

WHY THEY KILLED HRANT DINK

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ULTRA-NATIONALISM IS ON THE RISE IN TURKEY AND
HAS FOUND NEW TARGETS IN A BATTLE FOR
THE HEART AND SOUL OF THE COUNTRY

In the spring of 2005, the novelist and Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk was subjected to a sustained hate campaign in the Turkish press, and prosecuted for insulting Turkishness in December of the same year, because he told a Swiss journalist that a million Armenians had been killed in 'these lands' and that no one else in Turkey dared to talk about it. Had his interviewer asked for more detail, Pamuk might have added that the taboo was soon to be broken, thanks to a brave group of Turkish scholars, journalists, publishers and human rights activists, a few of whom were close friends.

Hrant Dink was the bravest of these friends. Born in the Anatolian city of Malatya, educated in Istanbul, and a veteran of the democratic left, he had served as the editor of the pioneering Turkish-Armenian weekly *AGOS* for 11 years. His dream was to give courage to Turkey's 70,000 Armenians, who should, he felt, be able to identify themselves as Armenians in full possession of their history, and at the same time be acknowledged as fully-fledged Turkish citizens. He wanted a public airing of the story of 1915 and was certain that when the Turkish people were fully acquainted with it, they would draw upon their compassion to seek both truth and reconciliation. It was with these sentiments that he joined forces with a group of writers, activists and scholars to bring about the first ever conference to be held in Turkish, and on Turkish soil, that engaged with serious genocide research.

The first date set for that conference was May 2005. The aim was to bridge the gap between Turkey's official line – that what had happened in 1915 fell way short of genocide – and diaspora claims that up to 1,500,000 of Anatolia's Armenians had perished. What they wanted was a depoliticised space where people from many disciplines and all backgrounds could examine and dispute the evidence together.

Many of the conference organisers were part of a Turkish and Armenian scholars' network created and directed by Müge Göçek, a Turkish sociologist at the University of Michigan. By 2005, this network had been meeting at conferences and conversing electronically for five years, opening up dialogues where before there had been only invective and injured silence. One such

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dialogue was between the Armenian diaspora and Armenians still living in Turkey. Hrant Dink was by a very long shot the most outspoken member of the Turkish-Armenian community, but he took issue with diaspora Armenians who believed the only way forward was to press the parliaments of the world to pass resolutions acknowledging the genocide. This, he thought, would harden nationalist attitudes in Turkey, marginalise all of its many persecuted minorities, and block the process of democratic change that the EU accession bid had helped initiate. The way forward, he believed, was to work with the current of democratic change, appealing to the hearts and minds of the Turkish people, educating them in a climate of respect, encouraging them to act on the ethical principles that they used in their everyday lives.

The old machines of the authoritarian state were, he and many others thought, soon to become obsolescent. Since 1999, when Turkey had become an official candidate for EU entry, there had been a marked and rapid move towards democratisation. By 2005, the EU's reform programme had resulted in, among other things, Turkey abolishing the death penalty, taking steps to stamp out torture, removing some laws that curbed free expression, granting limited cultural rights to Kurds, and (the most important reform in this context) rolling back the role of the military in the day-to-day running of the country. Encouraged by these reforms, there had been a cultural renaissance, with many musicians, artists, and writers moving beyond state-imposed definitions of Turkishness to explore their multi-cultural roots. The hope among pro-Europeans was that the promised benefits of EU entry would induce what some called a bloodless revolution, moving the state away from its old monocultural authoritarianism and bringing it closer to European norms. Pro-European democrats were aware that the Turkish state's official line on 1915 was a major obstacle to accession. So what better, they thought, than for Turks to take ownership of the issue and resolve it?

In his columns, speeches, and interviews, Hrant Dink gave this dream more detail, and in his version, Armenians, too, stood to gain from this process. Only by entering the EU would Turkey become a true democracy. Only a truly democratic Turkey could maintain peaceful and productive relations with the landlocked republic of Armenia. Only when it democratised would Armenia itself be able to pursue its own EU bid. As important as it was to have the tragic past acknowledged, it was also important to dream of a future in which Turks were at peace with themselves and their neighbours.

So he refused to define himself as a Turk pure and simple. 'I am not a Turk, but an Armenian of Turkey,' he told a conference in Urfa in 2002. These were the words that led to the first prosecution against him for insulting Turkishness. The second stemmed from a sentence taken out of context from an article in which he urged the Armenians of the diaspora to abandon their blanket hatred of 'the Turk'.

Both of these prosecutions were launched under Article 159 of the old penal code, which was taken from Mussolini's Italy and contained many draconian curbs on free expression. The new code, which had superseded the old by the time Dink went to trial for the second time, was meant to be part of the harmonisation process, bringing Turkey into line with European norms. However, it contains up to 20 laws and articles that seriously curb freedom of expression. Article 159 of the old code is the new code's infamous Article 301.

Though various human rights groups had expressed grave concerns about the new penal code, it went into effect in the summer of 2005 without their questions getting much of a public airing either in Turkey or in Europe. The first time most people heard about Article 301 was when Orhan Pamuk was to be prosecuted. If you do a search, you will see that almost every serious article on the Pamuk case also mentions Dink, though almost always in passing. You will also see his name in the short reports of the Armenian conference in September 2005.

By then, the cases against Pamuk and Dink had been made public and both had become hate figures in the tabloid press. The hate campaigns were vigorously criticised in Turkey's more democratic-minded papers, in the electronic network of Turkish and Armenian scholars, and in the networks of the Armenian diaspora. But as admired as Dink was in these constituencies, and among democratic-minded journalists both at home and abroad (you will be hard pressed to find a recent book by a British or American journalist on Turkey that does not use Hrant Dink as a symbol of the New Turkey), his profile was not high enough to merit sustained attention in the world press.

Most of those who filed stories in the British press on Pamuk's trial in December 2005 (and I was one of them) mention the fascist agitators who, protected by riot police and directed by plainclothes operatives, assaulted his friend Hrant in the corridors of the courthouse. But after charges against Pamuk were dropped in January 2006, the British public's interest in Turkey's beleaguered intelligentsia waned. Though almost 80 other Turkish writers, scholars, publishers, translators and activists were prosecuted in 2005 and 2006 – some for insulting Turkishness, the state, or the memory of Atatürk, others for alienating the people from the army or seeking to influence the judiciary process – there was only sporadic mention of them in the British press. But whenever they got a mention, Hrant Dink was among them, and each time he appeared, there seemed to be yet another case against him.

Like most other 301 defendants, he was subjected to a steady stream of death threats – a total of 26,000, according to some writers in the Turkish press. According to his associates, he was twice called into the Istanbul governor's office and told that if he did not watch his step, 'anything' could happen to him. He refused to be intimidated. On Friday 19 January, he stepped out

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Hrant Dink at Orhan Pamuk's trial, Sisli Court, Istanbul, 16 December 2005

Credit: Bulent Tavli/Rex Features

of his office on an errand and was shot in the head three times by a boy wearing a white beret. When the assassin, 17-year-old Ogün Samast, was caught 20 hours later in the Black Sea city of Samsun he was still carrying the gun, and still wearing the white beret that had also been recorded on the CCTV cameras that captured his escape from the scene of the crime.

Here in Britain, the newspapers that had never quite understood Dink's importance in the scheme of things were slow to pick up on the firestorm of outrage that news of his death provoked. But Istanbul-based CNN and BBC news teams recorded the waves of mourners who gathered outside the AGOS offices to express their grief and outrage, and over the weekend, several papers in the UK ran tributes to Hrant Dink by British journalists who had known him personally. These paved the way for most national papers to run longish pieces on the funeral, which was attended by at least 100,000 mourners, many carrying signs saying 'We are all Hrant, we are all Armenians' and 'Murderous 301'. In the days that followed, some papers carried small articles about the assassin and his accomplices, noting that one had used a TV opportunity outside the courthouse to tell Orhan Pamuk to 'be smart'. The same papers went on to report that he and 'several dozen' other writers who had been active in the 301 saga and had therefore become ultra-nationalist targets had been put under

police guard. Several days later, a few papers noted that Pamuk had quietly left the country. Dink's assassin was secretly filmed on a mobile phone getting a hero's welcome at the Samsun gendarmerie following his arrest. After it was aired on television, there was a new firestorm of outrage in the more democratic-minded sections of the Turkish media.

And then the story vanished – not for the first time, not for the last – leaving those without an intimate knowledge of Turkish history and politics rather puzzled. Having seen the great crowds at Hrant Dink's funeral, they knew that there were many in Turkey who shared his democratic dreams. This led them to hope that Dink's death would serve as a wake-up call to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who had, after all, publicly condemned the murder as a 'shot against Turkey'. If his party, the Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) was serious about getting into Europe, then it could not help but be seriously concerned about the damage the assassination had done to its public image – and anxious to reverse it.

But nothing much happened. Why? There are several reasons. Beginning with the most obvious: this is a critical election year. With the showdown between the AKP and the military, Erdoğan has been pulled into an open conflict and cannot challenge the rising tide of nationalism. If polls are to be believed, the party most closely associated with ultra-nationalism – the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), which has no seats at present in the National Assembly – is making serious gains.

But whatever party wins the general election, the government it forms will not really be running the country. For Turkey is not (and has never been) a full democracy. It is a tutelary democracy, in which the army oversees the day-to-day running of the country and steps in whenever it fears the elected government to be veering 'off course'.

From its inception in 1923 until 1950, the Turkish Republic was a single-party system. In 1960, its first democratically elected prime minister was removed from office – ostensibly because he had betrayed the secularist vision of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Turkey's founding father. He was put on trial, found guilty, and hanged. In 1971, the army stepped in again, this time to suppress the student left, and to save the nation (and the US, the army's main bankroller) from communism. There was another even more brutal coup in 1980, and this one was ostensibly to save the country from slipping into anarchy. For several years, left and right-wing paramilitary groups had been fighting it out in the streets. It is now widely believed that groups on both sides were being armed and funded by paramilitaries with links to the 'deep state'.

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The deep state is Turkish shorthand for a faceless clique inside the Turkish state that has, some claim, held the reins of real power throughout the republic's 84-year history. There are some who see it on a continuum with the shady networks that 'took care of business' (including, some believe, the Armenian business) in the last years of the Ottoman Empire. The deep state is held to be based in the army, but closely linked with MIT (the national intelligence service), the judiciary, and (since the 1960s) the mafia. It was during the 1960s that paramilitary groups connected to the right-wing, nationalist, and quasi-fascist MHP and calling themselves '*ülkü ocakları*' or 'idealist hearths' began to act as death squads, assassinating various figures identified as enemies of Turkish unity. Their most infamous act was the murder of the newspaper owner Abdi İpekçi. The man who pulled the trigger was Mehmet Ali Ağca, who went on to win international fame by shooting the Pope.

Not long after the case against Pamuk was dropped on a technicality, Ağca was abruptly and mysteriously released from the Turkish prison where he was serving a life sentence. The television crews were waiting outside to record his rabidly nationalist condemnation of the 301 defendants and his wish to serve the nationalist cause. These comments caused widespread outrage, and, until Ağca was returned to prison eight days later, various angry souls in the media printed specific information about Ağca's links to the deep state. This, too, is a pattern. Though Turkey is never without its deep state rumours, most lack substance: it is, after all, against the law to 'insult' the army, the judiciary, the memory of Atatürk, and so on. To publish hard information confirming the existence of the deep state is to invite prosecution or worse. But every once in a while there is a scandal that exposes deep state networks, and in its wake will come a brief but raging torrent of allegations.

So we heard a great deal about the deep state in 1996, after a sensational car crash in the Anatolian town of Susurluk. The only survivor was a Kurdish tribal chief, who was then a deputy in the National Assembly, and whose army of 8,000 mercenaries had been fighting on the side of the Turkish army in its war against the separatist PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) in the mostly Kurdish south-east. Of the three passengers who lost their lives in the crash, one was a former chief of police whose name had been closely linked with a counter-insurgency group, whose 'special teams' targeting Kurds in the same conflict had, according to Amnesty International, been responsible for at least a thousand extra-judicial killings. Another was the infamous hitman Abdullah Çatli, who was linked to the murder of seven leftist students in 1978, and who allegedly helped Mehmet Ali Ağca escape from prison in 1979 and is widely believed to have assisted him in the plot to kill the Pope. He himself had been on the run since 1990, after escaping from a Swiss prison, where he had been serving a sentence for

heroin smuggling. At the time of the crash, he was carrying a Turkish diplomatic passport, a gun permit and six identity cards, each bearing a different name. The third victim was his girlfriend, a former beauty queen whose ex-lovers included many other well-known gangsters. In the boot of the car were guns, silencers and ammunition.

We heard about the deep state again in 2005, when two of the three men bombing a Kurdish bookstore in the south-eastern city of Semsdinli were later found to be members of the (army-directed) gendarmerie and the third was found to be a police informer. There was another deep state scandal in the spring of 2006, when a man who presented himself as an Islamist extremist shot a court of appeals judge who was involved in the state ban on headscarves in universities and state institutions. After it emerged that the assassin had been under the control of a neo-nationalist group of retired military officers, some surmised that the murder had been a 'black' operation. By this they meant that it was not the act of an Islamist extremist, but a deep state ruse to discredit the ruling Islamist party.

That Dink's assassin was not acting alone is a theory endorsed even by the justice minister. A second man, Yasin Hayal, was arrested soon after Samast's capture and has been accused of planning the murder. He, in turn, has claimed to have received instructions from an agent he assumed to be with MIT, Turkey's national intelligence service. Hayal has already served an 11-month sentence for his part in the bombing of a McDonald's in Trabzon in 2004. Another suspect, Erhan Tuncel, is a student at Karadeniz Technical University and belongs to the Great Union Party (BBP), which is an ultra-nationalist Islamist offshoot of the MHP. There are other allegations which are currently circulating in the Turkish press. I cannot go into them here, because of the constraints of British libel law, which prohibit making allegations that are too expensive to defend, even if they're true. This means that if the instigators of Hrant's murder are never brought to justice – which is likely – then the story may never be fully told. That Ogün Samast was connected to a network with friends in high places was clear to Turkish audiences from the gun he was still carrying and the white beret he was still wearing when he was caught 20 hours after the assassination. From this they deduced that he thought that he could act with impunity. When it emerged that the only thing he threw away was his mobile phone, and that the SIM card later found in his pocket belonged to a different network, some columnists wondered aloud if his only fear might have been the calls logged in its memory. Their deep state suspicions were further confirmed not just by the pictures of the hero's welcome Samast enjoyed at the Samsun gendarmerie, but by the news that the Turkish General Staff had now banned the (Murdoch-owned) TV station from press events at staff headquarters.

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There is no direct evidence that the deep state is behind the 301 prosecutions, and only circumstantial evidence that it has had a hand in the spate of ultra-nationalist films, books and television programmes that have flooded the market over the past two years. But whoever their masterminds might be, these books, films, and programmes have – along with the hate campaigns against the 301 defendants and the faithful reporting of anti-Turkish sentiment in Europe – succeeded in turning a solid pro-EU majority into a solid anti-EU majority in the space of two years.

Why would the deep state be so against EU accession? On the surface, that's easy. These faceless entities have power. A move to a democracy along European lines would denude them of it. Their fears are echoed, perhaps even amplified, in the old Kemalist establishment, and most particularly in the army, which sees its primary aim as protecting national unity, and defending the Turkish state against all those who would break it up. Inside the staunchly secularist state – and remember, it is the state that runs the country, not the government – there are many who see the prime enemy as Islam, and who suspect the moderately Islamist ruling party as having a 'secret agenda' to bring in sharia law. They even see its EU ambitions as serving that agenda, for if the EU rolls back the Turkish army's role in government, then the army will be too weak to oppose an Iran-style Islamist takeover later on.

In other words, they are as suspicious of the West as they are of the East. The only way forward is a strong state that repels and expels all foreign elements. This is also the view of the ultra-nationalist groups that have sprung up in recent years: the Grand Union of Lawyers, which has brought so many of the 301 cases; the Nationalist Forces Movement, which is modelled on the vigilante civil defence units that sprang up during the break-up of the Ottoman Empire; the Patriotic Forces United Movement, which has more than a hundred branches nationwide; and the Kemalist Thought Association, which might be seen as the ultra-nationalists' intellectual wing. Though these groups differ greatly in their aims and appeal to different constituencies, they all believe that Europe is coming to Turkey to finish off what Atatürk prevented them from doing at the end of the First World War. To understand why they might think so, and why their words resonate in Turkey today, we need first to understand the history of the Turkish Republic, or rather, the version of history set out by Atatürk in his famous six-day speech, '*Nutuk*'. A glorious account of the Republic's rise from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, it still informs what all Turkish children learn in school today.

Like all or even most national histories, it is inclined to skip its dark chapters. The extermination of Armenians in 1915 features only as a malicious falsehood, and that is how most Turks continue to view it. This is hard for Europeans to

see in context, because they suffer from an inversion of the same condition: most have heard of the Armenian genocide but little else. Though they might have a vague knowledge of Turkey as a tourist destination rich in history, they know nothing about the Ottoman Empire from which the Turkish Republic emerged. This despite the fact that the Ottoman Empire extended well into Europe at its height and cast a very long shadow over the whole of Europe throughout its 600-year existence. That its history might be worth knowing more about, and now more than ever, is immediately clear if you look at a map of the eastern Mediterranean in the 19th century. Almost all the trouble spots in this region – Palestine, Israel, Iraq, Cyprus and most of the former Yugoslavia – were Ottoman possessions. All too often, the trouble we have seen in these spots has been caused or complicated by questions around minorities.

By the time the triumvirate headed by the German-educated Enver Pasha took the Ottomans into the First World War on the German side, there had already been much talk behind closed doors about the proper role of minorities in Turkey's future. Though Muslims and non-Muslims had lived together in relative peace for centuries, with Greeks, Armenians and Jews accorded certain rights and privileges under the *millet* system, tensions grew as the empire contracted during the late 19th and early 20th century, when some non-Muslim communities were seen to side with the enemy. This led Young Turks such as Enver Pasha to conclude that multiculturalism was dangerous and undermined any hope of unity. But what to do? At the start of the First World War at least a fifth of the population of Anatolia was Christian. A year later (following reports that some Armenians had crossed over to the other side to join forces with the Russians) Armenians throughout Anatolia were removed from their homes and executed by death squads or forcibly and brutally deported to Syria. No matter how passionately the Turkish state disputes the final death toll, the results are clear to anyone who visits Turkey's eastern regions today. Where millions of Armenians had made their homes for thousands of years, there were, by the end of 1915, almost none. Unless, that is, you counted the children who had been plucked from the death march and adopted by Turkish families who gave them Muslim names and identities. As Hrant Dink so often said, 'I know what happened to my people.'

The end of the war saw some survivors returning briefly to their ancestral lands, because by now the Ottoman Empire existed no longer, and the victorious Allied powers had shared most of its remnants among themselves. Istanbul was no longer a world capital but a vanquished city occupied by five foreign powers, all jockeying for first place. What many of the city's Muslims experienced as a humiliating occupation was a cause for celebration for many of its non-Muslims.

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The low point was the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, which parcelled out most of Anatolia to European countries that had been on the winning side of the war. It was after Greece sent its army into Anatolia that Mustafa Kemal (later Atatürk) pulled together an army to expel them. Having won the War of Independence, he went on to establish the Turkish Republic in 1923. It was, as people say, a revolution from the top down. Its aim was to cut the people off from their past, their traditions and their religion, thus freeing them to remake themselves in the image of a new and unified state. It was this new and unified state that the Mussolini-derived penal code aimed to protect. And there was no room in this new nationalist project for peoples who did not wish to identify as Turks.

The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne had already paved the way for a massive population exchange, abruptly forcing a million ethnic Greeks from Anatolia in exchange for half a million ethnic Turks from Greece. Istanbul was one of the few places exempted. Though half the population of Istanbul was Christian at the start of the Republic, a slow but steady hardening of the nationalist position made life for Greeks, Jews and Armenians increasingly insecure. After the imposition of a crippling anti-minority wealth tax during the Second World War, the deportation of many male minority members to work camps during the same years, the state-sponsored pillaging of Istanbul's Christian neighbourhoods in the first Cyprus crisis of 1955, and the mass expulsion of Greeks during the second Cyprus crisis of 1964, the city's Greek population dwindled to a few thousand.

I was an eyewitness to this – the final stage of Istanbul's ethnic cleansing. Almost overnight, the city I had come to know, where Turks of all ethnic backgrounds lived intertwined lives, where everyone seemed to speak at least five languages, became a city in which non-Muslims listened carefully to the state-sponsored injunction: Citizens Speak Turkish. The silence was not absolute. Behind closed doors, I heard a great deal about 1915 from the Armenians in our neighbourhood, and in Greek homes I heard a great deal about the 1923 population exchange, the riots of 1955, and the aftermath of the 1964 expulsions. At my school (the American College for Girls, one of the foreign-run schools that remained open after the Republic, educating all of Istanbul's elites), the fear of state-sponsored violence was certainly what prompted some of the Greek, Armenian and Jewish Turks in my class to underplay their differences and identify themselves as Turks first and foremost. But the minorities of this generation also had a strong wish to prove themselves as good citizens. They would often berate me for wishing to go into the humanities for, in their view, it was a plan serving no one but myself. They would speak of their duty to give their best to help the country develop and prosper – in business, economics, engineering, and other nation-building lines of work.

Hrant Dink was a member of this generation and his understanding of Turkishness was very much along these lines. He was a man who was proud to identify as an Armenian *and* a Turk – a dual identity of the sort that establishment old-guard Kemalists still view as treason. But for him dual identity was at the core of a new patriotism. He dreamed of a Turkey in which not just Armenians but Greeks and Jews and Kurds and all of Turkey's myriad other Muslim minorities could assert their cultural identities and still work together as a democratic nation, a nation that was at home in both Europe and Asia, and at peace with its history. He was, say his friends, Turkey's best ambassador. Or he could have been, had he not been silenced.

I began this essay with the story of Hrant Dink as it appeared, fragment by puzzling fragment, in the British press, and with a question: why has Turkey done so little to redress the damage done by his assassination? I hope the answer is clear by now. It's because Turkey is not the monolith it so often appears to be in its official pronouncements. It is an embattled half-democracy, and in the wake of the assassination it is more fractured than ever. Ultra-nationalism is on the rise, and its leaders seem to have the support and encouragement of dark forces inside the state.

Extreme nationalism is not new in Turkey, and neither is extra-judicial killing at the hands of extreme nationalists. What's new is the targeting of the pro-European intelligentsia, and the manner of the targeting. It was the media coverage afforded by the 301 prosecutions that allowed the new ultra-nationalists to speak directly to the nation, and that allowed them to reinforce their message with every new trial, in much the same way as Senator Joe McCarthy used the media to advance his views on communist sympathisers during the 1950s. It's the domestic coverage of the 301 story that sealed Hrant Dink's fate, and if we in Europe do not understand how or why, we could be helping to seal the fate of others like him.

So let's end by looking at how the 301 story played in Turkey. Let's go back to February 2005, when the ultra-nationalists hardly figured. Turkey seemed to be fast-forwarding into Europe. It was suddenly possible to talk openly about things that had once been whispered behind closed doors, and to imagine that Turkey was at last mature enough as a nation to enjoy full democracy. That was the sort of conversation into which Orhan Pamuk uttered his famous sentence, and that was why the subsequent media firestorm came as such a shock. It was as violent as it was sudden. Several columnists and media owners, with strong links to the establishment, went so far as to call for patriots to silence him, and following a wave of death threats, he briefly left the country.

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But the three Istanbul universities that had joined together to organise a conference on the fate of the Ottoman Armenians were determined to go ahead. This despite rabid criticism in the right-wing press and a televised debate in the National Assembly, in which Justice Minister Cemil Cicek accused the organisers of ‘stabbing the country in the back’ and called upon ‘civil society’ to take whatever steps were necessary to restore national honour. Just before the conference was to open, the rector of Boğazici University, which was to have hosted the conference, received a call from the police informing her of bomb threats, and warning her that the police would not be able to protect the conference delegates from danger.

So there was a postponement. By September 2005, the new penal code had come into effect, with its 20 laws and articles that seriously curbed free speech. The most famous of these was 301 and by September both Dink and Pamuk were charged for insulting Turkishness. The petitioner in both cases was Kemal Kerincsiz, formerly president of an obscure suburban chapter of the MHP, and now head of the new nationalist body called the Grand Union of Lawyers. He returned to the headlines in the run-up to the rescheduled Armenian conference, which was again vociferously opposed in the right-wing press (in one paper there was even a map showing where patriots wishing to silence these people could join a march to storm the campus of Boğazici University). At 5pm on the day before the conference was to begin, the organisers received word that Kerincsiz and his Grand Union of Lawyers had succeeded in having it banned.

However, the court order named only two universities – Boğazici and Sabancı – so it was the third sponsor, Bilgi university, that hosted the conference. That weekend, the television-viewing public saw Kerincsiz and his colleagues protesting outside the Bilgi University gates, declaring to the nation that those attending the conference were traitors. Not long afterwards, five prominent columnists associated with the democratic movement (among them Murat Belge, the scholar and human rights activist who was one of the conference organisers) also had cases opened against them for criticising the court’s attempt to ban the conference. As autumn turned into winter, the prosecutions increased in number, and by the time Orhan Pamuk stepped into the courtroom on 16 December 2005, there were, by some estimates, 60 other cases pending under 301 and related articles.

In the over-packed courtroom, Kerincsiz’s first act was to demand that the room be cleared of foreigners, by which he meant the dozen or so European parliamentarians who had come to observe the trial. When the judge refused, nationalist lawyers on his team proceeded to insult and assault several European parliamentarians. Denis McShane, the former minister for Europe, was one

of them. In the corridors of the courthouse, the 200 or so supporters who were not able to enter the courtroom were corralled and kept from leaving by riot police. I was in this crowd and witnessed ultra-nationalist agitators work their way through to surround Hrant Dink. As they assaulted him, they showered him with the same quasi-fascist insults that Orhan Pamuk had had to endure on his way into court. But they appeared to be under the direction of plainclothes policemen, and they stopped as suddenly as they had begun. The message was clear: those containing us by force did not intend to kill or cause us grievous bodily harm on this particular occasion. But we were being warned.

When Dink found his way back to the entrance of the courthouse, to meet with a wall of TV cameras and fascist agitators, the police offered him no protection. It was the same when it was Orhan Pamuk's turn to run the gauntlet. When Kerincsiz came outside, he told the cameras what he would repeat to them at each and every high-profile trial in the months that followed: that intellectuals like Dink and Pamuk and Belge were selling their country to Europe to advance their own careers. That they were (as the banner displayed most prominently outside the Pamuk trial declared) 'missionary children' – an epithet which, in addition to sounding like a variation of a familiar Turkish curse (children of whores), also reminded the public that these people had been educated in minority or foreign-owned schools. These sentiments were echoed and amplified in the right-wing press, and as the country fell under the spell of what some call the 'Sèvres Syndrome' (the fear that Europe wanted Turkish membership so that it could carve up the country and parcel it out, as it had tried and failed to do after the First World War) there was a race to see which town and which urban neighbourhood could display the most flags, the highest flagpole, and the most flamboyant monument to nationalism.

The ultra-nationalists did not go unquestioned. By September 2006, Turkey's pro-EU democrats were more outspoken than ever about the now more than 120 cases seeking to muzzle writers, publishers and scholars, and there was widespread condemnation of the 301 case launched by Kerincsiz against the bestselling and highly regarded novelist Elif Shafak for letting a character in a novel use the word 'genocide'. They made their views heard, too, when the journalist İpek Çalışlar was prosecuted for insulting the memory of Atatürk (by including in her memoir of his one-time wife, Latife Hanım, an anecdote about his escaping from would-be assassins in woman's clothing) and when a 92-year-old Sumerologist was prosecuted for offending public morals because she said that in the days of the Sumerians, headscarves were worn not by law-abiding Islamist wives but by prostitutes.

But the impact of the trials was clear in the mostly lukewarm, but sometimes overtly hostile, response to the news that Orhan Pamuk had won the 2006

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Get them while they're young: nationalists on the march, 4 February 2007

Credit: Fatih Saribas/Reuters

Nobel Prize for Literature. Most Turks had by now been convinced by the right-wing media that the Nobel was the prize for which Pamuk had sold his country to the Europeans. For the same reasons they were also convinced that Dink and all others associated with the Armenian conference were directly responsible for France passing a draft law that could make it an offence to deny the Armenian genocide. This despite the fact that Dink and indeed all those involved in the fight for freedom of expression in Turkey expressed despair about this law, as it so weakened their own case for the repeal of 301. Dink felt so strongly about this that he proposed to travel to Paris to make a public statement denying the genocide. If he could be prosecuted in Turkey for acknowledging the genocide, and prosecuted in France for denying it, he would, he hoped, demonstrate that the real issue in both countries was freedom of speech.

Instead he was gunned down by a 17-year-old boy, Ogün Samast, although the real forces behind his murder were the militant nationalists with their links to the deep state. Or perhaps it wasn't the 17-year-old boy who pulled the trigger. Perhaps he was chosen to take the rap, because he was underage and liable to get a lighter sentence.

Because he was wearing a white beret, the white beret has become a must-have in the growing ranks of nationalist youth. As the more democratic

sectors of the media continue their investigations into the dark forces behind the assassination, nationalist websites keep adding names to their death lists. Several dozen prominent writers, scholars, and media figures are now under police guard. Orhan Pamuk has again left the country. But not for ever, as some papers continue to claim. In the meantime, the clashes between writers and the authorities grow steadily bloodier, exacerbated by the tensions of an election year. So although it's far too soon to know how this battle for the soul of Turkey will be fought and won, one thing is clear. The writers, scholars, journalists, publishers and human rights activists of the democracy movement are on the front line. They live with danger because they have important things to say. They deserve our respect, and our attention. □

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