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Of Dark Pasts and Pipe Dreams: The Turkish University

Lerna Ekmekcioglu

At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Department of History we offer a course called "MIT and Slavery." It is taught by Professor Craig S. Wilder who wrote a book about the intertwined history of the American universities and slavery. How this course came to be illuminates important changes in American academia in the last decade or so. It is also extremely inspiring. As an Armenian from Turkey who works on the history of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey, I have observed this wave of awareness and action with admiration. Even though this American awakening is long overdue, and the current level of action is not enough, the process opened my eyes to the possibility of *doing otherwise*. "Doing otherwise" not only in terms of institutions but also in terms of questioning the historical conditions that enabled certain types of knowledge(s) to be produced while inhibiting others.

I had started contemplating the politics of "historical unknowns" and the limits of knowability (and who knows what) while still an undergraduate student at Boğaziçi University's Sociology Department (1997–2002), at a time when I was exploring my own visibility/invisibility as a Turkish Armenian feminist. Reading Michelle R. Trouillot's *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*[1] and works of Black feminists allowed me to recognize similarities between Turkish Armenians (as a minoritized ethnoreligious group made up of descendants of the Armenian Genocide) and Black and Native Americans. During my graduate studies in the United States but especially during my tenure as a professor at MIT, I developed a related habit of mind: constructing an imaginary "parallel universe" between here and there. I came to frequently substitute "Armenian Genocide" for "Black slavery," and "Armenian deportations" for "indigenous dispossession."

This critical lens has only been sharpened by the last round of Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests and their influence in academia. Obviously, the experiences of Armenians in Turkey do not align perfectly with those of African American or Native American people. Yet there is enough of an overlap in these groups' self-understanding, and significant parallels in terms of their position vis-à-vis the state power that we can draw lessons from what is shared. Turkism and white supremacy are similar enough to use BLM's critical lens to notice (and mourn) how Turkey could have *done otherwise*: how the Turkish universities could have worked for truth-telling instead of covering truths and how my scholarly fields—Ottoman/Turkish studies and feminist studies—could have reckoned with their intellectual blind spots and worked to amend epistemic injustices rather than perpetuating them. This short essay is my way of sharing a fantasy, a merging of my two worlds, my *here* and my *there*. I start with a brief summary of how MIT and similar institutions started facing their "dark pasts," followed by my wish list for the Turkey of the future. I will call it "the utopian era," which must follow "the denialist era," and through which we can make *Armenian Deaths Matter*.

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1 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

In 2003, Brown University President Ruth Simmons commissioned an investigation into her university's ties to slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.[2] She formed a steering committee made up of faculty and students to research that relationship and share their findings with the public. The committee's report detailed how this seventh-oldest US university's many past presidents personally enslaved people, how some of its buildings were built with slave labor, and how donations to its endowment came from money earned via slavery and the slave trade.[3] The report's recommendations included the establishment of a Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice, the creation of a slave trade memorial, new educational projects with the local community, expanded financial aid and outreach, etc.

The committee organized programs to stimulate public reflection on the complex historical, political, legal, and moral questions posed by any present-day confrontation with past injustice.[4] In 2013, inspired partly by Brown's initiative, MIT's Craig S. Wilder published a monograph titled *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery and the Troubled History of America's Universities*.[5] He showed how, from the very beginning, American universities, including those in the North, were funded by slavery. Moreover, the same universities produced pseudo-scientific race theories and became breeding grounds for the racist ideas that defended slavery. Coincidentally, 2013 was also the year that the BLM movement began after the shooting of Trayvon Martin and the subsequent acquittal of his killer.[6]

It was in this context that Simmons's actions and Wilder's ideas spread like wildfire. Years of engaged scholarship by Indigenous and African American scholars prior to Simmons and Wilder had prepared the grounds for this "wildfire."[7] In 2015, students of color in more than seventy-seven US colleges and universities organized to demand transformations aimed at addressing systemic racism on college campuses such as greater faculty diversity, curricular changes, and expanded budgets for cultural centers.[8] They also made a persistent demand that these universities reckon with their past. Faculty, students, and alumni, usually those belonging to minority populations and their allies, started demanding that their universities confront uncomfortable pasts and acknowledge their role, if any, in past and present racial injustices. Many universities followed suit, including public institutions such as Rutgers University of New Jersey. In 2015, as it began commemorating its 250th anniversary, the administration recognized that the campus was built on land taken from the Lenni-Lenape people and began researching its ties to slavery and the slave trade.[9]

Unlike Brown, Rutgers, or Harvard, MIT was founded in 1861, long after the legal end of slavery in Massachusetts (1781–1783). This is probably one of the reasons why, when asked about his university's historical ties to slavery during a road trip, President Rafael Reif was

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2 For a summary of the birth of this movement, see the information provided on the website of the Universities Studying Slavery (USS) Consortium created and led by the University of Virginia, "Universities Studying Slavery (USS): the Birth of a Movement," 2013, maintained by the Scholars' Lab at the University of Virginia Library, accessed October 24, 2021, https://slavery.virginia.edu/universities-studying-slavery-uss-the-birth-of-a-movement/.

3 "Slavery and Justice: Report of the Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice (2006)," accessed November 2, 2021, https://www.brown.edu/Research/Slavery_Justice/documents/SlaveryAndJustice.pdf.

4 In early 2007, the Brown Corporation endorsed a set of initiatives in response to the committee's report and many of its recommendations have since been implemented.

5 Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2014).

6 Sarah J. Jackson, Moya Bailey, and Brooke Foucault Welles, "Trayvon Martin and the Hashtag Campaign that Set the Stage for Black Lives Matter," accessed November 2, 2021, https://thereader.mitpress.mit.edu/trayvon-martin-hashtag-black-lives-matter-movement/.

7 Of the many trailblazing works, Native historian, Standing Rock member Vine Deloria Jr's *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (New York: MacMillan, 1969) is worthy of special mention as a classic. The book criticizes how the story of the coming of the US has been told without much regard to the erasure of native people and how anthropologists produced knowledge about the Native Americans in an exploitative manner that did more harm than good.

8 Jomaira Salas Pujols, "Epilogue: Scarlet in Black—On the Uses of History," *Scarlet and Black: Slavery and Dispossession in Rutgers History*, edited by Marisa J. Fuentes and Deborah Gray White (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 160–164, esp. 160.

9 Richard L. Edwards, "Committee on Enslaved and Disenfranchised Populations in Rutgers History," November 10, 2015, accessed October 24, 2021, https://newbrunswick.rutgers.edu/past-chancellors/committee-enslaved-disenfranchised-populations-rutgers-history. It is worth noting that many events in US universities now start with notes of "acknowledgment" of whose land the university is located. Many email signatures of professors carry statements to that effect, recognizing that their university is on the native land of X tribe/nation.

uncertain. The zeitgeist of the moment, however, required that he know. On his return he asked Wilder to recommend the best way for MIT to explore its historical links to slavery. That is how the "MIT and Slavery" course was born in 2017. It is an ongoing undergraduate research course in which students write a new history of MIT with archivists and librarians. It was launched with the full support of the president and his officers who participated in various public events to promote the project.

Among other difficult facts, the work of this project confirmed that MIT's founder, William Barton Rogers, owned slaves. "He enslaved people" is an even better way of describing his actions which reflects the current turn in historical writing towards more active-voice terminology. The students have recommended that rather than evading this fact, the university acknowledge it and make it part of its critical self-narrative. No more hagiographies, no more exclusive focus on great men of the past. Yet, we still were ignorant about MIT's ties to the erasure of indigenous people; for example, that MIT's third president, Francis Amasa Walker who served from 1881 to 1897 and after whose name we have a memorial on campus, played a major role in advancing the American reservation system and wrote a book in which he described native people as an "obstacle to the national progress."[10] In the fall of 2021, MIT History created a "distinguished visiting fellow" position to investigate MIT's connections to the theft of Native land and what the Institute's resulting obligations might be. As of this fall, we offer a course called "the Indigenous History of MIT" in which students are working with Professor David Shane Lowry to study how Native Americans influenced the rise and progress of MIT and of science and technology in general.

I have observed and partaken in this process with envy.[11]

Unfortunately, I know that a communal self-reflection of similar scale is structurally impossible in Turkey, at least for now. From the first days of its inception, the cadres who founded the Turkish Republic refused to recognize any wrong-doing or express regret with regards to their nation's near-wholesale elimination of non-Muslim communities.[12] In the US, an overwhelming majority of people, even those who vote for the right-wing Republican Party, agree that slavery was bad, and that it is unethical to hold human beings in bondage.

This does not mean that in the US there is no partisanship as to how to atone for the past injustices: Is affirmative action good or bad? Do we need to pay reparations? Is a public apology necessary for a past mistake? Is it okay to teach critical race theory in schools? However limited, fragmented, and vulnerable any gains might be, we are fairly certain that African Americans will not get enslaved once again *en masse* or that native people will not become targets of wholesale elimination. This is true even after the post-Trump rise of ultra-right movements targeting members of non-white groups.[13] Moreover, we know that people voicing their opinion one way or another will not be criminalized, let alone purged. This remains largely true even though curtailment of academic freedom in US campuses is a growing problem in the last decade or so.[14] Moreover, as the BLM activists remind us, systemic racism is an ongoing problem in the US, including the "containment" of Native populations in reservations and of Black Americans in prisons.

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10 See MIT President L.Rafael Reif's letter at the university paper on August 24, 2021 about this recently revealed fact: L.Rafael Reif, "Facing a difficult history," *MIT Technology Review,* August 24, 2021, accessed October 24, 2021, https://www.technologyreview.com/2021/08/24/1030530/facing-a-difficult-history/.

11 I participated in one of the community conversations about the topic: "The Task of History-MIT and the Legacy of Slavery Dialogue Series," *MIT SHASS*, May 3, 2018, accessed October 24, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sM_rEPbFstE.

12 Fatma Müge Göçek, *Denial of Violence: Ottoman Past, Turkish Present, and Collective Violence Against the Armenians, 1789–2009* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Seyhan Bayraktar, *Politik und Erinnerung: Der Diskurs über den Armeniermord in der Türkei zwischen Nationalismus und Europäisierung* (Bielefeld: transcript-Verlag, 2010).

13 I am aware of the dangers of anti-Black/anti-immigrant rhetoric of Donald Trump and the white supremacist policies of his administration. A recent book by a known anthropologist doing "perpetrator research" (a subfield of genocide studies) finely addresses these alarming signs: Alexander Laban Hinton, *It Can Happen Here: White Power and the Rising Threat of Genocide in the US* (New York: New York University Press, 2021). However, my focus here is on the differences between Turkey and the US. What is considered "extreme" in the US has been normalized in Turkey for a long time.

14 For more on this topic, see the website of the newly formed organization of US professors called Academic Freedom Alliance. "Solidarity in Pursuit of Truth," *Academic Freedom Alliance*, accessed October 24, 2021, https://academicfreedom.org/.

In short, I know that the US is not in its "utopian era." My point in this essay is neither the idealization of the US nor the romanticizing of MIT or any American university. Yet I do see enormous differences between my two worlds in which the one on the west side of the Atlantic is doing much better. In the US there are millions of Americans who are anti-racists or at least try to be. In Turkey, the numbers of anti-chauvinists are nowhere near that in terms of percentage to the overall population. And, to me, this is part of the tragedy.

In Turkey, we do *not* know, at least we are not completely sure, that the past will not repeat itself. This fear must have been the main cause of more than two thousand academics signing a petition in January 2016 in response to the state's military operations in Kurdish-populated towns in Southeastern Turkey. They demanded that the "state abandons its deliberate massacre and deportation policy of Kurdish and other peoples." Signing this petition cost many of them their jobs, a majority of them faced a court case, and hundreds of them had to leave the country.[15]

In Turkey, we are not confident at all that our violent past will not repeat itself against other groups such as transgender people or the Syrian and Afghan refugees. The underlying reason for these uncertainties is the lack of even a minimum public consensus that cleansing Turkey of non-Turks was ethically wrong; that we lost because of it rather than gained. The social Darwinist logic of either "them" or "us" which led to the processes of elimination in the first place continues to this day.

This ideological continuation is not happenstance but by design. Turkish institutions of all kinds, especially educational institutions, have been mobilized to prevent ways of *knowing otherwise*.[16] Framing this problem as one of "outside powers mingling into our domestic affairs," the Turkish state apparatuses successfully "branded" the problem as one of international relations rather than one of intra-Turkey matters.[17] As a recent discussion of Turkish denialism from an epistemological perspective reminds us, Turkism has been central to the collective social imagination in Turkey because it has been upheld by the institutions of the republic.[18] Universities loom large in this project.

Therefore, a course titled "Istanbul University and the Armenian Genocide" is nearly inconceivable. Despite a mellowing of the atmosphere of denialism in the early 2000s, the current turn to authoritarianism makes a joke of even the idea. In a country where professors lose jobs because they sign a peace petition, is it not daring to conceive of an inter-university project titled "April 24, 1915, Istanbul: Where, How and Why?"

As a radical exercise in imagination I am tempted to wonder: How would Turkey look if we were to do otherwise? How could we make (past) Armenian Deaths Matter (in the present)?

My pipe dreams include but are not limited to the following:

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15 This petition titled "We will not be party to this crime" states that "as academics and researchers working on and/or in Turkey, [we] declare that we will not be a party to this massacre by remaining silent and demand an immediate end to the violence perpetrated by the state." For more see "Barış İçin Akademisyenler," *Academics for Peace*, accessed October 24, 2021, https://barisicinakademisyenler.net/.

16 It is important to note here that while the Turkish "public" was prevented from learning about non-conforming pasts such as the Armenian Genocide, Armenians in Turkey have always known about it and passed it to their children sometimes through explicit story-telling, sometimes true silences, sometimes through music. Melissa Bilal theorizes the topic via her ethnographic research in her "Lullabies and the Memory of Pain: Armenian Women's Remembrance of the Past in Turkey," *Dialectical Anthropology* 43 (2019): 185–206. For a discussion of Kurdish people's memory transmission of the genocide in Diyarbakır, see: Adnan Çelik and Namık Kemal Dinç, *Yüz Yıllık Ah! Toplumsal Hafızanın İzinde: 1915 Diyarbekir* (Istanbul: İsmail Beşikçi Vakfı, 2015).

17 Jennifer M. Dixon, *Dark Pasts: Changing the State's Story in Turkey and Japan* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2018).

18 Imge Oranlı, "Epistemic Injustice *from Afar*: Rethinking the Denial of Armenian Genocide," *Social Epistemology* 35, no. 2 (2021): 120–132, esp. 126.

A consortium of universities launches a student-led project titled: "The Task of History: Turkish Universities and the Legacy of the Armenian Genocide." The project interrogates the whole process of the Turkification of the land we now call Turkey and not just the Armenian Genocide. The related course syllabi include microhistories of how different cities such as Antep, Diyarbakır and Bursa were historically cleansed of their *everything* Armenian.[19] Indeed, during this Utopian Era, history-writing in order to unearth layers of forced removal and land/people appropriation is considered normative. It is part of the curriculum and students of humanities and social sciences learn about such methods, for example in their methodology courses.

Many universities have a department called "Armenian Studies." Many Armenian people teach in these departments, because it is not only the production and passing of knowledge that matters; it is also who is given the chance to do so. If they do not have a department as such, the universities offer a minor in Armenian studies, some with the even more specific title of "Armenian Diaspora Studies." They frequently invite Armenian diaspora scholars from the US, Europe, and the Middle East to give lectures or teach courses. Many Turkish Armenians are full time faculty in these Armenian Studies departments and programs though they are not to be found only there. Even storytellers and amateur historians of the Armenian community in Turkey are sometimes invited to share their knowledge.

As of 2021, the Armenian survivor community in Turkey is made up of about sixty thousand people in a Turkey of eighty-five million. Let us assume, for the sake of the experiment, that during the Utopian Era these numbers will remain the same.

Meaning, they will continue to be 0.07 percent of the whole population.

One hundred percent of them lost at least one ancestor to the Armenian Genocide and subsequent attacks, more commonly a dozen.

Therefore, in the Utopian Era people do not view "Turks and Armenians" as if they are symmetrical equals on a horizontal plane. We humbly recognize that workings of power have not allowed this to happen. One Indigenous scholar has termed this period the "denialist habitus," while another described Turkish Armenians' (pseudo)citizenship performance during this era as "secular dhimmitude."[20] We now understand that the Denialist Era's fantasy of presumed sameness and reciprocity was the result of political ideologies like secularism and republicanism, and it was nothing short of wishful thinking.

This 0.07 percent does not include those who used to be lumped into the category of "Islam(ic)ized Armenians" who after 1923 passed as Muslim, therefore Turk, therefore non-minority. In the Utopian Era, we now refer to them as de-Armenianized Turks/Kurds/Muslims. This new naming practice signals our grasp of the genocide's main goal: de-Armenianizing the land and people, and butchering and forcibly transferring women and children in pursuit of that goal.[21] This new naming practice does not suggest that we do not respect how people "self-identify" as it might be the case that after the genocide and forced Islamization some people continued thinking of themselves as Armenians. The emphasis is on the fact that they did not have a chance to *live* as Armenians and pass on their identity by giving birth or fathering *Armenian* babies (or uttering words of love in

19 Uğur Ümit Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Anahid Astoyan, *Bursayi Nahanki Hayutyan Dndesagan Vijage yv Niutagan Gorusdnere Hayots Tseghasbanutyan Darinerun* (Yerevan: H.H. Kaa Kidutyun Hradaragchutyun, 2017); Ümit Kurt, *The Armenians of Aintab: The Economics of Genocide in an Ottoman Province* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021).
20 For the "denialist habitus" see Talin Suciyan, *Armenians in Modern Turkey: Post-Genocide Society, Politics and History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016); for "secular dhimmitude," see Lerna Ekmekcioglu, *Recovering Armenia: The Limits of Belonging in Post-Genocide Turkey* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2016), esp. chapter 4.
21 I made this point in: Lerna Ekmekcioglu, "A Climate for Abduction, A Climate for Redemption: The Politics of Inclusion during and after the Armenian Genocide," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55, no. 3 (2013): 522–553, esp. 551, n. 109.

Armenian). The emphasis is on the *crime* of not allowing them to *be* Armenian rather than just feeling it, many times secretly and only inside their hearts. This is similar to Orlando Patterson's idea that the African slaves went through a "social death."[22] To put it differently, we do not search for "survivors" where only victims exist.[23] Looking for "survivors" was likely a way of assuaging our feelings of guilt covered by the righteous scholarly goal of finding "agency," that ever-evasive, amorphous will.

Returning to the universities of our collective dream-future, I envision that—given the history—there are special scholarships for students belonging to minority communities. Many "Turkish Language and Literature Departments" teach Armenian language and literature too. For PhD degrees, knowing at least one non-Turkish/non-Ottoman indigenous language is a requirement in this field. Private universities provide funds, big or small, for the restoration of buildings of Armenians (and other minorities) that lived near or in the place of their lands. They petition the towns in which they have campuses to change the Turkified town names and they manage to get the names restored to their Armenian/Greek/Kurdish/Arabic etc. originals. Maps used in the curriculum similarly un-settle. Talks given at the university start with an acknowledgment of if the campuses are built on land appropriated from Armenians, Greeks, Kurds, etc. It is not rare to see in the professors' email signatures some form of land acknowledgement. All this communicates that what we see now around us did not have to be here *in this particular way*, that it is the result of some people making choices before us. Some of those choices can be unmade.

Most naturally, in the post-denialist era known names of Turkifiers in scholarship, such as the producers of pseudo-histories like the Turkish History Thesis, or people implicated in the Armenian Genocide are not monumentalized anymore. They are instead turned into objects of study and analyzed in the context of their time and place. But hiding behind "let us evaluate our historical actors on their own terms" does not pass anymore. We expose the political work of "assumed neutrality." If need be, we make explicit moral judgments about the past because we should and we can.[24]

We retire names or symbols associated with the destruction of non-Turkish groups from our university logos, buildings, endowed chairs, and grant names, both inside Turkey and outside. Similar to how remembering is not virtuous in and of itself, dis-remembering does not guarantee the end of epistemic vice. But it does two things at least. First, it conveys to the current generations that we, *now*, dis-identify with the perpetrators and their apologists, that we morally condemn what they did. We acknowledge our role as inheritors of this damage. Second, it provides the conditions for the possibility of a political and scholarly re-orientation. That is why we *now* monumentalize people who resisted being part of the violence, be it physical or epistemic. We include in our syllabi the works of those who did not exclude but included non-Muslim, non-Sunni, non-Turkish groups in the newly understood "history of Turkey" which is different from "Turkish history." The same goes for literature, art, architecture, music, etc.

Our process of due acknowledgement does not eclipse the recent past. On the contrary, we are attentive to finding ways of honoring people and institutions who took steps towards this direction in extremely unfavorable political climates. This happened towards the end of the denialist era. For starters, we go back to the mid-1990s and honor the efforts of the Human Rights Association (İnsan Hakları Derneği) in starting the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide, and the Belge, Pêrî, and Aras presses who published non-conforming historical studies and paid a price for it (from death threats to bombings and closures). We recognize the huge burden that the Turkish Armenian weekly *Agos* newspaper, along with many Turkish Armenian Indigenous intellectuals, have been carrying on their shoulders since 1996. No, since 1894. This was when the Hamidian Massacres commenced—the beginning of what we once thought was "the end."

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22 Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death, A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
23 Nora Tataryan picked up this question in: Nora Tataryan Aslan, "Facing the Past: Aesthetic Possibility and the Image of 'Super-Survivor,'" *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 17, no. 3 (2021): 348–365.
24 I take guidance here from the most recent book of Donald Bloxham, *History and Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

We acknowledge and teach our students that towards the end of the denialist era scholars and public intellectuals who defied state power and found ways of doing *somewhat otherwise* inside Turkey and in "Ottoman/Turkish studies" (wherever it was produced) had started making *Armenian Deaths* (somewhat) *Matter*. As expected, however, this process was not always free from mistakes and misconceptions. In the bumpy road towards "reconciliation" many a well-intentioned Turkish scholar fell into the traps of a residual *millet-i hakime* (dominant millet) subject position. A Turkish scholar whose name means "peace" (Barış, a relatively common name, something we are proud of) gave us a frame to understand how this subjectivity was concretized during the 1912–1922 period, during the earlier stages of the denialist era. A "Turkishness Contract" of some sorts was signed between the state and those who were deemed Turks or Turkifiables. It was transmitted from one generation to the next affectively, aesthetically, implicitly, and institutionally.[25] Towards the end of the denialist era when people recognized the very existence of this (imaginary) contract, they started breaking away from it. Some of them who thought they were free from it still fell into its traps. Wrong turns in the *yüzleşme* (facing the past) process were criticized, sometimes corrected, sometimes ignored. Overall, though, it is thanks to the three-decades-long battles waged in the quiet corners of universities, in the meeting rooms of civil society initiatives and publication houses, and in the columns of public petitions that in the year 2021 (this was when the whole world was still grappling with what was then still a "novel" Covid-19 virus), a scholarly publication in Turkey convened a special dossier in its "Meclis" (assembly) section to ask contributors to reflect on BLM in the context of Turkey. They even hosted a dreamer's uncensored voice.

This immediately-preceding era allowed for the dreams presented here to have different temporal distances within the pipe.

For example, I envision that during the transition years from the denialist to the utopian era, we compile a list of all non-Muslim/non-Turkish alumni and professors of our university and publish their names in our journal. We present them on the walls of the university together with their contributions and how they met their death. It is common knowledge, for example, among scientists that the first Ottoman subject with a PhD in Astronomy (1893, Carleton College), Garabet Arakel Sivaslıyan who was teaching at the American College of Mersovan (Merzifon Amerikan Koleji) in 1915 was collected from his school together with the seventy-two other Armenian students, teachers, and staff of the school to be (so-called) "deported." With the other men of his caravan, he was slaughtered right before entering the city of Sivas.[26] Hence the statue of Dr. Sivaslıyan, on the road entering the city of his last name where his bones had previously remained unclaimed for a long time until the beginning of the utopian era (archeology departments are busy excavating mass graves).

All chemistry departments learn that the first chemistry book in the Ottoman Empire was written in 1853 by Hovhannes Sarkis Vahanyan in Armenian. They also learn that the author's sister was one of the first Ottoman feminists, the first Armenian female novelist Srpuhi Dussap. Many Turkish language departments have a bust of Hagop Martayan Dilaçar, the first secretary general and head specialist of the Turkish Language Association and a Turkish Armenian. His name is not spelled in its deeply Turkified version of "A. Dilaçar" as it used to be during the denialist era on the label of his bust inside Boğaziçi University's library, staring at students (read: the author) waiting on the check-in line. Spelling his Armenian name and last name makes Turkish Armenians belong to their universities more fully. They do not have to fill in the real Armenian name of the person in their mind anymore. They can read it on the plaque and know that others are able to read it too. It is not *just* them.

Pointing out the "firsts" or "contributions" is not meant to stir competition amongst ourselves. Nor to create inferiority/superiority complexes. We do not engage in a fake nostalgia of empty multiculturalism and romanticize a past harmonious coexistence. This was a relatively common fallacy in the last quarter of the denialist era against which an indigenous

25 Barış Ünlü, *Türklük Sözleşmesi: Oluşumu, İşleyişi ve Krizi* (Ankara: Dipnot Yayınları, 2018).
26 Arsen Arşık, "İlk Doktoralı Osmanlı Gökbilimcisinin Acı Sonu," *Cumhuriyet*, April 24, 2015.

scholar warned us early on.[27] What enabled us to move from the denialist to post-denialist era was that we collectively worked on changing the collective "we." Sivaslıyan as one of "us," not "them." It is a way of epistemic restitution, the reversal of epistemic violence. Trying to create a new "we" has not been effortless nor comfortable. It has required real confrontation with the self, with the group identity. It has demanded responsibility-taking and it has been painful.[28] We are still working on it.

Small but meaningful steps such as naming practices allowed us to yearn for more.

In the utopian era, Turkish and Armenian universities have exchange programs even if the neighboring Turkey and Armenia continue not recognizing each other officially. The only Armenian university outside of Armenia, Haigazian in Beirut, partakes in these exchanges. They advance the efforts of the Hrant Dink Foundation in bringing the two academic worlds together. In the utopian era, no one imagines the two "academic worlds" or the two countries to be symmetrical and on par. One's dwindled numbers is a consequence of genocide and continued blockade; one's impoverishment enabled the enrichment of the other. Reckoning with our dark pasts does not start and end with "dialogue," that overused band-aid which managed to find a just and lasting solution to zero problems globally.[29] Gone are the days when solidarity meant emphasizing our similarities. It now means attending to the needs and anxieties of the oppressed group.

In the utopian era, students and their universities commemorate the April 24 together. There are multiple lists of righteous Turks (and Alevis, Kurds, Chechens, Arabs and Iranians) whose names they utter during these commemorations with humility and gratitude. The names are gathered through careful and substantial scholarship and not through a "pick and choose" method for the purposes of creating fake forefathers/foremothers and feeling good about ourselves (a practice of the previous era). Researching these names includes talking to descendants of survivors and amplifying their voices. Amplification is a way to (over) compensate for the denialist era's deafness.

During the utopian era, one such figure, a Schindler of "our" genocide," is considered a forefather—thus his monument in Çankırı or Ayaş, places where Ottoman Muslims murdered Armenian intellectuals in 1915. A larger than life statue of Hrant Dink imposes itself in the entrance of the huge avenue in the heart of Istanbul, the street where this Turkish Armenian journalist laid slain on that bright nineteenth of the month of January in the year 2007. The second or third Monday of every September is "Hrant Dink Day" in Turkey which is commemorated nationally (his birthday being September 15). This was implemented after the trailblazing Turkish historian Taner Akçam's suggestions. He was inspired by "Martin Luther King Day" in the US.[30] Schools open that day which is devoted to discussions of anti-racism/anti-nationalism, the ills of hate speech, and the benefits of national unity based on civic citizenship rather than on religion and ethnicity.

On that note of civic citizenship, a moment of pause.

When and if a war between Armenia and Turkey (or its allies) breaks out, university faculty and students freely convene panels to understand it all better and discuss different dimensions of the conflict.[31] Anyone opposing the war can do so. Public opinion might

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27 Melissa Bilal, "Türkiyeli Ermenileri Hatırlamak," in *Bir Zamanlar Ermeniler Vardı* (Istanbul: Birikim Yayınları, 2005): 237–246; Bilal, "The Lost Lullaby and Other Stories about Being an Armenian in Turkey," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 34 (2006): 67–92.

28 For a rare critical revaluation of one's own previous scholarship as well as family history in the context of Turkish academia's "past century of silence, complicity, and denial," see Ayşe Gül Altınay "Undoing Academic Cultures of Militarism: Turkey and Beyond," *Current Anthropology* 60, supplement 19 (February 2019): S15–S25.

29 I am inspired by Simona Sharoni's critique of women's peacebuilding and conflict transformation initiatives in Israel and Palestine: Simona Sharoni, "Gender and conflict transformation in Israel/Palestine," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 13, no. 4 (2012): 113–128.

30 Taner Akçam, "Bizim Martin Luther King'imiz," *Taraf*, September 16, 2013. He repeats this theme in many other opinion pieces.

31 Boris Adjemian and Vazken Khatchig Davidian, "Scholarship and Introspection in the Time of War," *Études arméniennes contemporaines* 13 (2021): 255–257, https://doi.org/10.4000/eac.2743.

brand them as "unpatriotic" or "traitors" much like in the immediate post-9/11 context when many Americans opposed the Afghan and Iraq Wars. Yet the Turkish intellectuals know they will not be criminalized as "terrorists." The university is free. Academic freedom is a given, not a favor.

To conclude: none of these efforts at restorative justice are done for "virtue signaling," nor to disown history. Because it is liberating and empowering we voluntarily address the past and examine the earlier institutional, intellectual, and political barriers to acknowledgement. In the end, *doing otherwise* is a way of owning our past, warts and all. It is about what kind of a story we want to tell about ourselves *now*, which values we endorse, which norms we profess as a university. By holding ourselves accountable for the past, we righteously come to terms with it, tell ourselves and the remaining Armenians, Jews, Greeks, etc. among our students and faculty that we feel regret. That we will not be party to such a crime, again.[32] *We are sorry*.

32 For an informative discussion and critical assessment of the Turkish intellectuals' 2008 Apology Campaign see Ayda Erbal, "Mea culpas, Negotiations, Apologias: Revisiting the 'Apology' of Turkish Intellectuals," in *Reconciliation, Civil society, and the Politics of Memory*, edited by Birgit Schwelling (Bielefeld: transcript-Verlag, 2013), 51–94.