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Changing Turkish *Other* in Post-Soviet Armenian Discourse on National Identity

Abstract: The paper is focused on the definition of the *Other* in the discourse on Armenian national identity from 19th century onwards and, particularly, on its transformations after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It argues that with the collapse of the Soviet Union and establishment of Armenian statehood the image of the Turkey-Other or Turkey-Enemy of the Armenian *nation*, developed within the discursive project of the last two centuries, became challenged by the projects voting for the pragmatic interests of the Armenian *statehood*. The post-communist elites tend to revise the historical representation of the Ottoman period and to reformulate Turkey as a force the cooperation with which is "vital" for the successful development of the state. The problem of Turkey-other became the very point where the concepts of the state and nation clash.

Keywords: Armenia, national identity, post-communist, Turkey, elite, discourse, other(ness)

Introduction

For a long time, the struggle to possess territory not only symbolically (or physically) but also politically was defined as the *raison d'etre* of every Armenian political organisation be it a party, a paramilitary group or even a state. Echoing the west, already by 18th century, Armenians had declared that the real history of their nation would begin only when it acquired its own state. Nevertheless, so far none of the three states that Armenians possessed during the last two centuries gave them a sense of a fully sutured modern nation. The diasporic mode of ethnic reproduction developed an ambivalent and rather supplementary view on the role that the state should perform in reproduction and endurance of the nation and national identity.

The post-soviet Armenia became a reality that changed the "stateless" form of the Armenian nation and challenged their traditional concept of nation and national identity. The newly achieved national sovereignty and statebuilding signified the difference between the concepts of state and nation, ascribed them with new meanings and demanded an equal stand for both of them. The process required fundamental change of already existing definitions of the nation, its boundaries, past and future imaginaries, and of its *Other[s]* in a way to meet the needs of the emerging state.

Until 1990s, partly due to the history and partly due to the power of discursive articulation, the image of the Turkey-enemy had an unbelievably important role in construction of Armenian national identity and of its entire mythical system. The new

statehood challenged, first of all, Turkey's traditional image of enemy and the centrality of its main historical representation—Armenian Genocide of 1915 in Ottoman Empire. The conceptualisation of the *Other* became the "hot-point" of the post-Soviet discourse when the projects, voting for the pragmatic interests of the Armenian statehood, defined the "dialogue" with Turkey as an issue "of vital importance" for the successful development of Armenia (Ter-Petrosian 1990: 11).

The present paper is an attempt to analyse the definition of the *Other* in the discourse on Armenian national identity 19th century onwards and, particularly, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The paper examines the problem of *Other* within the general theoretical problem of discursive change that usually accompanies the transformation of nations from ethno-culturally organised communities into modern nation-states.

The paper consists of three main parts. In the first part, I make a theoretical introduction to the problems of discourse, identity and the *Other*. In the second part, I describe the dominant image of nation and its enemy-other that was formed in Armenian discourse on national identity during the last two centuries and which was challenged in the post-soviet period. I resist my temptation to analyse this part thoroughly though it is sublime in its way. Rather, I point out only some of the features of this discursive perspective and focus on the third part that is devoted to the analysis of the post-soviet changes in discourse on national identity in Armenia.

Theoretical Inquiry

Following *constructivist approach*, I argue that each age refashions its discourse on national identity to serve new purposes. New meanings of nation, culture, time and space become forces actively reconstructing the social reality. Whether nation or national identity are *invented tradition*, serving for the "practical purpose" of making society and state increasingly inseparable (Hobsbawm 1983: 13–14), or *products of politics of culture*, serving for the purpose of political propaganda (Agulhon 1981: 189), or both, their meaning is permanently negotiated, persuaded, and re-shaped.

I avoid traditional classifications of the forms of national identity into "ethnic" or "civic," though some parts of my research may resemble such attempt. I argue that though projects can emphasise elements that suit the traditional dichotomy, such binarism ignores the fact that the meanings of identity are constantly redefined by groups for the purposes of subduing, excluding, or competing with another group.

I rather follow the *discursive approach* to the phenomenon, which allows going deeper into the interconnection between socio-political processes, political agents and the dominant discursive concepts of national identity in a particular society. Following discourse theory (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Laclau 1994), I argue that the construction of national identity should be seen as a process of constructing politico-ideological frontiers of identity and dichotomization of social spaces into *Us* and *Them* through discursive practices.

Thus, following the theoretical positions stated above, I define the main categories of the analysis in the following way:

The Identity

Following Castels (1997: 6), I define identity as construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute, or related set of cultural attributes, that is/are given priority over other sources of meaning. I also view culture not as fixed, or present, or possessed since "culture is more often not what people share, but what they choose to fight over" (Eley & Suny 1996: 9).

The *Other*

National identity is intrinsically connected with construction of social antagonism. Social antagonism establishes boundaries of the national identity and limits of its discursive formation by excluding the *constitutive outside* (radical *otherness*) that has no common measure with the differential system and therefore poses a constant threat to it (Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000: 124). Constitutive outside and social antagonism serve both as conditions of possibility and impossibility of a social identity.

Construction of frontiers of identity and the antagonisation of the *Other* is achieved through logic of equivalence and difference that institute a frontier between social spaces of *Us* and *Them* (Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000: 11). Articulations may succeed in emphasizing one of the two aspects. Emphasis on the equivalence will tend to simplify the social and political space but the collapse of difference will lead to a *loss of meaning* since the latter is instructively linked to differential character of identity.

The Myth

Political myths and imaginaries are the main elements of discursive projects that articulate meanings in a way to construct society and social agency as fully sutured identities. Whether located in the past or in the future, myths and imaginaries fulfil the same function: they provide a 'principle of reading of a given situation' (Laclau 1990: 61). It does not mean that myth is a pure fiction. It is rather a mixture of truth and untruth, a perceived reality providing aspirations that have the power to shape the political and social agenda and behaviour of a group (Shafer cited in Gavakian 2003).

The Time and the Space of Nation

Definition of "what are we to-day" should contain an account of the time and the space of the nation. It should conceptualise "…the necessity of the past and the necessity of its place in a line of continuous development…finally the aspect of the past being linked to a necessary future" (Bakhtin 1986: 31). The time-space dimension provides the group with structures of collective memories and historical representations, to which individual memory is bound to conform. Memories as discursive representations of historical events have their own constituting function since they are not aimed

at representing the nature of experiences in themselves, but are functionally bound to represent them is such a way as to constitute and sustain one or another kind of social order.

The Project

The imagination of the nation is a complex process of discursive articulation of its various meanings and of attempts to fix them. Following discourse theory, I rely on concepts of *political projects and ideologies*, defining them as complex articulative systems that wave together different strands of discourse in an effort to dominate or organise a field of meaning so as to fix the identities of objects and practices in a particular way.

The Dreamworld and *Other*:
The Conceptualisation of Armenian Identity Before 1990

The first relatively coherent discursive projects of Armenian nation and identity had been developed already by the second half of 19th century, when a set of well-organised political organisations started articulating the leading idea of the time—national self-determination—with a central goal of restoration of "historically Armenian territories" in a form of autonomous political space. While differing in the definition of the final form of the political space (autonomy or independence) as well as its future political system, the political programmes of those organisations had more or less coherent vision of who Armenians were and what they should do.

Founding myths of common descent, chosen nation, ancestry, heroic age, decline and regeneration were consolidated and put into motion: Armenians' descent from Noah, being the first nation adopting Christianity as a state religion, sacredness of the ancient homeland and of the mountain Ararat, possession of a unique language, and many other myths were politically, historiographically, and literally confirmed and firmed as being 'the truth.' Along with the idea of liberation of the Western Armenia (Eastern Anatolia in Turkey), the constitutive outside of the identity was also taking shape: "the Turks," symbolising not only "the Turks" of the Ottoman Empire but also the Muslims neighbours in the Caucasus (Tatars, Azeris, etc), were crystallising as the main *Other* of Armenians.

The main structure of the supportive mythical system of the discursive project was also almost completed. The major political imaginary was the "Great Armenia" that encompassed the "Eastern Armenia" (Russian Armenia) and the "Western Armenia" (Eastern Anatolia). The political process, including international negotiations and resolutions, connected with the division of the Armenian territory in 19th and 20th centuries, political actions aimed at reunion of the ancient Armenia, and the recognition and compensation of the Genocide 1915, were defined as the Armenian Question [Armenian Cause]. The political struggle for its "just" solution was formulated as the Armenian Trial. Armenian Question and Armenian Trial became the discursive myths, conditioning the possibility of the imaginary of a fully sutured and "perfect" nation—Free, Independent, and United Armenia.

The Armenian national identity became "individuated," "internalised" (Castels 1997: 7) only in the second and third decades of 20th century. The Armenian massacres in Ottoman Empire throughout the end of 19th and the beginning of 20th centuries with symbolic name and date of "Armenian Genocide of 1915" became what Libaridian calls an "equaliser of identity" (cited in Panossian 2002: 136). It fused the symbolic (ideological) level of national identity articulated before with the level of individual experience of the majority of Armenians.

Whether it was the powerful articulative system of nationalist organisations, or the external genocidial action, or the modernisation that brought to the mass feeling of national identity is a question. However, the genocide provided the already established national identity paradigm, its image of enemy and mythical system with undeniable arguments of being "true." It was immediately incorporated into the discursive frameworks and ascribed with unbelievable symbolic strength and as Panossian rightly put, "The Genocide itself, and its subsequent denial by Turkish authorities, became the defining moment—the founding symbol—of contemporary Armenian identity" (2002: 136).

Armenian Diaspora and its Alter-Ego

Since 1920, roughly put, Armenians themselves and the discourse on Armenian nation went into two different directions—the part of it became the Armenian diaspora and the other part the Soviet Armenia. Until 1991, the diaspora developed as a stateless *ethnie* and the Soviet-Armenia as quasi nation-state. On both sides, the further "imagination" of the nation as a nation-state experienced discursive and political stalemate.

Diaspora, according to Safran (1991: 91–94), consists of social groups that are dispersed from a specific original centre but retain their collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland and a belief in and commitment to the idea of its restoration as their "true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants should eventually return—when conditions are appropriate." The diasporic model of nation and nationalism described at least half of those who consider themselves Armenians.

Thus any attempt to understand the meaning that Armenian diaspora ascribed to "nation" until 1990s should consider the fact that diaspora, in general, always tends to reconstruct the meaning of nation in a way to make its own existence possible. It rejects any idea of nation-state, expanding the frontiers of a nation and limiting the role of the state in definition of "national." In this way, any political project of diaspora, dealing with nation and national identity, will have a tendency to reflect the moment of its borderlessness and to re-articulate it through elements and myths of identity which, following Smith, can be characterised as truly ethnic (1991: 8–11).

There has been a long tradition of viewing Armenians as an ethnic group the boundaries of which coincide with religious and linguistic ones (Smith 1971, 1991). In fact, the actual religious and linguistic unity of Armenians exists only at mythical level—adoption of Christianity in 301 AD and its "unique" form of Apostolic

Monophysite Christianity; and invention of the Armenian alphabet (5th century AD). In reality, however, religious cleavages of Armenians are of great importance and history provides with numbers of religious tensions between Armenians. Language differences are also significant.

The myth of homeland and return, seen as crucial for defining the diaspora, is also loosing its actual significance. Today the ambiguity of the "Homeland"—"Republic of Armenia or Turkish/Historical Armenia?"—leads to the decrease of its discursive power. As Panossian mentions (2002: 138), "[the homeland] is the second component of post-Genocide diasporic identity: the nation is here and now, in us, in our assertion that 'we are Armenian' *in defiance of 1915."*

The "Genocide past" is the prime-signifier of the concept of Armenian identity in frameworks of the present-day diaspora discourse and with strength precedes myths of linguistic or religious uniqueness (Chaliand and Ternon 1983; Guroian, 1987; Hamalian 1987): "homeland," "religion" and "language" exist in the present which is too diversified. In contrary, the very term "Genocide" gives a greater sense of *Us* as of a homogeneous entity: what had happened was against *Us*—to a sum-total-ethnic-other.

Genocide has become a mass identity symbol. As Panossian notes, it encapsulates four major themes of post-Genocide Armenian identity—"we are a victim nation," "we are still suffering," "we have lost our homeland," and *"pahanjatirutyun"*—"we" should demand justice, revenge and retribution (2002: 137). In the same manner, almost all major events or issues, relating to Armenian national identity, are articulated together with the genocide signifier. For example, national survival and genocide survival merge and conceptualise the idea of a "white massacre," symbolising a fear of assimilation into the host countries with a consequent loss of national identity (Gavakian 2003). Diaspora articulates Nagorno-Karabagh conflict with Azerbaijan as a threat of 'another Genocide' if not defended against both Azerbaijan and Turkey.

Theoretically, there can be several *Others* for diaspora. While distancing itself from the hosting country, Diaspora my construct a political frontier beyond which lies the *cultural Other*, that threatens with assimilation. However, the Otherness of the hosting country can be neglected and even sometimes it can be merged with *Us* through a chain of equivalence (e.g. citizenship) if hostland reserves from interfering into the processes of the ethnic reproduction of the diaspora and, moreover, if it is seen as a means to achieve an ethnic imaginary. For example, the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), one of the main Armenian lobbyist organization in the US, urges Armenian population to send the following message of a fax letter to the US Congress:

> As an American who values the vital role of our nation in advancing justice and human rights around the world, I am writing to urge the creation of a postage stamp on the American response to the Armenian Genocide. Our response, as a nation, to the Armenian Genocide…is part of our great legacy as Americans and should be more widely known and appreciated (ANCA 2003).

Turkey-Other was and is qualitatively different from the cultural *Other*. As trauma, Genocide created the identity of survivors and as Panossian wrote, "being Armenian, namely in the diaspora, meant being a survivor, and therefore a member of

a community of sufferers." (2002: 137). Turkey is the main *Other* of the diasporic Armenian identity and is univocally portrayed as the historical enemy of the Armenian nation—a nation/state the struggle with which leads to the realisation of the Armenian *imaginar-* punishing the victimizer, returning the historical territories and opening an opportunity to re-establish the Great Armenia where all Armenians can return (Armenian Revolutionary Federation [ARF] 1998). Turkey-Other has an unbelievably important role in construction of diasporic Armenian national identity, it is the *cement* of the whole mythical system: a kind of *discursive overlord*.

The political frontiers that Diaspora establishes with its *Other* are not territorial, economic, political or legal and not even much ethnic, historical, cultural, but rather *existential*. In the diasporic project, Turkey-Ottoman Empire becomes both the possibility and the impossibility of the Armenian nation.

Soviet Armenia, its Permitted "Nation" and "Other"

Symbolically speaking, in Soviet Armenia, the nation and national identity were outcomes of intermingled process of internal imagination and external construction: the imagination relied on the existing attributes of national identity but their scope and limits of articulation were externally defined. From time to time, Soviet Armenia was experiencing national revival and de-nationalisation and it is not clear whether they were caused by internal societal developments—modernisation, anti-system movements (dissidence), or changes in ethno-national composition—or by Soviet ethnonational policy. Nevertheless, the Armenian identity, developed within the discursive frameworks of Soviet Armenia, was based predominantly on less intense reproduction of the same mythical system and constitutive outside of the diaspora project.

Suny provides an exemplary analysis of how the post WW II foreign policy of the USSR towards Turkey re-opened the question of the restoration of the part of "historical Armenian lands"—Armenian Question—and also manipulated the Genocide issue for the same purposes, (1993: 162–187). [1] Since 1940s, Armenians enjoyed almost unrestricted opportunity to discuss and reproduce the symbolic meaning of 1915 and to some extent also of hopes of greater homeland.

The process of imagination possessed almost all necessary institutional and structural means. The narration of the nation became a popular culture, the discourse on national identity received a mass character and the attributes of national identity became relatively standardised by processes of social engineering through educational systems, scientific centres, and political organisations, actively reproducing the "permitted nation." And eventually, Soviet Armenia became poor but still important experience for Armenians in running a national quasi-state (Castels 1997: 52) with a small share of political autonomy and a great share of ethnic homogeneity.

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[1] Afterwards an impressive monument to the victims of the Genocide was constructed in Yerevan.

The Old-New Meaning of the Nagorno-Karabagh Conflict

The prevailing understanding of what was happening since 1988 was and is within the logic of the Armenian national(ist) thought of the last two centuries. The legitimacy, more, the charismatic power of the Karabagh movement was based, perhaps, on nothing else but discursive appeal to the already established hegemonic concepts and myths.

Karabagh became another historical representation of past and present truths about *Us* and *Them*. Symbols and historical representations of the past were enacted in the present. Discourse of the time established a historical continuity between the beginning and the end of the 20th century and between the Genocide of 1915 and the Sumgait of 1988. Sumgait events of February 23, 1988 where 27 Armenians were killed was seen as a new act of "genocide" against the Armenian people, planned and organised by the Azerbaijan state and Party leaders. The discourse also linked *Tanzimat* with *Perestroika*, *Ittihad ve Terakke* with *Musavat* and *Popular Front*, giving a sense of continuity of *Us* by keeping *Them* and the *History* unchanged.[2]

The extreme deprivation, hopelessness, fears for physical existence, accompanying the Karabagh war, intensified the sense of enemy and insecurity. Even the own government embodied higgledy-piggledy fears and images of the Enemy—Turks, Azeris, and Armenians of Diaspora with mixed Muslim blood.

> They [people in Ter-Petrosian's government] are selling the country to foreigners, to Turks, to Iranians (who are really Azeris [i.e., from Iranian Azerbaijan]). … How can it be that non-Armenians get citizenship to this republic? There are 1500 Iranian kids born here and with Armenian citizenship—and Azeri-Iranian! This is a disgrace but what do you expect from foreign leaders?" (the first president of Armenia Levon Ter-Petrossian was born in Syria to an Armenian family which repatriated to Armenia very soon after his birth, interview cited in Panossian 2002: 134–135)

The Karabagh war consolidated the nation and re-articulated the former concept of national identity with a new strength. Supposingly, the Karabagh war and the new discourse on national identity should help to overcome the internal otherness and discursive difference between Soviet Armenians and the diaspora. However, how and to what extent this unification was possible, including at the discursive level, became an important issue for the post-independence discourse on Armenian nation and identity.

The First Elite of Independent Armenia and Its Radical Discursive Otherness

In his insightful analysis of post-communist political developments in three South Caucasus republics of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, Jonathan Aves mentions the speed and success that the new post-communist political elite of Armenia managed to consolidate the state and to secure a relative internal stability (Aves 1996). What is

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[2] The chair of the faculty of Armenian History at Yerevan State University, L. Khurshudian, titled his book *The truth—the only criteria of historical science: Causes and aims of the new period of anti-Armenian campaign in the Azerbaijan regarding the problem of Nagorno-Karabagh*, deploring continuities of historical events, images, ideologies and aims. The book was one among many.

notable for the current analysis is the fact that while dealing with the major internal political competitors and securing stability of its political power, the elite legitimated itself by developing a new concept of national identity known as "new thinking."

Once there is an idea of state, it should be practised every day. The re-imagination of its boundaries should be a permanent process: they should be demarcated and obeyed, in reality as well as in discourse. A certain political project—ideology or whatsoever—should take the role of a promoter of the state, modifying and fixing its meaning. State should become a stable system of differentiation between *us* and *them*, otherwise it will lose its meaning. This was the *point de caption* of the new elite thinking.

Indeed something *revolutionary* happened in the very midst of the nationalist discursive revival that challenged it. In 1990, Levon Ter-Petrosian, one of the leaders of the Karabagh movement of 1988, and later the first president of the independent Armenia, declared:

> Today Armenia has a leadership which is led not by Moscow or other foreign directive, but only by the interests of its own state. I see the content of independence in this, the essence of the national leadership (translated by the author, Ter-Petrosian 1990: 17).

Already in 1989, the ideologists of the Armenian Pan National Movement, the first party in rule, were propounding a new approach to Armenian statehood, national security and interests, requiring a critical reinterpretation of the Armenian national identity (Bleyan 1990, Ishkhanian 1991, Sardarian 1991, Libaridian 1991). The "new thinking" challenged the whole conceptual and mythical system of the hegemonic post-genocide project of national identity, reformulated and narrowed down the meanings of the nation and national, questioned the centrality of concepts of homeland, genocide, and those associated with them—Armenian Question, Armenian Trial in their definition. In polar opposition to the diasporic project, the political elite reached almost up to *discursive rejection* of objectivity of any national construct:

> If the perception of national identity is historically determined, then it is not perpetual, and the same is the national interest. They become meaningful only if they are related to issue(s) of Armenian democratic state and are re-defined in a form of concrete political aims in activities of constitutionally formed state bodies… The concept of nation, of people is verified in its relation with the concept of statehood. State issues and programs superordinate the modes of traditional behaviour and historical memories of nation (APNM 1996: 3, 8).

In the elite project, territories of state and historical homeland had different time structures, and what was the past was a different country. Territorial boundaries of historical homeland serve only as political frontiers of the narrative past; they do not act for present and do not ascribe national identity with uniformity of political, legal or economic identity. In contrary, the territorial boundaries of the state do ascribe since the concept of a citizen is senseless without such uniformity.

The new *imaginary of independent statehood* clashed with the central discursive myth of Armenian genocide of 1915. Genocide was defined as "historical and moral issue but not political" (Libaridian 1999: 111). The rationality of the statehood was contrasted with the irrationality of the genocide past: for example, the inclusion of

the genocide issue in Declaration on the Independence of Armenia was seen as contrasting with the idea of a pragmatic state and "a simplistic and emotional element prevailing over rationality" (Ishkhanian 1991: 136).

The ideologists of the APNM argued that for the sake of independence and state building the Armenian Genocide should be left out from Armenia's political agenda. "In general, it is purposeless to ask various states or the United Nations for the recognition of the genocide of Armenians. Let's say that all states and the United Nations were to recognise that they [Turks] slaughtered us, what then?" (Ishkhanian 1991: 68). The new project ascribed Genocide with a meaning of being meaningless.

Any discursive project is highly dependent on historical research from which it derives the huge part of its legitimacy. The politics of historical interpretation became a discursive strategy that the elite extensively used. For example, while the historical truth of the genocide was never questioned, it was interpreted as partly the outcome of political actions of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, the most influential diasporic (opposition) party represented in the country. The party was accused of two main things—of provoking Abdul Hamid II's Armenian massacres by its revolutionary and terrorist rhetoric and actions and of collaboration with Committee of Union and Progress (Ter-Petrosian 2000; Abgarian 2001; and many others). Simultaneously, quite radical announcements (though not free from political rhetoric) were made by historians engaged in APNM politics: Erjanik Abgarian, doctor of history, accusing ARF's policy bringing to the lost of Armenian lands in the second decade of 20th century, wrote

And so, by the mercy of Talaat [sic], the Armenian statehood reincarnated as a phoenix over the 1/35 part of the Armenian territory. Yes, by the mercy of Talaat, since he could keep the chafing Enver from convincing Vehib to conquer the Yerevan and to erase the concept of Armenia once and forever (Abgaryan 2001).

The project attempted to re-construct the memory. And since what should be forgotten, or put behind, encompassed the most part of the previous historical paradigm, the history itself—'manipulated' and 'untrue'—was rejected. According to project, the logic to derive the political action from the past should be abandoned.

Regarding the issues of … the national ideology in general, there is an uncompromising conflict between two positions in political thought—the disposition to engage in ventures based on historical right and the rationalism based on the reality. I am sure that… instead of historicity the reality will become the basis of our national identity (Ter-Petrosian 1993: 37).

The change in the mythical system of the former approach to the national identity and its historical representation was rather an ideological prelude to the new political myth of the elite project: what was *Hay Dat* [Armenian Trial] for the former was "policy of independence" for the latter. "Policy of independence" meant a radical shift in the foreign policy of the elite and its was perceived that, in order to guarantee the existence of the nation, "some kind of balanced set of relations with the three major neighbors is needed" (Libaridian, cited in Sarafian 1998) and thus "we should search for and create new and more trustworthy guarantees …And one of [them] is the settlement [*kargavorum*] of relationships between Armenia and Turkey." (Ter-Petrosian, 1990: 12).

The concept of pragmatic state interest required re-consideration of the constitutive outside in two ways. First, the new meaning ascribed to 'Russia' re-defined it as constrain, a blockage to 'strong and Armenian state.' Second, the meaning ascribed to Turkey, to the main Enemy-Other, was also revised.

Russia was deprived of its role of a "defender" and was defined as a force responsible for lost Armenian historical lands ("was suggested, for instance, that the Russian army could easily have conquered the whole of western Armenia after defeating the Ottoman army at the battle of Sarikamish, December 1914 but deliberately waited for the massacres to be completed and for western Armenia to be emptied of its Armenia population before conquering the region [Ishkhanian 1991: 45–46]). Or Russia was defined as a force that is not interested in ensuring the security of Armenians: Ter-Petrosian declared that Baku pogroms of Armenians in January 1990 had destroyed the illusion that Russia is interested in the security of Armenians (Astourian 2000).

The elite project eliminated the difference between Turkey and other geopolitical identities that were seen as crucial for successful development of the state: normalisation of relations with Turkey was conceptualised as a means to achieve economic prosperity of the state and its population.[3] Armenia set out to establish "normal relations with Turkey without preconditions." This was the axis of the "revolution in Armenian political thought:" in which Turkey ceased being the paramount danger but became a force that is of "vital importance" for existence (Ter-Petrosian 1990: 11).

The main social antagonism, establishing the borders of identity, was eliminated and Pan-Turkism, defined as the ideological cause of Genocide and the permanent threat to Armenian national identity, was put in the "past." A historian from APNM wrote: "I was curious whether today foreign sources are writing about the existence of contemporary Pan-Turkism and about its plan to annihilate Armenia. I could not come across any information" (Ishkhanian 1991: 126).

In 1998, the first post-communist elite of Armenia was removed from the power by a velvet coup and completely de-legitimised. There were many obvious and latent causes of that. Among the most popular was the ideological defeat or miscalculation: first, one of the main thrusts of the "new thinking" failed when Turkey itself did not acknowledge the 'revolution' happening in the Armenian political thought and, second, the "new thinking" exalted the state, but the state of the time obviously was not the thing to be exalted. The only major victory that the elite had, the Karabagh war, was a victory of the rejected discursive framework and, obviously, as "Ter-Petrosian had nothing to show for the revolutionary thinking he had displayed" (Libaridian, cited in Sarafian 1998).

The Second Elite of Armenia and Its Discursive Policy of "Complimentarity"

In February 1998, new political elite replaced the first one. So did the new project of national identity. And if from the first sight, there is an impression that the new

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[3] Since 1989 Armenia was facing an economic blockade from Azerbaijan and Turkey, which had a disastrous impact on Armenian economy.

elite returned to the old hegemonic concept of national identity, the impression loses much of its force if one looks beneath the surface. Though, in contrary to the old one, the new political elite re-established the notion of nation exceeding and superseding the political frontiers of the state and returned the genocide issue into foreign policy, it offered a new approach to the relations with Turkey and redefined its *otherness*.

The project deconstructed and reconstructed the two former projects in a way to eliminate their discursive antagonism. It merged diaspora and the state into one nation and also gave Karabagh its small place in it. Armenia became a "transnation" with "territorialized state sector in the homeland; a quasi-state sector in the contested, Armenian-inhabited region of Nagorno-Karabagh … and diasporic communities everywhere else" (Tölölyan 2000: 116). In the new project, the State (Armenia) and the Nation (Diaspora-Armenia-Nagorno-Karabagh trinity)—became *conditions of possibility of each other*:

The nation and the state were 'bridged' in one project with equal standing since they were seen as linked through ties of interdependency and functionality. This discursive trick helped both concepts to maintain their 'initial' meaning while being united by a new *raison d'etre*—national unity or national survival.

> …It is obvious that at present Armenia, Karabagh and the Diaspora are facing significant national issues that require urgent solutions. And it is much more obvious that these problems can be solved only if our three national attributes cooperate closely and permanently, *led by national unity as the criteria* (Kocharian 1999).

However, only keeping *own* identities, the state and the nation may become a part of greater national project. Only being a state, Armenia can ensure "a favourable environment for the sake of the nation's maintenance" or favour the maintenance of the *national* identity of diaspora by "ensure[ing] possibilities and prerequisites to the end of making Diaspora Armenians more actively involved in the cause of creation of pan-national values" (Kocharian 1999). On the other hand, Diaspora's "… comprehensive organisational and political support to the national diplomacy … commencement of economic and diversifying business activities in Armenia" are seen as indispensable for the formation of a prosperous state.

In general, the new project returned to the definitions and political myths of the former hegemonic project of national identity developed within the diaspora during the last eighty years. However, the elements of the former project received a new form to meet the reality of the existence of the state and its pragmatic interests. The recognition of the genocide regained its significance as a political issue and was officially included in the foreign policy of Armenia. Since 1998, there was almost no chanced missed to mention explicitly or implicitly the genocide issue at international assemblies, summits, congresses, etc.

> Armenians, as a nation who survived a genocide, are willing to forgive and to move on. We are hopeful that the day would come soon when the people with whom we have shared a long history are themselves ready to own up to the truth of their own history. Then and only then, can we move on together and build our regional cooperation and security arrangements on sound bases of trust and respect (Oskanian 1999).

Instead of Armenian Trial or "policy of independence," the new elite articulates the position of "security policy" and "policy of complementarity" from which all

political actions and the general foreign policy of the state should be derived. The Russia retained its role of the main security guarantor since "after the collapse of the Soviet Empire, Russia is perceived by Armenian society at large as one of the main guarantors of its security against a potential Turkish threat" (Shugarian 2003).[4]

However, while Russia could be seen as the main ally of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabagh the same is not equally true for the remaining sectors of diaspora. The "policy of complementarity" came to fill this gap. It means not limiting the political and economic cooperation with one country or one political bloc but with many depending on the interests of the state: "to define ourselves and mold our policies in the spirit of multidimensional partnership, in the dimension of complementarity …, conducting even-handed relations with all countries which have political or economic interests in the Caucasus" (Oskanian 2000).[5] The complementarity policy is linked to "pragmatic state policy" but also articulated as the outcome of the past that all Armenians share:

> Complementarity can be also accounted for by the country's survival instincts and the experience accumulated during the centuries of man-made disasters and the stateless existence. This is a desire to keep an active security, political and economic balance in the relationship with the world powers (Shugarian 2003)

The Turkey-other is a two-faced concept in the project. It is the 'past and present threat' to *Us*, for example, to Armenia's economic development since it keeps closed its borders with Armenia, or to its geopolitical power—allying with Azerbaijan. However, the new project articulates the "Other" in a qualitatively new way—not so much as ontological (existential) "Other" but as a *political* "Other." This is what the complementarity policy towards Turkey is all about. The new idea of the *political Other* means articulation of new strategies of dealing with it: 'diplomatic relations,' 'economic and political relations,' …" talk to each other , deal with each other, visit each other, trade with each other, and do so within the framework of our own sovereign equal identities. This is true for each and all of our neighbors" (Oskanian 2002). These are completely different strategies and as Tölölyan characterises "…in the past two decades has there been an emerging notion of Armenian identity that is differential without being conflictual and so directly political…" (Tölölyan 2000: 129). It means the new identity has a "policy of complementarity" towards its defined *Other*.

Following the presumed discursive logic, genocide is articulated as a historical proof of Armenians' insecurity, but that is all. It is a moral issue for Armenians and also for Turkey itself since the latter as a democratic country should be interested in recognising it and thus improving its human rights record (Oskanian 2002a). However, the genocide is not the key to relations between Armenia and Turkey since, as before, "Armenia advocates full diplomatic relations with Turkey without preconditions" (Oskanian 2002).

The way the new notions of security and complementarity articulate the "transnation's" myths and enemies of the past together with the state interests of regional integration and the situation around Nagorno-Karabagh, the way the new project in general makes bridges across time and space, nation and state, ideas of integration,

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[4] In 2003, Rouben Shugarian was Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia.

[5] Vartan Oskanian is Armenia's Minister of Foreign Affairs since 1998.

security and conflict is both its discursive achievement and possible actual failure. The following part of the Foreign Minister's speech is worth of citation at length:

> … Turkey can—through its positive engagement, that is by removing the blockade, and by adopting a more even-handed approach regarding the conflict [Karabagh]—expand Armenia's security options, decrease our concerns about certain issues… In other words, as a result of Turkish policy today, Armenia is forced to insure itself against the possible deterioration of Armenian-Turkish relations, thus placing greater demands on security. For example, Turkey's recognition of the Armenian Genocide can have serious positive consequences on security guarantees for the people of Nagorno Karabakh. In any case, we think that that the Nagorno Karabakh conflict is about the right of the people of Nagorno Karabakh to self-determination, and the recognition of the Armenian Genocide aims to reestablish historical justice, and this has not only pan-Armenian significance but also universal (Oskanian 2001).

The new project of nation is put into full motion. Cultural events under the slogan of "One Nation, One Culture," Pan-Armenian Games, Pan-Armenian Conference, pan-Armenian youth and professional organizations, Pan-Armenian funds and charities, pan-Armenian business units, scientific societies, teachers' exchange programs etc., are already a part of the daily politics. Calls and activities to established bilateral relationship with Turkey have their own place in the top foreign policy agenda.

But can one ideology, one program, be so many things, aim so many things, and be in interests of so many different people, and still remain productive? The aptitude of discursive articulation may be unlimited but its coherence may be fragile and thus the real power to bring to a socio-political change may, in turn, become quite limited. Eventually, one would wish the new elite to formulate a concept of nation and national identity that is enough coherent and well grounded in the reality to be independent from both position of the *Other* and the legitimacy of individual leaders articulating it.

Conclusion

The example of the three different attempts to re-imagine the Armenian nation is another proof of the fluidity and ambiguity that the concept of national presumes. To what extent those projects succeeded in re-structuring of the society is still a question; whether they reflected the actual shifts in mass perception of national identity is highly dubious. Nevertheless, they were attempts of re-imagination of the nation as to re-appropriate and re-fashion its different segments to suit the political and socio-cultural milieu of the moment.

As the analyses shows, the major trend in the contemporary discourse on Armenian national identity is to set up firmly the cultural and symbolic boundaries of national identity while allowing its political boundaries to fluctuate. The mythological system of the Armenian national identity has experienced important and significant changes. The two post-independence projects of identity have substantially shaken the centrality of the concept of Genocide past: while it is by no means a marginal signifier of identity, it is no longer the *raison d'etre* of the state policy. Armenian Question, Armenian Trial and other derivative political myths experience serious challenges and have to co-exist with policies of more pragmatic state interests.

What became obvious with the establishment of independent Armenia is that, in order to ensure a speedy, stable and secure development of the state, Armenia should

re-consider the aims and the ways of communication with its neighbouring nations. The perception of the *Other* as a permanent source of a threat should be abandoned and new perception of mutually beneficial relationships should be established. This is the main reason why, while disagreeing extensively on the issues of the boundaries and constitutive elements of national identity as well as on the role and position of the state, both post-independence projects of national identity almost univocally emphasise the need to revise the image of the traditional *Other* of the Armenian nation—Turkey.

The need to revise does not mean coherent and agreed vision on what Turkey is for Armenians today. It is neither the crystallised victimising enemy-other, nor a regular cultural *Other*. It is the *Other of* and *in* transition since its vagueness, ambiguity and diffuseness are, perhaps, results of the transitional state of the discourse on Armenian nation and identity itself.

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