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**APOLOGIES FOR THE PAST IN TURKEY: THE EXAMPLE OF THE ‘I
APOLOGIZE’ CAMPAIGN AND THE DERSİM APOLOGY**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the issue of collective apology, which can function as a symbolic form of restitution that publicly addresses and acknowledges the grievances faced by victimized groups in post-conflict settings. The thesis focuses on two cases of collective apology in Turkey. The first is the 'I Apologize' online signature campaign regarding the Armenian issue in 2008, the second is an apology speech carried out by a state official on the Dersim massacre in 2011. Both events raised significant public debate in Turkish society.

There is a growing literature that deals with the issue of collective apology as a form of reparations for mass injustice. Taking two recent cases of collective apology in Turkey, and looking at them through the lens of existing literature on apology, this thesis explores the answers to a set of questions; regarding the format, wording and enactment of the apologies and their dealing with the issues of responsibility, and reconciliation. In order to do this the thesis looks at the written news media and articles published on the apology upon their enactment and carries out six in-depth interviews with members of the two communities, to understand their viewpoint on the two cases of apology for the acts of collective violence inflicted on their communities. While supporters heralded both speech acts as successful apologies that formed a step towards reconciliation and democratization, others criticized them for varying reasons.

Given the findings of this research, this thesis argues that the 'I Apologize' campaign was a significant civilian initiative of apology as acknowledgment in an environment of continued denial and discrimination. However the apology remained lacking of a call for serious acknowledgement and accountability and in this sense functioned as a form of *catharsis* for the apologizers.

Looking at the Dersim apology speech, this thesis argues that the apologies focus is on pinning blame on to a political opponent, and not on apology as an act of reparation or remorse. It also does not address the expectations of the victimized group. In this vein it is argued that the apology speech is more a reflection of the apologizers *hubris* than a sincere step towards remorse and reparation.

Özet

Bu tez kolektif özür meselesini incelemektedir. Kolektif özür, çatışma sonrası ortamlarda bulunan mağdurların mağduriyetlerinin sembolik bir tazmin şekli olarak işlev görebilmektedir. Araştırma Türkiye’den iki kolektif özür örneğini incelemektedir. Bunlardan ilki 2008 yılında Ermeni meselesine dair gerçekleşen ‘Özür Diliyoruz’ imza kampanyasıdır. İkincisi ise resmi bir yetkili tarafından Dersim katliamına dair gerçekleşen bir özür konuşmasıdır. İki olay da Türkiye toplumunda tartışma yaratmıştır.

Kolektif özürlerin toplu haksızlık olaylarına yönelik yapılan bir tazmin şekli olarak inceleyen, ve genişlemekte olan bir literatür mevcuttur. Bu tez Türkiye’de gerçekleşen bu iki kolektif özür örneğini bu literatür ışığında inceleyerek, bir takım sorunların cevabını aramaktadır; bu özürlerin biçimi, gerçekleşme şekilleri ve sorumluluk, ve yüzleşme meselelerine dair yaklaşımlarını incelemektedir. Buna yönelik olarak, özürler üzerine yazılı medyada yazılanları incelenmiş ve mağdur iki topluluğun üyeleri ile cemaatlerine yönelik gerçekleşen toplu şiddet olaylarına dair bu iki özür konusunda altı derinlemesine mülakat gerçekleştirilmiştir.

Özürleri destekleyenler bu iki özürü de yüzleşme ve demokratikleşmeye yönelik bir adım olarak görürken, başkaları farklı sebepler yüzünden eleştirilerde bulundular.

Bu araştırmanın sonucunda, bu tez ‘Özür Diliyoruz’ kampanyasının bir inkar ve ayrımcılık ortamı içinde önemli bir sivil insiyatif olduğunu savunmaktadır. Ancak bu özür gerçek bir kabullenme ve hesap vermeye çağrıdan yoksundur.

Bu tez Dersim özür konuşmasına bakarak, bu özür konuşmasının bir siyasi rakip üzerine sorumluluk yüklemeye odaklandığı, onarma ve pişmanlık amaçlı yapılmadığını ve bu bağlamda özür konuşmasının telafi ve yüzleşmeye gerçek bir katkıda bulunmadığını savunmaktadır.

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Introduction

In recent years, the use of public apologies to address past injustice has become a widespread global phenomenon. Apologies are increasingly seen as part of mechanisms to repair wrongdoing and acknowledge injustice.

The issue of apologizing for the past was raised in Turkey in the 2000's, firstly through an online signature campaign of apology regarding the Armenian issue, then through a speech by the prime minister on the Dersim massacres. Both events raised significant public debate in Turkish society.

The Armenian apology took place in December 2008, when a group of Turkish intellectuals initiated an online signature campaign, "Özür Diliyorum" [I Apologize]. In the short undersigned text posted at www.ozurdiliyoruz.com¹ participants, including prominent Turkish scholars, journalists, artists and activists, presented their personal apologies to "my Armenian brother" for "the indifference to the "*Büyük Felaket*" [Great Calamity] / [*Medz Yeghern*] (Armenian) that Ottoman Armenians were subjected to in 1915."² The apology was met by criticism from the nationalist and conservative block, but on the other hand collected 30,000 signatures by 11 January 2010.³

In November 2011 Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in an unprecedented move, gave a publicized speech to his provincial chiefs on the destruction of the Kurdish-Alevi communities of Dersim in 1937-38 under the Kemalist single party regime. In the speech, which was presented by the majority of the Turkish media as a path-breaking apology for the events, Erdoğan said: "If there is need for an apology on behalf of the state, and if there is such a (political) practice in the books I would apologize, and

1 <http://www.ozurdiliyoruz.com/> (accessed 4 July 2014)

2 <http://www.ozurdiliyoruz.com/> The Turkish text of apology was as follows; "1915'te Osmanlı Ermenileri'nin maruz kaldığı Büyük Felâket'e duyarsız kalınmasını, bunun inkâr edilmesini vicdanım kabul etmiyor. Bu adaletsizliği reddediyor, kendi payıma Ermeni kardeşlerimin duygu ve acılarını paylaşıyor, onlardan özür diliyorum."

3 "Apologizing to Armenians not a Crime," *Bianet*, 11 January 2010, <http://bianet.org/english/minorities/119379-apologizing-to-armenians-not-a-crime>, (accessed 2 January 2015)

I am apologizing.”⁴ Meanwhile, Erdogan’s government abides by the official Turkish stance of denying the Armenian massacres as genocide and shies away from offering an apology or reparations for the destruction of Ottoman Armenians by the Young Turk government.

These two instances of apology can be read as part of an increasing tendency worldwide to express public remorse for past injustices, with public apologies constituting one form of this tendency. In the past few decades, from public figures such as celebrities or leaders of state to religious institutions such as the Catholic Church, numerous individuals and groups have chosen to publicly express their remorse for transgressive actions committed in their names in the past. This comes with the understanding that societies need to deal with their pasts. States are not exempt from this trend, as they are no longer considered sacrosanct entities and held accountable for their actions.⁵

Among the reasons for this rise in the 1990’s into the 2000’s is a desire to “settle the accounts”⁶ of the past century. Another reason is increasing globalization, which has enhanced communication between states and communities, in the process limiting the possibility of hiding transgressions from public scrutiny.⁷

Barkan says that in line with the increasing importance of morality and justice, issues of restitution receive growing attention. He says that these issues have come “to dominate public attention and political issues and display the willingness of nations to embrace their own guilt. This national self-reflexivity is the new guilt of nations.” Apologies are part of this novel phenomenon where states are more ready to acknowledge guilt, and take into consideration increasing demands for restitution.⁸

⁴ " Turkey PM Erdogan Apologizes for 1930's Killings," *BBC News*, 23 November 2011, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-15857429>, (accessed 2 January 2015)

⁵ Kora Andrieu, " 'Sorry for the Genocide': How Public Apologies Can Help Promote National Reconciliation." *Millennium-Journal of International Studies* 38:1 (2009): 4.

⁶ Aaron Lazare, *On Apology*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004) 10.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 10-12.

⁸ Elazar Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations, Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices*. (New York: Norton, 2000) xvii.

The proliferation of one type of apology, namely those carried out addressing a collectivity that has faced injustice in the past, can be situated in this larger context. While in some parts of the world the establishment of truth commissions has reflected the need to remedy past wrongdoing, in others collective apologies have become the more employed form of reparation for the past.⁹

Collective apologies, through an acknowledgement of past injustice and identification of the responsibility of the wrongdoer carry the potential to facilitate reconciliation between wronged and perpetrator groups. In this way they can contribute to transitional justice and peace processes and thus change the effects of the past on the present. Collective apologies can also facilitate the building a new collective national identity and enable a questioning of official historical interpretations.

The issue of public/collective apologies has been studied in various fields, and certain criteria have been put forward to determine the effectiveness of an apology. Among these are a clear acknowledgement of the wrongdoing, a sincere expression of remorse and the involvement of further reparations to amend the victims.

This brings the issue of unsuccessful apologies and those considered inadequate in certain aspects such as the acknowledgement of responsibility and sincerity. Apologies can be instrumentalized for the interests of states and individuals, and thus can be unable to fulfill an aim of reconciling the victim and victimized.

In this thesis I explore these issues through the two recent cases of apology in Turkey, namely the Dersim apology and the 'I Apologize' campaign. These two cases of public apology addressed two genocidal massacres, one the total destruction of the Ottoman Armenians throughout Anatolia in 1915-1917, and the other the massacre of the Alevi Kurds of the Dersim region of Eastern Turkey in the 1930's. Both events reflect a

⁹ Howard-Hassmann, Rhoda E., and Mark Gibney. "Introduction: Apologies and the West." In *The Age of Apology: Facing up to the Past* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008) 4-5.

mentality of homogenization and ethnic superiority that began towards the end of the Ottoman Empire and would come to shape the Turkish Republic. These massacres would be interpreted by Turkish official history as necessary and justified precautions for protecting the unity of the nation. This narrative of official history would largely go unrivalled in Turkey, until recent decades when a small group of intellectuals and publishers would initiate a partial questioning of this official interpretation. However no measures were taken by the state to address and acknowledge these acts of injustice or to deal with the demands for recognition of victims and their communities.

In the 2000's two initiatives brought these acts of historical injustice to the fore. The 2008 'I Apologize' campaign was a signature campaign of apology that took place as a civilian initiative in a context of total denial of the genocide. In 2011, an official of the Turkish state opened up the issue of Dersim, giving a speech that included a statement that suggested an apology for the events. Both the apology campaign and the speech generated widespread discussion and controversy in Turkish society.

While supporters heralded both speech acts as successful apologies that formed a step towards reconciliation and democratization, others criticized them for varying reasons. Some of these criticisms were directed as nationalist responses towards any notion of the states acceptance of its guilt, more so for events that had been coded with a historical interpretation that justified all actions of the state towards its ethnic and religious minorities. Others supported the idea of apologizing as a way of confronting the Turkish past but raised criticism towards the apologies with regard to their format, presentation and aim. In the Dersim case, criticism was also directed towards the sincerity and lack of necessary actions that was expected to take place alongside such an apology. These criticisms were largely voiced through the written media.

Taking these two recent cases of collective apology in Turkey, and looking at them through the lens of existing literature on apology, I explore the answers to a set of questions;

Firstly; what is signified by the choice of specific wording in a text of apology? What does the context of apologies say regarding the apologies? Do these have any influence in determining if an apology is sincere and not used as an instrument for other interests?

The second set of questions is connected to responsibility. What does the standing of the apologizers say regarding responsibility? Can (or should) collective guilt be assigned for a past act? What do the two apologies say about the subjectivity of apologizers and their apologizing today for actions committed by past generations?

The third issue I look into is reconciliation. What is the context in which these apologies take place? What is the role of apology in the process of reconciling the wronged collectivity with larger society and the state? What is a contemporary apology able to do to amend the past and repair the effects of historical injustice?

In this thesis I explore these issues connected to public apologies, through these two cases of apology. There is a growing literature that views collective apologies as a way of reparations for mass injustice. Informed by this approach, I carry out an analysis of the apologies themselves and on what is suggested by their chosen format, wording and context.

Besides this, I look into the responses and reactions the apology has elicited from the Turkish public as well as from the Armenian- Turkish and Dersim communities themselves, as recipients of these apologies. In order to do this I carry out an analysis of the written news media and articles published on the apologies upon their enactment. I also carry out six interviews, with members of the Armenian - Turkish and Dersim communities, to understand their viewpoint on the issue of apologizing for the acts of collective violence inflicted on their communities. The news articles and interviews provide insight on how various segments of Turkish society read these apologies, and show their perspectives on what an apology can or should signify in terms of responsibility, and realize in terms of reconciliation.

I argue that considering the criteria set for effective collective apologies in scholarly work and keeping in mind the reparatory and reconciliatory role that is expected of these apologies, the ‘ I Apologize ’ campaign, while lacking certain elements of a satisfactory apology is a positive step towards addressing the historical injustice faced by the Ottoman Armenians.

The apology was criticized and questioned on certain aspects such as its evasion of the term genocide, its vague definition of the wrongdoing, its use of the passive voice and lack of agency, its focus on individual conscience, and its dealing with the issue of responsibility.

While an analysis of these aspects suggest that the apology functions as *catharsis* for the apologizers rather than a call for serious acknowledgement and accountability of the genocide, despite its shortcomings, the apology campaign marked itself as a small but important step towards generating public debate and visibility on the genocide, particularly in the context of denialism in Turkey.

The Dersim apology speech on the other hand, when analyzed from this lens of apology as a “regretful acknowledgement of a wrongdoing”¹⁰ which necessitates the accompaniment of appropriate reparatory steps remains a “hollow gesture”¹¹ of speech act that only perpetuates the victimization of the community it is addressed to, in terms of the context it took place in, its mode of enactment and the actions that followed (or *did not* follow) it. In this case the apologizers focus is on pinning responsibility on to his political opponent, and not on reparation or remorse. Thus I argue that the apology speech is more a reflection of Erdoğan’s *hubris* than of a sincere step towards remorse and reparation.

As in the ‘I Apologize’ campaign, the context of the apologies enactment, its dealing with the issue of acknowledgement and responsibility and its effect on reconciliation are analyzed through the varying reactions it

¹⁰ Nicolas Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation*. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1991), 19.

¹¹ Zohar Kampf, "The Discourse of Public Apologies: Modes of Realization, Interpretation and Mediation" in, *Public Apology Between Ritual and Regret. Symbolic Excuses on False Pretenses or True Reconciliation out of Sincere Regret?*, ed. D Cuyoers, Daniel Janssen, Jacques Haers and Barbara Segart, (Amsterdam/New York : Brill/Rodopi, 2013) 158.

received from Turkish society and the victimized community itself, and through the lens of existing literature on the criteria and outcomes of collective apology.

1. The 'Age of Apology'

1.1 Origins of Collective Apologies

An apology is a speech act, defined by the Oxford dictionary as “a regretful acknowledgement of an offence or failure.”¹² It is carried out in response to a wrongdoing as a way to show acceptance of one’s responsibility and as an expression of sorrow and regret for the action. Tavuchis defines apology as “a moment in a complex restorative project arising from an unaccountable infraction and culminating in remorse and reconciliation.”¹³

In its origins the word apology can be traced to the Ancient Greek word *apologus*, meaning story, from which the word *apologia*, an oral or written defense, has derived.¹⁴ Plato’s *Apology* is the prototype of this form, where he puts forward an *apologia* to refute the accusations against him.

Distinct from *apologia* is ‘apologetics’ the branch of theology concerned with argumentation for the defense or proof of Christian doctrine. Linguist Dale Sullivan defines *apologia* as “a rhetorical discourse that addresses specific cases and specific audiences” and “apologetics” as a “dialectical discourse that addresses general questions and universal audiences.”¹⁵ Today the initial use of apology still exists in the word ‘apologist’ denoting a spokesperson who through rhetorical strategies uses facts to influence an audience in defending or promoting a cause.¹⁶ However apology today has

¹² <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/apology> Accessed 4 February 2015.

¹³ Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa*, 43.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁵ Dale L. Sullivan, "Francis Schaeffer's Apparent Apology in Pollution and the Death of Man," *Journal of Communication & Religion* 21:2 (1998): 3.

¹⁶ Nick Smith, *I Was Wrong: The Meanings of Apologies*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), p.8; Also see <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/apologist>

lost this initial function of giving a speech in defense, to become a speech act indicating remorse and regret.

According to Smith, in the 16th century, alongside the use of apology as a form of a rhetorical strategy aiming defense, emerged the new usage of apology as an expression of acknowledgement of wrongdoing. He gives the example of Shakespeare's use of the term in Richard III to imply regret.¹⁷ Diplomatic state apologies took place in the 17th century and became more common in the 19th century. These apologies mainly took place between representatives of states.¹⁸

Public apologies for wronged groups and human rights violations are relatively newer practices following the changing of the status of states from sacrosanct entities to bodies that can be held accountable for their actions. Parallel to this understanding is an increase in collective apologies, which emerged in the period after World War two, and rised markedly since the 1990's, leading to a description of this phenomenon as an "Age of Apology."¹⁹

1.2 Phenomenon of Collective Apologies

Collective apologies are a type of public apology that aims to address the victimization of collectivities. Differing from interpersonal apologies which are an exchange between individuals, in collective apologies a representative of the perpetrator group, generally a leader who is given authority to speak in the name of the group, presents the apology.²⁰ These apologies are made on behalf of and address "identifiable communities".²¹

¹⁷ Smith, *I Was Wrong*, 9

¹⁸ Ažuolas Bagdonas, "The Practice of State Apologies: The Role of Demands for Historical Apologies and Refusals to Apologize in the Construction of State Identity" (PhD diss., Central European University, 2010). 3.

¹⁹ Mark Gibney, *The Age of Apology: Facing Up to the Past* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Roy L. Brooks, *When Sorry Isn't Enough: The Controversy over Apologies and Reparations for Human Injustice*. (New York: New York UP, 1999). 3.

²⁰ Celermajer, *The Sins of the Nation*, 14.

²¹ Eneko Sanz and Jeremy Tomlinson. *National Apologies: Mapping the Complexities of Validity: A Practical Paper* (Center of Conflict and Peace Studies, 2012), 10.

'Collective apology' is one among other terms used to refer to this act of redress, and which focuses on one or more aspects that these apologies might carry. Among the other terms used to refer to the same act are public apologies, national apologies, political apologies, Many to Many apologies, state apologies, community- focused apologies, political apologies, reconciliation apologies and historical apologies.²²

Govier and Verwoerd use the term "public apology" as one "expressed in the public domain on the assumption that it is relevant to the public at large and not solely to the victims of the wrongdoing."²³

Sanz defines "national apologies" as those that involve the state as a particular political and collective agent. They can also be synonymously called "state apologies" as the source of the apology is a nation-state, or referred to as "intra-state" and "domestic" as they aim to repair relations of communities inside the same country.²⁴

According to Celermajer apologies are "political apologies" in the sense that the collective or institution that presents the apology is a political entity. This may be for instance a sub-state political group or a group that acted in the name of the state.²⁵

Tavuchis, distinguishes between apologies based on their interacting actors:

1. Interpersonal apology from one individual to another or "One to One"
2. Apology from an individual to a collectivity or "One to Many"
3. Apology from a collectivity to an individual or "Many to One"
4. Apology from one collectivity to another, or "Many to Many"²⁶

Collective apologies belong to either, the "Many to One" or the "Many to Many" apologies. In the first case, the apology is offered by a group to the individual victim. Examples are the apology of the Catholic Church in

²² Ibid.,10.

²³ Trudy Govier, and Wilhelm Verwoerd. "The Promise and Pitfalls of Apology." *Journal of Social Philosophy* 33,1 (2002): 67-68.

²⁴ Sanz and Tomlinson. *National Apologies*, 10.

²⁵ Celermajer, *The Sins of the Nation*, 14.

²⁶ Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa*, 48.

1992 to Galileo Galilei for placing him under life-long arrest in 1633. Another case is that of the Canadian government to its citizen Maher Arar for its role in his forcible rendition to Syria in 2002 by the United States.²⁷

In “Many to Many” apologies the perpetrator is generally a state. This type of apology can take place in the international realm between states, such as the various statements of remorse in the 1990’s by Japan for the abuse of Korean and Chinese “comfort women” during World War 2.²⁸

The more common form of “Many to Many” apologies is when the state apologizes from a community for injustices it has inflicted. Although it is often representative individuals that carry out these apologies, they involve the presence of the apologizer as an individual who is a representative voice for the collectivity that is perceived as a “singular entity.” Individuals here act as “entities with characteristics that set them apart from individuals functioning as sovereign actors.”²⁹ For the purposes of this thesis, the term “collective apology” will be used.

Collective apologies can be further classified according to a temporal distinction. Celermajer groups apologies into “inter-temporal” or “historical” apologies, which are given for violations that took place in the more remote past and “transitional apologies” which deal with the recent past. While inter-temporal apologies involve the issue of agency or responsibility for the past actions of others, transitional apologies are those which have taken place in the “immediate aftermath” of injustices, as part of larger measures supporting transition from violence and repression into more stable and democratic communities. Apologies here emerge in the context of other transitional systems such as truth commissions, trials, and reparations.³⁰

Another set of terms describing this distinction is the one used by Weyeneth, who divides historical apologies into the “contemporaneous

²⁷ “Harper’s Apology Means the World: Arar” *CBC News*, 26 January 2007
<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/harper-s-apology-means-the-world-arar-1.646481>
(accessed 28 June 2015)

²⁸ “List of War Apology Statements Issued By Japan.” *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*.
Wikimedia Foundation, Web. 28 June 2015.

²⁹ Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa*, 98-99.

³⁰ Celermajer, *The Sins of the Nation*, 15.

apology”, carried out for an event “still within living memory” by perpetrator as agent to those who have been directly affected by the wrongdoing, and the “retrospective apology” as one that is given to later generations who are inheritors of the victimization.³¹ The latter works to highlight the role of history, in that even though the perpetrators and their victims may no longer be alive, the current day is still shaped by their legacy.³²

Collective apologies were increasingly offered in the decades after World War II by for atrocities carried out during the Holocaust.³³ Among the first of the countries to offer these was Germany, which gradually changed its hesitant attitude towards accepting Nazi era crimes. The apology of Chancellor Willy Brandt in 1970 reflected this change. As part of reconciliation attempts with Poland, Brandt visited the Warsaw ghetto, where in an unexpected act of expressing regret for the murders committed in his countries name, he spontaneously knelt before the Memorial to the Victims of Nazi Oppression in an act of speechless apology. This act of sincere and unexpected repentance would be termed the *kniefall* and publicized as a historic example of an apology, even though it did not involve any speech act.³⁴ The *kniefall* would suggest a way of mending relations between groups carrying the burden of the past and Germany would offer other apologies and be the first country to come to mind in terms of apologies for the Holocaust.

Following apologies by other European countries for their involvement with Nazism, collective apologies would be increasingly enacted for other atrocities, including those connected to colonialism and discrimination based on race, ethnicity or religious identity.³⁵

A significant number of apologies carried out in the name of colonialism

³¹ Robert R Weyeneth, The Power of Apology and the Process of Historical Reconciliation. *The Public Historian* 23: 3 (2001): 21.

³² *Ibid.*, 35.

³³ Celermajer, *The Sins of the Nation*, 24.

³⁴ Ruti Teitel, "The Transitional Apology", in *Taking Wrongs Seriously; Apologies and Reconciliation*, eds., Elazar Barkan and Alexander Karn (Stanford, Calif. : Stanford UP, 2006), 105.

³⁵ Celermajer, *The Sins of the Nation*, 26.

are those issued to indigenous peoples. An example is the case of Australia, and the apologies presented to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for the historical discrimination they faced due to colonial rule. Despite a non-apology stance headed by the Prime Minister Howard, a grassroots campaign of public apology took place where individual citizens signed "sorry books" as a way of expressing their regret for the policies of the government towards Aboriginal Australians. This would be followed by an apology in parliament in 2008.³⁶

Among other apologies issued to indigenous peoples is the legislation issued in 1995 and approved by Queen Elizabeth that "apologized unreservedly" to New Zealand Maori for taking their land in 1863. The legislation included monetary reparations and the return of 39,000 acres of confiscated land.³⁷ Another apology is the one that took place in 1998 in Guatemala when the state apologized to its citizens for its role in the 36 year civil war³⁸ or in Canada, when the government formally apologized for its historic mistreatment of indigenous peoples.³⁹

Apologies have also been carried out for discrimination. Examples are those issued by two American presidents as part of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 to Japanese-Americans for their forced relocation and incarceration during World War II.⁴⁰ Leaders from Japan have at various times accepted the call to apologize to Japan's Asian neighbors for crimes committed in the name of the country during World War II.⁴¹ In 1996, the Former South

³⁶Auguste, Isabelle. "Rethinking the Nation: Apology, Treaty and Reconciliation in Australia." *National Identities* 12, 4 (2010): 425-436.

³⁷ "Queen Signs Historic Maori Land Settlement" November 2 1995, <http://www.apnewsarchive.com/1995/Queen-Signs-Historic-Maori-Land-Settlement/id-808c85d946ad2a26c29813a2403e808e> (accessed 28 June 2015)

³⁸ "Apology to Guatemalans" December 31 1998, <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/12/31/world/apology-to-guatemalans.html> (accessed 28 June 2015)

³⁹ "Canada Apologizes for Mistreatment" January 8 1998, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/canada/stories/apology010898.htm> (accessed 28 June 2015)

⁴⁰ Eric K. Yamamoto. "Racial Reparations: Japanese American Redress and African American Claims." *BC Third World LJ* 19:1 (1998): 477-523.

⁴¹ Elizabeth, S. Dahl. "Is Japan Facing its Past? The Case of Japan and its Neighbours." In *The Age of Apology Facing Up To The Past*. eds. Mark Gibney, Rhoda E. Howard-Hassman, Jean Marc Coicaud, and Niklaus Steiner. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 245.

African president F.W. de Klerk apologized to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for the “many unacceptable things that occurred during the government of his National Party.”⁴²

The Catholic Church has also carried out various apologies, for instance the apology in 1993 of Pope John Paul II for the involvement of Catholics in the slave trade. Another of the various apologies enacted by Pope John Paul was his issuing in 2000 of a *mea culpa* for various crimes carried out by the Catholic Church in the past. In it he apologized for the wrongs done to “women, Jews, Gypsies [Roma] other Christians and Catholics.”⁴³ Collective apologies have thus taken many forms, and are increasingly seen as a legitimate way for individuals and the institutions they represent to seek redress for their involvement in past wrongs.

In her book *The Politics of Official Apologies*, Nobles suggests that apologies work to change the definitions and conditions of national membership. She suggests that apologies differ from other symbolic gestures such as monuments to remember events of injustice in their function as public support for reinterpretations of history but that they also “morally judge, reassign responsibility, and introduce expectations about what acknowledgement of that history requires.”⁴⁴ Apologies thus enable an alternative reinterpretation of the past, which in turn leads to public acknowledgement of past injustice and support of more inclusive forms of national membership and history. In this manner they both focus on the past and have impacts for the future.⁴⁵

Another aspect of apologies is its healing influence on victims. Victims of injustice suffer an enduring trauma, which is worsened by non-acknowledgement. Apology offers a step in the restoration of dignity of the victims. Apology also can enable visibility and debate regarding taboo issues, through a public confronting of the event, which in turn works

⁴² “Political Apologies; Chronological List”; <http://www.upenn.edu/pnc/politicalapologies.html> (accessed 28 June 2015)

⁴³ “Pope Says Sorry for Sins of Church” *The Guardian*, 13 March 2000, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/mar/13/catholicism.religion> (accessed 28 March 2015)

⁴⁴ Melissa Nobles. *The Politics of Official Apologies*. (New York: Cambridge UP, 2008) 2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

towards reconstruction and repair.⁴⁶

Collective apologies can be considered a form of collective memory in their function to help to comprehend and re-evaluate past events.⁴⁷ The act of apologizing suggests a desire to face and understand the “bitter truth”⁴⁸ of the past and prevent it from reoccurring. In facilitating an alternative memorialization for the collectivity as a whole, it changes the effect of the past on the present, and opens new possibilities to groups burdened by collective memories of the past.

Apology can work to promote understanding and foster dialogue among groups still facing the effects of past injustice. This potential it carries gives apology a marked importance for both perpetrators and for victims. Enabling the building of mutual confidence, it can contribute to transitional justice and peace processes and consequent to this, the building of a new collective national identity.⁴⁹

Apologies emerged as a global trend after the 1990’s with a marked rise in the 2000’s.⁵⁰ Fette lists several reasons which scholars have given for this increase; “ a new international focus on morality; a revised understanding of universal human rights, state sovereignty and international law; a willingness of state actors to show feelings of caring and regret and to view apology not as a weakness but a manifestation of strength; ... as well as increased demand for recognition by past victims.”⁵¹

One major reason for this rise is the number of countries that are undergoing political transition and regime change.⁵² States are no longer seen as sacrosanct and unquestionable entities but are increasingly held

46 Ridwan Nytagodien, and Arthur Neal. "Collective trauma, apologies, and the politics of memory." *Journal of Human Rights* 3.4 (2004): 465-475.

47 Jason A. Edwards and Amber Luckie. "British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s Irish Potato Famine Apology." *Journal of Conflictology* 5:1 (2014): 34.

48 All Truth is Bitter: *A Report of the Visit of Doctor Alex Boraine, Deputy Chairman of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission to Northern Ireland*. NIACRO and Victim Support Northern Ireland, 2000.

49 Sanz and Tomlinson. *National Apologies*, 12-13.

50 “Political Apologies; Chronological List”;

<http://www.upenn.edu/pnc/politicalapologies.html> (accessed 28 June 2015)

51 Julie Fette. "The Apology Moment: Vichy Memories in 1990's France", In *Taking Wrongs Seriously: Apologies and Reconciliation*, eds. Elazar Barkan and Alexander Karn, 259-286. Stanford and California: Stanford University Press, 2006.

52 Teitel, "The Transitional Apology", 101.

accountable for their actions.⁵³ In societies undergoing transition, collective apologies are widely regarded as a tool for democratization and peace building.

The global rise in apologies with the 2000's can also be explained by the influence of the new millennium to settle the accounts of the past. Globalization and the increasing interaction between societies and individuals have increased both the number of conflicts to settle and the possibility of hiding offensive actions from public view.⁵⁴

Despite the potential benefits of apologies, states often enact apologies only under pressure from aggrieved groups or refuse to apologize when it is against their interests. Perpetrator groups often attempt to cover-up the past and deny recognition of victimization. Among examples of these refusals are; the statement of President Clinton in 1995 that "the United States owes no apology to Japan for having dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki,"⁵⁵ or of France, which while accepting that its colonial occupation of Algeria past was "unjust" and "brutal," has refused Algeria's demands for an apology.⁵⁶

The case of Turkey and its long-time refusal to apologize or to accept any historical responsibility for the genocidal destruction of its Armenian population is one of the more notorious examples of this refusal of acknowledgement, and will be dealt with in detail in the following chapters.

1.3 Criteria of apologies

Sociologist Nicholas Tavuchis describes an apology as "an acknowledgement and painful embracement of our deeds, coupled with a

⁵³ Andrieu. "Sorry for the Genocide" 4.

⁵⁴ Lazare. *On Apology*, 10.

⁵⁵ "US President Rejects Apology to Japan" *New York Times*, December 2 1991, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/02/us/president-rejects-apology-to-japan.html> (accessed 28 June 2015)

⁵⁶ "Hollande Refuses To Apologize for Algerias Colonial Past" *France 24*, 20 December 2012 <http://www.france24.com/en/20121219-france-hollande-refuses-apologise-algeria-colonial-past> (accessed 28 June 2015)

declaration of regret.”⁵⁷ He distinguishes apologies from accounts such as excuses or defenses, which appeal to the reason of the aggrieved, and emphasize *causes* of the action, pointing away the individual’s own agency in what is actually an act that is not reasonable and cannot be justified.

For Tavuchis an apology is a three-stage process involving the naming of the offense, the act of apology itself, which includes an expression of sorrow and regret, and a response from the offended.⁵⁸

While these are the general criteria he sets for apologies, Tavuhcis points that collective apologies involve different dynamics. While personal apologies require an expression of “sorrow and remorse” these are not necessarily required of collective apologies, which are carried out by public representatives of groups and whose main aim is to “put things on record, to document as a prelude for reconciliation.”⁵⁹ These apologies gain meaning and authority only when they are publicly recorded and thus “official, binding and collective.”⁶⁰

Aaron Lazare also points to an acknowledgement of the wrongdoing as the basic requirement of an apology. This fundamental requirement of acknowledgement according to him involves four parts; 1) a correct identification of those responsible for the offence, as well as the party to whom the apology is owed 2) acknowledging the offending behaviors in adequate detail 3) recognizing its impacts on the victims and 4) a confirmation that the grievance was violated the social or moral contract between the two groups.⁶¹ While acknowledgement is the most important part of the apology process, the other three requirements of apology according to Lazare are an expression of humility and remorse, the offering of an explanation for the behavior and the providing of reparations.⁶²

MacLachlan states that apologies carry multiple functions; the first is a “*narrative*” function of identifying the wrongdoing, the responsibility of the

⁵⁷ Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa*, 19.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 17-21.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁶¹ Lazare. *On Apology*. 75.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 79.

wrongdoer and the harming of the victim. The second is of “*disavowal*” a simultaneous repudiating of the crime and the distancing of the wrongdoer from these actions and the factors, which led to their realization. The final function is “*commitment*”, to a consistency in this attitude of remorse and to work on repairing the effects of the wrongdoing.⁶³

Nick Smith suggests nine elements of a categorical or a “full” apology. His primary concern in elaborating these elements is to “protect” the meaning of apologies in the midst of other statements. While he points to the categorical apology as a “maximally meaningful” apology, he adds that they are rare occurrences and may not always be possible.⁶⁴

The twelve elements he proposes are; 1) the establishment of an official and corroborated account of the wrongdoing 2) an acceptance of blame which is distinguished from an expression of sympathy and which does not deny intentionality 3) the apologizer’s being of appropriate standing to carry out an apology for the offence 4) identification of the specific harm for which the victim seeks an apology 5) an identification of the moral principles which are breached by the harm 6) a shared commitment to moral principles underlying each harm 7) recognition of victim as moral interlocutor 8) categorical regret 9) performance of apology 10) reform and redress 11) intentions for apologizing 12) emotions.⁶⁵

Matt James summarizes the general criteria for an authentic apology in the literature as one ideally carrying the following elements;

That the apology (1) is officially recorded in writing; (2) names the wrongs in question; (3) accepts responsibility; (4) states regret; (5) promises non-repetition; (6) does not demand forgiveness; (7) is not hypocritical or arbitrary; and (8) undertakes- through measures of publicity, ceremony and concrete reparation both to engage morally those in whose name the

⁶³ Alice MacLachlan, "The State of "Sorry": Official Apologies and Their Absence." *Journal of Human Rights* 9:3 (2010): 376.

⁶⁴ Smith, *I Was Wrong*, 473-474.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 28-108.

apology is made and to assure the wronged group that the apology is sincere.⁶⁶

These criteria can function as guidelines for an evaluation of the speech act. While there is no established convention as of yet on the rules of public apologies, the fact that some apologies are considered more successful than others, suggests that there are some common points. These criteria provide a way to analyze collective apologies, and present a way to increase their success and chances of facilitating reconciliation.

In the following chapters, I explore the Dersim apology speech and the 'I Apologize' campaign in the light of these requirements for a successful apology. These two cases were selected for analysis because they represent two recent and well-known examples of apology in Turkey regarding past transgressions towards its minorities.

2. The Historical Context in Turkey

2.1 The Armenian Genocide

Armenians were historically one of the largest Christian minorities of Ottoman Empire. The Empire dealt with minorities based on an understanding of the Islamic concept of *dhimmi* ('tolerated subjects'), which established a contract with non-Muslim minorities granting them protection of their life and property in return to a certain tax pay (*cizye*). Minorities were dealt with not as individuals but as members of a "millet" or community, which allowed them relative stability giving them autonomy in terms of civil and religious affairs.⁶⁷

However in the context of the nineteenth century, which was a time of rapid decline for the Empire, this situation began to change. Faced by the dual challenge of increasing external pressure by the Western powers and

⁶⁶ James Matt, "Wrestling With the Past: Apologies, Quasi-apologies, and Non-Apologies in Canada." in *The Age of Apology: Facing Up to the Past*, ed. Mark Gibney, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008): 138-9.

⁶⁷ Benjamin Braude, "Foundation Myths of the Millet System," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, ed. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (Teaneck: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1982).

separatist nationalism from within its own territories, various ethnic communities of the Empire had begun to seek independence, and the Armenians would also voice demands of social and political equality through their own reform and revolutionary movements.⁶⁸

In this period, the loss of Ottoman territories in Europe brought in thousands of impoverished migrants to Anatolia. The only major non-Muslim populations left in the Empire in 1878 would be the Greeks and the Armenians.⁶⁹ While the majority of Ottoman Armenians were peasants, a considerable segment of the urban middle class were non-Muslims, who dealt with trade and were relatively better off in terms of wealth and status. This would add to growing resentment and violence from the Muslim majority, a large number of which had become impoverished migrants due to the wars.⁷⁰

In this context it was proposed that the millet system be substituted with a system based on "Ottomanism" to ensure the inclusion of all non-Muslim minorities into the polity on the basis of equality. However this inclusive society based on Ottoman citizenship did not materialize. The reforms that were created to unify society had the opposite effect as the divide between Muslim and non-Muslim communities grew and national identities solidified.⁷¹

Abdul Hamid II who came to rule in 1876 pursued a policy of rigorous Sunni pan-Islamism and centralization of the Empire. He would use the

⁶⁸ Donald Bloxham "Determinants of the Armenian Genocide" in *Looking Backward, Moving Forward: Confronting the Armenian Genocide*, ed., Richard G. Hovannisian, (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2003). 26.

⁶⁹ Erik Jan Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building from the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey*. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 68; Derya Bayır. "The Millet System" in *Cultural Diversities and Law: Minorities and Nationalism in Turkish Law*. (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 23-28; Çağlar Keyder, "The Ottoman Empire" in *After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation-building : The Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg Empires*, eds., Karen Barkey and Mark Von Hagen, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 33.

⁷⁰ Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide, : Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 28.

⁷¹ Şükrü Hanioglu *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 107; Levene, "Creating a Modern "Zone of Genocide, 393-400.

activities of the Armenian revolutionary parties⁷² as a pretext to carry out a series of massacres on the Armenians between 1894 and 1896, killing hundreds of thousands. The Hamidiye regiments which he founded in order to establish his authority over the Kurdish tribes would grow to more than thirty thousand and would be involved in early attacks on various Armenian villages.⁷³

The first of these massacres was the quelling of the Sasun uprising. The Sasun region had largely remained autonomous, and the Hnchak party had influence in the area. Clashes with state authorities over attempts to enforce taxation led to the slaughter of 3000 Armenians. This was followed by large-scale massacres throughout 1895 and in the same year the quelling of a protest for reform in Istanbul organized by the Hnchak party. Dozens were killed and the events triggered violence against Armenians throughout the Empire.⁷⁴ This was followed next year by the quashing of the defense/uprising of Van, which resulted in the killing of an estimated twenty thousand Armenians.⁷⁵

In August 1896 twenty-five members of the Tashnak party took the headquarters of the Imperial Ottoman Bank as a political statement, demanding rights of the Armenians and threatening to blow up the bank. As mobs surrounded the building, the revolutionaries managed to escape⁷⁶ while thousands of Armenians were killed in the ensuing violence.⁷⁷

The main organized group of opposition against Abdul Hamid would come to be the Committee of Union and Progress, (*Ittihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*; CUP) which aimed to bring back the constitution and parliamentary rule. The CUP aimed to seize control over the empire in order to save it from collapse. In 1908 it managed to force the Sultan to apply the

⁷² The major Armenian parties of the period were The Revolutionary Hnchakian party and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Tashnaksutyun), both formed in the late 1880's.

⁷³ Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide*, 50-56.

⁷⁴ Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response*. (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 59.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁷⁶ Through the negotiations of a few European ambassadors and the director of the Bank, the revolutionaries were persuaded to leave the bank and were granted safe passage on a French steamer to Marseilles. See Balakian, 103-115.

⁷⁷ Balakian, 107.

constitution and lift the 30-year suspension of parliamentary rule and exert political pressure on the palace.⁷⁸ Evolved from a secret revolutionary organization into a political party, the CUP's growth in power culminated with a coup in 1913, establishing a triumvirate of three *Pashas* Enver, Cemal and Talat. With this single-party rule was established and would remain in control until the dissolution of the Empire.⁷⁹

The CUP supported an increasingly Turkist version of Ottomanism, and Ottoman identity would become secondary. The CUP would soon make it obvious that they considered ethnic and religious plurality as a hindrance that needed to be eliminated in the face of rapid loss of territories.⁸⁰

The Ottoman Empire entered the First World War in November 1914, and the Armenians would be made into a scapegoat for the humiliating defeats in the war. The siege of Gallipoli increased existing tensions, and Armenian existence in the Empire began to be seen as a threat to the loss of Anatolia itself. Plans for mass deportations of Armenians aiming their extermination and homogenization of the remaining territories began to be made in this context.⁸¹

The Special Organization (*Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*) was a paramilitary group directed by the CUP central committee, which would play an important role in the ensuing massacres. Persecution began in the Ottoman army, where Armenian soldiers were assigned to labor battalions and killed in secret locations. Armenian civilians were also disarmed and massacres began in Cilicia, Van and Mush. The defense of Van would be used a pretext for the extermination program throughout the Empire.⁸²

On 24 April 1915, 235 leading members of the Armenian elite in Constantinople including intellectuals, political leaders and journalists were rounded up and imprisoned. This destroyed the cultural infrastructure of the

⁷⁸ Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 86.

⁷⁹ Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, 157.

⁸⁰ Erik Jan Zürcher. *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey*. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 69-71.

⁸¹ Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 178.

⁸² Bloxham, *The Great Game*, 70.

Armenian community and left them voiceless against the disasters that were to follow.⁸³

On 29 May 1915 a Temporary Law of Deportation (*Sevk ve Iskan Kanunu*) was passed which gave authorization for the deportation of the Armenians. Armenians throughout Anatolia would be sent on death marches towards the Syrian Desert. Defenseless and without provisions, the deportees were largely massacred on the way by tribesmen and the Special Organization, while those who survived the deportations themselves would perish in the desert destinations. Accompanying the massacres was the systematic expropriation of all Armenian property, along with forced conversions and the kidnapping of women and children.⁸⁴

While the exact number of those killed is unclear, a report taken by Talat Paşa himself and made public in 2008 is of date the clearest record of the official view of the genocide according to Ottoman administration. The report shows the aim of the deportations as the elimination of Armenian existence in the Empire. It records detailed information on Armenians living in various parts of the empire in 1914 and then later in 1917 and estimates that the Ottoman Armenian population before the war was around 1,500,000 and that 1,150,000 of these persons 'disappeared' between 1914 and 1917.⁸⁵

The loss of the war led to the resignation of the Ottoman cabinet. After the Armistice of Mudros was signed court-martials for war crimes began in Istanbul in 1919. The Allied forces, partly in pursuit of their own interests; pushed for the Ottoman administration to punish the perpetrators for crimes against humanity.⁸⁶

⁸³ Raymond H. Kevorkian, *The Armenian Genocide a Complete History*. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011): 251-254; Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 211-216.

⁸⁴ Bloxham, *The Great Game*, 86-89. Also see Taner Akçam, *Ermenilerin Zorla Müslümanlaştırılması*; (Istanbul: İletişim, 2014); Taner Akçam and Ümit Kurt, *Kanunların Ruhu. Emval-i Metruke Kanunlarında Soykırımın İzini Sürmek*; (Istanbul: İletişim, 2012);

⁸⁵ Ara Sarafian and Talat Paşa, "Talaat Pashas report on the Armenian Genocide" 1917. Taderon Press by arrangement with the Gomidas Institute, 2011.

⁸⁶ Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility*. (New York: Metropolitan, 2006); Raymond H. Kevorkian, *Part VI, The Last Days of the Ottoman Empire: The Executioners and their Judges Face-to-Face,*" in *The Armenian Genocide a Complete History*. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 699-799; Peter

The top cadre of the responsible CUP leaders, Talat, Enver and Cemal escaped and were only tried in absentia. Many of the other political leaders accused of massacres were deported to Malta without any serious investigation. The Greek Occupation in 1919 further facilitated a change in the political atmosphere. Kemalist nationalism was growing stronger and the public would increasingly see the military tribunals of those responsible as part of the occupation. Accused perpetrators who were held in prison would gradually be released and the war trials would be abandoned.⁸⁷

The Sevres Treaty signed in 1920 would pressure Turkey to try and surrender all those “accused of committing an act in violation of the laws and customs of war” and promised the remaining Armenians a homeland. However in the environment following the world war, where power had been taken over by the Kemalists who were not willing to try the CUP, and with the withdrawal of British military presence, Sevres was not implemented and the international criminal tribunal it envisioned was not set up. The treaty of Lausanne would liquidate it in 1923 after the War of Independence, and the leaders of the new state would reject their connections to the CUP.⁸⁸

As Göçek states; “The struggle for independence changed the emotional landscape; as former perpetrators became Republican heroes, they whitewashed their past sins in the righteousness of the independence struggle.”⁸⁹ She points that the blame for the massacres of the Ottoman Armenians would shift from the perpetrators to the victims soon after the end of the military tribunals and in the process of transition to the Turkish nation state. This shift masked the connection between the CUP and the Turkish nationalist movement, which would become official state position

Balakian, "Turkish Confessions: The Ottoman Courts-Martial" in *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response*. (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 331-347.

⁸⁷ Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 344.

⁸⁸ Taner Akçam, "The Treaties of Sevres and Lausanne: an Alternative Perspective." in *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide*. (London: Zed, 2004), 180-207.

⁸⁹ Fatma Müge Göçek, *Denial of Violence*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015): 35.

on the events, with the Armenian genocide becoming a taboo subject upon the creation of the Republic.⁹⁰

2.2 The Dersim Massacres

The Turkish Republic upon its founding, initiated a nation- building process which aimed to create on what was left over of the Ottoman Empire a homogenous, centralized, and controllable population.

The Armenian genocide had taken place towards the end of the Empire, and this mentality continued with the destruction of the Assyrian, Yezidi and Pontic Greek communities in the formation years of the Republic. As the Kemalist ideology of the new Republic took a more chauvinistic turn in the 1930's, attention was turned to the Kurds, following the suppression of the rebellions of Koçgiri in 1921, Şeyh Sait in 1925 and Ağrı in 1930.⁹¹ Dersim would become one of the main settings for the Turkification project through the implementation of state policies of forced assimilation through mass military force and displacement.

Dersim is a mountainous and geographically remote region located in East Turkey. The population of Dersim is culturally distinct from the larger Kurdish region as the majority of the population belongs to the Alevi sect and speaks the Zazaki language.⁹²

The Alevi belief system of Dersim is a heterodox one unique to the region referred to in Zazaki as *Raa Haq* meaning “way of justice and righteousness.”⁹³ The Alevis had been historically persecuted since the Sultan Yavuz Selim's (1515-1520) defeat of the Safavid Persians who were

⁹⁰ Fatma Müge Göçek, “Reconstructing the Turkish Historiography” in Richard G. Hovannisian ed. *Looking Back Moving Forward, Confronting the Armenian Genocide*, (New Brunswick, N.J: Transaction Publishers, 2003), 212-213.

⁹¹ Hans-Lukas Kieser, "Dersim Massacre, 1937-1938", Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence, [online], published on 27 July 2011, accessed 14 February 2015, URL : <http://www.massviolence.org/Dersim-Massacre-1937-1938>, ISSN 1961-9898

⁹² Martin van Bruinessen, "Genocide in Kurdistan? The Suppression of the Dersim rebellion in Turkey (1937-38) and the Chemical War Against the Iraqi Kurds (1988)." *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions, The American Journal of Law* 89: 4 (1994), 2.

⁹³ Hüseyin Çakmak, “Raa Haq İnançında Tanrı Anlayışı”, *Munzur Dersim Etnografya Dergisi*, 35:4 (2011), 14.

allies of the sect.⁹⁴ Tribal and religious leaders held power in the area, and conflicts among the various tribes and the military was common.⁹⁵

The population of Dersim did not carry close relations with the state manifested in a tradition of refusing to pay taxes and being conscripted in the army. In response to this numerous military campaigns took place to the region, which remained autonomous. This posed a problem particularly during in the 19th century during the centralization and Islamization plans of Abdul Hamid II (1876-1909). Dersim was thus seen as a problem due to its consistent resistance towards being assimilated and Islamicized into the dominant Sunni sect. The first two official reports regarding Dersim, which were written in the period by order of the palace, show the continuity in the perception of Dersim before and after the Republican period as a problem area that needed intervention.⁹⁶

The new Republic would implement policies like the closing down of traditional Islamic schools, and of setting the education language as Turkish which would incite a nationalist response from the Kurds.⁹⁷

In 1925 the religious leader Şeyh Said, who was against the abolition of the caliphate, gathered around him Kurdish nationalists who were unhappy with the new policies following the foundation of the Republic such as the non-recognition of Kurdish identity and incited a rebellion, which was crushed by the military.

By the 1930's Dersim was the only region left in Turkey, which had not come under control of the government.⁹⁸ A single party and nationalist Kemalist ideology ruled Turkey in the 1930's. The continuing autonomy of

⁹⁴ Annika Törne, "Dedes In Dersim: Narratives Of Violence And Persecution." *Iran & The Caucasus* 16:1 (2012) 72.

⁹⁵ Bruinessen, "Genocide in Kurdistan,?" 2.

⁹⁶ Alişan Akpınar, Sezen Bilir, Serhat Bozkurt and Namık Kemal Dinc, "Abdulhamit II. Dönemi Raporlarında "Dersim Sorunu" ve Zihinsel Devamlılık" in *Herkesin Bildiği Sır: Dersim*, ed. Şükrü Aslan, (Istanbul: İletişim, 2010) 311-335.

⁹⁷ Martin van Bruinessen, "Zazaki, Alevi and Dersimi as Deliberately Embraced Ethnic Identities" in "'Aslını İnkâr Eden Haramzadedir!' The Debate on the Ethnic Identity of The Kurdish Alevis." in Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, Barbara Kellner-Heinkele, Anke Otter-Beaujean, *Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East: Collected Papers of the International Symposium "Alevism in Turkey and Comparable Sycretistic Religious Communities in the Near East in the Past and Present"* Berlin, 14-17 April 1995, BRILL, (1997) 12.

⁹⁸ Bruinessen, "Genocide in Kurdistan,?" 2.

the region was regarded as an incongruous threat to this ideology and the government began to turn its attention to Dersim.⁹⁹

Newspapers of the period provide an idea of how the region was viewed by the administration of the time. The region was described as “the last home of feudalism” (*derebeyliğin son ocağı*), a region full of “rebels” (*asiler*), and “bandits” (*şaki*).¹⁰⁰

In 1926 The Inspector of Civil Service Hamdi Bey presented a report to the government where he wrote, “Dersim is an abscess for the Republican government. Carrying out a certain operation on this abscess and preventing deplorable possibilities is necessary for the welfare of the nation.”¹⁰¹

The Journalist and deputy Naşit Uluğ published a booklet in 1932 titled “The Feudal Lords and Dersim”; which suggested a way to “deal” with Dersim;

“One from Dersim is something (only) in the geography of Dersim. If he is separated from those mountains, every citizen in each corner of Turkey can challenge him. First the inhabitant of Dersim's fingernails should be pulled out, the weapons in his hands should be taken from him, those rebels leading them and those who are potential rebels should be brought into the valleys and then it can be seen will there be any difference left between Dersim and Kayseri?”¹⁰²

In 1934 a Law of Resettlement was passed regarding immigration and aiming the assimilation of non-Turkish minorities. The Law divided the Republic into three separate zones based on their degree of adherence of Turkish culture. According to the Law, groups of the population, which were not Turkish, would be moved into Turkish majority zones and could thus assimilate into the majority while depopulating certain areas. This would be the legal justification for the events that would decimate the population and lead the rest to forced resettlement.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Kieser, "Dersim Massacre," 2-3.

¹⁰⁰ Taha Baran, *1937-1938 Yılları Arasında Basında Dersim*. (Istanbul, İletişim; 2014).

¹⁰¹ Report on the situation in Dersim by Hamdi Bey, inspector of the civil service, dated 2 February 1926, reprinted in *Hallı, Türkiye Cumhuriyetinde Ayaklanmalar*, 1972, 375.

¹⁰² Naşit Hakkı Uluğ, *Derebeyi ve Dersim*. (Istanbul: Kaynak. 2009), 70.

¹⁰³ Bruinessen, "Genocide in Kurdistan?," 10.

In 1935 the Tunceli Law was passed, which changed the name of Dersim into Tunceli. Following this, the region of Dersim along with Sivas, Malatya, Erzurum and Gümüşhane were brought under a “Fourth General Inspectorate,” headed by military governor Abdullah Alpdoğan, who was given extraordinary authority on the region.¹⁰⁴ The region was declared a forbidden area and entrance was restricted. The construction of military and police stations began in strategic locations in the region, in order to further assert government control. As Bruinessen states;

“In 1936, Dersim was placed under military government, with the express aim of pacifying and “civilizing” it. The tribes’ response to the modernization brought by the state, consisting of roads, bridges and police posts, was ambiguous. Some chieftains sought accommodation with the military authorities, others resented this interference in their former independence. ”¹⁰⁵

A few of the tribes began raids against these constructions in their areas, coming together under the leadership of Seyit Rıza. Aiming to assert its hegemony on the region, in 1937 the military initiated a campaign on the tribes, attempting to “subdue to region.”¹⁰⁶ The wholesale destruction of Dersim through occupation, massacres and resettlement would begin, in a way reminiscent of the massacres of the Armenians in 1915.¹⁰⁷

In September 1937 Rıza was arrested by the army in Erzincan and after being hastily tried for incitement and involvement in rebellion was executed on 15 November. Alpdoğan was sent messages of congratulation from Atatürk, Interior Minister Şükrü Kaya and the Prime Minister İnönü.¹⁰⁸

The execution of Seyit Rıza marked the end of the 1937 resistance of Dersim. However while the 1937 campaign mainly targeted certain regions and tribes, the military expeditions of 1938 involved full scale violence

¹⁰⁴ Hüseyin Aygün, *Dersim 1938 ve Zorunlu Iskan*. (Ankara, Dipnot yayınları, 2009), 105-107; Alpdoğan was the son-in-law of the general Nurettin Pasha who was head of the repression of the 1921 Koçgiri uprising.

¹⁰⁵ Bruinessen, "Genocide in Kurdistan?", 3.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.,3.

¹⁰⁷ Michael McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*. (London: I.B.Tauris, 2007), 208.

¹⁰⁸ Kieser, "Dersim Massacre" 5.

against the whole civilian population, aiming in the words of the Prime Minister Bayar in parliament to "eradicate the [Dersim] problem."¹⁰⁹

The two-year military assault would lead to events "representing one of the blackest pages in the history of Republican Turkey, gracefully passed over in silence or deliberately misrepresented by most historians, foreign as well as Turkish."¹¹⁰ At least 10 % of the population would be exterminated,¹¹¹ and the survivors subject to assimilation and exile to the western provinces. The "disciplining project" of the state of Dersim through the wholesale destruction of the region and its people would constitute one of the "outstanding events" in the history of the Turkish republic.¹¹²

2.3 Aftermath: Minorities in the Turkish Republic

The Turkification process, which accompanied the nation state making of the Turkish Republic, involved the reshaping of the diverse geography of the new nation into a Turkish area in all aspects of social and economic life. An ideological struggle against all other ethnic religious and linguistic groups was carried out towards this aim.¹¹³

The first step in carrying this out was a process of demographic restructuring after the wide scale destruction of the Armenian minority, ensuring that minorities would only constitute less than 5 percent of the total population in any province.¹¹⁴

This homogenization of the population was followed by a renaming of the topography, which replaced previous geographical names with Turkish

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 5.

¹¹⁰ Bruinessen, *Genocide in Kurdistan?*, 1.

¹¹¹ Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi "Atatürk and the Alevis: A Holy Alliance?. In J. White and Jongerden (eds). *Turkey's Alevi Enigma: A Comprehensive Overview*. (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2003), 66.

¹¹² Zeynep Türkyılmaz, "Nationalizing Through Education, the case of Mountain Flowers at Elazığ Girls Institute " (MA diss., Boğaziçi University, 2001) 87.

¹¹³ Ayhan Aktar, "Conversion of a 'Country' into a 'Fatherland': the Case of Turkification Examined, 1923–1934", in eds. Ayhan Aktar, Niyazi Kızılyürek and Umut Özkırımlı, *Nationalism in the Troubled Triangle* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010), 23.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 25.

ones, including an approximate 3600 Armenian place names and 4000 Kurdish and Zazaki place names.¹¹⁵

A 'Resettlement Law' (*Iskan Kanunu*) was passed in 1934, which prohibited the return of former non-Muslim and non-Turkish immigrants into the new country. This included the surviving Armenian deportees in exile. The law also worked towards the assimilation of Kurds through their resettlement in western regions with a Turkish majority.¹¹⁶

The formation of a Turkish national identity also involved the construction of a "hegemonic historiography" by shaping an official historical vision, which was based on a glorification of the Turkic roots of the nation and on a devaluation of the groups considered others, and on erasing their presence and heritage in the past of the shared geography. As Öktem points out, the formation of the ethno-nationalist state was thus ensured by a dual assimilation of time and space, of creating a history and geography that was ethnically homogenous.¹¹⁷ Turkish national identity would thus be shaped through conscious attempts of the state to create a "collective amnesia" regarding the past.¹¹⁸

The legal realm was used passed to facilitate the process of moving from the definition of citizenship to an ethnic definition prioritizing 'Turks.' Among these were laws such as the State Employee Law of 1926, and a law regarding the press in 1931. These policies culminated with the Wealth Tax (*Varlık Vergisi*) in 1942, which made it compulsory for non-Muslims to pay high taxes. The tax would form a major step in the homogenization process and the elimination of minority presence in the Republic through a

¹¹⁵ Sevan Nişanyan, *Hayali Coğrafyalar: Cumhuriyet Döneminde Türkiye'de Değiştirilen Yeradları*. (İstanbul: TESEV, 2011), 54.

¹¹⁶ GG. Özdoğan, "Turkish Nationalism Reconsidered: The 'Heaviness' of State Oriented Patriotism in Nation Building", in Ayhan Aktar, Niyazi Kızılyürek and Umut Özkırmılı (eds), *Nationalism in the Troubled Triangle*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010)

¹¹⁷ Kerem Öktem, "Incorporating the Time and Space of the Ethnic 'other': Nationalism and Space in Southeast Turkey in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" *Nations and Nationalism* 10:4 (2004): 568.

¹¹⁸ Gülay Türkmen-Dervişoğlu, "Coming to Terms with a Difficult Past: The Trauma of the Assassination of Hrant Dink and Its Repercussions on Turkish National Identity" *Nations and Nationalism* 10:4 (2013): 677

Turkification of the economy.¹¹⁹ These official policies of exclusionary citizenship based on nationalism were accompanied by discrimination in the social realm, disseminated through the media.

The Armenian genocide would successfully be erased from public memory and remain unknown by the Turkish public until two secret Armenian organizations, the Justice Commandos Against The Armenian Genocide (JCOAG) and the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) carried out a series of assassinations of Turkish diplomats. As Göçek points out, while these acts were executed with the aim of drawing world attention to the Armenians situation, they would work to only deepen the denial of Turkish state and society regarding the issue. The state would at this point begin to establish an official narrative on the issue by systematic knowledge making through the creation of certain organizations, and the mobilization of certain historians and diplomats.¹²⁰

While Turkey gave official recognition to only three non-Muslim groups namely the Greeks, Jews and Armenians, other minorities including the Kurds were not given any of this albeit on-paper acknowledgement of identity. While the Kurds who came to constitute the largest minority in the Republic were considered co-founders of the Turkish nation in the initial years of the Republic, this soon evolved into a view of the Kurds as "prospective Turks"¹²¹ with no separate rights as an ethnic group despite their constituting approximately 23 percent of the population.¹²² In contrast to the non-Muslim minorities including the remaining Armenians in Turkey, Kurds were given the 'option' to assimilate into Turkishness.

This policy of forced assimilation by the state continued until the relative liberalization of the 1960's led to a Kurdish movement for cultural rights and economic development. Harshly repressed with the coup of 1980, the movement would take a more radicalized and separatist turn led by the

¹¹⁹ Ayhan Aktar, *Varlık Vergisi Ve Türkleştirme"Politikaları*. (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000)

¹²⁰ Fatma Müge Göçek, Late Republican Denial of Responsibility for Violence, in *Denial of Violence*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015): 428-476.

¹²¹ Mesut Yeğen, " 'Prospective-Turks' or 'Pseudo-Citizens' Kurds in Turkey", *Middle East Journal*, 63:4 (2009): 597-615.

¹²² McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 3.

Workers Party of Kurdistan, (PKK) which emerged as the main left-wing guerrilla group to lead an armed movement for Kurdish independence.

Following this, Southeast Turkey would become a scene of extreme brutality, as in its insistence on “solving” the Kurdish issue through an armed solution by eradicating the resistance movement, the state would suppress all expression of Kurdish identity and terrorize citizens in the mainly Kurdish populated regions, putting the region in a long-term state of emergency.

Thus the region including Dersim would see the forced evacuation of approximately 3000 villages. Tens of thousands of extrajudicial killings including those of members of Kurdish political parties would take place by paramilitaries, and these would take its height in the late 1990’s and lead to the death of according to official estimates an estimated thirty seven thousand persons on both sides of the conflict and the displacement according to official estimates of 380,000 people in fifteen years of conflict.¹²³

Kurdish citizens would be deprived of basic human rights and being of Kurdish origin would be enough to be considered a potential enemy of the state. The right to using the Kurdish language, freedom of the press, and Kurdish representation in parliament through political parties was all suppressed on the basis of separatism and terror.¹²⁴

This policy of harsh official denial of distinct cultural, ethnic and religious identities would largely remain uncontested until the end of the Cold War and liberalization. After some time following the 1980 coup in Turkey a number of historians, writers and publishers would gradually contribute to a partial questioning of the founding myths of the Turkish nation and national identity.

¹²³ See Grand National Assembly of Turkey, Report of the Committee of the National Assembly to Inquire the Problems of the Citizens, Who Migrated as a result of Evacuations in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, and To Determine Solutions, Commission Report No. 10/25 (9 Feb. 1997); However Human Rights Organizations set this number as at least a million and a half ; HRW, “Displaced and Disregarded: Turkey’s Failing Village Return Programme,” *Human Rights Watch*, 2002, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/turkey/> ; (accessed 4 March 2015)

¹²⁴ Yeğen, “ ‘Prospective-Turks,’ 597–615; Martin Van Bruinessen, *Kurdish Ethno-nationalism versus Nation-building States: Collected Articles*. (Istanbul: Isis, 2000) .

The AKP brought significant institutional developments in the 2000's regarding minority rights in relation to EU alignment laws. However with its evolvement into a more authoritarian stance in recent years, these progressive steps have largely come to standstill.

The Kurdish issue is still largely regarded as an issue of terrorism and socio-economic underdevelopment in Turkey. Little has been done to recognize or indemnify the historical wrongs carried out towards the Kurds. While a small group of society is aware of the context of Kurdish identity, Kurdish citizens still face public discrimination and are commonly made to downplay their non-Turkish identity.¹²⁵

The Alevis are another minority in Turkey, which constitute a distinct religious community constituting an estimated 15 percent of the countries population. Historically persecuted since the Ottoman period for the perception that they are deviants from Sunni Islam, Alevis have faced widespread discrimination. Violence against the minority in its extreme took the form of violence and pogroms such as the Maraş, Malatya, Çorum, Sivas, Ümraniye and Gazi events. The Alevis have conveyed their demands for official recognition of Alevi belief and recognition and reparations from the Turkish state, particularly after relative political relaxation following the 1990's.¹²⁶

The issue of the rights of Kurds and Alevis converge in the context of Dersim, whose inhabitants are Alevi Kurds, and thus have faced dual suppression and discrimination. The demands of the Alevis and Kurds as well as the Armenians for recognition, acknowledgement and reparations and how these are situated in the two cases of apology will be looked into in the following chapters.

3. The Apologies

¹²⁵ Svante E. Cornell, "The Kurdish Question in Turkish Politics," *Orbis* 45:1 (2001): 31-46;

¹²⁶ The increasing awareness and visibility of Alevi identity from this period onwards has been termed an 'Alevi revival'; see Martin Van Bruinessen, "Kurds, Turks and the Alevi Revival in Turkey." *Middle East Report* (1996): 7-10; Ayşe Betül Çelik. "Alevis, Kurds and Hemşehris: Alevi Kurdish Revival in the Nineties." In eds. Jongerden, Joost; White, Paul J., *The Alevi Enigma: a Comprehensive Overview*, Leiden, Brill (2003): 141-157.

3.1 The ‘I Apologize’ campaign

On 19 January 2007 Hrant Dink, the founder and editor-in-chief of the Armenian-Turkish weekly *Agos* was shot and killed by a 17 year old ultra-nationalist in front of the office building of his newspaper. Hrant had been a vocal critic of both Turkish denialism and of the diaspora’s hostile attitude, calling for mutual bettering of relations. He had become a target of nationalists, and threatened by the Istanbul governor and the National Intelligence Organization (*Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı*, MİT) after writing an article on the possible Armenian origins of Sabiha Gökçen.¹²⁷ Subsequent to this article and others, he had been tried with the 301 law of “insulting Turkishness,” and labeled as a “traitor” in the mainstream media.¹²⁸

On 23 January over a hundred thousand people spontaneously attended his funeral in an 8-kilometer silent march carrying placards reading “we are all Hrant, we are all Armenians.” His funeral which was an unexpected march attended by people from all ethnic groups, would be accepted as a significant event for the expression of Armenian identity in Turkey.

The academician Cengiz Aktar had discussed the idea of a public apology as a “grassroots initiative” with Dink while he was alive.¹²⁹ A year after his death, Aktar, together with the academic Ahmet Insel, the scholar and politician Baskın Oran and journalist Ali Bayramoğlu initiated an online signature campaign, titled ‘Özür Diliyorum’ [I Apologize].

On 14 December 2008 the website of the campaign was launched which opened with a short text along with its translations into 14 languages:

“My conscience does not accept the insensitivity showed and the denial of the Great Catastrophe that the Ottoman Armenians were subjected to in 1915. I reject this injustice

¹²⁷ Sabiha Gökçen was a pilot who took place in the massacres as an aerial bomber and the adopted daughter of Atatürk.

¹²⁸ Müge Göçek, *Denial of Violence*, 385.

¹²⁹ Thomas De Waal, *Great Catastrophe*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014) 193.

and for my share, I empathize with the feelings and pain of my Armenian brothers and sisters. I apologize to them.”¹³⁰

Beneath the text were the names of the 127 intellectuals who signed the text at its opening. The petition carried the aim to collect a maximum number of signatures in the period of a year.¹³¹

The apology would lead to various reactions, both official and non-official with some giving their support and others attacking the campaign. The following chapters will look at these reactions, as reflected in the Turkish media.

3.1.1 Official reactions

Criticism began as soon as the website was launched. Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan said that the campaign was “irrational”:

“I guess they carried out this genocide and so are apologizing for it? If there’s anyone who has committed a crime they can apologize for it. But neither my country nor my nation has such a problem.”

He pointed out that they as the Justice and Progress Party (AKP) in government had taken positive steps towards relations with Armenia giving the example of the restoration of the Akhtamar church in Van, and the trip of the president to Armenia for a football match. He claimed that the

¹³⁰ The Turkish text was as follows; “1915'te Osmanlı Ermenileri'nin maruz kaldığı Büyük Felâket'e duyarsız kalınmasını, bunun inkâr edilmesini vicdanım kabul etmiyor. Bu adaletsizliği reddediyor, kendi payıma Ermeni kardeşlerimin duygu ve acılarını paylaşıyor, onlardan özür diliyorum.” <http://ozurdiliyoruz.com>. Accessed 4 March 2015.
¹³¹ Tülay Şubatlı, "Ermenilerden Özür Diliyorum" Vatan, 5 December 2008, <http://www.gazetevatan.com/-ermenilerden-ozur-diliyorum--211898-gundem/> (accessed 8 June, 2014)

campaign would only "reverse these steps."¹³² In line with this, there was no expression of support from the AKP.¹³³

The Republican Party (CHP) condemned the campaign also claiming that Turkey had "nothing to apologize for" and that it was the Armenians who needed to apologize for killing Turkish soldiers and citizens during the First World War, for "not persecuting the murderers" of the diplomats by ASALA and for the "massacre and exile" of Azerbaijani citizens. They stated a communiqué stating; "while these facts remain, the attempt to apologize from Armenians has been rather an act violating the homage we owe to our history and ancestors, and one that hurts the honor of the Turkish Nation."¹³⁴

The nationalist party MHP began a counter-petition of 'non-apology', which emphasized that the events were deportation necessary due to war conditions.¹³⁵ "History had been lived, written and its judgment given" and thus "there was no crime to be ashamed of and no criminal to apologize in the name of." They also added that massacres and "tragic migrations" had taken place in the geography of the Empire but that the Turks had "buried these historical events in their soul and opened the door to a new world" and that "no one had the right" to "humiliate the memory of their ancestors of which they were inheritors of, to describe them as criminals and to ask for

¹³² "Erdoğan özürdiliyoruz.comculara kızdı," *Radikal*, 18 Dec 2008, http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/erdogan_ozurdiliyoruzcomculara_kizdi-913223 (accessed 22 March 2015)

¹³³ An exception was a statement by AKP deput Dengir Mir Fırat who said that "apologizing is a virtue." In 2012 another AKP deputy İsmet Uçma had apologized for what he termed the "race exile" carried out by the CUP. See "AKP'li Vekil İsmet Uçma Ermenilerden Özür Diledi." *t24*, 25 Nisan 2012, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/akpli-vekil-ismet-ucma-ermenilerden-ozur-diledi,202427> (accessed 22 March 2015); A week after the launch of the campaign, The Minister of Culture and Tourism Ertuğrul Günay would also apologize, but to the Alevi community. See *Radikal*, 23.12.2008, http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/bakan_gunay_alevilerden_devlet_adina_ozur_diledi-914013 (accessed 23 March).

¹³⁴ " Turkey's Main Opposition Party Condemns Apology Campaign for 1915 incidents, " *Turkish Press*, 17 December 2008, <http://www.turkishpress.com/news/255909/> (accessed 24 March 2015)

¹³⁵ The website of the counter apology; <http://www.ozurdilemiyoruz.biz/> (accessed 25 March 2015)

an apology.”¹³⁶ The head of the party Bahçeli similarly claimed that it was the Turkish nation, which needed an apology from the Armenian side.

Sixty retired diplomats wrote a declaration stating that the campaign was “unjust, wrong and undesirable in terms of national interests” and a betrayal of Turkish citizens who had been killed in past by ASALA.¹³⁷ The Turkish Head of the General Staff of the Military and the Minister of Foreign Affairs also gave critical statements.¹³⁸

President Abdullah Gül initially gave a moderate response saying, “it is state policy that every perspective be discussed.” In response to this Canan Arıtman a CHP deputy addressed Gül asking if him to clarify if he his mother was Armenian, because through these remarks he “had supported” the campaign. Gül filed a case for compensation, which he won for “the tarnishing of his statesperson identity” through “false claims on his ethnic identity.”¹³⁹

The pro – Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) supported the campaign and condemned the reactions of CHP and MHP. The deputy of the Batman province Bengi Yıldız was one of the first signatories of the campaign.

Sırrı Sakık, a deputy of the party, stated during a debate in parliament on the issue that the campaign was a “virtuous” and “humane” act, and gave the example of the apology given by the Bulgarian President Petar Stoyanov in 1997 for the oppression of the Bulgarian Turks:

¹³⁶ "Bahçeli'den 'Ermenilerden Özür Diliyorum'a Tepki," *Radikal*, 7 December 2008, http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/bahceliden_ermenilerden_ozur_diliyoruma_tepki-911831 (accessed 26 March 2015)

¹³⁷ "Ermenilerden Özür Dilemiyoruz !" *Vatan*, 16 December 2008, <http://www.gazetevatan.com/ermenilerden-ozur-dilemiyoruz--213560-gundem/> (accessed 27 March 2015)

¹³⁸ " 'Özür' Kampanyasına Asker de Karşı Çıktı." *Radikal*, 19 December 2008, http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/ozur_kampanyasina_asker_de_karsi_cikti-913416 (accessed 27 March 2015)

¹³⁹ "CHP milletvekili Arıtman Kafatasçılıkta Israrlı" *Radikal*, 19 December 2008, http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/chp_milletvekili_aritman_kafatascilikta_israrli-913368 (accessed 27 March 2015) "Kafatasçı Vekil Tazminat Ödeyecek" *Radikal*, 25 March 2009; http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/kafatasci_vekil_tazminat_odeyecek-927932 (accessed 27 March 2015)

“The President of Bulgaria came to the Turkish parliament and apologized from those people, from the Turkish people for the cruel policies carried out against the Turks there. What happened? This was a virtue. Now if we too face our past- with what happened, yes we have no sin, we have no responsibility, in what happened- would it be the end of the world if we too were to show this virtue? ”¹⁴⁰

3.1.2 Non-Official reactions

‘I Apologize’ was met with mixed reactions, of criticism from the majority, and support with 5000 signatures in 24 hours, which reached a total of 32,000 by 2014.¹⁴¹

Despite statements by the initiators that the apology was issued for “not having mentioned” the events “for a hundred years,” the campaign was accepted by the majority of the public as an apology *for* the genocide, and both supporters and critics reacted accordingly.

Soon after the ‘I Apologize’ campaign started, three websites of counter apology were launched.¹⁴² In 2009 several individuals filed a court case against the campaign for “insulting the Turkish nation.” The case was dropped on the basis of freedom of thought. However the prosecutor appealed the decision, and the case only finalized in the Court of Appeals in January 2010 with the decision that the campaign did not constitute a crime.

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<http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/TBMM/d23/c035/b030/tbmm230350300293.pdf> TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, Period 21, Vol. 1, Legislative year 1. 11 Genç, Kamer, 17 th Session, 17.6.1999 B30 01 18.12.2008

¹⁴¹ De Waal, *Great Catastrophe*, 194.

¹⁴² Wedonotapologize.biz. The other two websites were <http://www.ozurbekliyorum.com> and <http://ozurdilemiyoruz.biz>.

Currently only the last website is still existant.

¹⁴³ "Ermenilerden Özür Diliyorum Kampanyasına Soruşturma," *Radikal*, 9.01.2009, http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/ermenilerden_ozur_diliyorum_kampanyasina_sorusturm-a-916240

(accessed 27 March 2015); “Özür Diliyorum Demek Suç Değil,” *Radikal*, 18.01.2010, http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/ermenilerden_ozur_diliyorum_demek_suc_degil-975238 (accessed 25 March 2015)

Various institutions and organizations voiced their criticism. Among them was the Istanbul Bar Association.¹⁴⁴ The Senates of the Hacettepe University¹⁴⁵ and Istanbul University,¹⁴⁶ the Turkish History Association,¹⁴⁷ and The Turkish Public Union together with the Turkish Solidarity Council, which included ninety- six labor and trade unions, also gave statements of protest.¹⁴⁸

The reactions of public figures were varying. There were those who gave their complete support or were completely against it, and others who gave their partial support voicing reservations on certain aspects of the campaign.¹⁴⁹

Ismail Beşikçi a historian known for his pioneering research and outspoken stance on the Kurdish issue in Turkey criticized the text. He said that the term ‘Great Catastrophe’ was “insufficient” and too “weak” in describing the events, which obviously constituted genocide. In a written statement Beşikçi said:

“When you use the term ‘Great Catastrophe’ not to disturb the state, you can receive more signatures. However correctly understanding the contents of factual relations is more valuable than this. The issue of quality should be more valuable than that of quantity.”

¹⁴⁴ "Istanbul Barosu Tepki Gösterdi," *Milliyet*, 19.12.2008,

<http://www.milliyet.com.tr/istanbul-barosu-tepki-gosterdi/siyaset/siyasetdetay/19.12.2008/1029947/default.htm> (accessed 27 March 2015)

¹⁴⁵ "Kampanya İyi Niyetli Bir Girişim Değil," *Cumhuriyet*, 25.12.2008,

http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/diger/30862/_Kampanya_ iyi_niyetli_bir_girisim_degi_1_.html (accessed 25 March 2015)

¹⁴⁶ "Özür Dilemek Yersiz Bir Girişim," *Milliyet*, 24.12.2008,

<http://www.milliyet.com.tr/ozur-dilemek--font-color-red-yersiz--font--birgirisim/siyaset/siyasetdetay/24.12.2008/1031961/default.htm> (accessed 25 March 2015)

¹⁴⁷ "TTK 'Özür'e Tepkili," *Cumhuriyet*, 26.12.2008,

http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/diger/31136/TTK___ozur_e_tepkili.html (accessed 25 March 2015)

¹⁴⁸ "Akyıldız: "Sözde Aydınları Endişe ile İzliyoruz", 19 December 2008,

<http://www.turkishnews.com/tr/content/2008/12/19/akyildiz-sozde-aydinlari-endise-ile-izliyoruz/>, (accessed 25 March 2015)

¹⁴⁹ For further responses to the apology by public figures and an analysis of the apology see Ayda Erbal's work; "Mea Culpa, Negotiations, Apologias: Revisiting the Apology of Turkish Intellectuals." in Birgit Schwelling, ed. *Reconciliation, Civil Society, and the Politics of Memory, Transnational Initiatives in the 20th and 21st century* (Transcript Verlag, 2012), 51-94.

Beşikçi also criticized the campaign for not referring to what he termed the “genocides” against the Assyrians, the Kurds and the Alevis.¹⁵⁰

The historian Taner Akçam, a path-breaking scholar in Turkey on the Armenian genocide, wrote his views in an article in a news magazine. While supporting the campaign as a sign of collective awareness and an attempt to solve the issue in the face of the apathy of the state, he said that he would apologize for a mistake he himself had carried out, not for others mistakes. Stating that "it is not an individual of today which is to apologize for an event in history, it is the state of today which is the continuity of institutions of the period," he pointed to a need to distinguish between feeling guilty for a past murder and the responsibility of discussing and healing injuries of those who suffered because of by these murders. Akçam also stated that he found the text weak, that it could have called the state to accept the “catastrophy” of the events, and remind it for its owing an apology. He also criticized the avoidance of the usage of the term ‘genocide’ which he termed a common attitude among Turkish intellectuals.¹⁵¹

Ayşe Hür, another historian who refused to sign the apology text, wrote her reasons in her column in the *Taraf* newspaper. She stated that the apology was vague and insufficient in terms of who was apologizing, and to whom the apology was directed to. She similarly claimed that the term Great Catastrophe was not the right term for the events. The apology lacked an exact reason for apologizing, a pointing of who the perpetrator was and what the future commitment of the apologizers would be in order for the righting of the injustice. Hür further asked why the apology was directed only to 1915 and not for the events that took place in the period between “1915 and 1923, and throughout Republican history;”

“ Wouldn’t I have to apologize also to Kurds, inhabitants of Dersim, Alawites, Assyrians, Yezidis, Gypsies, communists, Islamists, and

¹⁵⁰ "Büyük Felaket mi Soykırım mı?," *Nasname*, <http://www.nasname.com/a/ismail-besikci-buyuk-felaket-mi--soykirim-mi> (accessed 29 March 2015).

¹⁵¹ "Tartışalım Ama Bilgiyle" 26 December 2008, <http://hyetert.blogspot.com.tr/2008/12/tartisalim-ama-bilgiyle-prof-dr-taner.html> (accessed 29 March 2015).

many other groups who have suffered in front of my eyes? Where does it end? Might there be groups that I was forgetting about? Would it be best to play it safe and say 'mea culpa!' in accordance with the Judeo-Christian tradition that considers even being human as sinful? In the end, I thought it would be insincere to sign such a document that I disagreed with in many respects.”¹⁵²

The writer Nuray Mert stated that the apology was vague in its addressees asking; “Who are we apologizing to? Those families of those who escaped this disaster, or the whole Armenian race or nation?”

She said the idea of apologizing in the name of a national or ethnic identity was disturbing and claimed there was no difference between being proud of one's nation and defining oneself with an ethnic identity, and apologizing for a nation. She stated that she would like to give her signature to an alternative wording;

“My conscience does not accept the indifference to the *Medz Yeghern* and its denial. I refuse this injustice and share the feelings and pain of my Armenian brothers for my own part.”

She claimed that this apology was part of recent “delirium of self-criticism” regarding the Turkish nation and that intellectuals started the campaign to “feel better and more civilized” in the eyes of the West which almost put the Turks as “the most faulty nation in world history.”¹⁵³

Mehmet Ali Birand, a journalist and political commentator wrote that the response of the AKP towards the campaign further proved that it was not

¹⁵² Ayşe Hür, "I Apologize For Not Apologizing," *Armenian Weekly*, 20 April 2009 <http://armenianweekly.com/2009/04/20/i-apologize-for-not-apologizing/> (accessed 28 March 2015)

¹⁵³ Nuray Mert, "Özür Değil, Paylaşma" *Radikal*, 16 December 2008, http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/nuray_mert/ozur_degil_paylasma-912950 (accessed 28 March 2015)

bound to democratic ideals and to a commitment towards the minorities as it had seemed on its emergence.¹⁵⁴

The right harshly attacked the campaign. Writer for the nationalist newspaper *Ortadoğu* Tarık Tavadoğlu asked how those who called themselves “intellectuals” could “swear at their own past.” The campaign was part of the “Greater Armenia” plan and a “political Crusader attack” by the Western states and the intellectuals who sided with them who he termed “*dönme* Armenians” who were “avenging the deportation.”¹⁵⁵

Another writer for the same newspaper Savaş Çolak, said that common pains had been experienced by all during the World War, and pointed to the “imperialist states” as having implemented genocide, with the participation of the Armenians. He questioned the definition of an ‘intellectual’ asking if it defined someone “at peace with the values of his people” and for “social peace” or a “pitiable human being” who “stabbed the state on the back on every occasion.”¹⁵⁶ According to him the Turkish state did not have any period of which it should be ashamed of and needed to apologize for.

Another case of criticism from the right was that of columnist Güngör Mengi in the daily newspaper *Vatan*. Güngör claimed that the campaign was a conspiracy by the Armenian diaspora and its timing suggested that it was an attempt by the diaspora to pass the “genocide allegation” in the US congress before the upcoming American elections.¹⁵⁷

Ahmet Insel, wrote about the racist backlash he received due to his involvement in the campaign. The messages he received questioned the origins of the initiators and suggested that they must be covert

¹⁵⁴ "AKP Ermeni Konusunda Kendine Ters Düştü..." *Milliyet*, 24 December 2008, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/-/mehmet-ali-birand/guncel/gundemyazardetay/24.12.2008/1031828/default.htm> (accessed 29 March 2015)

¹⁵⁵ The term “*dönme*” refers to conversion and here could refer to his claim that the intellectuals were “Armenians posing as Turks” or “Turks posing as Armenians.” Tarık Tavadoğlu, “Özür” Dilemiyorum, “Yuh” Diyorum” 13 December 2008, *Ortadoğu*, <http://www.ortadogugazetesi.net/makale.php?id=2596>; (accessed 29 March 2015)

¹⁵⁶ A. Savaş Tolak, “Özür Diliyoruz” 26 December 2008, *Ortadoğu*, <http://www.ortadogugazetesi.net/makale.php?id=2681> (accessed 29 March 2015)

¹⁵⁷ Güngör Mengi, “Büyük Felaket”, *Vatan*, 15 December 2008, <http://www.gazetevatan.com/gungor-mengi-213568-yazar-yazisi-buyuk-fel-ket/> (accessed 29 March 2015)

Armenians/Jews/Muslims or that they received money for the campaign.¹⁵⁸ The writer Ece Temelkuran similarly wrote that she received 150 emails containing insults, swearing and threats because of her support for the campaign.¹⁵⁹

The apology also elicited responses from the Armenian diaspora. Armenian intellectuals and artists living in the diaspora, among them the filmmakers Atom Egoyan and Serge Avedikian who started a campaign thanking Turkish citizens who started the campaign and stating their support.¹⁶⁰

Armen Gavakian, co-chairman of the Turkish-Armenian Dialogue Group initiated a campaign of apology from the Armenian side, apologizing for “the murders committed in the name of the Armenian people” and “sharing the feelings of the innocent Ottomans and Turks who suffered this pain.”¹⁶¹ He called out for the Armenians “to be as willing as the brave Turks to face the skeletons in their own cupboards.”¹⁶²

On the other hand, the European Armenian Federation wrote a statement claiming that the Turkish intellectuals campaign was a “populist venture.” Although the campaign was “good natured” its avoidance of the term genocide would only lead to the states wavering of its responsibility.¹⁶³

Aktar and Bayramoğlu as two of the initiators of the campaign, referring to the responses wrote that the campaign was a positive move in its “starting

¹⁵⁸ Ahmet Insel, "İrkçi Hezeyanın Üç Hali," *Radikal*, 28 December 2008, http://www.radikal.com.tr/radikal2/irkci_hezeyanın_uc_hali-914675 (accessed 1 April 2015)

¹⁵⁹ "Suçluyorum!," *Milliyet*, 19 December 2008, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/-/ece-temelkuran/guncel/gundemyazardetay/19.12.2008/1029936/default.htm> (accessed 29 March 2015)

¹⁶⁰ “Özür’e Karşılık Fransa’dan Teşekkür” *T24*, 15 January 2009, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/ozure-karsilik-fransadan-tesekkur,24809> (accessed 29 March 2015)

¹⁶¹ Adnan Gündoğan and Ertuğrul Mavioğlu; "Ermeni Aydınlar da Harekete Geçiyor" *Radikal*, 1 February 2009, http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/ermeni_aydinlar_da_harekete_geciyor-919591 (accessed 24 March 2015)

¹⁶² Adnan Gündoğan and Ertuğrul Mavioğlu "İki Özürden Sıkı Bir Kardeşlik Doğar Mı?" *Radikal*, 1 February 2009, http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/iki_ozurden_siki_bir_kardeslik_dogar_mi-919479 (accessed 24 March 2015)

¹⁶³ "Ermeni Diasporasından Özür Kampanyasına İki Farklı Tepki" *Bianet*, 3 February 2009, <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/dunya/112317-ermeni-diasporasindan-ozur-kampanyasina-iki-farkli-tepki> (accessed 24 March 2015)

a debate in both Turkey and the Armenian diaspora” and “breaking a taboo.”¹⁶⁴

3.2 The Dersim Apology

On 23 November 2011 in a meeting of party officials, the Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan gave a speech on the Dersim massacres. This speech was publicized and reflected in the mainstream news as a significant apology for the events of 1938. Erdoğan’s move was unexpected and unprecedented in terms of acknowledgement by a state official not only of the Dersim massacres, but of any such collective injustice by the state. However his speech led to debates questioning whether the speech could be considered a sincere act of apology, in terms of its context and its expected consequences.

The Dersim massacres were brought into the agenda of the public in 2009, with a statement by the vice president of the Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) Onur Öymen. On 10 November during preliminary meetings in parliament regarding the Kurdish “opening,” Öymen had taken the floor in the name of his party in the national assembly and criticized the “democratic opening” plans of the AKP government saying:

“Didn’t the mothers cry during the Dersim uprising? (...) Did one person come out in Turkey in and say “Let’s end this struggle so the mothers don’t cry?” Is there any one in the world who says this? Terrorists killed 3000 people in an hour in the USA. Did one American statesman say: “Don’t let the mothers cry, let’s negotiate with these terrorists.” You are the first to say this. Why? Because

¹⁶⁴ "Aydınlar: Diaspora'da da dir Tabu Kırıldı," *t24*, 3 February 2009, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/aydinlar-diasporada-da-bir-tabu-kirildi,27354> (accessed 20 March 2015)

you have no courage to fight terror. You can't show the courage all the other governments before you have shown.”¹⁶⁵

Öymen's remarks were met with protests and criticism from the public, particularly by the Alevi and Dersim community. The Tunceli Association left a black wreath in protest at the CHP headquarters. The president of the Ankara branch, Bülent Akdağ stated that Öymen had “instigated discrimination” in the country. The Federation of Tunceli Associations, asking for Öymen's resignation, carried out a protest in Istanbul. Over increasing protests as well as criticism from inside his party, Öymen gave an apology for the statement in a TV program, claiming in it that his words had been “distorted.”¹⁶⁶

One of those who asked for his resignation was Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, also a deputy in CHP who was himself from Dersim and who would become the head of the party in a few months. Kılıçdaroğlu said: " it is not correct to carry these events to today and enflame the events. The wound has bled. What has to be done in this process is to take these reactions into consideration." He asked Öymen to "do what was necessary" suggesting his resignation despite his apologies because public reaction had not ceased.¹⁶⁷ However he would change his position, after party leader Deniz Baykal defended Öymen.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ "CHP'de Dersim İstifaları," *Sabah*, 23.11.2009, http://www.sabah.com.tr/siyaset/2009/11/23/chpde_dersim_istifalari (accessed 30 June 2015)

¹⁶⁶ Öymen said the following in his apology; “If people are upset by reasons we never meant, if they were hurt, if they remembered past events due as a result of these distortions, we (I) would be the one to be the most upset from these. Despite us (I) being the reason for this upset, if their upset is a source of the referecing of our (my) words by those who have distored them, then we (I) really apologize from them”; *Öymen Özür Diledi*” NTV, 13.11.2009, <http://www.ntv.com.tr/arsiv/id/25020984/> (accessed 30 June 2015)

¹⁶⁷ " Kılıçdaroğlu: Öymen Gereğini Yapmalı," *Radikal*, 16 November 2009, http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/kilicdaroglu_oymen_geregini_yapmali-964636 (accessed 29 March 2015); "Katliamı Öven Onur Öymen'e öfke yağıyor," *Radikal*, 15 November 2009, ["http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/katliami_oven_onur_oymene_ofke_yagiyor-964270 "](http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/katliami_oven_onur_oymene_ofke_yagiyor-964270) (accessed 29 March 2015)

¹⁶⁸ " Kılıçdaroğlu Dersim'den Çark Etti," *Bianet*, 20 November 2009, <http://www.bianet.org/biamag/siyaset/118399-kilicdaroglu-dersim-den-cark-etti> (accessed 29 March 2015)

Dersim had still not fallen from the spotlight when in August 2010, at an AKP rally in Sakarya, Prime Minister Erdoğan brought up the issue of the massacres, referring to the CHP:

"You know what they said about Dersim right? Who bombed the villages of Dersim because they did not pay taxes? (It was with) the order, of the period, of the President of the period... Who was it? It was the head of CHP. The CHP bombed it. It is said 20 thousand, 30 thousand, 50 thousand people were executed summarily. Have a heart! This is your past. Come and clean this up first." ¹⁶⁹

Kılıçdaroğlu's response at the time was that he "had not been born yet" during the events.¹⁷⁰ The heads of two Dersim federations in Europe at this point wrote a statement of appeal addressing both the politicians with the title; "Hear the cry of Dersim, do not exploit it with politics!" ¹⁷¹

Meanwhile in 10 November the CHP deputy of 'Tunceli' Hüseyin Aygün who was himself from Dersim and author of a book on the events, gave an interview to the *Zaman* newspaper. Referring to the massacres as a "genocidal operation" of which CHP was responsible, he said that Atatürk "could not have been unaware of the massacres" but that the Alevis had "persuaded themselves" that he was unaware of them. ¹⁷² This interview generated controversy in the media and raised criticism from the CHP including a statement from Kılıçdaroğlu.¹⁷³ On the other hand two Alevi

¹⁶⁹ " Erdoğan: "Dersim'in Köylerini CHP Bombaladı," " *Cnnturk*, 14 August 2009, <http://www.cnnturk.com/2010/turkiye/08/14/erdogan.dersimin.koylerini.chp.bombaladi/586699.0/> (accessed 29 March 2015)

¹⁷⁰ " Ben Daha Doğmamıştım," *Hürriyet*, 16 August 2010, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/15561983.asp> (accessed 20 March 2015)

¹⁷¹ Quoted in Cengiz Çandar, " Dersim'in Çığılığı," *Radikal*, 16 September 2009, http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/cengiz_candar/dersimin_cigli-1013996 (accessed 23 March 2015)

¹⁷² " CHP'li Hüseyin Aygün: Dersim Katliamının Sorumlusu Devlet ve CHP'dir," *Zaman*, 10 November 2011, http://www.zaman.com.tr/politika_chpli-huseyin-aygun-dersim-katliaminin-sorumlusu-devlet-ve-chpdır_1200334.html (accessed 30 June 2015)

¹⁷³ " Kılıçdaroğlu 'Dersim krizi' Konusunda Sert Çıktı," *Radikal*, 17 November 2011, http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/kilicdaroglu_dersim_krizi_konusunda_sert_cikti-1069852 (accessed 23 March 2015)

Federations of Europe wrote a statement of support for Aygün, which also listed their demands for Dersim. ¹⁷⁴

In 21 November AKP deputy Mehmet Metiner, suggested that the name of Sabiha Gökçen airport be changed. The airport had been named after the adopted daughter of Mustafa Kemal who took part in the Dersim massacres as a bomber pilot. ¹⁷⁵ He also suggested that Tunceli be renamed Dersim and a commission be formed to inquire into the Dersim incidents. He stated that this would be “a step in facing the past of Dersim” and that would be “the beginning of an apology.” ¹⁷⁶

On 22 November Erdoğan said that he was “watching” the debate in the CHP regarding its history, and referring to Kılıçdaroğlu’s origins, said:

"The fact that CHP has a chairman from Tunceli who belongs to one of the tribes (*aşiret*) is an unequalled opportunity for CHP to face the Dersim disaster. (...) Say which tribe (*aşiret*) you belong to, the belief system you are a member of, why are you fleeing? He says “the prime minister should apologize on the issue of Dersim.” If there is someone to apologize on Dersim it is you."

Erdoğan also announced that the topic of his talk with party officials the following day would be Dersim and that he would "explain new

¹⁷⁴ "Alevilerden Hüseyin Aygün'e Destek," *Demokrat Haber*, <http://www.demokrathaber.net/m/guncel/alevilerden-huseyin-aygun-destek-h5046.html> (accessed 22 March 2015); Another response was by deputy Nur Serter who asked "why is CHP gaining this many votes from Dersim if it did a massacre there?" *Habertürk*, "Nur Serter: "CHP Dersim'de Katliam Yaptıysa Nasıl Bu Kadar Yüksek Oy Alıyor?,"" <http://www.haberturk.com/video/haber/izle/1nur-serter-chp-dersimde-katliam-yaptiysa-nasil-bu-kadar-yukse-oy-aliyor/55971>, (accessed 20 March 2015)

¹⁷⁵ This had been proposed earlier by the DTP but this had been criticized by the Minister of Justice Mehmet Ali Şahin who referred to it as "separatist mentality". See "Dersim Tartışmasında Hangi Mehmet Haklı?," *Radikal*, 22 November 2011, http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/dersim_tartismasinda_hangi_mehmet_hakli-1070306 (accessed 26 March 2015)

¹⁷⁶ "AKP'li Metiner: Sabiha Gökçen Havalimanının Adı Değiştirilsin," *t24*, 21 November 2011, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/akpli-metiner-sabiha-gokcen-havalimaninin-adi-degistirilsin,182921> (accessed 6 April 2015)

documents."¹⁷⁷ Erdogan's apology took place in this context of debate and controversy, which were all reflected in the media.¹⁷⁸

On 23 November he carried out a routine speech to party officials in Ankara where the press was also present.¹⁷⁹ The first half an hour of this speech was about current issues unconnected to Dersim.

One of these issues was the criticism Erdoğan and his government was facing regarding the ongoing Ergenekon trials. A number of military officers and journalists were being detained in the Silivri prison for allegedly plotting a coup against the government. Kılıçdaroğlu had criticized the prison as a "concentration camp" for all those in opposition to the government. Erdoğan now called out to him to "look at the past of his own party."

Also ongoing in the period Erdoğan made his speech, were operations against alleged members of the Kurdistan Communities Union (*Koma Civaken Kurdistan*, KCK), a group affiliated with the PKK. A significant number of individuals including Kurdish academics, writers, lawyers and prominent social figures had been arrested on terror charges as part of the campaign against the Kurdish insurgency. Erdoğan emphasized that he "supported and would continue supporting" the KCK operations.

Erdoğan moved on from these issues on which his party faced criticism to claim that the AKP had not left any "political and historical taboos" and had gone over "unquestionable issues." They had "not used any issue as a political tool." He said, "The biggest obstacle for the strengthening of the country is not being able to face its past, history, taboos and fears." For

¹⁷⁷ "Erdoğan ve Kılıçdaroğlu'nun Dersim Polemiği," *Evrensel*, 22 November 2011, <http://www.evrensel.net/haber/18006/erdogan-ve-kilicdaroglunun-dersim-polemigi> (accessed 6 April 2015)

¹⁷⁸ For a more detailed list of reactions on the Dersim issue from 2009 leading to the apology see Zırh Besim, "Aygün Röportajı ve Türkiye Basınında Üçüncü Dersim Depremi." http://www.academia.edu/2304614/Aygun_Roportaji_ve_Turkiye_basininda_ucuncu_Dersim_depremi

Alevilerin Sesi - 2012., 2012, (accessed 28 March 2015)

¹⁷⁹ A video record of the speech is available online; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BH9ceDERfHs> (accessed 27 February 2015) "Erdoğan'dan Dersim Açılımı," *Radikal*, 23 November 2011, Also See http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/erdogandan_dersim_acilimi-1070401 (accessed 6 April 2015).

these he gave the example of unidentified murders,¹⁸⁰ political tutelage,¹⁸¹ assimilation and denialist politics, particularly referring to the Kurdish issue, and claimed that it was the AKP, which had solved these, and that the AKP had “confronted everything.” This was met by applause by the audience.

Referring to the statement in 2009 by Onur Öymen and highlighting Kılıçdaroğlu’s origins from Dersim, Erdoğan mocked his changing attitude towards Öymen’s controversial statements. He emphasized that the AKP’s interest in Dersim was “not new,” or “aiming polemic.”

Erdoğan then introduced to his audience a 1969 book by the conservative poet and author Necip Fazıl Kısakürek. He said that the book introduced him and his generation to Dersim as an issue “that no one spoke about.” He emphasized that while referring to the Dersim incidents, Fazıl did not refer to them specifically as Alevis, instead categorized them as “persecuted due to religion” and conveying a “human tragedy.” He asked Kılıçdaroğlu why he used the word Alevi. He also criticized Kılıçdaroğlu for daring to compare him “the Prime Minister of Turkey” to the Armenian diaspora, using an expletive. (*Applause*) He continued, “We are struggling with sincerity for the bringing to light of everything in the recent history of this country.”

Erdoğan said that the operations in Dersim were trying to be erased from memory by being presented as an uprising. He referred to the various reports prepared on the area and called out to Kılıçdaroğlu once again, saying that the archive of the Prime Minister was open for him to look into.

In his speech, Erdoğan referred to various documents. The first of these was the Tunceli Law of 1935, which gave the governor of the area extraordinary powers including the authority to carry out executions and deportations. The other documents he referred to were the 1926 report on

¹⁸⁰ Referring to the enforced disappearance and extrajudicial killings of Kurdish individuals since the 1980 coup, which increased in the 1990's. For more information see Hakikat Adalet Hafıza Merkezi, "Database on Enforced Disappearances," <http://hakikatadalethafiza.org/en/calisma/database-on-enforced-disappearances/>, accessed 26 February 2015.

¹⁸¹ 'Siyasi vesayet' is a term increasingly used in the 2000's most particularly by the AKP to refer to the political control of the Turkish state by certain forces, it was first used to refer to the tutelage of the military, later to refer to the influence of the Gülen movement.

Dersim by the civil service inspector Hamdi Bey which described Dersim as an “abscess” that needed to be removed, and the autobiography of the military general Muhsin Batur, where he emphasized that CHP was the only party existing at the period. Randomly citing dramatic excerpts on the killing of civilians from the book, he read about the tragic execution of Seyit Rıza, the exile of thousands of civilians and the giving up into adoption of thousands of girls. One of the other documents he introduced during his speech was dated 1939 and documented the death toll of the military campaign and the other was a cabinet decree of 1938 which stated the number of people who would be sent from exile from Dersim.

Erdoğan pointed out the signatures of the Prime Minister İsmet İnönü and minister Ali Çetinkaya and asked the CHP how they were confronting their past while making commemorations and naming a park after individuals such as these, saying that the AKP “had no dark faces like these among our heroes.” The final document Erdoğan presented was regarding the “cleansing” of the region following the military operation.

Erdoğan stated; “Dersim is one of the most painful and tragic events of our recent past. Dersim is an event waiting to be bravely illuminated. Dersim is one of the most painful and bloody events of all the disasters of CHP. (...) It is not the AKP that has to apologize the Dersim calamity, to face this, it is the CHP who is the owner of this bloody work, it is the Tunceli deputies of CHP, it is the chairman of CHP from Tunceli! ”

He added that Aygün had “said the truth” and a lynch campaign had began against him;

“A chairman from Tunceli is a chance for CHP to face its history. The CHP chairman should stop insulting and face its parties past, as and a victim of these, should look into the oppressions of the CHP to this country.”

Erdoğan referred to the issue of apologizing for the past various times in the speech, putting responsibility on the CHP:

“CHP is supposedly going to save its past. That is why they are putting the blame on me. “The Prime minister should apologize” For one thing you are the inheritors of all this. There is no obstacle for us to apologize as a state but you are the will of this. Your mentality, the CHP mentality.”

The part of his speech, which was accepted as the “apology for Dersim events”, was also part of this calling out to the CHP. Addressing Kılıçdaroğlu, he called out;

“Dear Kılıçdaroğlu, where are you fleeing to? Am *I* to apologize or *you*? If there is need for an apology on behalf of the state, and if there is such a (political) practice in the books I would apologize, I am apologizing.” (*Standing ovation for around a minute*) However if there is someone who has to apologize in the name of the CHP, the new CHP, it is you! You say that you are honored to be from Dersim and from Tunceli. Come and save your honour.” (*Applause*)

3.2.1 Official reactions

Erdoğan’s speech was met by a long applause by the audience of party members. However reactions by his opponents and by most of the Dersim community were not as enthusiastic.

Kılıçdaroğlu, leader of the CHP which Erdoğan referred to various times in his speech, accused Erdoğan of revanchism and of “exploiting” the Dersim massacres, of “attempting to be the spokesman of those who suffered in Dersim” stating that he “wouldn't be surprised if Erdoğan would press the allegations on the Armenian genocide next on the people.” He declared that an apology was not enough, Erdoğan had to open the state archives, and furthermore, none of the documents he presented were new.

¹⁸² He said that if there was someone who had to apologize it was not CHP, but the state who had the authority to do so and was represented not by Erdoğan who was only the leader of a current government but the President.¹⁸³

The head of the Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP) Devlet Bahçeli harshly attacked the apology. He stated that it was not a massacre but an uprising that the state had rightfully carried out, and that "including the Empire years, there was no issue that was brushed under the carpet and that we (the Turkish nation) would find difficulty in explaining." As a reaction to Erdoğan's statement that he would apologize "if it existed in the literature" Bahçeli said there "did not exist in the Turkish state tradition" of a "Prime Minister carrying out an apology" and that this was a disgrace. He also asked if the Prime minister would next apologize for the "alleged" Armenian genocide.¹⁸⁴

A week after the speech, the Kurdish party BDP party gave a motion in parliament for a research commission to be formed to inquire over the events and policies of the period in Dersim. They claimed that this was one of the steps necessary for the verbal apology to find meaning. However this was met with the rejection votes of the AKP deputies including Mehmet Metiner who had said earlier that a commission should be formed. The BDP then accused the AKP of hypocrisy and disingenuity. They said that not a "hasty" apology but an official apology following a parliamentary inquiry should take place and demanded the knowledge of locations of the bodies of Seyid Rıza and his friends.¹⁸⁵

Demirtaş, the head of BDP later gave further comments on Dersim. He said that although they accepted the importance of the apology, it was the

¹⁸² " Kılıçdaroğlu: Dersim'den Sana Ekmek Yok," *Ntvmsnbc*, 22 November 2011, <http://www.ntv.com.tr/arsiv/id/25299340/> (accessed 8 April 2015)

¹⁸³ " Devlet Adına Cumhurbaşkanı Özür Dilemeli," *Dersimnews.com*, <http://dersimnews.com/manset/devlet-adina-cumhurbaskani-ozur-dilemeli.html> (accessed 5 April 2015)

¹⁸⁴ " Bahçeli'den Dersimle İlgili Tartışma Yaratacak Sözler," *Habertürk*, 29 November 2011, <http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/692484-bahceliden-dersimle-ilgili-tartisma-yaratacak-sozler> (accessed 5 April 2015)

¹⁸⁵ "Dersim Buraya Kadarmış," *Bianet*, 30 November 2011, <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/134422-dersim-buraya-kadarmis> (accessed 3 April 2015)

parliament and not governments who should be the arena for an apology. He said that there was no need to shift the blame between each other and that all those who had a role in governing the country carried a responsibility for the outcome of the events. He asked for the establishment of a truth commission. Demirtaş also made an analogy between the KCK operations and the Dersim incidents stating that the aim in Dersim had been to create “one nation, one language,” that the operations against the KCK carried this same aim and that Erdoğan needed to apologize for them too.¹⁸⁶

3.2.2 Non-official reactions

The apology was heralded in the mainstream media, which announced it as a “state apology” and an unexpected and positive move regarding the Kurdish issue.¹⁸⁷

Following the apology, the Association for Human Rights (*İnsan Hakları Derneği*, IHD) published a statement stating its acknowledgment of the “important beginning” an apology signified, however adding that this should take place as an official apology and that compensation should be paid to the families of victims. They put out a list of the main human rights issues in Turkey, which needed to be faced through a truth

Commission and put a legislative motion regarding the formation of a truth commission for these issues.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ "Demirtaş'tan AKP'ye: Son 30 yılın en ahmak işini yapıyorsunuz," *Radikal*, 29 November 2011, http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/demirtastan_akpye_son_30_yilin_en_ahmak_isini_yapi_yorsunuz-1071017 (accessed 3 April 2015) ; On the anniversary of the Dersim massacres, The BDP party would issue a statement describing the Dersim incidents as a 'genocide' and say that 'real apologies' needed to be issued. See "BDP: Dersim soykırımıdır!," *Radikal*, 4 May 2013, http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/bdp_dersim_soykirimdir-1132181 (accessed 3 April 2015)

¹⁸⁷ For instance the daily newspapers Cumhuriyet, Güneş, as well as the more government leaning Star, Sabah, Yeni Şafak, and Akşam described it in their headlines as an apology 'in the name' of the state or 'by the state'. The apology made the headlines of all major newspapers; <http://dersimnews.com/dersim38/dersim-gazete-mansetlerinde.html> (accessed 5 March 2015)

¹⁸⁸ "Dersim Katliamı için Özür Dilemek bir Başlangıçtır," IHD İnsan Hakları Derneği, 24 November 2011, <http://ihd.org.tr/index.php/baslamalarinmenu-77/genel-merkez/2461-ba20111125a.html> (accessed 11 March 2015)

A month after the apology, a poll was carried out by a private research firm on the perspective of the public and the residents of Dersim on the issue. According to the poll 44% of the Turkish public thought that the state had “quelled a rebellion” in Dersim, while 77% of Dersim residents thought that the state had “carried out a massacre”. When the question of responsibility was directed to those who described it as massacre, 26.7% of the Turkish public held CHP responsible, however in Dersim a majority of 45% held the state responsible. To the question of whether the apology by Erdoğan was “a correct thing to do,” 52.3% of the general public answered in the affirmative, while in Dersim this number was 71%. However on whether Erdoğan “had an open and clear attitude on the Dersim events” the public and Dersim were in agreement with a 58.5% of the public and 56.8% of Dersim answering negatively.¹⁸⁹

The reactions of the Dersim community were that a verbal apology on its own was not enough and there were further steps that needed to be taken if there was to be genuine recognition of the events. In a march carried out on December on by municipalities and 44 civil society groups in Dersim, a declaration was read demanding an identification of the legal dimensions of the violence, the pointing out of those responsible, the clarification of the burial place of Seyit Rıza and his comrades, the establishment of a truth commission, an official apology by the Parliament, and the restoration of the name Dersim.¹⁹⁰

Further demands by the Alevi community were that; 1) not only the archives of the Prime Minister and Presidency but those of the General Staff of the military forces be made public, 2) the fate of girls from Dersim who had been sent into exile, particularly those who were given for adoption be clarified, 3) Kızılbaş Alevi belief be officially recognized, 4) place names given after individuals who were involved in the massacres such as those of

¹⁸⁹ "Türkiye Dersim Özündü Uzlaştı," *Radikal*, 3 December 2011, http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/turkiye_dersim_ozrunde_uzlasti-1071375 (accessed 5 March 2015)

¹⁹⁰ "Dersim'den Açıklama var: Özü Kabul Etmiyoruz," *Radikal*, 10 December 2011, http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/dersimden_aciklama_var_ozru_kabul_etmiyoruz-1072116 (accessed 6 March 2015)

Sabiha Gökçen, Fevzi Çakmak, and Abdullah Alpdoğan be changed, 5) the Munzur Dam project which was seen as an attempt to destroy Kızılbaş Alevi culture be cancelled.¹⁹¹

Rüstem Polat, the grandson of Seyit Rıza stated that the apology of Erdoğan was “positive and meaningful” however added that he wished the apology had taken place “not in a party meeting but in the prime ministry or the parliament” which would have made it more “binding.” He did not accept that responsibility be pinned on Kılıçdaroğlu. He also echoed the demands of the Dersim community regarding the opening of state archives, of a clarification of the scale and details regarding the massacres and the disclosure of the location of his grandfather's burial place.¹⁹²

Reactions of public figures were varying. Nationalist and conservative columnists referred to the events as an insurgent uprising, instigated by “imperialists,” claiming that the apology criticized the period and thus Atatürk himself. Yılmaz Özdil a columnist for the *Hürriyet* newspaper was of this opinion, describing Seyit Rıza as a traitor.¹⁹³

Others were supportive of the apology. Ahmet Hakan, who was a columnist at the same newspaper, wrote an article in which he criticized both those who attacked the apology as an uprising as well as the AKP which he claimed was not genuine in its stance on Dersim. One of the critics he addressed was Özdil.

The writer of the liberal-left newspaper *Radikal* Ali Topuz who is of Dersim origin wrote that although the apology seemed path breaking, the issue of Dersim was a taboo, which was connected to a deeper “taboo of genocide” from which the current government could not escape.¹⁹⁴ He wrote

¹⁹¹ "Dersimlilerin Siyasilerden 7 Acil Talebi" *Radikal*, 25 November 2011, http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/dersimlilerin_siyasilerden_7_acil_talebi-1070592 (accessed 1 March 2015)

¹⁹² Rüstem Polat; "Hiç Kin ve Nefret İçinde Olmadık," Interview by Ebru Toktar Çekiç, *Akşam*, 25 November 2011, <http://www.aksam.com.tr/guncel/hic-kin-ve-nefret-icinde-olmadik/haber-81132> (accessed 4 March 2015)

¹⁹³ Yılmaz Özdil, "Dersim'e ne Dersin?," *Hürriyet*, 24 November 2011, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/19314080.asp> (accessed 4 April 2015)

¹⁹⁴ Ali Topuz, "Dersim: Geçmişteki ve Gelecekteki Jenosid," *Radikal*, 13 December 2011, http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/ali_topuz/dersim_gecmisteki_ve_gelecekteki_jenosid-1072348 (accessed 4 April 2015)

that the mentality which created Dersim was “still alive,” referring to the denialist policies in the government and the law.¹⁹⁵

4. Analysis of the Apologies

In this section I attempt to read the two cases of apology in the light of certain questions connected to collective apologies.

1) The first set of questions I ask are;

What is signified by the choice of specific wording in a text of apology? What does the context of apologies say regarding the apologies? Do these have any influence in determining if an apology is sincere and not used as an instrument for other interests?

2) The second set of questions is connected to responsibility. What does the standing of the apologizers say regarding responsibility? Can (or should) collective guilt be assigned for a past act? What do the two apologies say about the subjectivity of apologizers and their apologizing today for actions committed by past generations?

3) The third issue I look into is reconciliation. How can an apology amend for the past? What is the role of apology in the process of reconciling the wronged collectivity with larger society and the state? What is an apology carried out today able to achieve regarding historical injustice?

The following chapters explore these questions in the light of scholarly material on public apologies. The following section will analyze the ‘I Apologize’ campaign and the Dersim apologies in the light of these criteria, which provide a set of tools with which to explore apologies further.

¹⁹⁵ Ali Topuz, "Dersim'i Yaratan Akıl Hala Canlı", *Radikal*, 16 Aralık 2011, http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/ali_topuz/dersimi_yaratan_akil_hala_canli-1072607 (accessed 4 April 2015) Topuz gave the examples of the rejection or dismissal of charges for all the recent court cases demanding reparations and investigations for Dersim, and the refusal of a court to allow the naming of a child “Dersim.”

4.1 The 'I Apologize' Campaign

4.1.1 Format, Wording, Aim

An analysis of the 'I Apologize' campaign, which was took place as an online signature campaign, requires a close reading of the text presenting the apology. The text was as follows;

“My conscience does not accept the insensitivity showed to and the denial of the Great Catastrophe that the Ottoman Armenians were subjected to in 1915. I reject this injustice and for my share, I empathize with the feelings and pain of my Armenian brothers and sisters. I apologize to them.”¹⁹⁶

The use of the term “Great Catastrophe” to define the genocide is what first strikes the eye in the text. The events of 1915 fit the definition of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide as "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group."¹⁹⁷ The Turkish state however, has pursued a continuous policy of denial of the genocide against the Armenians, which is reinforced by national education and the media. The public is aware of international pressure for Turkey to accept the events as genocide. However the majority of the Turkish public follows the states line of reasoning, and the use of the term genocide to refer to the events is highly controversial in Turkey.

In the light of this back ground, one of the most striking points regarding the text of apology is that the initiators chose the term “Great Catastrophe” to describe the events of 1915.

¹⁹⁶ <http://ozurdiliyoruz.com>. The Turkish text of apology was as follows; “1915'te Osmanlı Ermenileri'nin maruz kaldığı Büyük Felâket'e duyarsız kalınmasını, bunun inkâr edilmesini vicdanım kabul etmiyor. Bu adaletsizliği reddediyor, kendi payıma Ermeni kardeşlerimin duygu ve acılarını paylaşıyor, onlardan özür diliyorum.”

¹⁹⁷ UN Convention For the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. http://legal.un.org/avl/pdf/ha/cppcg/cppcg_e.pdf (accessed 3 March 2015)

The term “Great Catastrophe” is used here as a translation of the word *Medz Yeghern*. In her analysis of the apology text, Erbal points out that the term “*Yeghern*” is only one of the various terms used in the Armenian language to refer to the genocide and can be translated as “pogrom” in English. However while the Armenian form of the word denotes agency, the equivalent it is given in an attempt to translate it into English or Turkish as Catastrophe/Felaket loses this reference to an agent.¹⁹⁸ Referring to the genocide as a “catastrophe” is in line with the attitude of the state to define the events not as a systematic act to eliminate the Armenians of the Empire, but an unforeseen result of war and conflict.

The choice of the term “Medz Yeghern” in a text of apology regarding the Armenian genocide also evokes the actions of politicians worldwide, who refrain from using the word “genocide” in their speeches on the issue in order to avoid a diplomatic confrontation with the Turkish state.¹⁹⁹ Erbal states that the use of the term “Medz Yeghern” with this aim of evading “genocide” leads the term to cease being “ a private term of communal mourning for Armenians, becomes something else; a political instrument in the hands of others.”²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Ayda Erbal, “Mea Culpa,” 85. “*Yeghern* embodies an element of agency, in the sense that there cannot be a *yeghern*, slaughter, without a *yeghernagorts*, slaughterer.”

¹⁹⁹ See the example of the head of the Catholic Church, and the US President; “Pope Avoids Armenia Controversy,” *BBC News*, 26 September 2011, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1564257.stm>. (accessed 2 April 2015) “Obama Marks Genocide Without Using the Word” *New York Times*, April 24 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/25/world/europe/25prexy.html?_r=11 (accessed 2 April 2015) However on 12 April 2015 Pope Francis used the term genocide to mark the 100th anniversary of the massacre. Turkey responded by recalling its ambassador to the Vatican and demanding an explanation. This was followed by recognition of the genocide by the European Parliament and the German Parliament. However the President of USA still used the term *Medz Yeghern* in his annual speech. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/04/turkey-demands-explanation-pope-genocide-remark-150412122124015.html>

²⁰⁰ Erbal, “Mea Culpa,” 88.

The conscious evading of the term genocide was criticized by public figures including those who gave their partial support for the campaign, such as the historian İsmail Beşikçi, who claimed that the use of the term had been to receive more signatures and "not to disturb the state" but that priority should have been given to "quality" and not of "quantity."²⁰¹

Ragıp Zarakolu, founder of Belge publications, similarly criticized the apology as a "populist initiative which consciously evaded using the term genocide" and thus aimed "to vindicate the Ottoman Turkish government of its eliminating 1,5 million Armenians." He criticized both the non-use of the term genocide, and the campaigns conceptualization as a "gesture" from the Turkish side that expected a similar response and was framed within the aim of bettering diplomatic relations between Turkey and Armenia. The campaign according to him approached the issue in a "superficial" manner without considering the role and opinion of the Armenian diaspora as descendants of victims.²⁰²

As can be seen from these reactions to the apology, the choice of the term "Great Catastrophe" in place of that of "Genocide" raises questions regarding the sincerity of the apology. It also brings up more indirect issues such as those arising from translatability and whether the term is adequate in conveying the meaning and gravity of the act for which the apology is issued. Another issue is on what the term implies regarding the agency of the perpetrator, or apologizer.

While these criticisms are legitimate, the context of the apologies must be taken into consideration when analyzing the text of apology. The campaign took place in 2008, in a context of complete denial towards the genocide and where a few previous events such as the seminal Bilgi University conference on the Armenian issue in 2005,²⁰³ and the

²⁰¹ For more details on Beşikçi's and other criticism by public figures see previous chapter section 3.1.2.

²⁰² Ragıp Zarakolu, "Özür o Kadar Kolay Değil," *HyeTert*, 13 February 2009, <http://www.hyetert.com/yazi3.asp?s=&Id=394&DiId=1>. (accessed 4 April 2015)

²⁰³ The conference was initially planned to take place in Bosphorous University, however was faced with obstacles. Among these were the statement by Minister of Justice Cemil Çiçek likening the event to "traitors stabbing the nation," the threat of ultranationalists to

unexpected mass protest at the funeral of Hrant Dink in 2007,²⁰⁴ constituted novel instances where public visibility and positive remembrance of the Armenian issue could be generated. The campaign carried significance as it showed that there were a significant number of people in Turkey who would accept to put their signatures under a statement of apology for the Armenian issue in spite of the staunch propaganda of the Turkish state.

Speaking in line with this, Sayat Tekir from the civil society group *Nor Zartonk*²⁰⁵ based in Istanbul said that it was normal that the term genocide is not used in the text. He pointed out that in the period even themselves as members of the Armenian community in Turkey were wary of using the term genocide publicly. They would for instance respond to foreign journalists who posed questions about use of the term by saying that they “could not talk” about the issue. This was due to the general uncompromising atmosphere regarding the Armenian issue as well as the risk of being prosecuted by Article 301 of “insulting Turkishness.”²⁰⁶ Thus according to him the apology text was appropriate for its context in 2008, but if the same text were to be used in a similar initiative today, it would naturally “come under fire,” considering the relative progress that had been made regarding knowledge of the Armenian genocide in Turkish society since Hrant Dink’s death.²⁰⁷

Another issue which Mamigonian or Erbal (or other critics such as Beşikçi or Zarakolu) do not deal with extensively in their criticism of the use of the term “Great Catastrophe” is the subjectivity of the apologizers. Both Erbal and Mamigonian make reference to Oran’s statements that the apology would counter the effects of what he claimed was the Armenian

place a bomb in the conference arena, and a legal court action filed by lawyer Kemal Kerinçsiz. The conference would take place in Istanbul Bilgi University. See Göçek, *Denial of Violence*, 388-389.

²⁰⁴ Over 100,000 persons turned up at the funeral, where they marched with the slogans “We are all Hrant Dink” “We Are All Armenians.” For the significance of the funeral see Türkmen-Derrişođlu “Coming to Terms with a Difficult Past” 684-689.

²⁰⁵ Nor Zartonk, http://www.norzartonk.org/en/?page_id=2 (accessed 4 April 2015)

²⁰⁶ The “I Apologize” campaign was launched in December 2008. Article 301 was amended in April replacing the word “Turkishness” with the phrase “the Turkish Nation” and reduction of the maximum penalty from three years to two among other changes.

²⁰⁷ Personal interview with Ohannes Kılıçdađı on 7 April 2015.

diaspora's hostile attitude towards Turkey.²⁰⁸ However despite Oran's attitude of insisting on pursuing a "dialogue" with the diaspora that dismissed the "terminology annoyance,"²⁰⁹ the claim that the campaign itself was about "quashing genocide recognition rather than about facing history"²¹⁰ is problematic, in its simple situating of the apology initiators on the same side as deniers of the genocide, ignoring their background and previous actions as public figures advocating against this denial itself. While focusing on Oran's statements on the use of the term they ignore statements made by him and the other initiators on the genocide and its denial, and on the larger aim of the apology itself.²¹¹

Ohannes Kılıçdağı, an academician and writer for the Agos newspaper also says that the political value of the initiative should not be completely erased due to its use of the term genocide. He points out that the lack of the term in the text does not necessarily refer to a denial of the genocide by each and every signatory, as it is known that the campaign initiators did not all carry the same position on using the term genocide. For instance while Cengiz Aktar used the term genocide in his articles, Baskın Oran did not, and had publicly asserted his refusal to use the term when referring to the events.

This issue of denial is another significant aspect in the wording of the text. One of the basic requirements of apologies in the literature is to "name the wrong in question."²¹² This means that the apologizer is expected to clearly identify the offense and provide an explanation for the act for which the apology is issued, in order that its addressee is made aware of the

²⁰⁸ Mamigonian "A Commentary"; Erbal; "Mea Culpa".

²⁰⁹ Baskın Oran, "Özür Kampanyası'ndan Fransa'da Ermeni Günlerine," *Radikal*, 6 June 2009, http://www.radikal.com.tr/dizi/ozur_kampanyasindan_fransada_ermeni_gunlerine-943779 (accessed 4 March 2015)

²¹⁰ Mamigonian, "A Commentary," 228.

²¹¹ One statement explaining this aim was given Baskın Oran: "Adı Önemli Değil Ermeni Medeniyeti Yok Edildi," <http://yazhocam.com/2015/05/baskin-oran-adi-onemli-degil-ermeni-medeniyeti-yok-edili/> (accessed 7 March 2015)

²¹² Matt James, "Wrestling with the Past; Apologies, and Non-Apologies in Canada," In *The Age of Apology: Facing Up to the Past*, ed. Mark Gibney, Rhoda E. Howard-Hassman, Jean Marc Coicaud, and Niklaus Steiner. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 139.

offenses and harm that the offender aims to correct.²¹³ In the 'I Apologize' text, the reason for apology is referred to as an apology for "insensitivity (shown) towards the denial (of) the Great Catastrophe."

In her book "*Denial of Violence*," Göçek defends that the Armenian genocide forms the foundational collective violence of the Turkish Republic, and because of its relation to the founding of the nation has become one of the most silenced and denied acts of collective violence. Because of this, discussion of the issue is regarded as a threat to the legitimacy of state and society.²¹⁴ She shows how denial is a complex process which emerged as denial in the Empire regarding the initial acts of violence against the Armenians. This denial continued its development until the late Republican period and the current day where denial and its effects on further acts of violence are still unaccounted for.²¹⁵

Considering this systematic nature of genocide denial in Turkey since its foundations and the reproduction and normalization of acts of violence towards minorities in Turkey, the apologies statement of "insensitivity" towards denial remains lacking of any call for serious acknowledgement of the injustice at hand.

The text of apology as well as the statements given by its authors led to debates questioning the motivation of the apology.²¹⁶ Some read the text of apology as one that evaded real responsibility and was merely a more subtle way of perpetuating denial of the genocide. However others pointed to the context and the situation whereby this should be considered a significant move in terms of societal confrontation of the past. The initiators themselves gave various statements on their aim.

Explaining the start of the campaign, Aktar said that the apology of the campaign was for "not having mentioned this this issue for all this time, for

²¹³ Smith, Nick. "The Categorical Apology." *Journal of Social Philosophy* 36.4 (2005): 479-480.

²¹⁴ Göçek, *Denial of Violence*, 18.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ See Chapter 3 for official and non-official responses to the apology.

not having openly talked about it for almost 100 years.”²¹⁷ He pointed out that the events that the Armenians faced were largely unknown and erased from the memory of Turkish society, particularly due to the effects of official history. Their aim was to bring the issue to light and initiate societal awareness.

Bayramođlu explained the aim of the apology as to increase “societal legitimacy” regarding the events;

“If the state and politics are to take a step forward then this should have a societal legitimacy. The Armenian issue holds a painful place in the formation of identity of Turkey. I supported this campaign for societal legitimacy to grow. Let there be such a text written that it does not give a historical verdict that we accept the events lived in 1915 but don’t name them. We said let whoever give whatever name they want. We started with the conviction; “Can we put the pains not we felt but that we caused in our own memory? Can we enter this test? ” Even if this test is difficult, progress can be made.”²¹⁸

While explaining the non-naming of the act of apology in this manner, Bayramođlu also emphasized that the apology was from members of the dominant majority of society.

“This apology is the apology of a lot of things. Until today we kept silent, did not want to learn, looked at our pain, humiliated others... I apologize for these. I can’t define everyone’s apology. If you are the dominant aspect of the country, you present your sorrow, your apology.”²¹⁹

²¹⁷ "Ermenilerden Özur Diliyorum." *Taraf*, 5 December 2008, <http://arsiv.taraf.com.tr/haber-ermenilerden-ozur-diliyorum-22827/> (accessed 5 April 2015)

²¹⁸ "Gazeteci Yazar Ali Bayramođlu: Demo Krat Olmak Kolay Deđil" *Yeni aktüel*, No 182, <http://www.yeniaktuel.com.tr/tur101-2,182@2100.html> (Accessed 30 June 2015)

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Despite these statements published in various media outlets, the apology was largely received by both the Turkish and foreign media as an apology for the genocide itself, which aggravated the backlash it received by critics. One way the apologizers were attacked was through racist accusations that the apologizers hid their real ethnic origins and that this pointed to the campaign's secret agenda.²²⁰ Supporters of the apology themselves gave varying reasons for participating in the apology.²²¹ The initiators had said that they would leave the motive of apology to the apologizers themselves, however this led to a lack of consensus on the aim of the campaign, and led to it being an open ended initiative instead of a real acknowledgement of suffering.

Another issue which the apology text brought up is its foregrounding of individual conscience. The text referred to a "refusal" of the "conscience" to accept that the "Great Catastrophe" is faced with insensitivity and denial, and its authors emphasized that the initiative was based on the liberty of the individual conscience to give their signature or to abstain from participating.

In Aktar's words, the campaign took off "with the conviction that the time had come and was in fact far past time, for a campaign which foregrounded the individual, the feelings of the individual."²²² In the same vein, Insel said; "Independent of official politics, we citizens have the right to state our opinions on Turkish history. The campaign should not be turned into political material."²²³

In another interview Aktar clarified;

220 http://www.radikal.com.tr/radikal2/irkci_hezeyanin_uc_hali-914675

221 For instance the academician Aksu Bora stated that they were not apologizing for the action itself, but for "turning a blind eye, for ignoring and forgetting." Referring to the attitude of the Prime Minister towards the campaign, the actress Lale Mansur said that the apology had "nothing to do with politics, with parties or politicians." It was regarding the "Armenians living in Turkey." See "Özür Dileyenlerden Başbakan'a: İmzalar Vicdanımızın Sesidir." *Radikal*, 18 December 2008,

http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/ozur_dileyenlerden_basbakana_imzalar_vicdanimizin_sesidir-913256 (accessed 4 April 2015)

222 <http://www.gazetevatan.com/-ermenilerden-ozur-diliyorum--211898-gundem/>

²²³ Ibid.

“Our aim is not to give a lesson to anyone. We also do not have any addressee. This is only our search to end the deafening silence on the issue. Our starting point is the individual stance. We will point out that our pains are mutual. Armenians, Kurds and Turks who lived for 4000 years on this land suffered huge pains. The Turks and Kurds are still living here, but the Armenians are not.”²²⁴

The apologies focus on individual conscience, ignores the issue of institutional responsibility and the fact that the state is paving the way for new acts of violence and perpetuating the genocide through its continuation of denial. The apology does not deal with accountability, and suggests that a gesture of remorse is adequate and that political and legal issues of official acknowledgement and compensation are irrelevant. The apology also does not take into consideration the demands of the offended, setting on its own terms that individual regret is enough as an apology. The reference to “mutual pain” felt on all sides hides the specificity and the scale of the victimization at hand, and the line between perpetrator and victim.

This issue of individual regret is connected to that of sincerity, and on to the extent the ‘I Apologize’ campaign can be considered a sincere act of contrition.

Lazare defends that private or interpersonal apologies, being based on “spontaneity, emotionality, flexibility,” carry the requirement of a sincere expression of shame and remorse. However he defends that sincerity is not necessarily a criteria of public apologies, which are based on a public declaration of an offense and the restoration of dignity.²²⁵ Apologies which take place in the public arena, as “a proper acknowledgement that a social or moral contract was violated” can be effective “regardless of sincerity.” The possible “insincerity” of these apologies, which may take place through public pressure does not lessen their value.²²⁶

²²⁴ "Ermenilerden Özür Diliyorum." *Taraf*, 5 December 2008, <http://arsiv.taraf.com.tr/haber-ermenilerden-ozur-diliyorum-22827/> (accessed 5 April 2015)

²²⁵ Lazare, *On Apology*, 39-40

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 118-119.

Tavuchis similarly states that “sorrow or sincerity” have no place in collective (“Many to Many”) apologies which are “official, binding and collective”²²⁷ and whose main aim is to “put things on record.” He claims that “to demand more” of an apology is “is to mistake its task and logic.”²²⁸

While it is generally agreed that the expectation for sincerity may differ in interpersonal and collective apologies, the claim that sincerity is not expected of collective apologies does not have consensus. Thaler suggests that collective apologies which are given by a representative who acts on behalf of a community involve a different sincerity than that given by an agent who apologizes. Looking at apologies through the lens of Nobles’ “membership theory,”²²⁹ he suggests a way of evaluating the sincerity of these apologies. His suggestion is that apologies be based on an evaluation of their *consequences* in terms of “renegotiating the legal, political, and affective dimensions of citizenship.” An apology is “authentic” or successful if followed by measures to ensure that citizens who have been excluded from political community due to their past victimization are reincluded. This in turn leads to a stronger “civic stability” of the community and increases the sense of belonging with the rest of society.²³⁰

The ‘I Apologize’ campaign is a unique case in terms of its being a collective apology not enacted in an official manner by a state representative but by civilian actors who take the initiative of apology and pass it on to other willing members of the community.²³¹ Nevertheless it is an example of collective apology, where members of a collectivity apologize through the coming together of individual apologies for the wrongdoing that has been committed firstly by the group holding power, then perpetuated by the Turkish state as its inheritor, with the involvement and inaction of society.

²²⁷ Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa*, 101

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

²²⁹ See Melissa Nobles. *The Politics of Official Apologies*. (New York: Cambridge UP, 2008)

²³⁰ Mathias Thaler, "Just Pretending: Political Apologies for Historical Injustice and Vice's Tribute to Virtue," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 15:3 (2012): 15

²³¹ Actually while the text of apology suggests the role of the “dominant group” in Turkish society, the act of signing the apology was open to any one who was willing to participate, nevertheless their identity and implication in the wrongdoing, thus in a sense transcending the categories of perpetrator/victim in collective apology.

Examined from the context of Thaler's conceptualization, it can be said that the apology was a sincere step in the "renegotiation" of Turkish citizenship, in its contradicting of national and official history by presenting the Armenians in Turkey and their ancestors as victims of a wrongdoing and as a group entitled to an act of public apology. It also albeit vaguely; pointed to individuals in larger Turkish society as actors who could voluntarily carry out this apology for victimization. This makes it an attempt to reshape the dominant understanding of citizenship in Turkish society.

However the issues of choice of wording, the non-naming of the act for which is apologized, the lack of call for serious accountability and the confinement of the apology to that of the individual conscience, make the apology more of an act of *catharsis*, than of an apology as a real "commitment to substantial enfranchisement"²³² of the victimized community. The campaign carries a therapeutic effect enabling the apologizers, in Oran's own words; "to be able to look at" themselves "in the mirror."²³³ or to express their "feeling of responsibility for history, for those who suffered pain."²³⁴ However by functioning only as a form of *catharsis* it closes up the possibility of a real confrontation of the perpetrator with its transgression or of the demands of the victims themselves, with the statement of sympathy not involving any structural change on the situation of the Armenians.

4.1.2 Responsibility

As dealt with in the previous section, the campaign carried the emphasis that it was a personal and individual act, and that everyone who participated

²³² Thaler, "Just Pretending," 15.

²³³ Baskın Oran, "Verdiğimiz Huzursuzluk için Özür Dileriz." *Radikal*, 14 December 2008, http://www.radikal.com.tr/radikal2/verdigimiz_huzursuzluk_icin_ozur_dileriz-912867 (accessed 27 July 2015)

²³⁴ Ali Bayramoğlu, "Özür kampanyası; Tarih, Gerçek ve Vicdan," 17 December 2008, *Yeni Şafak*, <http://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/alibayramoglu/ozur-kampanyasi-tarih-gercek-ve-vicdan-14349> (accessed 27 July 2015)

did so on their own initiative. Oran as one of the initiators, pointed to the free choice of apology and emphasized the personal stance of his apology in reply to critics;

“Allow me to apologize **for my own part** (bold font in original text) from the grandchildren of my co-citizens, for being this late in being aware of the 85-year denial of this ethnic-religious cleansing done in my own country.”²³⁵

Thus it was emphasized that the apology focused on individual responsibility for denial, as ‘co- citizens’ of those who carried on the victimization. Oran’s statement points how the apology is in Mamigonian’s words a “meta- apology” issued for the “effects of” the Great Catastrophe such as “denial, insensitivity, pain” and not for the event itself.²³⁶

One of the basic steps set forward by for apologies; is that of a proper acknowledgement of the offence through a complete acceptance by the offender of the wrongdoing.²³⁷ However certain elements of an apology can be regarded as an evasion of full acknowledgement of responsibility. The use of the term “Great Catastrophe” was one of the aspects of the apology which was brought up the issue of agency. Another of these aspects of the apology is its use of the passive voice.²³⁸

In the ‘I Apologize’ text the use of the passive voice leads to a lack of reference to any responsible actor, and to a lack of agency . The apologizer states that “insensitivity” and denial has been shown towards of the “Great Catastrophe”, and “rejecting this injustice” “emphasizes with” and “apologizes to” to his/her Armenian brothers and sisters. The text does not hint on the actor who has shown this insensitivity and denial, nor is there any reference to the actor of the “Great Catastrophe” itself.

²³⁵ Baskın Oran, "Verdiğimiz Huzursuzluk için Özür Dileriz," *Radikal*, 14 December 2008, <http://www.baskinoran.com/yazilar-2008.php> (accessed 24 March 2015)

²³⁶ Mamigonian, “A Commentary,” 229.

²³⁷ Smith *I Was Wrong*, 55; Lazare *On Apology*, 75

²³⁸ Smith, *I Was Wrong*, 35-36.

The apology in this sense comes close to Nick Smith's point of "safe apologies". These apologies, which go in the line of "I am sorry for your suffering" and make no reference to a responsible actor, in his words, attempt to "deflect casual responsibility while still offering something like an apology."

A categorical apology is expected to show admittance of causation and the wrongdoing, in other words to accept "blameworthiness." However the 'I Apologize' text does not take on responsibility, nor does it point to a responsible actor, yet still apologizes for the (after- effects of) the injustice, vaguely implying that the apologizer also carries a role in these acts, but is a little more than a witness of the wrongdoing. It is an example of Baker's statement that "the passive voice liquidates and buries the active individual, along with most of the awful truth."²³⁹

The reference to an "unaccepting conscience" of "rejecting injustice" and "empathy", make the apology in whole seem more like an expression of sympathy for the victims than a statement of acknowledgement for any responsibility. Besides the term "I apologize" and "for my share" there is little suggestion that the signatories of the apology are admitting guilt or responsibility for a wrongdoing.

Besides the issue of the text's acceptance of responsibility for the offence, is the question of whether individuals or groups in the present should be held responsible for the actions of previous actors and time periods.

As listed in the previous chapter, official reactions to the campaign were largely of denial of any responsibility of the Turkish state or its citizens. There were objections to the idea that Turkish society or the state would have to bear the collective guilt of the past. Others pointed out the need for an institutional apology and argued that the state was the agent of the injustice who had the standing to offer the apology.

²³⁹ Sheridan Baker, *The Practical Stylist*. (New York: Longman, 1998) 112-113.

Murat Belge, a well-known historian wrote of his conflicting feelings about apologizing although he was a signatory. He said he did not feel the need to apologize, as he did not feel any identification with those who had carried out the events. On the other hand, he felt that he and all Turkish citizens carried a responsibility for the situation which arise from the denial of the state. Paradoxically, he also said that it was not meaningful that any one apologizes in the name of the “Turks” as a homogenous entity to all Armenians. He asked why he should apologize for instance “from an Armenian fascist because some Turks did something like this to Armenians?”²⁴⁰

A columnist of the *Sabah* newspaper Emre Aköz similarly stated that he did not agree with the implication of responsibility. He pointed to a list of groups he thought should apologize, such as those who defended the expulsion of the Armenians, those who appropriated the properties of the Armenians, those who referred to Armenians as an insult and those who were involved in the murder of Hrant Dink.²⁴¹

Yasemin Çongar a columnist for the *Taraf* newspaper stated that she apologized even though she had not personally carried out the event at hand or agreed with it. She also pointed that she did not “necessarily look at the issue as a ‘member of the Turkish society’.” Referring to the emotional impact that the slogan *jedem das seine* on the Wall of the Buchenwald Nazi concentration camp²⁴² had on her, she listed her reasons for apologizing. Among these were her not being sure if she had unconsciously “benefited from” the genocide, and being in doubt if she was “brave, sensitive and

²⁴⁰ "Murat Belge: Sorumsuzum Ama, Ben de Özür Dilerim," *t24*, 15 December 2008, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/murat-belge-sorumsuzum-ama-ben-de-ozur-dilerim,20780> (accessed 29 March 2015)

²⁴¹ Emre Aköz, " "Özür" Meselesi," *Sabah*, 12 November 2008, http://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/akoz/2008/12/11/ozur_meselesi (accessed 28 March 2015)

²⁴² Translated from German meaning “To each his own” or “to each what he deserves.” During World War II the phrase was used by the Nazis as a motto displayed over the entrance of Buchenwald concentration camp.

decisive enough ” to address the issue of the genocide after she had learnt of it.²⁴³

These three responses exemplify the various individual stances taken towards apology for the past. A segment of the apologizers agreed to apologize in terms of their connection to the Turkish state through citizenship, or for simply being part of Turkish society. While some regarded this “belonging” as an affective and symbolic one, others focused on their own indirect involvement in the after effects of genocide, such as for being possible owners of expropriated goods, or for their direct involvement today such as through perpetuating the denial of the genocide. Others refused to or voiced their hesitation to participate on the basis of their claim of guiltlessness for the acts of past generations or by pointing that the state as a perpetrator bears responsibility for acknowledgement and atoning for the past and should carry out an apology.

The issue of whether citizens can be held collectively responsible for the crimes committed by the state is often debated in societies that have faced conflict in the past. One of these societies was Germany after the Holocaust, where questions on the collective guilt of Germans were raised. The work of Karl Jaspers and Hannah Arendt that emerge in this context of “discussions of guilt ” provide a framework for collective responsibility that can be applied in other historical settings.

Karl Jaspers proposed a distinction between four types of guilt, based on the participation of the individual. The first of these, political guilt, implies that all citizens of a state must accept responsibility for its crimes even if they are not involved directly in the acts because “everybody is co -responsible for the way he is governed.”²⁴⁴

Criminal guilt only implicates those who violated the law. Moral guilt refers to the personal responsibility of all individuals in which the conscience is where jurisdiction lies. The final category is of metaphysical

²⁴³ Yasemin Çongar, " Yasemin Çongar: Özür Diliyorum Çünkü" *t24*, 15 November 2008, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/yasemin-congar-ozur-diliyorum-cunku,20782> (accessed 27 March 2015)

²⁴⁴ Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 25.

guilt which he describes as the responsibility of those who survive towards those who did not, as human beings are “co-responsible for every wrong and injustice in the world” who have ultimately failed to prevent them.²⁴⁵

According to Jaspers, while criminal and political guilt are “charged from without” by the judgement of the public, moral and metaphysical guilt are charged “from within” by the conscience of the individual him/herself.²⁴⁶ Jaspers analysis points out that not only the state criminals but also the German population; albeit -for their actions as *individuals*- can (or should) feel responsible (although are not “guilty”) for the mass crimes of the state. However Jaspers mainly addresses the responsibility and involvement of the German population during the Nazi massacres; he does not extend his analysis to later generations.

Hannah Arendt’s conceptualization is of more significance for later generations. Arendt differentiates between political (and collective) responsibility, and legal (and personal) guilt. Like Jaspers she defends a notion of collective guilt whereby it is not only the perpetrators but also the people who carry responsibility. One can be held responsible for actions that were done in one’s name, due to one’s membership in the collectivity. This membership is not voluntary and cannot be dissolved voluntarily. Only the stateless or refugees do not belong to a political community and thus cannot be held not collectively responsible for the actions of the group. In her expression; “We are always held responsible for the sins of our fathers as we reap the rewards of their merits; but we are of course not guilty of their misdeeds, either morally or legally, nor can we ascribe their deeds to our own merits.”²⁴⁷ In line with this, it is expected that every government *and* nation takes responsibility for “the deeds and misdeeds” of the past.²⁴⁸

However differing from Jaspers, Arendt says that one cannot be held *guilty* for actions in which one has no participation. Guilt according to her conception is “strictly personal” and “refers to an act and not intentions or

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 26.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 32

²⁴⁷ Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*. (New York: Random House, 2005) 150

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 149.

potentialities.”²⁴⁹ She dismisses with the notion of collective guilt (or innocence) because it only “makes sense” when it applies to individuals.²⁵⁰ This is because “only in a metaphorical sense can we feel guilty for the sins of our fathers or our people or of mankind, in short for deeds we have not done.” The claim of collective guilt works to exonerate those who carry real culpability. In other words “where all are guilty, no one is.”²⁵¹

Based on this formulation, it can be said that Turkish citizens carry political responsibility for the actions of the Turkish state. However they need not necessarily be identified as guilty subjects, as they have not personally committed the acts of genocide, or supported them. All Turkish citizens – most particularly those of Turkish origin, who lived under the guilty administration of the Ottoman-Turkish state, are expected to accept political responsibility for its crimes.

However the guilt that can be attributed to them is limited to this. They cannot be held responsible for the criminal, moral, or metaphysical guilt of the atrocities carried out towards the Armenians. This is because, according to Jaspers’ terms, a “categorical judgement of a people” (with criminal, moral or metaphysical guilt) would be unjust, as it would deny the individuality, diversity and agency of citizens.²⁵²

4.1.3 Reconciliation

Apologies may seem an inappropriate or trivial act to carry out after an act of mass atrocity such as genocide, considering the scale of destruction and the legacies of suffering that it brings. As Kılıçdağı says for the Armenian context, it is “difficult to talk of justice because it is hard to talk of something to be repaired, because what is lost has been lost in an irrevocable way.” He points that while justice cannot be reached in this

²⁴⁹ Arendt, *Responsibility*, 147.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁵² Jaspers, *The Question of*, 33-35.

sense, steps can be taken to deal with the issues faced by Armenians in Turkey.²⁵³

Despite the scale of destruction of the atrocities they may be carried out for, collective apologies when successful can carry out a positive role in promoting recovery of the community and a step towards righting of the wrongdoing. An apology carried out after mass violence is a form of restorative justice and aims at “rebuilding” the community and facilitating reconciliation. As Andrieu states, for victims the acknowledgement of the injustice and its effects through the apology as a “public act of contrition” carry more value than forms of retributive justice such as courts, truth commissions, and material reparations or prosecutions which focus more on “closing the books.” Apologies in this sense fill a symbolic role of restitution, and are forms of restorative justice.²⁵⁴

In this sense the ‘I Apologize’ campaign, despite its issues of a real acknowledgement and the issue of responsibility forms a step towards societal recognition of the injustice. The significance of the campaign, despite its shortcomings in various aspects, is heightened by the context of denialism in Turkey regarding the Armenian genocide. In this context where there is no recognition of the wrongdoing, the ancestors of the genocide victims are lacking, because they are “unable to mourn” and to “satisfy their feelings of justice.”²⁵⁵

Bercuhi Berberyan says that the issue of acknowledgement is more significant than an apology. She states that for her personally, an apology is not necessary, as long as the state ends denial and is sincere in expressing its remorse to the community. She says that denial is the biggest issue for her;

“I as an individual am disturbed only by this. They should stop saying “Armenian lies,” “alleged genocide”. (They should say) “Yes it happened.” “We apologize.” - Or don’t apologize. It’s not a

²⁵³ Personal Interview with Ohannes Kılıçdağı on 7 April 2015.

²⁵⁴ Kora Andrieu, " 'Sorry for the Genocide', " 5;
Elazar Barkan, "Reconciliation Beyond Subjective Histories" in *Prospects for Reconciliation: Theory and Practice*, (Bonn: dvv international, 2011) 13;

²⁵⁵ Danzikyan, "Özür, Yüzleşme, Yas"

problem. But let them say that “yes it happened.” That is enough for me. I am a middle-aged person now. What would I want from the state- would I go and ask for compensation? What would it matter to me if they apologize-what would happen if they apologize? But my grandmother was a *kılıç artığı*.²⁵⁶ I know... But he (the state) looking right into my face, tells me that something I know happened did not, that I am a liar. This upsets me the most. It gives me pain. That is why it is enough. The end of denial. Let it not be denied, I think this is enough.”²⁵⁷

The apology campaign was a civilian initiative of countering the denial of the state. Since the campaign, while retaining its denialist rhetoric, state discourse regarding the events of 1915 has gradually changed from one of complete negationism to that emphasizing “common pains.” Alternative terms such as “*hellaleşme*” have been put forward to avoid full recognition of the genocide. The approach of the 100th year of commemoration of the genocide partially affected this change in attitude.

This attitude is reflected in an interview carried out in 2013 by the Agos newspaper with the minister of Culture Ömer Çelik, regarding the Armenian issue. Çelik described the genocide as “traumatic events” during a “time of a big drifting” and said;

“I think *yüzleşme* and *hellaleşme*²⁵⁸ are a bigger issue than apology. In the time of the Republic people were made to become diaspora due to their beliefs, their mother tongues, and ethnic origins even inside Anatolia. When mentioning *hellaleşme* and facing the past, we are also mentioning all this. Our future should not be stuck into the

²⁵⁶ Meaning “remnant of the sword,” a Turkish term used to refer to the survivors of the Armenian genocide which remained in Anatolia.

²⁵⁷ Personal Interview with Bercuhi Berberyan on 12 June 2015.

²⁵⁸ The term *yüzleşme* can be translated as 'facing' (the past) or 'confrontation' or 'reckoning'. *Hellaleşme* refers to a religious/cultural connotation of making peace with the other side by a clearing of all resentments/accounts regarding the past on both sides, by withdrawing any rights/grudges one holds towards the other due to his/her wrongdoing, a sort of 'letting bygones be bygones'.

parenthesis of the past. If we are to enter a reckoning, this is not a reckoning that the Turks and Armenians will do, but one the CUP and genocide lobby will (should) mutually do.”²⁵⁹

Çelik referred in his speech to “common pain” as a pain faced by both peoples which should not be taken outside the realm of grief or else would turn into an “instrument of radicalized politics.”²⁶⁰ Yetvart Danzikyan states that while Çelik’s suggestion of *yüzleşme* and *hellaleşme* sound positive, both terms are used in a problematic sense. According to him, the act of *hellaleşme* is not a solution, considering the gravity of the injustice faced by the Armenians. According to him, while an apology in the true sense involves the humbling of the perpetrator, his/her expressing the reason for apology and noting that it is accepted by the victim, *hellaleşme* suggests the opposite of ‘apology,’ in the perpetrator's maintaining of his hierarchic position of superiority and asking for a closure of the issue without defining the action of wrongdoing or accepting responsibility.²⁶¹ Çelik’s reference to demands for recognition of the genocide as a “genocide lobby” further disproves his sincerity regarding a “reckoning” of the past.

²⁵⁹ Bakan Ömer Çelik: Diasporayla Daha çok Konuşmalıyız,” Agos, 25 April 2013, <http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/4894/bakan-omer-celik-diasporayla-daha-cok-konusmaliz> (accessed 5 March 2015)

²⁶⁰ Ibid.,

²⁶¹ While I personally think that the act of “hellaleşme” can be considered a non-Western form of apology and a way of asking forgiveness from the perpetrator which *is* expected to include an expression of the act of wrongdoing without the hierarchy Danzikyan suggests is inherent to the term, in the case of the AKP it is true that the term is appropriated to propose an erasing and closure of the past enacted by both sides. Danzikyan astutely points out the AKP’s own attitude of demand for an apology and its declaration that there could be no normalization without an official apology from Israel during the Mavi Marmara events or its own refusal to apologize for the Uludere massacres. Yetvart Danzikyan, “Özür, Yüzleşme, Yas,” *Repair*, 16 September 2014, <http://www.repairfuture.net/index.php/tr/oezur-uzlasma-diyalog-turkiye-den-bakis/oezur-yuzlesme-yas> (accessed 20 March 2015); Erdoğan had referred to the need for hellaleşme in the earlier contexts, leading to clarifications on the meaning of the term, for instance by his political advisor Yalçın Akdoğan; “Yalçın Akdoğan 'Hellaleşme'nin Ne Anlama Geldiğini Yazdı,” *t24*, 7 May 2013, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/yalcin-akdogan-helallesmenin-ne-anlama-geldigini-yazdi,229335> (accessed 10 April 2014)

Ayata interprets the call for *hellaleşme* and the states taking of certain steps regarding the Armenian issue ²⁶² which initially seem positive, as pointing to a change in policy from one of “denial” to a more “flexible” form based on “management” of the minorities, aiming to appease the international arena and thwart demands for historical justice for the genocide. ²⁶³

On 24 April 2014 Erdoğan published a statement that offered condolences to the grandchildren of Armenian survivors and which described the events as "inhumane." The statement was offered in nine languages including Armenian. Despite its emphasis as the Armenian events as one among the “common pains” of the Ottoman communities in the era, the statement was received as a positive step, in that it was the first time a statement of condolence for 24 April by a state official had ever been issued in Turkey.

However in 2015, which marked the symbolic 100th year of the genocidal killings of the Ottoman Armenians, Erdoğan continued his usual attitude of aggressive denial. Turkey was faced with increasing pressure to officially acknowledge the massacres. In the face of large commemorations planned worldwide, the AKP announced that the 100th anniversary of the Gallipoli campaign would be marked with public ceremonies on 23-24 April, with Erdoğan even going so far as to invite Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian to attend the ceremonies on the same day as the genocide commemoration. ²⁶⁴

²⁶² The steps he referred to included the restoration of the Surp Haç Church and the Ahtamar churches and the returning of Armenian foundation properties.

²⁶³ Bilgin Ayata, “Inkar ve Devlet: Kati Olan Herşey Buharlaşmıyor.” Interview with Eren Barış. *Azad Alik*, <https://azadalik.wordpress.com/2014/01/10/inkar-ve-devlet-kati-olan-hersey-buharlasmiyor/> (accessed 14 April 2014)

²⁶⁴ Sarkisian: Turkey is Perfecting Distortion of History," *TheArmenianWeekly*, 16 January 2015, <http://armenianweekly.com/2015/01/16/turkey-perfecting-distortion/> (accessed 4 April 2015)

Sarkisian responded with an aptly worded letter, which stated “Each of us has a duty to transmit the real story to the future generations, and prevent the repetition of crimes and prepare the ground for rapprochement and future cooperation between peoples, especially neighboring peoples,” and pointed out that his own invitation of Erdoğan to the genocide commemoration was still unanswered

As institutions such as the European parliament, the Vatican and various parliaments announced their recognition of the genocide, Erdoğan adopted an aggressive language of negationism claiming that the genocide “which never happened” was trying to be imposed on Turkey, and that this was a futile attempt in which pains were being competed.

In the face of this attitude, human rights organizations under the umbrella group “100th year- Stop Denialism” carried out commemorations of the genocide and issued a statement demanding “recognition, apology, compensation and restitution.”²⁶⁵

4.2 The Dersim Apology

4.2.1 Format, Wording, Aim

The Dersim apology is significant in its constituting the first acknowledgement by the Turkish state on a mass injustice, as well as for its opening the issue of the massacres as an issue considered out of bounds to public debate.²⁶⁶ Kemal Kahraman states his own surprise over the bringing up of the Dersim massacres;

“Twenty years ago we would talk and say that the state will probably apologize one day for the Armenian events. But they will never apologize for Dersim. Because there is a refutation of the Ottoman period anyway, because (they think) 'it happened before me,' but Dersim stands at the foundations of the Republic. We never imagined that it would take place, and in a manner like this a political fight with Kemalism.”²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ “Turkey Rights Groups Demand Apology, Compensation, and Restitution for Genocide.” *The Armenian Weekly*, 19 April 2015, <http://armenianweekly.com/2015/04/19/turkey-rights-groups-demand/>

²⁶⁶ As Zırh points out in a media analysis, public discussion of the Dersim massacres, particularly reference to the events as a “massacre” that happened in “Dersim” instead of the terms “uprising” in “Tunceli” visibly increased following Erdoğan’s statement in See Zırh, “Aygün Röportajı” 2012.

²⁶⁷ Personal interview with Kemal Kahraman on 10 April 2015.

While the apology was applauded by its audience and was portrayed by the media as an important step by the state that would progress the Kurdish issue, a closer look at the enactment of the apology and its speech, raises questions over the sincerity and motivations. The context of the apology and the events surrounding it raise further questions on issues regarding its authenticity and effectiveness as a collective apology.

A first aspect of inquiry is the format and context of enactment of the apology. The apology took place as part of a speech Erdoğan gave in a meeting with the AKP provincial heads on a background of criticism against the CHP over the controversial remarks of its deputy Onur Öymen. Erdoğan would take on the Dersim issue a week after this event.

In the one-hour speech of which half an hour was devoted to the Dersim issue, Erdoğan called out a number of times to Kılıçdaroğlu and emphasized that the events had taken place under the Republican Party government and the CHP of today was its “inheritor.” According to him this was only one among similar events under the CHP administration, and this was not the responsibility of the AKP. While clearing the AKP (and himself as Prime Minister) of any responsibility in an apology for Dersim, he also emphasized that the AKP had no similar events in its past, and claimed they had no “dark faces” among their heroes.²⁶⁸

Kampf and Lowenheim, map rituals of apology into three prototypes, namely those of purification, humiliation and settlement. According to their schema, “purification rituals” are apologies that are employed by the transgressor to “purify” him/herself from a problematic past by “creating a new positive self-image.” In these apologies the apology act does not take into consideration the view of the offended in participation in the ritual, and while the apology is given voluntarily, the response of the offended him/herself “is not a necessity for the success of the ritual from the

²⁶⁸ A video recording of the speech is available online; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BH9ceDERfHs> (accessed 27 February 2015) “Erdoğan'dan Dersim Açılımı,” *Radikal*, 23 November 2011, Also See http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/erdogandan_dersim_acilimi-1070401 (accessed 6 April 2015).

offenders point of view.”²⁶⁹

The Dersim apology can be considered an example of a “purification ritual” in its enactment to enhance the positive image of the AKP by setting it in contrast with its rival party CHP. It can be said that Erdoğan’s ‘apology’ worked to dissociate himself, (as the one carrying an official status as prime minister), his party (as the ruling party in government) and his constituents (as a Sunni and largely Turkish/conservative/nationalist majority) from the past transgression of Dersim (as well as clearing himself of any other “dark periods”) by the creation of a positive and moral self-image.

Erdoğan’s speech, accepts that the events were not an “uprising” (as termed by nationalist responses defending the Republic) but a massacre, and an event that had disastrous consequences for the lives of a huge number of civilians during the time. This may have worked to convey to the larger Turkish public of the scale of the historic devastation in Dersim.

Kazım Gündoğan states that this is important in terms of the bringing to open debate what was widely known until then “Dersim Uprising.” He points out that;

“It was a mark on history, first in terms of the bringing to light of the lie of official history, secondly in terms of the states confession of a massacre. It was accepted as a confession in the name of the state, even if not an acknowledgement. Even though this “Dersim massacre”confession was later used as material for politics, it doesn’t change its quality of a confession.”²⁷⁰

However while his speech could be considered a confession in the name of the denialist state, Erdoğan’s speech was in many aspects a reflection of his *hubris* than of of humility, regret and reparation. He showed no sign of remorse, and regret for the events as is expected in an apology of the kind. Instead Dersim was used as a scene on which to set Kılıçdaroğlu as a culprit and to ‘defeat’ him as a political opponent. His proud attitude focusing on

²⁶⁹ Kampf and Lowenheim, "Rituals of Apology" 49.

²⁷⁰ Personal Interview with Kazım Gündoğan on 18 August 2015

cornering Kılıçdaroğlu through his Dersim identity, even when supposedly carrying out an apology in the name of the state (with the conditionals *if he* was “the one required to do this,” *if* it “existed in the literature”) misses the human aspect of the issue at hand that needed to be addressed, namely that the inheritors of the Dersim trauma are expecting an “acknowledgement and painful regret of the deeds, coupled with a declaration of regret.”²⁷¹

Erdoğan in his *hubris* aimed primarily to consolidate his political position and ignored the existence of individuals who are the inheritors of this suffering and trauma who are still waiting for reparations, and the fact that the aim of a public statement of remorse for a historical injustice should foremost be repentance and reconciliation. Erdoğan’s focus instead was on giving a ‘revisionist’ history lesson to CHP, and on ‘proving’ his own ‘righteous’ position with a constant reference to documents, archives, history and politics. While heralded by the media, the ‘apology speech’ skipped the basic requirement of an apology, putting into question the aim of the public act.

Erdoğan’s rhetoric in the speech which largely points to CHP as perpetrator also incorporates the victimization of the Dersim people into an existing discourse of the victimization of Erdoğan/the AKP/ its constituents, by Kemalist elites. This discourse focuses on reproducing images of previous injustices when the Kemalist elite was in power, and using this as a legitimization against criticism of various AKP policies today.

Erdoğan’s constant reference to Kılıçdaroğlu set the leader of the CHP in a position of both culprit and victim. Erdoğan on the one hand referred mockingly to Kılıçdaroğlu, quoting his to his desire to become prime minister, his attitude on Öymen’s remarks and his criticism of Erdoğan. On the other hand he himself acknowledged that Kılıçdaroğlu was a “victim” of the events. Referring to his “pride in being from Dersim,” Erdoğan called on him to come “save his honor” by daring him to take up the issue of Dersim. In what Ayata terms the “naming- shaming-executing of a Dersim-Alevi

²⁷¹ Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa*, 19

political subject”²⁷² Kılıçdaroğlu is in an absurd position as someone ‘of the victims yet symbolically ‘on the side’ of the perpetrators. However as Ayata says, Kılıçdaroğlu’s silence which “neither denies not accepts,” refers to the impossibility “to pursue a Dersim-Alevi political subjectivity within the spectrum of mainstream Turkish politics.”²⁷³

Kılıçdaroğlu’s own subjectivity as an Alevi from Dersim does not allow him the liberty of open denial of the events as massacres, as do his co-party members or the nationalists. However, as a member of the Republican Party which (in line with the large majority of other actors in Turkish politics) does not question its past, he does not diverge from the parties’ tradition of unconditionally defending its past notwithstanding the ethno-centric and totalitarian nature of Kemalist ideology on which it was founded.

While Erdoğan declared in his speech that "the biggest obstacle for the strengthening of the country is not being able to face its past, history, taboos and fears" and claimed that the AKP had not left any issues unquestioned, the attitude of the AKP regarding issues of the ethnic/religious recognition of minority groups in Turkey says otherwise. This aspect of the apology will be dealt with in detail in the chapter on reconciliation.

4.2.2 Responsibility

A significant part of the debate surrounding the Dersim apology was the issue of who carried the responsibility for the massacres. Erdoğan, as leader of the AKP, pointed to the CHP as the sole culprit, claiming that the party could not be disconnected from its past predecessor.²⁷⁴ While doing this he also pointed to leader of the party Kılıçdaroğlu, who was of Dersim origin.²⁷⁵ His statement of apology itself put the blame on Kılıçdaroğlu;

²⁷² Ayata, "The AKP's Engagement with Turkey's Past Crimes," 10.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ However Erdoğan himself refuses to accept that the Turkish Republic of which he is a representative of can be the inheritor of past injustices, particularly considering the Armenian genocide.

²⁷⁵ “Dersim is one of the most painful, tragic incidents of our recent past. Dersim is a calamity waiting to be put to light. Dersim is the most painful the most bloody of the numerous calamities of the CHP governments... It is not AKP not the AKP government

"Mr. Kılıçdaroğlu, where are you fleeing to? Am *I* to apologize or *you*? If there is need for an apology on behalf of the state, and if there is such a (political) practice I would apologize, I am apologizing."²⁷⁶

Kılıçdaroğlu, on the other hand stated in an interview that he could not be the one to apologize, as he was a victim himself.²⁷⁷ He claimed that Erdoğan was using Dersim in order to gain votes from the region.²⁷⁸ The similar attitude of his party was reflected in the statement of deputy Muharrem İnce; "What apology? We have made someone from Dersim a chairman, is there any a bigger apology than this?"²⁷⁹

In 2010 when the two actors had created a similar polemic on Dersim,²⁸⁰ the heads of two Dersim federations in Europe wrote a statement of appeal addressing both politicians entitled "Hear the cry of Dersim, do not exploit it with politics!" In the statement, they said:

"Dear Mr. Erdoğan, there is continuity in the state (as an institution). When Dersim was being bombed, the President was Mustafa Kemal, the Prime Minister Celal Bayar, and the leaders of the state today are the President Gül and yourself. The duty of the state to repair its injustices is in your responsibility."

who is to face this calamity, but the owner of this work the CHP. It is the CHP deputies of Tunceli, it is the chair of the CHP from Tunceli." "Erdoğan Dersim'in Belgesini Gösterdi," *CNNTURK*, 23 November 2011,

<http://www.cnnturk.com/2011/turkiye/11/23/erdogan.dersimin.belgesini.gosterdi/637777.0/> (accessed 28 March 2015)

²⁷⁶ "Erdoğan'dan Dersim Açılımı," *Radikal*, 23 November 2011, http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/erdogandan_dersim_acilimi-1070401 (accessed 20 March 2015)

²⁷⁷ "Ben Daha Doğmamıştım," *Hürriyet*, 14 August 2010, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/15561983.asp> (accessed 20 March 2015)

²⁷⁸ Ezgi Başaran, "Biri Anketlerde Olağanüstü Fark Atıyorsa Adayımızdır, Bitti!" *Radikal*, 28 October 2013, http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/ezgi_basaran/biri_anketlerde_olaganustu_fark_atiyorsa_adayimizdir_bitti-1157657 (accessed 20 March 2015)

²⁷⁹ "Muharrem İnce: Dersimli'yi Genel Başkan Yapmışız Daha Büyük Özür Mü Var?," *Radikal*, 24 November 2014,

http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/muharrem_ince_dersimliyi_genel_baskan_yapmisiz_da_ha_buyuk_ozur_mu_var-1238554 (accessed 20 March 2015)

²⁸⁰ "Erdoğan Dersim'in Köylerini CHP Bombaladı," *CNNTURK*, 14 August 2010, <http://www.cnnturk.com/2010/turkiye/08/14/erdogan.dersimin.koylerini.chp.bombaladi/586699.0/> (accessed 20 March 2015)

Pointing out that the people of Dersim had been “waiting for an apology from the state for 72 years;” they called out for the Prime Minister to show that he understood the pain of Dersim “not only with words, but with practical steps.” They also called to Kılıçdaroğlu;

“Do not close your ears to the cries of your relatives killed in 1938 in the foot of the Düzgün Bava Mountain. As a member of a proud and persecuted people, as a member of Dersim, hear the cries of your ancestors.”²⁸¹

Thus it was an ironic situation where members of the Dersim community were calling out to another member of the community, who was at the same time representative of an entity that carried responsibility for the past of Dersim.

This time in 2011, Erdoğan’s statement on Dersim was not just a remark but the theme of a whole speech which included the issue of apology. His statements on responsibility for the massacres were pointedly directed at the opposition party, who passed responsibility back to the state.

Addressing this shifting of blame, Selahattin Demirtaş, the head of the pro-Kurdish BDP party addressed both parties saying that there was “ no need to blame each other ” that “all were guilty” and had to apologize separately, both as the state and as a party.²⁸² There is a consensus on looking at the state to apologize for acts of previous administrations. The state is seen as an entity which is historically “continuous in time” notwithstanding the individuals which constitute it at any time. Officials representing the state thus are expected to apologize for injustices committed by their predecessors even if there is no direct causation between them and the events.²⁸³

²⁸¹ Quoted in Cengiz Çandar, "Dersimin Çılgılığı," *Radikal*, 17 August 2010, http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/cengiz_candar/dersimin_cigli-1013996 (accessed 20 March 2015)

²⁸² "Ulan Hepiniz Oradaydınız Be," *t24*, 18 November 2014, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/demirtastan-dersim-ozru-tepkisi-ulan-hepiniz-oradaydiniz-be,277485> (accessed 24 March 2015)

²⁸³ Thaler, "Just Pretending," 11; Michael Cunningham 2008, "Saying Sorry: The Politics of Apology." *The Political Quarterly* 70, 3 (1999): 285-93. 254.

In the Dersim case while the state, the AKP and the CHP accept the basic premise that massacres took place where civilians were killed on a mass scale; they refuse to accept total and unwavering responsibility for the events. Erdoğan points to the CHP as responsible; however as Haydar Karataş a writer from Dersim points out, he ignores the role of individuals of the conservative right like the prime minister of the period Celal Bayar, the head of the armed forces Fevzi Çakmak, or of the general Kazım Karabekir who wrote a report in 1909 on necessity of a military intervention on Dersim.²⁸⁴

The responsibility of the past massacres of Dersim cannot be put on any one of the involved parties today, and must be confronted by all of these groups. As Gündoğan states the Dersim massacres must primarily be understood as a product of the mentality of the state;

“It has been verified that the Dersim genocide has been realized with the collective mind of the state. It is a product of the homogenizing policies of the Turkic-Islamist mentality of the one-state government in power. Because of this, it is problematic to carry out the debate in terms of that party or this person, and it would be a political game towards eliminating the responsibility of the state. An unhealthy state mentality is the one responsible for the massacre, so a democratic state mentality should act with this responsibility and apologize.”²⁸⁵

A real reckoning of events such as Dersim can only be possible with as a change in the character of the power structure. Currently it is widely understood that while the AKP took the initiative on various reforms, the Party does not radically differ from previous structure in power, and the system is in place only with a face change.

²⁸⁴ Haydar Karataş, "Erdoğan Tarihle Hesaplaşamaz," interview by İbrahim Varlı, *Birgün*, <http://www.haydarkaratas.com/birgun-gazetesi-soylesi-erdogan-tarihle-hesaplasamaz-basindan-28.aspx> (accessed 26 March 2015)

²⁸⁵ Personal Interview with Kazım Gündoğan on 18 August 2015

Ayata states that the Dersim apology speech is part of the AKP's attempt to produce a new regime of truth while reproducing the official narrative of the state. Thus the AKP employs the discourse of facing the past and brings up certain events while ignoring the more recent massacres of Maraş, Çorum and Sivas in which its conservative and nationalist constituents are implicated.²⁸⁶

Referring this strategy of the AKP to deal with Dersim but not other acts of culpability, Kazım Öz says;

“ Because it is a massacre that took place during the previous generation, it is considered sort of as “unidentified” by these. (the AKP). However they *themselves* are the assailants, they are unaware of this. *They* continue the power structure. The CHP of the 30's, the AKP of today. There is no difference. Was there a revolution in Turkey and then new parties were formed? ”²⁸⁷

While the AKP presents itself as a break from the past, the CHP refuses to accept that it is the predecessor of a party that which was involved in violence against its own citizens. The party refuses to look critically at its past and particularly the period of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, which is regarded as sacrosanct and unquestionable. The involvement of Atatürk in the massacres was also not mentioned by Erdoğan.²⁸⁸

In this sense even though the AKP has carried out a relentless attack on Kemalist state elites as a way of consolidating its own power, the human rights violations carried out in the name of Kemalist ideology still remain unquestioned except on the level of public discourse generated towards creating a certain righteous image. While the ongoing effects of state policies on generations of Turkish society are still not accounted for,

²⁸⁶ Ayata, "The AKP's Engagement with Turkey's Past Crimes," 2-3.

²⁸⁷ Personal Interview with Kazım Öz on 7 June 2015.

²⁸⁸ See Aygün's interview which also dwells on the involvement of Atatürk; "CHP'li Hüseyin Aygün: Dersim Katliamının Sorumlusu Devlet ve CHP'dir," *Zaman*, 10 November 2011, http://www.zaman.com.tr/politika_chpli-huseyin-aygun-dersim-katliaminin-sorumlusu-devlet-ve-chpdir_1200334.html (accessed 5 April 2015)

attempts like an apology, which is not accompanied by attempts to change social structures of injustice remain “hollow gestures” of speech acts.²⁸⁹

4.2.3 Reconciliation

In her book *Breaking the Cycles of Hatred*, Martha Minow points out that although law can fall inadequate as a response to mass atrocities, inaction has far worse effects. The lack of a collective response removes the basic form of acknowledgement of the injustice, and without it the victims face “too much memory” or “too much forgetting.” Dwelling too much on the past can lead to the blaming of groups and feelings of revenge. On the other hand a lack of response to the incidents can lead to an intergenerational transmission of trauma for the victims as well as a risk of repetition of the atrocities by perpetrator groups.²⁹⁰

One objective of apologies is to ensure that reconciliation takes place, firstly through acknowledgement of the injustice done towards the victims. Then after forgiveness is asked of them it must be ensured that changes in social relations as well as political and legal arrangements take place, both to amend for the past wrong and to give the victims assurance that it will not happen again.²⁹¹

The Dersim massacres involve a necessity of reconciliation of both Turkish society with its history and of Turks with Kurds and Alevis today. While Turkish society has since the 1990's become more exposed to its past through an introduction of revisionist history by certain writers, scholars and publications, this is still confined to a small part of mainly university educated and liberal/left segment of society.

²⁸⁹ Zohar Kampf, "The Discourse of Public Apologies: Modes of Realization, Interpretation and Mediation" in, *Public Apology Between Ritual and Regret. Symbolic Excuses on False Pretenses or True Reconciliation out of Sincere Regret?*, ed. D Cuyoers, Daniel Jannsen, Jacques Haers and Barbara Segaert, (Amsterdam/New York : Brill/Rodopi, 2013) 158; For instance the acquittal of all the Balyoz defendants in 2014, or the lack of any indictment of any individual for the extrajudicial killings of thousands of Kurdish individuals in the 1990's.

²⁹⁰ Minow, *Breaking the Cycles of Hatred*, 16.

²⁹¹ Nobles, *The Politics of Official*, 112-139.

Reparations for the Kurdish issue are still non-existent. All the injustices carried out against the Kurds by the state, particularly in the 1980's following the military coup and in the 1990's including the tortures of the Diyarbakır Prison, forced disappearances, mass graves, extra-judicial killings, the forced evacuation of villages still remain unaccounted for and their perpetrators granted impunity. It can be said that apologizing for the Dersim massacre is an easy way out, passing over all the more recent injustices whose perpetrators are unpunished and whose victims are still alive and waiting for acknowledgement of their suffering in the hands of the state.

The other background, which the Dersim apology is set upon, is the Alevi issue. The Alevis who make up around 15 percent of Turkey's population have historically faced discrimination by the Sunni majority, which include numerous events of violence. Among these are the Maraş, Malatya, Çorum, Sivas, Ümraniye and Gazi incidents.²⁹² Most recently 7 of the deaths, which happened during the Gezi events, were of Alevi individuals.²⁹³ While Dersim constitutes a milestone in the collective memory of Alevis, it is only one among other events of injustice.

While the Dersim massacre is connected to the Kurdish and Alevi issues, if one chooses to review the prospects of reconciliation in a more micro lens, looking at the Dersim community specifically, an analysis of the consequences of the Dersim massacre still cannot be confined to the geography of the region or to the time period of 1937-8.

The attempt to destroy the population of Dersim through a military operation of genocidal scale was followed by massive population resettlement and exile. The interventions would have disastrous effects on the demographics which still last until today. There are still vast areas that

²⁹² Zeynep Alemdar and Rana Birden Çorbacıoğlu. "Alevis and the Turkish State," *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Istanbul 10:4 (2012): 119.

²⁹³ Ayfer Karakaya- Stump, "Geziyi Alevileştirmek," *Dersim News* <http://dersimnews.com/alevilik/geziyi-alevilestirmek.html> (accessed 4 March 2015); A news article revealed an analysis carried out by the security forces on suspects taken in during Gezi which claimed that 78% of the suspects were of Alevi origin; "Gezide Kaç Eylem Gerçekleşti Kaç Kişi Göz Altına Alındı", *t24*, 25 November 2013, <https://t24.com.tr/haber/gezide-kac-eylem-gerceklesti-kac-kisi-goz-altina-alindi,244706> (accessed 10 March 2015)

are unpopulated in Dersim, and the population only increases with outside migration.²⁹⁴

The coup of 1980 led to an increased attempt to assimilate the population of Dersim, with the forceful spread of Sunni Islam in the region through the building of mosques, the forceful sending of children to Imam Hatip religious high schools.²⁹⁵

The collective trauma created by these events would lead to an increased affirmation of 'Dersimness', which would present itself with a high rate of participation into radical political groups. Individuals whose origin was from Dersim would be marked by the state as a continuous potential threat, would be particularly under risk of being arrested on separatism and terrorism charges and would suffer more torment by security forces and police.²⁹⁶ Dersimness thus came to be coded in the Turkish public consciousness as being "against the state" and associated with "left political opposition."²⁹⁷

Gültekin and Yeşiltepe point out how clashes between the PKK and the security forces still take place in the rural parts of Dersim, and in the urban section protests ending with clashes with the security forces are a common part of daily life. Furthermore, one third of the *kalecols* or fortified military outposts, which have been built by the state in the east and South East, are located in Dersim.²⁹⁸ Constructed in the region despite the dissent of the inhabitants, they are often built on sacred locations or massacre sites and in

²⁹⁴ Ahmet Kerim Gültekin and Uğur Yeşiltepe, "Dersimli Alevilerin Makus Talihi mi? Dersim (Alevileri) için Yeni Fırsatlar mı? Kent Merkezinde Sünni Nüfusun Artışı ve Alevilerin Ötekileriyle İmtihani," *Birikim Dergisi*, 109-110 (2015): 108.

²⁹⁵ The documentary 'Olağan Haller' deals with the issue of religious assimilation of Dersim. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXpyTPA-Hzs>

²⁹⁶ See the account of prominent Dersim activists/leftists such as Nimet Tanrıkulu; Nimet Tanrıkulu, "İnsanlığa Karşı İşlenen Suçlar ve Zulüm Politikalarına Karşı Israrlı Direniş," <http://tr.boell.org/tr/2014/06/16/insanliga-karsi-islenen-suclar-ve-zuluem-politikalarina-karsi-issarli-direnis>, (accessed 3 April 2014)

²⁹⁷ Ahmet Kerim Gültekin and Uğur Yeşiltepe, "Dersimli Alevilerin Makus Talihi mi? Dersim (Alevileri) için Yeni Fırsatlar mı? Kent Merkezinde Sünni Nüfusun Artışı ve Alevilerin Ötekileriyle İmtihani," *Birikim Dergisi*, 109-110 (2015): 108.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

the eyes of the inhabitants are seen as “a test of sincerity which the state seems to fail.”²⁹⁹

Added to this are the ongoing construction and plans of large number of dams in the area most particularly the Munzur Dam, as well as mining activity. These have been opposed by the Dersimi's, and termed as an attempt at “cultural genocide.”³⁰⁰ This is because of the symbolic value of the Munzur Mountain, and the fact that the dams would lead to the flooding of sites sacred to Dersim Alevis, to the destruction of the ecosystem, and the further depopulating of the region.³⁰¹ Mass protests have taken place in the region opposing their construction.³⁰²

It is in this context, that the Dersim apology must be situated in, in order to evaluate its effectiveness as a symbolic sign of reconciliation by the state and Dersim, as it was presented in the media.

Gültekin and Yeşiltepe assert that with the recent moves of the state, Dersim has been turned into the “symbol city” of the Alevi and Kurdish openings, and an “illusion” has been created that the accounts of the past regarding the historical and contemporary victimization and suppression of all the Alevis of Turkey can be closed now, because an “apology” has taken place for Dersim, which is according to the Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu a radical “change of mentality.”³⁰³

The AKP in 2007 lauched an “Alevi opening” in which it attempted to “determine the main problems” of the Alevis and make necessary policies

²⁹⁹ “Observation Report on Dersim,” *Women's Initiative For Peace*, 20 July 2013, http://www.barisicinkadinlar.com/en/haber_detay.asp?haberID=370 (accessed 2 April 2015)

³⁰⁰ The slogan of the Munzur Nature and Culture Festival in 2012 reflects this perception; “Recognize the Dersim Genocide, the Dams are a second 38” <http://akunq.net/tr/?p=17121> (accessed 3 April 2014)

³⁰¹ “HES ve Barajlar Projelerini Durdurun,” *Evrensel*, 28 March 2015, <http://www.evrensel.net/haber/109008/hes-ve-barajlar-projelerini-durdurun> (accessed 3 April 2014)

³⁰² In March 2015 the Council of State stopped all construction of dams on the Munzur valley. “Danıştay'dan Munzur Vadisini Kurtaracak Karar,” *Bianet*, 25 March 2015, <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/toplum/163285-danistay-dan-munzur-vadisi-ni-kurtaracak-karar>; (accessed 3 April 2014);

³⁰³ Gültekin and Yeşiltepe, “Dersimli Alevilerin Makus Talihi mi?,” 108.

based on these.³⁰⁴ The opening was part of a larger project of a “democratic opening,” which was presented as an attempt to deal with discriminatory policies towards ethnic and religious groups in Turkey including the Kurds, the Alevis and the Romani people and initiate a reconciliation of these groups and the state. The ‘opening’ involved workshops organized by the government with members of the Alevi community and federations.

However five years later, the Alevis demands are essentially the same. Davutoğlu has used a more compromising discourse towards minorities than his predecessor. In 2014 the Dersim issue would be raised again when Davutoğlu referred to the former apology by Erdoğan, praising it “as symbolic, but a sign of a change of mentality” and referring to the depth of the massacres calling it a “modern Kerbela.”³⁰⁵ He stated "although it might seem symbolic, it pointed to new period that the prime minister of the Turkish Republic had apologized from all Alevis and citizens, in the name of the state for Dersim."³⁰⁶ Davutoğlu also declared he would continue the 'opening' and was presented with the demands of the Alevi community, which were mostly the same.³⁰⁷

Most recently an Alevi conference held by the HDP stated 14 demands of the community, including the formal recognition of Alevi identity and institutions, the acknowledgement of grievances caused by the state and the Sunni majority, the formation of truth commissions to research

³⁰⁴ “Alevi Çalıştayları Nihai Raporu” pg.10, T.C. Başbakanlık (Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry), Ankara.

³⁰⁵ Referring to the historical event involving the martyrdom of Ali, spiritual leader of the Alevis during the Battle of Karbala (680); A few days later Sezgin Tanrikulu the vice-chairman of the CHP, apologized in a television show for the massacres. The apology which had taken place on his own initiative, was met by protests from other CHP deputies, like Onur Öymen that this was unacceptable as it consisted an attack on the period of Atatürk and thus on Atatürk himself.

³⁰⁶ “Davutoğlu: Dersim Modern Kerbela’ydı,” *BBC Türkçe*, 8 November 2014, http://www.bbc.co.uk/turkce/haberler/2014/11/141108_davutoglu (accessed 13 April 2015)

³⁰⁷ “İşte Hükümetin Alevi Formülleri!,” *Radikal*, 3 December 2014, http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/iste_hukümetin_alevi_formulleri-1244684 (accessed 13 April 2015)

into the atrocities carried out against Alevis, and the ensuring of reparations for those victimized in the past.³⁰⁸

Kazım Öz says that the need to confront the past of Dersim is connected to the need to confront the more recent past, and for the reconciliation required today;

“There is a need to confront (the past of Dersim) not as if it is an event that happened a long time ago in the past, but knowing its meaning for today. Turkish society needs to face itself regarding this, there is need for self-criticism. Until a short while earlier there was; especially in the Sunni Turkish perception a serious denial of the Kurdish perception (existence). Actually confronting Dersim means facing the 1990’s, or rather with all of Republican history. (...) There is the need for society to face the past, to be healed. In this sense we can see it as a sickness. A societal sickness, and the Dersim massacre is one of the steps for this treatment.”³⁰⁹

A small but symbolic step to erasing the scars of the massacres was taken in 2014 by the Dersim municipality of the BDP in its changing of the names of streets and roads in Dersim, which had been named after those responsible for the 1938 massacres.³¹⁰ The same demands had been made to the state for the changing of the name of Tunceli back into Dersim, the changing of the name of the Sabiha Gökçen Airport and the military barracks in the Elazığ province named after Abdullah Alpdoğan.³¹¹ In 2012

³⁰⁸ "HDK'nın Alevi Konferansından 19 Maddelik Çözüm Paketi," *Radikal*, 6 April 2014, (accessed 13 April 2015) http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/hdknin_alevi_konferansindan_19_maddelik_cozum_paketi-1329480

³⁰⁹ Personal Interview with Kazım Öz on 7 June 2015.

³¹⁰ "Dersim Sokaklarından 1938'in İzleri Siliniyor," *İMC*, 3 April 2014, <http://www.imctv.com.tr/10544/2014/04/dersim-sokaklarindan-1938in-izleri-siliniyor/>, (accessed 13 April 2015)

³¹¹ Sabiha Gökçen was a pilot who took place in the massacres as an aerial bomber and the adopted daughter of Atatürk. Alpdoğan was the administrator of the massacres. "Group Calls for Renaming of Airport, Barracks Renamed After Dersim Massacre Actors," *Today's Zaman*, November 8 2011, http://www.todayszaman.com/national_group-calls-for-renaming-of-airport-barracks-named-after-dersim-massacre-actors_262072.html; (accessed 13 April 2015)

a memorial site was built by the BDP- owned Mazgirt municipality, which was a first for the Dersim massacre.³¹² These steps are significant as forms of memorialization for grievances through symbolic reparation, as is an apology.

On a visit to Dersim in 2014 Davutoğlu announced that the name of Tunceli University would be changed to Munzur that a Dersim Musuem would be built, and the roads to the *ziyarets* (sacred sites) would be rebuilt. However according to Barış Yıldırım, the lawyer and spokesperson of the Initiative to Protect the Cultural and Natural Legacy of Dersim, Davutoğlu by voicing these demands and ignoring the existing and persistent demands of the Dersim population has failed to meet their expectations.³¹³

Kemal Kahraman says that a lynch culture and if given a possibility the danger of genocide still exists in Turkish society. This is because the same system, mentality and norms of the past regarding “otherness” still exist unquestioned. He says “an apology is not an apology if it does not change the actual life of the individual it is addressed to.” The state must acknowledge Alevi belief, cancel political projects of intervention in Dersim and provide positive discrimination for the Zazaki language, which is under the threat of extinction.³¹⁴ Without steps to amend for the past, and acknowledging the current needs of the victims, apology is meaningless.

When compared to the past periods of the Republic it can be said that the attitude of the state towards Dersim and reparations for its past are better than ever before. But this evaluation is only relative to the past. There are legal and political steps that need to be taken to guarantee the rights of the Dersim- Alevi community and provide them with reparations for the past injustices they faced. The community themselves have voiced their concrete demands that need to be fulfilled in order to initiate true reconciliation, and for an apology to have meaning as a symbolic part of this reconciliation.

³¹² See "Dersim Massacre Memorial"

<http://www.memorializeturkey.com/en/memorial/dersim-massacre-memorial/> (accessed 13 April 2015)

³¹³ "Başbakan Ziyaretinin Dersimde Yankısı Hayalkırıklığıydı" *Bianet*, 24 November 2014, <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/toplum/160178-basbakan-ziyaretinin-dersim-de-yankisi-hayalkirikligiydi>, (accessed 4 April 2015)

³¹⁴ Personal interview with Kemal Kahraman on 10 April 2015.

Conclusion

Collective apologies play an important role in reconciliation as a symbolic form of restitution that can be given to publicly address and acknowledge the grievances faced by victimized groups in a post-conflict setting. Acknowledgement of the act followed by a sincere expression of contrition is a way of helping victims as well as perpetrators move forward from the effects of the past. As Rotberg says;

Since the utterance of apology is capable of muting recrimination and reducing bitterness, public acts of contrition are able to assist, accelerate, or commence the process of post-traumatic reconciliation in a manner that enables a nation-state to build or rebuild. Without the conferring of apology, a post-conflict nation-state may remain no more than a collective of contending sections and groups in search of a whole.³¹⁵

Apologies reflect a characteristic of the current age to express public remorse through accountability and acknowledgement for past injustice. The issue of reparation for the past has been dealt with in various societies that have suffered internal conflict.

Turkey is one of these contexts of a post-conflict nation- state, and carries in its historical record a long list of injustices carried out towards various ethnic and religious groups. One of these injustices which was formational to the building of the current state was the Armenian genocide which took place in the 20th century Ottoman Empire. The other were the Dersim massacres which took place in 1937-8 in the early years of the Turkish Republic. Both of these massacres were based on a mentality advocating the construction of an ethnically and religiously homogenous nation-state.

³¹⁵ Rotberg. "Apology, Truth Commissions, and Intrastate Conflict," *Taking Wrongs Seriously*, 33.

The massacres had disastrous effects for the two communities. The Armenian population, along with its centuries old cultural and historical heritage was virtually wiped out of existence. Today around 50,000 Armenians remain in Turkey, a nation-state which was built upon this foundational destruction. This population had to further face an aggressive denial and silencing of this genocide, by state propaganda and nationalist tendencies in society.

The Alevi-Kurdish population of Dersim similarly faced a destruction of genocidal scale when an estimated 40,000 persons were killed in a military campaign on the region. This would be followed with persecution on the surviving members of the community, in the form of forced relocation, systematic assimilation and societal discrimination. The Alevi-Kurds of Dersim today have voiced their desire for the recognition of their ethnic and religious rights and reparations for the injustices they have faced. However these have been met with indifference by the state, which instead of admitting its guilt, has taken up policies, which have added to the victimization of the collectivity.

In the face of state denialism, 2008 a group of Turkish intellectuals took their own initiative and started an online signature campaign inviting individuals to apologize for the denial of the *Medz Yeghern* as they chose to term it. Perceived by the public (through the interpretation of the media) as ‘an apology for genocide,’ the campaign received backlash from the majority, which reacted with nationalist feelings, while gaining the support of around 30,000 individuals.

A media analysis of the responses it generated shows that it brought up mixed responses. A large segment of responses including those of state represent voiced a refusal to accept that the Ottoman state (which was seen as a continuity of Turkish state and society) could be the agent of any such crime in its past, and dismissed both the victimhood of the Armenians and the agency of the Turks. They continued instead with the denialist narrative which defined the Armenians as “traitors” and the massacres as “tragic deaths” which took place as a result of war conditions. The apology in this

perception was an insult to the Turkish nation. Supporters on the other hand, saw the apology campaign as a significant step towards democratization, in terms of its generating collective awareness in an environment of utter silence regarding a past genocide, and of pointing out that individual conscience could take the place of institutional denial.

In 2011, it was the state, which brought up the issue of a public apology for the past, as the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made a speech that included a statement of apology for the destruction of the Dersim communities. The speech, which on the one hand accepted the scale of destruction in Dersim and the fact that it needed acknowledgement, included an apology as a conditional (*if* the state had to apologize, *if* it was in the literature) while directing most of the blame to the Republican Party CHP. The apology speech was the first acknowledgement of its kind by a Turkish state official in public and was received by the media as an important step showing the changing attitude of the state. However it was regarded by others as a political tool which instrumentalized the Dersim issue.

Apologies are expected to fulfill certain criteria, among the most important of which are; its involvement of an expression of remorse, a clear clarification of the wrongdoing at hand and a recognition of its harms, as an indication that the apology is accepted. Apologies are accepted as only a step to taking necessary others for reform and redress. When enacted successfully as Barkan states, apologies become part of “a recognition that transforms the trauma of victimization into a process of mourning and allows for rebuilding”³¹⁶

In this thesis I looked into these two cases of apology in the light of certain questions surrounding the issue of collective apology. A closer look at the format, presentation and context both apologies provide deeper insight into their roles, possibilities and limitations as collective apologies.

The ‘I Apologize’ campaign, took place in a context of denial both by state and society, where liberal intellectuals initiated a campaign of apology.

³¹⁶ Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations*, 323.

The text was criticized in terms of its wording, most particularly in its conscious avoidance of the term genocide, but also in its vague definition of the wrongdoing, of the wrongdoer as well as its addressee. The apologies use of the passive voice led to a lack of agency and made no reference to a responsible actor.

While the initiators emphasized the role of individual conscience regarding denial and that that participation was the personal initiative of the apologizers, the issue of responsibility was brought up on the extent that Turkish society could be seen as collectively responsible for the events.

Arendt and Jaspers provide a lens to look at the issue of collective responsibility. Arendt's conception states that collective responsibility endows one with responsibility for the actions done in ones name, due to one's involuntary membership in the collectivity. However this is different from the individual and personal responsibility carried by the perpetrator. Categorizing types of guilt, Jaspers similarly points out that not only the criminals but also the larger society are to be held responsible; albeit not guilty, for the wrongdoing of the state.

Through this framework, it can be said that while the state is primarily responsible, and is expected to be the agent of addressing the wrongdoing, individuals are expected to participate in the expression of remorse towards the wronged community, particularly considering that the victimization of the Armenians did not end with the genocide but continued through denial, a reshifting of the blame and of discrimination of the ancestors of survivors, who are carriers of the unresolved trauma of the past.

The "I Apologize campaign," despite its limitations can be considered a sincere civil initiative in attempting to reshape the dominant understanding of citizenship in Turkish society. On the other hand, its leaving out the issue of accountability and confinement to the individual conscience, as well as its lack of any follow up measures regarding the reparatory initiative, make the apology more of an act of catharsis, than an apology that works towards the enfranchisement of the victims.

With the approach of the 100th year of commemoration of the

genocide and increasing pressure from countries to recognize the genocide for what it is, as well as rising voices and a growing collective awareness from within Turkey, the state has been forced to take a new position. While maintaining its denialist rhetoric, the state has changed its discourse regarding the events of 1915 from one of complete negationism, to a more “flexible” one of “management” of the minorities.³¹⁷ In this vein it puts forward alternative terms to apology such as “hellaleşme” and an emphasis on “common pains” to avoid full recognition of the genocide.

Considering this context, and the reparatory role towards victimization that is expected of a collective apology, I argue that the ‘I Apologize’ campaign, although lacking certain elements of a satisfactory apology, is a positive step to addressing the victimization of the Armenians. The campaign maintains its mark as one of the initiators of the gradually rising awareness of individuals in Turkish society regarding the past.

In 2011, the same state which steadfastly refuses recognition of the Armenian genocide, unexpectedly carried out an apology speech for another genocidal massacre, that of the Dersim Alevi-Kurds in 1937-8. This took place through the publicized speech of prime minister towards party officials. The speech was heralded by the media as a significant step towards the changing of the discriminatory attitude of the state towards minorities including the Alevi- Kurds.

However analyzing the statement of apology in terms of its enaction, in terms of wording, presentation and aim as well as the context it was given in, provides a different insight into considering his statements as a valid apology.

Erdoğan’s apology speech took place during an ensuing political debate on Dersim. Remarks by a CHP deputy that legitimized the military campaign had led to protests by the public and a debate on the responsibility of the CHP for the events. Erdoğan in his speech would mainly take on this

³¹⁷ Bilgin Ayata, “Inkar ve Devlet: Katı Olan Herşey Buharlaşmıyor.” Interview with Eren Barış. *Azad Alik*, <https://azadalik.wordpress.com/2014/01/10/inkar-ve-devlet-kati-olan-hersey-buharlasmiyor/> (accessed 14 April 2014)

issue, making constant reference to the CHP and putting responsibility on the party and specifically the head of the party Kılıçdaroğlu from Dersim, as inheritor of this crime.

Throughout his speech, Erdoğan set a contrast between the “dark past” that the CHP had inherited and what he claimed was the clear and guiltless one of the AKP. The apology speech fits Kampf and Lowenheim’s term of apology as a “purification ritual”³¹⁸ in the use of the Dersim issue to dissociate the apologizer and the collectivity he represents from responsibility for the past, and ensure legitimation against criticism directed to the policies of the AKP today. The CHP similarly does not accept any responsibility or questioning of its past.

In the apology speech, Kılıçdaroğlu is disparagingly set as a culprit in a position of both victim and perpetrator due to his origins from Dersim and his representative role in the CHP. The speech is used as an attempt to corner and “defeat” a political opponent, is based on a conditional and ignores of the demands of the victims and their continued trauma. Erdoğan does not show any sign of remorse for the events, on the other hand he openly declares that his aim is to defeat an opponent through the issue. Thus the act is more a reflection of Erdoğan’s *hubris* than of humility, regret and reparation.

One objective of apologies is to ensure that reconciliation takes place, firstly through acknowledgement of the injustice done towards the victims, then through the ensuring that political legal arrangements take place as reparatory steps towards amending the wrongdoing. The Dersim massacres involve a dual necessity of reconciliation of both Turkish state and society with its past and of Turks with Kurds and Alevis today. However the issue of acknowledgement and reparations for the Kurdish and Alevi issues, whether on relatively recent atrocities such as the Diyarbakır prison and Sivas massacres or for the past such as the Dersim massacres are not in the agenda of Erdoğan or his government. The inheritors of the Dersim massacres have stated their demands on state intervention in the region, on

³¹⁸ Kampf and Lowenheim, "Rituals of Apology" 49.

steps to prevent assimilation and to ensure reparation for the past. However by leaving these demands unresponded to and unaccompanied by attempts to change social structures of injustice, the Dersim apology remains a “hollow gesture” of speech act.³¹⁹

Situated in this context of the attitude of the state towards minorities, including Alevis, Kurds and the Dersim population itself, and its response to demands for reparations of injustices and the recognition of ethnic and religious identities, I argue that this apology fails to fulfill its role in addressing the victimization of the Dersim population, in its enactment and dealing with the issues of responsibility and reconciliatory measures. The apology functions as a way of further consolidating the power of the AKP, as it deals with the Dersim issue as a tool against Kemalism, and only on the level of discourse, refusing to take the necessary steps for acknowledgement or reparation for Dersim.

As in the ‘I Apologize’ campaign, the apology is significant as a step taken in an environment of continued denial and discrimination. It is also similarly notable in its raising awareness in society regarding the massacres which had been undermined and legitimized as an ‘uprising’. However looking at its enactment, context, and the events following it, I argue that instead of working to facilitate reconciliation between the state and Turkish society towards the Dersim Alevi-Kurdish community which is much needed, the apology is not a ‘change in mentality’ as it was claimed to be, on the other hand it works to perpetuate the victimization of the Dersim people.

It has been voiced numerous times that if a confrontation had been carried out regarding the Armenian genocide, then the Dersim massacre would not have taken place. Looking at the case of these two apologies, it can be said that the conditions to ensure that these crimes will not be repeated are still missing from Turkish society and state. While the

³¹⁹ Zohar Kampf, "The Discourse of Public Apologies: Modes of Realization, Interpretation and Mediation" in, *Public Apology Between Ritual and Regret. Symbolic Excuses on False Pretenses or True Reconciliation out of Sincere Regret?*, ed. D Cuyoers, Daniel Janssen, Jacques Haers and Barbara Segaert, (Amsterdam/New York : Brill/Rodopi, 2013) 158

oppressive regimes which have existed in Turkey and carried out these massacres are no longer existant, in a condition of continued denial and impunity of perpetrators acknowledgement is urgently needed. This can only be possible through a re-envisioning of the past, and a questioning of the perceptions of both state and society towards self-identity in relation with the past and of Otherness. Apologies can only be effective and carry out their role of facilitating reconciliation in this context.

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