



Master thesis

The Denial of the Armenian Genocide and its Influence on Armenian Identity



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Introduction

*Turkey slams Dutch 'Armenian Genocide' vote. Ankara dismisses Dutch parliament's overwhelming majority vote to recognise World War I killings as a genocide.*¹

This was the headline of an article posted by Al Jazeera on February 23rd 2018 about an event which happened over one hundred years ago. The majority of the Dutch parliament voted in favour on the question to recognize the Armenian genocide, only three members of Parliament voted against. Previously, the Dutch parliament used the term of 'the affair of the Armenian genocide'. However, the Republic of Turkey dismissed the Dutch parliament's vote to recognize the mass killings of the Armenians during the Ottoman Empire as a genocide. Moreover, members of the Dutch parliament with a Turkish background were being threatened because they recognized the Armenian genocide. This happened after a Turkish newspaper published five names of Dutch members of parliament (MP) with a Turkish background and called them traitors to the Turkish state.² This shows how active and controversial this issue still is. While the policy of Armenia pursues further recognition of the genocide, the Turks follow a policy of denial. This obviously restrains a positive development of the Turkey-Armenian relations.

This study wants to research into how the denial of the genocide by the Republic of Turkey shapes Armenian identity. This leads to the following research question: 'Does the Turkish state deny the Armenian genocide? If so, how and to what extent does the denial by the Turkish state of the Armenian genocide shape Armenian state identity?'

This study wants to argue and show that the Turkish government does deny the Armenian genocide and that this denial shapes Armenian identity. The Turkish state has constantly denied the Armenian genocide, that happened between 1915-1918, since the formation of the modern Turkish state. This denial has shaped Armenian identity in terms of being a Christian, being a people of suffering, and international solidarity. This will be proven in the sections Christianity, the Armenian genocide and the denial of the Armenian genocide

¹ Al Jazeera, 'Turkey slams Dutch 'Armenian genocide' vote', click [here](#), consulted on 15-03-2018.

² Trouw, 'Kamerleden met Turkse wortels bedreigd om erkennen Armeense genocide', click [here](#), consulted on 15-03-2018.

and last the Armenian diaspora. The focus of this research will lay on the AKP administration, but this research will also elaborate how the denial has started and evolved.

First of all, the constructivist concept of identity will be elaborated in the theory and methods section. This study will show how the constructivist concept of identity is of use to explain how the Armenian identity is shaped. Secondly, the Armenian identity will be explained by the means of four components: Christianity, the Armenian genocide, the denial of the Armenian genocide and the Armenian diaspora. Through these components this study will show how each component shapes Armenian identity. Furthermore this study will show that one of the four of these components, the denial of the Armenian genocide, has the greatest influence on the Armenian identity and also effects the other components. As the denial of the genocide influences each aspect in its own way. Additionally, this study will show how some countries have recognised the Armenian genocide and how Turkey responded to these events. And prior how the policy of denial began as this study will focus on the Justice and Development Party (AKP) administration. And last, this research will zoom in on the Armenian diaspora in the Netherlands and in the United States of America to show what role the diaspora plays in getting countries to recognize the genocide. Concluding, by means of these sub-questions this study will endeavour to show how the denial of the Armenian genocide shapes Armenian state identity and consequently Armenian-Turkey relations.

The Turkish-Armenian Affair is the safest appellative for this utmost sensitive issue. For the Armenians it is a genocide, for the Turks an affair. Even without putting a name on it, it is definitely one of the most dramatic events from the history of humanity, that has caused that Turks and Armenians have been in a quarrel for over the last hundred years. On the one hand, there at the Armenians who, for the last century, have claimed the Turks have committed genocide on their people. On the other hand, are the Turks, who claim to be innocent and follow a policy of denial. Not only do they claim to be innocent, some also claim that the Armenians started the whole affair by murdering hundreds of thousands of Turks.³ Moreover, the Turkish government even argues that it are the Armenians who took arms against their own government.⁴ Since the independence of the Republic of Armenia in 1991, the two

³ Doğan Gürpınar, 'The manufacturing of denial: the making of the Turkish 'official thesis' on the Armenian Genocide between 1974 and 199', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* (2016) 18:3, 217-240, 223.

⁴ Republic of Turkey; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'The Armenian Allegation of Genocide: The issue and the facts', click [here](#), consulted on 22-05-2018.

independent countries have failed to establish diplomatic relations. A first step towards reconciliation, would be for the Armenians, recognition.⁵ Not only have they failed to establish diplomatic relations, the issue also influences the relation between Turkey and other states that have recognised the genocide.

Organised mass murder, genocide, is a particular atrocious form of violence. The long history of the Armenians, whether in Armenia or in the diaspora, is characterised by moments of organized violence inflicted upon them. This history dates back from the first massacre of a generation of aristocratic families, who were murdered by their Muslim Arab lords in Nakhichevan in 705. And the violence against Armenians have continued throughout their history. For example in 1988 when the Armenians of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, which officially belongs to Azerbaijan, petitioned to become part of Armenia and a pogrom against the Armenians arose in the town of Sumgait, killing thousands of Armenians.⁶ These two events are separated by more than a thousand years, yet they are events of the same nature: those who control the Armenians would not exclude the fact of killing them. However, the events of 1915 are of a different level. Genocide involves the act of murder on a whole different order and magnitude. The events of 1915 have become inherent to the national identity of Armenia and its diaspora. However, it has also become inherent to the national identity of Turkey. Also, the constructed national identities of the two countries have deeply settled into their foreign policies. Resulting into closed Armenian-Turkish borders and mutual exclusion and perception of the 'other'.⁷

⁵ Vahagn Avedian, 'Recognition, Responsibility and Reconciliation: The Trinity of the Armenian Genocide', *Europa Ethnica* (2013), 70:4, 77-86, 77.

⁶ Rouben Paul Adalian, *Remembering and understanding the Armenian genocide* (Yerevan 1995) 2.

⁷ Ebru Coban-Ozturk, 'National Identity and the Role of Diaspora: A Constructivist Approach to Turkish Armenian Relations', *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* (2015) 5:9, 63-70, 63.

Literature overview

The following section highlights some of the literature regarding this topic of research. Multiple authors from different disciplinary backgrounds have engaged in the discussion about the Armenian genocide. Not only from disciplinary background, but also from a wide range of different ethnic backgrounds, from Western countries to Turkey and Armenia. Most books and articles mainly focus on the dispute if the event was in fact a genocide.

Focussing on the discussion whether or not the event was a genocide, is definitely very important. These studies lay out the basis for further discussion and research. Guenter Lewy focusses on the fact whether or not the event was a genocide and he briefly addresses the campaign for recognition of the genocide. He argues that it is possible to use the word genocide not as a legal concept under the exclusive ownership of the experts, but as a term of moral opprobrium that is now part of our moral discourse. This will induce the word genocide as a term that will express the moral consensus of a great evil that has been perpetrated against the Armenian people by the Ottoman regime. However, Lewy argues that by calling it genocide in legal terms we prejudge the precise nature of evil suffered by the Armenians. With so much that is unknown, according to Lewy, we shouldn't call the events a genocide in legal terms. He argues to persuade the Armenians to forego resort to the legal concept and be satisfied with a Turkish acknowledgement of sincere regret for the terrible suffering. However, Lewy doesn't take into account that this would be highly inconceivable for the Armenians. Moreover, he argues that by determining whether or not the events of 1915 were a genocide or not, should not be the job of legislators, but of historians.⁸ Indeed, historians and other scholars should research into the fact whether or not the event was a genocide. However, politicians and legislators should then eventually decide upon the information provided by the scholar.

A historian that has provided an extensive historical overview is Ronald Grigor Suny in his book *A History of the Armenian Genocide*. Written in 2015 he shows that the Armenian genocide is still very much a debated topic. He offers an interesting explanation, saying that we need to look at the formation of modern nation-states to understand the origins of the Armenian genocide. Secondly he argues that the Armenians went through an 'identity crisis'

⁸ Guenter Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey* (Utah 2005) 259-267.

when their community transformed from being distinguished just by Christianity to also by nationalism.⁹ These are interesting arguments and certainly of use for this research. However, this research will argue that nationalism has always been a strong sentiment in their community and part of the Armenian identity.

Some agree with the argument that the Armenian genocide is still a very much debated topic, including this research. However, some argue that the event is being known as the 'forgotten genocide'. This designation is not suitable, due to the heated debates and ongoing research that is being done. Vahagn Avedian argues, in contrary to Lewy, that it is naïve to expect that the Armenian genocide needs to be left to historians, since it is a profoundly unresolved legal matter and until justice is served for the Armenians, the issue will keep disturbing the relations between 'the perpetrator' (Turkey) and the victim (Armenia).¹⁰ This of course, as said before, is partly true. Historians do need to carry out an important function in his matter, mainly to investigate and inform. Avedian also focusses on the neglect in recognition of third parties, mainly the world community and major powers. Moreover, he even argues that the world consciously chose to forget the Armenian case of securing political and financial interests offered by Turkey.¹¹ Concluding, Avedian also focusses mainly on the legal aspect of the recognition, and the discussion central to *realpolitik* and human rights, and on the economic and political consequences that it may have. He provides in interesting research, however stating that the world consciously chose to forget the Armenia because of relationships with Turkey is no longer suitable. The recognition of the genocide even plays a central part in EU membership for Turkey.

Central to this debate are also of course those who deny the event was in fact a genocide and provide legal or normative arguments why they believe it was not. Mustafa Serdar Palabiyik focusses on the legal aspect of the genocide. He argues that the events are being called a genocide due to anti-Turkish and anti-Islamic sentiments. Furthermore, he argues that the number of 1.5 million Armenian deaths is unrealistic and a lie and that there is 'evidence of Muslim suffering at the hands of Armenians'.¹² An argument that is often presented by Turkish officials as well. Whereas the numbers of death is a debated topic and

⁹ Ronald Grigor Suny, *They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else: A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton 2015)

¹⁰ Avedian, 'Recognition, Responsibility and Reconciliation', 78.

¹¹ Ibid, 80.

¹² Mustafa Serdar Palabiyik, *Understanding the Turkish-Armenian Controversy over 1915* (Istanbul 2015) 3.

estimates vary between 800.000 and 1.500.000, it is also unrealistic to call the estimated numbers a lie. When there is war there is suffering on both sides, however the suffering the Armenians had to endure over the Turks is not comparable. Another argument that some researchers provide is that countries who recognize the genocide are doing that because of Christian solidarity, like Alica Vidlickova. She does provide a good examination of the historical development of Armenian-Turkish relations. However, she keeps referring to the genocide as 'happenings'.¹³ However, she fails by incorporating countries that refer to the genocide as the Armenian massacres. So her argument that Christian countries refer to it as a genocide does not add up. Referring to the event as the Armenian massacres, is not in line with referring to it as a genocide, which is what the Armenians want, need, and deserve.

Furthermore, some scholars have focussed on identity and memory. For example, Uğur Ümit Üngör has researched into this aspect of the genocide and states the following: '*The Turkish government is denying a genocide that its own population remembers.*'¹⁴ This sentence also captures the scope of the book and documentary '*Bloedbroeders*', where a Dutch-Turkish journalist and a Dutch-Armenian actor travel through Turkey in search for answers and explanations of the genocide.¹⁵ Üngör argues that two Turkish nationalist regimes, the Young Turks and Kemalists, have successfully erased the violence of the post by means of the politics of memory that they followed during their dictatorships. He argues this on the outcome of 200 interviews with the grand(children) of those present of the events of 1915. The Turks erased the traumatic events and constructed an official narrative of heroic images. Furthermore, he argues that asking the Turks to acknowledge the genocide amounts to asking them to abandon their Turkish identity. Moreover, he argues that for the Armenians the genocide is still an identity issue and has a profound effect on the political elite, diaspora's and the general public. Üngör shows very interesting insights on the basis of oral history, however there needs to be more work done on what effect the denial has on the identity of the Armenians. His focus is mainly on Turkey and on Armenians living in Turkey. Whereas this research will mainly focus on Armenia.

¹³ Alica Vidlickova, 'Turkish-Armenian Relations and the Issue of the Recognition of the claims of the Armenian Genocide', *Alternatives Turkish Journal of International Relations* (2012) 11:1, 13.

¹⁴ Uğur Ümit Üngör, 'Lost in commemoration: The Armenian Genocide in Memory and Identity', *Patterns of Prejudice* (2014) 48:2, 147-166, 144.

¹⁵ Sinan Can and Ara Halici, *Bloedbroeders: verscheurd door het verleden, herenigd in hun zoektocht* (Antwerpen 2015).

Concluding, there hasn't been done enough research how the denial of the genocide by Turkey has affected Armenian identity. Most of the studies focus on the legal aspect of the genocide. The purpose of this study is to fill in the gap in the existing literature concerning denial of the genocide and its influence on Armenian identity and Armenian-Turkish relations through a constructivist approach of International Relations and a new method with the four components.

Theory and methods

This research will make use of the constructivist concept of identity, this theory will be explained and applied to Armenia and the Armenians. Many fields of social sciences have been incorporating identity as a fundamental concept, including International Relations (IR). For this study, the constructivist theory will be of use to explain the extent of how identities influence (foreign) policy actors. First, the concept will be explained. Second, the history and process of the construction of the identity Armenia will be elaborated by the use of four components.

*Constructivism is a structural theory of the international system that makes the following core claims: (1) states are the principal units of analysis for international political theory; (2) the key structures in the states system are intersubjective rather than material; and (3) state identities and interests are in important part constructed by these social structures, rather than given exogenously to the system by human nature [as neorealists maintain] or domestic politics [as neoliberals favour]*¹⁶

Wendt has classified identities by two different classifications: 'corporate identity' and 'social identity'. Corporate identity refers to the intrinsic, self-organizing qualities that constitute each actor individuality. This refers to the body and experience of consciousness for human beings. Second, for organizations this refers to their constituent individuals,

¹⁶ Alexander Wendt, 'Collective Identity Formation and the International State', *American Political Science Review* (1994) 882:, 384-396, 385.

physical resources and the shared beliefs and institutions where the individuals function as 'we'.¹⁷ The corporate identity is thus, a self-organizing identity that constitutes each actor individually and it generates four basic interests:

1. Physical security, including its differentiation from other actors.
2. Ontological security or predictability in relationships to the world, which creates a desire for stable social identities.
3. Recognition as an actor by others, above and beyond survival through brute force.
4. Development, for a better life at the collective level carried out by states.

Furthermore, how a state then satisfies these interests is depending on how it defines 'the self' in relation to 'the other', which then is a function of *social identities* at both domestic and systemic level of analysis.¹⁸ This theory is of use when defining Armenia as 'the self' and researching in to their relation to Turkey as 'the other'.

Second, social identities are a set of definitions that an actor characterises itself with, while taking the perspective of others as a social object. For the actor a social identity determines 'who am I' or 'who are we' in situations and positions in a social structure of expectations and shared understandings.¹⁹ These identities and interest are in a continuing process during interaction. Furthermore, Wendt then argues how collective action problems depend on the actor's social identities, whether they generate collective interests, or on the contrary, self-interests. The basis laid out for self-interests is on the relationship between the self and the other in the absence of positive identification. These self-interests, or state egoism, has multiple explanations divided between domestic determinants and systemic determinants. First, self-interest stems from the essential nature of states; the perception of being part of a group generates favouritism for that particular group and discrimination towards other groups. Second, states place their societal interests before those of other states, for political survival strategies. They have a shared norm and political culture of their domestic society. Third, nationalism, which is a sense of societal collective identity based on ethnic, cultural and linguistic characteristics. These domestic determinants are socially and

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid, 387.

¹⁹ Ibid, 388.

historically constructed, not inherent to stateness. Fourth, anarchy, states interact with other states and based on the result of that interaction, can become characterized by self-help, but is not necessarily determined. Here, self-help stands for believing that states can rely on no one but themselves for security.²⁰ And last, sovereignty, a social identity which is a property of states and of international society.²¹ These systemic determinants, combined with the domestic determinants can force states towards state egoism, but do not always exclude collective identities.

Furthermore, Wendt argues that collective identity leads to the identification of 'the self' with 'the other' through separating the differences between them. This will lead that 'the self' will categorize as 'the other'. Collective identity merges 'the other' and 'the self' into a single identity, whereby actors define the welfare of the other, as a part of the self.²² Moreover, the structures of regional systems constitute interaction that prevent or ease the collective identity formation. However, as Wendt argues, 'some structures cannot be changed in a given historical background'.²³ When states are in a situation of conflict, the more likely states will fear each other and act on behalf of egoistic identities. Moreover, Wendt argues that collective identity can transform the Westphalian system to the international state. The interests and identities of the international state are spread across 'transnational structures of political authority'. Wendt calls this the 'institutionalization of collective action', which means that state actors agree and permit that certain issues will be handled on an international level.²⁴

There is no 'set moment' to where a group of people decide to be a nation. It is rather a constant process of looking back to the past and relating the past in defining 'who we are'. That is why the 'how' and 'why' in the answer to the question 'when' is crucial in understanding the 'nation'. These questions are also important to understand nationalism and the political mobilisation of the people of that nation.²⁵ Furthermore, as Benedict Anderson argues symbols, myths and traditions are the foundations of the 'imagination of the nation.'

²⁰ Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy is What States make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics', *International Organization* (1992) 46:2, 391-425.

²¹ Wendt, 'Collective Identity Formation and the International State', 388.

²² *Ibid*, 390.

²³ *Ibid*, 391.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 392.

²⁵ Razmik Panossian, 'The Past as a Nation: Three Dimensions of Armenian Identity', *Geopolitics* (2002) 7:2, 121-146, 122.

Meaning that nationalism is not something natural or material, but nationalism exists because of the connection between psychology and culture. Members of a nation do not know each and every one personally, however they do have the feeling of belonging together. As Anderson puts it: 'It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'.²⁶ This argument is applicable to the Armenian diaspora. The members of this diaspora, spread throughout the world, even when they have never met each other are united through just characteristic: being Armenian.

Moreover, Ernest Gellner makes a similar argument, however it is more precise. He argues:

*'Nationalism is a species of patriotism distinguished by a few very important features: the units which this kind of patriotism, namely nationalism, favours with its loyalty, are culturally homogeneous, based on a culture striving to be a high (literate) culture; they are large enough to sustain the hope of supporting the educational system which can keep a literate culture going; they are poorly endowed with rigid internal sub-groupings; their populations are anonymous, fluid and mobile, and they are unmediated; the individual belongs to them directly, in virtue of his cultural style, and not in virtue of membership of nested sub-groups. Homogeneity, literacy, and anonymity are the key traits.'*²⁷

Here he argues that nationalism arises and develops through structural changes caused by modernity. Thus, a nation is not at the end a given entity. This research will build upon the definition of a nation by Panossian. A nation is a modern social construct, but with pre-modern roots. Meaning that a nation is a combination of factors. First, a nation is shaped by events of the past. Second, by contemporary culture. And third by a feeling of belonging arising from the notion of citizenship or political sense of belonging.²⁸ Especially this third factor is compatible with Anderson's theory.

²⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London 1991) 6.

²⁷ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca 2006) 132.

²⁸ Panossian, 'The past as a nation', 123.

Furthermore, a national identity is constantly in motion, dynamic and evolving. As Ronald Suny calls it an 'open-ended process, never fully complete'. Others refer to the nation as 'a historically evolving reality'.²⁹ Which is also true for the Armenian nation and identity. Their national identity has been constantly evolving, like many other national identities. Furthermore, major historical events during and after the Ottoman Empire have shaped and formed the Armenian identity. Armenia has a long lasting history. And Armenians are proud of their history. They even still call it '*Hayastan*', which comes from 'Hayk the Great' which dates back from 410 A.D. Moreover, they are extremely proud of the fact that Armenia was the first country to adapt Christianity as their state religion. Nowadays the Armenian genocide, and the denial, plays a major part in their culture. Nationalism is, and was, a very strong and visible sentiment in Armenia.

Building up upon these theoretical perspectives, this paper will identify four components of the Armenian identity throughout their history: Christianity, the Armenian genocide, the denial of the Armenian genocide and the Armenian diaspora. These components form, in addition to the used theory, the conceptual framework of this research. In this research the four components are the independent variables that shape Armenian identity – the dependent variable – . This research will show that the impact of these components are variable and shifting and that they are subject to changes during the process of social interaction. Christianity constitutes a significant characteristic of Armenian identity. As Armenia is a democratic society based on Christian values. Christianity is also an important component of theorizing Armenian identity as it demographically differs Armenia from the other, mainly Islamic, countries in the region. Secondly, the Armenian genocide defines a moment of suffering and has been a transforming event and therefore also shapes the Armenian identity. In third place, the denial of the Armenian genocide has caused a sentiment of unity among Armenians. This sentiment of unity is not limited to Armenians in Armenia, but also applies to the Armenian diaspora spread throughout the world. Consequently, the Armenian diaspora makes up the fourth element. The Armenian diaspora fits all of the diaspora conditions given by different authors over time. Examples of these definitions are: forced migration from the homeland, the development of national sentiments over time, the idea of moving back and involved in the homeland's politics and

²⁹ Ibid.

future.³⁰ The diaspora is also important to take into account as it characterizes the entire Armenian population and the movement of people. As the Armenian diaspora is a conflict-generated diaspora, they 'tend to keep strong attachment to their ancestral homeland and give symbolic importance to it'.³¹

And last, this study will be making use of secondary literature as of primary sources such as news articles and government publications. This study will build upon other studies and is an addition to the literature, since the four components used in this study have not been used in this composition before.

³⁰ Bahar Baser and Ashok Swain, 'Diaspora Design versus Homeland Realities: Case Study of Armenian Diaspora', *Caucasian Review of International Relations* (2019) 3:1, 45-62, 47.

³¹ *Idem*, 49.

Christianity

Armenians are an ethnic and especially a religious group whose history dates back as far as that of the Jews, Chinese, Egyptians and other similar groups of people. The history of the Armenians in Anatolia dates back in history until the 9th century B.C. The ancient people of the Urartian are seen as the forefathers of the Armenians and since then multiple kingdoms have emerged and disappeared. Then, on the beginning of the fourth century A.D., the Christianisation of Armenia took place, causing Armenia to be the first state that had embraced and institutionalized Christianity as their official state religion. A historical fact where they are still most proud of. Already during the Ottoman Empire a sense of fatherland (*hayrenik*) developed among Armenian writers. They made a distinction between *azgasirutyn* (love of nation), which raised the sense of a cultural nation beyond a specific territory, and *hayrenasirutyun* (love of fatherland), with a focus on the people in Armenia (*Hayastan*).³²

The Ottoman Empire controlled different parts of Europe, Asia and Africa. Subsequently the people that they ruled came from very different backgrounds. The Ottoman sultan, by right of conquest and divine sanction, ruled over his subjects of various religions and ethnicities in a very strict hierarchal system. The empire was not an ethnic Turkish state but more a multinational Islamic empire formed by Turks, Arabs, Kurds and Circassians. Those at the top had their own language: Ottoman Turkish.³³ Armenia became part of the Ottoman Empire in 1454 and the Armenians belonged to a so called *millet*, a semi-autonomous community, like other minorities in the empire. The millet system provided these minorities with a certain amount of legal autonomy, however *de facto* legislation ensured that they did not have any autonomy.³⁴ Muslims had privileges that Jews and Christians did not have. These groups lived under the rule of *dhimma*. Which guaranteed them a sort of freedom in the Ottoman Empire. This also meant that they could practice their religion, speak their own language, and take care of their own affairs as long as they recognized the ruling and superiority of the Muslim Ottomans. This millet system made sure

³² Suny, *A History of the Armenian Genocide*, 66.

³³ Shavkat Kasymov, 'The example of the Armenian genocide and the role of the millet system in its execution', *Social Identities* (2013) 19:1, 3-12, 8.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 5.

that the Ottoman empire could maintain such a diverse empire, by providing a level of tolerance and cohesive imperial society.³⁵ Moreover, this millet system made sure that the Ottoman empire could keep control over their minorities and that these minorities were visible.³⁶

Practicing their Christian faith, was and is, of utmost importance for the Armenians. The story of the conversion of the Armenians to Christianity is one of the pillars of their identity.³⁷ Before Armenians fled Armenia, the cornerstone of being Armenian was being a member of Saint Gregory's church.³⁸ As said, Armenia was the first country to make Christianity as their state religion in 301 A.D.. This development also contributed to their national identity, as being an Armenian also automatically meant being a Christian. Which developed a sense of unity and collective identity throughout their history. This idea of being the first nation that adopted Christianity as their state religion, and that of 'the chosen people' was spread throughout the centuries by the Church and historians. This idea of being 'the chosen people' comes from the story written by the Armenian historian Agathangelos (5th century A.D.) who argued that Armenia was where God's grace has been manifested. Furthermore, Armenians believe that 'their mountain', which is located in modern Turkey, is the resting place of Noah's Ark. Even the name of Armenia's mother church, Etchmiadzin Cathedral, means 'where the only begotten descended'.³⁹ The church itself was, and is, a national church. Furthermore other historians such as Movses Khorenatsi (410 A.D.) shared the common myth of descent and history that placed them at the start of human history. He argued: *'Although we are a small country and very restricted in numbers, weak in power, and often subject to another's rule, yet many manly deeds have been performed in our land worthy of being recorded in writing'*.⁴⁰ This expression already shows nationalistic sentiments and pride.

Furthermore, Armenians were well positioned as they were engaged in trading, education and banking. Armenians became very visible during the end of the nineteenth century. They put great emphasize on studying and making sure they were doing

³⁵ Ibid, 9.

³⁶ Ibid, 10.

³⁷ Panossian, 'The past as a nation', 126.

³⁸ Ibid, 127.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Suny, *A History of the Armenian Genocide*, 35.

economically well and ended up in jobs such as doctor, journalist or even got into positions of influence such as politics. These well-positioned Armenians continued improving their social status in the Ottoman Empire through pushing for internal political reform and by close cooperation with European countries.⁴¹ Often they send their children to be educated in Europe or to new schools set up in Turkey by Christian (Catholic or Protestant) European missionaries.⁴² This resulted into Armenians adopting European manners, values and behaviour. Furthermore, when the news of revolutionary changes throughout Europe, the rise of European nationalism and capitalism reached the shores of the Ottoman Empire, it affected Ottoman people. An alliance of liberal Armenians got encouraged by this news and wanted to modernize the Ottoman empire along European lines.⁴³ Which caused great resentment against the Armenians among the Turks. This component of their identity, Christianity, had evolved over time. Whereas being Armenian almost solely meant being Christian and expressing their religion, it transformed to being Christian with nationalist aspirations alongside the lines of European nationalism. As nationalistic sentiments were already quietly present in Armenian society for hundreds of years, now they expressed these sentiments. And these nationalist aspirations were perceived dangerous to the Ottoman empire.

The discourse of the creation of the nation-state started in Europe and spread throughout the world. During the nineteenth century the nation was understood to be a 'cultural community of shared language, religion and narratives'. Thus, the nation became ethnicized until the national community was consolidated and homogenous. Subsequently, during the twentieth century these imagined community's provided the basis for the constitution of states. Nations were perceived by nationalists as ancient and products of their history. The writing of this history was intertwined with the emergence of these nation states, such as the Ottoman Empire. Nations dealt with their internal problems in different ways. Where some rulers tried to repression others reformed. However, the Ottoman Empire chose the policy of physical elimination of designated peoples. Among these, the Armenians. The Armenians became the 'other' during the construction of the homogenous modern Turkish state. Christianity, as well as their social class and culture, marked

⁴¹ Ibid, 56.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid, 58.

Armenians for killings.⁴⁴ This event, known as the Armenian genocide, makes up the second component that shapes the Armenian identity.

⁴⁴ Suny, *A History of the Armenian Genocide*, 114.

The Armenian Genocide

The Armenian genocide was the dramatic event during WWI in the Ottoman Empire, which started on the 24th of April 1915. The killings took the lives of one and a half Armenians. It has been one of the most dramatic events from the history of humanity. Turkey denies that genocide is the right term for the event, as they argue it happened under the circumstances of a war and the killings were not systematic killings. While a majority of academics side with the Armenians, some historians have questioned the fact if it was a genocide. This research sides with the first and predicates it was in fact a genocide by providing the following explanations.

First, as said, many Armenians enjoyed a great height of prosperity. For example, they were in banking. They would buy up large landholdings and rent these out. But often Muslims were not able to pay these rents.⁴⁵ No matter what job they had; if they were a banker or a farmer, as most of the Armenians were peasants, Armenians were often successful. And even Armenian peasants were often being more successful than their Turkish counterparts, as they had the tendency to adopt Western harvest methods.⁴⁶ *'What might have been seen as economic and social competitions were increasingly framed in ethnic and religious terms; what might have been understood as conflicts associated with social standing were seen as one ethnoreligious community against another'*.⁴⁷ Armenians not only flourished in agriculture, but also in trading. The common language in the Ottoman Empire was Turkish, especially those in power spoke Turkish. Other languages were mostly related to Turkish. However, Armenian is an Indo-European language very different from Turkish.⁴⁸ The Armenian language has played an important role in the preservation of their cultural integrity. But more importantly, speaking Armenian gave the Armenians an advantage over the less well-educated Muslims. As it was easier to learn other European languages. This made that the Armenians were often more appealing to the European traders because of their common religion and their language skills.⁴⁹ Because of the

⁴⁵ Suny, *A History of the Armenian Genocide*, 50.

⁴⁶ Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey*, 32.

⁴⁷ Suny, *A History of the Armenian Genocide*, 50.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 47.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

prosperity of the Armenians in trade and farming, some of their Turkish countrymen resented them.

Moreover, already before WWI, the Armenians had welcomed Russian armies during the eastern crisis of 1875-1878 between Russia and the Ottoman Empire. The interaction between Russia and Armenia caused that the Ottomans did not trust the Armenians anymore.⁵⁰ Moreover, the Ottomans and its allies were losing the war against the Triple Entente and endured strong Armenian opposition when they invaded Eastern Armenia.⁵¹ Above that, as said, the Armenians demanded revolutionary and liberal reforms, which unfortunately never came. However, this led to suspicions and eventually to allegations that the Armenians were carrying out treasonable acts, separatism and other similar crimes. The Muslim Mullahs and the Ottoman government began spreading propaganda material through newspapers including statements such as: *'The Armenians are in league with the enemy. They will launch an uprising in Istanbul, kill all of the leaders and will succeed in opening the straits for the enemy fleets to capture Istanbul'*.⁵² Articles and messages in Ottoman newspapers were filled with words such as saboteurs, spies, infidels or traitors. As a result, Turks who already resented Armenians and who were dissatisfied with their prosperity, became encouraged and got filled with more hatred by these messages. They created and spread falsified pictures of Armenians bearing arms to convince other Turks that their Armenian neighbours were going to harm and even kill them.⁵³

And last, at the end of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was called 'the sick man of Europe'. The Ottoman Empire was disintegrating and it was in a state of political instability and insecurity.⁵⁴ The Armenian rebellions that were supported by the Russian Empire, fed the anger of the Turks. The Young Turks then envisioned an Ottoman Empire without the Armenian minority, whose prosperity, education and Western outlook did not fit into their concept of Turkish unity.⁵⁵ Moreover, the Ottoman Empire was in state of war and they were losing that war. They needed someone to blame. Moreover, it is believed that the party leader of the Young Turks Talât has stated that Turkey was *'intent on taking*

⁵⁰ Donald Bloxham, 'The Armenian Genocide of 1915-1916: Cumulative Radicalization and the Development of a Destruction Policy', *Oxford Journals* (2003) 181:1, 141-191, 147.

⁵¹ Vahakn N. Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide* (Oxford 1995) 203.

⁵² *Ibid*, 220.

⁵³ *Ibid*.

⁵⁴ Donald E. Millers and Lorna Touryan, *Survivors: An Oral History Of The Armenian Genocide* (1993) 47.

⁵⁵ Kasymov, 'The example of the Armenian genocide and the role of the millet system', 11.

advantage of the war in order to thoroughly liquidate its internal foes, that is the indigenous Christians, without being thereby disturbed by foreign intervention'.⁵⁶ Furthermore, even Morgenthau, the ambassador the US Secretary of State, said on the sixth of July in 1915: 'It appears that a campaign of race extermination is in progress under a pretext of reprisal against rebellion'.⁵⁷ As the genocide was beginning, the Allies issued on May 24th 1915 a joint declaration condemning 'the connivance and often assistance of Ottoman authorities' in the massacres:

'In view of these new crimes of Turkey against humanity and civilisation, the Allied governments announce publicly ... that they will hold personally responsible ... all members of the Ottoman government and those of their agents who are implicated in such massacres.'⁵⁸

This declaration shows that the international community was aware of the atrocities taking place against the Armenians and the involvement of the Ottoman authorities. Furthermore, it was a joint statement to prosecute those committing these atrocities after the war.

However, The atrocities continued and in the spring and summer of 1916 another mass killing took place along the Euphrates and Der el Zor. Before this event the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) or Young Turk government had moved the Armenians further south and east from Istanbul, as they wanted to limit the concentration of Armenians in one place to 5 to 10 percent of the population. This was made possible by The Temporary Law of Deportation, which was drafted in 1915. This law made it possible and legally justified to deport Armenians.⁵⁹ These hundreds of thousands of deported Armenians were eventually slaughtered in the events of 1916. If the deportation or the starvation did not kill them, they were murdered. These killings seem to have been motivated by demographic anxieties and threat- and security concerns.⁶⁰ Meaning, by deporting and murdering the Armenians they would wipe out the biggest Christian minority and create a pre-dominantly Islamic Turkish nation. And they would be able to confiscate and sell Armenian lands and wealth.⁶¹ Also this

⁵⁶ Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide*, 207.

⁵⁷ Albert J. Jongman, *Contemporary Genocides; Causes, Cases, Consequences* (Leiden 1996) 105.

⁵⁸ Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide*, 216.

⁵⁹ Jennifer Balint, 'The Ottoman State Special Military Tribunal for the Genocide of the Armenians: 'Doing Government Business'', *The Hidden Histories of War Crimes Trial* (Oxford 2013) 82.

⁶⁰ Suny, *A History of the Armenian Genocide*, 327.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 113.

was made possible through law as the Ottomans made the Temporary Law of Expropriation and Confiscation in late 1915.⁶²

The period from 1914 to 1950, meaning from World War I (WWI) to World War II (WWII), is characterized by high levels of violence against civil populations. And is therefore rightfully referred to and labelled as 'the era of violence'. Besides violence, forcible resettlement of groups of people and populations were not uncommon. The deportation of people was one of the many political strategies used for nationalistic policies. This way of social engineering was one of the many possible state policies to change a society. The period of 1914-1950 was a period of strong nationalistic sentiments and nation-states. Which amounted to the '*enforced maximization of ethnic, religious, economic, cultural homogeneity by any means*'.⁶³ In other words, identity politics ruled alongside nationalism.

Every Armenian became a victim, because every Armenian was directly or indirectly affected by the genocide. Meaning that every Armenian that had survived the genocide, knew someone who had not. And the stories of the victims have been told to each generation to keep the memory alive. The genocide is such a big aspect of their identity that being Armenian means being a survivor of a genocide. The Armenian people became a people of suffering. Also the confiscation of Armenian land by the Turks during the genocide contributes to this notion of suffering.⁶⁴ Sequential, the genocide has made a big impact on the Armenian consciousness. Armenians had and have a feeling of being murdered solely because they had a different ethnicity. Consequently, this has had a major impact on their identity, because it showed that their values had no meaning for their killers.⁶⁵ Their values, their identity had been brought back to numbers of deaths and statistics and their land had been stolen. What was left was a country reduced in size and in inhabitants.

As the United Nations resolution of 1951 states, created during the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide: '*Genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:*

⁶² Balint, *The Hidden Histories of War Crimes Trial*, 82.

⁶³ Ugur Ümit Üngör, 'Seeing like a nation-state: Young Turk social engineering in Eastern Turkey 1913–50', *Journal of Genocide Research* (2008) 10:1, 15-39, 16.

⁶⁴ Panossian, 'The past as a nation', 137.

⁶⁵ Iris Mihai and Adiran-Cosmin Basaraba, 'Stolen Identity: The Armenian People', *Sfera Politicii* (2014) 4:5, 67-74, 71.

(a) Killing members of the group;

(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;

(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;

(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

*(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group*⁶⁶

The explanations for this genocide appears to be the nationalist discourses by Turkey and Armenia and ethnocentric intolerance under the extreme circumstances of WWI.⁶⁷ During the heyday of the Ottoman Empire the Armenians were a suppressed people. However, because of their ambition they prospered. This prosperity and their nationalistic sentiments caused suspicion and distrust among the Turks. Together with the circumstances of WWI and the Ottomans losing the war were the *'factors that ferment the seeds of genocide.'*⁶⁸ The events of 1915 can be called a genocide, because of the methods used and the outcome of physical destruction of the Armenian community in the Ottoman Empire. Armenian men and boys were systematically killed or displaced. And women were killed, raped or converted into Islam and married away to Turks. The men and women who survived and the forced assimilated Armenian women and children who lived in Turkey, resulted into so-called crypto-Armenians (or 'hidden Armenians'): the Armenians who survived the genocide gradually became Muslims, but didn't forget their Armenian identity.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 'Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, click [here](#), consulted on 01-04-2018.

⁶⁷ Salvador Santino F. Regilme Jr., 'Genocide and Transnational Justice, *Human Rights Review* (2017) 18:1, 111-116, 115.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Üngör, 'Lost in commemoration: the Armenian genocide in memory and identity', 162.

The Denial of the Armenian Genocide

'There are Turks who don't admit that their ancestors committed genocide. If you look at it though, they seem to be nice people... so why don't they admit it? Because they think that genocide is a bad thing which they would never want to commit and because they can't believe their ancestors would do such a thing'. – Hrant Dink⁷⁰

The third and fourth aspect of Armenian identity arises from the genocide, namely the denial of the Armenian genocide and the Armenian diaspora. This chapter will focus on the denial of the Armenian genocide. In terms of the Armenian genocide countries can be divided into three categories: those who recognize the event, those who deny the event and those who choose to remain neutral. According to the Armenian National Institute in Washington, only 29 countries have officially recognized the Armenian genocide.⁷¹ With the U.S. as newest on the list as the U.S. Senate unanimously passed a resolution recognizing the Armenian genocide on the 12th of December in 2019.⁷² Most countries remain neutral and do not want to get involved in the issue to prevent the deterioration of diplomatic ties with Turkey. As Turkey, together with Azerbaijan, strongly deny the happening of the Armenian genocide.⁷³

As said, this research focusses on the period since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) administration since 2002. However, for this research it is of importance to briefly state the emergence of the modern Turkish state and the development of the denial. As argued above the CUP aimed for a solid and united society that was controlled and dominated by Ottoman Muslims, which eventually as said lead to among others the Armenian genocide. This has been explained in the above chapters. What most people know is that Turkey denies the Armenian genocide. However, what most people do not know is that before the formation of modern Turkey, the Armenian genocide was a recognized and mourned event by the Ottoman state. Above that, there were tribunals, the Ottoman

⁷⁰ Armenian Genocide Museum, *1915 project* (Yerevan 2018) 54.

⁷¹ Armenian National Institute, 'Countries that Recognize the Armenian Genocide', click [here](#), consulted on 15-06-2019.

⁷² The New York Times, 'Senate Passes Resolution Recognizing Armenian Genocide, in Defiance of Trump', click [here](#), consulted on 13-12-2019.

⁷³ Mihaj, 'Stolen Identity', 70.

Courts-Martial, to prosecute those who committed the crimes against the Armenians. There were about sixty-three trials to prosecute those who played a role during the genocide.⁷⁴ These trials were internationally driven and the fulfilment of the promise made on May 24th 1915.

Several allegations that the accused were charged with derived from the Peace Treaty of Sèvres, signed on August 10th 1920 between the Allied and Associated powers and Turkey.⁷⁵ The Allied powers described in this treaty were the British Empire, France, Italy and Japan. And the Associated powers were Armenia, Belgium, Greece, Hejaz, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia and Czecho-Slovakia. Especially Article 144, Article 228 and Article 230 were applicable and of use for the trials. The scope of Article 144 is that the Turkish government had to facilitate the return to the homes and the re-establishment of the businesses of Armenians and other Turkish subjects of non-Turkish race who had been forcibly driven away from their homes because of fear of massacre. And this article called for measures of restoration. Article 228 states that *'The Turkish Government undertakes to furnish all documents and information of every kind, the production of which may be considered necessary to ensure the full knowledge of the incriminating acts, the prosecution of offenders and the just appreciation of responsibility'*. Furthermore, Article 230 states that the Turkish government had to hand over to the Allied Powers the persons who were responsible for the massacres during the war. Furthermore, it called for the recognition by Turkey of the tribunal that was going to prosecute these persons.⁷⁶

The Ottoman government organized these courts-martial during 1919-1920, as the Armenian massacres became the primary topic of discussion in the Ottoman Parliament. On November 2nd 1918 the Ottoman government passed a motion for a trial of the Ministers of the cabinets during WWI. The motion contained ten charges against the Ministers' misdeeds related to the Turkish participation during WWI. Two of these charges (number five and number ten) were directly related to the massacres of the Armenians. Number five stated that the orders, instructions and outcome of the Temporary Laws, as explained in the above chapter, were 'completely contrary to the spirit and letter of the Ottoman Constitution'. Furthermore, charge ten indicted the Ministers for the creation of 'brigands (*çetes*) whose

⁷⁴ Balint, *The Hidden Histories of War Crimes Trial*, 78.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 83.

⁷⁶ The Treaty of Sèvres 1920, click [here](#), consulted on 28-06-2019.

assaults on life, property and honour rendered the ministers guilty as co-perpetrators of the tragic crimes that resulted'.⁷⁷

Eighteen defendants in the Istanbul Number One Extraordinary Court-Martial were condemned to death after they were charged with crimes against the Armenians. Of these eighteen persons, fifteen were absent. Leaving the number of people executed for crimes against the Armenians at three.⁷⁸ Furthermore, Turkish prisoners of war captured by the British, that were prosecuted or going to be prosecuted, were given back to Turkey in October 1921. The new Kemalist Turkish government promised that they were going to be tried. However, most of these prisoners 'moved to Ankara and were given posts in the nationalist government.'⁷⁹

The Turkish trials had been successful in documenting the crimes committed against the Armenians. However, the effort to prosecute the perpetrators and those responsible for the Armenian genocide failed, because of domestic and international considerations.⁸⁰ This all shows that Turkey in fact has recognized the Armenian genocide before. Trials were held and some of the perpetrators got their punishment.

But, after WWI Turkey had to rebuild itself. The CUP also got dissolved through these military trials in 1918, however they continued under other names. Many of the social engineers of the CUP ended up working for Mustafa Kemal's (Atatürk) Republican People's Party (RPP).⁸¹ These social engineers continued their ideas under Mustafa Kemal meaning: *the recreation of the population in their own image and to extinguish the plurality and differentiation of it.*⁸² Armenians who had returned to their villages, farms and fields were being told they were not welcome anymore through bullying and terrorization. Most Armenians who did not want to leave converted to Islam, changed their name and continued living as so called 'crypto-Armenians' or 'hidden-Armenians'.⁸³ This 'Turkification' continued under the guise of national sovereignty and 'modernization'. Because of the changed political situation and formation of modern Turkey, the trials were forgotten and the

⁷⁷ Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide*, 319.

⁷⁸ Vahakn N. Dadrian and Taner Akcam, *Judgment at Istanbul: The Armenian Genocide Trials* (Istanbul 2008) 195.

⁷⁹ Balint, *The Hidden Histories of War Crimes Trial*, 84.

⁸⁰ Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide*, 317.

⁸¹ Üngör, 'Seeing like a nation-state: Young Turk social engineering in Eastern Turkey 1913–50', 28.

⁸² Ibid, 29.

⁸³ Üngör, 'Lost in commemoration: the Armenian genocide in memory and identity', 162.

genocide became denied.⁸⁴ This was the result of *Kemalism* and social engineering. There was no place anymore for recognition, as it would not help with the unification of Turkey. As said, most war prisoners were freed, because the rise of this strong nationalist movement led by Kemal, did not harmonize with the legal efforts to prosecute those responsible in the Turkish government and military for the genocide.⁸⁵

The official Turkish view of the events is still primarily based on Kemal's memoirs, speeches and writings. In these documents he is portrayed as the architect and only leader of the nationalist movement. Furthermore, he is also known for removing harmful and undesirable facts from the history books.⁸⁶ Even the Turkish state archives are not accessible to most scholars and where the official court records are is unknown.⁸⁷

Turkish spokespersons have criticized other countries when they recognized the Armenian genocide by pointing out the obvious discontinuity between the Ottoman Empire and the present day Turkish Republic. So why doesn't present-day Turkey recognize and condemn the actions of its predecessor? Especially if it is not the same state? Unlike Germany, Turkey still actively follows a policy of genocide denial. This shows how state identity and continuity is closely intertwined with this possible responsibility.⁸⁸ Even though a revolution took place in Turkey, the state identity did not change. Above that, the nationalist Kemalist movement was basically the same as the CUP and continued the process of building a strong 'Turkey for Turks'. Since then every attempt to strengthen the diplomatic ties between Turkey and Armenia fails on the precondition of Armenia for Turkey to recognize the genocide.

In 2002 the AKP won the elections and took power. They formed a single government and the country has been led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan since 2003. Erdogan has stated that he was willing to re-open the Armenian-Turkish borders '*if the friendly initiatives of Turkey were reciprocated*'.⁸⁹ Furthermore, in 2005 Erdogan proposed the formation of a joint commission that would research into the events of 1915:

⁸⁴ Balint, *The Hidden Histories of War Crimes Trial*, 79.

⁸⁵ Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide*, 318.

⁸⁶ Vahagn Avedian, 'State Identity, Continuity, and Responsibility: The Ottoman Empire, the Republic of Turkey and the Armenian Genocide', *The European Journal of International Law* (2012) 23:3, 797-820, 805.

⁸⁷ Balint, *The Hidden Histories of War Crimes Trial*, 80.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 797.

⁸⁹ Nathalie Tocci, 'The Closed Armenia-Turkey Border: Economic and Social Effects, including those on the People and Implications for the overall situation in the region', *European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs Committee on Development* (2007) 18, click [here](#), consulted on 10-07-2019.

*'We are extending an invitation to your country to establish a joint group consisting of historians and other experts from our two countries to study the developments and events of 1915 not only in the archives of Turkey and Armenia but also in the archives of all relevant third countries and to share their findings with the international community.'*⁹⁰

This invitation was declined by the former Armenian President Kocharyan who had politicized the genocide issue. Armenia argued that the work and efforts by these historians would be undermined, because of poor access to the archives and incomplete materials. As said above, it is known that archival materials have been removed or destroyed. They felt that the outcome of this process would be polarized and the results inconclusive.⁹¹ Even though this invitation might sound friendly and positive, Armenia probably has made the right decision declining Erdogan's invitation. Seeing Erdogan's public statements since then, the outcome of the suggested commission would probably have been biased and indeed polarized.

Intellectuals who are critical and outspoken about not only the history of Turkey, but also the Turkish government can be convicted under Article 301 of the Turkish penal code. This code allows people to be convicted because of actions against the state or the Turkish identity. A famous example of whom this happened to is Hrant Dink, an ethnic Armenian Turk. Dink was an outspoken columnist and voice for the Armenians, who was prosecuted for challenging the official Turkish narrative of the events of 1915. He often received death threats as well, because of his remarks among others about the genocide. He was eventually shot dead on January 19th 2007. Thousands of people reacted to the event by marching to protest the killing. Shouting *'We are all Hrant; we are all Armenians'*. Interestingly Erdogan reacted with an unusual show of anger and grief, saying: *'A bullet was fired at freedom of thought and democratic life in Turkey.'*⁹² However, the limits of this 'freedom of thought' are very visible under Article 301.

⁹⁰ Vidlickova, 'Turkish-Armenian Relations', 4.

⁹¹ David Phillips, 'Diplomatic History: The Turkey-Armenia Protocols', *Institute for the Study of Human Rights* (2012) 19, click [here](#), consulted on 10-07-2019.

⁹² New York Times, 'Armenian Editor Is Slain in Turkey', click [here](#), consulted on 11-07-2019.

In 2008 Turkish intellectuals started the 'I Apologize Campaign', an online apology for the victims of the Armenian genocide. Over 11.000 people have signed the petition. Even though the word genocide is not mentioned in the petition, they did speak about a 'great catastrophe' in 1915 and criticising's Turkey's denial. That the Turkish civil society publicly expressed this opinion after the murder of Hrant Dink was interesting. And how well intended it was, and how Erdogan condemned the murder of Dink, this campaign lead to nothing but anger among right winged nationalists and politicians such as Erdogan. He replied: *'I neither accept nor support this campaign. We did not commit a crime, therefore we do not need to apologise.'*⁹³

These views and statements by Turkey did not change over the years. On April 24th 2019 Erdogan posted on Twitter in English: *'The relocation of the Armenian gangs and their supporters, who massacred the Muslim people, including women and children, in eastern Anatolia, was the most reasonable action that could be taken in such a period.'*⁹⁴ This caused an outrage on Twitter. And not only because of the content of the message, but the 24th of April is the official remembrance day of the Armenian genocide. Making this post even more inconsiderate and cruel. People replied by posting pictures of Armenian children and women being deported, asking if they were the gangs Erdogan was talking about. Furthermore, Erdogan said: *'I remember with respect Ottoman Armenians who lost their lives under difficult conditions of WW'*.⁹⁵ These statements are in line with the Turkish official view since Kemal. Turkey claims that the number of Armenians that have died between 1915-1916 have been victims of WWI.⁹⁶ Furthermore, to refer to the terrible atrocities that the Armenians had to endure they refer to the 'forced relocation'.⁹⁷ As said before, hundreds of thousands Armenians were deported south, to the desert of Syria. Modern day Turkey claims that the deportations of Armenians to the south were necessary due to the war. And they claim that the Armenians posed an national internal threat after Armenian groups sided with an invading Russian army.⁹⁸

⁹³ The Guardian, 'Turkish PM dismisses apology for alleged Armenian genocide', click [here](#), consulted on 10-07-2019.

⁹⁴ Twitter, Turkish Presidency, click [here](#), consulted on 18-07-2019.

⁹⁵ Bloomberg, 'Erdogan Says Deporting Armenians Was Appropriate at the Time', click [here](#), consulted on 10-07-2019.

⁹⁶ Mihaj, 'Stolen Identity', 70.

⁹⁷ Dilaver Arıkan Açar and İnan Rüma, 'External Pressure and Turkish Discourse on 'Recognition of the Armenian Genocide', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* (2007) 7:3, 449-465, 450.

⁹⁸ Balint, *The Hidden Histories of War Crimes Trial*, 78.

Erdogan also has said that it is even impossible that Turkey carried out a genocide. *'A total of 100,000 Armenians live in our country. They were never discriminated on the basis of citizenship, we have never deported any Armenians because of their nationality. We are very humane in our conduct, and we will keep on doing so.'*⁹⁹ This statement is a perfect example of historical revisionism as he distorts the historical truth. As shown before, The Temporary Law of Deportation, which was drafted in 1915, made it possible to legally deport Armenians. Furthermore, the crypto-Armenians are the embodiment of fear of being discriminated because of who you really are. By denying these historical facts he ignores what the Armenians deserve, namely the truth.

The European Parliament and other external political actors have claimed that if Turkey would recognize its history and started recognizing the Armenian genocide it would lead to further democratisation. Furthermore, this process might eventually lead to the so longed European Union membership.¹⁰⁰ However, the EU also has also other concerns namely the lack of human rights, media freedom and corruption. A variation of Turkish academics have come up with different reasons why Western countries want Turkey to recognize the genocide. First, they argue that Armenian lobbies and minorities put pressure on the countries they live in. Secondly, according to these academics there are strong anti-Turkey sentiments because of the Turkish 'intervention' in Cyprus to 'protect' the Turkish Cypriots. Third, they argue that there are some countries who are opposed to Turkish accession to the EU, because of anti-Turkish or -Muslim sentiments. And last, they argue that some countries want Turkey to recognize the genocide to demonstrate that other states have committed these sorts of crimes against humanity as well.¹⁰¹ Especially this last reason corresponds to a quarrel between Erdogan and the French president Macron. The reason for this dispute was the creation of a remembrance day of the Armenian genocide in France in April 2019. France has been the first big European country to recognize the event as a genocide and Macron said that *'Paris knows how to look history in the face'*. However, Erdogan did not appreciate this and made a public statement on April 27th 2019 where he urged Macron to *'focus on massacres committed by French troops during the colonial era'*. Furthermore, Erdogan argued: *'Delivering a message to 700,000 Armenians who live in*

⁹⁹ Ahval News, 'At G20, Turkey's Erdogan again denies Armenian Genocide, click [here](#), consulted on 11-7-2019.

¹⁰⁰ Rūma, 'External Pressure and Turkish Discourse on 'Recognition of the Armenian Genocide', 450.

¹⁰¹ Palabiyik, *Understanding the Turkish-Armenian Controversy*, 103.

France will not save you, Monsieur Macron'.¹⁰² Meaning that, according to Erdogan, this action by Macron will not make him more popular in France.

As seen, the dedicated policy of denial is rooted in the pillars of the Republic of Turkey since the emergence of the modern Turkish state. Whereas right after WWI Turkey organized trials to prosecute those responsible for the mass killings of the Armenians, nowadays they refrain from any responsibility or recognition. However, if one day Turkey would recognize the Armenian genocide it would make the country appear stronger and above all more righteous and credible. Furthermore, it would also give other minorities in the country a more secure feeling that the country respects the (international) rule of law and protects its citizen's rights. Armenia strives for recognition not only for straightening up the historical records in their favour, but also for four additional reasons. First, for the return of historical Armenian lands to their lawful owners. Second, to heal the collective and individual wounds of the survivors and their relatives, and the nation as a whole. Third, a compensation for their suffering. And last, 'to secure official legitimacy for purposes of public policy regarding the subject of the Armenian genocide.'¹⁰³ And the Armenian diaspora continues to campaign for their common battle internationally.

¹⁰² France 24, 'Erdogan slams Macron over Armenia Genocide remembrance', click [here](#), consulted on 10-07-2019.

¹⁰³ Guenter Lewy, *Outlawing Genocide Denial: The Dilemmas of Official Historical Truth* (Utah 2014) 131.

The Armenian Diaspora

The last couple of years the idea and concept of diaspora has become a more significant topic of research. Especially a diaspora's role in conflict and conflict resolution has become a topic of interest. This paper uses the following definition of the diaspora: *'A people with common national origin who reside outside a claimed or an independent home territory. They regard themselves or regarded by others as members or potential members of their country of origin (claimed or already existing) a status held regardless of their geographical location and citizen status outside their home country.'*¹⁰⁴

The Armenian diaspora is the second biggest diaspora in the world after the Jews. Their departure to other countries started during the conquest by the Ottomans, followed by the genocide and later on because of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute with Azerbaijan.¹⁰⁵ Because of these historical events, immigration became part of the Armenians destiny. *'In the Armenian case the geography determined the history'*.¹⁰⁶ However, it should also be noted that in the last decades Armenians also migrated because of economic reasons.

As the church is one aspect of Armenian identity, for the Armenian diaspora the membership of the Armenian Apostolic Church is not anymore necessarily the only thing what binds them together. What also binds them together is *'the subjective sense of belonging rather than traditional objective markers'*.¹⁰⁷ The people of the Armenian diaspora strengthened the ideas of recognition as they were and are the embodiment of exile and hardship. The diaspora has also made possible that they were heard more internationally in their pursuit of international recognition of the genocide. Obviously, before they were able to accomplish this and organise themselves, they had to integrate in their new home countries. In some countries they were more successful than in others. But overall, the Armenians integrated and adapted well, but at the same time maintained and preserved their culture and traditions.

According to estimates there are approximately 15.000 Armenians living in the Netherlands. These are rough estimates as it is difficult to research and determine, because of two reasons: the many different countries of origin (as Armenians have been living all

¹⁰⁴ Yossi Shain, 'Ethnic Diasporas and US Foreign Policy', *Political Science Quarterly* (1995), 109:5, 811-841, 813.

¹⁰⁵ Suny, *A History of the Armenian Genocide*, 38.

¹⁰⁶ Baser, 'Case Study of Armenian Diaspora', 52.

¹⁰⁷ Panossian, 'The past as a nation', 138.

over the world since decades) and the fact that the current state of Armenia has only existed since 1991.¹⁰⁸ In the Netherlands the Armenians are well integrated and organised. They are also involved in politics, for example Arminé Stepanyan who was eligible during the provincial elections for the green party in 2019. Furthermore, in the Netherlands there are three Armenian churches, multiple Armenian organisations and Armenian cultural institutions. They organise cultural events, but also political events. For example the Federation of Armenian Organisations in The Netherlands organises marches and demonstrations to call for the recognition of the genocide. Above that, there is an Armenian genocide memorial monument in Almelo, the Netherlands. The monument was erected in 2014 and caused a lot of anger among the Turkish community in the Netherlands. On the first of June 2014 approximately 3000 Dutch Turks came to Almelo to protest against this monument. This protest even led to parliamentary questions by five political parties, as the protest seemed to be supported and incited by the Turkish government. According to these parties the Turkish consul arranged free bus transportation for the protestors and encouraged people to protest. Even multiple Turkish mosques in the Netherlands assisted in the protest as they also organised busses to bring people to the protest in Almelo. As a party member of the Christian Democratic Appeal stated: *'The demonstration against the monument commemorating the millions of victims of the genocide around 1915, has in any case been largely organized by the Turkish government'*.¹⁰⁹ According to the then Dutch minister of foreign affairs, *'the Turkish authorities have been told that the issue of the Armenian genocide is sensitive and they have been asked to deal with the situation responsibly'*.¹¹⁰ This is not the only monument in the Netherlands that has caused disturbances among the Dutch Turks. Before, in 2001 the Turkish community also protested against an Armenian memorial, in Assen. In March 2001, the Turkish Islamic Cultural Association in Assen filed a lawsuit against the municipality of Assen, because of the monument. The court ruled a month later that the association could not be considered as an interested party and declared the appeal of the Dutch Turks inadmissible. The association

¹⁰⁸ Federatie Armeense Organisaties Nederland, *Armeniërs in Nederland: Een verkennend onderzoek* (Den Haag 2008) 33.

¹⁰⁹ Elsevier, 'Tweede Kamer wil weten of Turkije achter protest monument zit', click [here](#), 10-09-2019.

¹¹⁰ RTV Oost, 'Rol Turkse consul onduidelijk bij protest tegen Armeens genocide monument Almelo', click [here](#), consulted on 10-09-2019.

brought the matter before the Council of State. In August 2002, this court also declared the association inadmissible.¹¹¹

Besides the monument Armenian organisations in the Netherlands often organise demonstrations, offer petitions to the Dutch Parliament and send in official letters. For example in 2014 they send a letter to the Dutch House of Representatives with the title: ‘Turkish hate demonstration and 100 years of Armenian Genocide’. The House of Representatives addressed this letter in a commission, send it to the cabinet and asked the Minister of Social Affairs to answer this letter.¹¹² This shows that these organisations are taken very seriously by governments.

As said, 29 countries have recognized the Armenian genocide. However, the Netherlands still hasn’t legally recognized the genocide. As the Dutch cabinet still calls it: ‘the affair of the Armenian genocide’ instead of just the Armenian genocide.¹¹³ By calling it the affair, they legally do not recognize the genocide. A spokesperson for the ministry warned that acknowledging the genocide could have an impact on normalizing diplomatic relations between Turkey and the Netherlands. In contrary to the Dutch House of Representatives who voted on the matter in 2018 and only 3 Members of Parliament – of the party Denk – voted against the decision to recognize the genocide.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, in 2019 when Erdogan said deporting Armenians was appropriate at the time, another motion was submitted in the Dutch House of Representatives arguing that Turkey refuses to acknowledge its history and asking the Dutch government to distance themselves from these statements.¹¹⁵ The Dutch party DENK consists of 2 Dutch-Turkish Members of Parliament and one Dutch-Moroccan Member of Parliament. The two Dutch-Turkish Members of Parliament, Selçuck Öztürk and Tunahun Kuzu, have been openly critical about the Netherlands recognizing the Armenian genocide. On the day that the Dutch Parliament had a debate about the Armenian genocide and decided that a representative of the Dutch Cabinet was going to be present at the memorial in Yerevan, Selçuck Öztürk was being so

¹¹¹ NRC, ‘Toch Armeens monument’, click [here](#), consulted on 17-09-2019.

¹¹² Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, ‘Brief van de Minister van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid 34000-51’, click [here](#), consulted on 20-09-2019.

¹¹³ NRC, ‘Kamer erkent Armeense genocide, kabinet niet’, click [here](#), consulted on 15-06-2019.

¹¹⁴ Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, ‘Motie van het lid Voordewind 34775-56’, click [here](#), consulted on 20-09-2019.

¹¹⁵ Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, ‘Motie van het lid Voordewind 32623-263’, click [here](#), consulted on 20-09-2019.

uproarious that he had to be removed from the Plenary Hall.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, as already stated before, five Dutch-Turkish Members of Parliament were threatened since they recognized the Armenian genocide.¹¹⁷

Furthermore, the Armenians are also very well integrated in the United States of America (US) and the American-Armenian diaspora is one of the most powerful transnational communities. The American-Armenian diaspora also spends a lot of attention to the recognition for the genocide.¹¹⁸ The Armenian diaspora continues the full backing of the American government. In 2000 the U.S. Congress handled a resolution regarding the Armenian genocide. This was not perceived well in Turkey. Consequently Turkey decided that they were going to intensify their anti-recognition campaign, not going to invest in normalizing their relationship with Armenia and support academic research supporting their argument to counteract the 'pro-Armenian' activities in the U.S..¹¹⁹ The involvement of the Armenian-American lobby in American politics regarding the Caucasus is also visible in the Nagorno-Karabakh war. This long lasting dispute, regarding land, between Armenia and Azerbaijan still has not been resolved. In 1992 the U.S. Congress passed the Freedom Support Act to the former Soviet Union republics, which facilitated humanitarian and financial aid for those countries. During that time the Armenian lobby lobbied for an amendment, referred to as Section 907, which caused that Azerbaijan was banned from this aid by the American government. This lack of aid, compared to Armenia, left Azerbaijan in a difficult and uneven situation.¹²⁰

In December 2019, the ultimate goal of Armenian diaspora in the U.S. was achieved: the Senate passed a resolution recognizing the Armenian genocide. The vote to recognize the genocide was even unanimous. Not surprising, this caused an uproar in Turkey. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said that those who supported the resolution are cowards and that *'politicians with limited knowledge about the history should not judge*

¹¹⁶ WNL, 'DENK Kamerlid Öztürk kamer uitgezet wegens verstoring na debat Armeense genocide', click [here](#), consulted on 20-10-2019.

¹¹⁷ Trouw, 'Kamerleden met Turkse wortels bedreigd om erkennen Armeense genocide, click [here](#), consulted on 04-09-2019.

¹¹⁸ Baser, 'Case Study of Armenian Diaspora', 53.

¹¹⁹ Alla Mirzoyan, *Armenia, the Regional Powers, and the West : Between History and Geopolitics* (New York 2010) 92.

¹²⁰ Baser, 'Case Study of Armenian Diaspora', 60.

history'.¹²¹ He also posted a tweet on Twitter saying: *'US Senate Resolution is nothing more than a political show. It is not legally binding and it has not validity whatsoever. Those who want to exploit history for political ends are cowards unwilling to face the truth.'*¹²²

Çavuşoğlu is right that it is not, internationally, legally binding. However, the passing of this resolution is obviously a strong statement and can cause that other countries might also start the process of recognizing the genocide, due to the impulse this might give to other Armenian diasporas throughout the world.

As seen the diaspora plays a very important role in Armenia's foreign policy. Armenia is a weak political and economic state and relies on the support from its wealthy and quite powerful diaspora.¹²³ The Armenian state also depends on their diaspora in different ways. As the members of the diaspora are generally more wealthy, family members back in Armenia financially depend on them. Furthermore, members of the diaspora often go to Armenia to visit family, friends or just for vacation. The money that they spend there has resulted into a growing tourist business. However, research done by the World Bank has also shown that there is a link between diaspora remittances and obstacles to conflict resolution.¹²⁴ This research has shown that diaspora members contribute to conflict escalation rather than de-escalation by sending big remittances and collecting money for welfare organizations who 'fight' for their cause abroad. The fight, or conflict, in their homeland shapes the identity of the diaspora. Meaning in Armenia, the fight for the recognition of the Armenian genocide shapes the identity of the Armenian diaspora. However, diaspora groups tend to complicate the peace process and make the conflicts in issues in their homelands even more complicated and extensive.¹²⁵

This is also the case for Armenia and for their diaspora. While the diaspora fights for recognition of the Armenian genocide, it complicates things as well. How stronger they call for recognition, how stronger Turkey pursues their anti-recognition campaign nationally and internationally. This was shown in the last two chapters of this research. Even if the intentions are good, it might not lead to the outcome they hope for. On the other side,

¹²¹ NBC News, 'Turkey blasts U.S. after Senate passes resolution recognizing Armenian genocide', click [here](#), consulted on 13-12-2019.

¹²² Twitter, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, click [here](#), consulted on 13-12-2019.

¹²³ Baser, 'Case Study of Armenian Diaspora', 55.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 48.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 52.

Armenia stands stronger with other country's supporting their cause. But, the fight should be won diplomatically and by pushing Turkey too hard, they might lose.

Conclusion

The central question in this research was: 'Does the Turkish state deny the Armenian genocide? If so, how and to what extent does the denial by the Turkish state of the Armenian genocide shape Armenian state identity?'. This research focussed on the AKP administration and has also shown how the process of the denial started and evolved. By researching into news articles and online platforms such as Twitter where Erdogan and other Turkish officials have expressed their views on the genocide, it can be concluded that Turkey does in fact deny their involvement in a genocide on the Armenians between 1915-1918.

This research argued that there are four main aspects of Armenian state identity, namely Christianity, the Armenian genocide, the denial of the Armenian genocide and the Armenian diaspora and researched into these aspects. First this research has shown that Christianity is a big aspect of Armenian identity and that being Armenian almost solely meant being Christian and expressing their religion. And overtime this aspect transformed to being Christian with nationalist aspirations during a time of European nationalism and war. The Armenians became the 'other' during the construction of the homogenous modern Turkish state. And their aspect of being Christian marked Armenians for killings during the Armenian genocide. Which made up the second element. This horrific event made the Armenians a people of suffering, and united them. And the denial of this event, which started during the formation of the modern Turkish state and lasts until now, has caused that the resentment among Armenia and Turkey and the inhabitants of those states continues. It resulted into closed borders, no trade, and a poor economy. This third aspect, the denial, has proven to be the biggest aspect of all four as it not just a part of Armenia's identity, but it influences the other aspects as well. It influences Christianity as the denial of this event became a bigger part of their identity. Not just being a Christian, but being a person, or people, of suffering that continues to last as long as their suffering doesn't get recognized internationally, but most importantly by the perpetrator. And obviously it influences the second aspect, the event of the genocide, as it cannot be characterized as other genocides, such as the genocide on the Jews or the Tutsi, and therefore continues this battle of striving for recognition. And it effects the fourth aspect, the diaspora, as this diaspora is united in this goal: getting other countries to recognize the genocide so that

eventually Turkey will. So that Armenia can grow as a state and move on from this terrible history that still holds them back from growth and prosperity.

Concluding, in Armenia social identities have created collective interests: namely the pursue of the recognition of the genocide and a feeling of belonging together because of religion, genocide, the denial and the diaspora. Plus the determinants such as nationalism are, as shown, historically constructed. Also the favouritism of being part of a group applies to the Armenians. Discrimination towards the Turks and favouritism towards their own group is common. This is also applicable to the Turks and their discrimination towards Armenians and favouritism of their own people. The institutionalization of collective action is also visible in Armenia as they collectively strive for international recognition of the Armenian genocide. As said, there is no set moment to where a group decides to be a nation. And it is rather a constant process of looking back to the past and relating the past in defining 'who we are'. The Armenians keep looking back and define themselves as one through the genocide. Furthermore as Anderson argues '*symbols, myths and traditions are the foundations of the imagination of the nation*'. Nationalism exists in Armenia due to their collective feeling of belonging to the church, a collective suffering because of the horrors of the genocide and their diaspora that holds on to their traditions wherever they live. Also Gellner's argument is applicable to Armenia as history has shown that Armenia's identity is not a given entity. It has formed over time. From focussing on being a Christian country surrounded by other religious groups to a country where its people live all over the world and are united by language, customs and a shared history of suffering. The denial of the Armenian genocide has a major impact on the Armenian identity as it unites them, worldwide, due to their collective feeling of suffering.

Both Turkey and Armenia's collective action problems are generated in self-interests. Turkey refuses to recognize their actions in the genocide, as this will admit that they are guilty and that the Turkish administration has been wrong for the last hundred years. Furthermore, it might also cause that Turkey has to give the confiscated land back to Armenia, which will cause a decline of the Turkish state and anger among the Turkish population. On the other side, Armenia's strive for recognition has led to closed borders with Turkey and therefore a poor economic prosperity. They both place their own societal interests before those of the other state, for political survival strategies.

Self-interests, societal interests, nationalism, self-help (believing that states can rely on no one but themselves for security) and sovereignty can force states towards state egoism. But, as said, do not always exclude collective identities. Collective identity leads to the identification of 'the self' with 'the other' through separating the differences between them. This will lead that 'the self' will categorize as 'the other'. This collective identity merges 'the other' and 'the self' into a single identity, whereby actors define the welfare of the other, as a part of the self. Moreover, the structures of regional systems constitute interaction that prevent or ease the collective identity formation. However, as Wendt argues, *'some structures cannot be changed in a given historical background'*. In the case of Turkey and Armenia there is a big chance that this will never happen as long as Turkey does not recognize the genocide.

Interests and identity are based on shared ideas and are socially constructed through interaction between different actors. Turkey and Armenia have considered each other as enemies during WWI and after. Nowadays the diplomatic relations are still not constructive, however progress is being made. But, they are still not there yet. To achieve a good foundation for strong and constructive diplomatic relations, ultimately Turkey has to recognize the Armenian genocide. This ultimately will hopefully lead to a more bright future for Armenia. As the genocide will always shape their identity, the denial hopefully one day does not anymore.

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