

Theses
PhD dissertation

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Anti-Armenianism and Armenophilia
Contesting narratives of the Armenian Question in Hungary and Europe

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The background of the research and its hypotheses

‘The center of the world is now Armenia’ – wrote one Hungarian journalist in one of the best sold Hungarian daily papers in 1895. The Armenian question was, in the decades encompassing the turn of the millennium, widely discussed by the public and political spheres in Hungary and Europe, deeply influencing the discourse of the Eastern questions, thus shaping European visions on the future of international relations.

There is a vast special literature on the Armenian question. Researchers, however, tend to focus on its legal, diplomatic and military aspects and the history of Anti-Armenian violence and genocide in the Ottoman Empire; or they just simply confine to a mere event historical description. Linguistic expressions of the Armenian question receive discredibly little attention, although in Europe it appeared primarily as a linguistic phenomenon from the last third of the 19th century onwards. The fundamental hypothesis of my dissertation states that the Armenian question may be viewed as a discourse articulated by the master narrative that was the racist and imperialist ideology of Orientalism.

Edward Said’s *Orientalism* gave a new understanding to Western history of ideas, thus establishing a new and since thriving discipline: post-colonial studies. Said’s theses suggest that an imagined cultural and political superiority of the West over the East dominated the way the West viewed its place in the world, justifying global colonial hegemony by the notion of a civilizing mission over barbaric and backwards Easterners, unfit for self-governance. 19th century European political discourse on the Armenian question too unfolded in the linguistic and ideological context of Orientalism. Orientalist ideas articulated the language of the Armenian question, politicians, historians, anthropologists and journalist employed its discursive strategies such as stereotyping and dehumanizing groups of peoples deemed culturally inferior to the West on the one hand, emphasizing Western cultural values and the right to self-governance of other groups on the other.

Methodology

To conduct a discursive-historical analysis of the Armenian question a wide range of tools are provided by the methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It is a field of applied linguistics to study means of control and power, introduced by Norman Fairclough, who defined discourse as ‘the conception of language’. CDA thus focuses on both linguistic strategies of and the social context of discourse.

My dissertation employs a variety of CDA's methodologies. The so-called *overwording* analysis, that detects and analyses words and its synonyms used over and over in a text signaling a preoccupation with some aspects of reality, enables us to identify the focus of ideological struggle. Another focus of my research was assigned to stereotypes. Stereotypes, especially those of minority groups, are key areas of linguistic and social psychological research on totalitarian systems' and their racist discourses in particular, as they represent fundamental elements of social relations' cognitive processes between ethnic/linguists/religious groups on one hand, and the development and sustainment of racist beliefs individually and as a group, on the other.

Another important methodological role of my analysis is played by Teun van Dijk's K-device, the exploration of shared knowledge set by discourses in the public sphere, shaping collective identity, values and ideologies. As van Dijk noted, when studying the context of discourses, one should examine certain paradigms of knowledge, that appear as 'shared beliefs satisfying the specific (epistemic) criteria of a community' that plays a crucial role in the identification process of the community. As per my dissertation, probably the most important aspect of linguistic inquiry is provided by the theory of institutional crisis discourse coined by Tom R. Burns and Marcus Carson. The linguists defined institutions and a complex of relationships, roles and norms, defining a particular social order, a paradigm of core values and norms. An institutional crisis may arise when key components of the institution and its paradigms are challenged, that may propose 'alternatives that break with the prevailing arrangements and their particular norms, social relationships, cognitive categories and assumptions.'

Results and theses

I identified two opposing and contesting narratives of the Armenian question, which divided Europe along the borders of political-military alliances during and preceding the First World War: the Armenophile and the Anti-Armenian narratives.

This duality, however, represented the two sides of the same coin – the discursive reflection of a dominant ideology in a divided world, on the edge of an all-out war, ruled by empires: Orientalism. Armenophilia and Anti-Armenianism too clustered around the order of orientalist discourse and propagated the inferiority of Eastern, and the superiority of Western cultural and 'civilizational' values – they differed, however, in defining groups that shared these values. Armenophilia, on the one hand, ventured upon justifying Western influence in the

Ottoman Empire by setting Turkish ‘barbarism’ against the Western, Christian values of Armenians. Anti-Armenian discourse, on the other hand, legitimized Ottoman authority in the Middle East and rejected Armenian autonomy on the grounds of acclaiming Turkish cultural superiority and stereotyping Armenians as disloyal separatists and greedy usurers.

Examining Anti-Armenians discourse in the Hungarian public in the decades around the millennium, I detected five groups of racist stereotypes that were widespread against Armenians, showing an interesting overlap with Anti-Semitic stereotypes. 1) Economic stereotypes (greediness, fraud, usury, etc.), 2) Jewish attributes (proverbs such as ‘Jews of the Orient’, ‘one Armenian is worse than ten Jews’), 3) parasites (dehumanization), 4) characteristics based on race theory (physical and spiritual characteristics, such as long nose or timidity) and 5) the relativization of mass ethnic violence and genocide on the grounds of accusations of separatism and disloyalty.

The outbreak of the First World War was a turning point for the discursive development of the Armenian question in Europe. It unleashed an ever so fierce military propaganda and censure in the Central Powers just as much as in Entente states. The order of wartime political discourse’s master narrative was set by military orientalism. The border between civilization and barbarism imagined by the orientalist mind grew dim. From the heart of the British Isles, through France to Russia, war propaganda denounced the German nation as the main threat to Western, European civilization, a threat contented only by that of the Ottoman hordes. Contrariwise, political discourse and military propaganda of the Central Powers incriminated the French, Belgians, Brits and, most of all, Russians, as barbarians destroying European civilization, while portrayed Ottoman Turks and defenders of cultural values of the Old Continent. In this extremely tense discursive context there was no room for opposing narratives of the Armenian question: in the course of the Great War, in member states of the Entente Armenophilia, while in the Central Powers Anti-Armenianism prevailed and became the exclusive discourse on the Armenian question.

Not only the Entente powers, but also discourses and political agenda put forth by their members vanquished in the international realm at the end of the First World War. The Paris peace treaties became nodal points of political endeavors during the First Assembly of the League of Nations setting forth the order of political discourse. The focus of ideological struggle centered in preserving the new world order (the peace regime), to ensure that no war should be unleashed, or in other words, to maintain the global colonial hegemony and the continental overpower achieved by Britain and France. The First Assembly of the League was purely composed of former Entente-countries and their allies. Delegates of the Allies enabled

in Geneva shifted from military orientalist ideas and set forth a new order of discourse, one that I call Peace Orientalism, that reconstructed the map of civilization along new fields of forces dictated by the peace treaties, legitimizing all kinds of sanctions, even preventive and ‘humanitarian’ war, against entities questioning the legitimacy of the peace treaties. Therefore Soviets and the ‘Kemalists’ were determined as barbarian, ‘inhuman’ enemies of Western civilization, as these were the two major political forces that challenged the new world order and the Paris peace regime.

The Armenian question also fit in this discursive structure. The Armenophile narrative prevailed during the First Assembly of the League of Nations, however, it soon decayed and was dissolved by the very powers fueling it over the Great War. In November–December 1920, delegates of the Allies realized that due to lack of resources and political will the League is incapable of resolving the Armenian question on the grounds of the prepositions of the Armenophile discourse, i.e. the establishment of an independent Armenian Republic on the Armenian Highland. The mere suggestion that this could indeed occur and the League should fail to guarantee one of the Peace treaties (Sèvres) and a new war could be unleashed, challenged the most fundamental paradigms of the institution – the guardian of peace, ensuring the end of all wars – and resulted in an institutional crisis. The Allies shifted their paradigm concerning the Armenian question, they dissolved the Armenophile narrative into a discourse of mere humanitarian assistance to Armenian refugees and abandoned the prospects of an independent Armenian state. The dissertation highlights two crucial aspects of this early international refugee regime: the League participated in the forced deportation of Armenian refugees to Soviet Armenia and excluded any groups of refugees from the most rudimentary refugee protection other than those fleeing territories occupied by the Bolsheviks and Kemalists, the barbaric others set by the order of Peace Orientalism.

Publications related to the topic

Articles

- Örményellenes sztereotípiák a dualizmuskori Magyarországon. [Anti-Armenian stereotypes in Hungary in the dualist period.] *Regio* 1 (2021): 5–60.
- The Dissolution of the Armenian Question and the Crisis of the League of Nations. *Haigazian Armenological Review* 39 (2019): 375–406.
- Gyarmati és humanitárius eszmék határán: a menekültügy a magyar és a nemzetközi politikai diskurzusban az első világháború után. [Between colonialist and humanitarian

ideas: refugee affairs in the Hungarian and international political discourse after the First World War.] In: *Határmenti területek, migráció a XIX–XX. században tekintettel a XVII–XVIII. századi előzményekre*. Ed. Kránitz Péter Pál – Öze Sándor. Budapest: Szent István Társulat, 2019. 305–368.

- Örmény menekültek Konstantinápolytól Budapestig. A humanitárius politika korlátai a két világháború között, különös tekintettel Délkelet-Európára és Magyarországra. [Armenian refugees from Constantinople to Budapest. Limits of humanitarian politics between the two world wars, with a special regard to Southeast-Europe and Hungary.] *Századok* 1 (2018): 61–84.
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- The Armenian Genocide in Interwar Hungarian Political Discourse. *Journal of Levantine Studies* 2 (2015): 71–86.
- Survivors, asylum seeking and repatriation: the case of Armenian refugees in Constantinople. *Patmut'yun yev Hasarakagitut'yun: Taregirk'* 1 (2015): 88–100.
- Orosz és örmény menekültek és a menekültügy az I. világháborút követően Kelet-Európában, különös tekintettel Magyarországra. [Russian and Armenian reugees and refugee affairs after the First World War, with a special regard to Hungary.] *Világtörténet* 3 (2015): 461–483.
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- Örmények Kemál Törökországában. Néhány bizalmas diplomáciai jelentés a kis-ázsiai keresztények helyzetéről (1922–1928). [Armenians in Kemal’s Turkey. Some secret reports on the situation of Christian minorities in Asia Minor (1922-1928)] *Regio* 1 (2021): 76–94.
- A nemzetközi menekültügy és Magyarország az első világháború után. [International refugee affairs and Hungary after the First World War.] *ArchívNet* 4 (2016)

Reviews

- ‘Justifying Genocide: Germany and the Armenians from Bismarck to Hitler’ by Stefan Ihrig. *The Hungarian Historical Review* 4 (2016): 916–920.
- ‘Atatürk és az Új Törökország képe a náci ideológiában. [The image of Atatürk and ‘New Turkey’ in the Nazi ideology.] *Világtörténet* 4 (2015): 672–674.

Scientific knowledge dissemination

- Az örmény népirtás menekültjei Magyarországon. [Refugees of the Armenian genocide in Hungary.] *Újkor.hu* 2016. június 10. <https://ujkor.hu/content/az-ormeny-nepirtas-menekultjei-magyarorszagon> [letöltés ideje: 2022. május 14.]

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Selected conference presentations and public lectures

- *A menekültügy a humanitárius és gyarmati eszmék határán. Néhány gondolat a Nemzetek Szövetsége korai menekültügyi diskurzusához.* [Refugee affairs at the edge of humanitarian and colonial ideas. Some notes on the League of Nations’ discourse on refugee affairs.] Presentation at the conference titled ‘Úton. Menekülés, mobilitás, integráció az első világháború után Magyarországon és Közép-Európában.’ organized by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Budapest, Hungary. 9–10 November 2018.
- *From Colonial to Humanitarian? The Dissolution of the Armenian Question into the Discourse on Refugee Rights.* Presentation at the conference titled ‘15th Annual Graduate Student Colloquium in Armenian Studies’ organized by the University of California, Los Angeles. Los Angeles, USA. 14 February 2015.

- *Russian and Armenian refugees in Eastern Europe after the First World War: New perspectives on the birth of international refugee law.* Presentation at the conference titled 'Armenian Diaspora and Armenian-Russian relations: Past and present' organized by the Lomonosov Moscow State University. Moscow, Russia. 14–16 September 2016.
- *Hungarian Receptions of Armenians and the Armenian Question in the Dual Monarchy and the Interwar Period with a Special Regard to Genocide Denial.* Presentation at the conference titled 'Intersections: Holocaust Scholarship, Genocide Research, And Histories of Mass Violence' organized by the International Organization of Genocide Scholars at Hebrew University, Jerusalem. Jerusalem, Israel, 26–29 June 2016.
- *Survivors, Asylum Seeking and Repatriation. The case of Armenian refugees in Constantinople.* Presentation at the conference titled '100 Years of Genocide' organised by University of Minnesota. Minneapolis, USA, 24 April 2015.
- *Armenian Refugees, Humanitarian Assistance and Hungary.* Presentation at the conference titled 'Crossing the Centennial: The Historiography of the Armenian Genocide Re-Evaluated' organised by University of Nebraska–Lincoln. Lincoln, USA, 19–20 March 2015.
- *Genocide and Refugees. The Armenian Genocide and Hungary.* Public lecture at the Armenian State Pedagogical University. Yerevan, Armenia. 12 February 2015.
- *Migrants or Refugees? Defining forced migration in the 1920s.* Presentation at the conference titled 'Dislocations and Cultural Conflicts: Migrations, Diaspora, Terrorism, Borders'. Skopje, North-Macedonia. 1–3 September 2016.
- *The question of the Armenian Genocide in interwar Hungarian political discourse.* Presentation at the conference titled 'One Hundred Years of Remembrance' organized by Pázmány Péter Catholic University. Budapest, Hungary. 16 May 2015.
- *Menekültügy Magyarországon az első világháborút követő évtizedben.* [Refugee affairs in Hungary in the decade succeeding the First World War.] Presentation at the conference titled 'Mozgás és átalakulás' organized by Hajnal István Kör. Gödöllő, Hungary. 25–27 August 2016.
- *Armenian Refugees and Interpretations of the Armenian Genocide in Hungary between the Two World Wars.* Presentation at the conference titled 'The Caucasus Frontline of the First World War. Genocide, Refugees and Humanitarian Assistance' organized by the Armenian Genocide Museum and Institute. Yerevan, Armenia, 21–22 April 2014.