COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND NARRATIVE TOOLKIT IN TURKISH-ARMENIAN MNEMONIC STANDOFF OVER THE PAST

(GEÇMİŞTEN GÜNÜMÜZE TÜRK-ERMENI BELLEK AÇMAZINDA KOLLEKTIF HAFIZA VE ANLATI ARAÇSALLIĞI)

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Abstract: *Departing from two recent articles written by A. Davutoğlu and G. Libaridian this article examines the complex interrelationship between historical narratives, collective memory and cultural trauma in concern to Turkish-Armenian mnemonic standoff over the past. Proceeding from social cultural approach to collective memory as mediated by different types of narratives as cultural tools promoting remembering among groups it is argued that Turkish-Armenian standoff over the past to great extent is conditioned not only by history per se as by historical accounts available to members of these national groups. The author demonstrates psychological and political roots of the Armenian national narratives and memory and suggests new concepts and tools for tracing these national narratives and perspectives for attitude change.*

Key words: *Armenia, narrative, collective memory, Turkey, cultural trauma.*

Özet: *Ahmet Davutoğlu ve Gerard Libaridian tarafından yazılmış mevcut iki makaleden farklı olarak bu makale, son zamanlardaki Türk-Ermeni 'fikri' açmazını tarihi anlatılar, toplumsal hafıza ve kültürel travmanın birbirleri arasındaki karmaşık ilişkisi üzerinden incelemektedir. Her biri gruplar arasındaki hatırlamayı destekleyen kültürel araçlar olarak farklı türden tarihsel anlatılar ile oluşturulan bir kültürel hafıza, son yıllardaki Türk Ermeni açmazının hem tarihin kendisiyle hem bu ulusal gruplardan uygun üyelerinin tarihsel hesapları tarafından bu yönde bir şartlandırmayla oluşturulduğunun kanıtıdır. Yazar, bu yazısıyla, Ermeni ulusal anlatıların psikolojik ve politik köklerini göstermiş ve bu ulusal anlatıların izlenmesi ve bakış açılarındaki tutum değişikliğinin takip edilebilmesi için yeni kavramlar ve araçlar önermiştir.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Ermenistan, Anlatı, Kollektif Hafıza, Türkiye, Kültürel Travma.*

Two articles that recently appeared in *Turkish Policy Quarterly*—one written by then Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoğlu[1] and another by US-based Armenian historian, Gerard Libaridian as a commentary on Davutoğlu's article[2]—are remarkable not only because they touch upon a highly sensitive issue of the historical past for both parties, but also because they concern some fundamental problems that exist in the relationship between history, memory, narrative and politics. In what follows, I analyse some of these problems, which are presented in their articles either in explicit or implicit form, with the hope of developing a discussion in a productive manner. Let me begin with Mr. Davutoğlu's article.

Though Davutoğlu's article examines the different aspects of the Turkish-Armenian relations, I will consider only those aspects of this article that are related to the issue of the relationship between history, narrative, memory, and attitudes. Taken from this perspective, the gist of Davutoğlu's article can be summed up in the following theses:

1) Nationalisms, including Armenian, which arose in the 19th century (the "epoch of nationalism") required new historical accounts that distorted history (the Ottoman era) for their own purposes (in particular, for creation of a new Armenian identity.)

2) In order to reconcile Armenians and Turks both parties should make certain changes in their memories and thus achieve a "just" memory. The grounds for such a memory change are the following: a) Armenians and Turks had a long history of good relationship and shared intertwined culture in the past, prior to the events in 1915 and therefore both parties should recollect these positive history instead of focusing exclusively on the Armenian hardships in 1915; b) Not only Armenians but also Turks experienced great sufferings and huge damage and lost in that historical period and therefore more balanced accounts are required;

3) In order to get a "just" memory a joint truth commission of historians from both parties should be established.

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1 Davutoğlu, A. (2014) "Turkish-Armenian Relations in the Process of De-Ottomanization or "Dehistoricization": Is a "Just" Memory possible". *Turkish Policy Quarterly* Spring. (Available at:http://www.turkishpolicy.com/article/972/turkisharmenian-relations-is-a-just memory-possible-spring-2014/).

2 Libaridian, G. (2014) "Commentary on FM Davutoğlu's TPQ article on the Armenian Issue". *Turkish Policy Quarterly,* Spring (Available at http://www.turkishpolicy.com/ article/989/commentary-on-fm-davutoglus-tpq-article-on-the-armenian-issue/).

Responding to this article, Libaridian has written a commentary that can be regarded as an Armenian side's response. In his commentary, he disagreed with almost all suggestions presented in Davutoğlu's article. In particular, Libaridian disagreed with the thesis of Armenian identity as constructed in the age of nationalism. In opposition to this constructivist concept of nation, he viewed Armenians in terms of "ancient nation". Then he believed that in Ottoman Empire Armenians were of "second class subjects at best, and victims of massacres at worst, even before 1915". And finally, Libaridian disagrees with the Turkish perception of events of 1915 which he regarded as an "Armenian genocide"[3]. It seems there is only one point for which both sides agree – the importance of developing a dialogue. But, it seems quite difficult if not impossible to develop a dialogue if one cannot make a sense of the above oppositions. Is there a way to rationalize these oppositions in order to find out the new possibilities for overcoming them in a productive manner for a dialogue on a new level? In what follows further I consider the arguments of both sides in the context of an academic framework. My tentative hope is that such an endeavour will help to advance the dialogue between parties in conflict, and all those who are interested in peace and a better understanding of the matter in question.

Interplay of memory, narrative and conflict

Both articles in an explicit or implicit way refer to such concepts as memory, narratives, trauma, and conflict, which are often a subject of intense debates among scholars. As these concepts are crucial for our further exploration let me consider them at some length.

These concepts are in complex interrelationship between each other. Thus, memory has a complex relationship with intergroup conflict and reconciliation. On the one hand, shared memories and representations about the group's past can play a crucial role in inciting ethnic or ethno-political conflicts[4]. Similarly, memories of the conflict can create a serious impediment for post-conflict reconciliation[5]. On the other hand, collective memories can serve as a useful tool for reconciliation as well.

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3   Ibid, p.5.

4   Garagozov R., Kadyrova R. (2011). "Memory, emotions, and behavior of the masses in an ethnopolitical conflict: Nagorno-Karabakh". *The Caucasus & Globalization*, 5 (3-4), pp.77-88.

5   Bar-Tal, D. (2010). "Culture of conflict: Evolvement, institutionalization and consequences". In R.Schwarzer & P.A.Frensch (Eds.), *Personality, human development, and culture: International perspectives on psychological science* (pp.183-198). New York: Psychology Press.

Scholars have discussed two main strategies of dealing with troubled memories. One strategy calls for attempts to prevent forgetting[6]. For example, by addressing grievances and acknowledging past wrongdoings and injustice through various institutions such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in post-*apartheid* South Africa, one opens up the possibility to explore and create new interpretations of the past, which eventually bring peace and reconciliation between former adversaries[7]. One of the important corollaries of the activities of the TRC is the creation of a framework for new historical narratives. In some circumstances, however, it might be more conducive for reconciliation to let the past be forgotten[8].

Shared memories are based on a certain toolkit of historical narratives, but collective memories can preserve different, sometimes quite opposite versions of historical events than the one officially acknowledged and legitimized by history textbooks, thus, creating a tension between official and unofficial history[9]. Thus, collective memories that are preserved and passed through generation sin the form of community stories provide a fertile ground for negative attitudes and acts of violence between groups[10].

Recently scholars have turned to analyze the role of narratives for conflict resolution thus giving birth to narrative approach to inter-ethnic conflict[11]. Within the "narrative" framework conflicts in some essential ways are considered as competing stories[12].

As evidenced by many cases parties at conflict strive for legitimizing their claims by creation and dissemination of their own version of "what happened in reality" while at the same time trying to delegitimize the narratives and claims of their opponents. In this connection supporters of narrative approach believe that, for effective conflict resolution, competing narratives should

6   Asmal, K., Asmal,L., Roberts, R.S. (1996). *Reconciliation through truth: A reckoning of Apartheid's criminal governance.* Cape Town: David Roberts Publishers.

7   Gibson, J. L. (2004). *Overcoming Apartheid: Can Truth Reconcile a Divided Nation?* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

8   Devine-Wright, P. (1999). *Tracing the hand of history: the role of social memories in the Northern Ireland conflict.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Surrey, Guildford.

9   Wertsch, J.V. (2002). *Voices of Collective Remembering.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

10 Barton, K.C., McCully, A. (2003). "History Teaching and the Perpetuation of Memories: The Northern Ireland Experience". In E.Cairns & M.D. Roe (Eds.), *The Role of Memory in Ethnic Conflict* (pp.107-124). New-York: Palgrave Macmillan.

11 Winslade, J. Monk, G. (2000). *Narrative Mediation. A new approach to conflict resolution.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

12 Cobb, S. (2004). *Fostering coexistence in identity-based conflicts: Towards a narrative approach.* In: A.Chayes, M.Minow (Eds.). Imagine Coexistence. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, pp.294-310.

undergo certain transformations that could bring them towards convergence into a common narrative[13]. The underlying assumption is that a common narrative would help parties at conflict to create a shared, internally consistent vision of the past, present and future, which is considered as an important precondition for civil peace[14]. In this connection supporters of narrative approach believe that, for effective conflict resolution, competing narratives should undergo certain transformations that could bring them towards convergence into a common narrative[15].

Put within this framework, Davutoğlu's propositions can be considered as a suggestion to alter the Armenian and Turkish memories of the troubling past via some kind of narrative transformations. In particular, the author suggests narrative transformations towards two types of narratives that can be conditionally identified as: "shared, intertwined cultures"[16] and "common suffering"[17]. These narrative transformations he believes could shift memories toward "just memory" and bring reconciliation between the two nations.[18]

However, the possibility of narrative changes is not as simple as one might think. There are extremely powerful forces that can constrain essential narrative change. In what follows further I shall outline briefly a theoretical framework and present some experimental data on the narrative intervention into conflict that would provide us insights into some of such counterforces.

Narrative intervention in conflict resolution: empirical evidence

Based on mentioned above narrative framework I have suggested the model of narrative transformations which is aimed to contribute to change of memories, emotions and attitudes towards reconciliation. This framework has been applied to the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno Karabakh conflict [19].

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13 Cobb, S. (1993). "Empowerment and mediation: A narrative perspective". *Negotiation Journal*, vol. 9 (3), pp.245-259.

14 Steiner-Khamsi, G. (1994). *History, democratic values and tolerance in Europe: the experience of countries in democratic transition*. Council of Europe Symposium, Sofia.

15 Cobb, S. (1993). Empowerment and mediation: A narrative perspective. *Negotiation Journal*, vol. 9 (3), pp.245-259.

16 Davutoğlu, A. Op.cit., p.26.

17 Ibidem, p.28.

18 Ibidem., p.29.

19 Garagozov, R. (2012). "Do woes unite foes? Interplay of narratives, memory, emotions and attitudes in the Karabakh conflict". *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict: Pathways toward Terrorism and Genocide*, 5(2), 116-135.

I have constructed four types of narrative ("Common suffering", "Common cultural traits", "Blame third party", "Apology") that might be conducive to reconciliation between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in the Karabakh conflict. The basic question which guided my research was the following: What types of narratives are more conducive to attitude change towards reconciliation? Key to the study was comparison of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and non-IDP Azerbaijani respondents receiving the same narrative interventions[20]. I expected that narrative reconstruction would be more difficult for Azerbaijanis who suffered more personally in the conflict.

The attitude effects of narrative intervention in the Karabakh conflict have been examined by direct and indirect measures.

Detailed description of the experiments and the analysis of the obtained data is given elsewhere[21]. I will be focused on two findings from this research which might be useful for further discussion.

First result of interest is dealt with the fact that from the four types of experimental narratives, the "common suffering" narrative was especially strongly rejected on the explicit level by the respondents [22]. At the same time, it was the only one narrative type that had even if on a small scale a positive impact on IDPs' attitudes towards Armenians on the implicit level[23]. This fact provides a fragile hope that under certain conditions "common suffering" narrative might be conducive to attitude change among former adversaries.

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20 Currently, there are more than 600,000 Azerbaijani IDPs, that is, seven percent of the total population (one of the highest rates in the world). They were forcibly evicted from Nagorno-Karabakh and seven surrounding districts of the Azerbaijan Republic by Armenian forces soon after the breakdown of the Soviet Union (CIA, World Factbook, 2012). The last and largest forced displacement occurred in 1993 and 1994, when over 500,000 Azerbaijanis living in adjacent districts around Nagorno-Karabakh were forced to flee in the wake of an Armenian military offensive (De Waal, T., Huseynov, T., Kharashvili, J. (2007). "The situation of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia". The European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs. 2012, February, 24). (Available   at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegistreWeb/search/advanced.htm?relName=NUPE&reference=385.5 52&language=EN).

21 Garagozov, R. (2012). "Do woes unite foes? Interplay of narratives, memory, emotions and attitudes in the Karabakh conflict". *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict: Pathways toward Terrorism and Genocide*, 5(2), 116-135; Garagozov, R. (2013). "Implicit measures of attitude change via narrative intervention in the Karabakh conflict". "*Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict: Pathways toward terrorism and genocide*." http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17467586.2013.861919; Garagozov, R. (2014). "Painful collective memory: measuring negative affect in the Karabakh conflict". Manuscript submitted for publication.

22 Rejection was articulated almost with the same wording which can be summarized as following: "how one can compare our suffering with theirs, as we have lost much more. We have lost our lands, homes, and all our property which they [Armenians] seized"

23 Garagozov, R. (2014). Op.,cit.

Second finding was dealt with the fact that negative affect measured in our experiments was significantly higher among the IDP and non IDP participants of the focus group discussions than in respondents treated individually. In other words, the non-IDP participants of the focus groups who presumably would haven't particularly painful personal experiences and memories of the conflict, have expressed higher level of negative affect than IDPs - individuals, who experienced lost and sufferings on a larger scale but treated individually. The results suggest that particular kinds of collective memory[24] which are shaped by social context of the protracted ethno-national conflict can even exceed individual memory in yielding strong emotions among individuals even in those who do not have painful individual memories about the conflict.

While individual memory is more about personal experiences, which might not be necessarily painful with respect to the Karabakh conflict, collective memory serves as a reminder of social norms, perceptions, ideas, representations which are accepted in the given society with the respect to the matter at issue. In this regard, the Karabakh conflict is an issue of great concern in Azerbaijani society, touching upon with evokes strong emotions among all strata of population. This conflict or at least several episodes associated with it can be considered as *collective* or *cultural trauma[25]*. I suggest to call this kind collective memory which is framed by social context peculiar for a society with the cultural trauma as *painful* collective memory .

> *So, we have arrived at two concepts, - collective memory and cultural trauma. Both concepts are crucial for our further consideration as they provide some clues for better understanding of the powerful forces that are underlying Turkish – Armenian mnemonic standoff over the past. Let me begin with the issue of collective memory.*

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24 In this research collective memories are defined as involving "the ongoing talking and thinking about the event by the affected members of society or culture" (Pennebaker, J.W. (1992). "On the Creation and Maintenance of Collective Memories". Unpublished manuscript. The University of Texas. Austin, p.2.)

25 Garagozov, R. (2010). "The Khojaly Tragedy as a Collective Trauma and Factor of Collective Memory". *Azerbaijan in the World*, vol. 2, no. 10, March 1. Baku: Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy. (Available at:
http://www.azembassy.ca/ada/2010/ Vol.% 203,% 20No.%205,%20March%201,%202010.pdf).

Collective Memory as Mediated by Narrative Toolkit

In my considerations I follow the concept of collective memory which is developed within the framework of sociocultural theory[26] and especially Wertsch's approach to collective memory as mediated by specific kinds of cultural tools, in particular "textual resources" in the form of narratives. According to this approach historical narratives are considered to be cultural tools, promoting collective remembering[27]. Certain properties of narratives affect the collective remembering process in a very specific way. In this connection James Wertsch proposed to make distinction between «specific narratives" and "schematic narrative templates" (SNT)[28].

According to the author, specific narratives are surface texts that include concrete information about the particular times, places and actors involved in events from the past. In contrast the SNT provide the recurrent constants of a narrative tradition. They do not include any concrete information, but are instead cookie cutter plots that can be used to generate multiple specific narratives. These templates differ from one cultural setting to another and require special analysis to reveal their role as a basic model for constructing plot lines for major historical events, including events that may not fit particularly well in this scheme. It is also argued that narrative template is used by a "mnemonic community" to interpret multiple specific events by interpreting them in accordance with a schematic plot line. In turn, as schematic narrative templates are deeply entrenched with patterns of collective memory and identity they may resist any significant narrative transformations.

Following this line of reasoning we can postulate that Turkish and Armenian thinking and perceptions of the past are to a great extent shaped by their national narratives. Indeed, Libaridian in his commentary on Davutoğlu's article makes several explicit or implicit references to the Turkish national narrative[29]. In this connection it seems reasonable to look at the narrative toolkit of the Armenian mnemonic community that is underlying Libaridian's arguments.

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26 Cole, M. (1996). *Cultural Psychology: A Once and Future Discipline*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press; Wertsch, J.V. 2002. *Voices of collective remembering*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

27 Wertsch, J.V. (2002). Op., cit

28 Wertsch, J.V. (2002). Op., cit.

29 Thus, Libariadian writes: «it seems the Minister [Davutoğlu] has fallen prey to the propaganda spread by previous Turkish governments and their official court historians that the past of the Armenians can be sacrificed to the altar of Ottoman sanctity and, by extension, Turkish nationalism today" (p.4)

Narrative tools of the Armenian Mnemonic Community

One of the most important shared narratives that bind the Armenian mnemonic community together concerns repeated Armenians' "sufferings" at the hands of the "infidels," first the Persian fire-worshippers, then the Muslim Arabs, afterward, the Mongol "pagans," and later, the Turks. This national memory has encouraged Armenians to develop habits of emplotment, or narrative templates that lead them to interpret many events in a similar way – namely as suffering at the hands of external enemies[30]. In this regard, the Armenian historical writing tradition has a well-developed and specific schematic narrative template. The Armenian Church which traditionally patronized medieval history-writing has played a particularly significant role in creation of this narrative template. Based on the narrative analysis of the main Armenian historiographic works, I have outlined the following formulae of this narrative template what I called the ""a faithful people though surrounded and tormented by enemies"[31]:

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1. The starting situation (the "Golden Age"): the Armenian people are living in a glorious and valiant time, which is undermined by hostile intrigues, as a consequence of which:

2. The Armenians are fallen upon by hostile forces, as a result of which:

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30 In this regard it is worth pointing out that, in actuality, relations between the Armenians and the Persian court and, later, with the Arab caliphs, unlike relations with Orthodox Byzantium, were quite friendly (Walker, C.J. (1990). *Armenia. The Survival of a Nation*. New York: Saint Martin's Press, pp. 28–29); Even in regard to the Turkic tribes that adopted Islam and formed a huge empire, with Armenians ending up under their rule, their relations were less tense than in regard to Byzantium. The Armenian Church having been forced to wage a struggle against the influence of both Byzantium and Catholic Rome, was less fearful of the Muslims, who, in contrast to Orthodox Byzantium, which exerted ideological oppression and pressure on the Armenian Church, did not interfere in the affairs of the Armenian Church, and they granted freedom of religion, while limiting themselves solely to the collection of taxes (See: Boase, T.S.R. (1978). "The History of the Kingdom." In *The Cilician Kingdom of Armenia,* ed. T.S.R. Boase, pp. 1–33. New York: St. Martins Press; Darbinian-Melikian, M.O. (1986). "Foreword." In Iovannes Draskhanakerttsi, *Istoriia Armenii,* trans. from Armenian, foreword, and commentary, Darbinian-Melikian, pp. 1–25. Erevan: AN Arm. SSR; Ghazarian, J.G. (2000). *The Armenian Kingdom in Cilicia During the Crusades.* Surrey: Curson Press). These, however, are different "histories," which could hardly be desired, inasmuch as they were not in accord with the ideological attitudes of Armenian Church historiography.

31 Garagozov, R. (2015). *Collective Memory: How Collective Representations about the Past are Created, Preserved and Reproduced*. New York: Nova Science Publishers.

3. The Armenians experience enormous torments and sufferings.

4. If they remain steadfast in their faith, they overcome their enemies; if they depart from the faith, they suffer defeat.

To sum up, the Armenian cultural tradition has produced numerous "victim" narratives which are based on the mentioned above narrative template and which a left strong footprint on how Armenians perceive themselves and others. In this connection we can say that the Armenian narrative template mediates the effort after meaning in the Armenian "mnemonic community". It is a cultural tool that is widely understood and employed by Armenians when making sense of events, both past and present, and as such it provides a plot line for narratives such that they take the shape of the same story told over and over with different characters. In this connection, taking into account the strong "anti-Turkish" mode of the major Armenian historical accounts and the Armenian schematic narrative template, it is easy to anticipate Libaridian's disagreement with Davutoğlu's thesis - about Armenians' "good life" in the Ottoman Empire.

The same narrative toolkit is underlying Libaridian's disagreement with the constructivist or instrumental approach to nations "imagined communities" proposed by Ahmet Davutoğlu as applied to Armenians. Libaridian considered Armenians in terms of an "ancient nation". He takes this thesis for granted and does not provide any argument in support of it. For Libaridian, the thesis about "Armenians - ancient nation" is obvious and does not need any addiitonal substantiation. But let us consider this issue more carefully.

Indeed, there are scholars who albeit cautiously support the thesis about Armenians as an "ancient nation".[32] If we look into their line of reasoning we can see that they arrive at this conclusion based on the analysis of the texts of Armenian historical narratives. The logic behind these judgments is as follows: the presence of ethnonyms, terms reflecting Armenian self-identification in the Old Armenian historical narratives[33]. The problem with

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[32] See, for examle: Grosby, S. (1996). "Borders, Territory and Nationality in the Ancient Near East and Armenia." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 39, no. 4, pp. 1–29; Smith, A.D. (2001). "Nations and History." In M. Guibernau and J. Hutchinson, eds., *Understanding Nationalism*, pp. 9–31. Cambridge: Polity Press.

[33] For example, Grosby writes: "Evidence of the existence of bounded Armenian territory and the nation of Armenia within it (Greater Armenia) in the fourth century CE is found in abundance in the following works: Favstos's *Epic Histories*, . . . Agathangelos's' *History of the Armenians,* . . . Egishe's *History of Vardan and the Armenian War,* . . . and Moisei Khorenatsi's *History of the Armenians*"" (1996, pp.17-18). In turn, A.D. Smith, referring to Grosby, concludes: "[I]n the case of Armenia in the fourth and fifth centuries, Grosby refers to documents that offer confirmation of nationality in two areas, namely, delimited territory and a common language, to which we might add a sense of common origin"(2001, p.18).

this argumentation is connected with several different points. I have discussed them in detail elsewhere[34]. Here it seems enough to indicate that the overwhelming majority of the preserved Armenian manuscripts to which scholars refer as Old historical narratives, are dated to the seventeenth century and later. And more importantly, these narratives contain the narrativizing historical discourse (in terms of Hayden White)[35] that presents history as a coherent story with well-developed plot - beginning, middle and ending with a moralization. It should be noted that such kind of historical accounts appeared in the Christian historiography which had historical accounts in form of annals and chronicles (that is without plot and well developed ending) not earlier than the thirteenth century[36].

In the light of all these considerations, it appears that the Armenian historical works, which textually asserted a particular level of historical consciousness and development of ethnoreligious identity—and this is an indisputable fact—could most likely have been the product of a later time, reflecting a historical consciousness and ideals that are inherent to subsequent periods of historical development. Taken from this perspective, it would seem more plausible that the ethnic Armenian identity formed in periods later than those suggested by supporters of "Armenians - ancient nation" thesis.

Here I am not going into the dispute with the proponents of the primordialist view on nations[37]. My point is just to indicate the power of the narrative toolkit that mediates thinking and perceptions of the past of the member of a particular (in this case - Armenian) mnemonic community. This influence is also evident in concern to the most important and troubling issue which is at the core of the Armenian-Turkish dispute – the events of 1915 which Davutoğlu terms as "relocation of Armenians" accompanied by their huge losses and sufferings while Libaridian perceives it as the "Armenian genocide" committed by Turks.

Libaridian believes that "if to face the reality of what happened in 1915… there is no better word to characterize what happened than the word

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34 See: Garagozov, R. (2015). Op.,cit.

35 White, H. (1987). *The Content of the Form. Narrative Discourse & Historical Representation.* London: The John Hopkins University Press.

36 Barnes, H.R. (1937). *A History of Historical Writing.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

37 By the way, even A.D. Smith, a prominent and staunch defender of the primordialist interpretation of "nation" as an "essential" formation whose roots trace back to the historical past, who criticizes the "instrumentalists" for their postulate concerning the "construal" of nation, has changed his position towards recognizing political, sociocultural, psychological, in one word- "subjective" factors in shaping nation, by proposing so called «ethnosymbolism».

genocide"[38]. But the problem with this argument is that the perception of "the reality of what happened in 1915" is to great extent defined by the narrative toolkit peculiar for members of Turkish and Armenian mnemonic communities. One may argue that when it comes to 1915, not everything falls in the same category of memory; there are also archival documents, which, while they are frequently not very truthful either, do come up with different angles. The problem is that there is nothing special in these documents that might be diagnosed as a "genocide" in a way as it is done with medical symptoms. There is plenty of narrative evidence about Armenian suffering, losses and death; but how to term this narrative evidence is a matter of choice which is defined by political and legal decisions. In a sense, opening the archives does not essentially change the situation with the issue of "Armenian genocide".

There is another problem with the term. Armenians well remember how they were killed and massacred but they have totally forgotten, denied and refused to accept that they also killed and massacred hundreds of civilians. For instance, one may refer to atrocities and massacres committed by Armenian military bands in Turkey in period previous to 1915[39] or later in Azerbaijan in 1918.[40] The last large scale massacre committed by Armenian militants happened in small town of Khojaly in Karabakh in 1992.

So, if we have to accept one (Armenian) part of story should not we also accept another part of the same story. And if we call the Armenian part of story a genocide then how should we regard the part of story about atrocities and massacres committed by Armenians? In this connection we can see that the framing of historical episodes — deciding what to select and what to omit — to a great extent defines the angle of historical perception and interpretation.

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38   Libaridian, G. (2014). Op.cit.

39   Çiçek, K. "Türk Ermeni anlaşmazlığının siyasi kökenleri, tehcir ve dönüş üzerine yaklaşımlar". (Available at: http://www.ttk.gov.tr/templates/resimler/File/m1.pdf).

40   It should be noted, in this regard, that the state of Armenia was established in May 1918 on the territory of the former Azerbaijani Irevan khanate (the South Caucasus) which was conquered by Russian Empire in 1828. (The Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan. Legislative Acts. Collection of Documents. Baku, 1998, p.14). The creation of the Armenian state was accompanied by ethnic clashes and cleansing conducted against local Azerbaijanis (Swietochowski, T. (1985). *Russian Azerbaijan 1905-1920. The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community*. Cambridge University Press). Just recently published archives (forbidden in the Soviet times) provide us with testimonies in abundant number about Armenian atrocities committed in different regions of Azerbaijan. («*Baku. March 1918: Pogroms against Azerbaijanis in documents*», collec. by S. Rustamova-Togidi. Baku, (2009); «*Guba. April-May, 1918: Pogroms against Muslim*s", collec. by S. Rustamova-Togidi. Baku, (2010); «*Shamakhi. March-July, 1918. Pogroms against Azerbaijanis in documents*», collec. by S. Rustamova-Togidi. Baku, 2013.)

Indeed, there is no such a thing that might be regarded as an "objective" observer. According to Michail Bakhtin, the words we speak are always someone else's.[41] In this regard, as William Cronon notes: "The stories we tell about the past do not exist in a vacuum"[42]. He, for instance, demonstrates how the choice of a plot and its ending influences a description of the same event by two professional historians, resulting in two different stories[43]. Again, my point here is not to debate the issue of 1915 as it is beyond the scope of this article. My point here is to establish the perspective within which we could better understand the Turkish-Armenian mnemonic standoff. The impact of the Turkish national narrative on the Turkish perception of the 1915 events, by the way, has been to certain extent analyzed by Libaridian in another article[44]. From his analysis is evident that the problem of the Turkish stance on the issue of the "Armenian genocide" has not only narrative but also certain political dimensions. But the same is true regarding the Armenian hold on this issue. Armenian stance is also mediated not only by the Armenian narrative toolkit but by a certain political context. To be sure, the political processes involved in this issue are complex and in some aspects are unique. But certainly, these processes in some aspects are similar to what Peter Novick described for the political context that conditioned the Holocaust issue in the United States[45]. According to Novick, the Holocaust became "virtually the only common denominator of American Jewish identity in the late 20th century" as assimilation and intermarriage led to a thinning sense of Jewish commitment among the young. At the same time, he suggests, the rise of identity politics and the "culture of victimization" made it acceptable, even fashionable, for American Jews "to embrace a victim identity based on the Holocaust."[46] In the same vein, identity and memory politics are among the forces that define the Armenian's agenda of the "Armenian genocide". I am not going into the detailed consideration of its political dimensions as it is beyond the scope of this article. Instead, I will consider the concept of cultural trauma which is interconnected in some essential ways with collective memory and to certain extent is defined by political context as well.

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41   Bakhtin, M.M.(1986). *Speech genres & other late essays*. Austin: University Texas Press.

42   Cronon, W. (1992). "A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative." *Journal of American History*, vol. 78, no. 4, p. 1372.

43   Cronon, (1992), Op.cit., pp. 1347–76.

44   Libaridian, G. (2013). "Erdoğan and His Armenian problem". *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Spring. (Available at: http://www.turkishpolicy.com/article/889/erdogan-and-his-armenian-problem-spring-2013/).

45   Novick, P. 1999. *The Holocaust in American life.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

46   Cit., from Kakutani, M. (1999). Vexing New Book. (Available at: http://www.fpp.co.uk/Auschwitz/Novick/Michiko.html).

Cultural Trauma

The notion of cultural trauma should be distinguished from psychological trauma in some essential ways. If psychological trauma refers to immediate experience by an individual of a distressing or life-threatening event[47], cultural trauma is experienced by a group, irrespective of being an immediate witness or victim of the act of violence[48].More precisely, psychological trauma is experienced if there is a direct threat to physical existence of the individual while cultural or collective trauma may occur if community members experience a threat to their collective identity[49].

Unlike psychological trauma, which is diagnosed by psychiatrists or psychologists, cultural trauma is often determined or established by cultural, religious, social or political figures[50]. Cultural trauma also differs from psychological trauma in terms of its mechanisms and possible effects and outcomes[51]." Stated otherwise, if psychological trauma "operates" on an individual level and deals mostly with psychological processes "inside" the mental life of an individual, cultural trauma affects groups, their cultural memory, group identity and worldview or ideology. One possible way of dealing with cultural trauma could be identified as performing acts of collective remembering for rebuilding an appropriate identity[52]. Another option comes in the rediscovering or emergence of new ideology in a "traumatized" community[53].

In brief, cultural trauma that is perceived as a disastrous threat to collective identities can play a particular role in generating new ideologies, collective memory, and identity constructions. In this connection, cultural trauma often serves as the cornerstone for shaping painful collective memory which is able

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47 Foa, E.B., Keane, T.M., Friedman, M.J., & Cohen, J.A. (2009). *Effective treatments for posttraumatic stress disorder: Practice guidelines from the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies.* Second Edition. New York: Guilford Publications.

48 Alexander, J.C. (2004). "Toward a Theory of Cultural trauma". In J.C.Alexander, R. Eyerman, B. Giesen, N. J. Smelser, and P. Sztompka. (Eds.), *Cultural trauma and Collective Identity.* A: University of California Press, pp.1-10.

49 Smelser, N.J. (2004). "Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma". In J. C. Alexander, R. Eyerman, B. Giesen, N.J. Smelser, P. Sztompa (Eds.), *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity.* Berkely: University of California Press, pp. 31-59 at p.38.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid, pp.38-39

52 Aarelaid-Tart, A. (2009). "Cultural Trauma as the Mnemonic Device of Collective Memory". In: E. Koresaar, E. Lauk & K. Kuutma (Eds.), *The Burden of Remembering*. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, pp.197-221.

53 Hechter, T. (2003). "Historical Traumas, Ideological Conflicts, and the Process of Mythologizing"*. International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Vol., 35, pp.439-60, at p.442

as we traced it in our experiments to exceed individual memory in yielding strong emotions among individuals even in those who do not have painful individual experience.

Taken from this perspective, the issue of the "Armenian genocide" can be considered as a deliberate construction that reframed the Armenian tragedy of 1915 in a certain narrative which is currently at the core of the Armenian memory politics. It is not to suggest that this tragedy is simply a fabrication or product of the imagination of the Armenian mnemonic community. Instead, it suggests that politics (including memory and identity politics) is playing a decisive role in reframing historical events in certain ways.

Concluding remarks

We can see how powerful forces are underlying the Turkish-Armenian mnemonic standoff over the past. To be sure, the list of such forces can be much longer. In this article I have been focused only on a few of them: narrative, collective memory and cultural trauma. These can be considered as major cultural predicaments in the Turkish-Armenian mnemonic standoff. We can also see the social nature of these forces, their so called human "hand-made" nature. Unlike natural cataclysms such as tsunami or earthquakes, these socially constructed and socially sustained forces can be managed relatively easier. At least there is some hope that productive dialogue would provide us by means and vision for overcoming these significant cultural predicaments which are present not only in the Turkish-Armenian mnemonic standoff but can be also found in some other conflicts over the globe.

> *Taken from this perspective, the issue of the "Armenian genocide" can be considered as a deliberate construction that reframed the Armenian tragedy of 1915 in a certain narrative which is currently at the core of the Armenian memory politics.*

As Ahmet Davutoğlu put it in his article– "is "just memory" possible?" Responding to this question, Libaridian argues that there is no such a thing as "just memory" as these two words have different natures: one is a moral category while another refers to a fallible category of knowledge regarding the past[54]. Philosophically speaking, the answer would not be so straightforward as it depends on what do we understand by "justice" and

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54 Libaridian, G. (2014). "Commentary on FM Davutoğlu's TPQ article on the Armenian Issue". *Turkish Policy Quarterly,* Spring (Available at: http://www.turkishpolicy.com/article/989/commentary-on-fm-davutoglus-tpq-article-on-the-armenian-issue/).

"memory". For instance if we acknowledge the socially construed, instrumental character of the kind of collective memory that is "invented" or created for purposes that include eliminating the old images of enmity that feed collective experience and understand justice as "cultivating virtue and common good" [55] then we can probably arrive to kind of memory that can be tentatively called a"just memory".

> *Taking into account the complexity of the region where memories are so strongly entangled with politics, history and conflicts, including the long running Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno Karabakh struggle, it seems reasonable to develop a comprehensive and multileveled program that embraces the resolution of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno Karabakh conflict, opening of Turkish-Armenian borders, and a program of profound narrative intervention towards creating a shared and internally consistent vision of the past, present and future for the nations of the region.*

In any case collective memory is viewed as susceptible to manipulations, distortions, and inventions. Some scholars even talk about the "syndrome of false collective memory"[56]. Within this line of reasoning, the collective memories that are peculiar to Armenian and Turkish mnemonic communities can be characterized as *selective* and *painful*. But if parties stuck by such memories then it would be hard for them to come to terms with each other. In this connection, I would reformulate Davutoğlu's question: "*Is a more shared collective memory possible?*" Obviously, this is harder to achieve. Taking into account the complexity of the region where memories are so strongly entangled with politics, history and conflicts, including the long running Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno Karabakh struggle, it seems reasonable to develop a comprehensive and multileveled program that embraces the resolution of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno Karabakh conflict, opening of Turkish-Armenian borders, and a program of profound narrative intervention towards creating a shared and internally consistent vision of the past, present and future for the nations of the region. To be sure, each of these problems in itself is extremely complicated and hard to achieve but it would also seem that none of these problems can be resolved separately[57].

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55 Sandel, M.J. (2009). *Justice. What's the right thing to do?* New-York:Farrar,Straus and Giroux, p.260.

56 Lowenthal, D. (2001). "Preface." In A. Forty and S. Küchler, eds., *The Art of Forgetting,* Berg: Oxford International, at p. xiii.

57 In this regard, recent statement of Turkish Trade Minister Kursad Tuzmenn is revealing:"The Turkish-Armenian border could be opened only after Armenia gives up distorting history and restores Azerbaijan's territorial integrity". Turkey not to open Armenia border until Azerbaijan's integrity restored. *Hurriet Daily News*, December 20, 2014; (Available at:
http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/english/world/10506578.asp).

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