

**THE NEED TO APOLOGIZE: A STUDY ON THE POLITICAL APOLOGIES  
IN THE WORLD AND THEIR COMPARISON WITH  
THE TURKISH NON-APOLOGIES**

by

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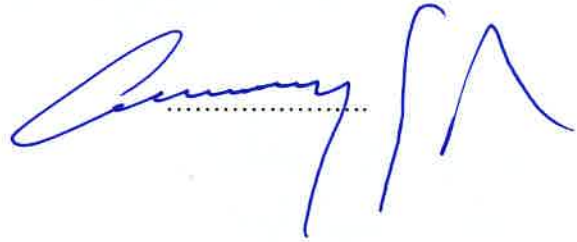
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## ABSTRACT

### THE NEED TO APOLOGIZE: A STUDY ON THE POLITICAL APOLOGIES IN THE WORLD AND THEIR COMPARISON WITH THE TURKISH NON-APOLOGIES

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Thesis Supervisor: Asst. Prof. Nedim Nomer

**Keywords:** apology, political apology, non-apology, Turkey

This thesis aims to explore what a political apology is and how a political apology is important in groups' relation with one another. The main question of the thesis is whether a real political apology is possible for Turkey in the near future. The thesis first provides the reader with the definition of political apology and gives the necessary criteria for a full-fledged apology based on outstanding scholars' criteria. Secondly, the thesis examines three world apology cases: Australia, Japan and Germany. The author comments on the apology cases about whether they are full-fledged apologies or not. World apology cases are followed by apology debates in Turkey which the author claims as non-apologies. When world apology cases and Turkey are compared, it comes out that Turkey's political culture which is consisting of people with nationalistic mindset does not allow for a full-fledged political apology in the near future.

## ÖZET

# ÖZÜR DİLEME GEREKLİLİĞİ: DÜNYADAKİ SİYASİ ÖZÜRLER VE TÜRKİYE'DEKİ SÖZDE SİYASİ ÖZÜRLERİN KARŞILAŞTIRILMASI ÜZERİNE BİR ÇALIŞMA

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**Anahtar Kelimeler:** özür, siyasi özür, sözde özürler, Türkiye

Bu tez siyasi özrün ne olduğunu ve siyasi özrün gruplar arasındaki ilişkide ne kadar önemli olduğunu araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Tezin cevap bulmaya çalıştığı ilk soru Türkiye’de yakın gelecekte tam teşekküllü bir siyasi özrün gerçekleşmesinin mümkün olup olmadığıdır. Tez ilk olarak siyasi özrün ne olduğunu tanımlayıp alandaki seçkin akademisyenlerin kriterleri doğrultusunda tam teşekküllü siyasi özür için gerekli kriterleri açıklar. Daha sonra, dünyadaki üç özür örneğini inceler: Avustralya, Japonya ve Almanya. Yazar bu özür örneklerini girişte belirtilen kriterlere göre tam teşekküllü özürler olup olmadıklarını yorumlar. Dünyadaki özür örneklerinden sonra Türkiye’deki özür tartışmalarına bakılır. Yazar Türkiye’deki özürlerin tam teşekküllü özür yerine sözde özürler olduğunu iddia etmektedir. Dünyadaki özür örnekleriyle Türkiye’deki özür örnekleri karşılaştırıldığında ise ortaya çıkmıştır ki Türkiye’nin milliyetçi zihniyetli insanlardan oluşan siyasi kültürü yakın gelecekte tam teşekküllü bir siyasi öze izin vermemektedir.

*To my parents and my brother...*

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## INTRODUCTION

There is a tendency within public to look at the past events as heroes and villains or winners and criminals.<sup>1</sup> This causes us to have subjective accounts of the past. Public judges the past according to their own point of view. Additionally, it is also not possible to measure the past events as just or unjust. They are evaluated according to the mindset of the groups. As a result of these disagreements, a long disputes appear and some groups who feel themselves as having been treated unjustly expect apologies or reparations from the 'guilty' party.

Compared to the previous century, in today's world what happened in the past is now more reachable by public and other actors thanks to the developing technology. As a consequence, injustices of the past are recognized more, and the injured parties of the injustices are usually in demand of compensation bracing up to have their sufferings been heard all around the world. On the surface it can seem as if the peace has been restored between the parties until then, yet the psychological consequences of the harm during the conflict or injustice can be felt for generations.<sup>2</sup> The harm that is felt is one of the precepts for the injured party's expectance of a phase towards reconciliation. Accepting that there was an injustice sincerely or insincerely is the first step towards reconciliation. Apology can be thought as the second step towards it. According to *Oxford Dictionary*, apology is defined as follows, "a regretful acknowledgement of an offence or failure."<sup>3</sup> It is derived from the Greek word *apologia* which can be defined as defense or speech in defense.<sup>4</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> Elazar Barkan. *The Guilt of Nations*. 2000. p. xxi.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. xxii.

<sup>3</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of English*.

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Tavuchis. *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation*. Stanford University Press. California. 1991. p.15.

time, it lost its defense meaning but turned into a speech act acknowledging the wrong doing.

In the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Turkey witnessed apology debates due to offended parties', public's and international pressure as well as when it mattered for the benefits of the leaders. However, the apology debates did not result in a solid resolution and in the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the subjects were dropped. Apart from examining the adequateness of the policies, this thesis aims to find out what are the reasons for Turkey's not having a full-fledged apology.

Even in the relationship between people, apology holds an important place as it leads to the reconsideration or the reevaluation of the relationship. Yet, one cannot argue that apologies can only be carried out at the level of individuality. Nicholas Tavuchis describes the apology as "acknowledgement and painful embracement of our deeds, coupled with declaration of regret"<sup>5</sup> and categorizes the apologies into four: 1) Apology from one to one (individual apologies) 2) Apology from one to many 3) apology from many to one and 4) apology from many to many.<sup>6</sup> Apologies for the injustices of the past happened at the state level or done by the groups generally fall into the third or fourth category. It is possible to call them political apologies or if they are delivered by the state representatives they can be called official apologies.

"Official or intergroup apology goes beyond the recognition of responsibility and the adhesion to moral norms as individual phenomena. Morality, responsibility, guilt and shame become collective in character." says Paez in his article.<sup>7</sup> It is not possible to see collective apologies the same as individual apologies, which are one part's acknowledging the responsibility and reaching a reconciliation between individuals. It is possible for individual apologies to lead to a building of a new relationship. However, this does not affect or concern the rest of the society. Different from individual apologies, collective apologies can help build a new national identity<sup>8</sup> or these apologies may lead to a reform in international relations which are of concern to larger groups. Paez's words can be extended, and it can be said that after uttering the apology the actors, the state or

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.19.

<sup>6</sup> Tavuchis. pp. 69-117

<sup>7</sup> Dario Paez. *Official or political apologies and improvement of intergroup relations: A neo-Durkheimian approach to official apologies as rituals*. 2010. p.102.

<sup>8</sup> Tavuchis. p.107.

the state actors, are expected to take an action. This is to say that even though apology is an important step, unlike individual cases, a collective apology does not finalize things between parties. It is a start for other actions which would result in a reconciliation between groups. An example for taking an action is opening up of the archives. Barkan also touches upon this in his book,

“An apology does not mean the dispute is resolved, but it is in most cases a first step, part of the process of negotiation, but not the satisfactory end result. Often, lack of apologies, and the refusal of them are all pre-steps in negotiations, a diplomatic dance that may last for a while, a testimony to the wish and the need of both sides to reach a negotiations stage.”<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, it is to be noted that an apology cannot undo what was done. If an apology is delivered for some wrong action, it is not to resolve the issue but to reach a reconciliation between parties. “... an apology, no matter how sincere or effective, does not undo anything. However, in a mysterious way and according to its own logic, this is what it precisely does.”<sup>10</sup>

While mentioning the collective apologies, it is not possible to pass over the idea of collective responsibility which in most contexts refers to ‘the causal responsibility of moral agents for the harm in the world and the blameworthiness that we ascribe to them for having caused such harm.’<sup>11</sup> However, it is not one thought supported by everyone, there are controversies within it. The first question is “Is it possible to hold someone responsible for the actions of the past group?” If it is possible, who are we going to hold responsible? Are their descendants accountable for it? The second question is “If we attribute the guilts of the past to a present group, is it okay to distribute responsibility? Can the wrong of one person be attributed to whole nation of group?” Another dilemma is not knowing the motives of the wrongdoers. Did they participate in the action because the moral standards of the time required it to be done or were there any other motives?<sup>12</sup>

I argue that if inheritance from a family member is accepted without any question, the wrongdoings of the ancestors can also be accepted. In the case of inheritance, we not only accept the tangible possessions which are worthy of money, but also the debts of our

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<sup>9</sup> Barkan. p.xxix

<sup>10</sup> Tavuchis. p.5.

<sup>11</sup> Collective Responsibility. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. First published on Aug 8, 2005.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/collective-responsibility/> accessed on 29.06.2018. p.1.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p.2.

family members; or money or debt of one person is distributed among all family members.

Engert has a similar argument,

Being a member of a collective always entails rights and duties. For example, sons or daughters will one day inherit their parents' possessions, but this entails not only inheriting the assets (e.g., the house), but also the debts (e.g., the mortgage). Similarly, in belonging to a nation, one is often entitled to certain advantages.<sup>13</sup>

### Criteria for Apologies

Nicholas Tavuchis' *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation* (1991) is the first book dedicated totally to the concept of apology. For him, there are four criteria for an apology to be a full-fledged apology: naming the offense, including the expressions of sorrow and regret, a response from the offended and the apology being publicly recorded not being secret. For collective apologies, the last criterion is the most important one as a collective apology's aim is to reach a reconciliation between groups and this cannot happen without the actions being recorded publicly.<sup>14</sup> The expression of sorrow and regret are not a must for collective apologies for Tavuchis as the main aim of collective apologies is to put things on record and trying to reach a reconciliation.<sup>15</sup>

For Aaron Lazare, apology,

refers to an encounter between two parties in which one party, the offender, acknowledges responsibility for an offense or grievance and expresses regret or remorse to a second party, the aggrieved. Each party may be a person or a larger group such as a family, a business, an ethnic group, a race, or a nation. The apology maybe private or public, written or verbal, and even, at times, nonverbal...<sup>16</sup>

His criteria are similar to Tavuchis': stating the responsible and the offended of the offense clearly, acknowledging the offense in detail, recognizing the effects of the harmful doing on the offender and confirming the grievance of the offender.<sup>17</sup> For him, a

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<sup>13</sup> Stefan Engert. "A Case Study in "Atonement": Adenauer's Holocaust Apology." *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 4.3 (2010): 111-122. p.112.

<sup>14</sup> Tavuchis pp.17-21 and p.109

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p.109.

<sup>16</sup> Aaron Lazare. *On Apology*. Oxford. Oxford UP. 2004. p.23

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p.10.

sincere acknowledgment of the wrongdoing is the most important part of an apology before the other things.<sup>18</sup>

Another scholar, Nick Smith, lists twelve criteria for a ‘full’ apology. However, he says that it is very rare to have such an apology and may not always happen. His criteria are as follows; 1) establishment of an official account of wrongdoing 2) acceptance of the blame 3) having an appropriate standing to carry out an apology 4) identification of the harm 5) identification of the moral principles which are breached by harm 6) a shared commitment to moral principles underlying each harm 7) recognition of the victim 8) categorical regret 9) performance of apology 10) reform and redress 11) intentions for apologizing 12) emotions.<sup>19</sup>

As stated, political apologies can be considered under many to many apology category by Tavuchis. It is announcing to the public that you (or the government you are representing) accepts the responsibility for the harmful or wrong actions of the past which led to disadvantage or victimization of a group of its own citizens or citizens of another country.<sup>20</sup> Political apologies can be considered as reinterpretation of history by judging them right or wrong.<sup>21</sup> As there is a concept of political apology, the criteria of the leading scholars have been used to determine the effectiveness of the apology. With this in mind, there appeared a concept of non-apology which is an apology delivered as a speech act but led to nothing or insufficient in reaching a reconciliation.<sup>22</sup> In other words, non-apologies are apologies which have failed, which is to say those apologies have not fulfilled the necessary criteria and have not resulted in a reconciliation between groups.

The last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and 21<sup>st</sup> century is called as ‘the age of apology’, as there is an increase in the number of apologies delivered. There are several reasons for this. First, the states want to settle the accounts of the past. This is especially true for the apologies or apology demands in the 90s as when the new millennium approached they wanted to make a clean break from the past.<sup>23</sup> The second reason is the increasing communication between states, so thanks to this everything has become more visible and

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Nick Smith. *I was wrong: The meanings of apologies*. Cambridge University Press, 2008. pp. 28-108.

<sup>20</sup> G. Raumaty Hook. The political apology as a millennial phenomenon. *MAI Review*. 2008. 2. Article 2. p.3.

<sup>21</sup> Melissa Nobles. *The politics of official apologies*. Cambridge University Press, 2008. p.72.

<sup>22</sup> Hook. p.3.

<sup>23</sup> Lazarre. p.10.

some states have started to feel themselves obliged to apologize. The third reason is the change in the perception of the states in the eyes of the public. States have become questionable and accountable entities. They are no longer seen as sacrosanct or unquestionable but are increasingly held accountable for their actions.<sup>24</sup> Another reason is the increasing importance of morality and justice which have started to dominate public attention in recent years according to Barkan.<sup>25</sup> This reason is related with the developing technology which eased the way to reach information.

In this thesis, I first look at the collective apology cases from the world: Australian apology to Aborigines, Japanese apology to the war-slaves of South Korea, and German apology to the Holocaust survivors and their descendants. Each case is examined through a perspective of historical developments. Additionally, I try to see whether speeches of the actors involved are in compliance with the criteria for political apologies established by Aaron Lazare and Nicholas Tavuchis. Finally, I look at whether the compliance statuses change over the years. Later, I examine the insufficient non-apologies in Turkey related with the Armenian ‘issue’ and Dersim ‘issue’. The following chapter compares the world apology cases and Turkey’s [non] apologies. The primary research question deals with the reasons for Turkey’s inadequacy in forming full-fledged apologies that comply with the basic criteria established by Lazare and Tavuchis. Another question is, “To what extent, do the political cultures of the countries, public opinion and opinion polls and the interests of the leaders matter in delivering apologies?”

The current literature does not have a work dedicated to comparing the apologies of these four countries. In two individual works Japanese and German apologies and Japanese and Turkish apology cases are examined. In the former, Lind claims that Japan, like Germany, should acknowledge its war time guilts while also recognizing its war-time achievements. In short, Japan should come to terms with its past by acknowledging both its positive and negative actions.<sup>26</sup> In the latter, Zarakol compares the nationalist cultures of Japan and Turkey by concentrating mostly on their denials of war crimes, suggesting that it is

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<sup>24</sup> Kora Andrieu. “Sorry for the Genocide: How Public Apologies Can Help Promote National Reconciliation”. *Journal of International Studies* Vol.38 No.1, pp. 001–022. p.1

<sup>25</sup> Barkan. p.xvii.

<sup>26</sup> Jennifer Lind. “The Perils of Apology: What Japan Shouldn’t Learn from Germany.” *Foreign Affairs*. Vol.88. no:3 (May/June 2009) pp. 132-146. p.133.

because of the insecurity of these countries about their geopolitical belongings, whether they are Eastern, Western, both or neither?<sup>27</sup>

The three examples that I chose for comparison with Turkish apology cases reflect a spectrum of apologies and non-apologies. Australian apology was achieved after long years of pressure to the government by Aborigines and local civil society associations. German apology was a result of pressures put by newly established Israeli state and international political and civil society. These two cases differ from Turkish non-apologies because, unlike the Turkish case, they comply with the criteria for full-fledged apologies. However, the both cases are similar to the Turkish case in some respects. In both Australia and Turkey, local civil society is effective in the issue of apology. At the same time, Turkey, just as Germany, received international pressure to issue an apology. Japan's whimsical claims on the situation of comfort women and war slaves make the Japanese case a non-apology. In this sense it is similar to Turkish case which is also a non-apology.

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<sup>27</sup> Ayşe Zarakol. "Ontological (in) security and state denial of historical crimes: Turkey and Japan." *International Relations* 24.1 (2010): 3-23.

## CHAPTER 1: APOLOGY EXAMPLES IN THE WORLD

As discussed in the introduction, the apologies have begun to increase in number in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The aim of this chapter is to look at the principal examples of apologies from the world and have a sense about the motives and the circumstances and see if there are any common points.

### 1.1. The Case of Australia

The roots of the apology debate in Australia date back to the turn of the millennium when there were debates about Australia's need for a change in its constitution. On the centenary of federation, there were some groups requesting a constitution based on equality, diversity, and respect for human rights.<sup>28</sup>

These requests caused Australians to question their past and face the stories of Indigenous people who have been generally ignored both by the state and the society. It would be wrong to say that the turn of the millennium was the very first time that the Aborigines were mentioned, however the general tendency until then was to ignore them. The Aborigines were constituting the 1.6% of the population and this was causing them to be seen as inferior people who cannot have any right to speak up for the nation. Them being seen as inferior people was being justified by their small population.

The earlier constitutions were very racist toward the Aborigines, for example they did not have a right to vote, to drink, to travel or marry without a permission of the state.<sup>29</sup> Celermajer also bases this on the fact that Australia did not have a Bill of Rights and the

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<sup>28</sup> Danielle Celermajer. *The Sins of the Nation and the Ritual of Apologies*. Cambridge University Press. 2009. p. 143.

<sup>29</sup> For race relations in Australia, see Andrew Markus. *Australian Race Relations 1788-1983*. Allen & Unwin. 1994.



constitution does not proscribe racial or other forms of discrimination.<sup>30</sup> In addition to this, there was a big gap between the living standards of the Aboriginal people and the white Australians. This was so apparent that when Kevin Rudd delivered the apology speech, closing the gap between the living standards was one of the first things he mentioned.

In the 1950s and 60s some of the most discriminatory laws were dismantled, but still the voting restrictions continued, and it was not possible to see the Aborigines having an equal place as the white Australians in the constitution. The pressure for having a more inclusive Commonwealth did not stop and all these paved the way for the 1967 Referendum in which people were asked about amending the discriminatory laws in the constitution.<sup>31</sup> On the way to the referendum, the leader of the opposition party -Gough Whitlam- said:

... the members of this Parliament will be able for the first time to do something for Aborigines—Aborigines representing the greatest pockets of poverty and disease in this country.<sup>32</sup>

The referendum ended with a 90.77% “yes” vote, but rather than the results the campaign before it carries great importance. The political parties in favor of the “yes” vote shared dramatic images of Aborigines.

... dramatic images of Aboriginal camps, infested with mangy dogs and populated by dirty and deprived-looking children were broadcast across the media, successfully provoking shock amongst ‘ordinary’ (non-Indigenous) Australians.<sup>33</sup>

Following the referendum, the land rights of the Aboriginal people started to be discussed. *Terra nullius* meaning nobody’s land had deprived Aborigines of their original lands and made them sell their labor to have a livelihood. *Terra nullius* claims that when the British occupied the lands of Australia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there was no one who could claim right on the territories and thus all the land was made belong to the Crown and the ones granted land by the Crown. As the referendum led the white Australians to be more aware of the Aboriginal people, debates about the rights of the Aborigines were unavoidable.

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<sup>30</sup> Celermajer. See footnote 9 on p.145

<sup>31</sup> Bain Atwood and Andrew Markus. “*The 1967 Referendum or When Aborigines Did Not Get the Vote.*” *Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. AIAT-SIS.* 1995.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in *Research Brief of Parliamentary of Australia.* The 1967 Referendum – history and myths. p.11.

<sup>33</sup> Celermajer. p. 146.

However, the Aborigines could not find broad political support for themselves and this issue was swept under the carpet until 1980s.

In 1987, the Australian government appointed a Royal Commission to investigate the deaths of Aborigines in custody. The commission investigated 99 deaths and concluded that none of the deaths were due to political violence, but due to diseases, suicide or trauma.<sup>34</sup> Yet, the report brought out that forty-three of the Aborigines in custody were separated from their families as children. Apart from this, the Commission's authors stated that the problems of Aboriginal people were because of the fact that they were non-recognized as the citizens of Australia. They also stated that as the general tendency is towards the non-recognition of the Aborigines, people tend to ignore the fact that the Aborigines could be sovereign people with pre-existing rights.<sup>35</sup> The Commission's report ended with 339 recommendations about what can be done for the Aborigines to improve welfare.<sup>36</sup>

Commission's findings resulted in the Commonwealth's establishing a Council for Aboriginal Recognition. All of these progresses were followed in curiosity by the media and thus by the society. In 1992, in a case between the Queensland and Mabo<sup>37</sup>, a problem ignored for years was found out in the court that Aboriginal people also retained distinct land rights<sup>38</sup>. As mentioned above, the debates after the 1967 Referendum about the land rights did not come to a conclusion as the Aborigines could not find broad political support. Celermajer suggests that this Mabo case exposed the link between non-recognition of the Indigenous groups and the constitution of the Australian nation.<sup>39</sup> By Mabo's suing the Queensland and its broadcast on media, non-Indigenous people have become to be more aware of their failure to accept the citizenship and the pre-existing rights of the Indigenous people. After it acknowledged that the Aborigines also had a land

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<sup>34</sup> NATIONAL REPORT VOLUME 1 -CHAPTER 3 THE FINDINGS OF THE COMMISSIONERS AS TO THE DEATHS. <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/rciadic/national/vol1/54.html> accessed on 22.02.2018.

<sup>35</sup> Celermajer. p. 149.

<sup>36</sup> NATIONAL REPORT VOLUME 1 -CHAPTER 3 THE FINDINGS OF THE COMMISSIONERS AS TO THE DEATHS. <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/rciadic/national/vol1/54.html> accessed on 22.02.2018.

<sup>37</sup> Mabo is a member of another Indigenous Australian group -Torres Saint People or Meriams- on the North coast of Australia. The land right case he opened resulted on the benefit of Meriam people. This case is known to have overturned the two hundred years of *terra nullius* of Australia.

<sup>38</sup> Celermajer. p. 150.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 151.

right, the highest court presented a detailed argument about why at first they were deprived of their land rights and they came to a conclusion that it was because the Indigenous people were at the lowest scale of social organization so they were not capable of having a land of their own.<sup>40</sup> The exact words of the court is as follows, “Yet the supposedly barbarian nature of indigenous people provided the common law of England with the justification for denying them their traditional rights and interests in land...”<sup>41</sup> In a way, they justified the decision of the Queensland and admitted that for them the Aborigines did not have the enough capacity to have a land of their own thus all the land belonged to the Queensland. This also justified the idea of *terra nullius* as when white people arrived at the continent there were not people with the same ‘capacity’ as white people. However, the imaginary understanding of Australia as *terra nullius* started to be torn apart.

This being the case, the governments started to mention the Aborigines more than they had in the past. Some of the Aborigines were in favor of the fact that they should be more visible, and the mistakes of the past should be compensated; whereas some of them were against it. Then Prime Minister, Paul Keating who was the head of a right-wing party, commented on the issue. Some of what he said is worth quoting,

... It is a test of our self-knowledge. Of how well we know the land we live in. How well we recognize the fact that, complex as our contemporary identity is, it cannot be separated from Aboriginal Australia ... It begins, I think, with the act of recognition. Recognition that it was us who did the dispossessing. We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the disasters. The alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practiced discrimination and exclusion. It was our ignorance and our prejudice ... As a consequence, we failed to see that what we were doing degraded all of us.<sup>42</sup>

Keating’s speech was a breakthrough for Australian politics. He was the first to admit the effects of the European settlement on the lives of the Aborigines. He preferred to speak on behalf of the whole nation using the first person plural pronoun. He named the wrongdoings of his nation, took responsibility for the wrongdoings. If we are to remember

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p.151 and <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/mabo-case> accessed on 22.02.2018.

<sup>41</sup> Mabo v Queensland (No 2) ("Mabo case") [1992] HCA 23; (1992) 175 CLR 1 (3 June 1992) Article 38.

<sup>42</sup> His speech is known as “The Redfern Address” delivered in Redfern Park, Sydney in 1992. The transcription of the speech can be found on <https://aso.gov.au/titles/spoken-word/keating-speech-redfern-address/extras/> accessed on 28.02.2018.

criteria of Lazare and Tavuchis for an effective apology, Keating clearly stated who is the offender and who is the offended; he expressed the feelings of remorse and shame; which means out of Lazare's four criterion he accomplished two. In this case, Keating's speech can be named as a proto-apology which opened the way for the debates for a formal apology by the state.

Five years after Keating's speech, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission published an almost 700 pages report about the forceful removal of Aboriginal children from their families named as *Bringing Them Home: National Inquiry into the Forced Removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*<sup>43</sup>. It was a report about the removal of children from their families just because they were Aborigines. Even though, the nation had started to be more curious about the 'past' of the Indigenous people, this report made them face the brutal truths about what the Australian government had done. There were personal testimonies of the removed children, documentary evidence taken from governmental and non-governmental organizations and testimonies of the witnesses in the report.<sup>44</sup> Thanks to the report, it was found out that between the years 1920 and 1970, between one in three and one in ten Aboriginal children had been removed from their families and put under the sanction of the state against the will of their families.<sup>45</sup> Families were denied access to information about their children. The children were sometimes adopted by white families or given to foster homes without having an idea about their past. It is stated in the report than more than half of the children were settled in multiple places as they could not satisfy the white families or could not adjust to the families.<sup>46</sup> The children were sexually abused in their foster homes.<sup>47</sup> There were other abuses as well, yet the basic aim of the removals was the denigration and destruction of Aboriginality.<sup>48</sup> One of the most important things that the report agreed was "forcible removal was an act of genocide contrary to the United Nations Convention on Genocide ratified by Australia in 1949."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> The report can be reached on <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/bringing-them-home-report-1997> accessed on 28.02.2018.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Celermajer. p.156.

<sup>46</sup> *Bringing Them Home Report*. 1997

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p.141.

<sup>48</sup> Celermajer. p.158.

<sup>49</sup> *Bringing Them Home Report*. 1997

As mentioned before, the Aborigines were seen as being at the lowest scale of social organization, so destruction of their culture was seen as a must; because if they had grown in numbers they could absorb the white culture into theirs.<sup>50</sup> Aborigines were not seen as human, because seeing them as equal humans would result in giving them equal rights and life-standards as the white people. Celermajer sees the policies of the Australian governments as a politics of the post-colonial Australian nation the legitimacy of which required being detached from the Aboriginal base.<sup>51</sup>

After all the injuries and damages of the past coming to light with the *Bringing Them Home Report*, there appeared the question about how to have a reparation. There was a disagreement among the Australians about their collective responsibility. One group thought that they should accept it as a part of the nation's past and apologize for it; whereas another group resisted to being blamed for action's they did not personally take.<sup>52</sup>

The first-year anniversary of the *Bringing Them Home Report*, 26 May 1998, was celebrated as "National Sorry Day" throughout Australia. Aboriginal people narrated their stories about removal, public 'sorry' events were organized and in 'Sorry Books' white-Australian individuals delivered their written apologies to the Indigenous people. Next year, the name of the day was changed officially into "Journey of Healing". The reason behind this was to show to the international and national public that the process was going towards a more positive direction. However, the wording was still obscure as who was 'healing' was not mentioned. Was it the Aborigines healing from being the 'other' of the society, was it the Australians healing from being exclusionist or was it the relationship between the white Australians and black Australians? The same is also true for the wording of the 'National Sorry Day'. On the surface it was a sorry day for the non-Indigenous Australians to express their remorse, but it was also a sorry day for the Indigenous people to nationally remember what happened to them in the past and express their sorrow. Both senses of 'sorry' was circulating around in the 'National Sorry Day' and after in the 'Journey of Healing Day'.

The public ceremonial activities continued in the following years. In 2000, almost a million people took part in it. The public participated in the two key ways for the delivery

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p.159.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. p.161.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p. 172.

of the mass apology.<sup>53</sup> Sorry Books were opened in 1998 for individuals to sign and express their remorse feelings, and until 2002 they remained open. An apology website was also opened in which people registered their names and almost 250.000 people registered. One statement from the 1998 is worth quoting,

By signing my name in this book, I record my deep regret for the injustices suffered by Indigenous Australians as a result of European settlement and, in particular, I offer my personal apology for the hurt and harm caused by the forced removal of children from their families and for the effect of government policy on the human dignity and spirit of Indigenous Australians.

I would also like to record my desire for Reconciliation and for a better future for all our peoples. I make a commitment to a united Australia which respects this land of ours, values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and provides justice and equality for all.<sup>54</sup>

This statement carries some of the important features of a proper apology according to the criteria of Tavuchis and Lazare: It acknowledges the fact of wrong doing, accepts the responsibility of his/her nation and expresses sincere sorrow and regret.<sup>55</sup>

Meanwhile, while the public was trying to compensate for the mistakes of the past, the Prime Minister, John Howard, was repeatedly refusing to apologize. He said, it was unnecessary to apologize about something for which you are not directly responsible. Yet, he also admitted that he was sorry for what happened to the Indigenous people before. During the opening speech of Australian Reconciliation Convention in May 1997 he said,

Personally, I feel deep sorrow for those of my fellow Australians who suffered injustices under the practices of past generations towards indigenous people. Equally, I am sorry for the hurt and trauma many people here today may continue to feel as a consequence of those practices. In facing the realities of the past, however, we must not join those who would portray Australia's history since 1788 as little more than a disgraceful record of imperialism, exploitation and racism.<sup>56</sup>

What he said is not considerable as an apology, as he does not seem sincere, there is no shared empathy and most importantly he refuses any responsibility. His speech can be accepted only as a non-apologetic regret. "Howard once also explained that if you express

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<sup>53</sup> Haydie Gooder and Jane M. Jacobs. 'On the Border of the UnsayableApology in Postcolonizing Australia'. Interventions, International Journal of Postcolonial Studies. 2:2 p.240

<sup>54</sup> Sorry Books 1998. Quoted in Ibid. p.241.

<sup>55</sup> Tavuchis. p. 7.

<sup>56</sup> John Howard. Opening Address to the Reconciliation Convention, 27 May 1997. <https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-10361> accessed on 28.02.2018.

regrets for things, 'you are collectively and in a direct sense responsible', and he did not think 'that applies to the current generation of Australians'.<sup>57</sup> Yet, his words were paradoxical; in the same speech, he also referred to the actions of the founding Australians as 'blemishes' during the nation building process.<sup>58</sup>

In a parliamentary debate in 1999, Howard uttered similar words, "To say to them they are personally responsible and that they should feel a sense of shame about those events is to visit upon them an unreasonable penalty and an injustice."<sup>59</sup> What he says makes the white Australians, who were 'forced' to apologize, victims. In a way, he changes the understanding of the word 'victim' and puts it in a different context. Other than the word 'victim', he also plays with the idea of what is injustice. By that time, what had been thought as injustice was the exclusion and discrimination that Aboriginal people experienced and who had been seen as victim was the Aboriginal people themselves. As mentioned, there was a disagreement among the Australians about whether to apologize or not and from this point on Howard's statement became the major defense of people who were against any apology as they had not personally taken actions.<sup>60</sup> However, Howard's position about past was inconsistent as many times he said he was proud of what Anzacs did in Çanakkale during the First World War.<sup>61</sup> So, it can be said that he accepted the 'positive' inheritances; while he refused the 'negative' ones.

However, hereafter requests for an official apology was on the to-do-list of the nation. Dr. Lowitjja O'Donoghue, former chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission once stated,

I now believe, as do many of my people, that reconciliation will not proceed unless our Prime Minister can bring himself to say that simple 'S word' – Sorry. His refusal to do so on behalf of the Government of the day diminishes him as a person and Australia as a nation.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Frances Peters-Little, Ann Curthoys, John Docker. *Passionate Histories: Myth, Memory and Indigenous Australia*. Australian National University Press. 2010. p.314.

<sup>58</sup> John Howard. *Opening Address to the Reconciliation Convention*. 28 May 1997.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Marinella, Padula. "The road to "sorry": Kevin Rudd's apology to the Stolen Generations." *The Australia and New Zealand School of Government*. 2009.

<sup>60</sup> Celermajer. 158-9.

<sup>61</sup> Brigid Delaney. *The many faces of Anzac Day: how grief became a national rallying point*. The Guardian. 24 April 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/apr/24/the-many-faces-of-anzac-day-how-grief-became-a-national-rallying-point> accessed on 01.03.2018.

<sup>62</sup> Haydie Gooder and Jane M. Jacobs. p.239.

Malcom Fraser, former Prime Minister of Australia between the years 1975-1983, also stated,

We cannot undo the past, but we can, in an apology, recognize the fact that many actions in the past did a grave injustice to the Aboriginal population of Australia. We have a commitment to recognize that and other past injustices in walking together into a new future.<sup>63</sup>

On 24 November 2007, there was an Australian Federal Election in which Kevin Rudd and the then Prime Minister John Howard competed. During the election campaigns, Rudd's one of the most important claims was to deliver a proper apology to the Aboriginal people and to the Stolen Generations<sup>64</sup> of Australia. The attitude of Howard towards an official apology has already been discussed above.

In the elections, Kevin Rudd got 52.70% of the votes and 83 seats out of 150. On 13 February 2008, the first day of the new Parliament, Kevin Rudd abided by his words and sharply at 9.00 a.m., he delivered his apology. The audience was not only restricted with the members of the parliament, members of the Stolen Generation and their families were also invited, and this was the first time in the history of Australia that the Aboriginal people found a place for themselves in a parliamentary sitting. Apart from the parliament, big screens were placed in the different parts of the country and millions of people were about to watch that historical moment. As it was an important historical moment, Rudd's apology is worth being quoted at length here:

To the Stolen Generations, I say the following: as Prime Minister of Australia, I am sorry. On behalf of the Government of Australia, I am sorry. On behalf of the Parliament of Australia, I am sorry. And I offer you this apology without qualification. We apologize for the hurt, the pain and suffering we, the parliament, have caused you by the laws that previous parliaments have enacted. We apologize for the indignity, the degradation and the humiliation these laws embodied. We offer this apology to the mothers, the fathers, the brothers, the sisters, the families and the communities whose lives were ripped apart by the actions of successive governments under successive parliaments.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Scott Kuzner. "Seeking Justice for Australia Aborigines". Sidebar in David Masci, "Reparations Movement". *CQ Researcher* 11. 2001.

<sup>64</sup> With the *Bringing Them Home Report*, the children of the Indigenous people who were forcefully removed from their families were named as Stolen Generations.

<sup>65</sup> Kevin Rudd's apology speech on 13 February 2008 in the Parliamentary Opening. The transcript and the video versions of the apology can be found on <https://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples> accessed on 02.03.2018



Rudd's apology was followed by his speech about a brief history of what happened to the Indigenous people: the removal of children, the abuses they encountered and their sufferings as unequal citizens. He finished his speech by saying that the two divided races of Australia should be brought back together, and they should have a future together. As the brief discussion about the 20<sup>th</sup> century history of Australia has shown so far, it does not seem very possible to think about Australia as opposed to what Rudd uttered. Later, one of the most significant criticisms about the apology was about his idea of a future together.

The opposition party leader, the successor of Howard, Brendan Nelson made a speech after Rudd. Even though, their party policy was against an official apology, he delivered a supportive statement.

Our responsibility, every one of us, is to understand what happened here, why it happened, the impact it had not only on those who were removed, but also those who did the removing and supported it. Our generation does not own these actions, nor should it feel guilt for what was done in many, but not all cases, with the best of intentions. But in saying we are sorry - and deeply so - we remind ourselves that each generation lives in ignorance of the long-term consequences of its decisions and actions. Even when motivated by inherent humanity and decency to reach out to the dispossessed in extreme adversity, our actions can have unintended outcomes. As such, many decent Australians are hurt by accusations of theft in relation to their good intentions.<sup>66</sup>

After Nelson's speech, Rudd invited him to join the 'war cabinet' about Indigenous disadvantages<sup>67</sup> and the two men shook hands. When the opposition and the leading party found a middle way, this inevitably affected the ordinary citizens on the streets. Even those who were not sympathetic to the apology started to feel involved with the issue. In the following weeks, the main topic of the media was Rudd's apology. Interviews were carried out and many people uttered that they were sorry about what happened.

As the debate about the apology deepened, it appeared that both sides, those in favor of an apology and those who were not, would share the same thoughts and were sorry about their nation's wrongful doings. Yet, where they were parted was the shameful representation and the possibility of paying a compensation. It is not possible to say that

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<sup>66</sup> Brandon Nelson's speech on 13 February 2008 in the Parliamentary Opening. The transcript of the apology can be found on <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22chamber%2Fhansard%2F2008-02-13%2F0004%22> accessed on 02.03.2018.

<sup>67</sup> Celermajer. p.212.

an apology means everything is resolved, it can only be accepted as the start of some changes between the both parties' relations.

If one is to examine Rudd's apology in terms of whether it fits to the criteria of Tavuchis and Lazarre, it can be said that he fulfilled the conditions they listed. First, he acknowledged the offense and accepted that the former Australian governments were responsible. Though he did not have to according to the criteria of Tavuchis but had to according to Lazarre he repeatedly accepted the responsibility of his nation by using he nouns such as indignity, degradation, humility and suffering which seem to be deliberately chosen to demonstrate his empathy with the Indigenous people. His speech was full of regret and finally he frequently promised that the mistakes of the past would not be repeated again. Additionally, though it was not unanimous he got a response from the offended party.

The Aborigines, the addressees of the apology, did not react to it unanimously. Damien Short categorizes the reactions into three: first group accepted the apology unreservedly; second group saw it as a belated first step and the third group saw it as a hollow gesture without a compensation.<sup>68</sup> No one can deny that the apology acknowledged the wrongful doings of the past and its trauma upon the Indigenous people. Yet, the absence of the word 'genocide' in the apology speech caused some people to think that it was delivered in order to relieve and look ahead. As discussed, it was the *Bringing Them Home Report* which showed the agonizing history of the Aborigines and the report had used the word 'genocide'. So, the whole discussion about the Aborigines became more concrete with the report and it ended up with an apology, yet the apology failed to mention it. On the other hand, if Rudd had used that word, he could have got less support from the white Australians as the genocide point in the report was the most controversial aspect of it.<sup>69</sup>

Rudd did not have a chance to fulfill his promises about closing the gap between the life standards of the white people and Aborigines as he could not complete his three years Prime Ministry due to some intra-party conflicts.

... the government changed, and the apology was pushed into the limelight without the legal argument that had helped place it on the national agenda. The nation, it is safe to say, did not want to know. The Rudd government,

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<sup>68</sup> Damien Short. When sorry isn't good enough: Official remembrance and reconciliation in Australia. *Institute of Commonwealth Studies*. 2012. p.298.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. p.299.

striving for maximum consensus, was not about to rub open a bitter controversy.<sup>70</sup>

It is not possible to say that apologies have fixed and universal meanings. Also, an apology cannot undo what was done in the past. According to the culture they were uttered, they give a rise to new changes and help the society build a new future. Yet, it should be accepted that an apology is a challenge to the official history of a country. In the case of Australia, the ideas about the Aboriginal identity and the land owning were challenged with Rudd's speech. With the apology people became more aware of themselves as a nation. Together with a challenge to the official narration of history, an apology also changes the political culture of a country. In Australia, there was a resistance against an official apology by the government for a long time. With Rudd's speech, the government accepted that some wrongs had been done to the Aboriginal people and providing the equal conditions for them became a priority for the government as opposed to the past. Also, the apology legitimized the presence of Aborigines in contrast to the past when they were seen as people who were incapable of handling their lands. It can be said that while legitimizing the presence of the Aborigines, they delegitimized the ex-political culture of Australia.<sup>71</sup>

## 1.2. The Case of Japan

The Meiji Restoration in Japan in 1868 led to enormous changes in the country's political and economic structure. There were ruling emperors, but they were brought together as Empire of Japan. The country entered a period of Westernization. These changes in the country were followed by Japan's invasion of Korea and China as its Western counterparts were doing over their colonies. After the end of Russo-Japanese war in 1905, Japan declared itself as the protectorate of Korea and implemented a policy of assimilation to Korea, one of its main vehicles for assimilation was education.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Tony Barta. Sorry, and not sorry, in Australia: How the apology to the stolen generations buried a history of genocide. *Journal of Genocidal Research* 10(2) p.208.

<sup>71</sup> Danielle Celermajer. "The apology in Australia: re-covenanting the national imaginary." *Taking wrongs seriously: Apologies and reconciliation* (2006): 153-184. p.176.

<sup>72</sup> Elizabeth S. Dahl. "Is Japan Facing Its Past?" *The Age of Apology*. University of Pennsylvania Press. 2008. p.242.

As it was a country which had started to feel itself powerful than before, the citizens had also started to be more nationalistic. Japanese forces were all loyal to the emperor and any infraction was punished immediately.<sup>73</sup> However, it should be noted that Japanese women were nowhere in the picture, they were just expected to raise patriotic children. On the other hand, foreign women were seen as people ranking in the lowest in social hierarchy.

Growing Japanese nationalism, aggression towards the outer world and growth in the need of natural resources, which can be rephrased as Japan's desire for colonialism, resulted in its involvement in the Second World War. During and before the War, military 'comfort stations' were instituted where Japanese soldiers could meet their sexual needs. The earliest of the comfort stations dates back to 1932. The latest was recorded in 1945 at the end of the Pacific War. In these 'comfort stations', 'comfort' women were recruited by force as sexual slaves to the Japanese soldiers in wartime. The 'comfort' women are not to be confused with the military prostitutes as prostitution may sometimes be voluntary. What the comfort women were experiencing can be categorized under 'sexual slavery' and those women were chosen according to their gender, class and ethnicity. Yoshiaki describes the issue as a gross violation of human rights which combined sexual violence against women, racial discrimination and discrimination against the impoverished.<sup>74</sup> Most of the women were taken away from their homes with promises to work in restaurants or factories but ended up in the comfort situations.

The actual number of the comfort women is unknown as they were not recorded by the Japanese government. The estimates vary from 20.000 to 4000.000, but historian Yoshiaki's study shows that the number was between 50.000 and 200.000.<sup>75</sup> 80% of these women were from Korea, the others were from China, Thailand and some other countries in Asia. The main focus of this thesis is on the Korean women, because they constituted the majority and the efforts of the South Korean women enabled this issue to be brought to the attention of the international community.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Yoshimi Yoshiaki. *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II*. Columbia University Press. 2000. p.23.

<sup>75</sup> Tessa Morris-Suzuki. "Japan's 'Comfort Women': It's time for the truth (in the ordinary, everyday sense of the word)." *The Asia-Pacific Journal*. Volume 5. Issue 3. March 01, 2007. p.3

Even though there is a lack of documental evidence, the testimonies of the Korean ‘comfort’ women in the 1990s demonstrate the brutality of the practice. One of the most important criteria for a woman to be chosen as a comfort woman was her being unmarried, presumed to be a virgin, because the Japanese army wanted to protect the soldiers from sexually transmitted diseases. While Korean women were forced to meet the sexual needs of the Japanese military forces, one of the policies of the Japanese government at home was telling young Japanese women to fulfill their most important missions in their lives which were being chaste and raising their children to be patriotic. Another policy of Japan was the assimilation of Korean girls by changing their Korean names into Japanese, hoisting the Japanese flag, worshipping to the Emperor and attend to *Shinto*<sup>76</sup> ceremonies.<sup>77</sup> Drafting of women into the army was legal according to Japanese constitution, but in order not to experience problems later on, Japanese government preferred to say that the women were there on a voluntary basis. In fact, some of the women were in the Pacific War voluntarily as they were promised work in factories, hospitals with a good compensation for their work in the war area. Information supplied by Korean National History Compilation Committee demonstrates the age range of the girls which was sometimes as low as 12 years old.<sup>78</sup>

After a long time of silence, in 1991 the first testimony from one of the surviving comfort women came. South Korean Kim Hak-sun gave a public testimony about her life as a comfort woman during the Pacific War. She filed a lawsuit against Japan for all the damage she had gone through.<sup>79</sup> She became a role model for the other surviving former comfort women and other women filed lawsuits against Japan. They had four demands from Japan: 1) a formal apology 2) compensation for their damages which was \$2.29 million 3) construction of a monument 4) revision in the official Japanese history.<sup>80</sup>

However, the first response of the Japanese government was to ignore the women. The government said there was a lack of documentary evidence. As Yoshiaki also mentioned in her book Japanese government had destroyed most of the records related to comfort

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<sup>76</sup> Traditonal religion of Japan.

<sup>77</sup> Chunghee Sarah Soh. “The Korean “Comfort Women””: Movement for Redress”. *Asian Survey*. Vol.36, No.12. Dec., 1996. pp. 1226-1240. p.1228.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. p.1229.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. p.1233.

<sup>80</sup> *Korea Times*, January 6, 1993. Stated in Ibid.

women.<sup>81</sup> Besides, there was a normalization treaty between Japan and Korea in 1965 which foreclosed South Korea from having any claims about the issue of comfort women. As mentioned, most of comfort women were taken to the war area by being given false promises to work and earn money there. This gives us a hint about the socio-cultural situation of them, in other words most of the women were chosen from poor families. What happened to them was social injustice inflicted upon poor and powerless.<sup>82</sup> This being the case, there was not enough social concern about their situation. Apart from these, it is not possible to say that Korean government had had positive policies about young women in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They intentionally exploited the young Korean women not only as cheap laborers in factories, but also as sex workers in international tourism.<sup>83</sup> Young Korean women worked as *kisaeng* (professional female entertainers), serving to foreign men, which was especially popular among Japanese tourists. In addition to that, the U.S troops were still in South Korea and the Korean media was still using the word *wianbu*, which means ‘comfort women’ in Korean, to refer to the girls entertaining the U.S troops.<sup>84</sup>

Even though the Korean government chose to ignore the sufferings of comfort women, women associations had started to be more focused on the issue and put pressures on the government. In 1990, Korean President Roh Tae Woo planned to make a state visit to Japan which was met with protests from women’s associations. When the visit was certain, the associations prepared a list of demands to be made to the Japanese government which included investigation of the comfort women issue and apologizing for it. Japanese government rejected these demands and stated that they were not governmentally involved in the issue and comfort stations were private enterprises.<sup>85</sup>

Until 1992, Japanese government denied all its responsibility for comfort stations. In 1992, historian Professor Yoshimi Yoshiaki published his book about comfort women and the book proved heavily involvement of the Japanese government in comfort stations. Yoshiaki’s findings changed the way Japanese government approached to the issue, they admitted their involvement yet still stated that most of the stations belonged to private

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<sup>81</sup> Yoshiaki. p.36-37.

<sup>82</sup> Chunghee. p.1230.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. p.1231.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Nishino Rumiko, *Jugun lanfu* [Military comfort women] Tokyo, Akashi Shoten. 1992. Quoted in Ibid. p. 1232

entrepreneurs. Upon this, a petition was submitted to the U.N. Human Rights Commission by Lee-Hyo-chaee who was the co-chair of KCWS<sup>86</sup>. As a result of this, the petition was taken to the official agenda of the 1992 meeting in Geneva. In the meeting, one former comfort woman and delegates from KCWS testified. By a sub commission of the UNHRC, the military comfort women system of Japan was called, “a crime against humanity that violated the human rights of Asian women and the international agreement prohibiting forced labor that Japan signed in 1932.”<sup>87</sup> Even after the decision from the UNHRC, Tokyo government still denied the fact that the women were forcefully recruited. Their main argument was that even if it was a state related issue, the women were in the comfort stations on their own will.<sup>88</sup> If Japan had admitted that the women were forced to go to the comfort stations, it would have resulted in them being obliged to pay compensation.

As the issue of comfort women had begun to be heard more in public, people in Korea reacted to the response of the Tokyo government to the decision of the sub commission of the UNHRC. In January 1992, a group of people including some former comfort women gathered in front of the Japan embassy in Seoul and shouted slogans as “Apologize!”, “Punish!”, and “Compensate!”.<sup>89</sup> The public demands of them were met with two counter ideas by Japanese: The first was to say that, suffering is a part of war, so it was not only the comfort women who suffered. Secondly, the government alleged that the aim of the Koreans was merely to make money by getting a monetary compensation.<sup>90</sup> Following these claims of Japan, in May 1993 Korean President announced that they would seek no material compensation for what had happened during the war, but they would insist on Japan working to uncloak the truth and demand a comprehensive and formal apology.<sup>91</sup> The reflection of this move on the society was explained with an example in the article of Chunghee. She recounts her encounter with a taxi-driver in South Korea after the statement of the President where the driver said the

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<sup>86</sup> Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan

<sup>87</sup> Alice Y. Chai. “Asian-Pacific Feminist Coalition Politics: The Chongsindae/Jugunianfu (Comfort Women) Movement”. *Korean Studies*. No.17 (1993) pp. 67-91. Quoted in Chunghee. p.1235.

<sup>88</sup> *Han'guk Ilbo*, July 7, 1992, August 4, 1992.

<sup>89</sup> Chunghee. p.1235.

<sup>90</sup> *Han'guk Ilbo*, February 12, 1992; *Chosun Ilbo* July 5,8 1992.

<sup>91</sup> Chunghee. p.1236.

government did well as what the government needed to do was to be future oriented rather than sticking into the past.<sup>92</sup>

The President's statement was also welcomed by Japan and they saw it as a friendly gesture which led Japan to make a progress in admitting its heavily involvement. However, what they suggested was to deal with the issue in a non-governmental way. They admitted that the women were recruited with coercion and they violated humanitarian laws. In August 1993, the Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono gave a statement concerning comfort women,

As a result of the study which indicates that comfort stations were operated in extensive areas for long periods, it is apparent that there existed a great number of comfort women. Comfort stations were operated in response to the request of the military authorities of the day. The then Japanese military was, directly or indirectly, involved in the establishment and management of the comfort stations and the transfer of comfort women. The recruitment of the comfort women was conducted mainly by private recruiters who acted in response to the request of the military. The Government study has revealed that in many cases they were recruited against their own will, through coaxing, coercion, etc., and that, at times, administrative/military personnel directly took part in the recruitments. They lived in misery at comfort stations under a coercive atmosphere.<sup>93</sup>

His statement was taken into the literature as 'Kono Statement' and is seen as the official apology of Japan over the comfort women issue. He accepts the fact that women were taken away from their homes forcefully and sometimes directly sometimes indirectly the government of the day participated in this action.

If we are to examine his speech according to the criteria of Lazarre and Tavuchis, it is not possible to say that the speech fulfills all the criteria. It acknowledges the offense and states who is the offender, who is the offended. It accepts the fact that the former government was guilty about the issue. However, the speech only accepts the problem, but does not have a wording which would share the sorrow of the victims and does not promise that similar mistakes will not be repeated. So, out of four criteria, it fulfills only two. Yet, does this make it far from being an official, acceptable apology? The wording of the speech does not make it a non-apology but giving no place to what will happen in

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/women/fund/state9308.html> accessed on 15.05.18.



the future makes it so, as the offended party could anticipate compensation or want to know the mistakes of the past would not be repeated.

Following the statement, public opinion of Japanese people was started to be questioned by public research companies and newspapers. In *Asahi* Newspaper, an article was published in November 1993 named “War Compensation Questioned”. Upon the question whether the Japanese government should provide compensation to the comfort women, 51% of the participants said “yes”; whereas 37% of them said “no”. According to the survey, the younger generation was more in favor of compensation as opposed to the older generation especially men over age 60. 72% of the participants aged between 20-24 said “yes” to compensation.<sup>94</sup> Taking the ages of the participants into account, it can be said that older generation who are more likely to have experienced war was against compensation. Based on newspapers, above it was said that Japanese people saw even the apology as an unnecessary thing as they thought what happened was during the war, and not only Koreans but also Japanese people suffered during it. So, people who have experienced war were not concerned about the sufferings of other people, they believed that there was a reciprocal pain during war conditions.

After the statement, no government-initiated compensation attempt was seen. The aim of Japan was to deal with the issue in a non-governmental way.<sup>95</sup> In 1995, Tomiichi government of Japan announced that they would support the creation of Asian’s Women Fund through which some monetary compensation would be paid to the surviving comfort women. The money in the Fund was collected from ordinary Japanese citizens who would like to help surviving comfort women.<sup>96</sup> Some victims refused to take money offered to them as they thought it was the government’s responsibility to pay compensation and it should not have been non-governmentally. Apart from that, the aim of this fund was not only helping the comfort women, the money collected there was aimed to be used for women who have faced violence.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Takagi Ken’ichi, “The War Compensation Issue of Japan: Its Development and Assignments,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Boston, Massachusetts, March 1994.

<sup>95</sup> Chunghee. p.1237.

<sup>96</sup> Suzuki p.4.

<sup>97</sup> Chunghee. p.1237.

As discussed, there was a UNHRC meeting in 1992 in Geneva. In 1996, a detailed report came from a Special Rapporteur. It said,

The Special Rapporteur is absolutely convinced that most of the women kept at the comfort stations were taken against their will, that the Japanese Imperial Army initiated, regulated and controlled the vast network of comfort stations, and that the Government of Japan is responsible for comfort stations. In addition, the Government of Japan should be prepared to assume responsibility for what this implies under international law.<sup>98</sup>

The report obviously states that Japan was guilty on the issue and what was needed to be done is to pay compensation to the victims. However, there is no recorded action by Japanese government after the report. In a way, they chose to ignore the international opinion.

However, testimonies from women and the attention given to them did not stop. Women's International War Crimes Tribunal collected all the testimonies by former comfort women. The group met on 8 December 2000. In 2001, they issued a final statement about 200 pages long. The statement finished as follows,

The Crimes committed against these survivors remain one of the greatest unacknowledged and unremedied injustices of the Second World War. There are no museums, no graves for the unknown "comfort woman", no education of future generations, and there have been no judgement days for the victims of Japan's military sexual slavery and the rampant sexual violence and brutality that characterized its aggressive war.

Accordingly, through this Judgment, this Tribunal intends to honor all the women victimized by Japan's military sexual slavery system. The Judges recognize the great fortitude and dignity of the survivors who have toiled to survive and reconstruct their shattered lives and who have faced down fear and shame to tell their stories to the world and testify before us. Many of the women who have come forward to fight for justice have died unsung heroes. While the names inscribed in history's page have been, at best, those of the men who commit the crimes or who prosecute them, rather than the women who suffer them, this Judgement bears the names of the survivors who took the stand to tell their stories, and thereby, for four days at least, put wrong on the scaffold and truth on the throne.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> The report of Special Rapporteur on Comfort Women. <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/commission/country52/53-add1.htm>.

<sup>99</sup> The Prosecutors and the Peoples of the Asia-Pacific Region v. Hirohito Emperor Showa et al. <http://www.internationalcrimesdatabase.org/Case/981/The-Prosecutors-and-the-Peoples-of-the-Asia%E2%80%93Pacific-Region/> accessed on 22.05.2018.

Even though Japanese government stopped paying attention to the issue of comfort women, as seen above the international public reaction did not recede. It is true that not all of the comfort stations were managed directly by Japan or Japanese military, yet this does not negate the fact that they were involved in the some of them and contributed to the suffering of comfort women.

Fourteen years after the Kono Statement in 2007, in the US House of Representatives a debate began about the comfort women and they called on Japanese government to offer a proper apology and provide ‘true’ history education in schools about the sufferings of comfort women. The Congress discussed issue upon the testimonies of three former comfort women.<sup>100</sup> On March 1, the Prime Minister Abe responded to the call of the Congress and stated that there was ‘no evidence’ that the comfort women were forcibly recruited. He added that he felt no historical responsibility and his government would not apologize about anything.<sup>101</sup>

However, as discussed so far it is clear that Japanese government and military of the time were involved in the forcible recruitment of the women. Also, with the Kono Statement it was assumed that Japan had acknowledged its responsibility and it was thought that the only problem left was them not paying compensation to the comfort women. With Abe’s statement everything turned back to square one.

In 2014, Japan asked for a revision of the Special Rapporteur’s report on the issue of comfort women. Yet, the rapporteur rejected their request. Upon their request, the Foreign Minister of South Korea, Noh-Kwang-il gave a statement,

However hard the Japanese government tries to distort the true nature of the comfort women issue and play down or hide the past wrongdoings, it will never be able to whitewash history.<sup>102</sup>

In 2015, the two countries reached an agreement about the issue. However, the deal was just for the benefit of Japan as it said there was no need for Japan to pay individual

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<sup>100</sup> Kim Se Jeong,. Comfort Women Testify to U.S. Congress Bill would demand Japanese government apology to former sex slaves. *Ohmy News*. 17 February 2007.

[http://english.ohmynews.com/ArticleView/article\\_view.asp?no=345932&rel\\_no=1](http://english.ohmynews.com/ArticleView/article_view.asp?no=345932&rel_no=1) accessed on 22.05.2018.

<sup>101</sup> Suzuki. .2

<sup>102</sup> Japan, Seeking Revision of Report on Wartime Brothels, Is Rebuffed. Martin Fackler. October 16, 2014. *New York Times* <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/17/world/asia/japan-rebuffed-over-un-report-on-wartime-brothels.html>. accessed on 23.05.2018.

compensation to the comfort women. Japan donated 1 billion yen (\$8.8 million) to a women's organization in South Korea in order to be spent for women who have experienced violence. This is similar to the donation made to the Asian Women's Fund in 1995 which was not accepted by many surviving comfort women as they thought Japan was trying to refrain from dealing with the issue in an official way. So, this donation in 2015 just meant Japan sticking to its past position and Korea giving up on what they had wanted by that time.

Upon the controversy that the deal caused among the victims of the issue in the beginning of 2018, South Korean President demanded a proper apology from Japan again though, it was thought as they made a deal in 2015 and dropped the subject. The President said, "A knot wrongly tied should be untied."<sup>103</sup> Yoshihide Suga, Foreign Minister of Japan, rejected the demand of South Korea and stated it was not possible for Japan to accept such a demand.

More than 25 years after since the first testimony came from a former comfort woman, it seems that Japan has not managed to come to terms with its past. Even though, some improvements have been seen in time, nothing is different from the day the apology debates have begun.

### **1.3. The Case of Germany**

When the Second World War ended, Germany found itself facing with the problems left from Nazis. The defeat of Nazi Germany divided Germany into two blocks during Cold War: Federal Republic of Germany, known as West Germany and German Democratic Republic known as East Germany.

Before and during the Second World War, the Nazis implemented inhumane laws and actions upon the Jewish and Romani people such as the law enacted in 1933 which stated that there were people whose lives were not worthy of life and marriage with them was

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<sup>103</sup> New apology from Japan needed over "comfort women": S. Korea's Moon. KYODO NEWS - Jan 10, 2018. <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2018/01/2c11442fe4bc-s-korea-leader-says-japan-needs-to-apologize-to-comfort-women.html> . accessed on 23.05.2018.

prohibited.<sup>104</sup> According to the population census in January of 1933, there were 522.000 Jewish people living in Germany. During the first six years of Nazi dictatorship almost 300.000 of them emigrated and 212.000 of them were living in Germany during the Second World War.<sup>105</sup> Even before the WWII began, the segregationist laws of Nazis continued, and Jewish people were deprived of basic rights, expelled from professional life, etc. The WWII brought even more obstacles to Jewish people to continue their lives as the other Germans. They were forced to live in designated areas, the Nazis subjected them to forced labor.<sup>106</sup> Listing and commenting on all the difficulties that Jewish people went through is beyond the scope of this thesis, yet even what has been discussed so far gives us a general overview about the reasons for the apology debate in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

After the WWII, the newly founded state of Israel demanded an official act of repentance from the two Germanys in 1951. On May 8, 1945 the Nazi Germany surrendered and this date is accepted as “*Stunde Null*” (zero hour) before which they do not see themselves related at all. So, what the state of Israel was actually about a time with which Germanys did not accept their relation. As Germany was a newly founded country, its first occupation was to recover from war<sup>107</sup>, dealing with the wrongs of Nazi Germany was not the first preoccupation of Germany, so until Israel demanded an official apology no attempt came from Germany. “The war was over, the Nazis gone. Germans looked forward, not backward.”<sup>108</sup> However, as a response to Israeli’s request, first formal apology came from West Germany, East Germany did not show interest. First chancellor of Federal Germany, Konrad Adenauer was heavily interested in consolidating the sovereignty of Germany which would enable Germany to join NATO and into Western Security Network.<sup>109</sup> With all these on the agenda, Adenauer delivered the first speech of regret on September 27, 1951 in Bundestag,

The government of the Federal Republic of Germany and with it the great majority of the German people are aware of the immeasurable suffering inflicted upon the Jews in Germany and the occupied territories in the era of

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<sup>104</sup> Roy L. Brooks. *When Sorry Isn't Enough: The Controversy over Apologies and Reparations for Human Injustice*. New York University Press. 1999. p.70.

<sup>105</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. GERMAN JEWS DURING THE HOLOCAUST, 1939–1945. <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005469> accessed on 06.06.2018.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. and <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005180> accessed on 06.06.2018.

<sup>107</sup> Engert. p.115.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. p. 116.

National Socialism. The large majority of the German people abhorred the crimes and did not participate in them. ... There were many Germans, despite endangering themselves out of religious reasons, the call of conscience, and shame at the dishonor of Germany's name, who showed willingness to help their fellow Jewish citizens. In the name of the German people, unspeakable crimes were committed which create a duty of moral and material restitution... Regarding the extent of reparations, ... one has to take into account the limits set on the German ability by the bitter necessity to supply the countless victims of war to care for the refugees and expellees. The Federal Government is prepared... to bring about a solution to the material reparation problem ... [which is] the most distinguished duty of the German people.<sup>110</sup>

Adenauer did not acknowledge the political responsibility of Germany but admitted the guilts of the Nazi Germany. He insistently repeated the Germans during the WWII who did not take part in the wrongs against Jewish people and objected to the acts of Nazi Germany. According to Engert, stating that most of Germans did not take part in the crimes or objected to the Nazi Germany's wrongs is nothing but whitewashing, as most of the Germans were aware of what was being done to Germans, but tried to gloss over to it.<sup>111</sup> His saying this is a sign that Germany, in this case West Germany, did not want to be seen related to the time before *Stunde Null*. The speech also did not mention the identity of the perpetrators, but rather saw what happened to them as suffering during the Nazi Germany time. He avoided using words describing the magnitude of the sufferings, rather said used words as 'unspeakable crimes' or 'immeasurable sufferings'. Israeli's demand of repentance also included a material compensation, yet Adenauer's speech did not include that. He just said they would bring a solution to the material reparation problem, yet no detail was given and added that financial limits of Germany had to be taken into account while deciding this. Additionally, according to the criteria of Lazarre and Tavuchis, a sincere apology is supposed to include a promise that the mistakes of the past will not be repeated in the future, should have a[n] "impossible" wish about going back to the past and not having experienced the days on which apology is delivered. As a result of his speech, West Germany was accepted as an ally during Cold War Era by America and this apology speech increased the reputation of Germany in the West.

After the speech, negotiations started between West Germany and the state of Israel. As a result of these negotiations, an agreement was signed between two parties in Hague,

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<sup>110</sup> Quoted in Ibid. p.116. Deutscher Bundestag: *Stenographische Berichte, erste Wahlperiode*, September 27, 1951, 6697–8.

<sup>111</sup> Engert. p.114.

Netherlands in 1952. First, West Germany, i.e. Federal Republic of Germany, promised to provide necessary help to the newly founded state of Israel. Second, the body representing the state of Israel demanded Germany to add laws to its constitution about the compensation they would pay to the victims.<sup>112</sup> This compensation was codified in laws in 1953. The ones who would benefit from the compensation were decided through applications. Between the years 1953 and 1987, more than four million people benefited from the practice and more than 72 million German mark was paid. After the unification of two Germanys in 1990, they decided to extend West Germany's compensation provisions.<sup>113</sup>

One thing to be mentioned about the compensation paid to the victims is the popular opinion among Germans. There were two thoughts: First, that is done to repair the damage, so it was a necessary step. Second, some felt uneasy about having to pay for somethings with which they have no personal involvement. The second thought was popular especially among second and third generations who did not see or experience the brutality of Nazi Germany. In other words, they did not feel the emotional responsibility of the Genocide.<sup>114</sup>

On December 7, 1970, Warsaw witnessed a historic moment in terms of Germany's repentance. Willy Brandt, German Chancellor of the time, was in Warsaw to sign the Warsaw Treaty. His travel agenda also included a visit to the Warsaw Memorial, built in memory of Holocaust victims. Then unexpectedly, he kneeled down and remained so for a minute. This moment changed the way how Germans looked at their relations with the Nazi past. Until then they had seen themselves as the victims of Nazis, but knee fall of Brandt demonstrated that Germans were also the perpetrators.<sup>115</sup>

In time, it came out that Germany's efforts to compensate for the Holocaust was not enough. In the last decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was assumed that more than fifty thousand Holocaust survivors had gained nothing or almost nothing. Germany after the unification

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<sup>112</sup> Brooks. p.61.

<sup>113</sup> Brooks. p.61-88.

<sup>114</sup> Wolfgang Benz. Auschwitz and the Germans: The Remembrance of the Genocide. *Holocaust & Genocide Studies*. 94 (1994) p.96.

<sup>115</sup> Valentin Rauer. "Symbols in Action: Willy Brandt's Kneefall at the Warsaw Memorial." *Social performance: Symbolic action, cultural pragmatics, and ritual* (2006): 257-82. p.257.

approached to the issue unenthusiastically when compared to West Germany.<sup>116</sup> To have the problem solved, another law was implemented in 1992 promising to compensate for people who had gained less than they expected.<sup>117</sup>

It was not only Germany that tried to overcome the memory of the Holocaust, international world was also interested in it. For instance, Vatican opened its archives to the public, international forums were held, and the United States believed that they needed to resolve the issue before a new century began.<sup>118</sup> The issue started to be reconciliated in the 1990s as the Cold War which divided the Europe into two had ended.<sup>119</sup> Especially the US forced Germany to reconsider its reparation program. In 1999, the US President told German Chancellor Schröder that the relation between the countries was dependent on the commitment on human dignity and together they should protect the inviolability of human dignity which is the first article of German Constitution.<sup>120</sup> In the end, an 18 months negotiation process started. The victims' groups were represented by the US attorneys. Apart from the victims' groups and representatives of Germany, NGOs, business representatives, state government officials, foreign foundations and some Holocaust organizations were present during the negotiations. The parties reached an agreement in December 1999. 10 billion German marks were decided to be paid to the victims and the German President Johannes Rau delivered an apology speech.

This compensation comes too late for all of those who lost their lives back then, just as it is for all those who have died in the intervening years. It is now therefore even more important that all survivors receive, as soon as possible, the humanitarian payment agreed today. I know that for many it is not really the money that matters. What they want is for their suffering to be recognized as suffering and for the injustice done them to be named injustice.

...

I pay tribute to all those who were subjected to slave and forced labor under German rule, and, in the name of the German people, beg forgiveness. We will not forget their suffering.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Brooks. p.77.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> J.D. Bindenagel. Justice, Apology, Reconciliation, and the German Foundation: 'Remembrance, Responsibility, and the Future.'. *Taking Wrongs Seriously: Apologies and Reconciliation*. 2006. pp.286-310. p.290.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. p.293.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. p. 298.

<sup>121</sup> Pablo De Greiff. "Justice and reparations." *The Handbook of Reperations* (2006). p.427.



Additionally, he talked about the importance Holocaust education in schools and reminded the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin which would help to teach about their part to younger German population.

The speech was delivered in Knesset, house of representatives of the State of Israel. During the speech, Holocaust victims and survivors were present. It is apparent from the speech that Germany was aware of the faults of the Nazi Germany and wanted to restore peace with the victims. Rau asked for the forgiveness of the victims, acknowledged the guilt of the past, assured that compensation would be paid and promised that the sufferings would not be forgotten. All these and the place where the speech delivered make his speech a full-fledged apology. However, it is up to the victims to decide whether to accept the apology or not as one criterion of Tavuchis stated. On behalf of the victims Roman Kent, a Holocaust survivor, spoke: He asked for a continual remembrance and respect for the memory of those who lost their lives and for those who were still in pain. He added that only by that the peace could be restored.<sup>122</sup> However, there were also some legislators boycotting Rau's speech basing their boycott on the fact that his speech only reminded them of their pains and suffering but did nothing more.<sup>123</sup> So, on the side of one victim group it was a full-fledged apology, whereas for one group it was not.

The parties signed an agreement in 2001 and the promised money was paid to the victims. As Germany was aware of the mistakes of the past, the apology did not cause many problems among German society. The first apology came in 1951 and in order to dress the wounds, the government made some strides. Following the first apology, most of the debates revolved around the compensation paid or not paid to the victims. The last apology speech by the President Rau in 2000 is a sign for this. As the compensation paid until then was seen insufficient, there appeared a need for renegotiation and the need for the review of the compensation brought out a new apology speech. "Both financial assistance and apology were essential in the German effort. One without the other would have been insufficient."<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Bindenagel. p.302.

<sup>123</sup> German President Asks Forgiveness For Holocaust. February 17, 2000. REBECCA TROUNSON *Los Angeles Times*. [http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/2000-02-17/news/0002161140\\_1\\_german-president-rau-s-speech-far-right-leader](http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/2000-02-17/news/0002161140_1_german-president-rau-s-speech-far-right-leader) accessed on 19.06.2018

<sup>124</sup> Bindenagel. p.306.

Unlike the apology examples from Australia and Japan, Germany was aware of its guilt since the first day and unlike the leaders and state officials of the other countries German officials did not give denying statements. The debate in the German case was about the amount of the compensation or about the proper payment of the compensation.

This chapter provided us with three different apology examples from the world. The first one ended with an apology after five decades of debate between the parties. The second one has always had ups and downs according to the mindset of the administrators of the time and still has not reached a conclusion. Compared with the first two, the third apology example can be accepted as a full-fledged apology as it included both a proper apology and monetary compensation. The apology cases examined also provided what kind of problems, ups and downs a country may experience in the course of apology debates and what are the stages that lead to an official apology. These examinations will help when Turkey's apology cases are discussed.

## CHAPTER 2: POLITICAL APOLOGIES AND NON-EXISTENCE OF POLITICAL APOLOGIES IN TURKEY

### 2.1. Transition to Democracy and the Nation State

When the WWI started, it was obvious that the Ottoman Empire would not be able to recover from it. The Young Turks who were trying to maintain the unity of the Ottoman Empire holding the power at that time tried to form a homogenous land in terms of nationality and religion.<sup>125</sup> According to a group of people, the ‘relocation’ of the Armenians during the war witnessed some violations of human rights. Today, it is still a highly debated issue in the world as well as it is among Armenians and Turks. People who believe that Armenians suffered during that period request that the Republic of Turkey should take the responsibility or at least admit that there was a suffering. Armenians call themselves as the offended and the offender is Turkey as they inherited all the debts of the Ottoman Empire.

Another important event which can be considered under the title of violation of human rights and was made important in terms of political apology thanks to the recent debates is the 1937-38 ‘Dersim Massacre’ or ‘Dersim Rebellion’ in the Tunceli Province of today’s Republic of Turkey in the Middle Eastern Anatolia. As it is in the case of Armenian issue there are different narratives about what happened in 1937 in Dersim. One is the official narrative of the state which says there was a rebellion against the newly founded nation state and the armed forces had to suppress that rebellion. A journalist named Ahmed Emin Yalman at that time wrote an article in a newspaper and the name

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<sup>125</sup> Diving into the details of this is beyond the scope of this paper. For more information on the subject: Taner Akçam. *The Young Turks’ Crime Against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and the Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire*. 2012, Ronald Grigor Suny. "They Can Live in the Desert But Nowhere Else": *A History of the Armenian Genocide*. Princeton University Press, 2015. and Uğur Ümit Üngör. *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913-1950*. 2011.

of the article was *Yüz Senelik Dersim İşi Şifa Yolunda*.<sup>126</sup> Apart from this the General Staff<sup>127</sup> has a book named *Revolts in the Republic of Turkey (1924-1938)* in which the operations in the Dersim area are referred as revolts which had to be suppressed.<sup>128</sup> The other narrative is by some scholars and their claim is that there was an ethnic cleansing in the area at that time due to the religion and ethnicity of the people living there.<sup>129</sup> The methods told in the book published by the General Staff make one think that there was a visible violation of human rights during this ‘rebellion’ or ‘massacre’. Therefore, it needs to be compensated. Though the need for compensation is not a highly debated issue among the people of Dersimi origin as the Armenian issue is, in the past ten years the speeches by the state actors have caused to the reopening of the issue.

In this chapter, the aim is to discuss and examine the reasons why we cannot see full-fledged political apologies on the part of the Turkish state. Following that even if we do see apologies from the state officials, can we consider them as official political apologies?

## 2.2. Apology or non-apology

### 2.2.1. Armenian Issue

“Despite frequent requests that it acknowledge and apologize for the Armenian genocide of 1915, the Turkish government denies that the episode ever occurred.” say Wohl, Branscombe and Klar in their article.<sup>130</sup> In fact this is the attitude that the Republic of Turkey has since taken its foundation<sup>131</sup>. In January 2017, a parliamentary deputy from pro-Kurdish the PDP (People’s Democratic Party) in his speech said, “We lost four folks during the chaos period between 1913 and 1923: Armenians, Jews, Assyrians and Rums.

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<sup>126</sup> *A Hundred Year Dersim Problem is on the way to Healing*. 1937.

<sup>127</sup> Highest military institution in Turkey.

<sup>128</sup> *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nde Ayaklanmalar (1924-1938)*. Genelkurmay Harp Tarihi Başkanlığı. 1972.

<sup>129</sup> For more information: İsmail Beşikçi. *Tunceli Kanunu ve Dersim Jenosidi*, Belge Yayınları. 1990., Martin van Bruneissen. *Genocide in Kurdistan? Suppression of Dersim Rebellion in Turkey (1937-1938)*. 1988 and Hans-Lukas Kieser. *Alevis, Armenians and Kurds in the Unionist/Kemalist Turkey (1908-1938)*. 2003

<sup>130</sup> M. J. A Wohl, Branscombe, N. R., & Klar, Y. “Collective guilt: Emotional reactions when one’s group has done wrong or been wronged”. *European Review of Social Psychology*. 2006.

<sup>131</sup> Roger W. Smith, Eric Markusen, Robert Jay Lifton “Professional Ethics and the Denial of Armenian Genocide” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Volume 9, Issue 1, 1 March 1995, pp. 1–22.

People were relocated. We were 40% once and now we are one per thousand. I call it genocide, you can call it whatever you want.”<sup>132</sup> The deputy, Garo Paylan, is of Armenian origin. After his speech, the response of the other deputies in the session was booing. The Deputy Speaker of the Assembly, Ahmet Aydın, warned Paylan to be careful about what he says. Aydın said, “Mr. Paylan, please watch out your words. There could have been reciprocal pains, but you cannot insult the Turkish nation by using the word genocide.”<sup>133</sup>

This anecdote was shared here in order to understand the general attitude of Turkish people as we may think of the General Assembly as a representation of the population as they are chosen by the votes of the population. Mentioning that there was a ‘genocide’ is seen as insulting Turkish nation. This being the case, it is not possible to expect an official apology from the state.

On the other hand, there have been some attempts by the intellectuals in order for the society to face the events of 1915. Even though we do not know the real motive behind his statement, in February 2005 in an interview with Swiss *das Magazin* magazine, the famous Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk said, “Thirty thousand Kurds and a million Armenians were murdered. Hardly anyone dares to mention it, so I do. And that’s why I’m hated.”<sup>134</sup> His statement is not an apology, it just admits the offense but does not attempt for a repair. Pamuk’s statements faced with great criticism and he was sued under the article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code.

Here the article 301 requires a parenthesis in order to understand the Republic of Turkey’s approach towards Turkishness and nationalism. It was introduced in 2005, later amended in 2008 and it states,

“1. A person who publicly degrades Turkish Nation, State of the Turkish Republic, Turkish Grand National Assembly, the Government of the Republic of Turkey and the judicial bodies of the State shall be sentenced a penalty of imprisonment for a term of six months to two years.

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<sup>132</sup> <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem26/yil2/ham/b05801h.htm> accessed November 2017.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/16/world/europe/popular-turkish-novelist-on-trial-for-speaking-of-armenian.html> accessed on 15.11.2017.

2. A person who publicly degrades the military or security organisations shall be sentenced according to the provision set out in paragraph one.

3. The expression of an opinion for the purpose of criticism does not constitute an offence.

4. The conduct of an investigation into such an offence shall be subject to the permission of the Minister of Justice.”<sup>135</sup>

Pamuk’s prosecution under this law demonstrates the intolerance of state against the freedom of speech when it comes to patriotism. Even though its third sub-article denotes that expression of an opinion for the purpose of criticism does not constitute an offence, Pamuk’s statement caused an offence. The charges against Pamuk were dropped later on, yet this article can be seen as a menace against people’s freedom of thought and speech. “The Turkish state wields not only constitutional or legal, court-based authority over its population, but also cultural dominance and the ability to use fear as a silencing tool.”<sup>136</sup> states Gellman in the article. To further her words, it is possible to say that as long as there is an article in the Penal Code which ‘uses fear as a juridical tool’, it is not possible to expect a fully expression of thoughts from people. In our case this leads us not to expect a full-fledged confrontation with the past as there is a chance to be labelled as traitor. Not having enough chance to deliver your thoughts about what happened a thousand years ago does not allow a free discussion about delivering an apology.

Following Pamuk’s statement, there was a conference held at Bilgi University in 2005. The title of the conference was “Ottoman Armenians during the Decline of the Empire”. The title itself does not suggest anything negative or positive about the situation of Armenians at that time; it can be considered as a neutral title. Yet, still it met a great deal of criticism and it was charged highly. “The conference participants were bussed in with a police escort, past a crowd of nationalist demonstrators throwing eggs and rotten tomatoes.”<sup>137</sup> The instant response of the Ministry of Justice to the idea of the conference was telling that the participants are ‘traitors’ and ‘they were stabbing the nation of Turkey in the back’.<sup>138</sup> This reaction is similar to what Ahmet Aydın said to Garo Paylan in the

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<sup>135</sup> Article 301 (Amended on 30/4/2008 – By Article 1 of the Law no. 5759)

<sup>136</sup> Mneesha Gellman. *Remembering violence: the role of apology and dialogue in Turkey's democratization process*. p.772. 2013.

<sup>137</sup> Thomas, de Waal. *Great Catastrophe Armenians and Turks in the Shadow of Genocide*. p. 178. 2015

<sup>138</sup> <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/cicek-arkadan-hancerlediler-38732076>.

parliament. Despite its neutral title, the reason why the conference met such criticism is the viewpoint of Turkish nation towards the Armenian issue and generally towards almost everything which does not praise Turkishness. The reaction that participants met is not much different from what Pamuk experienced after his statement. Barkan in his book says, "... the public looks at wars through lenses that see only heroes and villains, winners and criminals."<sup>139</sup> The statement by Barkan is valid for Turkey. As the general tendency among the society is to accept the Young Turks as the 'founding fathers'<sup>140</sup> of the Republic of Turkey, the society cannot fit it into their minds to think about Young Turks as 'fathers' who have participated in harmful acts. Thus, the Young Turks are the heroes and the Armenians are the villains of this story. We tend to ignore the fact that history is not an objective phenomenon, even though it is, and it should be open to subjectivity.

About studying the 'Armenian Genocide' in Turkey Akçam in 2013 stated,

As currently constructed, our existence as the Turkish nation, as well as the Turkish national identity, necessitate the non-existence of the Armenians, their conceptual annihilation, so to speak. The other's non-existence cannot be removed without bringing the parameters of our own existence into question. To put it in another way, for the Armenian to again be able to "exist", for us to actually face our history and accept the reality of Armenian Genocide -means to wrestle with our very identity as Turks.<sup>141</sup>

Akçam in this comment touches upon a very fundamental aspect of Turkish nationalism which is very prevalent among all layers of the society as stated so far. Akçam is the first Turkish scholar who called the deportation in 1915 as a 'genocide', yet he did not get much support from the colleagues due to the fear that they will all be called as 'traitors'. So, the conference in Bilgi University in the September of 2005 was a breakthrough in terms of academia. As he also stated, talking about the 'genocide' harms the patriotic feelings of the society. Similar to Pamuk and the participants of the conference, Akçam was also criticized and received death threats. "A lonely and combative figure, Akçam became a lightning rod for Turkish nationalist anger in 1990s." says de Wall about him.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> *The Guilt of Nations*. p. xxxi.

<sup>140</sup> Emre Erol. *POLS 504*. 28.04.2017. Lecture presented at Sabancı University

<sup>141</sup> Taner Akçam. *Dealing with the Armenian Genocide in Turkey: Being Pressured Between Tacit Agreement of Silencing and Exterminatory Hatred*. Presented at Hrant Dink Memorial Workshop. 2013.

<sup>142</sup> de Waal. p.182

Despite the many criticisms, the conference was held. Historian Halil Berktaş, one of the participants of the conference, said, “A dam broke.”<sup>143</sup> More than 200 academics took part in the conference and this was the first time that a group of people came together and discussed the issue historically without the biased opinions of national historiography. Berktaş stated that he was very disturbed by the mainstream narrative about the Armenian issue and there was deep viscous hypocrisy that seemed to be sticking on you like a napalm.<sup>144</sup> The conference was also important in the sense that Fikret Adanır, a scholar from Ruhr University, stated that they started to use the word ‘Armenian Genocide’ in their academic writings.<sup>145</sup>

After the conference, in the following years the scholars who came together in İstanbul held a series of workshops named Workshop for Armenian/Turkish scholarship. An Armenian-American scholar Gerard Libaridian stated that “The whole idea is to move away from argumentativeness (use or non-use of the term “genocide”) to make possible research and discussion of the history.”<sup>146</sup>

The conference gave the means for many people other than scholars to disclose their opinions about the issue. A journalist, Bekir Coşkun, who is known for being secular and nationalist wrote that,

Never mind what may have been done to the Armenians, or why people are fighting about it now, but I would like to know what power separated my grandmother when she was just a young girl from her nest, her home and hearth. I would like to know who was responsible for the pain she tried to hide from us, and for the life-long exile she had to lead. I do not know about the one million Armenians, just this one, the sad woman whom I loved so much.<sup>147</sup>

His wording is important in several senses: First, he is a Kemalist, secularist person. His columns in the newspapers are generally about defending secularism in Turkey.<sup>148</sup> Secondly, the courage he got from the conference forced him to question his and his grandmother’s past which is said to have been silent for several years. These steps show

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<sup>143</sup> de Waal. p.179.

<sup>144</sup> Quoted in de Waal. p. 183

<sup>145</sup> Suny, Göçek and Naimark. *A Question of Genocide*, 7-8.

<sup>146</sup> Gerard Libaridian. “A Report on the Workshop for Armenian/Turkish Scholarship” unpublished manuscript. 2006.

<sup>147</sup> Quoted in de Waal. p.180. and <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/bekir-coskun-my-armenian-matter-38770295>

<sup>148</sup> [http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/koseyazari/16/Bekir\\_Coskun.html](http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/koseyazari/16/Bekir_Coskun.html) <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/bekir-coskun/> and <http://www.sozcu.com.tr/kategori/bekir-coskun/>



that a resolution began even among the people who call themselves ‘Turkish and bound to the roots planted by Kemalism’.

However, even though Coşkun’s grandmother’s history about being an orphan of an Armenian origin did not cause reaction in the society and was acceptable; when Hrant Dink, an Armenian origin, Turkish journalist and intellectual, claimed that Sabiha Gökçen, who is the adopted child of Mustafa Kemal, was also an Armenian orphan separated from her house during the deportation of Armenians in 1915<sup>149</sup>, a lawsuit followed his statement. Dink was prosecuted under the Article of 301 of the Penal Code, as was Pamuk. He was accused of denigrating one of the most important women of the Turkish national history and the daughter of the Republic’s founder.

Coşkun wrote the article in 2005 and Dink’s claim was in 2004. There is not a significant time difference between two statements which are both about Armenian children who left orphan during the deportation. Coşkun’s claim was about a personal issue and thus did not cause many reactions as deep inside many people accept that there have been pains whether one-sided or reciprocally. On the other hand, as Dink’s claim was about a woman who is considered as a national value as opposed to Coşkun’s grandmother. Ülkü Adatepe, another adopted daughter of Atatürk, refuted Hrant’s words and said, “The defamation of such a respectable person who carries Atatürk’s name with honour makes me upset. The main purpose behind this is to defame Atatürk.”<sup>150</sup> If someone has Armenian roots, why should it be something to be ashamed of? Here, Akçam’s statement about the relationship between Turkish people and Armenians matters again. He said that Turkish nationalism accepts the non-existence of Armenians.<sup>151</sup> Yet, still the question why Coşkun’s grandmother being Armenian does not count as offence, but Gökçen’s does need a clear response. This shows the importance of nationalist values for Turkish society and the state. If one is to talk about a person who is significant collectively, there the state and society stop being sorry for the ‘victim’ and national values matter more even though we can think of both women as the ‘victim’ of the same issue.

Hrant Dink was the editor and founder of a newspaper called *Agos* which is published in three languages: Armenian, English and Turkish. He defined himself as a Turkish person

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<sup>149</sup> Hrant, Dink. Sabiha-Hatun’un Sırrı. *Agos*. February 6, 2004. accessed on 16.11.17

<sup>150</sup> Fatma Ülgen. Sabiha Gökçen’s 80-yer-old Secret. p.119. 2010.

<sup>151</sup> Akçam. 2013.

who has Armenian roots. His comments about the adopted daughter of Atatürk raised great anger among the nationalist society. He said what Turkey needed was to achieve a full-fledged democracy nothing else.

The problem Turkey faces today is neither a problem of “denial” or “acknowledgment”. Turkey’s main problem is “comprehension”. And for the process of comprehension, Turkey seriously needs an alternative study of history and for this, a democratic environment. It is unfair, either through political pressure or laws, to impose denial or acknowledgement upon the individuals of a society who are in the middle of a process of comprehension. Such a method would be the greatest blow inflicted on the process of comprehension. After all, denial or acknowledgement without comprehension benefits no one... In the process we are going through, it is impossible to say that, those who expect Turkey to accept historical reality or impose denial on it are reading the current reality of Turkish society well. After all, it is not that the society knows or denies the truth; the society is defending the truth it knows.<sup>152</sup>

His claim is that there is historical ‘reality’ even though he does not use the word ‘genocide’. He also insists on people’s comprehension of the event without having a biased opinion about the issue. What he requests is not different from the requests of the scholars who came together for the Workshop for Armenian/Turkish Scholarship: comprehending the event and then accepting or denying it. Similar to other people who have talked about the Armenian issue outside the borders of Turkish historiography, Dink also had received many death threats since his article about Sabiha Gökçen. On January 19, 2007, by a Turkish teenager from the Black Sea Region, which is known for being nationalist, Dink was shot in the head when he left *Agos* and he died there instantly. His funeral turned into a big event in İstanbul. Almost 200.000 people joined his funeral. People were holding placards and banners saying, “We are all Armenians” or “We are all Hrant Dink” in Armenian, Turkish and Kurdish.

Without doubt he died in a tragic way, yet his death and funeral opened new ways for changes in the Turkish history. After his death, one of his close friends announced that with Dink they had discussed about a public apology which would be open to everyone in Turkey. He said that Dink had opened the period and destroyed the taboo about the issue and now it was their time to continue.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> “To Unlock and Transcend History” *Agos*. May 27, 2005. Translated by Hrant Dink Foundation.

<https://hrantdink.org/en/hrant-dink/hrant-dink-articles/739-to-unlock-and-transcend-history>

<sup>153</sup> de Waal. 193.

As a result of this first Dr Cengiz Aktar and some intellectuals, journalist Ali Bayramođlu, Prof Ahmet İnsel and politician Baskın Oran, initiated an “I Apologize Campaign” in December 2008. It was announced on the website named, [www.ozurdiliyoruz.com](http://www.ozurdiliyoruz.com) which is no longer in use. In fourteen languages it was said:

My conscience does not accept the insensitivity showed to and the denial of the Great Catastrophe that the Ottoman Armenians were subjected to in 1915. I reject this injustice and for my share, I empathize with the feelings and pain of my Armenian brothers. I apologize to them.<sup>154</sup>

When they opened the website, 275 people signed it, the website was shut down in 2014 and until that time 32.000 signatories’ name were there.

### **2.2.2. Responses to the Apology Campaign**

The campaign was ignored in the main Turkish press at first. After the reactions from the state officials, the campaign found itself a place in the mainstream media.

The first official reaction to this non-official apology was from the Prime Ministry saying that there was not a need to apologize and their act was irrational. Then Prime Minister Erdoğan said, “The ones who have committed an offence are expected to apologize. We do not have that kind of a problem. I do not accept it. I do not support it. If they (the initiators of the campaign) accept that they participated in the crime of genocide, then they can apologize. We do not.”<sup>155</sup>

Then President of the Republic Abdullah Gül’s reaction was not as harsh as Erdoğan’s, and this was also criticized. He said that the apology could be considered within the framework of freedom of speech.<sup>156</sup> Republican People’s Party (RPP) condemned the campaign. A deputy of RPP, Canan Arıtman, blamed President Gül for not reacting enough and she said it was because of his Armenian origins.<sup>157</sup> Here again we see using the word Armenian as a domiciled attitude to ‘insult’ someone. Gül took her words to the

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid. p.194.

<sup>155</sup> <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/erdogan-ozur-dileme-kampanyasi-mantiksiz.LjS9OKmz5UGMo7MNypow2Q> accessed On 17.11.2017.

<sup>156</sup> Ayda, Erbal. “Revisiting the Apology of Turkish Intellectuals.” 2012. p.66

<sup>157</sup> <http://bianet.org/biamag/siyaset/111501-chp-ayrimciliga-karsi-tuzugunu-aritman-icin-uygulamiyor>

court and a non-pecuniary damage sue was opened which resulted in Aritman's being sentenced to paying 1 YTL compensation to Gül.

From the other political parties in the Parliament, Nationalist Action Party, an ultra-nationalist party, also condemned the campaign by using similar words with the RPP. Democratic Society Party, now People's Democratic Party, was the only political party supporting the campaign. One of its deputies, Sırrı Sakık, said that it was a confrontation with the past and it was a must.<sup>158</sup>

Another important reaction came from sixty retired diplomats of Turkey. They launched a counter website and named it [www.ozurdilemiyorum.net/](http://www.ozurdilemiyorum.net/).<sup>159</sup> They called the campaign as a betrayal and also said this might lead to Turkey pay reparations and participating in that kind of an act is being 'traitor'.<sup>160</sup>

Some leading industrial unions such as KAMU-SEN (Confederation of Civil Servants Trade Union of Turkey) and MEMUR-SEN (Confederation of Public Servants Trade Unions) also opposed to the campaign and they said that Turkey was the one expecting an apology from Armenia about the acts of terrorist ASALA (Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia).

İsmail Beşikçi, a Turkish sociologist, was also among the critics of the campaign. His criticism was about the wordings they chose to reflect what happened in 1915. He said,

“The term Great Catastrophe is not enough to define what happened to the Armenians in 1915. It degrades what happened to those people. ... The only concept that fits to what happened to those people is 'genocide'. There were systematic and planned acts against Armenians. When we say genocide, we should not only understand people brought together and put into a room and burned or poisoned. There are a lot of ways to debunk an ethnic group. When you relocate a group in the middle of the winter and force some of them to leave their families, it is nothing but a genocide.”<sup>161</sup>

The ground-breaking scholar of Armenian studies in Turkey, Taner Akçam, also expressed his opinions in an article. He said that apology of the today's individuals was a good act, yet it was the state who is expected to apologize and accept the reality as they

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<sup>158</sup> Erbal. p. 67

<sup>159</sup> I do not apologize.

<sup>160</sup> de Waal.194

<sup>161</sup> <http://www.nasname.com/a/ismail-besikci-buyuk-felaket-mi--soykirim-mi> accessed on 17.11.2017.

are the continuation of the state which committed the offense.<sup>162</sup> That is the reason why he refused to sign the campaign.

Other than these criticisms, there are two more important things to be mentioned in terms of the language they use. First, they chose to use the word Great Catastrophe which is what the Armenians use in order to refer to the events in April 1915. *Medz Yeghern* is great crime or great catastrophe in Armenian and is the one which they prefer to use. Second, they do not apologize for the ‘genocide’ or ‘catastrophe’ itself, but they apologize for denial of the events happened in 1915. However, when we look at the most negative reactions they got, it seems that public perceived it as an apology for the ‘genocide’. The signatories did not attempt to fix this perception.

Supporting her argument with Lazare’s criteria for a real apology, Erbal states that it is not possible to perceive the campaign text as a real apology. “offering a vague and incomplete acknowledgment; using the passive voice; [...] minimizing the offense; using the empathic ‘I’m sorry’; [...] apologizing for the wrong offense”.<sup>163</sup> Lazare says, “These statements are not apologies, since they do not contain acknowledgments of grievances, acceptance of responsibility for causing them, and expressions of personal remorse.”<sup>164</sup> When examined according to the criteria of Tavuchis, this speech does not state who is the offender and offended, so it lacks the basic criterion.<sup>165</sup>

Additionally, the addressee of the text is unknown, in other words the responsible(s) for the blame of denial is/are unknown. Adding up on the Beşikçi’s comments, saying that it was a ‘catastrophe’, can lead to the degradation of the issue. If they had called the issue as ‘genocide’, they would have drawn reaction much more than they did. In addition, if they had named it as ‘genocide’, it was possible for them to experience legal problems such as being sued under the Penal Code 301. Other than this, as mentioned the term ‘Great Catastrophe’ is a direct translation of the term used by Armenians. This terming could have been meaningful to the audience in Armenia, yet it is something new for the public in Turkey together with the idea of apologizing from Armenians. This leads to double estrangement of the society from the issue.

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<sup>162</sup> <http://hyetert.blogspot.com.tr/2008/12/tartisalim-ama-bilgiyle-prof-dr-taner.html> accessed on 17.11.2017.

<sup>163</sup> Erbal. p.86.

<sup>164</sup> Lazare. p.22.

<sup>165</sup> Tavuchis. p.109.

If a person, who has not been interested in the subject and is not aware of the issue, reads the text, for him/her it is not possible to identify who is apologizing for what and who is to blame for the crime. In that aspect, it is a vague claim and it has lack of agency and lack of offense.<sup>166</sup> There is no specification of the agency not only for the past for who is responsible for the ‘catastrophe’, but also for the present as who is responsible for the denial. Finally, the most important of them all is the fact that the authors’ having apologized for the denial of the genocide. However, they should have explained what kind of a denial they were talking about. As seen throughout the chapter, what is common among the Turkish society is denying that they participated in the act of genocide deliberately and there was a single-sided pain. As the examples from the official assembly reports demonstrate, general tendency is towards accepting there was a reciprocal pain for which it is not possible to blame only Turkish side. This led the apology text to be incomplete in its acknowledgement.

An interesting comment came from the signatories later on. To the newspaper *Milliyet*, Baskın Oran said,

“The Prime Minister should be praying for our campaign. Parliaments around the world were passing automatically resolutions. These are going to stop now. The diaspora has softened. The international media has started to no longer use the word genocide”

The apology campaign which started as a reaction against the general approach toward the Armenian people in Turkey casts doubt on the intention of the campaign organizers.

Human-rights activist Ayşe Günaysu said,

We now hear some of the initiators of the campaign trying to use the apology as a means to fight the use of the word genocide and hamper the work of those who seek the recognition of the Armenian Genocide. They portray those seeking recognition as the twin sisters and brothers of the Turkish fascists, and they present the ‘diaspora’ as the enemy of any reconciliation [...]. [By] their discourse, they contribute to the demonization of those who do use the word genocide.<sup>167</sup>

As she said, demonization of people who use the word genocide does not help to the reconciliation of the issue. However, at first, initiation of such a campaign was first thought as a step towards reconciliation. This is a clear discrepancy of the signatories. Erbal thinks that it is the Jacobinist nature of the campaign which led to these

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<sup>166</sup> Erbal. p.89.

<sup>167</sup> Quoted in Erbal. p.91

discrepancies and vagueness.<sup>168</sup> It is true that the “I Apologize” campaign was not an inclusive campaign. The public and even 30.000 Turkish people who signed were not present in during the preparations and they were not given the chance to express their own feeling about the denial. Maybe, what the signatory Turkish people wanted was to apologize for the ‘genocide’ or the ‘catastrophe’ itself but they could not find a chance to express these opinions. Gellman in the article states that in Turkish politics, elite-led solidarity networks play a formative role.<sup>169</sup> In this case the elites lead the apology process in a Jacobinist way.

The apology campaign could have been a breakthrough step in Turkish history and towards the reconciliation of the issues between Turkish people and Armenians. Yet, as stated above in some ways it failed to fulfil this, though it set out after the tragic death of Hrant Dink whose aim was to have a country which is in peace with its past and have a society which is away from being partisan and approaches the past in a reasonable way. It would be inequity to say that the campaign was ineffective. For example, even though it was not on the mass-media immediately, later on it helped many people to think about the 1915 issues again, yet it remained incapable of being a solid step towards reconciliation.

On the anniversaries of the day Armenians were forced to leave the Ottoman lands, 24<sup>th</sup> April, there appears expectations from the Armenian Community within and outside Turkey. For the first time on 23<sup>th</sup> April 2014, one day before the commemoration, then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan published commemoration message on the official website of the Prime Ministry.

We wish that the people with similar traditions and customs of the ancient and unique geography will be able to speak of their past with maturity. We hope and believe that they will show their losses worthy methods and belief and the Armenians who lost their lives in the conditions of the 20th century will rest in peace.<sup>170</sup>

His message does not contain any implications that may lead one to think that there was an action which can be considered as genocide or single-sided pain. It also falls short from being constituted as an apology. He does not acknowledge any responsibility, does

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<sup>168</sup> Erbal. p. 92.

<sup>169</sup> Mneesha, Gellman. “Remembering violence: the role of apology and dialogue in Turkey's democratization process.”, *Democratization* p. 773. 2013.

<sup>170</sup> <https://www.cnntrk.com/haber/turkiye/basbakan-erdogandan-24-nisan-aciklamasi> accessed on 15.112017

not give any detail about what happened in 195 and does not expect a response from the offended party. Still, after almost a hundred years this was a breakthrough in Turkish politics, even though it cannot be considered as an official apology by the state. In the following years, the same wishes were repeated by using the similar phrases which imply that the pain was due to the war conditions and it was not at all related to people's ethnicity or religion.<sup>171</sup> On behalf of the state, Mr. Erdoğan sent his condolences to the Armenian Patriarchate in Turkey. Other than Erdoğan's commemoration speeches for the deceased ones, there has not been any attempts by the state.

Erdoğan's commemorating speech on Armenian deportation for the first time came five years after the 'I Apologize' campaign. There is no evidence whether the campaign had been effective in his thoughts or not, yet it is worth noting that the fixed perceptions of societies may change in time with the effect of public movements.

### **2.2.3. Dersim Apology by the Prime Minister**

The Dersim Massacre of 1937-39 was a long time silenced issue in the Turkish Republic. Even though Sabiha Gökçen's name, who was a war pilot during the massacre, was given to the one of the airports in Istanbul; in a neither positive nor negative way, no official speech was recorded about the issue. However, in 2009 the Republican People's Party deputy and ex ambassador Onur Öymen brought up the issue during the negotiations about the democratic Kurdish opening.

They say, "Don't let mothers cry!". Did not mothers cry in the War of Independence? Did not mothers cry during the Şeyh Said Rebellion? Did not mothers cry in the Dersim Rebellion? Did a single person come and say "Let's stop this fight in order not to make mothers cry? You are the first to say this, because you do not have enough courage to fight the terrorists. You do not show the courage that all governments before you have shown."<sup>172</sup>

His speech met many protests not only from outside but also within the Republican People's Party and especially by the Dersimi and Alevi community. First thing to mention is that there were some deputies from the area of Dersim in the RPP. What he said can be thought as a disrespect towards their predecessors. Other than that, it is an unmerciful

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<sup>171</sup> <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/cumhurbaskani-erdoganin-24-nisan-mesaji-28825872>, accessed on 15.11.2017.

<sup>172</sup> <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem23/yil4/bas/b015m.htm>.



comment for the suffering of people as Dersim Massacre is the peak point of the state violence against the Alevi-Kurdish minorities of the country.

The president of the Federation of Tunceli Associations (TUDEF) replied his comments saying, “The Dersimi people should immediately quit from the RPP.” and he added that “it has been an ongoing understanding for these old foggy politicians to implement what they want with blood and repression.”<sup>173</sup> Hüseyin Aygün, then human rights advocate and lawyer, said, “1938 is a shame page for Turkey. It is embarrassing for a deputy chairman of a social democratic party to support and defend the history, which stands for physical extermination. There is a lot of reaction against this sentence in Tunceli.”<sup>174</sup> A protest was carried out in İstanbul against Öymen’s comments. Soon to be the leader of RPP, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu who is also of Dersim origin, was one of the people who asked for Öymen’s resignation. Kılıçdaroğlu said, “A wound bleed due to him. The best thing for him to do is to take the criticisms and suggestions into consideration. This would be for the best for RPP and the deputies of RPP.”<sup>175</sup>

After all of these criticisms, Onur Öymen published an apology in which he says,

If our people were hurt and offended by what I said, and remembered the past after all these distortion, I am the one who feels sorry the most. Even though I am not the one who caused their unhappiness, if it is due to the people who twisted my words, I really apologize to them<sup>176</sup>.

It is not possible to accept his apology as a real and genuine apology as his speech in the parliament is a direct justification of the pain experienced in 1937-38 in Dersim. Lazare states that the dual meaning of apologies in today’s world sometimes lead us to have perfunctory apologies which is to say they do not carry any genuine intentions and they are carried out for the sake of formality.<sup>177</sup>

The long-time silenced issue of Dersim became a popular topic in Turkish politics after the election of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu as the chairman of the RPP following the resignation

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<sup>173</sup> <https://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/bu-soz-chp-yi-dersim-de-bitirdi-49369.html> accessed on 29.11.2017.

<sup>174</sup> <https://m.bianet.org/biamag/toplum/118184-oymen-in-dersim-deki-katliami-desteklemesi-utanc-verici> accessed on 29.11.2017.

<sup>175</sup> <http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/kilicdaroglu-oymen-geregini-yapmali-964636/> accessed on 29.11.2017.

<sup>176</sup> <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/oymen-ozur-diledi.L0DkPvIGUEWiYjasnmDQ1A> accessed on 29.11.2017.

<sup>177</sup> Lazare. p.23.

of Deniz Baykal from being the chairman. In a party rally in Sakarya in 2010, Erdoğan brought the issue up again.

You know what they say about Dersim, right? Who bombed the Dersim villages saying that they do not pay the taxes after the order of the then President of the Republic. Who was the President? İsmet İnönü... I mean he was the head of RPP. So, RPP is the one which bombed Dersim. It is said that 20 thousand, 30 thousand, 40 thousand, 50 thousand people were terminated with prejudice. Have a heart! This is your past. You should clean up this first<sup>178</sup>.

Kılıçdaroğlu's response to Erdoğan was saying that he was not born at that time so that he could not be held responsible.<sup>179</sup> Heads of two Dersim Federations in Europe, Yaşar Kaya and Özkan Tacar, published a call after the dispute of two leaders during their rallies for referendum. "Show that you understand the pain of Dersimis not only with words, but also with practical steps. Please hear the cry of Dersimis and do not manipulate it for your politics."<sup>180</sup>

Discussions over the Dersim Massacre did not come to an end. In an interview with the *Zaman* Newspaper, it was stated that Deputy of RPP Hüseyin Aygün also commented on the issue and he said, "The RPP and the state were the ones to blame for the Dersim Massacre." Later, he said that his words were manipulated and what he meant was saying that many people in Turkey at that time supported the massacre.<sup>181</sup>

On 21 November 2011, Justice and Development Part Adıyaman deputy Mehmet Metiner suggested a committee to be founded in order to investigate what happened in Dersim 1937-38. Another suggestion of him was to change the name of the Sabiha Gökçen Airport as the adopted daughter of Atatürk was the female war pilot of the time and was very active during the bombardment of Dersim in 1937-37. She mentions her role in her memoirs.<sup>182</sup> Another suggestion of him was to change the name of the present day Tunceli

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<sup>178</sup> <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/erdogan-dersimi-inonu-bombaladi,j6haJmPbtUyjAEaGMwEA3A> accessed on 29.11.2017.

<sup>179</sup> <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/ben-daha-dogmamistim-15561983> accessed on 29.11.2017.

<sup>180</sup> <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dersim-in-cigli-i-15569920>. accessed on 29.11.2017

<sup>181</sup> <http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/dersim-soylesisinden-medya-kavgasina-1071005/> accessed on 29.11.2017

<sup>182</sup> Sabiha, Gökçen and Oktay Verel. *Atatürk'le bir ömür*. 1994.

Province to Dersim. He added that if the RPP complies with these suggestions, then the state of Turkey can face his past and we can think of an apology process following it.<sup>183</sup>

There was no response from the RPP to the suggestions of Metiner. Yet, the government officials continued their comments about the Dersim Massacre. During a caucus of JDP on 22 November 2011, the head of the party Erdoğan said:

The RPP should face not only the past of these lands, but also the past of itself. The first thing it should face is Dersim and then comes the other pressure it has made towards the people, faith and the values of this society. It should question its own history. It is an unmissable opportunity for it to have a deputy who has written a book about Dersim and brought the issue to the agenda. (*Here, he refers to Hüseyin Aygün.*) Moreover, it is a unique opportunity for it to have a chairman who is from Dersim and belongs to a Dersimi tribe. It is an unmatched opportunity for the RPP to have a chance to face the Dersim Disaster. When I mentioned this during the referendum campaigns, he felt unconfident. Why? You are from Tunceli, tell this, why are you escaping? Tell your tribe, tell your faith. He told that what I did was discriminatory. Now, he says that the Prime Minister is the one to apologize. If there is someone to apologize for Dersim, it is you. Why? Because it was due to the party of which you are head now and you represent. The bill of Dersim is what your party made those people pay. So, you are the one to apologize. There was not a single party except the RPP. Only your party was there. If you do not face your history now, you will never get a chance to this again<sup>184</sup>.

The next day Erdoğan gave another speech to his party members. He said, “What they try to do is legitimizing and cleaning from the memories of people what happened in Dersim by saying that it was a suppression of an uprising.”<sup>185</sup> He continued his speech by giving archival documentary evidences and gave details of The Bill of Tunceli in 1935<sup>186</sup>. Other than these he mentioned the military tutelage, the number of executed people, the number of exiled people and the number of dead people during the bombardment. He also referred to Onur Öymen’s speech in 2009 and criticized Kılıçdaroğlu for not having mentioned his Dersimi identity back then. He added, “But if there is a need to apologize on behalf of the state, if there is such a practise in the litterateur, I apologize. But you are the will

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<sup>183</sup> <http://t24.com.tr/haber/akpli-metiner-sabiha-gokcen-havalimaninin-adi-degistirilsin,182921> accessed on 29.11.2017.

<sup>184</sup> <http://www.akparti.org.tr/index.php?akim/haberler/basbakan-erdoganin-22-kasim-2011-tarihli-ak-parti-grup-toplantisi-konusmasi/16269> accessed on 29.11.2017.

<sup>185</sup> <http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/erdogandan-dersim-acilimi-1070401/> accessed on 29.11.2017.

<sup>186</sup> For more information on the Bill of Tunceli: Beşikçi, İsmail. *Tunceli Kanunu ve Dersim Jenosidi*, Belge Yayınları. 1990.

of this apology. Dersim is the most tragic event in our history. It is a disaster which should be questioned by courage.”<sup>187</sup>

#### **2.2.4. Responses to Erdoğan’s apology**

His speech on this day is what has been considered as the Dersim apology. His speech was welcomed with lots of applauses by the party members in the room. Whether it can be considered as an official apology or not is open to discussion. “Erdoğan’s speech in November 2011 is unprecedented in the sense that for the first time, a head of the Turkish state announced that he would apologize for the “Dersim Massacre,” which was presented in the domestic and international press as a factual apology.”<sup>188</sup> say Ayata and Hakyemez in their article. In the following days after his speech, his apology was celebrated, welcomed with enthusiasm and perceived as an official apology by the main stream media and by the society. The reason for this was the ‘apology’ being a breakthrough in Turkish politics, thus nobody read between the lines.

Official reactions to Erdoğan’s speech can be classified as those who rejected an idea of apology immediately and those who saw it as a first step and wanted to further it.

Kılıçdaroğlu’s first response to the apology was stating that Erdoğan was manipulating what happened in Dersim and was trying to take advantage of it for the sake of his politics. He said, “If you are sincere in what you are saying, do what you can do. If you want us to give an account for the past and if you do not do it, you are vile.”<sup>189</sup> What he says and what he does is contradictory in itself. On the one hand, he in a way accepts that criminal things happened in Dersim, but on the other hand he blames Erdoğan for bringing up the issue. In the same speech Kılıçdaroğlu also touched upon the issue of Armenian Genocide and said, “One day this man can also accept the accusations about the so-called Armenian

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid. <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/erdogan-dersim-icin-ozur-diledi-siyaset-1466430/>  
<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/first-official-apology-for-killings-in-dersim-7663>  
accessed on 29.11.2017.

<sup>188</sup> Bilgin, Ayata and Serra Hakyemez. “The AKP’s engagement with Turkey’s past crimes: an analysis of PM Erdoğan’s “Dersim apology”. Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht. 2013. p.8

<sup>189</sup> [https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/kilicdaroglu-dersimden-sana-ekmek-yok.Nd1r1\\_NySU6kYZ\\_vJUEksA](https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/kilicdaroglu-dersimden-sana-ekmek-yok.Nd1r1_NySU6kYZ_vJUEksA) accessed on 29.11.2017.

Genocide, then do not be surprised.”<sup>190</sup> This demonstrates the nationalist mindset of the RPP which sees the acceptance of genocide as a high treason and knows that most of the society would see the acceptance in the same way.

The head of the Nationalist Action Party, Devlet Bahçeli, objected to the comments of Erdoğan harshly and he asked Erdoğan to retract from his apology.

It is a wrist wrestling between the RPP and JDP. On the contrary to what the Prime Minister said, there was an uprising in the area not a massacre. They tried to challenge the Turkish state impertinently and the state responded to them. The ones who resorted to the Dersim Revolt were no different from today’s PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party) and KCK (Kurdistan Communities Union).<sup>191</sup>

Bahçeli’s response was not unexpected as he is the head of an ultra-nationalist party which does not accept any ethnicity divergence. Similar to Kılıçdaroğlu, he also touched upon the Armenian Genocide and asked Erdoğan whether he would also apologize for the ‘Armenian lies’. An important thing he also said is “There is nothing like a Prime Ministerial apology in the Turkish state traditions.”<sup>192</sup> Using the word ‘tradition’ is important as it shows the nationalist mindset of Turkey as a state. Turkish people are prone to see themselves as the heroes of the history. The speech of Bahçeli shows that this idea is not open to discussion.

In the following week after the apology speech, Peace and Democracy Party gave a research proposal in the parliament in order to investigate what really happened in Dersim. The proposal was rejected by the parliament mostly by the reject votes of JDP deputies. JDP deputy Mehmet Metiner, who suggested a research committee to be founded a few week ago, was among the deputies rejecting the PDP’s proposal. He said, “The parliament is not the place to talk about Dersim.”<sup>193</sup> Upon this PDP deputy Hasip Kaplan blamed the JDP for hypocrisy and said that a hasty apology was not possible to accepted as a real one, an official apology could come after a research in parliament.<sup>194</sup>

The head of the PDP, Selahattin Demirtaş, said,

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/bahceli-erdogan-ozrunu-geri-alsin-siyaset-1468881/> accessed on 30.11.2017.

<sup>192</sup> <http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/692484-bahceliden-dersimle-ilgili-tartisma-yaratacak-sozler> accessed on 30.11.2017.

<sup>193</sup> <http://m.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/134422-dersim-buraya-kadarmis> accessed on 30.11.2017.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

It is not the job of governments to apologize. If the Prime Minister is sincere in his words, he should apologize in the parliament. There is a need for a Truth Research Committee in Turkey, because the official historiography does not teach the truth to the society and today we are governed by the people who grew up under the effects of official historiography.<sup>195</sup>

He added that if the JDP wanted to face the past, there were many problems in the Turkish history. Demirtaş said, “If Erdoğan did not apologize in order to stalemate one political party, all the archives should be opened to the research committee in the parliament.”<sup>196</sup>

The headlines of the main-stream media after the apology demonstrated that they saw the apology speech of Erdoğan as the apology of Turkish state which had never been a case before. The timing of the apology is important in the sense that it was during the “Peace Process”<sup>197</sup> over the Kurdish question was continuing. This made people think that more positive actions can also be taken to solve the Kurdish problem. On 25 November 2011, Human Rights Association published a statement on their websites.

The Prime Minister’s apology about the Dersim issue is an important step for Turkish history. The RPP will inevitably admit their own guilt about the issue and see the demands of the Alevi community voting for the RPP. Yet, as we said this is just a beginning and it has to continue. The apology should be turned into an official one and a compensation should be paid to the families of the victims ... A process which will enable Turkey to face its past can only be possible with the foundation of a Truth Commission in the parliament.<sup>198</sup>

At the end of their statement, they made a legislative proposal with 9 articles about what they want to be researched in the Truth Commission which also included the Armenian ‘Genocide’ and Dersim ‘Massacre’.

Ten days after the apology a poll was carried out by a survey company which asked people what they think about the Prime Minister’s apology. The results showed that the public was glad about what the PM said. Most of the people also stated that they were expecting another apology from the RPP itself. 52% percent of the total participants said they thought it was right for the Prime Minister to apologize. 71% of the participants from Tunceli was content with the apology. 44% of the total participants said they thought the

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<sup>195</sup> <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/bdpli-demirtas-ozur-hukumetlerin-isi-degildir-19352856> accessed on 30.11.2017.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Peace Process or Solution Process (*barış süreci* or *çözüm süreci* in Turkish) refers to the process which aimed to resolve the ongoing Kurdish problem in Turkey between the years 2009-2015.

<sup>198</sup> <http://www.ihd.org.tr/ba20111125a/> accessed on 30.11.2017.

issue was the suppression of a revolt in the area. 68,5% of the total participants said they wanted the archives to be opened in order to have a solid understanding of the issue.<sup>199</sup>

The grandson of the Dersimi leader Seyyid Rıza, Rüstem Polat, commented on the apology and said that it was a positive step, but it was wrong for Erdoğan to put all the blame on Kılıçdaroğlu. Yet, he said that he wished the Prime Minister to apologize not in the party caucus, but in the parliament in an official way.<sup>200</sup>

The apology speech of Erdoğan opened the ways for Dersimi people to put forward their long time silenced demands about the issue other than an apology. Their demands included: 1) The name of Dersim to be given back to the area. 2) Not only the archives of Prime Ministry and Presidency, but also the archives of General Staff to be opened. 3) The names of the lost Dersimi girls after the massacre to be shared with public. 4) The graves of Seyyid Rıza and his friends to be made known to the public. 5) The names of people who have aggrieved the Dersimi people to be deleted from public spaces. 6) Kızılbaş-Alevi faith to be recognized by the state. 7) Cancellation of Munzur Dam Project which according to them aims to destroy the Kızılbaş-Alevi faith<sup>201</sup>.

The comments of the well-known columnists from leading newspapers also varied. Yılmaz Özdil, a nationalist columnist, criticized Erdoğan and said that he was manipulating the history and portaying Seyyid Rıza as an innocent man who was an English agent and bandit.<sup>202</sup> Another columnist from the same newspaper, Ahmet Hakan, replied to Özdil's comments harshly and said, "We talk about the lost girls, killed children of the time, but you come and say they were bandits. Were even the children bandits?"<sup>203</sup>

German *Märkische Oderzeitung* Newspaper also touched upon Erdoğan's apology, they stated that they did not find him sincere.

If a Prime Minister apologizes, we need to incline our ears. But in this case, we remember the killings of Armenians a hundred years ago. He has not apologized for this ... His words mostly affect the Republican People's Party. Atatürk's party is his target. Taking advantage of the victims is a great offence. His statement does not make sense, because at the time of his

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<sup>199</sup> <http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/turkiye-dersim-ozrunde-uzlasti-1071375/> accessed on 30.11.2017.

<sup>200</sup> <http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/sevit-rizinin-torunu-konustu-1070608/> accessed on 30.11.2017.

<sup>201</sup> <http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/dersimlilerin-siyasilerden-7-acil-talebi-1070592/> accessed on 30.11.2017.

<sup>202</sup> <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dersim-e-ne-dersin-19314080> accessed on 30.11.2017.

<sup>203</sup> <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/bari-iki-dakika-susun-19321952> accessed on 30.11.2017.

speaking the Turkish soldiers were continuing to shoot the Kurdish people who have similar aims with the Dersimis of 1937-38.<sup>204</sup>

The apology speech of Erdoğan carries discrepancies within itself. First of all, it seems like a political manoeuvre rather than a sincere apology. What leads to this implication is the timing of the apology. Before the RPP had a Dersimi origin chairman, it was not possible to hear anyone mentioning Dersim Issue as a massacre or mention it at all. The RPP being the main opposition party makes it the most important rival of the JDP. So, Kılıçdaroğlu is the biggest reason for the apology speech. Second, the sincerity of the apology is open to discussion as mentioned above several times. The place where the apology speech was delivered was a party caucus, thus it does not carry officiality. It being an unofficial state apology blocks the roads which go to opening of the archives. The only documental evidence that public knows is limited with what Erdoğan said during the party caucus. In addition to this, the PDP's legislative proposal to investigate the events being turned down mostly by the votes of JDP deputies leaves question marks in the people's minds. Prime Ministerial apology puts people into expectation<sup>205</sup>, for example in this case the expectations may be a compensation to the victims' families or the opening of the archives, when the expectations are not realized it makes people question the sincerity of the Prime Minister.

The language he uses also does not carry sincerity. In terms of the language, the first thing to be said is the 'If clause' he uses. "If it is necessary to apologize on behalf of the state, if there is such a practise in the literature, ..."<sup>206</sup> This leads to think that if there was not such a practise for a Prime Minister to apologize, we cannot say an apology is needed. His speech also makes one question whether he is really interested in what happened in Dersim in 1937-38 or it was in order to stalemate Kılıçdaroğlu as the head of the main opposition party. The fact that he mentioned the possible need for an apology on behalf of the state also matters. As it is a crime committed by the state, if people are not going to expect an apology from the state, from whom else are they supposed to expect? Also, an official research run by a parliamentary committee is the best mechanism to uncloak the truth.

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<sup>204</sup> [http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/diger/300658/Erdoğan\\_in\\_Dersim\\_ozru\\_mantiksiz.html](http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/diger/300658/Erdoğan_in_Dersim_ozru_mantiksiz.html) accessed on 01.12.2017.

<sup>205</sup> Stephen, Mills. "I am sorry": Prime ministerial apology as transformational leadership" ANU Press. 2014. p.20

<sup>206</sup> See footnote 59.



Another thing leading to question his sincerity is the way he began his speech. Erdoğan opened the topic by quoting a passage from a political Islamist writer Necip Fazıl Kısakürek. He said Necip Fazıl was the best narrator of the brutalities which took place in the early years of the Republic. Following that he described the massacre as a brutality against humans, while the target of the massacre was the Kurdish-Alevi community inhabiting in the area. “Erdoğan replaces the notion “Alevi” with “human,” which he uses as a rhetorical device to collapse the tragedy of one ethnoreligious group into another.”<sup>207</sup> As the news of German *Märkische Oderzeitung* Newspaper also stated, the target of Erdoğan is Atatürk’s party and the single-party period of the RPP. Yet, as he represents the Sunni-Islamic politics, he does not directly empathize with the pain of another religious group, but names it a tragedy against humanity which enables him to refrain from empathizing with Alevis.

As stated, Atatürk’s party was his target. His other target was the head of the RPP Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. Erdoğan tried to depict him as the perpetrator and thus stated that Kılıçdaroğlu had to resign even though Kılıçdaroğlu was a descendant of a victim family from Dersim. This could have led to Kılıçdaroğlu’s falling from the graces of Alevi people who have voted for the RPP and seen Kılıçdaroğlu as a symbol of their Alevi identities being represented in the parliament. He supposedly carries out an apology, yet the aim does not seem to show empathy towards the victims, but to eliminate the strongest rival. This can also be understood by taking the place of the first Dersim speech of Erdoğan into consideration which was in a party rally before the 2010 referendum<sup>208</sup>. He forced Kılıçdaroğlu to make choice either to accept the massacre or deny it, both of which would lead Kılıçdaroğlu to be feeble in front of his party members.<sup>209</sup> He said, “If it is an honour for you (to Kılıçdaroğlu) to belong to Dersim, save your honour!” Honour or hometown bounds are important determinants in Turkish culture and for Turkish society as well. Being a politician for almost thirty years, Erdoğan knows this very well and thus plays upon this when he wants stalemate Kılıçdaroğlu. All of these prove it right to say that his apology speech was a political manoeuvre.

However, this does not mean that Kılıçdaroğlu was not in a contradiction. He is a victim of the massacre, but also, he represents the party which gave the order for the massacre.

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<sup>207</sup> Ayata and Hakyemez. p. 9

<sup>208</sup> See footnote 50.

<sup>209</sup> Ayata and Hakyemez. p.10

It is a problem of Turkish politics and Turkish culture as there has not been a significant political party to represent the Alevi minorities in the parliament even though according to the estimations they make up of 15% of the population.<sup>210</sup> That is one of the reasons why they tend to vote for the RPP which appeals to them more than other political parties in terms of being less Sunni-Islam oriented and a supporter of secularism.

It goes without saying that his speech changed the paradigm of the official narrative about the Dersim Massacre which had always been referred as an uprising until then.<sup>211</sup> Even the name of the area was changed from Dersim to Tunceli at that time, so Erdoğan's move caused people to remember something which had been collectively forgotten. However, as mentioned several times it was a political move.

### **2.3. Conclusion**

Both of the non-apology examples for the wrongdoings of the state demonstrate that the nationalist culture of the Turkish society does not allow for an official apology on the state level. Sometimes, a part of the society or a group of individuals feel themselves obliged to apologize. Yet as the case of 'I Apologize' Campaign showed, the apology of the individuals may also carry problems within itself. Their apology did not include the perpetrator; was not sorry for the 'crime' itself and was sorry for the negligence. However, who is the active neglecter, was it the state or the society was not stated. Other than this, having a state-oriented society put the intellectuals in a weaker position vis-à-vis the state which refused to present any apology about the issue.

When we come to the state level, even though Erdoğan's Dersim speech was an important step for Turkish politics in terms of acknowledging the guilt, yet as explained with examples it was a political move for him in order to stalemate the main opposition party's leader and impress the electors of the Dersim region. Deciding whether he and his party were sincere about the apology came with several dilemmas. First, even though the JDP was the party switching the narration about the 'Dersim' from a rebellion to massacre, they never carried it to the official level and opened the way for the archives.

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<sup>210</sup> Ali Çarkoğlu. "Political Preferences of the Turkish Electorate: Reflections of an Alevi-Sunni Cleavage. Turkish Studies, 6:2, 273-292.

<sup>211</sup> Ayata and Hakyemez p.7

Other than this, sincerity would require the issues to be discussed further until a resolution was found.

All in all, first the nationalist and state-oriented mindset of Turkish society do not prepare the grounds for any type of apology. Second, the politicians' approached to the subject as a political move and manoeuvre and did not pay attention to the feelings of the offended part or their families.

## CHAPTER 3: COMPARISON OF APOLOGIES

Having discussed three apology cases from the world and seen the circumstances and debates related with apology in Turkey, this chapter aims to discuss similarities and differences between the world examples and Turkey's case. The chapter will try to find an answer to the question as to why is it not possible to encounter an official apology in Turkey or is it possible in near future or at all?

### 3.1. Australia and Turkey

The targets of the apologies in Australia and Turkey cannot be seen as belonging to the same group. In the case of Australia, the target of the apology was the Indigenous groups of the land who had been living there long before white people arrived. Whereas, in the case of Turkey, Armenians and Dersimis had been living along with Turkish people for many centuries, yet it was the Turkish people who founded the nation state.

However, stating that the target groups of the apologies were different does not necessarily mean that the circumstances preparing the apology act were different, too. The similarities between the two apology cases can be grouped into two: public movements and moves by the states.

Both the Australian apology and Turkey's Armenian apology case included a public movement. With the publishing of *Bringing Them Home Report* in 1997, general public started to be more aware of what had happened to the Aborigines in Australia. A group of white Australians started to celebrate the anniversary of the report as "National Sorry Day". They opened Sorry Books for public to show their empathy and emotions, and an apology website was opened in 2002. In the case of Turkey, first public apology came

from a group of people by opening a website ([www.ozurdiliyoruz.com](http://www.ozurdiliyoruz.com)). The way to the website was paved by the conference held in Bilgi University and the speeches of Hrant Dink. Both of these public movements enabled the issues to be heard more by the rest of the public and to be taken more seriously by the government officials.

When we come to the state level, Australian Prime Minister at that time, John Howard, and Turkey's Prime Minister at that time, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, had lots of opinions in common when they were objecting to an official apology by the state. First thing to be said is the fact that both of the leaders were the heads of right-wing parties. Both of the leaders responded to the public movements in a similar way. Howard stated that it was not them personally who caused the pain and for him explaining regret for something would you a direct responsible of the issue which the current generation of Australia was not. In the case of Turkey, Erdoğan saw the apology as irrational and stated the ones who committed the crime should apologize and that was not them. Both of the leaders refrained from uttering the word 'sorry', because they did not accept the inheritance of their predecessors. However, both of the leaders have used proud words when they were referring to historical achievements of their predecessors. Howard was proud of Anzacs in Çanakkale and Erdoğan is generally proud of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>212</sup> Australia did not achieve an apology during the Prime Ministry of Howard, the official apology speech came from Kevin Rudd, who was a left-wing party leader.

As it was discussed in Chapter 2, Erdoğan had different approaches to an apology to the Armenians and an apology to the Dersimis. Even though, he used the Dersim case as a political maneuver to stalemate the main opposition party leader, Kılıçdaroğlu, he expected an official apology from the people whom he saw as responsible and accountable. The fact that the issue was usually brought up during party rallies and caucuses bears similarities with the way that Kevin Rudd won the elections in Australia in 2007. One of the most important promises of him during the election campaign was to deliver a proper apology to the Stolen Generations of Australia. With the long-standing divergencies within the government about whether to apologize or not and public being more and more aware of what had happened to the Aborigines in the past, Rudd got 52%

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<sup>212</sup> <https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2018/02/11/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-abdulhamid-han-dunyanin-son-evrensel-impatorudur> accessed on 06.07.2018 <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/345264/erdogandan-abdulhamid-guzellemesi> accessed on 06.07.2018

of the votes. This is similar to what Erdoğan tried to do but did not accomplish. He wanted to gain the votes of Dersim which is an area where the JDP does not get the majority of the votes. However, he did not reach this goal and the apology debate did not reach a conclusion.

Even though Erdoğan refrained from an official apology and blamed the ‘Dersim Massacre’ all on Kılıçdaroğlu, him bringing the topic of Dersim Massacre forward is a breakthrough in Turkish politics. His first mention was the first time that a politician took the issue seriously. He named the offender according to his own perspective and requested a proper apology to the offended party. Almost two decades before Erdoğan, Paul Keating was the first politician who accepted the wrong doings of previous governments towards Aborigines in Australia. He was the first politician who admitted the effects of European settlement on Aborigines and his speech was also seen as a breakthrough in Australian politics.

Another similarity between the two apology cases is founding commissions to investigate the cases. In Australia, the Human Rights and Opportunity Commission was founded, and their report had a big effect on the way to Australian apology as it was discussed in Chapter 3. In Turkey, a commission was suggested to be found about the Dersim case by the JDP deputy Mehmet Metiner in 2011, but later on the research proposal by the PDP was rejected in the parliament. In Uludere case two research commission were founded: one by the state one by the Human Rights Commission. Findings of the commissions were different from each other, the commission in the parliament did not see the bombing as intentional as opposed to the Human Rights Commission.

When Australian and Turkish cases of apologies are compared, it is seen that both countries have gone through similar paths but differed at some part. Some of the most important reasons for Australia to reach an official apology are the public opinion’s pressure and the commission founded to investigate what had happened, which resulted with the publishing of *Bringing Them Home Report* the anniversary of which is celebrated every year in Australia as ‘National Sorry Day’. Another thing to be noted about Australia is that the apology was delivered when a left-wing party came to power. However, this cannot be anticipated in the case of Turkey. The RPP has been the main opposition party for almost two decades and even though it is a leftist party, it has nationalistic tendencies and accepts neither the Armenian ‘Genocide’ nor the Dersim ‘Massacre’. The only

political party in the parliament which is in favor of an official apology is the PDP, yet it is a pro-Kurdish party and it does not seem possible for them to find a chance to be the leading party.

### 3.2. Japan and Turkey

In terms of being nationalist and patriotist, Japan and Turkey are very similar to each other. As stated in Chapter 1, the path which ended with Japan's war crimes was paved by Japan's growing desire for nationalism and it led to the actions for which Japan is expected to apologize. The Young Turks, who were in power during the deportation or 'genocide' of Armenians, had similar nationalistic instincts as Japan and wanted to establish a nation state and this led to the actions for which Turkey is expected to apologize by some groups. Nader Sohrabi claims that Japan's Meiji Restoration had a huge impact on the mindset of Young Turks.

After the French Revolution, the Meiji Restoration of 1868 impressed the Young Turks more than any other revolutionary achievement. For them, the Restoration was an illustrious proof that constitutional administrations were preconditions for progress and that immense "civilizational" strides could be made in a very short time, particularly if directed by an enlightened nationalist leader.<sup>213</sup>

Not only the Armenian issue is a product of nationalistic mindset, but also the Dersim Massacre. Dersimis living in the area were seen as 'bandits'<sup>214</sup> by the state. The people there mostly had Kurdish-Alevi identity which was exactly the opposite of most of the society who were mainly Turkish-Sunnis.

As discussed, the 'comfort' stations of Japan were seen as a gross violation of human rights. There are mainly scholars inside and outside Turkey who also perceive the Armenian deportation as such.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Nader Sohrabi. "Global Waves, Local Actors: What the Young Turks Knew about Other Revolutions and Why It Mattered". *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Jan., 2002), pp. 45-79. p.53.

<sup>214</sup> Reşat Hallı. *Türkiye Cumhuriyetinde ayaklanmalar: 1924-1938*. TC Genelkurmay Harp Tarihi Başkanlığı Resmî Yayınları, 1972.

<sup>215</sup> Taner Akçam. *The Young Turks' crime against humanity: the Armenian genocide and ethnic cleansing in the Ottoman Empire*. Princeton University Press, 2012. Guenter Lewy. *The Armenian massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A*

Other than the similarities between how the actions of two countries took place, the way they reject to an official apology is also similar. Most of the Japanese people, especially older people, see the ‘comfort’ stations as necessary during war time and suffering as an inevitable part of war, so there is nothing to apologize for them. Even though Japanese government denied its responsibility at first, with the findings of Yoshiaki it came out that government had direct involvement in the issue, so they changed their narration. In Turkey, people also have similar opinions. Most of the society think that there was a reciprocal pain, it was not only the Armenians who suffered. So, an apology is not a point in question. In the case of Dersim, even though the idea of reciprocal pain is not present, as people in the area at that time are still seen as bandits who rebelled against the state by most of the society, the state was right to suppress the rebellion. In other words, for most of the people state did what was needed to be done. However, it needs to be mentioned that this point of view was started to be broken with the speeches of Tayyip Erdoğan. This leads us back to the nationalist mindset similarity between Japan and Turkey.

Other than the approaches to an official apology within the country, both Japan and Turkey have faced an immense amount of international pressure. The situations of ‘comfort’ women were brought up in the US and discussed in the US Courts. Turkey has also faced a similar pressure. In order for Turkey to be accepted to the European Union, the member countries requested Turkey to settle the accounts of the past.<sup>216</sup> For example, French Parliament was one of the first countries in Europe which formally recognized Armenian Genocide.<sup>217</sup> This being the case, they Turkish recognition as a must. It was not the case for Dersim Massacre as none of the part was international, this was a more interior problem compared with the Armenian issue.

The leaders of the countries for decades have objected to an official apology putting forward similar opinions. Japan is known to have destroyed most of the archival evidence about ‘comfort’ women, and Turkey has not allowed the archives of General Staff and Prime Ministry to be opened. However, Japan is one step further than Turkey as in 1993

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*disputed genocide*. University of Utah Press, 2005. Ronald Grigor Suny. "They Can Live in the Desert But Nowhere Else": *A History of the Armenian Genocide*. Princeton University Press, 2015.

<sup>216</sup> Marcie J. Patton. "AKP Reform Fatigue in Turkey: What Has Happened to the EU Process?" *Mediterranean Politics*. 12:3 2007. pp. 339-358. p.346-347

<sup>217</sup> *World: Europe France recognises Armenian genocide*. BBC. 29 May 1998.  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/102803.stm> accessed on 10.07.2018



Yohei Kono gave a statement acknowledging what had happened to the ‘comfort’ women during Pacific War and this speech is accepted as the first apology of Japan, yet this has not been general approach of Japan as a state; lots of inconsistencies in the speeches of following governments have been observed in the following years. This is also the case for Turkey, as a state it does not have a general attitude; it rejects an official apology for both Dersim and Armenian case, but from time to time, not in an official way though, the pains of the offended parties are acknowledged.

When cases of both countries are compared, it is seen that both countries had been through similar nationalist establishment. This resulted in Japan’s colonialism and Turkey’s founding a nation-state. The countries differ in whether apology as a speech act was achieved or not. Despite the inconsistencies, some Japanese officials acknowledged their wrongdoing to the South Korean women. None of the government officials in Turkey acknowledged any wrongdoing or in the case of Dersim accepted responsibility as a state. It seems that neither Japan nor Turkey is likely to apologize officially for what they have been accused of.

### **3.3. Germany and Turkey**

Chapter 1 showed that without much objection Germany apologized to the Holocaust victims, because they were aware of their wrongdoing. This may lead to think that in terms of their apology cases Turkey and Germany have nothing in common, however though not much, the countries went through similar circumstances as Australia & Turkey and Japan & Turkey did.

As stated in Chapter 1, Germany sees the time when Nazis surrendered as *Stunde Null*. Even though the newly founded country was accused of actions of people whom they did not acknowledge as their predecessors, without much objection they accepted the wrongdoing and wanted to compensate for it. On the other hand, Turkey accepts the Ottoman Empire as its predecessor but rejects what was practiced against Armenians during the Ottoman times. However, the claim of Turkish Republic is that there was not a genocidal practice. Even though German society did not object to an official apology, most of them are against having to pay compensation for something they did not participate. If we are to take time when a person was born as zero hour, the idea of most

German people is similar to the idea of *stunde null* by the Republic of Germany. When it comes to say sorry, most of Turkish people are on the same track with the Republic of Germany. This was also uttered by the Prime Minister of the time, Tayyip Erdoğan, when a group of intellectuals published an apology on their website. He said, “We are not the one to apologize, whoever committed the crime they are the one to apologize.”<sup>218</sup>

Another thing to be stated when comparing the apology cases in Turkey and Germany is the international pressure they have had. Adenauer, the first German Chancellor to deliver an official apology, was heavily preoccupied with consolidating the sovereignty of Germany and delivering an official apology to Israel would enable Germany to be a part of NATO and Western Security Network. In the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the USA forced Germany to review its apology and deliver a more proper one so that the trade agreements between two countries would continue without any problem. As discussed when comparing Japan and Turkey in terms of apology debates, Turkey did not accept to deliver an official apology even though they were promised with being a part of the European Union.

A third powerful stimulus to surge in nationalism emanates from EU complaints that Turkey is failing to conform to the EU standards by suppressing discussion of the Armenian Genocide that occurred nearly a century ago. The spate of resolutions passed in EU member state parliaments that recognition of the Armenian Genocide should be a prerequisite for EU membership.<sup>219</sup>

Turkey and Germany have not gone through similar paths in apology debates. Germany was aware of its fault and wanted to compensate for it to have a more solid place in international world. The only similar thing is the international pressure they faced to which they reacted different from each other. Turkey as a state thoroughly rejects the idea of genocide, the archives have not been opened by the state yet. Germany’s apology case has nothing in common with the Dersim apology debate. These two are debates which continue in different paths.

Comparison of the world apology cases with Turkey has shown that Turkey is still far away from a proper official apology. Among Germany, Japan and Australia, Japan’s case is full of inconsistencies and speeches of some government officials throughout the debate

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<sup>218</sup> <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/erdogan-ozur-dileme-kampanyasi-mantiksiz,LjS9OKmz5UGMo7MNYpow2Q>

accessed on 13.07.2018.

<sup>219</sup> Patton. p.9.

cannot be considered as the attitude of the whole nation. Turkey's case is even further away than Japan from an official apology. The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century witnessed the apology debates discussed in this thesis, but they came to an end. Today in Turkey, an apology is not a preoccupation of government.

## CONCLUSION

The apology cases discussed throughout the thesis demonstrated the approaches of different countries to a necessary apology. They all differed from one another at some point, yet as Chapter 3 showed they had some similarities as well.

Last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the 21<sup>st</sup> century witnessed lots of collective apologies. Countries wanted to settle the accounts of the past and open a new page. Germany, having apologized in the 1950s, dealt with compensation problems. Australia, after many years of interior debates, carried out an apology speech. Japan, similar to Australia, has had lots of interior debates, yet has not reached a conclusion on these debates. The question asked in the introduction part about to what extent the political cultures of the countries, public opinion polls and benefits of the leaders matter when delivering an official apology has found itself an answer.

Germany, to have its place solid in the Western World, apologized to Israel and offered help in many terms to the newly founded state of Israel. It will not be appropriate to see the political culture of Germany as a big effect on its apology as in spite of the *Stunde Null* idea, they carried out an apology and the knee fall of Brandt showed that rather than just taking the Holocaust as their victimization, the country felt guilty about it as well. Public opinion polls and benefits of the country mattered when the US requested Germany to review its apology at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In Australia, similar to Germany, in spite of *terra nullius* idea an apology speech came in 2008. Kevin Rudd used the promise of apology as an election pledge and this resulted in his being elected as a Prime Minister. More important than these two factors public pressure, Sorry Books or the celebration of National Sorry Day were biggest reasons which pushed Australian government to apologize to Aborigines. The public was celebrating the anniversary of Bringing Them Home Report, when government was still objecting to the idea of an official apology. Rudd being aware of these dynamics used these to good account and became a Prime Minister.

In Japan, political culture of the country and the leaders' benefit have mattered more than public opinion and public pressure in apology debates. Being a nationalist country, not younger people but older people have not accepted the fact that what they did to South Korean women during Pacific War was a violation of human rights. This became an attitude of many leaders as well. Apart from that, Japan saw Korean women as less worthy than Japanese women thus Korean women were chosen to be 'comfort' women. It is also possible to claim that benefits of the leaders were important in delivering an apology as in the last thirty years some Japanese leaders acknowledged the wrong doing where as some leaders have not.

As discussed in chapter 2, Turkey's apologies are actually non-apologies. As a state, it acknowledges responsibility for neither the Armenian 'Genocide' nor the Dersim 'Massacre'. In Australia, left-wing party leader recognized the offense towards Aborigines, whereas a right-wing party rejected to apologize for almost a decade. In Turkey, none of the political parties is likely to do so, except the PDP which is not likely to come to power in the near future. Though Tayyip Erdoğan in unofficial meetings acknowledged the Dersim Massacre, he rejected to take an action as a state and used the apology debates as political maneuver. The debates about the Armenian issue caused nothing but being labelled as a traitor and did not go further.

To sum up, the nationalist culture of Turkish society does not allow Turkey to have a sound discussion about a political apology. Being nationalist has been the state's policy since its foundation and this nationalism does not allow for an open space to discuss a possible apology about any past wrong-doing.

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