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# REWRITING HISTORY AND PASSING BLAME: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN THE KATYŃ MASSACRES (1940) AND THE ARMENIAN RELOCATION (1915)

(TARİHİN TEKRAR YAZILMASI VE SUÇUN BAŞKASININ ÜZERİNE  
ATILMASI: KATYŃ KATLIAMLARI (1940) VE ERMENİ SEVK VE  
İSKÂNI (1915) ARASINDA KARŞILAŞTIRMALI BİR ÇALIŞMA)

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**Abstract:** *During the nineteenth and twentieth century, different nations initiated their own nation-building process. In early processes of nation-building, the focus was on glorifying existing events to create unity. There are; however, cases in which the focus shifted from glorifying past events into neglecting or even denying events. This was especially the case for newly established nations who witnessed major conflict during the two world wars in which multiple war crimes were committed. In order to not "taint" their independence with such mishaps, the committed atrocities were subsequently downplayed, neglected, or even (in the most extreme situation) subjected to complete rewriting of history. Few nations have resorted to engaging in complete rewriting of history. Nations that rose from the ashes of the two world wars often had a big part in the violence since they had to fight their way to their independence. Hence, they resorted to complete rewriting of history. Since newly established nations preferred to start of their newly reached independence with the thought of being "a noble people" not capable of vile actions against other nations, they exerted much effort into narrating in an alternative manner what happened during the previous period. Nations justified their struggle for independence by*

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*pointing out that they were victims of other nations that were oppressing them. Two clear examples for this were the Armenians during their war effort against the Ottoman Empire during World War One (1914-1918); and the Soviet Russians in Poland during Second World War (1939-1945). In both events, the perpetrators tried (and still try) to shift their role in the events from committing atrocities, to victims and heroes. A comparative look into the two case studies will be a good start for a preliminary research in which an outline and model will be determined for nations who have resorted to rewriting history in the process of nation building.*

**Keywords:** *Soviet Union, Poland, World War Two, Ottoman Empire, World War One*

**Öz:** *On dokuzuncu ve yirminci yüzyılda farklı uluslar, kendi ulus inşası süreçlerine başladılar. Bu ulus oluşturma süreci başlangıçta, ulusun kendi tarihsel olaylarını yücelterek birlik oluşturmayı çalışmıştır. Bir başka bir yöntemse, bazı olayları yüceltirken diğer tarihsel olayları ihmal veya inkâr etmek olmuştur. Özellikle o dönem bağımsızlığına kavuşan uluslar, çok sayıda savaş suçunun işlendiği iki dünya savaşı sırasında büyük çatışmalar yaşamışlardır. Bu “lekeli dönemden” kendilerine temiz ve ak bir sayfayla başlangıç yapmak için, özellikle bağımsızlıklarına ulaştıkları dönemlerde yaşadıkları tarihsel olayları yüceltmek veya tam tersi ihmal etmek istemişlerdir. Dolayısıyla bu aşamada ihmal etmek, ardından inkâr etmek ve son olarak da tarihi yeniden yazmak gibi üç yöntem uygulanmıştır. Tarihi tamamen yeniden yazma yönetime başvuran uluslar az sayıda olmuştur. Fakat özellikle iki dünya savaşının ardından yeni kurulan uluslar, bağımsızlıklarını sürdürmek için savaşmak zorunda kaldıkları ve şiddetli bir dönem yaşadıkları için, bu yöntemlere başvurmuşlardır. Bu dönem, ortaya koydukları “asil ulus” tablosuna uymadığı için, o dönem yaşananları bilinçli olarak farklı bir şekilde anlatmak için büyük uğraş göstermişlerdir. Bu uğraş içerisinde, bağlı oldukları devletten kopup kendi ulus-devletlerini kurabilmek için uyguladıkları savaş ve şiddet doğrultusunda bunu farklı anlatmayı daha uygun gösterip bu savaşın “adaletli bir mücadele” olduğunu göstermeye çalışmışlardır. Böylece suç işleyen taraftan mağdur olmuş veya kahraman taraf olmayı çalışmışlardır. Bunun iki en belirgin örneği ise, Birinci Dünya Savaşı sırasında (1914-1918) Osmanlı Devleti’ne karşı ayaklanan Ermeniler ile 1939-1945 arasında gerçekleşen İkinci Dünya Savaşı sırasında, Polonya’da katliam uygulayan Sovyet Ruslarıdır. Her iki olayda da vahşet saçan taraf kendi ulusunu mağdur ve kahraman göstermeye çalışmıştır. Bu iki konuyu araştırıp karşılaştırarak, ulus inşası çabası sürecinde tarihi yeniden yazma yöntemi uygulanan uluslar hakkında taslak ve aşamaları belirlemeye çalışan bir ön araştırma için uygun bir başlangıç yapılması amaçlanmaktadır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeleri:** *Sovyetler Birliği, Lehistan, İkinci Dünya Savaşı, Osmanlı Devleti, Birinci Dünya Savaşı*

## 1) Introduction

Rewriting history to encourage the buildup of an image of the ‘ideal state’ is not something unique. Almost every nation does this, either by promoting some elements of the ideal image by cultural praise for poets (Shakespeare) or philosophy such as in Germany. The latter was and is still widely known as German idealism. Who does not know about the founding fathers of philosophy: Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Karl Marx (1818–1883), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) and many more? The emphasis on the Deutsche Schule of scientists has brought a sense of identification in Germany that the nation has a long tradition of raising solid scientists like Einstein, Freud, and other intellectuals like Mozart and Goethe; even though Mozart and Freud were in fact (German-speaking) Austrians and not Germans. It has also led to the theory that the reason Germany never had colonies up until the very late nineteenth century while other European countries started theirs in the fifteenth or sixteenth century; some 300-400 years prior, was this highly developed intellectual culture that deemed all peoples to be equal.

This is in fact a great example of how nations emphasize traits that are, in their eyes, great factors of success. It goes hand-in-hand with neglecting other elements of the nation, mostly events in history that occurred. This process of rewriting history is not new and also occurs in every nation. However, two examples of how the core of the national image is centered around an event that is, not only actively rewritten, but also proved a decisive moment in history in which the “blame” for the event is passed on to another nation involved, are much harder to come by.

One fairly known example is the relocation of the Armenians within the Ottoman Empire during 1915, after which the first Prime Minister of Republic of Armenia, Hovhannes Katchaznoui (1868-1938) expressed great self-criticism by stating during the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun) convention held in Bucharest in April 1923 that it was in fact the ARF (which habitually resorted to what is today deemed as “terrorism”) that caused massive Turkish losses after which the Ottoman government decided to relocate the Armenians. His speech was titled “Dashnaktsutyun Has Nothing More to Do” as Katchaznoui called for Armenians to accept that what happened as their own fault and abolish the Dashnaktsutyun.<sup>1</sup> However, Katchaznoui was soon imprisoned by Soviet forces, where he died and from the 1960s, Armenians used the events of 1915 to carve out their nationalist ideology as “victims of Ottoman-Turkish violence”. In this predominant nationalistic view, the Armenians did nothing

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1 Hovhannes Katchaznoui, Mehmet Perinçek (ed.) & Lale Akalın (tr.), *Dashnagtzoutiun Has Nothing To Do Anymore: Report Submitted to the 1923 Party Convention* (Istanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2007).

wrong and the violent Armenian uprisings and rebellions against the Ottoman Empire have been heavily downplayed or even completely neglected. In this pro-Armenian stance, the victimized role of Armenians is a unique example of how history is rewritten to pass blame to another group or nation and use it as the core of nation-building.

The opposite is seen in the Katyń massacres (in short; Katyń) of 1940 in which more than 22,000 Polish intellectuals were systematically killed by Soviet secret agents in a direct order from the leader of the Soviet Union Joseph Stalin in an effort to incapacitate Polish efforts for reorganization against Soviet rule. These agents arrested Polish academics and rounded up Polish prisoners of war (from Nazi-Germany among others) and under the pretext of being sent off to Russian camps or being brought back to their families, were instead killed in remote forests by specially trained executioners from NKVD, the notorious secret intelligence agency of the Soviet Union (later renamed KGB). By killing the (military) elite, Poles would not be able to form any strong resistance, uprisings, or rebellions against the Soviet occupying forces. It was also seen as a revenge by Stalin for the long and costly resistance of Polish forces against the Soviets, like during the Polish-Soviet War (1919-1921) which was won by Poland and which delayed Soviet expansion into Poland, Western Ukraine, and Western Belarus for almost two decades.<sup>2</sup> However, after the massacres of Katyń, the Soviet Union deployed an intensive campaign to derail the events by passing blame to Nazi-Germany. In this situation, it was not possible to shift the blame to Poland since Poland had become a part of the Soviet bloc after World War Two. The other option was to shift blame to Nazi-Germany since that nation was defeated during the same war and it was subsequently blamed for many other war crimes after which it was divided and abolished. During the twentieth century, it became the core of Soviet-Polish unity as the Soviets were portraying themselves as the saviors of Poland after the atrocities committed against Poles by Nazi-Germany. Although the Soviet Union confirmed some responsibility for Katyń in 1990, just before the collapse of the Soviet Union, it fanatically denied it being a war crime or even having a genocidal trait whatsoever. After the fall of the Soviet Union, its heir Russia continued the denialist policies but Katyń shifted to be the core of the new Polish awakening of its own national identity which it continues to be until today.<sup>3</sup>

The main comparison between the Armenian Relocation (1915) and the Katyń Massacres (1940) derives from the denialist policy of respectively the instigators themselves: Armenian Revolutionaries, primarily organized as

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2 Gerhard Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 107.

3 George Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940: Truth, Justice and Memory* (Oxford: Routledge, 2005), 44.

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Dashnaktsutyun (but also as Hunchakian, Ramgavar, Armenakan, and some smaller local semi-independent cells), and Soviet leadership. Both made use of many tools (such as rewriting history, forging evidence, falsifying documents, deceiving eye-witnesses by state-organized mass-propaganda and indoctrination, and much more) to create a new ‘history’ in which the main instigators were seen as “victims” or even “heroes” instead of perpetrators.<sup>4</sup> It also became an important part of the national identity for Armenians on one hand, and Soviet-Polish unity on the other hand. The latter has since been partly opened with the collapse of the Soviet Union while the first is still an ongoing process of Armenian nation-building with no end in sight.

The main question of this study centers around the process of nation-building in nations where important aspects of its decisive history is rewritten by the perpetrators themselves. This paper focuses especially on the war crimes during World War One (1914-1918) and World War Two (1939-1945). This article argues that after major traumatic events some nations coped with their own actions by denying it entirely and rewriting history in order to “cover it up” by means of historiography.

### 2) Rewriting History As A Tool To Create A National Identity

To create a national identity, nations have made use of many tools. These tools can make use of many elements, such as television, radio, poetry, theater, education, music, sports, and historiography (for example, through the use of textbooks). These are just some of the examples that can be used as tools in order to ensure the process of creating a national identity in a certain nation. This has been the topic of many scientific researches ever since the mid-nineteenth century. The process of nation-building, and by which tools this is accomplished, is best described in Karl W. Deutsch’s *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality* (1966), as well as Rupert Emerson’s *From Empire to Nation* (1960). Taking into effect the historical efforts, one can study Carl J. Friedrich’s *Man and His Government* (1963) and James Dobbin’s *Europe’s Role in Nation-Building: From the Balkans to the Congo* (2008). A more general overview of literature on the correlation between how history is perceived and nationalism can be seen in Louis Snyder’s *The Meaning of Nationalism* (1954); Carlton H. Hayes’ *Nationalism: A Religion* (1960); and Hans Kohn’s *Nationalism: Its Meaning and History* (1955). However, it is in Eugen Lemberg’s *Der Nationalismus* (1964) that the focus is shifted to the various instruments of creating a national identity. An overview on the instruments of creating a national identity are

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4 Geoffrey Roberts, *Stalin’s Wars: from World War to Cold War, 1939–1953* (London: Yale University Press, 2006), 171.

offered in the collections edited by Karel W. Deutch and William J. Foltz (2010), *Nation Building in Comparative Contexts*; John H. Kautsky (1962), *Political Change in Underdeveloped Countries: Nationalism and Communism*; and Daniel Lerner (1958), *The Passing of Traditional Society*.

When looking at relatively new nations (who established their independence in the twentieth century), Seymour Martin Lipset's *The First New Nation* (1963) is useful as he compares the uses of instruments in order to create a national identity in the specific case of the United States of America, while Sujit Choudhry's *Bills of Rights as Instruments of Nation-Building in Multinational States: The Canadian Charter and Quebec Nationalism* (2007) focuses on the situation in Canada. Other analytical works on specific case studies the various instruments they use for creating a national identity can be found in David M. Potter's *People of Plenty* (1954); Hans Kohn's *American Nationalism: An Interpretative Essay* (1957a); *Nationalism and Liberty: The Swiss Example* (1956); and *The Mind of Germany: The Education of a Nation* (1960). Slowly moving into the nineteenth century, *Prophets and Peoples: Studies in Nineteenth Century Nationalism* (1957b) by Hans Kohn, and Armand Sağ's *Nation-Building and Historiography in Modern Turkey* (2015) are centered on processes of nation-building in which history is either emphasized, neglected, ignored, downplayed, or rewritten in general to suit the image of the ideal nation'.<sup>5</sup> While Sağ focuses on the use of history textbooks, Anthony D. Smith (1991) takes into account the agencies of popular socialization, notably the public system of education in his *National Identity*.<sup>6</sup>

One can see more tools in the process of creating a national identity, for example in Sung Jae Park's *Physical Education and Sport as an Instrument of Nation Building in the Republic of Korea* (1974) in which the title speaks for itself; or Paz D.T. Nkomo's *The Military and Nation Building: A Comparative Study of the Nigerian and the South African Military as Instruments of National Integration* (1999). Although all of the before-mentioned tools are involved in the process of creating a national identity, they emphasize existing traits (like historical events) or use new elements (like sport). The uniqueness of rewriting history to create something new is different in that it uses existing traits to create something completely new from it in order to replace the first with the latter. Yet, these efforts to unite people of a certain land into one nation is not considered peculiar.<sup>7</sup>

It is not called "peculiar" by Smith as every state in the world at one point struggled with this process of nation-building in order to create one "nation".

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5 Armand Sağ, *Nation-Building And Historiography In Modern Turkey* (Utrecht: U2pi BV, 2015).

6 Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin Book, 1991), 21.

7 Smith, *National Identity*.

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While this did not always mean that the boundaries of the nation also needed to be expanded as in the nineteenth century, the smaller German states formed one nation, or *Kulturnation*, to speak in the terms of Friedrich Meinecke,<sup>8</sup> without actually becoming one unified state.<sup>9</sup> It was then widely believed that the concept of “nation” was interchangeable with that of “race,” because it was accepted that a nation was carved out by descent.<sup>10</sup> In order to forge a new national identity, it became important to either adjust or emphasize certain myths, traditions, cultural trademarks, linguistic commonality, and even celebrate a suitable version of history.<sup>11</sup> This process of “inventing” history by emphasizing or downgrading certain aspects in history, is an important tool of the newly established nation-state.<sup>12</sup> Most states focused on earlier times in order to depict an ancient “golden age”.<sup>13</sup> In this defining process, selecting or neglecting parts of the national history in order to create a nation in which people felt united and part of the same community, is crucial.<sup>14</sup> However, denying or even altering history is the most extreme form of this tool, such as is the case with the Armenian Relocation (1915) and the Katyń Massacres (1940).

Although the process of nation-building aims to create a community in which people feel that they are part of the same unit, there is the need for a national identity to identify with. One shares this sense of belonging to one state, or to one nation, with a group of people, regardless of one’s citizenship status.<sup>15</sup> National identity comes from elements (either past or present) that include national symbols, language, national colors, history, national consciousness, blood ties, culture, music, cuisine, radio, and television, among many others.<sup>16</sup>

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8 Friedrich Meinecke, *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat: Studien zur Genesis des deutschen Nationalstaates* (Munich, 1922).

9 Constantin Iordachi, “The Ottoman Empire: Syncretic Nationalism and Citizenship in the Balkans,” in *What Is a Nation? Europe 1789-1914*, Timothy Baycroft & Mark Hewitson (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 120-151.

10 Adrian Collins & Arthur de Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races* (Charleston, 1855/2010); Mark Hewitson, “Conclusion: Nationalism and the Nineteenth Century,” in *What Is a Nation? Europe 1789-1914*, Timothy Baycroft & Mark Hewitson (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 312-355.

11 Anthony D. Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd edition (London: Verso, 1983/1991); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

12 Nicholas J. Higham, *King Arthur, Myth-Making and History* (London: Routledge, 2002).

13 Patrick J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History* (Oxford, 1939).

14 Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth Of The State*, 4th Edition (London: Yale University Press, 2009).

15 Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives* (London: Pluto Press, 1993).

16 Arthur de Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (Paris, 1853-1855/1999); Louis Snyder, *The Meaning of Nationalism* (New Brunswick/Canada, 1954); Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Boston, 1969).

The identity of most citizens of a nation tends to originate in the promotion of the concept of “national identity” within that state or nation.<sup>17</sup> The sense of belonging to the nation, as experienced by the inhabitants themselves, becomes essential to (especially) newly formed states.<sup>18</sup> In the process of molding a national identity, a certain construction of the past becomes eminent.<sup>19</sup> When these elements are not entirely present, like with a common history between Armenians, one is forced to either find other common elements (like religion or language) or construct an elaborate fabricated version of it in which this is portrayed as such. However, when there is even no basic element to emphasize or celebrate, history is forged. This is especially the case with dictatorial states where the leadership fears that the violent past will make people feel animosity against the state for the pain they have suffered.

The construction of the fabricated past in a nation is directed and maintained by its political elite. Through political socialization, the task of shaping a common public with a mass culture can be pursued by government agencies.<sup>20</sup> The best example of this undertaking is found in forced versions of history that are, specifically, meant for both the outside world (outside of the own nation) as well as one’s own population. By portraying oneself as either the victim (as with Armenians), or the saviors (as the Russians) against the outside world, the image of the nation itself as either “the victim” or “the savior” becomes part of the ‘ideal image’. This image is spread globally, and is supported by a fabricated, deceiving state-organized rewritten version of history meant to be mass-propaganda for the outside world and indoctrination for its own people in order to create or maintain unity and reinforce the national identity.

### 3) The Case Of Armenian Victimization

The events of 1915 are still a large source for political, legal, and historical debate focusing on the definitions of what happened. Pro-Armenian sources state that it was a systematically organized genocide by the Ottoman Empire that continued up until the creation of the Republic of Turkey, making it a vital part of its own process of nation-building. Although the events took place in 1915, its socio-political origins date back to the mid-nineteenth century. It was at this time that the first claims were put forth by Armenian nationalists in an effort to strengthen their arguments that all Armenians should unite against a common foe; without considering whether or not it was a realistic view.

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17 Carlton Hayes, *The Historical Evolution of Modern Nationalism* (New York, 1931).

18 Ziya Gökalp, *Türkçülüğün Esasları* (İstanbul, 1923/2001) ; Mahir Ünlü & Yusuf Çotuksöken, *Türkçülüğün Esasları (Günümüz Türkçesiyle)* (İstanbul, 2001).

19 Umut Özkırımlı, *Theories of Nationalism: A critical introduction*, 2nd Revised and Extended Edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

20 Smith, *National Identity*; Gabriel Almond & Lucian Pye, *Comparative Political Culture* (Princeton, 1965).

### **3.1) A Short Historic Overview**

The first political entity that brought Armenians and Turks into the same political unit was the Seljuk Empire after the Seljuks entered Anatolia in 1071. The Armenians subsequently joined the Seljuks against the Byzantines since the latter were prosecuting the Armenians due to their different Christian sect. After the eleventh century, the Turkish-Armenian collaboration stayed intensive and continued up until the collapse of the Seljuk Empire and the rise of the Ottoman Empire in the thirteenth century. Although the two were different entities, the core was dominated by Turkish-speaking rulers and warriors that incorporated Armenians into its bureaucracy and culture. Even when the Turks became Islamized, the relations with the Christian Armenians stayed at a very good level.<sup>21</sup>

While the Armenians were enabled to carve out their own semi-independent states under Seljuk leadership, the Ottomans gave autonomous rights to the Armenians. This made the Armenians one of the most loyal subjects of the Ottoman Empire, which was especially evident during the siege of Constantinople (present-day İstanbul) in 1453 when the Armenians demonstrated themselves to be an important ally of the Ottoman forces. After the conquest, the Ottoman Sultan Fatih Sultan Mehmet (II) rewarded the Armenians with their own Church and Patriarch in Istanbul in 1461, and the exclusive title of “Sadık Millet” which was not given to any other subjects of the Ottoman Empire (1299-1922); including Turks. Literally, it meant “The Loyal People”, and included a tax exemption on trade products for the Armenians.<sup>22</sup> Lastly, the Armenians were mostly exempted from military draft and were granted many of the trade-related jobs within the Ottoman Empire (as well as trade-representative jobs as civil-servants abroad). Especially the tax exemption in combination with the monopoly on trade, brought the Armenian population considerable wealth during the Ottoman period of 1453-1774.<sup>23</sup>

Somewhere during the reign of the Ottoman Sultan Murad IV (1623-1640), who was famous for adding Revan (present-day Armenian capital of Yerevan) to the Ottoman Empire, the tax exemption for the Armenians changed. Especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the Ottomans were confronted with heavy financial decline after the Battle of Vienna in 1683, which the Ottomans lost. The financial difficulties made the Ottomans overturn

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21 Armand Sağ, “Categorizing Historiography: Turkish-Armenian Relations Throughout History,” *Review of Armenian Studies*, no. 26 (2012): 127-172.

22 Almıla Gökçe Özcan, “XVI. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında Osmanlı Devleti’nde Vergi Muafiyeti: Derbendçilik,” *Akademik Bakış* 11, no. 22 (Summer, 2018): 305-322.

23 Armand Sağ, “The perfect ethnocide: A review of Bas Kromhout’s ‘De perfecte genocide’,” *Review of Armenian Studies*, no. 31 (2015): 243-292.

any tax exempts for the Armenians after some 230 years. Unhappy with this turn of events, the Armenians in Zeytun (in the present-day province of Kahramanmaraş) refused to pay taxes from 1774 onwards. When the Ottoman governor traveled to Zeytun to try to negotiate with the Armenians, he was subsequently killed despite being unarmed and unescorted by Ottoman soldiers. It caused the Ottomans to send the army to Zeytun and after heavy fighting, the Armenian revolt of Zeytun was eventually quelled in 1780 after some seven months of heavy fighting. The Armenians, being numerous after being mostly exempted from military service, had used their wealth for the acquisition of considerable military weaponry; allowing them to put up stiff resistance against the army of the declining Ottoman Empire.

Although Zeytun did quell the Armenian resistance for the time being, it was followed by another 30 rebellions of which the Second Revolt of Zeytun (1887) proved to be the starting point for a massive attack on Ottoman targets by armed Armenian groups with militant ideologies. During the 1870s, the Armenians pressured the Ottomans for more autonomy, especially with the rise of nationalist sentiments in Europe. When the Ottoman Empire declined, multiple armed groups were quickly founded of which Armenakan (1885), Hunchakian (1887), Dashnaksutyun (1890), and Ramgavar (1921) are the most known. Especially Armenakan, Hunacakian, and Dashnaksutyun are seen as the three traditional Armenian organizations that were responsible for the bloodiest confrontations. Amongst them all, Dashnaksutyun is described as “the most bloodthirsty”. Between 1910 and 1922 alone, Dashnaksutyun was solely responsible for the killing of more than 523,000 Ottoman citizens (mostly Muslims, either Turkish or Kurdish but also fellow-Armenians that Dashnaksutyun deemed “Pro-Ottoman”).<sup>24</sup> In 1905, Dashnaksutyun instigated the so-called “Armenian-Tatar massacres” (as the names “Tatars”, “Turks”, and “Azerbaijanis” were used interchangeable in those years) which lasted until 1907 and claimed hundreds (or even thousands) of lives; mostly from Turkish-speaking Azerbaijani’s.<sup>25</sup> According to Armenian sources, 158 Azerbaijani villages were destroyed, although it is expected that the real number is much higher; going over two hundred.<sup>26</sup> Going into modern times, from 1968 onwards, such militant ideology morphed into blatant terrorism; Armenian organizations such as ASALA and JCAG instigated an assassination campaign against Turkish ambassadors and diplomats.

The aim of these organizations was to cause animosity between Armenians and the non-Armenian Muslim majority of Turks and Kurds within the Ottoman

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24 Armand Sağ, “De Eerste Wereldoorlog: Armeense Opstanden,” *ArmandSag.com*, 2009, accessed June 25, 2019, <http://www.armandsag.nl/artikelen/De%20Eerste%20Wereldoorlog%20-%20Armeense%20Opstanden.html>

25 Armand Sağ, “Armand Sağ vanuit Armenië: Vol spanning op het vliegtuig,” *AIP*, May 26, 2014.

26 Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan (1905-1920): The Shaping Of A National Identity In A Muslim Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

Empire by carrying out attacks on the latter. This in turn would cause the Ottoman forces to engage into battle against the militant Armenians, who would hide behind human shields and let the Ottoman unwittingly cause great losses amongst Armenians. Subsequently, the Armenians would ask for humanitarian aid and an intervention by the major European powers (like France and Russia) who would defeat the Ottomans and carve out an Anatolian state for Armenians. In the last phase, Armenian insurgents would cleanse Anatolia of everything non-Armenian; especially the local inhabitants.<sup>27</sup>

When looking at the totality of Armenian militant organizations (either guerrilla or terrorist) in the period of 1774 until 1994, the Turkish victim count is estimated to be at least one million and up to two million. This is excluding the almost one million displaced Azerbaijani Turks during the Nagorno-Karabakh War (also known as the Armenian-Azerbaijani War) of 1988-1994. In the most explosive year, 1915, Armenian rebels even managed to gain control of the major Ottoman city of Van and declare it an independent Anatolian-Armenian state. To change the demographic status of the city (only 37% of Van was Armenian), mass-killings were conducted in which the Muslim Turkish and Kurdish majority of the Ottoman citizens were decimated. In 1915 alone, some 111,200 Ottoman citizens died on the hands of Armenian rebels. In the same year, the Ottoman Empire decided to relocate its Armenian community from Eastern Anatolia to mostly the Syrian province of Deir ez-Zor (which was a province of the Ottoman Empire at that time and known as a fertile and relatively peaceful region near the banks of the river Euphrates, far from the battle fields). This relocation has been raised as the decisive moment in Armenian history.

Although this is all very well documented, even the aim of Armenian nationalist, the history is intentionally distorted by Armenian historiography to fit into the Armenian process of nation-building to conduct a national identity in which the ideal image of the nation is portrayed as the only true one.

### **3.2) Armenian Nation-Building**

After the French Revolution of 1789, nationalism became the dominant ideology in Europe and many nations were deeply influenced by it. It was not very different within the Ottoman Empire, which was up until then portrayed as one undivided state with a dominant common culture but comprised also many other ethnicities in its so-called *millet* (or “national community”)-system. The Ottoman Empire was inhabited by Turks, Armenians, Zazas, Arabs, Greeks, Jews, Laz, Kirmanci (and other Kurdish tribes), and many more ethnic

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<sup>27</sup> Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties Through the Nineteenth Century* (California/USA, 1963).

or religious groups.<sup>28</sup> Since Armenian Ottomans were the main trade representatives of the Ottoman Empire abroad, they were among the first to come in contact with this concept of nationalism. By the eighteenth and nineteenth century, most of the ethnic *millet*-minorities of the Ottoman Empire had somehow formed their own concept of a national identity because the *millet*-system actually preserved a serious form of autonomy for all religious ethnicities ever since the early period of the Ottoman Empire. Except the Turks, most inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire (especially the Armenians) had refused the notion that “their” culture was part of a “common” culture in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>29</sup>

When these ethnic minorities of the Ottoman Empire, had come into contact with the newly spreading ideology of nationalism, they quickly developed their own views on it. The nationalists strongly opposed the Ottoman Empire and felt more connected to their own cultural or religious group. Therefore, it was not uncommon that an ethnic Greek living in the Ottoman coast of Anatolia during the 1910s regarded himself part of the Greek nation, dismissing any other view on his identity; especially that he was part of an Ottoman cultural identity.<sup>30</sup> Arguably the most fanatic anti-Ottoman sentiments belonged to the Armenian *millet*, who tried to engage the Ottoman forces in a very violent way to create its own independent nation-state of homogenous Armenia in the very heart of the Ottoman Empire: Anatolia.<sup>31</sup>

Although the Armenians failed in their efforts to create a new state in Anatolia, at least not for long, these actions did lay the basic fundament for the Armenian process of nation-building in which the Armenian national identity was carved out. In this process (from 1887 onwards), the sentiments of Armenians towards Turks changed, which was something that was further instigated by the leaders of the First Republic of Armenia of 1918-1920.<sup>32</sup> By completely neglecting the pre-1915 events in which militant Armenian organizations in essence behaved like guerrilla-terror squads, Armenia conceived a new fierce Armenian nationalism with a nation that “all non-Armenians, in particular Turks, were archenemies of the Armenians”. This made it possible for Armenian leaders to

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28 Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, *History of the Ottoman State, Society & Civilisation*, Volume I (Istanbul, 2001), 63-131.

29 Şerafettin Turan, *Türk Devrim Tarihi: 2. Kitap - Ulusal Direnişten Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'ne*, 3. Basım (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1992/2009), 78-126.

30 Constantin Iordachi, “The Making of Citizenship in the post-Ottoman Balkans: State Building, Foreign Models, and Legal-Political Transfers,” in *Ottomans into Europeans: State and Institution-Building in South Eastern Europe*, Wim van Meurs & Alina Mungiu-Pippidi (eds.) (London: Hurst, 2010), 179-220.

31 Şerafettin Turan, *Türk Devrim Tarihi: 3. Kitap (Birinci Bölüm) - Yeni Türkiye'nin Oluşumu (1923-1938)*, 2. Basım (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1995/2005).

32 Şerafettin Turan, *Türk Devrim Tarihi: 1. Kitap - İmparatorluğun Çöküşünden Ulusal Direnişe*, 3. Basım (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1991/2008), 22-36.

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shift blame of the Armenian disaster, ignore the factuality of the plan to sacrifice Armenian lives in return for European intervention, and focus solely on the relocation of 1915. This victimized role made it possible for Armenians to unite against “their common enemy” although there was, in reality, no enemy and a chain of events were triggered out by militant people amongst Armenians themselves to elicit a foreign reaction.

This new fierce nationalism did not only result in a massive tragedy in Anatolia during 1915, but also in the new Armenian Republic declaring war on all of their new neighbors: Georgia (1918), Azerbaijan (1918-1920), Kars Republic (1918-1919), and even the newly forming Republic of Turkey (1920). It was only with the Soviet occupation of Armenia that the Armenian quest for violent expansion could be quelled. The Soviet period lasted for some seventy years until 1991.

In the 1960s, the events between 1885 until 1921 were subsequently used as the base for Armenian cultural identity as other options were not available. Armenians were divided between Armenian-Orthodox, Protestant, Catholic, and even Russian-Orthodox Churches, and also the difference in West-Armenian and East-Armenian made it difficult to form a linguistic unity. Adding the different history of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire (who were much wealthier), and those in Iran and Russia, it soon became evident that Armenians lacked the necessary common traits.

The only trait became the strongly anti-Turkish sentiments which were (and still are) fueled by the Armenian government throughout the Soviet period (1921-1991). Even when Turkey recognized the Republic of Armenia as an independent state when the Armenians declared themselves sovereign from the Soviet Union in 1991, making Turkey one of the first states to recognize the Armenian Republic, this was ignored by Armenia. Turkey’s friendly gesture of goodwill was seen as a contradiction with the Armenian doctrine passed down by the Armenian government in which Armenians were to see Turkey as their “archenemy” instead of a “friendly neighboring nation-state”.<sup>33</sup>

This process started in the period up to 1915, cultivating in the Armenian revolts in the Ottoman Empire and other wars with neighboring states, but was shortly thwarted by Katchaznoui’s speech in 1923 and the Soviet invasion of Armenia in 1921. However, somewhere in the 1950s and 1960s, this early Armenian nationalism took a new turn for revival and focused on one common enemy (and for the sake of focus, used interchangeable names for Turks, Tatars,

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33 Durmuş Yalçın, Yaşar Akbıyık, Dursun Ali Akbulut, Mustafa Balcıoğlu, Nuri Köstüklü, Süslü, N., Refik Turan, Cezmi Eraslan & Mehmet Akif Tural, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Tarihi I* (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 2014), 416-431.

and Azerbaijanis) through a process of rewriting history and passing blame to ensure the victim-role for itself.

This was a complicated process that was backed by governmental institutions and could only succeed with their backing. One can still see it today, like in Armenia's national museum, called "History Museum of Armenia", that was established in 1920 and is located on the Republic Square of the Armenian capital city of Yerevan. The Armenian state fully finances the whole museum and even has the ownership of the entire historical collection as well as the building the museum is located in. Almost immediately after entering the museum, one can see a picture of atrocities committed against Armenians with the text: "After Armenians peacefully asked for more rights, the Turks responded with the only way they know: massacring and killing everyone."<sup>34</sup> This is based on this author's own observation during his field work in Armenia between 6 and 16 August 2014. This field work was conducted during a study visit, which was part of projects of the European Union, and financed by the European Commission.<sup>35</sup>

### 3.3) The Enforced Armenian Identity

The Armenian identity is an enforced national identity with an image of the ideal nation. In this specific case, it is an ideal nation that deserves to expand in each and every direction (Georgia, Turkey, Azerbaijan), but is deprived of this through deliberate actions from mostly the Turks (of both Azerbaijan and Turkey). To promote this victimized role of Armenians, the state implemented a strict policy of both rewriting history, as well as passing blame to the Turks in order for Armenia to ensure the victim-role for itself. This process has been difficult to complete but was helped by the secluded and closed character of the Soviet Union of which Soviet Armenia was a part of between 1921 and 1991. As we will see with Katyń, it was not an unusual process for the Soviet Union to completely rewrite history in order to be able to pass blame to others. This made Soviet authorities hesitant to do anything when Armenia basically implemented the same tools as the Soviets in Moscow in order to accomplish the process of nation-building in Armenia.

Using history as a tool has never been a unique case as all countries have tried to use history to their advantage by either emphasizing or neglecting certain parts of its history. For example, the Netherlands has tried to neglect or downplay its operations in Indonesia in both 1947 and 1948 (which some scholars characterize as genocidal) by mentioning next to nothing in its history

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34 History Museum of Armenia, Հայաստանի պատմության թանգարան (Yerevan, 2014).

35 The research was part of a project of the European Union, financed by the European Union, and is known with the following ID-certificate: PG6A-7X9J-73CH-WG6Q.

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text books, but does not replace it entirely with another version. Some elements are enhanced and portrayed as being more important than they really were; like for instance the Indonesian shootings between pro-Indonesian and pro-Dutch armed forces. Although this event is seriously neglected in Dutch historiography, it is not erased entirely from history and one can still find sources and documents concerning it. So, how different is the case of Armenia?

In order to rewrite history, Armenia has followed some crucial steps in which it is no longer a question of which events are celebrated or neglected, but a more radical approach. Armenia has chosen to rewrite history altogether by leaving out pre-1915 events and actively erasing it from history. In order to accomplish this, some historians have even suffered a questionable fate in the 1970s after Armenian nationalism revived in the 1950s and 1960s, entering its climax in the 1970s and 1980s. Armenian-American historian Louise Nalbandian (1926 - 1974), who researched Armenian revolutionary organizations, suddenly died in a car crash after her Ph.D.-thesis was published and showed that Armenians carried out attacks on Ottomans in order to provoke a counter-attack in which many Armenians would die at the hands of the Ottomans; sparking an military intervention by the major European superpowers to help the Armenians. American historian Stanford J. Shaw suffered a similar fate in 1977 when his university office was bombed, and his house was hit by a Molotov-cocktail. This continued up until contemporary times, as investigating prosecutor Samuel A. Weems died in 2003 at age 67 when he was about to finish his second book about the Armenians.

These examples show the seriousness of the Armenians when it came to erasing and rewriting their history. Other tools to accomplish this were the fabricated documents of which the “Hitler-quote”, “Andonian telegrams”, Toynbee’s Blue Book, Lepsius reports, “Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story”, Atatürk-remarks, and many altered pictures (including the infamous Atatürk picture with skulls) deserve special attention as the most known forgeries and falsifications of Armenian historiography.<sup>36</sup> It is impressive to see how this combined effort has resulted in the distorted image of Armenians as the absolute victims.<sup>37</sup> Seeing the strong governmental support this process requires and receives, it can be argued that it is necessary to have a strong authoritarian or even dictatorial regime to accomplish this process of nation-building with the abovementioned tools of rewriting history with forgeries and falsifications.

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36 This list was originally compiled by; Holdwater, “Armenian Forgeries and Falsifications,” *Tall Armenian Tale*, accessed June 25, 2019, <http://www.tallarmeniantale.com/forgeries.htm>. Although this website cannot be considered an academic source, it nevertheless serves as a good source for directing the reader to sources that shed light on the facts and disputes concerning the events of 1915 and the Armenian relocation.

37 Gwynne Dyer, “Turkish ‘Falsifiers’ and Armenian ‘Deceivers’: Historiography and the Armenian Massacres,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 12, no. 1 (1976): 99-107.

#### 4) The Soviet Passing Of Blame

Just like the Armenian case, Katyń was a mass-killing of citizens by an organized group that later tried to distort the events by systematically rewriting history with forgeries and falsifications. Again, in this case, the rewriting of history goes hand-in-hand with a strong authoritarian and dictatorial regime that involves all aspects of life. The importance for covering up what happened in Katyń belays in the justification of occupying Poland by the Soviets after World War Two. This would have been impossible if the war crimes committed by the Soviet governmental forces would have been in the open. It would also sparked serious animosity by the Polish population against the Soviets for losing its intelligentsia at the hands of the Russian-Soviet forces. The denialist policy of the Soviet Union concerning Katyń became the corner stone of the Polish-Soviet national identity, which only could be shed in 1990 when the Soviet Union was about to be dissolved in 1991 leaving the truth about Katyń behind.

##### 4.1) The Background Of Katyń

Poland and Russia always had a troubled history with sixteen wars in approximately three hundred and seventy years (1577-1946) of which Russian forces won every war between 1654 and 1918. In 1918-1919, the Russians lost their Soviet offensive westward against an army led by Poland that was comprised of forces from Ukraine, Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, and even some anti-Soviet Russians with German and British support. This quickly escalated into the Soviet-Polish War of 1919-1921 in which Russian forces managed to occupy large parts of Ukraine, incorporating it into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. The Russian-Soviet forces even advanced to the Polish capital of Warsaw and Poland was on the verge of total defeat when a sudden counterattack left the Russians with a major and decisive defeat. Not able to recover from this defeat, the Russians asked for a peace treaty and left all westward expansions ambitions behind them. The plan to start a global proletarian revolution, leading the world in a new communist system instead of a capitalist world system, was thwarted by the Poles and left the Russian-Soviet high command with a deep resentment for the Poles.

The first defeat in almost four hundred years against the Poles made the new Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin (1924-1953) who led the Soviet Union after the death of Vladimir Lenin in 1924, revengeful against the Poles. The first opportunity to take revenge on the Poles for stopping the Soviet goal of expanding westward, eventually cultivating in a worldwide global revolution of the proletarians for the implementation of communism, served itself in the late 1930s when Germany proposed to divide Poland between a German and

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Russian occupation force. In 1939, the foreign minister of Germany approached Moscow with a public Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Soviet Union which also contained a secret protocol that divided Poland in a German and Russian region while also determining the borders of both countries' sphere of influence. The treaty was eventually signed on 23 August 1939 in Moscow by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Germany, Joachim von Ribbentrop, and the Soviet Union, Vyacheslav Molotov, giving the Treaty its name: the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

This subsequently paved the way for the Nazi-German forces to attack and invade Poland on 1 September 1939, after which Soviet forces also invaded Poland on 17 September 1939. Unable to wage war on two fronts, Poland was soon caught by surprise and defeated. Soviet forces occupied all of Eastern Poland, while German forces annexed Western Poland; as was decided upon in the secret supplementary protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Some mere days after the initial attack, the Soviet Interior Ministry (abbreviated as NKVD) started rounding up and arresting all Polish prisoners of war on 19 September 1939, even before the war was over. Almost immediately after the Polish defeat on 6 October 1939, Polish soldiers who were born in Western Poland were soon transferred to Germany as Western Poland now belonged to it. In return, the Germans returned the soldiers that were captured in the West but originated from the Eastern parts of Poland. The Soviets also released non-Poles like Ukrainians and Belarusians that were forced to fight for Poland, before also releasing the soldiers without any rank. These conscripts were deemed as uneducated, but almost all officers were kept in prison, leaving the Polish conscripts crippled without any officers. Eventually, NKVD chief Lavrentiy Beria also arrested a great portion of the Polish intelligentsia, including who he believed were intelligence agents, gendarmes, landowners, saboteurs, factory owners, lawyers, officials, and priests.<sup>38</sup>

On 19 November 1939, a NKVD report revealed that it had approximately 40,000 Polish prisoners of which the majority were army officers or police officers.<sup>39</sup> In December 1939, this was further expanded by more arrests and the assignment of roughly 25,000 low-ranking or non-commissioned officers to forced labor. After months of interrogations from October 1939 to February 1940, it was selected who would live and who would die. Those that were seen to stubborn to adopt a “pro-Soviet” attitude, were promptly proclaimed to be an enemy of the Soviet Union.<sup>40</sup> After some discussion about that to do with

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38 “Decision To Commence Investigation Into Katyn Massacre,” Institute of National Remembrance, November 30, 2004, accessed June 25, 2019, [http://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/77\\_dok.html](http://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/77_dok.html)

39 Anna M. Cienciala & Wojciech Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), 81.

40 Benjamin B. Fischer, “The Katyn Controversy: Stalin’s Killing Field,” *Studies in Intelligence* (1999-2000): 1-26.

those that were deemed “enemies”, Beria proposed to Stalin on 5 March 1940 that they should all be killed.<sup>41</sup> Almost immediately, Stalin and five other high-ranking officials from the Soviet Politburo (which was the highest policy-making government authority of the Soviet Union), signed an order to execute roughly 25,700 Polish prisoners. The speed of which Stalin answered to this quite shocking proposal of Beria paves the way for conclusions that this was the plan all along.

Overall, during 1939 between a quarter<sup>42</sup> and half a million<sup>43</sup> Poles were held at prisoner camps.<sup>44</sup> Most were freed as they were simple conscripts, or escaped, and eventually some 125,000 prisoners were left of which approximately 43,000 Poles were transferred to Germany since they originated from West-Poland. Another 42,400 soldiers were released since they were (mostly) of Ukrainian and Belarusian descent and their regions within Poland were now annexed by the Soviet Union.<sup>45</sup> By October 1939, some 39,600 Poles prisoners were left which rose to well over 40,000 prisoners after a new wave of arrests in November and December 1939 as stated prior. Although some 25,000 of those were assigned to hard labor, this did not mean they were excluded from the massacres. Most of these prisoners were killed nonetheless.

After the order by Stalin, some 21,857 Poles were massacred according to Soviet documents.<sup>46</sup> However, Polish archives show that 21,768 Polish prisoners were killed.<sup>47</sup> Why the others were pardoned has not become clear, although escape or last-minute cooperation with the Soviets seem plausible explanations. Most of the survivors were sent to gulags where the vast majority died nonetheless.<sup>48</sup> In total, between 150,000 and 500,000 Poles died under Soviet rule during World War Two, of which the massacres at Katyń, Kharkiv, and Mednoye (commonly known as “Katyń”) become symbolic.<sup>49</sup> During the massacres, not only military personnel were killed; such as 1 admiral, 16 generals, 24 colonels, 79 lieutenant colonels, 258 majors, 654 captains, 17 naval captains, 85 privates, 7 chaplains, and 3420 other officers, but also 200

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41 Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (New York, 2009), 140.

42 Alfred J. Rieber, *Forced Migration In Central And Eastern Europe, 1939-1950* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000), 31-33.

43 Mikhail Meltiukhov, *Отчёт Украинского и Белорусского фронтов Красной Армии* (Moscow, 2010).

44 Małgorzata Kuźniar-Plota, “Decision To Commence Investigation Into Katyn Massacre,” Departmental Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, 2004.

45 Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940...*, 44.

46 Bożena Łojek, Muzeum Katyńskie w Warszawie, *Agencja Wydawn* (CB Andrzej Zasiieczny, 2000), 174.

47 Kuźniar-Plota, “Decision to commence investigation into Katyn Massacre.”

48 Cezary Gmyz, “1.8 mln polskich ofiar Stalina,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 2009, accessed July 23, 2019, <https://www.rp.pl/artykul/365363-1-8-mln-polskich-ofiar-Stalina.html>

49 Tomasz Szarota & Wojciech Materski, *Polska 1939-1945. Straty osobowe i ofiary represji pod dwiema okupacjami* (Warsaw, 2009), 314-315.

pilots, 43 government representatives and/or officials, 1 prince of royalty, and many more civilians. Known cases of the latter include 3 major landowners, 131 refugees, 20 university professors, 300 physicians, several hundred lawyers, engineers, and teachers as well as well over a 100 writers and journalists at the execution place of Katyń alone. The executions decimated the Polish intelligentsia and exterminated almost half of the Polish army officer corps.<sup>50</sup> The other half was either in German hands, fled abroad, went into hiding, or complied with Soviet authorities.

Seeing the low count of survivors, some prisoner camps had a death toll of 99%, it was relatively easy for the Soviet authorities to keep the murders hidden from both Poland and the Soviet population. To give an idea on how extended the killings were, one can look at the heavy debates that took place throughout April and May 1940, when the executions were carried out with debates on how to kill that many people without putting too much of a strain on the executioners. The first complaints concerned that the NKVD had difficulty killing 390 Poles in one day, as it proved to be too many although the executioners worked from evening until early morning. The amount was subsequently put to 250 Poles to death in one night. The following example concerns the murder weapon, which was firstly Soviet-made revolvers but were soon replaced by Moscow-issued, German-made pistols since the former had too much recoil making the wrists of the executioners painful after the first shots and kills. Most NKVD-executioners soon preferred the German-made pistols instead of the Soviet-made revolvers.

However, just one year later, Nazi-Germany cancelled the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and attacked Soviet Russia on 22 June 1941 during the military operation Barbarossa which was being prepared ever since 4 July 1940. The rapid and quick German advances, along with the Soviet unpreparedness, enabled the Germans to acquire information about the mass killings of the Poles. Although the Germans cared little for the fate of the Poles, as Germans were also implementing death camps in their half of Poland, they did see the chance to use the massacres to form an anti-Soviet public opinion while gaining support for their own military actions against them.

#### **4.2) Creation Of A New “History”**

The Nazi-German discovery of the massacres of Poles, first discovered in the region of Katyń and therefore bearing the name “the massacres of Katyń”, sparked a discussion that goes on today. Nazi-Germany chose to investigate the mass graves to understand what had happened before making it public in

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50 Fischer, “The Katyn Controversy...”

April 1943 that it had found mass graves in the Katyn Forest.<sup>51</sup> The discussions started when the Nazi-Germans tried to use their discovery of Soviet atrocities to show the world how evil and vile communism in general, and the Soviet Union in specific was. Almost immediately, the Soviets tried to shift blame to Nazi-Germany itself, by using the smallest details; for instance, the use of German-made pistols to kill the prisoners. According to Moscow, this proved that it was in fact the Germans that killed the Poles and not the Soviets. Since the Soviets eventually emerged victorious from Operation Barbarossa and re-occupied the lands that it lost to Nazi-Germany, their version of history became the most dominant one. When World War Two came to an end, and all of Nazi-Germany's war crimes and atrocities (including the Holocaust) became public, it became much easier for the Soviet Russians to pass blame to the Nazis.

Although some minor accounts emerged after World War Two by survivors, like military officer Józef Czapski and economic historian Stanisław Swianiewicz, it was mostly kept silent by the Soviet forces which now also ruled the whole of Poland and Eastern Germany. Along with the Western policy of appeasing Soviet Russia and not escalating the Cold War, the Soviets managed to erase Katyn from history up until the 1970s and 1980s as it became a public taboo to talk about it in Poland as well as the rest of the Soviet Union. It was also actively rewritten to fit into the official historiography of the Soviet Union, in which the Slavic brotherhood of all Soviet republics was propagated and promoted. The mass execution of Poles by Russians did not fit in this picture of brotherhood.

Immediately after the end of the Second World War, the Soviet Russians tortured Nazi-German prisoners of war to convince them to take the blame for Katyn, which at least one Nazi-officer, Arno Düre, did. In return, he was not sentenced to death (unlike six other Nazi-German Wehrmacht-officers) by a military Soviet court in Leningrad between 28 December 1945 and 4 January 1946.<sup>52</sup> It was also put forth by the chief prosecutor of the Soviet Union at the Nuremberg Trials (20 November 1945 until 1 October 1946), Roman Andreyevich Rudenko, but dismissed as there was no direct evidence linking the trailed suspects to the events. The village with the same name Katyn had encountered a violent ethnic cleansing in 1943 by Ukrainian Nazi-soldiers that had defected from the Soviet army to the Nazi's and was burned to the ground after almost all inhabitants were killed. In 1969, this Belarusian village became the designated site for a grand war memorial commemorating not only the victims of Katyn by the hands of the Ukrainian Nazi-soldiers, but also all other

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51 David Engel, *Facing A Holocaust: The Polish Government-In-Exile And The Jews, 1943-1945* (North Carolina/USA, 1993), 71.

52 Inessa Sergeevna Yazhborovskaja, Anatoly Yablokov & Valentina S. Parsadanova, *Катынский синдром в советско-польских и российско-польских отношениях* (Moscow, 2001), 336-337 ; Anna M. Cienciala, "The Katyn Syndrome," *The Russian Review* 65, no. 1 (2006): 117-121.

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Belarusian victims of World War Two. This was perceived as a way to confuse people about what had happened in Katyn.<sup>53</sup>

Further pressure on the Soviet Union to look further into Katyn, was dismissed and answered with heavy consequences as early as 1943 when the Polish government-in-exile in London, asked the International Committee of the Red Cross in Switzerland to look into the matter. Stalin immediately severed all diplomatic ties with the London-based Poles. In Soviet-run Poland, the matter was heavily censored and even took up a prominent place in the so-called “Black Book of the Censorship in the Polish People’s Republic”.<sup>54</sup> Subsequently, all books that mentioned Soviet involvement in Katyn were removed from libraries, and destroyed accordingly in the mid-1940s, late 1940s, and early 1950s. In the 1950s, the Soviets even proposed (and actually carried out) the complete destruction of all archives related to Katyn.<sup>55</sup> The subsequent destroying was headed by Alexander Shelepin, head of the Soviet secret security service KGB, who took his job very seriously and even asked Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev to also destroy all personal files of all 21,857 executed Poles to be thorough.<sup>56</sup> This offer to Khrushchev by Shelepin on 3 March 1959, is now hailed as one of the few preserved archive documents concerning Katyn.<sup>57</sup> Next to destroying all state documents related to Katyn, he also destroyed all personal files of the victims to effectively minimize the chance of any public revelation concerning the facts about Katyn, which the Soviet Union fought so hard to hide and replace by an alternative version of history. However, this was not an isolated example.

Especially after World War Two, Poland (having a pro-Soviet government) followed the strict Soviet censorship as Poland was occupied by Soviet forces after the war. After the initial neglect, and ignorance, the second phase started when an alternative version for Katyn was promoted in accordance with the official line of Soviet propaganda. On the one hand, Katyn was strongly and deliberately censored in any source that might provide additional information about the massacres. On the other hand, Katyn was also used in highlighting Nazi atrocities against Slavic-Soviet peoples to emphasize the importance of staying loyal to each other. The image was that no outsider, be it fascist Nazi-Germany, or capitalists from the West, could be trusted, and they were all out to eradicate the Slavic-Soviet peoples who needed to enforce their brotherhood in order to withstand this threat.

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53 Louis Robert Coatney, “The Katyn Massacre: A Master of Arts Thesis,” Western Illinois University (Illinois/USA, 1993).

54 Jan Józef Lipski, *KOR: A History Of The Workers’ Defense Committee In Poland, 1976-1981* (Berkeley, 1985).

55 Matthew J. Ouimet, *The Rise And Fall Of The Brezhnev Doctrine In Soviet Foreign Policy* (North Carolina/USA, 2003), 126.

56 Cienciala & Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, 240-241.

57 Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre Of 1940...*, 94.

### 4.3) Brethren Within The Slavic-Soviet Image

The ideal image that is strongly intertwined with the neglect of Katyń in Soviet historiography has everything to do with the upholding of Soviet righteousness (as Soviets were living in the “paradise” and not able to conduct such hideous crimes as this was an exclusive trait of capitalism), but also gaining the support and loyalty of all Soviet or pro-Soviet republics. In order to sustain this, the blame for Katyń was to be shifted to another outside force that could be portrayed as the enemy of both the Polish peoples as the very future of the Soviet Union. This would not only bring the two (Poland and Soviet Union) closer together, but it would also ensure their unity by enforcing it by a common enemy; even though this enemy was long-gone, as Nazi-Germany did not exist anymore. The portrayed and imagined enemy, Nazi-Germany in this case, was easily found as it did indeed commit enormous and hideous crimes against Slavs in general, and Poles in specific; hitting two birds with one stone. It was therefore easy to make the Soviet war crimes shift to the Nazis, especially since they were not able to defend themselves anymore, and it “proved” that only Western capitalism was capable of such atrocities against the Slavic-Soviet brethren of the world.

So, when Katyń became a forbidden topic in postwar Poland, it became a massive undertaking which was only possible with the full support of both the pro-Soviet government in Poland, and the Soviet Union itself. It required the authorities to control all the media and even all academia. This governmental censorship not only suppressed all references to Katyń as a Soviet war crime, but also made the sheer mention of it very dangerous. Many disillusioned Polish army officers, fed up with the Soviet cover-up propaganda concerning Katyń and the feeling that they desecrated the very memory of their fallen comrades by ignoring it, refused to work together with the occupying Soviets and committed suicide. The same was the case with the family members of the victims of Katyń, who could no longer cope with the grief and also took their own lives. This social phenomenon was portrayed in the Polish film ‘Katyń’ in 2007.<sup>58</sup>

This continued grievance expanded the denialist Soviet policy with an alternative history for Katyń in which the Nazis were the perpetrators. This way, the victims of Katyń would still be able to receive some sort of respect and commemoration, like with the monuments at Powązki Cemetery in Warsaw where the inscription “Katyń, 1940” was confiscated by police and subsequently replaced with the official inscription: “To the Polish soldiers—victims of Hitlerite fascism—reposing in the soil of Katyń”.<sup>59</sup> This makes the

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58 Andrzej Wajda, *Katyń* (ITI Cinema, 2007). 115 minutes.

59 Fischer, “The Katyn Controversy...”

case of Katyń and the complete replacement of history in the search for nation-building very unique.

On the other hand, Katyń also proved one of the decisive events that caused the Polish resistance against the Soviets in the 1970s and 1980s until Poland regained its independence from the Soviet Union on 30 December 1989. In the re-established independent Polish Republic, Katyń in turn became the very embodiment of all the suffering the Polish people had endured under Soviet-Russian reign. Slowly, the real reasons for Katyń surfaced which provided stability for the Polish search for nation-building by carving out a national identity and embracing the painful pages of history.

### **5) Concluding remarks**

In this comparative study between the Katyń Massacres (1940) and the Armenian Relocation (1915), one can clearly see common traits in which the tool to rewrite history entirely and, by doing so, passing blame to another is used to its fullest extent. This trait aims to construct a national identity out of the ashes of a failed historic event that needs to be either ignored or erased from history in order to accomplish the nationalistic portrayal of the “ideal image”. This fundamental approach to nation-building can firstly be seen in Katyń.

Basically, the massacres of Katyń were revenge for the Polish-Russian War (1919-1921) which followed the efforts of the Soviet Union to create a westward offensive in 1918 and 1919 into Eastern and Central Europe. This expansion was seen as the first step to a global communist revolution in which a worldwide proletarian order would seize power and dismiss capitalism. With the victory of Poland in both wars, the ‘grand’ Soviet dream of a worldwide communist revolution was quelled before it even started. This created serious animosity amongst the ambitious Soviet leader Stalin when he took control of the Soviet Union in 1924. In order to prevent any similar Polish resistance in the future, he quickly developed the idea to eradicate Polish intelligentsia and leadership and leave the Polish population vulnerable to Soviet propaganda and indoctrination. This two-sided reasoning would on the one hand, incorporate a collective punishment for Poland as a whole, and accordingly also deprive a future Polish generation of its military potential as well as a large portion of its intellectual talent. This would both be a collective punishment, as well as tool to make the incorporation of Poland into the Soviet Union (or at least have a pacified western neighbor at the Soviet border) possible.

When it was finally possible to implement this collective punishment, it was 1939 and Stalin carried out his plans for the Poles. And in 1940, Stalin (and others of the Soviet leadership) perceived the Polish prisoners as a serious threat to Soviet authority as most of the prisoners still resisted being under Soviet rule, and verbally proclaimed to stay anti-Soviet. With this development, the idea of Stalin to isolate Poland from its intelligentsia, by keeping them as prisoners inside special prisoner camps until they agreed to be subjected to pro-Soviet sentiments, continued to develop into the policy to be killed as archenemies of the Soviet Union. The subsequent massacres in turn caused a breach in the Soviet efforts of unity as it would be unexplainable why the Soviet Russians would kill their Slavic brethren. To cover up this side of history, a massive governmental apparatus was built up to not only completely erase all aspects of the massacre, but also to give it a new form by blaming it on another entity that was deemed a convenient common enemy for both Russians and Poles in order to create a long-lasting Russian-Polish alliance in which the Soviet Russians were falsely perceived as the saviors of the Poles by defeating the Nazi-Germans. The Soviets were promptly promoted to hero status while they were, in fact, the perpetrators of the (war) crimes they promoted to have saved the Poles from.

In the Armenian case study, many resemblance are to be found as it was also a version of history that tried to hide to militant Armenian-perpetrated aggression and crimes and replace it by an alternative version of history in which the Armenians were the mere victims of the (war) crimes committed by others; namely the Ottoman Turks. Just as the involvement of the Soviets in the murder of the Poles, the Armenians had committed atrocities through Armenian militant organizations such as Armenakan, Hunchakian, and Dashnaktsutyun. These three parties are still active within the Armenian political landscape, and in some periods of time, even dominated the Armenian government. While the Soviet Union no longer exists, the three Armenian groups are still seen as notable actors in Armenian politics. In this case, it makes the case of the Armenians more difficult to study since that process of nation-building, in which history is consciously distorted, is still fully active. Whereas Soviet historiography denied any wrongdoing against the Poles and even denied that they killed the Polish elite, Armenian historiography also denies that Armenians that engaged in any wrongdoing against the Turks and also denies that whole villages of ethnic Turks and Kurds were subjected to mass violence.

As such, in both cases, the perpetrators accompanied their denial with the active replacement of history by “their” version of history in which they made use of fabrications and falsifications, mass-propaganda, indoctrination, and also a misleading state-organized rewritten version of history in which they made themselves come off as either the “good guys” or the victims. Embarrassing

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and incriminating past events were censored and erased, while a new version of history was promoted as the fundamental core of the 'ideal image' of the nation. The former constituted the factual history, while the latter applied to the altered, alternative, and completely rewritten version of history in which the blame was passed on to "a common enemy" in order to create unity in the process of nation-building. Debates between the two versions of history were not allowed and many books were simply forbidden or destroyed instead of factually debating their content. In order to accomplish this, both made use of the grand governmental apparatus that controlled all aspects of everyday life in society (music, poems, remembrance days, monuments, history textbooks, etc.). The authoritarian or even dictatorial regime that these tools of nation-building need can be found in both the Soviet Union as Armenia (both pre-1991, as post-1991).

One interesting detail is that all parties involved are theoretically leftist (Soviet, Hunchakian, Dashnaktsutiun, and Armenakan -which later became Ramgavar) but maintain rightist thoughts while resorting to force, violence, torture, and terrorism as means to their aim. The continued existence of Hunchakian, Dashnaktsutiun, and Armenakan/Ramgavar on the true nature of the events of 1915 make public debate very difficult.

Another difficulty stems from the fact that in both instances, it has become the core of the ideal image. The Soviets used Katyń to emphasize their Slavic-Soviet brotherhood with the Poles in order to create an image of Soviet Russians being the protectors of all Slavs in general, and Poles in specific against the capitalist West that was being represented by Nazi-Germany. Where this case is no longer applicable, as the Soviet Union is collapsed, this portrayal is still being promoted by the successor of the Soviet Union: the Russian Federation.

With the Armenians, it is no different. The altered history is used to emphasize Armenian brotherhood between all Armenians (despite religious, linguistic, historical, and even cultural) differences and create the image of having to protect themselves against a common enemy: in this specific case, the Ottoman Empire that has been replaced by the Republic of Turkey.

One important difference is that the former case study is no longer dominant as both Nazi-Germany and the Soviet Union do not exist anymore and Poland is freed from Soviet dominance. In the case of the latter, the Ottoman Empire has collapsed but both the militant organizations as well as the state of Armenia still exist. This made it possible for the process of nation-building in the Soviet case to be halted while the usage of the alternative version of history in the Armenian case remains the core of Armenian nationalism. In Armenia, the distorted portrayal of the events remains the core of its national identity.

One can say that the rewriting of history and passing blame has eventually failed in the case of Katyń but is certainly not failing in the case of Armenia. This aggressive form of nation-building, however, has and will always continue the pattern of violence because the upholding of the “ideal image” depends on the common enemy that has been created. Both the Soviet Union and Armenia made/make use of this portrayal of a fabricated enemy in which Armenia is more successful in gaining outside support from governments abroad than the Soviet Union was. It needs to be noted that the actual competition between the Soviet Union and the West during the Cold War (1945-1991) made it more difficult for the Soviets to promote their ideal image through distorted history, while the Armenians lack an ideological competitor.

Armenia is unhindered in its process of nation-building, which became evident when the supposed “enemy” (Turkey) was amongst the first nations to recognize Armenian independence in 1991. Lacking a true enemy, Armenia set about searching for a new one; its first act of after its independence was the declaration of war against the Turkish-speaking Azerbaijan. With the Karabakh War, Armenia thus gained a new enemy besides Turkey; Azerbaijan (it should be noted that Armenians commonly lump Turkey and Azerbaijan into one large Turkish entity, which they perceive as their archenemy). This approach has unfortunately caused more victims and can be seen as the continuation of the use of violence by Armenia in order to uphold its image of the “ideal nation”. The fact that Armenia lacks an ideological opponent, in turn, has allowed its process of nation-building to proceed fairly unhindered and therefore became relatively successful, as in, it is still the core of the Armenian national identity.

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