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“On the grounds where they will walk in a hundred years’ time” - Struggling with the heritage of violent past in post-genocidal Tunceli

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“On the grounds where they will walk in a hundred years’ time” - Struggling with the heritage of violent past in post-genocidal Tunceli

Annika Törne

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- 1 At the backdrop of the opening politics, proclaimed by the ruling government party, the Justice and Development party [*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, hereafter AKP], it is assumed that the conditions for voicing oppressed memories and for negotiating contested identities are increasingly favourable in Turkey (Ayata 2012; Pérouse 2011). In regard to memory and collective identity —the cornerstones of heritage conceptualizations— Üngör recently stated that while the Armenian Genocide is denied in official state discourse, it is still remembered among the Kurdish and Turkish population in the Eastern Anatolian provinces (Üngör 2014). In order to critically scrutinize this supposed dichotomy between public written and private oral history, this paper will explore whether and to what extent the denialist discourse in the postgenocidal society in Turkey (Suciyan 2013) is challenged by contested heritage production.¹ In the scope of this study, following Girard, heritage production is understood as a category of public action in which non-governmental, governmental and international actors engage with representations of pasts in public spaces (Girard and Scalbert-Yücel 2014: 221). To sound out the limits of the discursive condition, this article will analyse the constitution and attribution of meanings to places of collective

violence by examining the particular case of Tunceli, former Dersim province². In the last century this region has been marked by a history of collective violence. The Armenian Apostolic and Syriac Orthodox population of Dersim was annihilated in the Armenian Genocide from 1915 to 1916 (Kévorkian and Paboudjian 1992: 381-387); the region's majoritarian Zazaki-³ and minoritarian Kurmanci-speaking Alevi-Kızılbaş population⁴ and the remaining Armenian population⁵ were massacred in the Turkish military campaign Tunceli from 1936 to 1938 (Bilmez *et al.* 2011)⁶; for two decades since 1990, Tunceli has been one of the main theaters of war between the Kurdistan Workers' party [*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, hereafter PKK] and the Turkish army, both raising nationalist claims of hegemony on the region (Le Ray 2009; Jongerden 2009).⁷

- 2 In regard to its religious traditions, Tunceli presents a particular case for a discussion of the limits and perspectives of heritage production in Turkey. Today Tunceli is the only province in Turkey with a majority of the population adhering to a regionally distinctive religion, externally designated as Alevism (Dressler 2013; Göner 2005; Törne 2012). This distinct religion in Dersim did not feature any architecture, because natural sites served as places of worship and pilgrimage (Çem 2000; Deniz 2012).⁸ Only a relatively small amount of historical Islamic architecture —mosques, hamams and mausoleums— was to be found in the more accessible districts in the plains of Çemişgezek and Pertek. In the remote and mountainous areas of Dersim however, there were no Islamic buildings before Republican times. On the contrary, as the ethnographic reports provided by Armenian Apostolic clergymen in 1878 show, there was a considerable amount of Armenian Apostolic and Syriac Orthodox architecture in Dersim by the end of the 19th century, although often already in poor condition of preservation (Yarman 2010). Since the Armenian Genocide, as is evident from oral tradition, the numerous tangible cultural remains, namely churches, monasteries and cemeteries, have been systematically destroyed and confiscated by state agencies including the Turkish Army, the General Governor's office and the state museums of Elazığ and Ankara. According to Özyürek, this Kemalist modernist policy of dissociation from the Ottoman past can be conceptualized as sites of forgetting "being marked with a residual sense of rupture that should be constantly remembered to prove that the break actually took place" (Özyürek 2007: 6). Epitomizing destruction, decay, or at least abandonment, tangible Armenian heritage, along with the massacre sites as places containing victims' last remains, are manifest traces of the violent crimes committed in Turkey, and are persistently perceived as an obstacle to stumble on. In the last decade, this perpetually confirmed and consolidated discontinuity from the Ottoman past has been transformed into a reappraisal of Ottoman plurality and tolerance in the AKP's opening politics (Ayata 2012).
- 3 This paper will thus centre on the question of the limits and perspectives of contested heritage production in Tunceli to challenge the dominant denialist discourse. As a part of this investigation, it will address the following questions:
 - Which discourses can alternative heritage actors meaningfully adhere to?
 - How do these actors imagine their audience and in how far do they integrate this audience into the heritage production process?
- 4 This study argues that the post-genocidal society of Turkey produces a systematic discourse of disregard towards non-Muslim non-Turkish heritage, especially Armenian and Syriac Orthodox heritage. It further posits that the recently emerging contested heritage production in post-genocidal Tunceli takes a unique stance in the

renegotiation of Turkey's violent past by striving for representation of the massacres in Tunceli from 1936 to 1938 and its recognition as genocide.⁹ While drawing on the heritage of violent past, and especially on Armenian heritage, non-Armenian heritage actors in Tunceli obscure the memories of the Armenian survivors and their descendants in order to strengthen their own claims for genocide recognition of the massacres from 1936 to 1938. Thereby these heritage actors fail to challenge the hegemonic discourse of denial. By linking up to a shared victimhood discourse and to a nostalgic discourse of a harmonious and peaceful coexistence of all religious groups in Ottoman times (Mills 2010) they perpetuate denial through recognition (Dabag 2002).¹⁰ This investigation will take account of written and oral material, the latter being considered as representing "(...) the narratives of counter-memory" (Allison 2013: 10). The oral material consists of free narrative interviews recorded in the Ovacık, Pertek, Mazgirt, and Hozat districts of Tunceli, in Istanbul, Turkey and in Frankfurt, Germany, from 2010 to 2013. Interviews were conducted with two groups; descendants of survivors of the Armenian Genocide in 1915, and with survivors and their descendants of the massacres in Tunceli from 1936 to 1938. This oral material will be contrasted with relevant written source material, comprising of newspaper articles, publications from state-related institutions such as the Tourism and Culture Directorate and the General Directorate of Foundations, as well as scientific literature, especially historical and archaeological studies. The source material will be analysed using a genealogical approach in order to reconstruct the transformations of the discourse on heritage produced in regard to Tunceli. The analysis will reconstruct this process as historically contingent to its respective contexts over time. Consequently, the time frame of the study applies a *longue durée* perspective covering a century.

- 5 This study first sheds a genealogical look at the transformation of heritage production in regard to Tunceli's non-Muslim past. It will then analyse the resonances and contradictions between counter-memories and local heritage actions as well as commemorative actions at sites of massacres. Finally it moves on to scrutinize empowerment strategies employed in recent memorialization attempts of the civil society in Tunceli.

I. Genealogy of heritage discourse in post-genocidal Tunceli

- 6 This study will first adopt a genealogical approach in order to provide a wider setting for understanding current challenges of heritage discourse in relation to cognition and memory in Tunceli. The discourse on heritage in Tunceli has been sustained throughout Early Republican times until today. The emergence of the discursive production of heritage can be traced back to the Turkish nation-state's violent assertion of power in Tunceli province in 1938. The legitimisation of these state-led violent crimes in Tunceli was disseminated through mass media and more specifically through the Elazığ Peoples House' publication series. After a cursory glance at the nationalist education project for Tunceli, this section will move on to critically address the interrelation between archaeological scientific discourse and heritage discourse. The first heritage preservation action in Turkey was realized in Tunceli in the course of the Keban dam rescue project in 1967. Representing the next critical moment for the

discursive production of heritage, this heritage action in Tunceli set the standards for dealing with non-Muslim heritage throughout Turkey.

- 7 Released directly after the state's violent military campaign in Tunceli between 1936 and 1938, the "Geography of Tunceli - Dersim" [*Tunceli - Dersim Coğrafyası*] counts among a few publications released by state institutions and national civil servants addressing the issue of how Tunceli should be perceived in future. Accordingly, newspapers abounded with apologetic articles praising the accomplishment of the civilizing mission in Tunceli (Baran 2014). The author of the publication, Ömer Kemal Açar, was a library and publishing committee member of the Elazığ People's House and a history and geography teacher at a secondary school in Elazığ, located south of Tunceli province (Açar 1940: 3).¹¹ As many other republican educational workers did, Kemal Ömer Açar depicted himself as a missionary serving the Turkish nation-state by providing enlightenment and moral-ethical guidance to uneducated locals (Taşkın *et al.* 2010: 91).¹²

Tarihe karışan Dersimin yerine modern Türkiye'nin Tuncelisi kaim olmuştur.

Dersim that used to disturb history has been replaced by modern Turkey's Tunceli. (Açar 1940: 64)

- 8 With this authoritarian statement, Ömer Kemal Açar casts the decisive break with the Ottoman past, marked by the renaming of the province from Dersim to Tunceli, into positive light (Jongerden 2009: § 32 n. 12). As he states he aimed at providing basic knowledge on the allegedly unknown region that would henceforth be opened up for the Turkish national system of meanings. This approach reveals an attitude of ignorance towards prior knowledge and cultural significations and thereby implies the radical disqualification of regional heritage. In the introduction he underlines the necessity "(...) to pull out the roots, to let Tunceli understand its national Turkish identity (...)" (Açar 1940: 4) while he stresses the population's descent from Central Asian Turks (Açar 1940: 24). Joining the Young Turk nationalist discourse on Anatolia and especially on Alevis, he describes the local population as true Turks adhering to a pure and uncorrupted form of Islam, not without simultaneously cementing their difference.¹³ This irresolvable contradiction becomes more obvious when Açar outlines the region's historical architecture, for which he uses the term "old works" [*eski eserler*]. As proof of the Turkish people's presence all over Tunceli (Açar 1940: 40) he lists as "old works" a fortress, an Ottoman bath and two mosques in Pertek. Similarly, he considers a prehistoric mountain rock castle to be proof of a Turkish ancient culture. The only mention of non-Muslim architecture is obscured, as he distorts the information on their cultural and historical signification as follows:

Hozatın Kızılkilise denilen köyünde eski Türk mimarîsi tarzında yapılmış bir mabet harabesi göze çarpmaktadır. Kirmil nahiyesinde Vank köyünde bir mabet daha vardır. Zemine 20 basmakla inilmektedir.

In Hozat in a village called Kızılkilise a temple in ruins made in an old Turkish architectural style catches the eye. In the local community Kirmil in the village Vank there is another temple. 20 steps descend to the ground. (Açar 1940: 42)¹⁴

- 9 To describe the architecture, Açar neither uses the term church, nor admits its Armenian belonging. Instead Açar designates both churches as temples, in order to suggest they were places of worship that he can assume as an old Turkish architectural style. Thereby, he systematically either conceals or appropriates Armenian cultural remains. Despite the short period since its destruction, the main Armenian Apostolic monastery in Dersim, Surp Garabed, located in Vank village that was hit in 1937 by the

air strike flown by Atatürk's adopted daughter Sabiha Gökçen, is thereby blurred (Altınay 2004; Ülgen 2010).¹⁵ In contrast to this, Ağar regrets the desolate state of the buildings he acknowledges as Turkish old works (Ağar 1940: 41). As the semantic and significant context of Armenian life and culture in Anatolia is dissolved the readers encounter a corrected silhouette of the cultural geography of Tunceli. Ağar excludes the local population of Tunceli by the way he constructs the addressees of his book as being Turkish citizens with no knowledge of this region. Thus the guide book reiterated the Young Turk nationalist discourse on Tunceli and contented itself with providing a scarcity of information on historical buildings in Tunceli under the condition that they could be accommodated into a Turkish Muslim national identity.

- 10 Ömer Kemal Ağar could draw his interpretations on Young Turk nationalist knowledge production that reached its peak in the 1930s when Kemalist nation builders discovered archaeology as a means to provide scientific evidence for the imagined Turkish Anatolian Homeland (Bilsel 2007; Bozdoğan and Necipoğlu 2007).
- 11 The repercussions of this Early Republican archaeological knowledge production became decisive in 1967, when an international archaeology research project was carried out in the Keban area (Whallon 1979: 1). Before the area was flooded by the Keban dam in 1975, an initial survey was conducted, followed by a series of archaeological rescue excavations under the direction of the Middle East Technical University in Ankara [*Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi ODTÜ*, hereafter METU] (METU 1970-1982). In 1969 as a part of these archaeological salvage works, a rescue restoration project was implemented in the town of Pertek. This project was realized as a cooperation between the religious Directorate General of Foundations [*Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü*, hereafter VGM] and the General Directorate of State Hydraulic Works [*Devlet Su İşleri Genel Müdürlüğü*, hereafter DSİ], both being state institutions under the direct responsibility of the Prime Ministry of the Republic of Turkey (Dissard 2011: 19-20). By then, this rescue restoration project constituted an unprecedented heritage production project in Turkey. In the project's initial phase, the heritage actors considered moving two Ottoman mosques called Baysungur Camii and Çelebi Camii located in Old Pertek, and a Syriac Orthodox church located in Korluca¹⁶ to the new site of Pertek¹⁷ in order to save them from inundation (Danık 2004: 180; Tükel and Bakirer 1968: 188). In the preliminary report, the church is described as one of three located in Korluca. Moreover, the report underlines the site's special archaeological interest, comprising a cemetery in the church's direct vicinity that had known an extensive period of use and a castle on a prehistoric mound. The report states that "It is hoped that in the coming years, it (castle and prehistoric mound, A.T.) will be taken into consideration for a detailed study by the groups participating in the Keban Project" (Tükel and Bakirer 1968: 190). However, no such archaeological salvage excavation or any other closer study was conducted by Turkish governmental or non-governmental agencies. At the last moment before the flooding in 1972, it was the French Armenian art historian Thierry who reconstructed the general outline of the churches' art-historical importance and documented their, by then, poor state of preservation (Thierry and Boudoyan 1972; Sinclair 1989). According to his study, one of the churches was an Armenian triconch¹⁸ church, situated at the eastern margins of the village and used in the 1970s as drying-frames, which still preserved fragments of mural paintings on the walls and on the cupola. Another church, which disposed of two apses, was used as a residential house in the 1970s, and a third was isolated at the western margin of

the village, being part of a former monastery complex. Another church was situated in the area surrounding the two mosques that were later to be removed.

- 12 All three buildings taken into consideration for removal were among the listed monuments in *Doomed by the Dam*, a publication that raised considerable public interest, edited by the restoration department at METU, presenting the results of a survey realized as a student workshop between 18-29 October 1966 (METU 1967). The explanatory notes in this survey documentation are concise to the extreme. The data acquired during the survey is assembled in the form of tab cards presenting photographs, schematic drawing maps indicating roughly the monument's location in its immediate surroundings, and short technical information on each of the examined architectural structures. This inventory mirrors the publishers' lack of interest in a detailed historical and social contextualization of the archaeological findings. According to Dissard's critical study, the Keban rescue excavations as well as international archaeological research are characterised by a colonialist, historically decontextualising approach that conforms to the Turkish state's nationalist aims (Shoup 2008; Dissard 2011). However, the entry for the Syriac Orthodox church gives an impression of the importance of the building. It includes several black and white photographs of exterior and interior views, one detailed photograph of one of the fragmented mural decorations preserved at the apse, and one photograph depicting the whole of the fragments of mural paintings in their context (METU 1967: 38-41). The inventory notes briefly indicate that the church was in good condition, not in use, and that the name of its then current owner was Ekrem Yolga, whereas the name of its original owner was unknown (METU 1967: 38). The latter indication of a lack of knowledge indicates a fundamental discursive procedure of exclusion in regard to issues that cannot be addressed in the discourse. This overt indication of the lack of information emphasizes the absolute inaccessibility of relevant information sources and constitutes a main thread running through the whole documentation. This strategy of omitted information in regard to non-Muslim heritage thereupon became discourse moulding.¹⁹ Whenever the issue of origins or ownership of non-Sunni Muslim and non-Turkish historical monuments is addressed, relevant information is not indicated and stated to be unavailable. By means of this alienation, historical remains of the victims of violent homogenization policies in Anatolia, especially of Armenians, are excluded from the Turkish state-based conceptualization of national heritage.
- 13 The restoration project was agreed upon in 1968 and signed by the VGM, DSİ, METU and the Supreme Committee of Ancient Buildings and Monuments and it was financed by the DSİ (Dissard 2011: 13). It was successful in raising funds through a call for donations in support of the two mosques, whereas the initiators refrained from the idea of rescuing the church. According to their own statement, they made this decision due to the lack of financial support from organizational or individual sources.

In this particular case the building could not function as a church because there was no congregation, but it was proposed as a religious visiting without another function given to the building. The detailed study on this building remained unused since no national or foreign institution offered to transport it to another site. (Tükel 1981: 732).²⁰
- 14 Meanwhile, the Armenian Apostolic and Syriac Orthodox communities could not mobilize the necessary joint action and organize the financial means necessary to rescue the church. Given the fundamental threats and legal constraints these communities faced in post-genocidal Turkey (Suciyan 2013), all the more for those

members not residing in Istanbul but in the Anatolian provinces, the difficulties to respond to such a call are not surprising. The absence of powerful support was rather a result of the expropriation, financial ruination, and social isolation of the Armenian Genocide survivors. It therefore seems unlikely that these survivors and their descendants would not have appreciated the safeguarding of the churches and the monastery. One of the major problems of the local Armenian Genocide survivors based in Elazığ or in the villages of Tunceli was the lack of possibility to worship, and lack of religious communal life. Thus it can be assumed that the Armenian community would have preferred to engage in rescuing this place of communion and commemoration.

- 15 In practice, the two Ottoman mosques, abandoned and out of service at the time, were retrieved from the dam area. Meticulously rebuilt stone by stone, the two mosques were taken into service in the new town of Pertek where they continue to be places of worship today. Located along the main street the two mosques define the town's appearance – indeed, the town does not feature any other historical buildings. The selective rescue of cultural heritage has created an adjusted cultural landscape in the modern town of Pertek, its architectural remains no longer reminding of its heterogeneous pasts. At the same time the project resulted in an overemphasis on Sunni-Muslim-Turkish heritage in Pertek that has, since the lifting of emergency rule declared in 2002, gone through resuscitation following the growing number of Sunnis settling in Pertek. Indeed, Pertek is the only town of Tunceli that has seen economic growth during the most recent years due to its proximity to Elazığ.
- 16 The VGM's historical self-portrait implies the concept of a shared responsibility and the obligation to bestow the cultural heritage to future generations, and attests it a bonding and unifying function both between Anatolia and Europe and between succeeding generations (Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü 2011). However, in 1976, when a displacement of historical buildings was realized for the first time in Turkey under the supervision of the governmental agencies VGM and DSİ, both the supporters and the addressees of this heritage production project were considered to be Sunni Muslim Turks. If there was no intention of destruction, at least this was a sign of negligence towards cultural goods considered to be less favourable than Islamic architecture for nourishing the imagined national identity.
- 17 While displaying only few variations, this discourse of disregard continues to be dominant up to date and is fed with further official literature, as was recently confirmed in a series of tourism publications launched by the Tourism and Culture Ministry of Tunceli and the Tunceli province General Governor (Ulaşoğlu 2011; Işık 2012). After having traced back the exclusionary procedures at work during the first and discourse-moulding rescue project of cultural heritage in modern Turkey, the study will now focus on the repercussions of this early Republican heritage action that disregarded non-Muslim religious heritage on cognition and memory among local population groups of nowadays Tunceli.

II. Armenian heritage sites as places of counter-memories

- 18 In the construction of collective identity and for the attribution of meaning to places, collective memory and intergenerational transmission of memories are of crucial

importance (Halbwachs 1995; Assmann 1999). As in all Eastern Anatolian provinces, in Tunceli, the social frameworks that enable the constitution of collective memories and allow for intergenerational transmissions are broken as a consequence of the history of collective violence. This section will focus on the example of the Armenian monastery Tilavank in Korluca submerged under the Keban dam in order to demonstrate that the local non-Armenian population, while remembering the Armenian cultural life in Til, meticulously conceal their entanglement in the violent extermination of the Armenian local population and in the ongoing destruction of Armenian sacred architecture. Indeed, when reminiscing, descendants of Armenian survivors still refer to this site in two ways: they remember Korluca as a site of lost Armenian heritage and as a site of massacres. Their narrations can thus be understood as counter-memories to the dominant discourse of disregard towards Armenian heritage. In the scope of this study, interviews were conducted with local villagers from Korluca. Hıdır, born in Til, was resettled at the time of the dam flooding to a new settlement near Pınarlar village.²¹ Hıdır remembered three churches in his native village Til, frequented every year by Armenian pilgrim groups coming mainly from the surrounding villages, from Elazığ, and from Istanbul in order to visit Tilavank on the occasion of a festival in springtime.

Til'de üç kilise vardı, baraj suyun altında kaldı. Kiliselerin birine Ermeniler ziyaretine geldi. İstanbul'dan Til'a geldiler 1970 yıllarına kadar.

There were three churches in Til that were left under the flood dam. To one of the churches Armenians came to worship. They even used to come from Istanbul to Til until the 1970s.

- 19 In memory accounts by locals in Tunceli it is common to refer to a place with its former name. Hıdır, while recalling the areas of the village submerged under the dam, associates the former name Til with the place. In his dense narration Hıdır refers to three layers of alienation achieved by annihilation, expulsion and expropriation of the local Armenian population, renaming the place, and finally rendering the place irrevocably inaccessible. Hıdır remembers that the monastery Tilavank in Korluca was still in use until it was finally submerged by the floods of the Keban dam in 1976. An active communal life was manifest through regular pilgrimages to the monastery at Korluca. Tilavank, meaning hill monastery in Armenian, is also mentioned as an important centre of pilgrimage related to the bishop's residence in nearby Habap, today's Ekinözü, located approximately 50 km east of Korluca (Thierry and Boudoyan 1972: 187). While this important pilgrimage centre and Armenian monastery could not be saved in 1976, 34 years later, in 2011, an Armenian Fountain Project was carried out in Habap village that gained considerable public attention. This project was acknowledged by Turkish anthropologist Altınay for effecting a tangible impact on the struggle for the recognition of Armenian history and physical belongings, because, as she states, "(...) it creates a space to acknowledge and give voice to silenced histories (...)" and "(...) through the physical reconstruction of the fountains, the project is confronting and reversing processes of destruction" (Altınay 2014: xx). However, the limits of these reversing processes of destruction are obvious. While it might be possible to restore Armenian architecture, the social framework and function of the building are irretrievably erased. The recognition of the limited character of the restoring of historical Armenian architecture is sustained by its ongoing deliberate destruction by treasure hunters. Experiences and narrations of treasure hunting are common and accepted among large parts of the population of Tunceli. While these treasure hunters have gone largely unprosecuted by state and police departments, the

lack of security in regard to non-Muslim architecture provides proof of the incapability to tie in with current discourse.²²

View of a ruined church with two apses in Korluca village, Pertek district, Tunceli and view of the Keban dam in the background.

THIS CHURCH IS THE ONLY ONE OUT OF THREE THAT WAS NOT SUBMERGED BY THE KEBAN DAM, BUT IT WAS REDUCED TO ITS FOUNDATIONS DUE TO PILLAGING BY LOCAL VILLAGERS.

DEVİRİM TEKİNOĞLU, 10/07/2013

- 20 Given the difficulties in receiving official approval to hold Armenian Apostolic services in Akhtamar church, another Armenian monastery restored recently in Van province, it appears improbable that the reconstruction of an Armenian monastery in Tunceli would have received approval by Turkish state institution (Over 2012; Ayata 2012). The disastrous consequences of the Armenian Genocide and the denialist discourse at work have resulted in the deprivation of literally every vital condition for the life of Armenian and Syriac Orthodox religious communities in Tunceli, as well as in other rural areas throughout Anatolia. Such a ritual as the festival in springtime in a historical building is clearly of utmost importance for the continuation of cultural transmission (Suciyan 2013).
- 21 At the same time Korluca functions as a reference point in recollections of survivors, because it became a site where collective violence was committed twice in the recent past. In this respect, A.B., an Armenian interviewee originating from Hozat district, and born into a priest family,²³ recalled the following from intergenerational transmission from his parents, who were both Armenian Genocide survivors from Dersim:

Babam ve annem 1915 kırımını böyle yaşamışlar. Binlerce Ermeni'yi 'sizi sürgün edeceğiz' diyerek götürüp Pertek'te Til tarafından Murat suyuna atıyorlarmış.

Annemin söylediği bir ağıt vardı:

Bizi kırdılar harmanlar vakti

Denizler kenarında morkanlar aktı

Bize dediler Urfadır

Meğer planmış

Urfa değil Pertek Suyuymuş.

My father and mother experienced the massacres of 1915 in that way. Telling thousands of Armenians 'we will deport you' they took them to Pertek, where they threw them from the surrounding of Til into the Murat River.

My mother used to sing a lament:

They killed us in the times of threshing

At the shores of the seas, the bloods ran dark violet

They told us it is Urfa

But really it was pretence

It was not Urfa, but the water of Pertek.

- 22 When recalling his mother's lament, the interviewee underlined that his brothers and sisters and he himself grew up with these laments giving voice to the memories of the massacre committed in 1915 against the Armenians from Dersim in the vicinity of Pertek town. The massacre was carried out in June in Til village, where crossing the Murat river, a tributary of the Euphrates River, was made possible by a ford.²⁴ The Euphrates River occupies a prominent place in many other accounts of Armenian survivors, who had to cross this river on their deportations to the Syrian Desert. They recall their memories of the victims' dead bodies whose blood ran red in the waters of the Euphrates.²⁵

- 23 In 1938 in the same area another massacre was committed against local Armenians. An Armenian interviewee originating from the centre of Dersim recalled the events of 1938 and how his relatives, Armenian Genocide survivors hiding in the town of Pertek, were killed in a massacre on thirty Armenians during the military operation officially named Tunceli.

Pertek'te Til köy var, Til. O köye her zaman ziyarete ederlerdi, her kes, giderdiler. O şimdi suyun içinde kaldı. Bu baraj yapıldı, Til köyün o kilise şimdi suyun içindedir. (...) Pertek'te halam giller vardı. Onlara Halebe götürmediler. O zamanlar, Pertek'in içinde gil vardı, ailece. Ondan sonra bir demirci vardı, ailesi bir de çoluk çocuğunu. Bir de onun akrabası vardı. Aşağı yukarı otuz kişiden fazla vardı bile. 38'te Ağustos aylarında bunları götürdüler Pertek'in içinde bu suyun kenarında kurşundular. Biz de o zamanlar Elazığdaydık. Kurşundular, 30 kişiden fazla vardı.

*In Pertek there is the village of Til. They used to go on pilgrimages to this village, everybody went. Now it is submerged under water. This dam was built and the church in the village of Til is now under water. (...) There was my aunt with her family. They had not led them off to Halep. At those times we had relatives in Pertek, as a family. And there was a blacksmith with his family and children. And there was his relative. There were more than thirty people. In '38 in the month of August they led them off to the water of Pertek and shot them on its shore. At that time we were in Elazığ. They shot them; there were more than thirty people.*²⁶

- 24 In his account he clearly associates Til as a pilgrimage place with Til as a site of massacre, not without mentioning that the place was submerged under the water of the Keban dam. Thereby he refers to a trifold loss epitomized at this site: on a personal level his family relatives are lost, on a spiritual level the place of worship is lost, and on a social-collective level the places of communion and remembrance are lost.
- 25 Taking these narrations by descendants of Armenian survivors into account, the importance of the village of Korluca, the church and its immediate surrounding on the shores of the water of Pertek as sites of massacres becomes obvious. The "shores of the seas" or also rivers where "the blood ran dark violet" is a metonymy that constitutes a common element of the narrativization of the two events of mass violence in the memory narrations of survivors. In the regional oral culture laments serve as predestined mnemonics to transmit the memories of these events (Yıldırım 2013). The survivors of the Armenian Genocide recall their memories of the victims' dead bodies

whose blood ran red in the waters of the Euphrates River. In the lament of Seter in the times of massacres in 1938 the Munzur River runs blood red (Yıldırım 2013: 67). As Yıldırım pointed out, the landscape is considered in the regional belief system to be holy and a particular spiritual significance is attributed to the Munzur River and mountains. Therefore the massacres committed on sites charged with religious significance implied a violation of religious values, a crime that is associated with these massacre sites in the survivors' memory accounts that this, in turn, is mirrored in collective memory.

- 26 At the same time this place was of crucial importance for the constitution of collective memory and for the victims' commemoration. The flooding of the Keban basin has submerged the mass graves containing the remains of the Armenian victims of the Genocide in 1915 and the victims of the massacre of Armenians in 1938, as well as the churches at Korluca and those at other significant sites in the basin. The Keban dam flood had a significant annihilating effect, not only on the physical evidence of the violent crimes, but also by destroying a potential spatial framework of recollections on site for the survivors and their descendants. Even though the survivors and their descendants may not have the possibility to ever visit the site, the very knowledge that it was flooded leaves their reminiscences bereft of their setting. In a narration, the reference to the setting functions as a means of authentication. After all, a place like Korluca, if it was not prevented from being accessible, would have provided a place for the Armenians to pay visits to the places of the human remains of their killed relatives, whose graves are not marked by any tombstone.²⁷
- 27 This section aimed at voicing the memory narrations of descendants of Armenian survivors originating from Tunceli. It further conceptualized them as counter-memories to the dominant discourse of disregard. As was stressed earlier, difficult living conditions led a majority of Tunceli Armenians to flee to Turkish metropolises or emigrate. As a consequence, their counter-memories can contribute to the constitution of collective memory in Tunceli only in exceptional cases and to a very limited extent. Against this background, the next section will examine whether and how the experience of the Armenian Genocide in Dersim has been drawn on in recent public actions of commemoration and memorialisation of collective crimes in the region.

III. The Armenian Genocide as an empowerment strategy in commemorative actions and memorialisation at sites of massacres

- 28 Taking into account the fact that there are numerous sites of massacres in Tunceli of which some became mass graves on two occasions, both in 1915 and in 1938, this last section will analyse how the Armenian Genocide is used as an empowerment strategy by different heritage actors in Tunceli. In the following this study argues that Armenian heritage actors refer to the collective religious identity of Kızılbaş-Alevi and Armenians in Dersim when mentioning the Armenian Genocide. This enables them to strengthen their otherwise unprotected voice in the hegemonic discourse of denial. Indeed, non-Armenian heritage actors draw on the Armenian Genocide and construct a shared victim identity of Kızılbaş-Alevi and Armenians in order to both lessen their

ancestors' responsibility in the Armenian Genocide and strengthen their claims for recognition of the massacres in 1938 as genocide.

- 29 Yalçın Çakmak, a local correspondent from Tunceli, reported from Geçimli,²⁸ a village in Hozat district where a group of a hundred people, among them local villagers, were holding a commemoration at the ruins of the Armenian Apostolic monastery Erkayn Enkuzik. "Hrant Dink was commemorated also on land abandoned by Armenians", declared the headline of the *Agos* weekly on 19 January 2014, seven years after the assassination of its chief editor Hrant Dink and with the trial of his murderer still pending. On the occasion of this commemoration, the independent mayor of the Hozat district, Cevdet Konak, held a speech. The mayor had been elected in 2004 with the support of the Democratic Right's Federation [*Demokratik Haklar Federasyonu*, hereafter DHF], a legal organisation related to the Maoist Communist Party [*Maoist Komünist Partisi*, hereafter MKP], that is officially banned as a terrorist organization by the Turkish state. In his speech Mayor Konak expressed his commitment:

Bugün burada Hrant Dink'in 7. ölüm yıldönümü vesilesiyle, 1915'ten beridir katledilen Ermeni kardeşlerimiz aziz anıları huzurunda toplanmış bulunmaktayız. Biliyoruz ki bu toprakların en az biz Kürt-Aleviler kadar sahipleri olan Ermeni halkı, Hrant Dink'in katledilişiyle büyük bir üzüntüyü daha yaşamıştır.

Today we have gathered here on the occasion of Hrant Dink's seventh anniversary of death in reverend commemoration of our Armenian brothers and sisters, who have been murdered since 1915. Because we know that these lands' owners are, at least as much as us Kurd-Alevis, the Armenians, who experienced another big grief through the murder of Hrant Dink. (Çakmak 19/01/2014)

- 30 In his statement Cevdet Konak draws a historical line from the Armenian Genocide to the present as an unconcluded process of ongoing murder of Armenians. At the same time Konak draws parental lines between the position taken by him, as speaking from amidst a collective identity of Alevis, and the Armenian victims by designating them as "our brothers and sisters". Thereby, he links up to the discourse on Alevis from Dersim that constructs a close relation between Armenians and Alevis. Accordingly, Konak equals the ownership of the lands in Tunceli of Kurd-Alevis and Dersim Armenians. As Leyla Neyzi pointed out, the question of land ownership commonly constitutes a prompt for young Kurds in Turkey to speak about the past Armenian presence by drawing on transgenerational memory transmission (Neyzi 2013). Konak uses a passive construction in regard to the act of murder, either because he wants to avoid naming the actual perpetrators of the crime or because he aims to tie up to the discourse on shared victimhood of Alevis and Armenians in Anatolia. By evading this significant divide he joins the systematic silencing in regard to the responsibility of perpetrators, and thereby plays into the hands of the denialist discourse of the Armenian Genocide. In the case of this commemorative action, in order to strengthen the authoritative position of the speakers, the activists choose an Armenian church as the location.
- 31 The Armenian Apostolic monastery Erkayn Enkuzik counts among the most prominent Armenian architectural remains in present day Tunceli. Michel Thierry visited and documented the monastery in the early 1980s (Thierry 1986-1987). His study shows that the monastery, an important centre of manuscript production, was built in 975 and was restored after a period of destruction and decay in 1435.²⁹ Until today, inside the nave of the monastery, two tombs belonging to the Armenian clergyman's family from Ergen remain covered by concrete. For many years this family strove to preserve the church

after its abandonment in 1938. During these years, they came from Istanbul, where they have been based since their deportation from Ergen in 1938.

Ergen village, Hozat district, Tunceli province.

RUINED ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC MONASTERY ERKAYN ENKUZIK FROM THE 10TH CENTURY, VIEW OF THE NORTH ENTRANCE.

DEVİRİM TEKİNOĞLU, 20/05/2012

- 32 In 2012 the Tunceli Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism [*Tunceli Kültür ve Turizm Müdürlüğü*] applied for the monument's registration into the Erzurum Cultural Entities Protection Council [*Erzurum Kültür Varlıklarını Koruma Kurulu*]. So far, however, no measures have been taken on behalf of state authorities to save the ruins from further decay and pillaging.³⁰ According to Pérouse, recent heritage production in Turkey reveals to be disintegrating into a production for internal use by an exclusively defined we-group and a production for external use by foreign tourists (Pérouse 2011). In this respect, to look into an alternative heritage production project initiated by local descendants of Armenian survivors is revealing. Currently the Dersim Armenians Belief and Social Aid Association DERSİYAD [*Dersimli Ermeniler İnanç ve Sosyal Yardımlaşma Derneği*]³¹ in cooperation with the Association of Reviving and Researching Architects and Enigneers HAYCAR [*HAYRAT Canlandıran ve Araştıran Mimar ve Mühendisler Dayanışma Derneği*]³² is developing a project in order to raise funds for the restoration of the church. In the preliminary restoration project the initiators express the importance of the church for the local population as follows:

Tüm inançları bir potada eritmiş olan Dersimlilerin en çok ziyaret ettikleri ibadethaneler arasında, (...) Yergayn'daki Kırmızı Manastır da Dersim'in en önemli hac yerlerinden biriydi ve Kızılbaş beylerinin koruması altındaydı.

Among the places of worship visited the most often by the Dersim people, constituting a melting pot of all beliefs, (...) the red monastery in Yergayn was one of the most important pilgrimage sites, and it was under protection of the Kızılbaş lords (DERSİYAD and HAYCAR 2014).

- 33 In their argumentation for the restoration of the church, these heritage actors, comprising descendants of Armenian survivors from Dersim, take a defensive speaker's position. By linking up to the discourse on the close relation between Armenians and Alevi in Dersim they evoke the image of a converged religious identity of the collective of Dersim people. Accordingly, they remind of the Alevi pilgrimage practice to Armenian churches and monasteries in Dersim. Furthermore, they assume that the loyalty of Kızılbaş lords towards their Armenian neighbours who during the Turkish nation-building process became their subjects and in the best case their proteges, translated into the preservation and protection of Armenian sacred architecture by the Kızılbaş communities. They call on this historical loyalty to raise awareness among the local population in order to mobilize support from the Alevi community to save the Armenian heritage of Dersim and to prevent further pillaging. This heritage project is therefore striving to integrate both aspects into the production —external use by foreign Armenian Christian tourists and internal use as pilgrimage site by the Alevi-Kızılbaş local community.
- 34 Geçimli village is one of the numerous places in Tunceli where violent state crimes were perpetrated in 1915 and in 1938. Two major mass killing sites are situated in the village's direct environs: one contains the corpses of Armenians massacred during the 1915 Genocide, and the other, adjacent, contains the corpses of both Armenians and non-Armenians massacred during the 1938 Turkish Army military strike in the region. The first place, a cliff upon the Tahar River, is called Kayışoğlu Yarması by the local population. In an interview, Zeynel Örnek, born into an Alevi holy lineage, in 2009 an administrative officer in the local municipality, drew on oral tradition to explain that the cliff is named after a local Armenian belt manufacturer, who was the first to be thrown to his death from that cliff in the Genocide.³³

Kayısoğlu cliff near Ergen village, Hozat district, Tunceli Province.

MASSACRE SITE DURING THE 1915 ARMENIAN GENOCIDE AND THE 1938 TURKISH MILITARY CAMPAIGN TUNCELI.

ANNIKA TÖRNE, 26/05/2012.

- 35 The Armenian businessman A.B., now based in Istanbul, also originating from Ergen, was born into an Armenian clergy family in 1938. In his memory account A.B. reflected upon the crimes committed at the Kayısoğlu cliff. A.B. condensed the results of the massacres that were first perpetrated against his family members in 1915 and were then, in 1938, directed against Armenians as well as non-Armenian locals. Amongst the latter he explicitly mentions those who had been perpetrators in 1915:

(1915'te, A.T.) Hozat'tan jandarma geliyor. Dedem ve amcasının oğlu'nu götürüp Kayısoğlu Yarması'ndan aşağı atıyorlar. Kayısoğlu Yarması'ndan çok Ermeni'yi atıyorlar. Çocukları, hatta bebekleri sepetlerin içine koyup buradan atıyorlar. Dedemi yakalatan İbrahim Ağa'yı 1938'de Kayısoğlu Yarması'nda dedemlerin atıldığı aynı yerde askerler öldürdüler. Dedemi ve amcasının oğlunu aşağı atan yine Dersimli olan jandarma Balo'yu aynı yerde bir hayvan nasıl kesilirse öyle kestiler, öldürdüler.

(In 1915, A.T.) gendarmes came from Hozat. They led my grandfather and his uncle's son off to the Kayısoğlu cliff and threw them down. They threw many Armenians from the Kayısoğlu cliff. Children, even infants, they put them in baskets and threw them from there. İbrahim ağa³⁴ had trapped and caught my grandfather. He was killed by soldiers at the same place, from where my grandfather had been thrown down. They killed the gendarme Balo, again from Dersim, who had thrown my grandfather and his uncle's son down there, they killed him at the same place the way they would have slain an animal.

- 36 In his narrative, A.B. relates and puts the murders of his ancestors and of the two collaborators in contrast. The local Alevi tribe leader İbrahim and the police officer Balo collaborated with the Young Turk government and murdered their Armenian neighbours. Then, over the course of time, they fell victim to the Turkish military operation in 1938 and were murdered at the exact site where they murdered

Armenians in 1915. Although conforming to the discourse on the shared victimhood of Armenians and Alevis in Tunceli, A.B. takes a unique position. By means of clearly differentiating between the victims, on the one hand the Armenians' innocence and on the other hand their perpetrators' responsibility, A.B. expresses his sense of justice. As a Christian believer, A.B.'s view may derive from the concept of Divine justice accomplished in the death of the murderers. Thereby this memory narration counters the modern nation state's understanding of justice and citizen rights by relating to transcendental justice.

- 37 Standing in sharp contrast to this personal sense of justice, over the last five years, a growing civil society movement of Dersim communities evolved, striving for official recognition by the Turkish state's legal system of the violent crimes in 1938. To this end, these activist groups launched commemorative events which have been held each year on 4 May at different massacres sites in the region. On 4 May 2014, several activist groups gathered in the town of Hozat in order to walk to the Kayışoğlu cliff and to commemorate the victims of the massacres committed there. This commemoration was organized under the direction of two international non-governmental organizations. One of them, the Dersim Clubs Association [*Dersim Dernekleri Federasyonu*, DEDEF] is related to the DHF and MKP, and the other one, the European Democratic Federation of Dersim Associations [*Avrupa Demokratik Dersim Birlikleri Federasyonu*, ADEF], is also categorized as an organization related to the MKP in Europe. Both political umbrella organizations are engaged in the creation of collective identity among Tunceli communities by means of constructing a collective memory through cultural events. In a joint declaration, together with three local cultural associations, the Dersim Culture Association [*Dersim Kültür Derneği*], the Hozat Culture Art and Support Association [*Hozat Kültür Sanat ve Dayanışma Derneği*] and the Ovacık Culture Association [*Ovacık Kültür Derneği*], they commemorated, for the first time, the Armenians from Dersim massacred at the Kayışoğlu cliff in the Armenian Genocide in 1915.

1937-38 Dersim soykırımı için 4 Mayıs 1937 tarihinde ferman çıkaran devlet on binlerce Dersimliyi katlederken bu toprakların kadim halklarından Ermenilere karşı gerçekleştirdiği soykırımda kullandığı yöntemleri kullanıyordu. 1915 yılında, yaşlı, çocuk, kadın, erkek demeden Ermeni halkına mensup kardeşlerimizi kıyısında durduğumuz bu Kayışoğlu Yarması'ndan atarak katleden devlet, tarihler 1937-38'i gösterdiğinde bu sefer Dersimlileri aynı yerde katlediyordu. Ondandır ki burası Ermeni halkıyla acılarımızın kardeşleştiği yerdir. Onlarca kardeşimiz koyun koyuna yatıyor burada.

On 4 May 1937 the government released an order for the 1937-38 Dersim Genocide when they killed tens of thousands of people of Dersim using the methods they had used in the Genocide against the Armenians, one of the ancient peoples of these lands. The government that, in the year 1915, drawing no distinction between the old, children, women, or men, threw and killed our Armenian brothers and sisters (...) from this very Kayışoğlu cliff we are standing over. When the time of 1937 to 1938 had come, this time they killed the people from Dersim at the same place. For this reason this is the place where the Armenian people's grief fraternizes with ours. Tens of our brothers and sisters rest here closely entwined. (Halkın Günü 05/05/2014)

- 38 In this context, the commemoration of the massacre committed at the site in 1938, by underlining its parallels to the Armenian Genocide, serves the actors as a strategy of empowerment to demand recognition of this state-based violent crime as genocide. Therefore, the actors refer to the past victimization of the people of Dersim [*Dersimliler*], that is projected as a collective identity encompassing the whole variety of different identifications in Dersim, including the Armenians. To this end they evoke the

image of the murdered victims' corpses laying in union next to each other in mass graves. Thus they suggest similarity of the victims in both events in terms of their shared defencelessness and innocence. The demand for recognition of the crimes of 1938, while it acknowledges the Armenian Genocide, entails a mechanism of exclusion. The responsibility of parts of the non-Armenian Dersim population as supporters of the Young Turks annihilation policies in the Armenian Genocide is unspoken and remains rejected. By de-historicizing the two different events of mass violence, a common victim identity is created, embracing Alevi and Armenian identities. Parallels in the argumentative patterns can be drawn to other commemorative events in the region, as well as in Kurdish provinces in Anatolia. The Sur Municipality in Diyarbakır for instance inaugurated a Memorial of Common Conscience on 12 September 2013, declaring on the memorial stone in six languages "We shared the pains so that they are not suffered again", to suggest the possibility of sharing the grief of the Armenian Genocide survivors' descendants. The local mayor, Abdullah Demirbaş, apologized in the name of their Kurdish ancestors for the massacres and deportations of the Armenian and Assyrian people in 1915, but at the same time did not miss to call upon the Turkish government to apologize as well.

- 39 In 2012 a first effort was undertaken to create a site of commemoration for the victims of the crimes of 1936-1938 in Tunceli. A civil society initiative, in cooperation with the Tunceli Foundation for Education and Culture [*Tunceli Eğitim ve Kültür Vakfı*] and the municipality of Mazgirt district, developed a "Dersim '38 memorial" project.³⁵ Similarly to the municipality of Hozat, the Mazgirt municipality, headed by Mayor Türkel, was elected by the support of the DHF related to the MKP. According to the initiators, the memorial project aims at creating a commemoration site for those massacred in the violent state-sponsored crimes committed against the people of Tunceli between 1937 and 1938. They envisaged the construction of this memorial in the vicinity of the town of Mazgirt to be installed *in situ* upon the killing fields of one of the massacres perpetrated by the Turkish Army against local civilians in 1938.
- 40 Besides the Monument of Common Conscience addressing "all the massacres that took place since 1915" at the time when the Dersim '38 memorial project actors commissioned a draft, there was only one memorial project underway in Turkey that could have functioned as a reference for the conceptual and visual realisation of the topic. The Roboski memorial located in the Rojava Park in Diyarbakır was opened on 30 December 2013 for the commemoration of 34 civilian victims killed in a massacre committed by the Turkish Air Force in Uludere, Şırnak district on 28 December 2011 (EKN 30/12/2013). The elements of the memorial's visual design, featuring a central monumental sculpture of a kneeling mother raising her arms in grief for her massacred family members, representing the victim's grief, could have offered an aesthetic reference for the draft of the Dersim '38 memorial. During this process the initiators showed interest in including the local population by taking oral tradition into consideration. Through a news series published throughout 2012 in Turkish newspapers and via the project's website and on social media, the transnational community was invited to follow the project's development from its initial draft and throughout the implementation process.³⁶ As the initiators stated, local residents had initially drawn their attention to this site with their narrations of the massacre they witnessed in 1938. In this regard, the interview with C.D., an Alevi local from Mazgirt

and descendant of Armenian survivors of the Genocide, was telling. C.D. recalled in his autobiographical narration the site of the massacre in Mazgirt in 1938:

O Mazgirt'in çevresi saaaaaade cesetti. Millet cesetti. Geçemiyordu o kadar ki millet kırdılar orda. Çooooook, püüüü, çok. Hatırlıyorum, iyi hatırlıyorum. Geçemiyordu cesetten, kokudan geçemiyordu. Yaz zamanıydı.

*The surrounding of Mazgirt was basically nothing but corpses. The people were corpses. One could not pass, so many people they had killed there, so many, püüüü, many. I remember, I remember it very well. One could not pass because of the corpses. Because of the smell one could not pass. It was in summer time.*³⁷

- 41 As C.D. explained, after his parents had survived as children in 1915 by hiding in Alevi families in Mazgirt, in 1938 his family survived because they had converted to Alevism to save their lives in 1915. His account displays the impossibility to speak of his parents' experiences of the Genocide. Instead C.D. adhered to official discourse in linking up to the state's legitimization of violence presented as necessary to install modern life in Tunceli, depicted as the most backward region of the Republic. This concealment of the Armenian survivor's memories of the 1915 Genocide is extended and consolidated by the 1938 memorial's conceptualization and design. Unlike the figural representation of the Roboski memorial, the initiators opted for an abstract memorial design. Architect Dârâ Kırmızıtoprak designed a draft in the form of a labyrinth consisting of a rectangular area with irregular cubic blocs of concrete arranged around a burning flame in the centre. According to the architect, the irregular blocs were meant to represent the victims' corpses impossibly entwined in the massacre. The current chief editor of the Armenian newspaper Agos, Rober Koptaş, scrutinized the visual resemblances between the Dersim 38' memorial and the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin.³⁸ Disregarding the Armenian Genocide in Dersim, the visually evoked association with a Holocaust memorial strengthened the descendants of the victims' claims for acknowledgement of the crimes committed in 1937 and 1938 as genocide and their expectation addressed to the Turkish government to accept responsibility.³⁹

- 42 Another contradiction in the memorial's conceptualization is revealed in the date chosen for its inauguration. The memorial should have been opened on the anniversary of local tribe leader şey Rıza's assassination on 17 November 1912.⁴⁰ This date hints at the initiators' intention to relate the commemoration to a heroic narrative depicting members of the victimized group as heroes of local resistance groups, who resisted the Turkish state's hegemonic claims in order to fight for their independence. According to the Kurdish nationalist narrative, the events are appropriated as one of the Kurdish uprisings in the course of the Kurdish resistance struggle against the Turkish government. By classifying the events as a conflict between two opposed groups, the character of a genocide as a politic of homogenization directed against a victimized group defined as such by the perpetrators is ignored.

- 43 The memorial's construction was already completed when its inauguration was finally impeded and prohibited by the office of the district's General Governor in October 2012 (Demir 24/10/2012). According to the local mayor Tekin Türkil, the prohibition was declared on the grounds that certain steps in the obligatory procedure to obtain public authorization for construction works on public land were missing, and that the land where the memorial was under construction was registered as belonging to the treasury. He underlined that throughout the whole process of application, the municipality had carefully complied with the necessary requirements. However,

according to the mayor, although no problems had occurred so far, just when the construction work was about to be completed, and when only one month was left prior to the envisaged opening of the memorial, the office of the district's General Governor intervened. The memorial in its current completed state has so far not been inaugurated after the governmental intervention and impediment. It may be perceived as a mute reminder that proves the legitimacy of the state-induced violent crimes in Tunceli.

Mazgirt district, Tunceli province.

DERSİM '38 MEMORIAL SITE, UNACCOMPLISHED CONSTRUCTION SITE. PLACE OF MASSACRE IN THE 1938 TURKISH MILITARY CAMPAIGN TUNCELI.

KORAY KESİK, WINTER 2013

- 44 The local mayor Türkil stated that the memorial project's most important impact should be the consolidation of intergenerational transmission of the legacy of the victims epitomized in the memorial for future generations.

İktidarlar, yönetimler, isimler değişir. Ancak benim torunumun torunu yüz yıl sonra yürüdüğü yerlerde 1938'de neler yaşandığını bilmeli. İşte anıt Dersim gerçeğini geleceğe taşımak için gerekli.

Rulers, governments, names change. But my grandchildren's grandchildren should know what happened in 1938 on the grounds where they will walk in a hundred years' time. So the memorial is necessary to carry the truth into the future. (Vardar 12/10/2012)

- 45 This statement shows that the heritage actors projected the memorial's audience as a memory community of the survivors of the 1938 massacres and their descendants, one for which the memorial would provide support in perpetuating a counter-narrative to the violent past. In the imagination of future generations as projected by the Turkish state-sponsored heritage production, the destruction layer represents an obligatory and solid basis upon which to build future modern life. On the contrary, succeeding

generations as imagined by survivors of violent crimes are a community of heirs, for whom the destruction layer represents a reminder of their demands for recognition.

Conclusion

- 46 Alternative heritage production in Turkey evolves in the discursive field span between Armenian Genocide denial and its legitimization, produced as two complementary elements.
- 47 In contrast, the specific historical and religious peculiarities of Dersim are, despite ongoing destruction, testified still today by Armenian Apostolic and Syriac Orthodox religious architecture and natural pilgrimage sites. Taking this regional distinctive heritage into consideration, it becomes obvious that the dominant exclusionary discourse on non-Muslim non-Turkish cultural heritage has particularly far-reaching and exhaustive consequences in Tunceli, former Dersim province in Turkey.
- 48 In order to scrutinize recent alternative heritage production, this study outlined the genealogy of the discursive formation of the Turkish state-led cultural heritage production in Tunceli. This reconstruction has shown that heritage production in post-genocidal Tunceli in archaeological and historical sites puts emphasis on an essentialist representation of Turkish Sunni-Muslim culture. In the discourse-defining Keban rescue project, heritage actors legitimated the exclusionary discourse by ostentatiously pointing at the inaccessibility of knowledge and the impossibility to mobilize resources in favour of restoring non-Muslim, non-Turkish cultural heritage in Tunceli. Turkish state authorities, by taking no measures against violations of non-Muslim cultural heritage, consolidate the legitimacy of acts of pillaging and destruction. As a consequence of the discourse of disregard, Armenian and Syriac heritage is not deemed worthy to be preserved, unless it promises future economic advantages through tourism. Thus, the Turkish post-genocidal society implicitly underlines the legitimacy of the annihilation of the Armenian victims in the Genocide.
- 49 The assumption that in recent years, as a consequence of the AKP government's opening politics, the social framework of action for contested heritage production has changed, proves to be misleading. By means of two apologetic statements on the violent transformation process of Turkish nation state building issued by Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan, the discourses on the events of 1915 and on the Dersim massacres have been transferred into the realm of civil society that continues the Armenian Genocide's denial by recognising it. Recent heritage actions related to Armenian churches, by presenting them as mere tourist attractions exploitable for the market, decontextualize the heritage. The existence and vital problems of Armenian community life inside Turkey is glossed over by externalizing Armenian cultural life into the Diaspora. Consequently the imagined target audience consists in Armenians, as well as other foreign tourists, who only visit Turkey. Local heritage actors, also including descendants of Armenian survivors, broadly conform to the hegemonic discourse of denial by constructing the audience as alienated from Armenian Christian religious identity, and as undistinguishable from Alevi-Kızılbaş identity.
- 50 Furthermore, this study has shown that recent commemorative actions emerging among Tunceli communities engage in the representation of contested memories of the heritage of violent pasts in public space at the sites of massacres. By doing so

occasionally, they voice the silenced memories of the Armenian Genocide as a strategy to strengthen their own claims for recognition of the Turkish state's violent crimes from 1936 to 1938 as genocide. Meanwhile they adhere to the official discourse in the following crucial aspect: the argumentation pattern from the denialist discourse constructing the victim-perpetrator-equalization is met by drawing on the collective identity constructed as a victim group of Armenians and Alevis alike. Thus recent heritage actors continue to conceal their responsibilities in the Armenian Genocide in 1915 by instead drawing attention to the massacres in 1938. In conclusion, it can be stated that recent efforts of civil society actors in Tunceli, striving for memorialisation of the 1938 massacres, even if drawing on the genocide concept as a strategy of empowerment, continue to exclude the history of the Armenian Genocide and to reject responsibility. As a consequence, these 1938 commemorations and memorialisation projects ultimately fail to counter the dominant denialist discourse.

- 51 The potential of the discourse on heritage to include the diversity of Anatolian heritage remains dependant on whether the preservation of non-Muslim heritage is acknowledged as a restitution of a traditional religious site, one that can be made use of by religious groups accepted as an integral part of Turkey. In this way the widespread conception in Turkish post-genocidal society of the legitimacy of the Armenian Genocide could be challenged.

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NOTES

1. The denialist discourse of the Armenian Genocide has been well established and sustained since it was launched by the Turkish state in the 1970s (Bayraktar 2010; Dabag 2002), following a set logic of argumentation based on guilt-shifting, perpetrator-victim inversion and equalization, chronological distortions, and cause-and-effect reversal. Turkish denialist politics create an extensive lack of knowledge about the Genocide amongst the population of Turkey. The post-genocidal society of Turkey is understood as a society in the aftermath of genocide, shaped by a reiterated discourse of denial. See Suciyan for her conceptualization of a denialist habitus (Suciyan 2013).
2. In this study the two names that were historically given to the region, Dersim and Tunceli, are used in their respective historical context, i.e. when the times before 2 January 1936 are addressed the name Dersim is used, whereas in regard to the times afterwards, the name Tunceli is used. On 25 December 1935 the law Nr. 2884 called the "Law on the Administration of the Vilâyet Tunceli" [*Tunceli Vilâyetinin idaresi hakkında kanun*] was passed by the Turkish Parliament and became effective on 2 January 1936. The extensive intervention given way by this law, namely by means of the introduction of the state of emergency and the creation of a military dictatorship equipped with absolute freedom of criminal jurisdiction, legalized the systematic disfranchisement and discrimination of the region's population that ultimately led to the massacres of 30.000 to 70.000 inhabitants between 1937 and 1938 committed by the Turkish Army indiscriminately against civilians and a small number of armed resistance fighters. The impact of

the renaming of former Dersim into Tunceli can be explained on a semantic level and on a functional level: on a semantic level the term Tunceli etymologically can be derived from Turkish *tunç eli*, meaning iron hand, whereas on a functional level the name Tunceli was given by a single law at the same time to designate the territory, as well as the military operations entailed. These two explanatory levels, when read together, reveal a demonstration of state power announcing the state's intention to take the decision on both the territory and its population in hand by making use of force. Thus, the discriminatory impact of the name Tunceli as imposed by the Turkish state is taken into consideration as much as the counter hegemonic impact of the reuse of Dersim by a whole array of different actors, including left-wing activists (Le Ray 2009; Jongerden 2009; Jongerden and Akkaya 2012), see also recent scientific knowledge productions striving to "release Dersim from its brackets" (Aslan 2013). On toponymic change politics see (Öktem 2008).

3. Besides the obligatory national language Turkish, there are two North-western Iranian languages spoken in the region: according to estimations 90% of the population derives from a background of speakers of the endangered language Zazaki, whereas 10% of the population speaks Kurmanji (Paul 1998). For an analysis of the historical and cultural distinctive features of Zazaki-speakers see (Asatrian 1995).

4. Kızılbaş was a pejorative term used by the Ottoman Empire to designate Anatolian combat groups wearing a red bandeau as a sign of their loyalty to the Persian Shah Ismail in the times of religious-political schism between the Sunni Ottoman and Shii Safavid Empires (Dressler 2005). Since the Alevi Revival in the 1990s it has been appropriated by pro-Alevi activists as self-designation referring to leftist identifications. Young Turk nationalist discourse coined Alevism as an umbrella term to replace the former pejorative term Kızılbaş. By introducing this neologism they aimed at appropriating different religious streams into official Sunni Islam, and to claim them as carriers of Turkish heritage deriving from pre-Islamic Turkish Anatolian culture. On scientific discourses constructing Alevis and Alevism see (Dressler 2013; Göner 2005; Jongerden and White 2002).

5. Currently the descendants of Armenian Genocide survivors are conceptualized in research as "Islamized" or "Crypto Armenians". The International Hrant Dink Foundation, together with the Bosphorus University, both based in Istanbul, Turkey, organized an International Conference in Istanbul from 2 to 4 November 2013. The conference title was telling: whilst in English the title was translated into passive *Islamized Armenians* the full title in Turkish was *Müslümanlaş(tırıl)mış Ermeniler* using brackets to suggest indistinctness of the forced or deliberate character of conversion. The conference organizers aimed at raising acceptance for Muslim Armenians in Turkey, thereby rejecting a reluctant attitude towards converted Armenians by the side of Orthodox Sunni Muslims by locating such an exclusive attitude in the Armenian Christian community.

6. For a discussion of the Ottoman archive accounts of Ottoman military campaigns in Dersim see: (Gündoğdu and Genç 2013). And for the times of the Early Republic of Turkey and the military campaign on Tunceli from 1936 to 1938, see (Bilmez *et al.* 2011; Watts 2000).

7. According to the Kurdish nationalist discourse, Tunceli constitutes an integral part of the imagined Kurdish territory. In depicting the essentialist view of Tunceli's Kurdish origin, the Kurdish nationalist discourse follows the same rules as the Turkish nationalist one, both aiming to prove Tunceli's national belonging. Similarly, Kurdish and Turkish nationalists explained the religious peculiarities of Dersim as remnants of an early unspoilt version of respectively a Kurdish religion deliberately named Zoroastrianism with pre-Islamic traits or for the latter, an original version of Turkish belief. Accordingly, the local language Zazaki is denied consideration as a proper language, but is declared a Kurdish idiom, or a Turkish derivation to underline its national belonging.

8. Another more specific discourse relevant to this discussion constructs the close relation between Armenians and Kızılbaş Alevis and has been mainly fed by two narratives. The first dates back to the second half of the 19th century to the times when US-American missionaries encountered Kızılbaş in Dersim region and perceived them as Crypto-Armenians in order to render them a legitimate object for their proselytizing mission in Central Anatolia (Kieser 2000; Reinkowski 2007). This close relation between Armenians and Kızılbaş Alevis was also sustained by the Armenian traveller Antranik, who reported a legend of Kızılbaş pilgrims worshipping at Christian Armenian religious sites (Antranik 2012 [1900]) from oral lore, and by Halajyan, who handed down the collective conversion legend of Der Simon (Halajyan 1973). In contrast, the second Young Turks' counter-narrative suggests that the pejoratively called Kızılbaş in Tunceli were indeed Zaza Alevis, and derived from true Turkish stock (Karakaya-Stump 2004; Dressler 2013). Recently, the first narrative was appropriated by Yusuf Halaçoğlu, a Nationalist Movement Party [*Milli Hareket partisi*, MHP] politician and the former president of the Turkish Historical Society [*Türk Tarihi Kurumu*, TTK]. By assenting to the Ottoman discourse on Kızılbaş as political traitors and disloyal believers (Dressler 2005), Halaçoğlu constructs a similar difference in Zaza Alevis of Tunceli. In order to further legitimate their exclusion from discourse, Halaçoğlu presents them as Crypto-Armenians (Halaçoğlu 2007).

9. In 1990, fifty years after the mass atrocities in Tunceli had been committed and legitimized by the Turkish government, it was a Turkish pro-Kurdish sociologist, İsmail Beşikçi, who first introduced the Dersim Genocide to academic discourse to classify the military campaign of the Turkish Army in Tunceli in 1936-1938. In his study he adheres to the Kurdish nationalist lecture of the events as a Kurdish insurgency by situating the Turkish military operations in Tunceli in a wider frame of interpretation and by listing it among the state-based counterinsurgencies adopted against the growing Kurdish nationalist movement in the 1920s and 1930s (Beşikçi 2013). Following Beşikçi in framing his analysis of the events, van Bruinessen termed the atrocities as "Dersim Ethnocide" because as he argues the measures taken aimed at the destruction of Kurdish ethnic identity not at the destruction of the Kurds or parts of them as such (van Bruinessen 1994: 148). In the last few years this discourse provided the patterns of interpretation for two statements uttered by the Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan. First, he held a speech in 2011 on the "Dersim massacres" and then published a speech online on 23 April 2014 on the "1915 events". Both statements resulted in broader media debates, and although they did not actually break with the state's official denialist discourse, the civil society perceived and discussed them to be signs of recognition (Ayata and Hakyemez 2013).

10. This nostalgia discourse is commonplace in Anatolia and links up to a modern Turkish nationalist perception of a homogenous and therefore conflict-free social fabric. Mills argues in her study on memories related to the built environment of Kuzguncuk, a formerly multiethnic quarter in Ottoman Istanbul, that "Nostalgia for cosmopolitanism, by sustaining the erasure of difference, writes minorities back into a seamless collective, and so nostalgia for minority places and people is part of the discursive field that dispossesses minorities of place." (Mills 2010: 211)

11. The early Turkish Republican People's Houses [*Halkevleri*], were state-related community centres established to construct Turkish national identity through education and publication, and can be considered successors of the Young Turks Turkish Hearth centres, for the People's Houses opened in Tunceli, see (Sertel 2013). For the journal *Altan* published by the People's House in Elazığ see (Haykır 2007b). For a first study on Young Turkish discourse production about Nazımiye district in Dersim see (Öztürk 1995). Besides his other monograph on the region (Ağar 1938), Ağar mainly published articles in the local People's House journal *Altan*, see (Taşkın 2010; Haykır 2007a; Ergen 2007).

12. Similar to another more prominent character Elazığ Mountain flowers boarding school director Sıdika Avar (Türkyılmaz 2009) who was reportedly called a missionary by Kemal Atatürk before being sent to Elazığ (Putney and Burlin 2012: 62).

13. As Dressler has shown, the Young Turks discourse on Alevis especially applying to Dersim due to the population's predominantly Alevi identification, aimed at projecting the imagined true Turks adhering to a unaltered form of essential Islam in the groups formerly known and persecuted since the 16th century as Kızılbaş (Dressler 2013).

14. According to the Turkish Republican Statistics Directorate, Kirmil was a subdistrict of Hozat district. The state census of 1935 registered 391 inhabitants for Halvuri vengi, one of a total of 17 villages located in Kirmil subdistrict (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Başbakanlık İstatistik Genel Direktörlüğü 1937). Uluğ states that Kirmil was Dersim's heart (Uluğ 1931).

15. For more detailed information on the Armenian Surp Garabed monastery, also known als Halvori Vank as reconstructed according to Armenian sources see (Arakelova and Grigorian 2013). Moreover, oral history research documented the memory accounts of relatives of the last clergyman who did his duty in the monastery until 1937 (Gündoğan and Gündoğan 2012: 520-544).

16. In 1946 the village's name was Til, etymologically derived from Armenian and Kurdish for 'mound' or 'hill'. The village was renamed into Korluca. Until the end of the 13th century, Til was the main settlement in the area situated in the prosperous Til plain, that offered transition over the Murat River [Armenian *Artsani*], through a ford (Sinclair 1989: 93-94, 100-104). In this article the historical name Til is used in accordance to the time it referred to in the respective context similar to the use of Dersim and Tunceli.

17. The old settlement of Til was abandoned and was moved to the old site of Pertek to improve security facilities. The old site of Pertek in turn was abandoned in favour of the present site in 1838 (Sinclair 1989: 93-94, 100-104).

18. The term triconch, literally meaning three shells, belongs to Byzantine architecture vocabulary and refers to a ground plan of a building with only three apses, contrary to the more common tetraconch plans with four apses, forming a Greek cross

19. For instance, on the website of the Tourism and Culture Directorate in Tunceli there are two short entries for churches in the whole province that are recommended to tourists: one is to be found in Mazgirt and the other one in Hozat, referring to the monastery in Geçimli. The churches are listed at the bottom of the website page and described only briefly, suggesting that no extended information about the church is available. The statement that this church is of bigger proportions compared to the other churches in the region seems to be pointless as no other churches are introduced. The list of cultural tourism destinations proposed by the Tourism and Culture Directorate in Tunceli lists churches at the end, after a long list of in the first places Islamic religious architecture, Islamic public architecture and natural sites, see: <http://www.tuncelikulturturizm.gov.tr/TR,57329/kiliseler.html>.

20. A detailed study on the envisaged transportation of the church was contributed by (Ülgen 1970).

21. Interview held in Pınarlar, Tunceli on 10 May 2012 with Hıdır G., Kurmancı-speaking Alevi, born in Til village, Pertek district, Tunceli.

22. The actual condition of the church, if it still remained accessible today, would most probably resemble the condition of another of the three churches documented in *Doomed by the dam* that was not submerged by the dams flooding (METU 1967: 42). In addition, this church was exposed to decay and pillaging by successive attacks of treasure hunters who ravished the region since the Armenian Genocide. Due to state agency incentives, these campaigns even intensified from the 1980s onwards. Treasure hunters have posed the heaviest threat to the province's cultural heritage. Nowadays the church is almost completely destroyed and reduced to its foundations, since the actual private owner of the land decided to enlarge his fields throughout the course of 2012. The latest attack on the church was carried out in June 2013. One of the current owner's neighbours stated that, for several days, his neighbour was busy quarrying the church's ruin, reducing it to its foundations before he was reported to the local gendarmes, and was required to

refrain from further destruction. So far the case has gone unprosecuted. The sole authorities monitoring and sanctioning this destruction of cultural heritage are the PKK. The PKK entered Tunceli at a relatively late stage in the beginning of the 1990s. In the initial phase, when they started to set up their organization, they were introduced to the region by the armed wing of the Communist Party of Turkey, the Liberation Army of the Worker's and Peasant's of Turkey [Türkiye İşci ve Köylü Kurtuluş Ordusu, TİKKO]. Already during the previous ten years of intensification, the PKK incorporated the institutional knowledge of TİKKO, see (Jongerden and Akkaya 2012: § 23). In 2012 an Armenian church already in ruins due to repeated pillaging and decay, located in the village of Yaylagünü in Ovacık district, was attacked by five treasure hunters coming from Ovacık, Elazığ, İstanbul, Maraş and Canada, equipped with professional devices. The PKK challenged them and forced them to leave.

23. Interview held in İstanbul on 22 May 2012 with a survivor from a massacre in Ergen in 1938, born in 1938 in Hozat district (Tunceli) whose parents, both survivors of the Armenian Genocide, originated from Dersim.

24. Tacy Atkinson, US-American missionary stationed in Harput since 1902, was a witness of the Armenian Genocide. She mentions a massacre in Pertek in June 1915 (Atkinson 2000: 39).

25. The very expression gave name to a documentary film directed by J. Michael Hagopian called "The River Ran Red" that was released in 2009 as part of the series *The Witnesses Trilogy*.

26. Interview held in Frankfurt on 18 March 2012 with M. A., Armenian born in 1939 in Hozat, Tunceli.

27. On the contrary, by means of establishing military or security zones, restricting the accessibility to places of former Armenian communal life or massacre sites is a common method of discursive exclusion employed by Turkish state authorities.

28. Today called Geçimli, the village was formerly called Ergen. In 1928 the village's name was still Ergen or Yergan, meaning 'long' in Armenian. Its full former Armenian name was Yergan Inguzak, meaning 'long walnut trees', changed into Turkish Geçimli, meaning 'affable'. In this article the name Ergen will be used to refer to the times up to 1938 and the name Geçimli to refer to the times after the massacres in 1938.

29. Thierry considered the sculptures style and iconography, and compared the results with the analysis of ten manuscripts copied in the monastery between 1432 and 1608, preserved in the archives of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

30. Local residents complain about incidents of grave and stone pillaging and destruction, committed on behalf of Turkish state institutions and later by non-state actors, the local population, and private investors. Thomas Alan Sinclair also refers to oral history, and states that the cut stones were robbed from the building and reused for the first time in the construction of the village public school. "Local tradition suggests some serious robbing of the stone in 1944, possibly in order to build a school —but this point needs clearing up by looking at the school" (Sinclair 1989: 82). Cevdet Konak considered the same historical event to be the cause of the building's actual dilapidated condition, also referencing oral tradition. "After the 1938 massacre these historical buildings were destroyed as well, our elderly people are telling this. Again, this church's stones were used in a school construction that was realised after the 1950s. From the 1950s to the 1960s it was also used by building companies." (Gözlü 21/10/2013). Thus oral tradition gives evidence of this plundering practice as a state-induced intervention carried out in order to use this material for the construction of public buildings. Prior to the emergence of the armed conflict between the PKK and Turkish Army in 1994, the old school building was superseded by a new school that was built in the surrounding area. The masonry of the old school building as well as several houses in the village display the stones cut from the monastery reused mainly for the solidification of house cornerstones and foundations.

31. The Dersim Armenians Belief and Social Aid Association was founded in 2010 by its first chairman Miran Pirgiç Gültekin in İstanbul, Turkey. The associations activities range from

meetings, cultural events, group visits to Tunceli, the Republic of Armenia and Armenian communities in the Diaspora, to the publishing of a quarterly. In summer 2014, the association opened an agency in Tunceli. <http://dersimermenileri.blogspot.de/>

32. The HAYCAR Association, founded in 2007 is based in Istanbul, Turkey. <http://www.haycar.com/>

33. Interview held in Hozat, Tunceli on 28 October 2009, with Zeynel Örnek, born in Ovacık, Tunceli.

34. İbrahim ağa was the leader of the Abassan tribe.

35. The project was financed by Özer Özgen and Akçelik Özgen and realized with the contributions of architect Dârâ Kırmızıtoprak, construction engineer Mustafa Güler, documentary director Özgür Fındık and Dilaver Eren.

36. A group was set up respectively, also offering, though with a very limited scope, the opportunity to discuss on the memorial's design and purpose.

37. Interview held in a village in Mazgirt, Tunceli on 1 July 2012 with M.E., a descendant of Armenian Genocide survivors, who was born in 1932 in Mazgirt, Tunceli.

38. Rober Koptaş on Twitter "Of course the Dersim 38 memorial is important, but does it not too much resemble the Holocaust memorial in Berlin?" [@rober_koptas: "dersim 38 anıtı önemli tabii ama berlin'deki holokost anıtına fazla benzemiyor mu?"] https://twitter.com/rober_koptas/status/256684734636228608.

39. Following Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan's speech on 2 November 2011 in which he brought forward his apology for the massacres committed in Dersim in 1938, the Armenian community in Istanbul had uttered their hopes for an extension to a corresponding excuse to be expressed on behalf of the Turkish state representatives to the Armenian Genocide survivors and their descendants.

40. Şey Rıza is assigned a place of local resistance in collective memory in Tunceli. On the day of his judgement Şey Rıza expressed his defence by addressing an audience that was indeed absent, because he was to be hanged hidden from the public gaze in Elazığ. He reportedly claimed with risen voice to the absent public that they were children of Kerbela, innocent, and that this was a shame, an atrocity, and a murder [*Evlad-i Kerbelayız, günahsızız, ayıptır, zulümdür, cinayettir*]. Şey Rıza's role in the formation of the local resistance against the Turkish military campaign plays a major role in the construction of local identity in Tunceli.

ABSTRACTS

Adopting a genealogical approach, this paper discusses recently emerging alternative heritage production as a discursive site for the confrontation of representations of contested memories of the violent past in modern post-genocidal Turkey by exploring the particular case of Tunceli province, former Dersim. The study critically questions the perspectives, constraints and limits of alternative heritage production. It argues that recent contested heritage action evolving in the discursive field, span between post-genocidal denialist discourse and tourist marketisation endeavours, contributes to the ongoing negotiations and struggle over the attribution of meanings to Turkey's violent past and present. It then moves on to argue that local heritage actors, by claiming representation and recognition of state-induced violent crimes as genocide,

adhere to the dominant denialist discourse whilst acknowledging the concept of genocide for their political ends.

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