet etme dönemini kapatmamız lazımdır."

The concepts like nation, treason, superiority of the nation, national history and memory, the responsibility of the members of the nation/citizens are in the centre of the debate that is exemplified by the above quotations. However, these speeches made in the parliament were also criticized. Most of the media took the side of the universities in the name of freedom of speech and the independence of the universities as institutions.

However, due to the perceived problems of security and the rising tension due to the speeches made in the parliament Boğaziçi University decided to postpone the conference and issued a statement to the media declaring:

“We are concerned that the prejudgments about the content of a conference which has not taken place will disturb academic freedom of a state university. Under these circumstances and considering the possible result of the realization of the conference we have decided that it will be more suitable to postpone the meeting.”

This decision has led to a coverage not only in the Turkish media but also in the world media and has caused a series of reactions by the representatives of the European Union, the impact of which has been discussed in the previous chapter. Consequently, The Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has declared that the speech made by the Minister of Justice was only reflecting his personal opinion, not the opinion of the government, even if he has taken the ground in the name of the government. Another reaction came from 109 members of Boğaziçi University faculty in the form of a declaration criticizing the decision of the postponement and the declarations in the parliament in which they have stated :

The declarations made by the Minister of Justice and some of the parliamentarians regarding a conference which has not taken place constitutes an offense to the freedom of thought and speech. Moreover, it makes the situation even worse to try to prevent the thoughts which are not yet declared. It is in clear contradiction to spirit of the reforms undertaken regarding freedom of expression in Turkey. To accuse individuals and institution of treason in the name of the government regarding a scientific meeting which has not taken place yet is a serious offence against the individual and citizenship rights(...)¹²⁵

¹²⁵ 24 Mayıs tarihinde Adalet Bakanı ve bazı milletvekillerinin henüz yapılmamış bir konferansla ilgili beyanları düşünce ve ifade özgürlüğüne bir saldırı mahiyetindedir. Üstelik henüz ifade edilmemiş düşüncelerin engellenmeye

Together with the support of the government , later, it is announced that the conference will take place on 23 September 2005. However, just a day before the beginning of the conference, an unexpected ruling has been passed by the court against two of the universities (including the one which was supposed to host the conference) banning the Boğaziçi and Sabancı universities to host the conference till an appropriate investigation regarding the funding and the content of the conference is conducted. Taking the support of the media, the Prime Minister and the Higher Education Council(which was opposing the conference by labeling it as unscientific as I pointed out in the second chapter) , the conference was held in the third university on the 24th amidst crowds throwing rotten tomatoes and eggs at the participants as they arrived. . The events I described led to a big public discussion and a wide coverage in the media about the nation, history and the qualities attributed to the Turkish nation.

As can be seen from the examples above, the main themes of discussion evolve around the concept of nation which will turn into discussion about democracy and freedom of speech ,first, after the decision to postpone the conference by Boğaziçi University Rectorate and second, after the court decision. . If we look at the quotation from Şükrü Elekdağ there are three important themes that will be crucial in the analysis of the column writers: Treason, scientificity and the position of a state university in what has been called propagation of the Armenian thesis. The connection of these three is especially interesting from the point of the triangle of nationalism, state and history. It reflects an understanding of loyalty to the state

çalışılması, durumu daha da vahim bir hale getirmektedir. Bu durum Türkiye'de düşünceyi ifade konusunda yapılan reformların lafzına ve ruhuna temelden ters düşmektedir.

Hangi konuların kimler tarafından ve nasıl tartışılacağına akademik kurullar tarafından karar verilmesi, bilimsel özerkliğin esasıdır. Bu nedenle üniversite öğretim üyelerinin düzenlemiş olduğu bilimsel toplantılara her türlü siyasi müdahaleyi şiddetle kınıyoruz.

Henüz gerçekleştirilmemiş bir bilimsel toplantıya atfen, kurumları ve kişileri hükümet adına ve meclis kürsüsünden 'hıyanetle' itham etmek, kişi ve vatandaşlık haklarına yönelik ağır bir saldırıdır.

(See chronology for the full version)

through loyalty to the nation to the extent that the deviation from the official national perspectives¹²⁶ leads not only to treason but also being unscientific. The issue of science will be brought in the discussions between the column writers, most of the times in relation to ‘truth’ claims.

Another interesting aspect is the underlying ‘Sevres Syndrome’ which keeps occurring. When Ramazan Toprak refers to ‘those who advocate mandate’ he actually refers to the period between the end of WWI and proclamation of the Republic. At the time, in relation to Sevres peace treaty there were people, mainly different segments of Ottoman elite, who were advocating to accept a mandate of one of the Allied powers. Since the official national discourse of today portray them as ‘internal enemies’ of the nation in terms of laying the ground for losing sovereignty and independence, this reference has been used to stigmatize the organizers of the conference as traitors again.

Above all, the most commented speech was made by Cemil Çiçek from whom I also included a large quotation. The depiction of the nation as innocent and noble (free from the burden of any sort of mischief or guilt) is directly connected to the effort of Turkish nationalism to create self-esteem and uniqueness, which can be traced back to Early Republican period as I have discussed in the first chapter. This belief of innocence goes to the point of victimization which functions through Sevres Syndrome, and thus they are directly connected. Related to that, the whole reaction ,again, ends up with the issue of loyalty and treason.

Before moving to the analysis of the column writers, I should also note an interesting agreement between the CHP (Republican People’s Party which is the main opposition party in

¹²⁶ According to Tanil Bora, official nationalism/ Atatürk nationalism ,which is different from other types of Turkish nationalism such as Kemalsit, Islamist, Liberal, Radical etc., has a mental perspective focused on the state itself and on populist attributions of heroism. (Tanil Bora. ‘Nationalist Discourses in Turkey’ *the South Atlantic Quarterly*, 102:2/3, summer 2003,p.437)

the parliament) and the AKP (Justice and Development Party which is in power). In terms of their ideological stance, CHP can be described as Kemalist (meaning following the perceived ideology of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in a very secular line) while AKP can be described as Islamist (some say moderate Islamist or liberal Islamist). As can be seen from this description, generally these two can not agree upon any issue but interestingly enough they seem to have agreed upon criticizing the conference (after the reactions the position of AKP has changed in terms of supporting the conference while members of CHP has had mixed stances.) This agreement is also an interesting sign of alignment between some segments of Turkish left and right under the discourse of nationalism while incorporating anti-imperialist discourse in reference to EU.

So far I have tried to give a short analysis of the political climate because it is now possible to point out the similarities between the discourses of some of the writers with the ones I have just described and analyzed to provide a better understanding of the connection between discourse, ideology, nationalism and elites. In this respect, I will look at the discussion which was accelerated after these speeches in the parliament (it was at this point that it has attracted the public attention since it was given as breaking news in television and it has been put to the headlines in some of the newspapers.)

Themes in the discourses of ColumnWriters

Sevres Syndrome : Enemies, Conspiracy, Betrayal

What the Sevres syndrome includes is the sense of being besieged and the fear of the plot against Turkey by the external powers for partition/division Turkey just like the treaty suggested in 1920. The mistrust created towards the West led to the sensitivity about sovereignty

in the early years of the Republic.¹²⁷ This is correctly explained by Dietrich Jung as the following:

The foundational myth of the Republic and the political culture of modern Turkey were heavily molded by this violent struggle against internal and external foes. This historical experience reinforced the Ottoman heritage of conspiracy and betrayal that already was a part of the social habitus of the Republican elite. Through the lenses of this particular legacy, Turkey's military-bureaucratic establishment has perceived the Turkish state as permanently endangered¹²⁸

This understanding culminating in the 'Sevres syndrome' has not only been an important aspect in the discussions of self-determination and minority rights in Turkey but also has functioned as a unifying umbrella, as a common theme in the Turkish political culture. It can be considered as an impact of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire or can be treated as a legacy of the Early Republican era. In both cases, we can assume an implicit reference to the similarity of the political environment of that period and today (great power politics working against the Ottoman Empire because of plans of partition). According to Baskin Oran¹²⁹, the legacies of the Early Republican period were coupled with the Cyprus problem, terrorist activities of the Armenian ASALA, PKK and Kurdish activities in Northern Iraq. They strengthened the belief of ongoing attempts to divide Turkey and the sympathy in the Western public towards them turned it into a paranoia. It highlights the need to be strong and unified in the face of enemies, conspiracies and betrayal. In these terms it supports some of the characteristics of Turkish nationalism such as claim of uniqueness, difference, global importance while at the same time including the fear of a potential threat of its existence. According to Nancy Lindisfarne¹³⁰ this

¹²⁷ Ayla Göl. *Turkey's Euro-vision* National Europe center Paper no.107, 4 July 2003

¹²⁸ Dietrich Jung. Wolfgang Piccoli. *Turkey at the Crossroads: Ottoman Legacies and a Greater Middle East*, London ; New York : Zed Books ; New York : Distributed in the USA exclusively by Palgrave, 2001

¹²⁹ Baskin Oran. *Türkiye'de Azinliklar: Kavramlar, Lozan, Ic Mevzuat, Ictihat, Uygulama* (Minorities in Turkey: Concepts, Lozan, Internal Legislation, Precedent, Implementation) Istanbul: TESEV yayinlari, 2004 p.117

¹³⁰ Nancy Lindisfarne. 'Ayrksicilik' (Uniqueness) *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce-Milliyetçilik* (Political Thought in Modern Turkey-Nationalism) (vol. IV) Istanbul: İletisim,2000

emphasis on uniqueness leads to highlighting the differences while writing the history of the country or the nation. By implication it prevents any comparison and leads to an ambiguity of understanding one's place in the world stage together with lifting the responsibility of the politicians upon their acts.

Since Sevres syndrome is a common theme that has been referred to in different contexts, it is not surprising to see it in the discourses of both the supporters and opponents of the conference in the media. However, before moving on, another distinction should be made at this point between the supporters of the conference in terms of its content and the supporters of the conference in terms of EU process, image of Turkey and freedom of speech. In the first case, rather than using Sevres syndrome as part of their argument, the tendency is to criticize it as a paranoia. However, in the second case, there is also a discourse of enemies of Turkey or an image of Turkey surrounded by plotters to find a weak point. Thus, the following argument is either not to give another card to the hands of the enemy to use it against Turkey because they are trying to prevent the democratization of Turkey or EU process. Consequently, from this perspective, external enemies are collaborating with the internal ones who are anti-European, anti-democratic, or ignorant enough to give an advantage to the enemies of Turkey. “ If Mr. Cicek with his junta like words thinks that he has served Turkey, he is very wrong. Because even if he wanted to, he couldn't have given a bigger trump to the incurable enemies of the Turks and Turkey in Europe and America”¹³¹ In the case of the opponents to the conference, the actors and the intentions are different but the setting is quite the same. In reference to the postponement of the conference, Emin Çölaşan states that ‘to be hit from inside by somebody and the possibility to give a trump to the enemies of Turkey, Armenia and Armenian Diaspora

¹³¹ Semih Idiz, *Milliyet*, 26 May 2005

have been avoided.'¹³² It is at this point that what can be called as nationalist and 'official' line will be criticized by those who are supporting the alternative discourse like Can Dunder :

The claim of 'they have stabbed in the back' is a sword of power which perceives every different idea as an enemy. This weapon, dating 1930[the Early Republican Era], works for every age. Sometimes attributed to Armenians, sometimes to Arabs, sometimes [this sword] turns inside and chops the intellectuals of Bosphorus who embrace the enemy(...)¹³³

These presentations of enemies of Turkey are also functional in terms of drawing the lines of 'us' versus 'them' which I will elaborate later. A follow-up theme in this framework is conspiracy theories that take a step further than enemies of Turkey/Turks. It lies in the heart of the Sevres syndrome as the legitimization of the reproduction of Turkish nationalism. It also serves as a basis for the current emphasis on the unity of the nation and the indivisibility of the country/state. As can be seen from the Turkish constitution of 1982 the theme of indivisibility and nationalism¹³⁴ constitute one of the main pillars of the mentality of the power elites as well as being deeply rooted in the discourses of politicians.

In the context of the conference just like the division of internal and external enemies, there are internal and external conspiracies most of the time collaborating with each other. Generally, they refer to Armenia, Armenian Diaspora, Europeans and internal collaborators in the form of intellectuals/academicians who are organizing/participating in the conference, with a slight addition of anti-imperialist discourse.

¹³² Emin Çölaşan, *Hürriyet*, 27 May 2005

¹³³ "Arkadan hançerlediler" iddiası, her farklı fikri düşman sayan bir iktidar palasıdır. 1930 model bu silah her dönem işe yarar. Gün olur Araplara, gün olur Ermenilere yakıştırılır, bazen de "içeri" dönüp "düşmana sahip çıkan", viskici "Boğaz aydınları" nı doğrar. (Can Dunder, *Milliyet*, 26May)

¹³⁴ An excerpt from the preamble: *In line with the concept of nationalism and the reforms and principles introduced by the founder of the Republic of Turkey, Atatürk, the immortal leader and the unrivalled hero, this Constitution, which affirms the eternal existence of the Turkish nation and motherland and the indivisible unity of the Turkish state, embodies;*

Conspiracies can be summarized as:

- a) to prevent Turkey's membership to EU-“Armenia, by inciting European crusader subconsciousness with the aim of taking something from Turkey and chauvinist Europeans with the aim of preventing Turkish membership to EU, are using ‘genocide’”¹³⁵.
- b) to damage/destroy Turkey (related to the image of Turkish nationalism of itself--greatness)- “I am sure that this is the game of the global players to beat Turkey once more with an Armenian stick.”¹³⁶
- c) to achieve the imperialist aim of history upon Ottoman Empire- “Now the imperialists want to light up the fight [over Anatolia] once more, opening up the old bruises, the old bills dating the beginning of the last century are started to be checked through weird plots of genocide.”¹³⁷

These three versions of conspiracies are reflecting the new application of the old recipe of Sevres syndrome in the new/changing socio-political conjuncture. Sevres Syndrome starts to be used as part of the conservative/ nationalist discourse against the membership to the EU together with anti-imperial discourse which has been incorporated as well (both by the left and the right). Not surprisingly apart from the explicit anti-Western discourse, these comments of the column writers are very much in line with the comments of the MPs in the discussions in the parliament

Having these two important characteristics of division paranoia and anti-Western discourse, Sevres Syndrome has been incorporated as a critique of extreme Westernization under the title of ‘national conservatism’¹³⁸. According to Tanıl Bora it could be seen as a leitmotif in various

¹³⁵ Taha Akyol, *Milliyet*, 28 May 2005

¹³⁶ Omer Lutfi Mete, *Sabah*, 26 September 2005

¹³⁷ İlhan Selçuk, *Cumhuriyet*, 27 September 2005

¹³⁸ Tanıl Bora. *Milliyetçiliğin Kara Baharı* (Dark Spring of Nationalism) (Ankara: Birikim, 1995) p.76

types of nationalism like Kemalist, central rightist, conservative or ultra nationalist¹³⁹. Actually, I believe that the reactionary function fulfilled by the Sevres Syndrome could be seen as a part of the Turkish conservative discourse in general.(putting together neo-conservatism, religious conservatism, Kemalist conservatism¹⁴⁰ even if they use different points of reference and different understandings of the golden age to be returned.) Since change in Turkey is generally associated with Westernization, this myth fits in the critical and/or skeptical stances very well. It seems especially true for the periods of crisis in which a form of radical change is on the horizon of public discussion. This reaction against the ‘radical’ change is also reflected in the case of relations with EU.

Moreover, this tool can also be used against any perceived threat of an opposition from inside. Thus, the internal enemies will be collaborating with the external ones to ‘stab from the back’ in a very cowardly manner since they can not confront Turkey/Turks openly. Emin Çölaşan provides a nice example in his article after the description of Turkey being besieged in terms of ‘genocide’ decisions where he states that “Today, countries are hit not necessarily by weapons but with such cunning methods both from inside and from the back.”¹⁴¹ Ruhat Mengi also follows a similar line after adding that Armenian businessmen are spending millions of dollars for the recognition of the genocide she goes on as follows: “It is possible to question the relationship of interest of those who have participated the conference and the funding of the [previous] meetings in the American universities”¹⁴²

¹³⁹ According to Tanıl Bora Kemalist nationalism (ulusculuk) is a reaction against neo-liberal hegemony and rise of the Islamist movement demanding a Kemalist revision of secularism. Neo-liberal nationalism on the other hand focuses on the modernization /capitalization and achieving the level of development of the West. On the other hand Islamist nationalism perceives Turkey as the potential leader of the Islamic world.

¹⁴⁰ Kemalism can both be seen as conservatism and nationalism since there is a certain golden age , Early Republican period, that supporters of this line wish to return to, in which one of the main pillars is considered to be nationalism

¹⁴¹ Emin Çölaşan, *Hürriyet*, 27 May 2005

¹⁴² Ruhat Mengi, *Vatan*, 24 September 2005

In the same way, it is possible to talk about an image of a greater scheme to prevent Turkey's greatness and divide it so just like in the 'centuries old imperial plans' these internal enemies are trying to damage Turkey in multiple fronts. "These same cadres weren't ashamed of praising PKK at the height of PKK terrorism. We have even lived through this and didn't forget anything."¹⁴³ It can be connected to the interpretation of emergence of nationalism in the Balkans as a Western conspiracy and propaganda against the Ottoman Empire. Connected to this mentality the current issues like Kurdish nationalism or greater pressure upon Turkey regarding the 'Armenian issue' can be interpreted in the same way. The perspective of reducing Kurdish problem to an outside conspiracy and propaganda since it is 'artificial' seems to prevail in almost all types of Turkish nationalism¹⁴⁴. Moreover according to Tanıl Bora¹⁴⁵ Kurdish nationalist movement was also linked to the Armenians (who were perceived to be 'subcontractors' of the master plan of dividing Turkey) as another tool to divide 'us'.

One aspect or implication of the Sevres Syndrome is perceived national isolation. As has been discussed by Yumul and Özkırmımlı , the understanding of 'the Turk has no friend but the Turk' has been one of the underlying themes of nationalism in the press.¹⁴⁶ This isolationism couples with an understanding of uniqueness and vulnerability of the nation which paradoxically leads to constant comparison and evaluation vis-à-vis the West since it has been presented as the symbol of modernization to be targeted for reaching the 'contemporary level of civilization'(the ultimate aim of Kemalism). "Turkey can not be treated as a whipping boy to be slapped in every instance. If EU is strong enough then let it first condemn the 'genocide' injustice of France

¹⁴³ Emin Çölaşan, *Hürriyet*, 27 May 2005

¹⁴⁴ Mesut Yeğen. 'Türk Milliyetçiliği ve Kürt Sorunu' (Turkish Nationalism and Kurdish Question) *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce-Milliyetçilik* (Political Thought in Modern Turkey-Nationalism) (vol. IV) İstanbul: İletişim,2000p.886

¹⁴⁵ Tanıl Bora. 'Milli Ezber: Saf Türk -Karisik Öteki'(Pure Turk-Mixed Other) *Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce-Milliyetçilik* (Political Thought in Modern Turkey-Nationalism) (vol. IV) İstanbul: İletişim,2002. p. 918

against Turkey.[referring to the law passed by the French parliament which made it illegal to claim that there was no Armenian genocide]. France, the contemporary civilization...”¹⁴⁷ On the other hand as part of the love and hate relationship, there is another aspect of self-victimization which is coupled with the concern of legitimization in the eyes of the West. As reflected by Reha Muhtar : “ Let it be... Everybody is making up stories, why not them? [referring to the organizers of the conference] Let them speak as well... The infidel will say, what a barbarism, and even if he was not inclined to believe in it, will believe to those nonsense of the so-called intellectuals”¹⁴⁸ The usage of ‘infidel’ is quite telling in terms of emphasizing another aspect of the dichotomy of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ in the form of the Christian West and Muslim Turkey. It can also be connected to the perceived Ottoman heritage of being besieged by the Christian West (as depicted by official\ national history).

Those who are supporting the conference just from the perspective of freedom of speech (especially after the court decision) may not refer to a conspiracy but would refer to the image of Turkey even if they also oppose the conference. Reha Muhtar is a very nice example in this case : “They [in reference to court decision] managed to show how democrat we are. Now, there is no need for the conference [he finds it one-sided]. The world has already had an impression about our situation.”¹⁴⁹ This point seems to be concern of the supporters of the conference together as well. “I don’t care about EU negotiations , the miserable situation that Turkey has fallen into , as incapable of tolerating a scientific conference, is enough to be ashamed of.”¹⁵⁰ This concern for the image of Turkey may be connected to an underlying feeling of shame due to

¹⁴⁶ Yumul and Özkırmılı, ‘Reproducing the Nation: Banal Nationalism in the Turkish Press’ in *Media, Culture & Society*, vol.22, 2000 p795

¹⁴⁷ Ruhat Mengi. *Vatan*. 27 May 2005

¹⁴⁸ “Olsun varsin... **7 düvel**, atıp tutuyor, **onlar mı eksik kalacak?..**Onlar da konuşsun(...)” “Elin gavuru, Bu ne **barbarlıktır** deyip, **inanmayacağı varsa inanıverecek, alim allah soykırım safsatalarına...**” (Reha Muhtar. *Sabah*. 26 May 2005)

¹⁴⁹ Reha Muhtar, *Sabah*, 23 September

lack of tolerance and democracy which are generally associated with the West as the contemporary level of civilization. From a different perspective the image of Turkey is also crucial for convincing the world public about the unfair claims of genocide. “Turkey is going to be presented as a country that can’t stand free discussion of history, which Turkey trusts so much, and this will accelerate the ‘genocide’ claims of Armenians”¹⁵¹ Thus, the image of Turkey vis-à-vis the world/West is a very important theme shared by all sides of the discussion.

This brings us to the recurrent discussions of modernization and Westernization in Turkey. It’s not surprising to find such a common ground since reaching the ‘level of contemporary civilization’ has been the main aim of the Republican elites¹⁵². This ideal seems to be incorporated in the mentality of both the nationalists and liberals. Moreover, even in the conservative circles, West/Europe has been main point of reference for comparison regarding the main themes of conservatism like the question of ‘what to conserve and what to change’. In this environment the image of Turkey is crucial with an implicit feeling of being misunderstood most of the times. With the growing importance of EU in Turkish politics, the prospective membership to EU has contributed to this discourse as I have discussed in the previous chapter. “Either we are going to become a prosperous society of western style or a third world country in which the agenda of discussion is set from above.”¹⁵³ Thus, the western model is the predominant paradigm even if there may be a love-hate relationship. It can be used to prove that ‘we’ are better than them and they don’t have a right to criticize us as can be seen in the examples referring to French treatment in Algeria or the case of Indian Americans. However,

¹⁵⁰ Can Dunder, *Milliyet*, 24 September

¹⁵¹ Taha Akyol, *Milliyet*, 26 May 2005

¹⁵² Another excerpt from the current constitution (from the preamble): *The determination to safeguard the everlasting existence, prosperity and material and spiritual well-being of the Republic of Turkey, and to attain the standards of contemporary civilization as an honourable member with equal rights of the family of world nations;* (source: <http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/english/constitution.htm>)

¹⁵³ Ergun Babahan, *Sabah*, 25 May 2005

even in these cases the structure of arguments evolve around the perceived characteristics/merits of the West like democracy and freedom of speech. “Turkey has proved that it is not opposing freedom of speech like France and Sweden that try to prevent the views rejecting genocide thesis: those who accept genocide have also talked.”¹⁵⁴

In the framework of the supporters and the opponents of the conference there are different layers of arguments as i have showed above, however, this complexity is also limited due to a constant distinction of ‘us’ from ‘them’ how ever defined by different parties. Therefore it leads to a climate of polarization in the center of which lies the position of the intellectuals and social scientists of the alternative discourse and their responsibility towards science or the nation.

Challenging the Official Discourse: Polarization, Intellectuals, One-sidedness, Us versus Them

Armenian issue has already been polarized politically before the conference in terms of the firm positions taken by Turkish and Armenian sides officially as I pointed out in the introduction. Since the conference was perceived and presented as a challenge or denial of the official perspective of Turkey, new lines were to be drawn concerning the ‘Turkish’ side. Depending on the stance taken in terms of the conference, the depictions of the two sides/two poles of the discussion vary enormously. ‘Us’ versus ‘Them’ depiction ha also been made accordingly.

The line of description of the division from the perspective of the supporters of the conference evolves around the concept of change and democracy. Can Dundar describes ‘them’ as the mentality of the status quo: “The mentality that is used to rule despite universal laws is trying to stop the wind of change which will erase its power.”¹⁵⁵ From another perspective, in

¹⁵⁴ Sahin Alpay, *Zaman*, 27 September 2005

¹⁵⁵ Can Dundar, *Milliyet*, 28 May 2005

reference to court decision, Guler Kazmaci in a paradigm of modernism and openness since shariat has this pejorative connotation of backwardness in the secular discourse: “They don’t want shariat to come but at the same time they want to live in a closed regime like Iran.”¹⁵⁶ In these examples, on the one side of the discussion there are those supporting the status quo, the fascists, the ‘demagogy block’ while on the other side there are the responsible intellectuals. Thus, the discussions about the Armenian issue as called as ‘last taboo’ by some of the participants of the conference becomes a symbol of a more structural change in Turkey. It’s not only about challenging the official historical discourse about the events but it’s also about challenging the mentality of a status quo resisting to democratic change.

On the other side, the depictions of the two sides are evolving around the image of conspiracies as discussed above. The side of the organizers/supporters of the conference as those looking up to EU as their master and ready to betray Turkey ¹⁵⁷or as foreign Turks¹⁵⁸ The side of the opponents have been perceived to be silenced through different conspiracies [prepared by supporters of the conference], nevertheless, they are loyal citizens trying to prevent such conspiracies and injustices against Turkey.

Another important theme in terms of questioning the legitimacy or the credibility of the conference has been the characteristics attributed to ‘intellectuals’. ‘Issues of Scientific Responsibility and Democracy’ has been part of the title of the conference and not surprisingly one of the issues raised has been what is the responsibility of a scientist/academician/intellectual. Do they have the right to criticize the sacredness of the nation /country or do they have to defend the position of a loyal patriot (who should say ‘my country, right or wrong’) and refrain from any criticism to prove their loyalty?

¹⁵⁶ Guler Kazmaci, *Posta*, 24 September 2005

¹⁵⁷ Omer Lutfi Mete, *Sabah*, 25 May 2005

Are they ‘fake heroes’¹⁵⁹ just following the fashion of degrading the Turks which is perceived to be the indispensable criterion of being an ‘intellectual’ by some¹⁶⁰ or have they brought the idea of being an intellectual to the point of collaborating with the enemies of the nation¹⁶¹? The answer is somewhat clear: “A scholar does not complain about her country to the world”¹⁶² Thus, in this manner, just like Gündüz Aktan suggests they are expected to follow the ‘national’ thesis which I have discussed in the second chapter.

On the other hand another possible answer to such questions can be formulated around being the pioneers of democracy to fulfill the mission of guidance. “Intellectuals who have the mission of carrying Turkey to Copenhagen criteria or in universal words to modern democracy have to lead the political cadres. Despite the politicians if necessary.”¹⁶³ They may be in a position to walk against the wind to force change upon the society, even to the point of criticizing one’s own country. “The main principle of being an intellectual is to question the official perspective.”¹⁶⁴

It is possible to contextualize these debates by looking at the history of the intellectuals in Turkey. Elites and the intellectuals have been perceived as the main actors (i.e. the project of social-engineering of the Early Republican period) although there is a certain tone of populism in the discourse of Turkish politics in general and Turkish nationalism in particular especially after 1950s. This discourse of populism has been functionalized and shared by both the left and the right. Even if there differences in their references, it has been used as a legitimizing force

¹⁵⁸ Necati Dogru, *Vatan*, 30 September 2005

¹⁵⁹ Ruhat Mengi, *Vatan*, 24 September 2005

¹⁶⁰ Hasan Pulur, *Milliyet*, 28 May 2005

¹⁶¹ Emin Çölaşan, *Hürriyet*, 27 May 2005

¹⁶² Ruhat Mengi, *Vatan*, 24 September 2005

¹⁶³ Erdal Safak, *Sabah*, 23 September 2005

¹⁶⁴ Ergun Babahan, *Sabah*, 25 May 2005

incorporating a unity beyond classes, representing the ‘silent majority’¹⁶⁵. Therefore, in the discursive usage of Turkish nationalism the term ‘intellectual’ itself has a negative connotation to a certain extent especially if associated with living in an ivory tower which can lead to ignorance and degeneration.

Regarding the claims of these ‘intellectuals’ another strategy of defense is made through questioning of scientificity and conspiracy theories. “The ‘conference’ which Boğaziçi University wanted to organize regarding Armenian claims but postponed has been tried to be turned into a ‘democracy problem’. By using the name of science, the ‘role of victim’ has been played successfully before the public opinion.”¹⁶⁶ From a Foucaultian perspective, it can also be claimed that the discourse of science has been constructed just like the discourse of politics¹⁶⁷. In this sense, the political ideology of nationalism uses the authoritative claim of science, in this case history as a scholarly discipline, to legitimize its own discourse while official history has been fed through the existence of the nationalist discourse as reflected in the press. “Are Berktaç and those who are standing next to him going to announce what has already been known or are they going to contribute to new knowledge or new evaluation? What is the scientific motivation here and how can it be described?”¹⁶⁸

Lines drawn about the discussion in the media

There has been strong emphasis on the dichotomy of ‘us’ and ‘them’ albeit used in different contexts. This distinction may signify Turkey vs. West, Turks vs. Armenians, ‘internal enemies’ vs. loyal citizens\members of the nation, nationalists vs. democrats and so on. In this

¹⁶⁵Tanıl Bora and Nergis Canefe Türkiye’de ‘Populist Milliyetçilik’ *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce-Milliyetçilik* (Political Thought in Modern Turkey-Nationalism) (vol. IV) Istanbul: İletişim,2002 P.662

¹⁶⁶ Deniz Som. *Cumhuriyet*, 31 May 2005

¹⁶⁷ Waheed Samy, “Perspectives on 9/11: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Ideologies, Opinions, and Attitudes in Arab Media” (PhD Dissertation,University of Michigan, 2004). , p.7

¹⁶⁸ Ahmet Selim, *Zaman*, 25 September 2005

representation there would be positive representation of ‘we’ and negative representation of ‘them’ through comparison. There is a striking negative lexicalization¹⁶⁹ especially (in the cases of those who are against the conference) like ‘earth quake’, ‘calamity’, ‘forcing Turkey’, ‘destroy’, ‘selfish’, ‘shameful’, ‘cunning’, ‘cruel’ etc.

. In this environment the discourses that have been produced seem to fit in the categorical presentation of discourses by Ruth Wodak¹⁷⁰. They can be used to maintain and reproduce the status quo but they can also be used to transform and even destroy the status quo. In the case I presented one can talk of a clash between these two discourses as a result of a contested point in the national history. If nationalism can be treated as an ideology which created its own political discourse then it is important to see how this discourse can be reproduced or challenged. Media at this play an important role not only for the reproduction of the ‘knowledge’ offered by the discursive framework but also by participating in its creation. Therefore, I have tried to analyze the discourse of the column writers in the light of the socio-political context and in the light of the political discourse at the time.

Thus, as a result of this analysis Sevres Syndrome can be said to have a central place in the reconstruction of this discourse. In this respect Schöpflin’s explanation of the function of the myth’s would be very useful. He argues that “The cognitive delimiting created by myth can have a very negative result in blocking rational enquiry and the understanding of change. (...)This process will frequently go together with the construction of mythic enemies who are attempting to destroy the collectivity in a demonic conspiracy.”¹⁷¹ The usage of Sevres syndrome for the resistance of change (especially against the pressure put by EU) can also be seen in the recent

¹⁶⁹ The selection of (strongly) negative words to describe the actions of the Others (from Teun A. van Dijk)

¹⁷⁰ Ruth Wodak(et. al.) *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, Edinburg: Edinburg University Press,1999 p.8

attitudes put forth by the nationalist groups in Turkey in favor of the status quo which is also reflected in the discussion that I have analyzed. In a society which feels itself on the verge of detrimental changes because of the accession process of EU or the effects of globalization, these dynamics that I have tried to discuss are very important especially if we consider that half of this society defined itself as Turkish nationalist¹⁷².

¹⁷¹ George Schöpflin. 'The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths', *Myths and Nationhood* London : C. Hurst, 1997 p.26

¹⁷² Umut Ozkirimli, 'Türkiye'de Milliyetçilik' (Nationalism in Turkey), unpublished research report, 2006

CONCLUSION

"My country, right or wrong" is a thing no patriot would ever think of saying except in a desperate case. It is like saying "My mother, drunk or sober."
G. K. Chesterton

The interpretation of the past offered by the framework of nationalism is crucial for the nationalist paradigm to ensure its hegemony as I have discussed in the introduction. Since the legitimization of the 'present' is heavily molded with the certain understandings of the past, the foundational myths and taboos of nationalism form a defensive block for this paradigm to work as has been the case with the 'Sevres syndrome' in the context of Turkey. As I have pointed out in the introduction and elaborated on in the second chapter, the conference titled 'Ottoman Armenians during the Decline of the Empire: Issues of Scientific Responsibility and Democracy' deserves special attention not only because it has challenged the official national discourse regarding the 'Armenian question' but also because of its impact and the nature of the issue it has ended up being in the center of the discussions regarding democracy and the statist ideology which has attracted the attention of the general public. Therefore, the question of 'how and why this official discourse has been formed and reproduced, through which dynamics it has been built and how it has been challenged in the context of the discussions regarding the conference' is very important to be able to understand the contemporary Turkish nationalism, yet has not been dealt with by the current literature on Turkish nationalism.

To be able to answer this question in the first chapter I reviewed the current literature regarding the link between history and Turkish nationalism with respect to 'master narratives', myths, collective memory some of the theories of nationalism that I find relevant. By taking this theoretical and historical framework into consideration I was able to focus more on the debates

of official historiography and the background of the discussion regarding the conference. It has enabled me to analyze the actors and the discourses involved in the discussions especially those who are perceived to have professional authority on the subject matter. This analysis has revealed the main perspectives of the opponents and the supporters of the conference and their pattern of action which has been crucial to understand the dynamics of the discourses.

One of the important themes in this respect has been the issue regarding the role of the collective memory. As I have discussed in the first chapter 'collective memory' is a useful concept to explain the situation of conflicting visions of the past especially in terms of the usage of the power of one of the groups in the society to make their perspective hegemonic. Therefore, in my thesis, I found the usage of the collective memory as the 'memory of the nation' engineered by the official discourse important to explain the 'truth' claims of this discourse in which the foundational myths and taboos were incorporated. In this respect, it was also very important to see how the organizers and the participants of the conference perceived it and how they situated themselves in this framework. An interesting outcome of the in-depth interviews I have conducted was the diversity of the interpretation and the positioning of this collective memory. This, in itself, signifies the diversity within alternative discourse which did not have the claim to offer one 'true' interpretation to the past but a common desire to question the monolithic view of the official discourse as the aim of the conference.

Moreover, this diversity of the perspectives regarding the concept of collective memory, its applicability to the Turkish context and the actors involved in its formation has also provided an important insight in terms of they perceived the society as an actor in this framework. In most of the cases the collective memory is perceived to be open to the attempts of social engineering by the elites in which the society itself is not an actor. It may become a partial

actor, according to the perspectives of some of the interviewees, when the memory of the past is preserved in the sub consciousness of the society. Therefore, it seems that the domination of the collective memory is the battle field of the conflicting discourses while the collectivity itself does not have much of a say because of the structure of the society and/or the state.

However, this structure is prone to change due to the challenges of globalization in general and the impact of prospective EU membership in particular. The issue of accession to the EU has brought series of fundamental reforms while it has created reactions in some of the conservative/nationalist circles that have been supportive of the status quo. One of the main themes of the discourse formulated by these circles, in the form of anti-imperialism most of the times, was the recontextualization of the Sevres syndrome in terms of the emphasis of sovereignty which is threatened by the conspiracies. This framework was directly reflected in the discussions regarding the conference as my analysis of the discourses of the column writers in the prominent newspapers of Turkey has shown in the third chapter. It was especially important to confirm that the official discourse was reproduced not only the organizations I discussed in the second chapter but also the media. However, as my analysis showed, this time, there has been a considerable support to the conference by the media especially after the two attempts to stop it i.e. the accusations in the parliament and the court decision. Considering the power of the media in terms of gate keeping and filtering, which to that point has worked to the advantage of the official discourse, this new tendency had an important impact in terms of gathering the attention of the public, thus, breaking the taboo.

When the two different analysis that I undertook are compared, there is a convergence in terms of the discourses that are produced (by the power elite or by the scholars of the alternative line) and the discourses that are reproduced (by the media in case study the column writers).

The lines drawn in terms of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ and the negative lexicalization used for the opposing camps follow similar lines in both of the cases. Moreover, the arguments used for the legitimization of the position are also similar such as the usage of the Sevres syndrome by the opponents to the conference both in the parliamentary discussions and the comments of the column writers. Following the same line, the issue of democratization, freedom of speech and the responsibility of the intellectuals are one of the most important arguments put forward not only by the participants and the organizers of the conference but also by the supporters in the media.

Therefore, it will not be wrong to conclude that even if the foundational myths or taboos are created to serve a specific need, i.e. justification of the new regime, once created they become tools that can be recontextualized to fit in new situations. Due to the nature of these foundational myths such as the purity of the past from any kind of sin, they are deeply rooted through the representations in the mass media and the education system which leads to internalization and naturalization of these myths. The ‘Sevres syndrome’ is a good example of the case which has been recontextualized to resist change in the society. However, still, these myths and taboos can be challenged as the conference has shown. Within the context of change, democratization and freedom of speech, a politicized historical debate was able to challenge this link between nationalism and history by gaining the ear of the society through media. Consequently, the reactions it has received provided important signals in terms of the discourses of the Turkish nationalism(s) which has tried to adopt an already existing framework to the new situation. Thus, in the context of nationalism studies, this example shows how the reinterpretations of the past can serve the needs of the nationalist elites and how the link between history and nationalism can indeed integrate broader challenges of change that nationalist elites

have to face. Even if this analysis is limited in its scope due to the restrictions of time frame (since the discussions about the issue is still going on) and the complexity of the situation, it sheds some light on the actors and their motivations regarding the discussions of nationalism.

A broader analysis of the media to include the more extreme but at the same time more marginal views could have been interesting, however, the purpose of focusing on the mass media was to provide an insight about the perspective of the apolitical general public. Another interesting comparison could have been done regarding the content of the conference however; the papers have not been published yet. Nevertheless, the mere fact that the conference took place with a large coverage in the media has made the biggest impact upon destroying the hegemonic 'truth' claim of the official discourse. Thus, nationalism can not always reconstruct the past as it pleases since the link between nationalist ideology and history writing is challenged.

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Ilhan Selcuk, *Cumhuriyet*, 27 September 2005
Sahin Alpay, *Zaman*, 27 September 2005
Necati Dogru, *Vatan*, 30 September 2005

APPENDICES

CHRONOLOGY

March 2000- Chicago meeting of some Armenian and Turkish historians organized by Fatma Muge Gocek, Gerard Libaridian and Ronald Suny

9 October 2000- Halil Berktaş's interview in Radikal where he challenges the official thesis, though not using the term 'genocide' (During the debates about the proposal given to US parliament for the recognition of Armenian genocide)

January 2001- İlber Ortaylı published an article in a magazine, *Popular History*, in support of the official thesis and joined the debate

February 2001- in Hulki Cevizoglu's program Taner Akçam says that it was genocide and Turkey should apologize for it

13-14 April 2001- 'Symposium of Turkish Armenian Relations throughout History' ("Tarih Boyunca Türk-Ermeni İlişkileri Sempozyumu") at TBMM (Turkish Grand National Assembly) organized by the Association of Turkish Parliamentarians

7 March 2005- Halil Berktaş's interview in Milliyet where he states that forced migration (tehcir) has targeted the whole Armenian population and this in itself is enough to be in the realm of the concept of genocide without the element of killing

13 April 2005- For the first time Turkish parliament discussed the claims of Armenian genocide and foreign minister declared that Turkish prime minister has sent a letter to president of Armenia, Kocaryan, to suggest the establishment of a joint commission of Turkish and Armenian historians to discuss the issue

24 April 2005- 90th anniversary of the events

24 May 2005- Discussions in the parliament about the conference titled 'Ottoman Armenians during the Decline of the Empire: Issues of Scientific Responsibility and Democracy'

25-27 May- Original date announced for the conference titled 'Ottoman Armenians during the Decline of the Empire: Issues of Scientific Responsibility and Democracy'

25 May 2005- Boğaziçi University decided to postpone the conference and issued a statement to the media declaring: "We are concerned that the prejudgments about the content of a conference which has not taken place will disturb academic freedom of a state university. Under these circumstances and considering the possible result of the realization of the conference we have decided that it will be more suitable to postpone the meeting."

25 May 2005- declaration criticizing the decision of the postponement signed by 109 Boğaziçi University professors:

The declarations made by the Minister of Justice and some of the parliamentarians regarding a conference which has not taken place constitutes an offense to the freedom of thought and speech. Moreover, it makes the situation even worse to try to prevent the thoughts which are not yet declared. It is in clear contradiction to spirit of the reforms undertaken regarding freedom of expression in Turkey. To accuse individuals and institution of treason in the name of the government regarding a scientific meeting which has not taken place yet is a serious offence against the individual and citizenship rights. Recently, the government and the opposition in the Turkish Grand National Assembly have been offering the Armenian question to be discussed in the scientific circles and in the public as an official policy. The declarations made about a scientific meeting which should be evaluated within this framework is in clear contradiction with the policy mentioned. As a conclusion, we would like to declare to the public opinion that we are worried and concerned with the postponement of the conference and wish it to take place in Boğaziçi University as soon as possible.

22 September 2005 Fourth administrative court in Istanbul had ruled in favor of the appeal of the Association of the Union of Jurists (Hukukçular Birliği Derneği) to stop the conference and the event has been put on hold for the two of the organizing universities : Boğaziçi and Sabancı

24-25 September 2005- The conference titled ‘Ottoman Armenians during the Decline of the Empire: Issues of Scientific Responsibility and Democracy’ took place at Bilgi university

23-25 November 2005 -‘International symposium on the Evolution of Turkish-Armenian Relations and the Events of 1915’ (Türk Ermeni İlişkilerinin Gelişimi ve 1915 Olayları Uluslararası Sempozyumu) at Gazi University

15-16 December 2005 -Symposium titled ‘Historical Facts in Turkish Armenian Relations’(Türk-Ermeni İlişkilerinde Tarihi Gerçekler)at Istanbul Technical University organized by the Platform for the Association of NGOs

20-22 April 2006 -Conference titled ‘The Art of Living Together in the Ottoman:. The Case of Turkish - Armenian Relations’ (Osmanlı Toplumunda Birlikte Yaşama Sanatı: Türk-Ermeni İlişkileri Örneği)at Erciyes University

8 March 2006- Conference titled ‘History of Genocides,Armenian Claims of the West’ (“Soykırımlar Tarihi Batının Ermeni İddiaları”) at Inonu University

15-17 March 2006-Conference titled ‘New approaches to Turkish Armenian Relations’ ("Türk Ermeni İlişkilerinde Yeni Yaklaşımlar")at Istanbul University

15 April 2006- “Conference on the Reality of ‘Armenian Question’” (‘Ermeni Sorunu’ Gerceği Konferansı) at Bilgi University by Bağımsız Toplumsal Hareket Derneği (Association of Independent Social Movement)

2 May 2006 -Conference titled ‘How Republic of Turkey is Established, Atatürk and Armenian Question’ ("Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Nasıl Kuruldu, Atatürk ve Ermeni Sorunu") at Black Sea Technical University

**ORIGINAL PROGRAM OF THE CONFERENCE DESIGNED FOR 23-25 SEPTEMBER
2005**

**İmparatorluğun Çöküş Döneminde Osmanlı Ermenileri :
Bilimsel Sorumluluk ve Demokrasi Sorunları**

23 – 24 – 25 Eylül 2005

**Boğaziçi Üniversitesi
Garanti Kültür Merkezi
Ayhan Şahenk Salonu**

Hazırlık Komitesi

Murat Belge (Prof Dr, Bilgi Üniversitesi Karşılaştırmalı Edebiyat Bölümü başkanı),
Halil Berktaş (Doç Dr, Sabancı Üniversitesi Tarih Programı koordinatörü),
Selim Deringil (Prof Dr, Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Tarih Bölümü başkanı),
Edhem Eldem (Prof Dr, Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Tarih Bölümü),
Çağlar Keyder (Prof Dr, Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Sosyoloji Bölümü),
Cemil Koçak (Doç Dr, Sabancı Üniversitesi Tarih Programı),
Nükhet Sirman (Prof Dr, Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Sosyoloji Bölümü
Akşin Somel (Yard Doç Dr, Sabancı Üniversitesi Tarih Programı)

Danışma Kurulu

Fikret Adanır (Prof Dr, Bochum Ruhr Üniversitesi, Almanya)
Engin Akarlı (Prof Dr, Brown Üniversitesi, ABD),
Taner Akçam (Doç Dr, Minnesota Üniversitesi, ABD),
Ayhan Aktar (Prof Dr, Marmara Üniversitesi),
Şeyla Benhabib (Prof Dr, Yale Üniversitesi, ABD),
Üstün Ergüder (Prof Dr, Sabancı Üniversitesi, İstanbul Politikalar Merkezi Direktörü),
Fatma Müge Göçek (Doç Dr, Michigan Üniversitesi, ABD)
Nilüfer Göle (Prof Dr, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Fransa),
Cemal Kafadar (Prof Dr, Harvard Üniversitesi, ABD),
Metin Kunt (Prof Dr, Sabancı Üniversitesi),
Şerif Mardin (Prof Dr, Sabancı Üniversitesi),
Oktay Özel (Yard Doç Dr, Bilkent Üniversitesi),
İlhan Tekeli (Prof Dr, Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi),
Mete Tunçay (Prof Dr, Bilgi Üniversitesi),
Stefan Yerasimos (Prof Dr, Paris VIII Üniversitesi, Fransa)

23 Eylül 2005 Cuma

Kayıt 08:30

Açılıs 09:15

Selim Deringil (Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Tarih Bölümü başkanı)

1. Oturum 09:30-10:40 Sorunlara toplu bakış

Şerif Mardin

oturum başkanı

Halil Berktaş
Selim Deringil
Murat Belge

Resmî söylem ne diyor ?
Ermeni meselesi ve Arşiv : “Belgenin boğazına sarılmak”
Demokrasi açısından Ermeni sorunu

Kahve molası 10:40-11:10

2. Oturum 11:10-13:00 Dünya ile Türkiye arasında, bilgi ve algılama farkları

Üstün Ergüder

oturum başkanı

Osman Köker
Fikret Adanır
Fatma Müge Göçek
Nazan Maksudyan

Tehcir öncesinde Osmanlı devletinde Ermeni varlığı
Kıyım, soykırım ve tarihçilik
Bir bilgi birikimi olarak Chicago-Salzburg süreci
Genel dünya ve 20. yüzyıl tarihçilerinde 1915-16 olayları

Öğle yemeği 13:00-14:00

3. Oturum 14:00-15:40 Balkan Savaşları öncesi “eski düzen”

Hakan Erdem

oturum başkanı

Akşin Somel
Oktay Özel

Ermeni okulları ve Abdülhamid rejimi (1876-1908)
Muhacirler, yerliler ve gayrimüslimler : Osmanlı'nın son döneminde Karadeniz'de toplumsal uyumun sınırları üzerine bazı gözlemler
1896 İstanbul Ermeni olayları
Adana Ermenileri ve 1909 “iğtişası”

Kahve molası 15:40-16:10

4. Oturum 16:10-18:00 Kopma noktası : 1912-1915

Mete Tunçay

oturum başkanı

Stefan Yerasimos
Nesim Şeker

1915'e gelirken : Ermeni özerkliği, Zeytun ve Van olayları
Ermeni meselesi ve “demografi mühendisliği”

Rober Koptaş

Krikor Zohrab, Vahan Papazyan ve Karekin Pastırmacıyan'ın kalemlerinden, 1914 Ermeni reformu ile İttihatçı-Taşnak müzakereleri

Elif Şafak

Zabel Yesayan ve "sakıncalı Ermeni entellektüeller" listesi

24 Eylül 2005 Cumartesi

Kayıt 09:00

5. Oturum 09:30-11:00 Tehcir ve sonrası

Taha Parla oturum başkanı

Fuat Dündar
Taner Akçam İttihat ve Terakki'nin iskân politikası (1913-1918)
İmha edilenleri ve kalanlarıyla Osmanlı belgeleri ışığında,
İttihat ve Terakki yöneticilerinde soykırım kastı ve soykırımın organizasyonu

Cemil Koçak Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa'yı nasıl bilirsiniz ?

Kahve molası 11:00-11:30

6. Oturum 11:30-13:20 Facia ve kurtuluş öyküleri

Ferhunde Özbay oturum başkanı

Sarkis Seropyan
Fethiye Çetin
İrfan Palalı
Aykut Kansu Acı bir tarihin içinden vicdan manzaraları
Heranuş'tan Seher'e, bir "kurtuluş" öyküsü
Tehcirin çocuğu Fatma Ane
Tehcirden sağ kalanların hikâyesini düşünmek

Öğle yemeği 13:20-14:20

7. Oturum 14:20-16:00 Anılar ve tanıklıklar

Ayşe Öncü oturum başkanı

Hülya Adak
Ahmet Kuyaş
Gündüz Vassaf
Cevdet Aykan Anılarda Ermeni sorunu
İttihatçılar ne diyor ?
Saatli Maarif Takvimi'nde Ermeniler
Anıların anlamı ve zamanın, politikanın sorumluluğu

Kahve arası 16:00-16:30

8. Oturum 16:30-18:00 Bir yüzleşme eşiğinden, tabuların oluşmasına

Selçuk Esenbel oturum başkanı

Ayhan Aktar Osmanlı Meclisi'nde Ermeni meselesi : Kasım-Aralık 1918

Erol Köroğlu
Baskın Oran

Türk edebiyatında unutma ve hatırlama örnekleri :
Suskunluğun farklı kırılma noktaları
Bir tabunun kökenleri : Türkiye kamuoyunun
Ermeni sorunundaki tarihsel-psikolojik tıkanışı

25 Eylül 2005 Pazar

Kayıt **09:00**

9. Oturum **09:30-11:30** **Ermenilik halleri**

Nükhet Sirman

oturum başkanı

Hrant Dink
Ferhat Kentel
Karin Karakaşlı,
Ferhat Kentel,
Günay Göksu Özdoğan,
Füsun Üstel

Dünyada ve Türkiye’de Ermeni kimliğinin yeni cümleleri
Türkiye ve Ermenistan toplumlari : Sınırlar ve önyargılar
Türkiye’de Ermeni olmak : Cemaat, birey, yurttaş

Melissa Bilal

Geçmiş ile bugün arasına sıkıştırılmış bir kimlik :
Türkiye’de Ermeni olma deneyimi

Ayşe Gül Altınay

İki kitap, bir sergi : Türkiyeli Ermenilerin yeniden keşfi

Kahve molası *11:30-12:00*

10. Oturum **12:00-13:40** **Ermeni sorunu ve Türkiye demokrasisi**

Murat Belge

oturum başkanı

Ali Bayramoğlu
Etyen Mahcupyan

Türkiye toplumunda Ermeni meselesine bakış ve yaklaşımlar
Türkiye’de millî kimliğin kurucu ögesi olarak
tarih algısı / zihniyet ilişkisi

Ahmet İnsel
Murat Paker

Türk siyasetinde iç düşman kavramı ve Ermeni sorunu
Türkiye’deki egemen politik kültürün psikanalitik
değerlendirmesi bağlamında Türk-Ermeni meselesi

Şahin Alpay

Türk-Ermeni dostluğunun yeniden tesisi için ne yapılabilir ?

Öğle yemeği 13:40-14:40

11. Oturum 14:30-16:00 Panel : Basın özgürlüğü ve Ermeni sorunu

İsmet Berkan oturum başkanı

Yavuz Baydar (Sabah)
Kürşat Bumin (Yeni Şafak)
Oral Çalışlar (Cumhuriyet)
Ahmet Hakan (Hürriyet)
Fehmi Kuru (Yeni Şafak)

Kahve molası 16:00-16:30

12. Oturum 16:30-18:30 Panel : Bugün ve gelecek

Halil Berktaş oturum başkanı

Bir diplomat : Temel İskit
Bir hukukçu : Turgut Tarhanlı
Bir yayıncı : Ragıp Zarakolu
Bir politikacı : Cem Özdemir
Bir tarihçi : Mete Tunçay

Hazırlık Komitesi ve Danışma Kurulu dışındaki katılımcılar

Hülya Adak Sabancı Üniversitesi : Dr (Karşılaştırmalı Edebiyat, Kültürel Çalışmalar)
Şahin Alpay Bahçeşehir Üniversitesi : Dr (Siyaset Bilimi); *Zaman* gazetesi yazarı
Ayşe Gül Altınay Sabancı Üniversitesi : Dr (Antropoloji, Kültürel Çalışmalar)
Cevdet Aykan Tıp doktoru, eski Tokat milletvekili ve Sağlık Bakanı
Ali Bayramoğlu *Yeni Şafak* gazetesi
Yavuz Baydar *Sabah* gazetesi
İsmet Berkan *Radikal* gazetesi
Melissa Bilal Chicago Üniversitesi : doktora öğrencisi (Etnomüzikoloji)
Kürşat Bumin *Yeni Şafak* gazetesi
Ahmet Hakan Coşkun *Hürriyet* gazetesi
Oral Çalışlar *Cumhuriyet* gazetesi
Fethiye Çetin avukat, *Anneannem* kitabının yazarı
Hrant Dink *Agos* gazetesi
Fuat Dündar Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (Paris) : doktora öğrencisi
Hakan Erdem Sabancı Üniversitesi : Dr (Tarih)
Selçuk Esenbel Boğaziçi Üniversitesi : Prof Dr (Tarih)
Ahmet İnel Galatasaray Üniversitesi : Prof Dr (Ekonomi)
Temel İskit emekli büyükelçi
Aykut Kansu Bilgi Üniversitesi : Doç Dr (Tarih)
Karin Karakaşlı *Agos* gazetesi
Ferhat Kentel Bilgi Üniversitesi : Dr (Sosyoloji)
Rober Koptaş Boğaziçi Üniversitesi : lisansüstü öğrencisi (Atatürk Enstitüsü)
Fehmi Kuru *Yeni Şafak* gazetesi

Osman Köker
Erol Körođlu
Ahmet Kuyař
Etyen Mahcupyan
Nazan Maksudyan
Baskın Oran
Ayře Öncü
Ferhunde Özbay
Cem Özdemir
Günay Göksu Özdođan
Murat Paker
İrfan Palalı
Taha Parla
Sarkis Seropyan
Elif řafak
Nesim řeker
Turgut Tarhanlı
Meltem Toksöz
Fusun Üstel
Gündüz Vassaf
Ragıp Zarakolu

yayın yönetmeni, Birzamanlar Yayıncılık
Sabancı Üniversitesi : Dr (Edebiyat Tarihi, Kültürel Çalışmalar)
Galatasaray Üniversitesi : Dr (Tarih, Siyaset Bilimi)
Zaman gazetesi
Sabancı Üniversitesi : doktora öğrencisi (Tarih)
Ankara Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi : Prof Dr (Siyaset Bilimi)
Sabancı Üniversitesi : Prof Dr (Sosyoloji, Kültürel Çalışmalar)
Boğaziçi Üniversitesi : Prof Dr (Sosyoloji)
Yeşiller partisi milletvekili, Almanya
Marmara Üniversitesi : Prof Dr (Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler)
Bilgi Üniversitesi : Dr (Psikoloji)
Ege Üniversitesi : Doç Dr (Nörofizyoloji)
Boğaziçi Üniversitesi : Prof Dr (Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler)
Agos gazetesi
yazar, edebiyatçı; Arizona Üniversitesi (ABD) : Dr (Yakın Dođu Etütleri)
Orta Dođu Teknik Üniversitesi : Dr (Tarih)
Bilgi Üniversitesi : Prof Dr (Uluslararası Hukuk)
Boğaziçi Üniversitesi : Dr (Tarih)
Marmara Üniversitesi : Prof Dr (Kamu Yönetimi)
Doç Dr (Psikoloji); *Radikal* gazetesi yazarı
Belge Yayınları yönetmeni