

# UNCONVINCING TURKISH ARGUMENTS RE THE 'G' WORD

*Posted on July 6, 2015 by Keghart*



Category: [Opinions](#)



**Samim Akgönül**, [Repair](#), 6 July 2015

☒ Once upon a time, I had become a good reader of Harry Potter thanks to my children. I watched, of course, the film series several times. I noticed in this period: Voldemort is normally a person "who must not be named", but everyone, without exception, knows that his name is Voldemort and says it. I remember asking my eldest son "but his name should not be said, how it is possible that everybody say his name?" He answered with a very serious expression: "No, only cowards do not say it."

In Turkey, reactions about the Armenian Genocide have become very bizarre in 2015. This has become more visible with the recent statements of the Pope and the decision of the European Parliament.

Let's first remember what happened, we will then examine the reactions.

**Samim Akgönül**, [Repair](#), 6 July 2015

☒ Once upon a time, I had become a good reader of Harry Potter thanks to my children. I watched, of course, the film series several times. I noticed in this period: Voldemort is normally a person "who must not be named", but everyone, without exception, knows that his name is Voldemort and says it. I remember asking my eldest son "but his name should not be said, how it is possible that everybody say his name?" He answered with a very serious expression: "No, only cowards do not say it."

In Turkey, reactions about the Armenian Genocide have become very bizarre in 2015. This has become more visible with the recent statements of the Pope and the decision of the European Parliament.

Let's first remember what happened, we will then examine the reactions.

On April 12, 2015, the Vatican, with the initiative of the Armenian Catholic Church, organized Holy Mass to mark the centenary of the Genocide. People retained their breaths in Turkey. Would Pope Francis say "genocide" or "massacre" at the services held at the centenary's occasion? It would be nice if he says "massacre" or "disaster" ... We realized later that the issue was raised during Pope's visit to Turkey. "Say what you want, but not genocide," he had been told. Mehmet Paçacı, ambassador of Turkey to the Vatican, comforted Turkish hearts: "He will not say genocide."

The Holy Mass was attended by Armenia's head of state. The Pope stated: "In the past century, our human family has lived through three massive and unprecedented tragedies. The first, which is widely considered 'the first genocide of the 20th century', struck your own Armenian people."

Following the remarks, the ambassador was immediately recalled to Turkey for "consultation". He said that the Pope had not kept his promise and had exceeded his "religious" mission. "He has

shamed by speaking of genocide," the ambassador said.

Every year on April 24, we can observe that people retain their breath for the statements of the Pope and the president of the United States. If they say "massacre", "catastrophe" or "Great Calamity", it's feast time in Ankara. But those who read the statements must be aware that these manifestations of joy diminish progressively. The word that starts with "G" long time ago became normal outside Turkey. As for the reactions to the pronunciation of the word, it should be noted that they can be used together or alternately by the same people. Depending on the situation, one or more of these reactions may appear. I could identify ten of these:

**"In fact, we were massacred by them":** I heard this argument gradually less and less until 2015. Finally, there is an obvious demographic problem. But I see that this argument is resurrected in 2015 probably due to the tactics that can be summarized as "the best defense is attack." According to the last Ottoman census of 1914, there were 13 million Muslims and 1,800,000 Armenians in the country (There were also 1,600,000 Greeks). According to the first census of Republic of Turkey in 1927, the Armenian population was 64,000. Fuat Dündar has several times written on this subject. It is not necessary to give more details here.

**"They committed massacres also":** There is here a fundamental and structural problem, outside the statistical abyss discussed below. This argument makes equal the possible crimes committed by Armenians--while the principle must be the individuality of crimes--and the mass crime committed by the Ottoman State. Thus the Turks identify themselves with the Ottoman State.

**"They collaborated with the Russians":** This was the most widespread argument. But it was gradually abandoned when it became difficult to explain why Armenian participation in the Russian army in the Kars region could be pretext for deportations in the provinces of Eskişehir, Malatya or Edirne? I still hear the arguments sometimes.

**"This kind of things happens in war":** Of course this kind of things does not happen during war. If they happen, they are considered war crimes. In addition, there was no war in most of the places where "this kind of thing" happened in Anatolia.

**"But Muslims are killed in the world and you say nothing about it":** This argument is problematic on three points. First, it is an anachronism and a comparison of things that could not be compared. Second, any massacres cannot be a pretext for another massacre.

Third, no. We say many things about it.

**"But Americans also massacred Indians":** This is a confession. That means "Yes, we also committed massacres." In addition, the United States does not deny it and has given status to survivors. Besides, should be barbaric because there are other examples of savagery?

**"But the French massacred Algerians and the Germans the Namibians":** You can expand the list. See above.

**"We should leave this subject to the historians"**: This is an important argument. But there are several issues. First, which historians? Who will select the historians? Secondly, historians have written entire volumes on this subject. There are very few things unknown. Imagine that a historians' commission is, by chance, established. Let's suppose that this commission has done its research and has given its verdict (even if an historian cannot give a verdict). If the commission said "this was genocide" those who oppose the definition will reject the decision. Or let's suppose that the commission ruled it was not genocide. Will the Armenians accept the decision? I repeat: an historian does not judge. He consults and analyzes documents.

There is also the famous question of the archives. Based on the documents from archives around the world, historians have written about the genocide that was decided and committed against Ottoman Armenians. Not all archives in Turkey accessible. For example, general staff's are not. The accessible archives are those that have been cleaned and they are not open to everyone. Lastly, the Armenian Genocide is not just a question about history. For a nation, it is a question of reconciliation and strengthening its weak foundations. The Armenian Genocide issue is significant to save Turkey. It has no relation to Armenians.

**"Our common pains"**: This is a new argument. If it included the meaning "the pain that Armenians suffered between 1909 and 1915 and later are also the pain that we share," we might appreciate it. But this is not the case. It means "we also have been killed (whatever that means), we also have pain; we cannot take care of you." This argument has also "don't compare the suffering" version. But saying it, already compares pains.

**"The notion of genocide did not exist in 1915"**: It is a technical argument. It is the strongest of the used arguments. Those who use this argument agree that Armenians were exterminated in 1915. But they say that genocide is a legal concept that was created after World War II and the Armenian Genocide can not be qualified as genocide (at least, those who are the most reasonable say that). The weaknesses of this argument are the following: jurist Raphael Lemkin, who first used the term "genocide", claimed that he coined the word inspired by the Armenian and Jewish Genocides. Second, the definition of genocide fits what Armenians suffered. Lastly, the water was always water before it was defined as H<sub>2</sub>O.

Am I wrong? Voldemort's face did not become clearer with each episode.

***Mr. Samim Akgönül is a Turkish historian and political scientist.***

