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# “a hoax and a sham”

An Argumentative Analysis Investigating  
Western Denial of the Armenian Genocide

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## Abstract

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This paper studies Western academic denial of the Armenian Genocide, focusing especially on the Hamidian Massacres of 1894 – 1896, the Armenian Genocide of 1915 – 1916, and on post-war actions and reactions to the genocide, taking place from 1919 to 1923. Using Richard Hovannisian’s phrase “patterns of denial”, the study maps three different strategies of denial visible in the account of four separate Western scholars denying the Armenian Genocide. Firstly, arguments of absolute denial are being described and analysed. Secondly, arguments trivializing the acts and actions of genocide are included, and, thirdly, arguments aimed at “rewriting” the chronology and course of history are being studied.

The study partly re-emphasises the “classic” type of denial, noticed by several scholars of the Armenian Genocide and its denial, where absolute denial is only partly visible, having to give way to arguments of trivialization and rationalization. However, the most extreme type of denial is also presented, in this essay represented by American writer Samuel A. Weems. He openly utilizes all patterns of denial. Nothing happened, Weems claims, but what happened was the fault of the Armenian victims themselves.

Finally, British historian Bernard Lewis is example of a third type of strategy, where denial to a large degree is latent, but none the less present.

Key words: denial, revisionism, historiography, genocide, Armenian Genocide, Stanford Shaw, Justin McCarthy, Bernard Lewis, Samuel A. Weems

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<sup>1</sup> This essay has been presented as a second term paper at Lund University, examined in January 2009.

# 1 Preface

On the shores of Lake Van, in the remote north-eastern corner of Asia Minor, lies the Turkish city of Van. Here events unfolded in April and May 1915 that would prove to be significant parts of the first genocide of the twentieth century – and of the subsequent denial thereof.

In late 1914 the Ottoman government, since 1908 led by the so-called Young Turks, declared war on Russia, and the city of Van was caught in the crossfire. Within two weeks the Ottoman Army at the eastern front had suffered terrible losses, and the military failure was unequivocally blamed on the Armenian subjects. Henry Morgenthau, American Ambassador in Constantinople at the time and an oft-used witness of the Armenian Genocide, observed that the Armenian population in Van and other locations across the Empire were regarded as sympathetic of Russia and of the Entente powers<sup>2</sup>, and notes further, with a wording that seems characteristic of the period, that “[t]he Turkish Government has made much of the ‘treasonable’ behaviour of the Armenians of Van, and they have even urged it as an excuse for their subsequent treatment of the whole race”<sup>3</sup>.

As the Ottoman Army in early 1915 were pushed back, the Armenian population of Van acted in resistance to widespread violence aimed at Armenians all over the Empire, and the city became one of few instances of outright resistance to the persecutions and the harsh war requisitions especially aimed at Christians within the Empire.<sup>4</sup> The fortunes of war changed, however, and the Russian Army retreated in the spring of 1915, leaving the Armenian citizens of Van at the hands of the Ottomans. Ambassador Morgenthau describes this turn of events in his memoirs:

*In the eyes of the Turkish generals [...] the withdrawal of the Russians was a happy turn of war mainly because it deprived the Armenians of their protectors and left them at the mercies of the Turkish Army. Instead of following the retreating foe, therefore, the Turks’ Army turned aside and invaded their own territory of Van. Instead of fighting the trained Russian Army of men, they turned their rifles, machine guns, and other weapons upon the Armenian women, children and old men [...].*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Henry Morgenthau, *Secrets of the Bosphorus: Constantinople, 1913 – 1916*, London: Hutchinson 1918, p. 193 – 194.

<sup>3</sup> Morgenthau 1918, p. 194.

<sup>4</sup> Morgenthau 1918, p. 193.

<sup>5</sup> Morgenthau 1918, p. 195 – 196.

From inside the walls of the city, American doctor Clarence D. Ussher also left behind eye-witness accounts stating that “thousands of defenseless men, women, and children were being slaughtered with the utmost brutality”<sup>6</sup>.

The voices of Morgenthau and Ussher has, however, not always been listened to when describing the events of 1915, at Van or other places of the Empire. Rather, denial has been the norm both in the Ottoman successor state of Turkey, and among a few Western scholars. This latter group of “revisionists” is the one in focus of this essay. According to their narratives there was never resistance at Van, but revolution.

The Western revisionist accounts refer to the events at Van in 1915 as an “open Armenian revolt against the sultan”<sup>7</sup>, and as a “large scale rebellion”<sup>8</sup>. The Armenians that died did so when choosing to retreat together with the Russian Army and “not as a result of direct Ottoman efforts to kill them”<sup>9</sup>. Armenian resistance at Van is said to be outright revolution, calling for decisive measures from the central government, in which it would be “impossible to determine which of the Armenians would remain loyal and which would follow the appeals of their [revolutionary] leaders”<sup>10</sup>. The resistance at Van is here used as proof of Armenian provocation, developing into a civil war. Whatever it was, they seem to conclude, it was revolution and war, never genocide. These types of arguments, denying the reality of the Armenian Genocide, and the legitimacy claims for recognition will be the focus of this essay.

## ***1.1 Choice of Topic***

When given the option to write a historical essay on any subject, why choose to focus on the atrocities of genocide? And why choose to further deal with those few scholars choosing to deny it? My reasons have been threefold. Firstly, there is within the study of genocide a valid and urgent political and historical aspect concerned with learning from the past.

Secondly, genocide has proven itself to have a continued, current relevance. When Barack Obama was elected President of the United States in November 2008, the Armenian Genocide yet again proved itself to be a vital topic on the agenda of international politics. As heads of states from around the globe sent their well-wishes, or expressed their hopes and fears

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response*, New York: Perennial 2003, p. 204.

<sup>7</sup> Stanford J. Shaw & Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey: Volume II: Reform, Revolution, and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808 – 1975*, New York: Cambridge University Press 1997 (1977), p. 315.

<sup>8</sup> Justin McCarthy, *The Ottoman Peoples and the End of Empire*, London: Arnold 2001, p. 106.

<sup>9</sup> Shaw & Shaw 1997, p. 317.

<sup>10</sup> Shaw & Shaw 1997, p. 315.

concerning the future, the Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, instead chose to focus on one of Obama's lesser noticed election campaign promises – namely to officially recognize the massacres of Armenians during the First World War as genocide. Erdoğan stated clearly: “[w]e hope that certain topics that surfaced during the election campaign remain nothing more than campaign topics in the past”<sup>11</sup>. This continued relevance of the Armenian Genocide, perhaps most recently shown in the example above, is another one of the reasons for my choice of topic.

Furthermore, focusing on the denial of genocide among Western scholars has in a similar way been an active choice. The widespread and institutionalized denial of the Armenian Genocide has in many ways been preventing the development of further research on the subject. Instead of analysing all different kinds of aspects and angles (as has been done, and is still being done, in the case of the Holocaust), scholars of the Armenian Genocide have been forced to continue to validate the very existence and reality of a genocide. Focus has been placed on confirming dates, numbers, archives and verifying eye-witness accounts, and not until the existence of an Armenian Genocide has been placed beyond any reasonable doubt, analysis of the actual event and its aftermath has been engaged. The essay is in this context an attempt to accept the Armenian Genocide as a proven historical reality, and analyse the denial of it very much as denial of the Holocaust has been analysed – as part of the genocide, and not as a different kind of interpretation of it.

## ***1.2 Aims and Questions at Hand***

*The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.*<sup>12</sup>

Czech writer Milan Kundera expresses in the quote above many of the predicaments facing scholars when dealing with the Armenian Genocide. The active denial of the genocide, both from Turkish officials and certain Western academics caused the Armenian Genocide to, for a long time, be known as the “forgotten genocide”, or as “the successful genocide”<sup>13</sup>. On that note, the first genocide of the twentieth century has often been part of the side Kundera labels “forgetting”. Why then write an essay focusing on this “forgetting”-part of the

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in *Sydsvenskan* November 6, 2008, p. A9. Translation from Swedish made by the author.

<sup>12</sup> Milan Kundera, quoted in Terrence Des Pres, “Introduction: Remembering Armenia” in Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.) *The Armenian Genocide in Perspective*, New Brunswick & Oxford: Transaction Books 1987, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Kristian Gerner & Klas-Göran Karlsson, *Folk mordens historia: Perspektiv på det moderna samhällets skuggsida*, Stockholm: Atlantis 2005, p. 142.

Armenian Genocide? Why not embrace “memory”, and tell the tale of genocide without devoting time and effort on explaining denial and tactics of “forgetting”? It has even been noted to be “morally wrong to privilege the deniers by according them space and time”<sup>14</sup>. My response to these valid concerns is that, as historian Richard Hovannisian notes, in comparison with the Holocaust, denial of the Armenian Genocide has been (and still is) much more extensive and institutionalized, even among Western scholars.<sup>15</sup> It is, therefore, near impossible to write and analyse the Armenian Genocide without including its subsequent denial. In the case of the Armenian Genocide, it has been noted, denial seems to be the very last stage of genocide.<sup>16</sup>

Seeing denial as an integrated part of the Armenian Genocide, however, opposes Kundera’s quote above. In this case, “memory” and “forgetting” are not opposites, but rather intimately bound together. As Hovannisian adds, “following the physical destruction of a people and their material culture, memory is all that is left and is targeted as the last victim”<sup>17</sup>. This essay is therefore an attempt to stand in between “forgetting” and “memory”, where the analysis of denial hopes to serve remembrance.

The purpose and aim of this essay is however not, I feel urged to stress, to acknowledge the revisionist “interpretation” of the Armenian Genocide as the other side of a legitimate scholarly debate. Historian Deborah Lipstadt emphasized this very same concern as she in 2000 wrote to the Congressional Committee, speaking in favour of them passing a resolution validating the Armenian horrors of 1915 and onwards as genocide. She wrote: “Denial of genocide – whether that of the Turks against the Armenians or the Nazis against the Jews – is not an act of historical reinterpretation. Rather, it sows confusion by appearing to be engaged in a genuine scholarly effort”<sup>18</sup>. This has likewise been my point of view.

More specifically, however, the essay seeks to answer:

- How four different Western revisionist narratives present:
  - 1) the Hamidian Massacres of 1894 – 1896 (often seen as a dress rehearsal to 1915),
  - 2) the genocide of 1915 – 1916,
  - 3) the immediate aftermath of the Armenian Genocide, that is, the war tribunals set up post-war, and the international peace treaties signed 1919 – 1923.

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<sup>14</sup> Balakian 2003, p. xxiii.

<sup>15</sup> Richard G. Hovannisian, “Denial of the Armenian Genocide in Comparison with Holocaust Denial” in Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1999, p. 202 – 203.

<sup>16</sup> Roger W. Smith, “The Armenian Genocide: Memory, Politics, and the Future” in Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *The Armenian Genocide: History, Politics, Ethics*, Houndmills: Macmillan 1992, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Hovannisian 1999, p. 202.

<sup>18</sup> Deborah Lipstadt quoted in Balakian 2003, p. xxii.

- What are the *patterns of denial*, or themes, detectable in the four investigated revisionist accounts?
- Do the four different Western narratives use different patterns of denial and arguments, in order to negate the reality of the Armenian Genocide?

### ***1.3 Sources and Historiography***

As primary sources in this investigation four Western revisionist accounts will be focused upon, namely:

- The third edition of Bernard Lewis' *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (2002)
- Justin McCarthy's *The Ottoman Peoples and the End of Empire* (2001)
- Stanford and Ezel Kural Shaw's *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey: Volume II: Reform, Revolution, and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808 – 1975* (1977/1997), and
- Samuel A. Weems' *Armenia: Secrets of a "Christian" Terrorist State: The Armenian Great Deception Series – Volume I* (2002)

These four accounts share "revisionist" tendencies, all denying the validity of calls demanding acknowledgment of the Armenian Genocide. Their patterns of denial differ though, and they all use more or less different strategies of denial and structure of arguments.

These four different books used as material for the study at hand were however not chosen on a whim, but deliberately picked. Firstly, on the basis of their academic "weight", where at least three out of the four writers hold high academic degrees at renowned American universities. Secondly, these accounts have been chosen as they can be seen to serve as examples of different strategies of denial.

Danish historian Torben Jørgensen notes that the types of Western revisionist tendencies here under investigation surfaced already in the 1950's, during the midst of the Cold War, where Turkey in many ways was viewed as the last Western outpost against the East.<sup>19</sup> The origins of Western denial of the Armenian Genocide, therefore, suggest political aims and purposes of denial.

Explaining Western denial through political aims has since the end of the Cold War, however, not lost its relevancy. In 1990 a letter was sent from the Turkish ambassador in Washington to American historian Robert Lifton, having included comparisons between the

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<sup>19</sup> Torben Jørgensen, "Turkey, the US and the Armenian Genocide" in Steven L. B. Jensen (ed.), *Genocides: Cases, Comparisons and Contemporary Debates*, Copenhagen: The Danish Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies 2003, p. 209.

Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust in his book. The letter regretted that a professional scholar on the Holocaust had been incompetent enough to “compare a tragic civil war (initiated by Armenian nationalists) and the human suffering it wrought on both the Muslim and Christian populations with the horrors of a premeditated attempt to systematically eradicate a peaceful people [i.e. the Holocaust]”<sup>20</sup>, and advised him to in his future works rely on scholars such as Justin McCarthy (included in this essay as an example of Western denial) and Heath Lowry. In the envelope containing the letter, the original draft had by mistake been included. The draft was, however, not written by the Turkish ambassador, but by American historian and revisionist Heath Lowry. Considering events like this, political cooperation between the Turkish state and Western revisionist scholars does not seem like a far-fetched idea.

Stanford Shaw, professor of Turkish and Near Eastern History at UCLA, as well as editor-in-chief of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, and mentor of the above mentioned Heath Lowry<sup>21</sup>, is here included as an example of Western denial. According to Jørgensen Western denial peaked in 1977, as *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, written by Shaw and his Turkish wife, was published.<sup>22</sup>

Following Shaw’s footsteps, Justin McCarthy, professor of History at the University of Louisville, and included as suggested reading in the draft letter above, can in several ways be regarded as continuing a type of “mainstream” Western revisionism. His reliance on Shaw is very much noticeable in his *The Ottoman Peoples and the End of Empire*.

Samuel Weems, on the other hand, holds no professional academic degree, but presents himself as a former district attorney and judge from Arkansas, as well as a life-long Baptist, American taxpayer and neutral seeker of facts – all with the hopes of creating a type of scientific suspension of disbelief. His reliance is primarily of Justin McCarthy (and indirectly therefore of Stanford Shaw), but the extent of denial is here far greater. Similarities have been noted between Weems’ *Armenia*, and the anti-Semitic *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.<sup>23</sup>

Renowned British-American historian and professor of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University, Bernard Lewis, represents the fourth and last account of denial in this essay. He does not appear to depend as heavily on any of the revisionist scholars presented above, and

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<sup>20</sup> The whole correspondance, including the letter quoted here, can be found in Roger W. Smith, Eric Markusen, Robert Jay Lifton, “Professional Ethics and the Denial of the Armenian Genocide” in Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1999, p. 280.

<sup>21</sup> Jørgensen 2003, p. 211.

<sup>22</sup> Jørgensen 2003, p. 210.

<sup>23</sup> Gerner & Karlsson 2005, p. 361.

seems in many ways as the “odd one out” in this quartet. Lewis is often considered as one of the Western world’s premier experts on Islam and the Middle East, and was in 2006 awarded the American National Humanities Award.<sup>24</sup>

His revisionist position on the Armenian Genocide, however, caused him in 1995 to be sentenced in a French court. Following this so-called Lewis Affair, he seems to be one of the most official deniers of the Armenian Genocide. It should, perhaps, also be further noted that in one of the articles used in this essay, Bernard Lewis is generally presented as representing a “new” and increasingly refined type of Western denial, termed “neorevisionism”.<sup>25</sup> Within this new type of revisionism “[t]he ‘reality’ of the events is not denied as such. There seems to be only a question of interpretation. The historian is the master interpreter”<sup>26</sup>. It shall be interesting to note whether this different kind of denial will be visible in the analysis below.

Previous research done on the denial of the Armenian Genocide has been, more or less, focused upon Turkish denial, both academic and political (if such a distinction can even be drawn). The few Western revisionists have been generating less interest among historians, perhaps partly because of their relative scarcity. Focus has rather been placed on their (possible) collaborations with the Turkish state, than on their academic work (perhaps with the exception of Bernard Lewis). In the light of this, my analysis has been based to a large extent on the four primary sources presented above.

However, some attempts at organising the structure of arguments of denial has been made, perhaps foremost by one of the leading historians of the Armenian Genocide, Richard Hovannisian. In his article he deals with arguments of genocide denial in general, as they appear among deniers of the Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide.<sup>27</sup>

Historian Roger Smith also presents arguments of denial in his article<sup>28</sup>, of which some ideas and influences have been transferred into this essay. It seems worthy to keep in mind, though, that the scope of these articles is very limited, and based to a large extent on Turkish denial. Likewise, neither of them is based solely on investigations of primary sources. An outright examination of Western denial of the Armenian Genocide seems therefore to be

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<sup>24</sup> A choice of recipient which did not go unnoticed. The Executive Director of of the Armenian National Committee, Aram Hamparian, commented that "The President's decision to honor the work of a known genocide denier - an academic mercenary whose politically motivated efforts to cover up the truth run counter to the very principles this award was established to honor - represents a true betrayal of the public trust", November 22, 2006. Retrieved January 5 2009, from [http://www.anca.org/press\\_releases/press\\_releases.php?prid=1024](http://www.anca.org/press_releases/press_releases.php?prid=1024).

<sup>25</sup> Marc Nichanian, “The Truth of the Facts: About the New Revisionism” in Hovannisian (ed.), *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1999, p. 250.

<sup>26</sup> Nichanian, 1999, p. 252.

<sup>27</sup> Hovannisian 1999.

<sup>28</sup> Smith 1992.

lacking. It is with this in mind that I hope to contribute, very humbly, to the field of research with this essay.

#### ***1.4 Method***

In order to analyze the revisionist accounts and arguments mentioned earlier, an argumentative analysis will be undertaken. Partly based on a term used by Hovannisian, “patterns of denial”<sup>29</sup>, I have chosen to organize the arguments in terms of their function. While Hovannisian, however, uses the phrase “patterns of denial” as a descriptive term, accounting for how strategies of denial have changed over time, focusing primarily on Turkish denial, I have decided to use it as an analytical tool. Patterns of denial, in this essay, refer to broader structures of denial, under which it is possible to place arguments amounting to the same theme or “type” of denial. Among the four Western revisionist narratives here under investigation I have noticed three different patterns, namely: absolute denial, trivialization and the re-writing of history. These thematically organised structures will be presented in hopes of answering the second and third of this essay’s questions at hand.

Under each of these broader themes, however, individual arguments will be analyzed according to their structure and content. The level of analysis of individual arguments has, naturally, been more detailed and will attempt to answer, primarily, the first of the above mentioned questions. It has, furthermore, been my intent throughout this essay to primarily let the sources decide the structure and method used, and not to adjust the sources in order to fit the structure.

#### ***1.5 Limits***

Writing within the framework of extensive fields of research naturally sets limits for my investigation, and due to time restraints and the extent of the essay several interesting comparisons have been left out. Of particular interest are perhaps the similarities and differences between Turkish and Western denial of the Armenian Genocide. By several scholars it has been said to be one and the same, and Turkish denial has in a way been “professionalized” as Western scholars “who mastered the expressions and standards of Western research”<sup>30</sup> were “willing to back up the Turkish interpretation of the Armenian question”<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Richard G. Hovannisian, “The Armenian Genocide and Patterns of Denial” in Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *The Armenian Genocide in Perspective*, New Brunswick & Oxford: Transaction Books 1987a, p. 111.

<sup>30</sup> Jørgensen 2003, p. 209.

<sup>31</sup> Jørgensen 2003, p. 209.

Likewise, limits were placed on what parts of the genocide to investigate, and the three ultimately chosen: the Hamidian massacres of 1894 – 1896, the events of 1915 – 1916 and the post-war aftermath were all included on the basis of being integral parts of a traditional, mainstream historical narrative.

Other possible choices could have included the depiction of the Armenians (as terrorists, troublemakers, heathens and a people that “love[s] to hate”<sup>32</sup>), of the European powers (“they were lions, wolves and bears, waiting for a chance to devour their victim [the Ottoman Empire]”<sup>33</sup>) or even of the Young Turk government.

## ***1.6 Structure***

The second chapter of this essay will give a briefly description of the background of the Armenian Genocide, and its historiography. The traditional Western account will be presented, including the Hamidian Massacres, the 1915 – 1916 events as well as the peace treaties and war tribunals of 1920 – 1923. The traditional, mainstream narrative of the Armenian Genocide will during the analysis serve as the opposition to the revisionist arguments.

In the third chapter an analysis of the Western revisionist arguments will be undertaken. The section will be divided into three separate patterns of denial: absolute denial, trivialization and re-writing history. Each of these will further be divided into specific arguments.

Chapter four will present a short discussion of the results made, as well as the conclusion of the essay, repeating the questions at hand and aims of the investigation, and presenting areas of this essay worthy of further investigation.

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<sup>32</sup> Weems 2002, p. xvii.

<sup>33</sup> McCarthy 200, p. 3.

## 2 Background

This second chapter of the essay will review the mainstream narrative of the Hamidian Massacres, the 1915 – 1916 events and the post-war aftermath in order to both inform the reader of the traditional descriptions and explanations, and to, in chapter three, be able to present the revisionist arguments in opposition to this traditional account. The first section of this second chapter will, however, account for Western historiography, presenting the scholars that in this essay are used as opposition to the arguments of denial included in chapter three. Additionally, the phenomena of denial and the choice of the term “revisionism” will be explained.

### *2.1 The Traditional Account*

Fifty years post-genocide, 24 April 1965, marks in many ways the “return of history” in the case of the Armenian Genocide. Protests erupted in the capital of Soviet Armenia, Yerevan, where thousands of second and third generation survivors called for remembrance and acknowledgement.<sup>34</sup> This growing political awareness and pressure, together with an increasing scholarly interest in the Holocaust, helped to make possible a Western academic interest in the first genocide of the twentieth century<sup>35</sup>, up until then mostly defined as “the forgotten genocide”.

In this essay the Western, mainstream account of the Hamidian massacres, the 1915 – 1916 events and the post-war aftermath are all presented in order to serve as representing the professional narrative, which the revisionist writers here investigated seek to deny. In many ways, therefore, arguments against revisionism and denial are presented here through facts and eye-witness accounts.

In the attempt to present a reasonably fair picture of this Western narrative four Western academic writers have been chosen, together with the aforementioned ambassador Morgenthau (often cited and referred to by all). Swedish historians Kristian Gerner and Klas-Göran Karlsson, as well as Armenian-American professor Vahakn Dadrian present, in their respective books, the chronological unfolding of events before and after 1915, including the historiography of the Armenian Genocide. Richard Hovannisian, professor in Modern Armenian History at the University of California, often used in this essay and one of the premier experts of the Armenian Genocide, has been included with several articles. With the

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<sup>34</sup> Gerner & Karlsson 2005, p. 359.

<sup>35</sup> Gerner & Karlsson 2005, p. 355, 363.

hopes of including at least some of the many eye-witness stories and sources both Morgenthau's memoirs and a book by American scholar Peter Balakian, heavily filled with quotes and witness accounts, have been used.

### **2.1.1 The Hamidian Massacres, 1894 – 1896**

Taalat Pascha, Ottoman Minister of Interior during the Young Turk period, and one of the premier planners and executors of the Armenian Genocide, commented boastfully to Ambassador Morgenthau in 1915 that “I have accomplished more toward solving the Armenian problem in three months than Abdul Hamid accomplished in thirty years”<sup>36</sup>. This quote, crude and cold as it is, both states something about the mentality of the Young Turk government and helps to underline the truism that “the significance of any given historical period is best measured by its degree of relevance to the unfolding of subsequent events”<sup>37</sup>. Taalat Pascha here successfully links together the Armenian Genocide with earlier attempts to solve “the Armenian Question”. Sultan Abdul Hamid II, ruler of the late Ottoman Empire from 1876 to 1909, had, during the 1890's, performed the latest attempt.

Armenians as well as other minority groups in the Ottoman Empire had during Abdul Hamid's reign endured decades of discrimination and persecution. Sir Edwin Pears, British writer and journalist resident in Constantinople since the 1870's, noted that the name “Armenia” had been banned from use in newspapers, and Armenian schools were often closed without warning. Teachers often ran particular risks, and were frequently arrested, tortured and killed.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, taxes placed on Armenian subjects were often higher than average, and it does not seem to have been uncommon for Armenians to be forced to pay taxes both to Ottoman officials, and to Kurdish clan leaders.<sup>39</sup>

During the late nineteenth century's influx of Western ideas and customs, however, Armenians grew to become an increasingly influential part of Ottoman society<sup>40</sup>, and at several instances around the Empire they made attempts to seek reform and security of life, property and civil liberties. These demands were put down by force. Distinguished historian Vahakn N. Dadrian notes that “in response to Armenian clamors for equality and other

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<sup>36</sup> Morgenthau 1918, p. 225.

<sup>37</sup> Vahakn N. Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus*, Providence & Oxford: Berghahn Books 1995, p. 172.

<sup>38</sup> Balakian 2003, p. 36.

<sup>39</sup> Dadrian 1995, p. 114.

<sup>40</sup> Gerner & Karlsson 2005, p. 118.

ancillary rights, the dominant group set out to exercise its institutionalized power by applying that power as force”<sup>41</sup>.

Beginning with Armenian protests and uprisings in the Sassoun highlands in 1894, put down by armed Sultan troops, these initial massacres sent tremors throughout the rest of the Empire. Dadrian further acknowledges that “the Sassoun massacre was the first instance of organized mass murder of Armenians in modern Ottoman history”<sup>42</sup>, and Peter Balakian adds that “in the autumn of 1895 the map of Armenia in Turkey went up in flames”<sup>43</sup>.

In 1897 sultan Abdul Hamid contently stated that “the Armenian question was closed”<sup>44</sup>. However, American eye-witness Clarence Ussher, presented above as an eye-witness at Van in 1915, could note as he entered the Empire in 1899 that Ottoman customs “confiscated his dictionary because it contained the words ‘liberty’ and ‘revolution’, and [---] cut the maps out of his Bible because the name ‘Armenia’ appeared on them”<sup>45</sup>. To him, as to several others, the “Armenian Question” still seemed to be open.

### **2.1.2 The Murder of a Nation, 1915 – 1916**

Increasingly conservative, Abdul Hamid II was overthrown by the *Ittihad*s, or Young Turks<sup>46</sup>, in 1908. Ambassador Morgenthau, in hindsight describing the feelings of the Ottoman Armenians, notes that this change of power caused “the Armenians now for the first time in several centuries [to feel] themselves to be free men”<sup>47</sup>. He comments further, however, that “all these aspirations vanished like a dream”<sup>48</sup>. What had started out as a reformist movement, focused on Westernized reform and liberty, quickly and unexpectedly turned its interests towards empowering Turkish nationalism and a strengthening of central authority. For the Armenians, Hovannisian notices, this sudden change turned out to be “one of the most unexpected and [...] most tragic metamorphoses in modern history”<sup>49</sup>.

The following years, leading up the First World War, included growing domestic opposition towards the Young Turk government, and a triumvirate (consisting of the

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<sup>41</sup> Dadrian 1995, p. 113.

<sup>42</sup> Dadrian 1995, p. 117.

<sup>43</sup> Balakian 2003, p. 59.

<sup>44</sup> Dadrian 1995, p. 163.

<sup>45</sup> Balakian 2003, p. 36.

<sup>46</sup> The term “Young Turks” often includes a variety of Western influenced reformist movements and groups of the late Ottoman Empire. The term itself originates from a liberal Turkish journal published in France at the time, *La Jeune Turquie*. See for example: Gerner & Karlsson 2005, p. 121.

<sup>47</sup> Morgenthau 1918, p. 186.

<sup>48</sup> Morgenthau 1918, p. 186.

<sup>49</sup> Richard G. Hovannisian, “The Historical Dimensions of the Armenian Question, 1878 – 1923” in Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.) *The Armenian Genocide in Perspective*, New Brunswick & Oxford: Transaction Books 1987b, p. 26.

aforementioned Taalat Pascha, as well as Enver Pascha and Jemal Pascha) was formed leading the Ottoman Empire on the road towards an increasingly authoritarian and militarized society. It seems clear that during this time “extreme Turkish nationalism triumphed over multinational Ottomanism”<sup>50</sup>, and the Armenians were less and less fitting into the picture.

As explained in the preface above, the Ottoman entry into war in late 1914 enhanced the tensions already present, and in 1915 a policy of extermination of the Armenians was undertaken by the Young Turk rulers. On April 24 1915, a date usually put forward as the starting point of the Armenian Genocide<sup>51</sup>, Armenian intellectuals, as well as the Armenian political and religious leaders, of Constantinople were arrested, deported, and subsequently murdered in the deserts of Anatolia. At about the same time Armenian soldiers that had served in the Ottoman Army were stripped of their arms and forced into labour battalions, only to be murdered in the deserts.

The rest of the Armenian population from all over the Empire<sup>52</sup>, women, children, teenagers and the elderly, were taken from their homes and likewise deported into the vast deserts of Anatolia and Syria. These death marshes led nowhere, and very few survived to tell the tale. Most died from starvation, disease, executions or repeated abuse and rape by Ottoman soldiers, gendarmes, bands of released prisoners or locals.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, Hovannisian notes, “even the memory of the Armenian nation was intended to for obliteration; churches and monuments were desecrated, and small children, snatched from their parents, were renamed and farmed out to be raised as Turks”<sup>54</sup>.

At this point, reports from around the Empire speak of the same horrors, and several of these eventually reached Ambassador Morgenthau in Constantinople. For example, the American Consul in Harput, Leslie Davis, wrote to him:

*Another method was found to destroy the Armenian race. This is no less than the deportation of the entire Armenian population [---]. The full meaning of such an order can scarcely be imagined by those who are not familiar with the conditions of this isolated region. A massacre, however horrible the word may sound, would be humane in comparison with it. In a massacre many escape but a wholesale deportation of this kind in this country means a longer and perhaps even more*

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<sup>50</sup> Richard G. Hovannisian, “Introduction: History, Politics, Ethics” in Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *The Armenian Genocide: History, Politics, Ethics*, Houndmills: Macmillan 1992, p. xvi.

<sup>51</sup> See for example Gerner & Karlsson 2005, p. 128.

<sup>52</sup> Perhaps with the exception of the Armenian populations of the large cities, that seem to have been somewhat spared thanks to foreign diplomatic presence. See for instance Gerner & Karlsson 2005, p. 128.

<sup>53</sup> Hovannisian 1987b, p. 29.

<sup>54</sup> Hovannisian 1987b, p. 29.

*dreadful death for nearly everyone. I do not believe it possible for one in a hundred to survive, perhaps not one in a thousand.*<sup>55</sup>

Morgenthau noticed the same, and stated that “the Young Turks displayed greater ingenuity than their predecessor, Abdul Hamid. [---] Instead of massacring outright the Armenian race, they now decided to deport it<sup>56</sup>”, recognizing that “the real purpose of the deportation was robbery and destruction”<sup>57</sup>. As Talaat Pascha gave the orders for deportation he was therefore, in Morgenthau’s words, “giving the death-warrant to a whole race”<sup>58</sup>. Diplomats and missionaries stationed in the Empire were however not the only ones outraged and appalled by the extermination campaigns taking place. The 1915 *New York Times* headlines read: “Tell of Horrors Done in Armenia”, “Million Armenians Killed or in Exile” or “800,000 Armenians Counted Destroyed”.<sup>59</sup>

All in all, around one million Armenians, about half of the Ottoman Armenian population, are likely to have been murdered during the peak of 1915 – 1916, but as Gerner and Karlsson notices, persecutions and murder of Armenians did not end when the war did, but continued with varying severity up until 1923, and the formation of the Turkish Republic.<sup>60</sup>

### **2.1.3 Post-war Battlefields, 1919 – 1923**

It is clear, states Hovannisian, that the essence of the term “genocide” was well known and relevant long before Raphael Lemkin coined the word in the mid-twentieth century. Related terms such as “murder of a nation”, “race extermination”, “holocaust” and “crimes against humanity” were all used in order to sum up the horrible experiences of the Armenian population.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, the severity of the crimes, differentiating them from formerly known crimes of war, did not escape attention once the war was over.

In the Ottoman Empire the perpetrators of genocide were scheduled to be dealt with through a series of court-martials, organized largely as a result of British pressure for Armenian justice.<sup>62</sup> However, there seems to have been Ottoman desires to deal with recent events as well. For example, the Ottoman foreign minister at the time, Ahmed Reshid,

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<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Balakian 2003, p. 232.

<sup>56</sup> Morgenthau 1918, p. 202.

<sup>57</sup> Morgenthau 1918, p. 203.

<sup>58</sup> Morgenthau 1918, p. 203.

<sup>59</sup> Balakian 2003, p. 226.

<sup>60</sup> Gerner & Karlsson 2005, p. 128.

<sup>61</sup> Hovannisian 1992, p. xvi.

<sup>62</sup> Balakian 2003, p. 333.

declared that “with regard to the Armenian massacres, it was not merely the intention but the firm decision of the Government to punish the guilty”<sup>63</sup>.

All in all, more than two hundred files were prepared by the tribunal, and a number of Young Turk leaders were put on trial.<sup>64</sup> Taalat, Enver and Jemal received death sentences in absentia, and the tribunal concluded that the Armenian massacres were centrally planned, and based on several oral as well as written orders originating from the Young Turk government.<sup>65</sup>

At the end of 1919, however, the Kemalist takeover of the Empire redistributed power once more, and the war tribunals soon came to an end. British appeals for Armenian justice, likewise, faded away as time went by.<sup>66</sup> The international peace treaties following the First World War show a pattern similar to that of the Constantinople trials. The original Treaty of Sèvres, signed in August 1920, acknowledged the Armenian Genocide and called for international support and the possible formation of an independent Armenian republic. Three years later, however, the Lausanne Treaty “marked the international abandonment of the Armenian Question”<sup>67</sup>. As in the case of the abandonment of the Ottoman court-martials, the new Kemalist government in Turkey was able to avoid any mentioning of “Armenia” in the final documents.<sup>68</sup> From 1923 and onwards Turkish officials have maintained a strategy of silence and denial towards the Armenian Genocide.<sup>69</sup>

## ***2.2 Denial and Revisionism***

The tyrants of ancient times, notes Roger Smith, tended to boastfully erect monuments and instruct epic chronicles to be written about their successful eradications of entire peoples.<sup>70</sup> In modern times, however, this has been, by far, the exception. Denial has been the rule. In the case of the Armenian Genocide denial has in many ways prevailed, especially within the political sphere, but to some extent also within the academic arena. In this case, as noted above, denial is often explained as the final phase of genocide. Richard Hovannisian maintains:

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<sup>63</sup> Balakian 2003, p. 333.

<sup>64</sup> Balakian 2003, p. 334.

<sup>65</sup> Gerner & Karlsson 2005, p. 138.

<sup>66</sup> Balakian 2003, p. 344.

<sup>67</sup> Hovannisian 1987b, p. 37

<sup>68</sup> Hovannisian 1987b, p. 36 – 37

<sup>69</sup> Jørgensen 2003, p. 193.

<sup>70</sup> Smith 1992, p. 8.

*Falsification, deception, and half-truths reduce what was to what may have been or perhaps what was not at all. [---] Senseless terror gives way to reason, violence adapts to explanation, and history is reshaped to suit a contemporary agenda.<sup>71</sup>*

In Turkey, denial of genocide has been the official strategy ever since the republic was founded in 1923. Within Western history writing, however, denial has appeared in opposition to a mainstream account, explaining the term “revisionism” used in this essay in order to refer to Shaw and Shaw, McCarthy, Weems and Lewis. There should be no misconceptions that despite the term of reference used, the fact of the matter is that denial of the Armenian Genocide is here viewed as denial under the guise of historical debate, and not as an objective revision of past conclusions. In many ways, as historians dealing with genocide denial have observed, the term of reference might as well have been “negationist”<sup>72</sup> or “rationalizers-relativizers”<sup>73</sup>, as that is the true nature of denial.

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<sup>71</sup> Hovannisian 1999, p. 202.

<sup>72</sup> Ternon, Yves, “Freedom and Responsibility of the Historian: The ‘Lewis Affair’” in Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1999, p. 238.

<sup>73</sup> Hovannisian 1999, p. 211.

### 3 Analysis

Below follows an argumentative analysis of the four Western revisionist narratives presented above. As noted the analysis will be presented according to three different *patterns of denial* noted above: “absolute denial”, “trivialization” and “re-writing”. Each of these separate patterns, or themes, has then been subdivided into different types of arguments, which in turn has been given a thorough analysis.

A thematic structure has here been favoured instead of, for example, a lay-out presenting the arguments revisionist by revisionist, or by organizing the arguments by each chronologic historical event. This has been done with the hope of discovering structures of arguments, rather than focusing on each argument on its own, and its consequent refutation.

#### ***3.1 Pattern of Denial: Absolute Denial***

The first, and perhaps most obvious, pattern of denial is that of absolute denial of the genocidal activities taking place in the Ottoman Empire from 1915 and onwards. This pattern, in the accounts investigated here, expresses itself in one of two ways, either as explicit or latent denial.

##### **3.1.1 Explicit Denial**

*There was no ‘genocide’ as they claim.*<sup>74</sup>

The quote above, from Samuel Weems’ *Armenia*, seems a typical representative of arguments here classified as explicit denial. There was no genocide, nothing happened. Weems, additionally, seems to be the premier representative of absolute explicit denial in this essay and constantly refers to the events of 1915 as the “alleged genocide of 1915”<sup>75</sup>, or as “the greatest tall tale being told by Armenians today”<sup>76</sup>. It is, according to him, clear that claims of genocide are nothing more than a hoax and a sham, and these claims are often explained in combination with different conspiratorial theories<sup>77</sup>, and as part of an Armenian “genocide industry”<sup>78</sup>.

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<sup>74</sup> Weems 2002, p. xvii.

<sup>75</sup> Weems 2002, p. x.

<sup>76</sup> Weems 2002, p. 38.

<sup>77</sup> For instance, claims of genocide are by Weems explained to be “an effort to get mega-dollars out of both the Turks and American Christians”, Weems 2002, p. xi.

<sup>78</sup> Weems 2002, p. 59. A symbolic terminology, referring to the somewhat derogatory term of “Holocaust industry”.

Weems, furthermore, tends to combine explicit denial with other patterns of denial, presenting a somewhat logically flawed set of arguments. Example of this ought to be quotes such as the one above, stating that nothing happened, combined with arguments stating that for what did occur the Armenians were themselves to blame.<sup>79</sup>

Another typical type of absolute explicit denial claims that there was never any genocide, only war time propaganda stories about it, invented in the allied countries in order to create public opinion against the Ottoman Empire. Justin McCarthy writes, for instance:

*The British and French were victims of their own wartime propaganda. In alliance with the American missionary establishment, the British propaganda office had built a picture of 'starving Armenia' that played on emotions at home and abroad to mobilize animosity toward the Ottomans. [---] The Armenians were portrayed both as unarmed innocents who had been slaughtered by 'The Unspeakable Turk' and as a plucky people who had fought for the Allies.*<sup>80</sup>

In this example it is the 1915 – 1916 events that are being denied as allied propaganda, but it seems that it is the post-war tribunals that are being qualified as propaganda more often than not. McCarthy colloquially refers to the tribunals as “kangaroo courts”<sup>81</sup>, pointing out the revisionist view of them as a sham. The new government, revisionist accounts claim, only held the trials as a means of pleasing the victorious Entente powers, and sentenced the accused on the basis of imagined crimes.<sup>82</sup>

### **3.1.2 Latent Denial**

*Not to remember is not a neutral act.*<sup>83</sup>

The second type of absolute denial is here referred to as latent denial, very much on the basis of Roger Smith’s conclusion, quoted above. Actively choosing not to deal with, or to withhold relevant information in the case of the Armenian Genocide is not a case of choosing sides in a historical debate. Rather, it is an active way of denying genocide, by the simple use of silence. In most instances where denial is latent it presents itself as a sort of “non-argument”, and the “non-telling” of history here equals a very absolute way of denying

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<sup>79</sup> Often the formation of Armenian revolutionary societies or the expansion of Armenian nationalism is seen as valid reasons for Turkish “intervention”. See, for example, Weems 2002, p. 58.

<sup>80</sup> McCarthy 2001, p. 121.

<sup>81</sup> McCarthy 2001, p. 128.

<sup>82</sup> Shaw & Shaw 1997, p. 332.

<sup>83</sup> Smith 1992, p. 2.

history. In many ways, therefore, this type of absolute denial tends to be the least visible, and yet most interesting version of genocide denial.

To some degree every revisionist scholar here under investigation utilizes this type of denial. Most frequently left out of history in the four revisionist narratives under investigation here are the post-war peace treaties, and, perhaps most noticeable, the Abdul Hamid massacres of 1894 – 1896. While Weems does not mention the reign of Abdul Hamid whatsoever, McCarthy instead focuses on reforms done by the sultan, and concludes that “the Ottoman Empire could not have fought as well in World War I, nor the Turks win their Independence War, were telegraph lines, roads and railroads not in place beforehand”<sup>84, 85</sup>. The massacres are never mentioned.

Shaw & Shaw, as well as Lewis, does on the other hand mention the massacres, though with varying consequence. They do write about the massacres, but in doing so, they resort to other types of denial. Bernard Lewis, however, presents a slightly more nuanced picture. He describes the reign of Abdul Hamid as despotism, but deals with the massacres in a single parenthesis, noting that “the Armenian participants, mindful of the massacres of 1894 – 1896, were anxious”<sup>86</sup>. In this case, further questions concerning latent denial arise. Where does the boundary between limiting one’s scope of research and denying history go? Do renowned scholars and expert historians not hold, at least, some intellectual freedom to choose and interpret their collected material, and to exclude that which they see fit? In the case of Lewis’ narrative of the emergence of Turkey, this type of questions and reservations seems to be most relevant. His presentation of the Abdul Hamid massacres may well be short and questionable, but it is really his presentation of the 1915 – 1916 genocide that is most relevant here.

Lewis’ narrative is divided into two separate parts, the first giving a chronological description of the emergence of Turkey, and the second concerned with “aspects of change” (including style of government, religion, culture, class and so on). During this first chronological view of history, nothing is mentioned of the Armenian Genocide. The term “repressive and centralist policies of the Young Turks”<sup>87</sup> is mentioned on occasion, but no recount is made of the actual genocidal activities. This type of non-narrating, and non-arguments, seems a classic example of latent denial, especially when recognizing Lewis’

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<sup>84</sup> McCarthy 2001, p. 28.

<sup>85</sup> In itself an argument with frightening similarities to the more common comment: “but Hitler *did* build roads, and put people to work”.

<sup>86</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, third edition, New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002, p. 202.

<sup>87</sup> Lewis 2002, p. 219

background as a historian. In the grand, chronological narrative of the emergence of Turkey and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Armenian Genocide, according to Lewis, holds no place. Instead, a short account of the Armenian suffering is made in the second part of the book, under the heading of “The Religious Minorities”. Here the “terrible slaughter of 1915”<sup>88</sup> is included, though in combination with other patterns of denial.

The question of how to classify Lewis’ account of the Armenian Genocide, or perhaps the lack thereof, presents an interesting case. Genocide is never included in his “grand narrative”, yet it is included in the later stage of his book<sup>89</sup>. In conjunction with secondary material, however, it seems increasingly justified to refer to Lewis’ denial as latent. The Armenian Genocide was, in the first edition of *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* from 1961, referred to as “the terrible holocaust of 1915, when a million and one half Armenians perished”<sup>90</sup>, and declared with the use of the term “holocaust” the magnitude and scope of the events. In the 1988 French translation of the book, and in the third edition of the English version which is being used in this essay, the very same phrase has, however, been altered into “the terrible slaughter of 1915, when, according to estimates, more than a million Armenians perished, as well as an unknown number of Turks”<sup>91</sup> (where, naturally, the addition of Turks as victims points towards an additional pattern of denial, dealt with below). This shift in position is worth to take into account when describing Bernard Lewis’ account of the Armenian Genocide, and it does seem more likely that the silence with which the 1915 events is being dealt with is indeed a form of absolute, active, latent denial.

### ***3.2 Pattern of Denial: Trivialization***

The second pattern of denial visible in the four revisionist sources is often termed as a “trivialization” of genocide, so for example by Richard Hovannisian. He argues that by using arguments of trivialization and rationalization deniers of genocide are able to place “emphasis [---] away from the planned, systematic process of mass murder, and genocide is explained in the context of general wartime causalities, the number of victims are minimized, and doubt is cast upon the reliability of the eyewitness testimony and documents relating to the mass killings”<sup>92</sup>. Instead of absolute negation of the Armenian Genocide, as was the case in the pattern of denial investigated above, arguments trivializing genocide instead agree to the basic

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<sup>88</sup> Lewis 2002, p. 356

<sup>89</sup> Though by then as something undefinable outside the main Turkish narrative, and only connected to the victim (the religious minority), never to the perpetrators.

<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Ternon 1999, p. 242.

<sup>91</sup> Lewis 2002, p. 356.

<sup>92</sup> Hovannisian 1999, p. 202.

historical “reality” of genocide. But rather, as Hovannisian further notes, it is a case of academic deception, where the objective of denial remains the same.<sup>93</sup>

To some extent, it should be noted, the arguments presented as trivialization are more specified, dealing with detailed facts, than the somewhat more philosophical, or theorizing, arguments of absolute denial, or of re-writing.

### 3.2.1 Provocation

*The internal threat was a massive Armenian revolt in eastern Anatolia.*<sup>94</sup>

The quote above, from McCarthy, contains many of the arguments included in the so-called provocation thesis. There was an actual, internal minority threat dangerous to the Ottoman state (and not just a perceived one), Armenians were terrorists, Russian spies and guerrilla soldiers, and the revolts taking place were ‘massive’ – transforming the Armenian Genocide into a civil war<sup>95</sup> between two equal parts. Hovannisian explains the intention of these types of arguments as an attempt to “show that the alleged victims were not free of guilt and that the security measures taken by the state were no different from what beleaguered governments have done before and after”<sup>96</sup>. Gerner and Karlsson additionally notes that arguments claiming Armenian provocation are common among Turkish historians, but that a few Western academics likewise present them as valid explanations for the actions taken by the Young Turk government.<sup>97</sup> Among the Western revisionists included in this investigation, the use of arguments of provocation seems widespread. McCarthy’s quote above is one of many in his book<sup>98</sup>, and Shaw and Shaw likewise build their narrative of the 1915 – 1916 events upon this thesis of provocation. Apart from their description of the massacres at Van, presented in the preface of this essay, the whole World War period is being described as a case of Armenian revolt and uprisings, to which stressed Young Turk leaders responded. Armenian revolutionaries, Shaw and Shaw note, “became increasingly violent”<sup>99</sup> during the late nineteenth century, forcing sultan Abdul Hamid to resort to send in troops<sup>100</sup>, and once

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<sup>93</sup> Hovannisian 1999, p. 202.

<sup>94</sup> McCarthy 2001, p. 106.

<sup>95</sup> A term that revisionist Samuel Weems actually uses as a description of what happened in 1915 – 1916, see Weems 2002, p. 4.

<sup>96</sup> Hovannisian 1999, p. 207.

<sup>97</sup> Gerner & Karlsson 2005, p. 123.

<sup>98</sup> Where, additionally, the whole 1915 – 1916 period is being referred to under the heading of “Armenian Revolt”, see McCarthy 2001, p. 106.

<sup>99</sup> Shaw & Shaw 1997, p. 202 – 203.

<sup>100</sup> Shaw & Shaw 1997, p. 204.

the First World War broke out Armenians made common cause with the Russian Army. In 1915, they conclude, “Armenians again flooded into the czarist armies”<sup>101</sup>, forcing the Ottoman leaders to take action. Samuel Weems sums up this provocation thesis, and its subsequent denial of genocide, as he writes that “Armenians alleged genocide when they joined the Russians in attempting to overthrow the Ottomans and the Ottomans reacted to defend their country”<sup>102</sup>, often adding the rhetorical question: “[w]ouldn’t any nation do the same when acting in self-defense?”<sup>103</sup>.

In the preface to the second edition Shaw and Shaw respond to the critique they have received by claiming that “the experience of the Armenians [---] was not unique to them. It was part of a general tragedy that engulfed *all* people of the Empire”<sup>104</sup>. In this latter quote it is unproblematic to recognize that one of Bernard Lewis’ main arguments is being recited. He, like McCarthy above, notes that “[f]or the Turks, the Armenian movement was the deadliest of all threats”<sup>105</sup>, and once war was declared on Russia in late 1914 a “desperate struggle between them [Armenians and Turks] began – a struggle between two nations for the possession of a single homeland”<sup>106</sup>. This labelling of genocide as an equal struggle, however, proves an indirect version of denial, clouding the roles of victim and perpetrator, and overriding the apparent differences between an armed and professional army, and a scattered, defenceless minority people. There was never an Armenian plan aimed at vanquishing the Turks, but rather a hope of restoring individual and civil liberties within an authoritarian state.<sup>107</sup> Samuel Weems, it seems, often uses a more radical version of this provocation thesis, as dealt with below (under section 3.3.1).

### 3.2.2 Humanism

*We make no apology for using Ottoman sources for a history of the Ottoman Empire. [---] No history of France would be considered methodologically sound and balanced if it were written on the basis of English and Italian observations.*<sup>108</sup>

Arguments appealing to humanism and a sort of moral academic code, much like the one above, belong, as Roger Smith notes, within a “flawed moral discourse”<sup>109</sup>. Here,

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<sup>101</sup> Shaw & Shaw 1997, p. 315.

<sup>102</sup> Weems 2002, p. 102.

<sup>103</sup> Weems 2002, p. 63.

<sup>104</sup> Shaw & Shaw 1997, p. x.

<sup>105</sup> Lewis 2002, p. 356.

<sup>106</sup> Lewis 2002, p. 356.

<sup>107</sup> Gerner & Karlsson 2005, p. 124.

<sup>108</sup> Shaw & Shaw 1997, p. x.

methodological and factual claims, bordering on truisms, are made in an off-context. Using Shaw and Shaw's quote above, the scholarly sound judgement of using diverse and valid sources becomes, in the context of the denial of the Armenian Genocide, an argument very much favouring denial. Using Turkish historians' claims of denial in order to narrate an "unbiased" version of Turkish history seems solid proof of the unsound moral judgement Smith refers to.

On a similar note Samuel Weems rhetorically asks his readers: "Whom do you believe – other Americans who saw the Armenians, very much alive, leaving the Ottoman Empire? Or Armenians who merely *claim* 1.5 million of their people were murdered by the Ottoman government?"<sup>110</sup>. These alleged American eye-witnesses, said to have seen Armenians leaving the Ottoman Empire alive and well, are, however, never presented further.

Nevertheless, these types of arguments do apply to humanist considerations in their readers. There is generally a shared agreement between academics to try to see every side of the story, and although this is never the case here, appeals are made for it to appear that way. Roger Smith refers to these arguments as claims of "fairness", grounded in the simple truism that "there are two sides to every question"<sup>111</sup>. Shaw and Shaw further plays on these arguments vouching for fair and critical judgements of the 1915 – 1916 events as they note that "[c]onsiderable further study is needed to determine the exact degree of blame and responsibility that can be assigned to each of the parties involved"<sup>112</sup>. These types of arguments, however, clearly only aids in clouding an issue of blame and responsibility that both to Turkish officials (as war tribunals was held within Turkey, see Background) and the involved European powers was settled, more or less, during the First World War.

Furthermore, narratives describing the Armenian Genocide as a struggle, as presented above, could also be included among arguments of humanism. Arguments claiming that, for example, war and the end of an Empire were "a general tragedy that engulfed *all* the people of the Empire"<sup>113</sup> seems valid enough on its own, but in the context of genocide these types of arguments can very well be classified as denial. Roger Smith further exemplifies this flawed logic when asking "would those who use the 'two sides' theory to cast doubt on the reality of the Armenian Genocide apply the same argument on the Holocaust?"<sup>114</sup>.

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<sup>109</sup> Smith 1992, p. 4.

<sup>110</sup> Weems 2002, p. xi.

<sup>111</sup> Smith 1992, p. 5.

<sup>112</sup> Shaw & Shaw 1997, p. 316.

<sup>113</sup> Shaw & Shaw 1997, p. x.

<sup>114</sup> Smith 1992, p. 5.

### 3.2.3 Deportations and the Question of Intent

*On 26 of May 1915, the government gave orders to relocate Armenians from potential war zones [---]. The intent, a common one in governments fighting guerrilla wars, was to deprive the rebels of the support they needed to carry on their battles.<sup>115</sup>*

Questioning the genocidal intent of the perpetrators serves as another type of trivialization among the revisionist narratives included in this essay. As in the quote above, from Justin McCarthy, the deportations, or death marches, during World War One are in revisionist accounts often rationalized and excused. Firstly, the deportations are redefined as relocations, or evacuations<sup>116</sup>, turning what was a mere excuse for the extermination of a whole people into a war time emergency exit, aimed simply at relocating troublemakers. Secondly, the deportations, or “relocations”, are limited only to Armenians living in war zones, both by McCarthy and the Shaw couple (when the actual deportations took place all around the Empire, with the exception of larger cities where foreign presence halted arrests and killings). Thirdly, the intent of the deportations, as explained by McCarthy above, is described as a common practice to deal with internal enemies.

Weems uses the same arguments as McCarthy when he states that “[t]here is no genuine proof the Ottomans desired to do anything but remove this very real threat to their army and this is why the Armenians were removed.”<sup>117</sup>. On the contrary he concludes that the deportations seem nothing more than a sham and a hoax, where “Armenians have produced fake documents in an attempt to prove otherwise”<sup>118</sup>.

Shaw and Shaw, however, further develop this revisionist inquiry into the genocidal intent of the deportations. They note that “instructions were issued for the army to protect the Armenians against nomadic attacks and to provide them with sufficient food and other supplies”<sup>119</sup>. Once the alleged destinations were reached “[t]he Armenians were to be protected and cared for until they returned to their homes after the war”<sup>120</sup>. The intent to commit genocide is here completely erased, and while McCarthy and Weems seek to transform genocide into commonly used strategic safety manoeuvres, Shaw and Shaw seek to erase the reality of the deportations all together. There was never an intention of killing, they

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<sup>115</sup> McCarthy 2001, p. 110.

<sup>116</sup> Shaw & Shaw 1997, p. 315.

<sup>117</sup> Weems 2002, p. 58 – 59.

<sup>118</sup> Weems 2002, p. 59.

<sup>119</sup> Shaw & Shaw 1997, p. 315.

<sup>120</sup> Shaw & Shaw 1997, p. 315.

stress, only to remove Armenian agitators for the duration of the war, and then help them return safe once peace was restored.

### 3.2.4 The Numbers Game

*Armenians claim that as many as 2 million were massacred, but no counts of the dead were ever taken, and the actual total can only be inferred. These claims are based on the supposition that the prewar Armenian population [...] was 2.5 million. According to the Ottoman census in 1914, however, it was at the most 1.5 million. Half of these people resided in the areas affected by the deportations, [---] it appears that about 400,000 people actually were transported in 1915 – 1916. [---] [O]ne can conclude that about 300,000 died if one accepts the Ottoman census reports, or 1.3 million if the Armenian figures are utilized.<sup>121</sup>*

Richard Hovannisian notes that it seems to be a common feature within denial of genocide to question and manipulate the number of victims.<sup>122</sup> The fewer the victims, revisionist arguments seem to reason, the less valid are claims of genocide. The, perhaps, most reasonable type of argument questioning the number of victims is similar to Shaw and Shaw's discussion presented above. They stress that there are different numbers circulating depending on which sources are being used, and note that absolute figures are not easy to come by. On its own, the argument seems valid. However, placed in a narrative context denying the Armenian Genocide all together, even these objectively valid arguments, bordering on maxims, become both ways of confusing and clouding accounts of genocide, and ways to place focus on details – ignoring the greater picture of genocide.

Additionally, it seems, on the basis of the quote above, that not only are the total number of deaths questioned, but also the total number of Armenians actually living in the Ottoman Empire at the time of genocide. Armenians claim 2.5 million, Shaw and Shaw note, and the Ottoman census 1.5 million. It goes without saying that the fewer the Armenians were to begin with; the fewer total deaths can be accounted for by revisionist debaters. Using solely the statistics of the perpetrator government in order to deduce these numbers is, however, never questioned.

Samuel Weems uses a more drastic version of Shaw and Shaw's argument above, and attempts to cloud the question of numbers far more. He presents odd arguments of denial, when a number of 1.5 million victims is being discussed, claiming that "Armenians are

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<sup>121</sup> Shaw & Shaw 1997, p. 315 – 316.

<sup>122</sup> Hovannisian 1999, p. 217.

coming up with more Armenians murdered than there were Armenians in Anatolia”<sup>123</sup>. When, a few pages later, the number 2 million victims has come up (on the basis of a number given by Richard Hovannisian) Weems, instead, asserts that “[n]o historians of the 1915 time period list the number of Armenians as more than 1.5 million in total”<sup>124</sup>, agreeing with the number formerly refuted. In Weems’ book the aim of discussing numbers amounts to nothing more than clouding the issue of genocide further.

### ***3.3 Pattern of Denial: Rewriting History***

As the third, and final, pattern of denial the phrase “re-writing” has been chosen to sum up both arguments recasting the roles of victim and perpetrator, and of arguments inverting the historical chronology of the Armenian Genocide. In both cases it is a matter of not only denying or trivializing actions of genocide, but actually to re-write them into their opposites.

If the two previous patterns of denial have proven themselves to be, at least somewhat, straightforward, then this third pattern has during the course of the investigation presented itself as vividly different. It does, in many ways, seem to represent the most drastic revisionist arguments.

#### **3.3.1 Inverting the Roles of History**

*They [western diplomats] concluded it was Armenian revolutionary societies doing the revolting, slaughtering, and massacring of Muslims. [---] The Armenians always managed to send reports stating that they were being killed when the truth was it was they who were massacring civilians.*<sup>125</sup>

The most basic historical roles seem to be those of perpetrator and victim, and in the case of genocide casting them would appear to be an uncomplicated procedure. The Armenian men, women and children, led out into the deserts towards a certain death have, rightfully, been attributed the role of victims in traditional accounts, and Ottoman leaders, gendarmes, soldiers, and Kurdish tribes have all been defined as perpetrators (perhaps with somewhat varying degrees of responsibility). In Weems’ narrative of the Armenian Genocide, however, these clear-cut roles have been reversed. In the quote above Armenians are defined as doing the killing, while Muslims and Kurds are presented as the innocent, “civilian”, victims. It is clear that these arguments differ from trivializing arguments of Armenian provocation, which

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<sup>123</sup> Weems 2002, p. 39.

<sup>124</sup> Weems 2002, p. 78.

<sup>125</sup> Weems 2002, p. 5.

“simply” seek to portray the massacres and genocide as a rightful response to a violent group of revolutionaries, threatening national security. This re-casting of roles, however, does not only make Armenians share Turkish responsibility. Instead, all responsibility is being placed on the Armenians, who are being categorized as the perpetrators. Armenian resistance, at the city of Van for instance, is likewise being labelled as active revolution, where Armenians play the role of perpetrator as they “managed to *capture* the unarmed city of Van and hold it until the Russians arrived”<sup>126</sup>.

These types of arguments are certainly a form of denial, but one cannot help but wonder if they are not bordering on something else as well. Where, it seems valid to ask, should the line between denial and outright lies be drawn? Not telling the whole truth, keeping silent or rationalize and trivialize serious historical events is certainly an unsound, and non-academic, form of writing history, but simply making up new scenarios and lying about events seem to be arguments residing on another level of denial. Perhaps one distinction between the two levels of denial could be to argue that arguments of absolute denial, or trivialization, argue *against* another narrative. Lies, however, does not argue in opposition to anything, but are simply drawn out of thin air. This drastic form of denial has nonetheless clearly abandoned all intellectual considerations, surrendering entirely to ideological aims.

### 3.3.2 Inverting the Chronology of History

*[M]ore than forty years after the event, Armenians cried out the Turks committed a terrible ‘genocide’ in 1915. Modern-day Turkey didn’t even become a nation until 1923 – eight years after the Ottomans kicked the Armenians out of their country for being terrorists and disloyal.*<sup>127</sup>

The argument above, stating that the Republic of Turkey cannot be held responsible for the Armenian Genocide in 1915 on the basis of chronology, seems to, on its own, form a logical argument. States and persons, coming into being post-genocide, cannot very well be regarded as responsible for events and actions taking place prior to their existence. This is all very well, had it not been for a few minor adjustments in the case of the Armenian Genocide. Here, persecutions and violence against Armenians did not quit when the war did in 1918 but continued<sup>128</sup>, and those responsible for ordering and performing acts of genocide were never dealt with. Additionally, the on-going active, state-sponsored denial of the Turkish state forms

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<sup>126</sup> Weems 2002, p. 4. My italics.

<sup>127</sup> Weems 2002, p. xv.

<sup>128</sup> Gerner & Karlsson 2005, p. 128.

the very last stage of genocide. Nonetheless, arguments like Weems' above tend to be used as a way of denying Turkish responsibility.

On the other hand, actions taken by the Armenian Republic, formed in 1918<sup>129</sup>, are, in Weems' narrative, accounted for as valid excuses, origins and reasons for the Armenian Genocide – showing a completely opposing position in comparison with the one presented above, relieving Turkey of responsibility. His view on Armenia is best summed up in the table of contents of his book, presenting chapters such as “Armenia Founded as a Dictatorship”, “Bloodthirsty Armenian Bandits”, “Armenian Cruelty” or “Armenia Joins Hitler's Nazi Cause”. Taking his reader through this Armenian “great deception”<sup>130</sup>, actions taken by the Armenian Republic since 1918 and till today are used as explanations and validations for genocide. For example, Armenian cooperation with czarist Russia in 1915 is being proven through the 1920 Soviet annexation of the Republic, which took place “without [Armenia] ever firing a single shot in self-defense”<sup>131</sup>.

These arguments, determining that post-genocide states and actions both can and can not be held responsible for the massacres of the 1890's, and the events of 1915 – 1916, serve to show that arguments of denial are never rigid. They can, it seems, be used at will, in order to fulfil revisionist aims of denial.

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<sup>129</sup> Only to, in 1920, become a part of the Soviet Union. In 1991 independence was once more declared.

<sup>130</sup> An expression used by Weems in order to name the series that his book is a part of, *The Great Deception Series*.

<sup>131</sup> Weems 2002, p. xvi.

## 4 Discussion and Conclusion

This essay sets out to investigate Western denial of the Armenian Genocide, as it appears in the narrative of four different works, written by Western scholars. The narratives of three periods, or historical events, were chosen to be included – the Hamidian Massacres of 1894 – 1896, the genocidal events of 1915 – 1916 and the post-war aftermath of 1919 – 1923. The actual Genocide events and actions, performed during the war, as well as the post-war aftermath have largely been dealt with above. The Hamidian Massacres, on the other hand, have not been as visible, simply because it has, to a large extent, been left out by the revisionist accounts. Pre-genocide massacres, it seems, are not to be included in a revisionist narrative. Additionally, the essay would attempt to answer whether the four Western narratives used different patterns of denial, and arguments, in order to negate the Armenian Genocide.

After having analyzed the narratives of Shaw and Shaw, McCarthy, Weems and Lewis it seems like three different usages of the above presented patterns of denial can be detected. Firstly, Shaw and Shaw, together with McCarthy, seem to represent what Hovannisian in his article describes as a “classic” combination of absolute denial and trivialization of the Armenian Genocide. He notes that among scholars denying genocide the trend has been a “[change] from [strategies] of absolute negation of intentional mass killing to that of rationalization”<sup>132</sup>. The 1915 – 1916 events take up most of the narrative, and they are by both Shaw and Shaw and McCarthy trivialized using arguments of provocation, arguments appealing to humanism, questioning genocidal intent and clouding the number of victims. The post-war tribunals are denied, and described as allied propaganda.

Secondly, Weems presents a tactic somewhat similar to that of Shaw and McCarthy, but still vividly different. He, as the only one of the revisionists investigated, utilizes all three patterns of denial in attempt to deny everything. According to him, there was never any genocide or massacres or war tribunals. However, that which did happen was due to provocation from Armenian revolutionaries and terrorists. In addition to this somewhat logically flawed argumentation, Weems furthermore argues in accordance with the third pattern of denial – by re-writing history. He presents the massacres (which, according to him, never occurred) as performed by Armenians, on the Turkish and Kurdish civilians of the Ottoman Empire. In a similar sense, he also attributes responsibility to the Armenian

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<sup>132</sup> Hovannisian 1999, p. 201.

Republic, formed post-genocide in 1918. Armenian terrorism and conflicts are both presented as justifying genocide, and as provoking genocide, post-genocide.

Weems' use of arguments, it seems safe to conclude, presents the most drastic form of denial. Logical fallacies, silence or trivialization aside, Weems' narrative of the Armenian Genocide is thoroughly ideological, utilizing lies in order to deny historical facts. In fact, the comparison done between Weems and *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is not that far-fetched. In his presentation the world is a magnificent conspiracy, in which the Armenian Republic is struggling for world domination, and his views are, more or less, an example of anti-Armenianism. The back text of his book reads, for instance, that "Armenia has lied – and continues to lie – about an invented massacre that never took place [...]. This, along with its terrorist activities, has enabled this dictator state to bilk the United States, European countries, as well as Russia out of billions of dollars"<sup>133</sup>.

Thirdly, Bernard Lewis presents a final strategy of denial. In his 487 paged book, one and a half page, presented outside of the chronological narrative, as a parenthesis of Turkish history, the Armenian "massacres" are mentioned, and referred to as a "struggle" between two equal parts. The use of trivialization is apparent, but more interesting in the case of Lewis' narrative is the use of what in this essay is referred to as "latent denial". Silence is here more than silence, serving as an actively chosen argument of denial. Neither the Hamidian Massacres, nor the war tribunals are dealt with, indirectly denying their validity.

For further research, this latent denial and its implications seem an interesting area of investigation. What is a fair judgement of his or her material? To what extent can we argue the freedom of the historian? What are the responsibilities of the historian? Where does the free choice of including and excluding material and perspective become transformed into active denial? Where is the other line to be drawn, between lying and distorting, and revisionism? The questions are fascinating and infinite, and with additional time and knowledge it would be rewarding to deal with them further.

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<sup>133</sup> Weems 2002, back page.

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