

# The Opposition of Truth and Falsehood in the Novel “The Armenian Gate” by Wilfried Eggers

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**Abstract:** The present study seeks to explore the polemical features of the struggle against the denial of the Armenian Genocide in the detective novel “The Armenian Gate” by Wilfrid Eggers. The focus of the research is the first part of the novel, which with its content and form, plot lines, and gradual character development can be interpreted as a short story within the genre of the epic form. The main situation that reveals the nature of the character, is created by the intersection of two conceptual templates of the political discourse “Turks and Armenians - a complicated relationship”, and the dichotomy of truth-justice and falsehood-distortion. Accordingly, the study of the polemical preconditions of the research material, the bipolar opposition between truth and falsehood was suggested. The author exposes the official political path of impunity and concealment of the past. W. Eggers brings to the forefront of literature the discussions and debates organized by Turkish communities in various countries regarding the fact of the Armenian Genocide and tries to capture their essence, the spread of the ideology of distortion and rejection of the fact of the Genocide. The author's concern about the Turkish policy extends beyond the massacre of Armenians. He sees in this policy the massacres of Greeks, Jews, Kurds, Zazas, Assyrians implemented by the Turks. In this sense, the novel is also humanistic. In the novel, the character of Turk Ali Soylemyozoghlu acts as the commissioner. He believes that the advertised discussion is a dialogue for peace. On the other side of the conflict, memory associations are not accepted as a tendency to preserve one's own past, but rather an obligation to learn and reflect upon it. The character is pushed to renounce religious and educational dogmas and to abandon illusions. This is considered the main polemical prerequisite, which creates the possibility for character expansion and acquisition of new typical traits. In this sense, Anahit Petrosyan's individual struggle evolves into an idea that unites all Armenians.

**Keywords:** Wilfried Eggers, Detective Novel, Denial of the Armenian Genocide, Polemics, Bipolar Opposition, Political Discourse

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## 1. Introduction

During the period of the Renaissance man as a supreme value was convinced of his right to live a dignified life. This idea formed the basis for the first educators to address the issue of violence as a universal problem. Nevertheless, the problem of genocide and violence remained relevant and exacerbated even further in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Humanity faced a broad range of major issues while in literature man had fallen into existential contemplations. In the midst of Turkey's political stance of denial and the influences of globalization and scientific and technical achievements, the century-old mnemonic presence of the Armenian Genocide in literature as a component of “cultural

memory” has taken on a modern axis: the cognitive issue of the historical concept of the Armenian Genocide is being explored from a political, philosophical, psychological and cultural point of view. Here Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk highlights the role of the novelist: “... The “politics” of the novelist originates from his imagination, his ability to be someone else or to imagine others. Through this ability the novelist becomes a voice for those who cannot speak about the true reality [1].

In the context of world literature, authors writing on the Armenian Genocide share a common goal of studying it at the level of a universal issue. In German-language literature, this topic maintains its relevance with unique development trends. Franz Werfel's historical book “The 40 Days of Musa

Dagh" and Edgar Hilsenrath's psychological survival novel "The Tale of the Last Thought" are the best examples. Haypress, the only active online news agency in Germany, regularly presents books published on the topic to its readers. Some of these books are "The Light of My Father's Land", "Here Are Lions", "The Armenian Gate", "They Call Us Another Name on the Street", etc. [2]. Among these works, German literary studies and literary criticism have highlighted the novel "The Armenian Gate" by Wilfried Eggers written over the course of eight years.

Tessa Hoffmann, a German PhD, writes about the novel "The Burden of Armenian History" in her review: "W. Eggers has recently succeeded in a detective novel that promotes his human rights concerns with the means of entertainment literature. The focus is not so much on the history of the Ottoman genocide, but on the current Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict history in the South Caucasus and South and Iranian-Azerbaijan. As a result of the Republic of Azerbaijan's repeated attempts to retake Nagorno-Karabakh militarily, this emphasis is gaining particular relevance and illustrates the continuing structural threat to the Armenians in this region" [3].

The novel was covered by various magazines. "Wilfried Eggers, a lawyer and a notary, puts the historical and current events on solid ground. The novel effectively portrays the duration of the genocide, falsehoods and violence, without avoiding parallels with the history of Germany. However, you should be careful. Eggers seems to be a perfect artist, but it soon becomes obvious that the "The Armenian Gate" is not an artificially created painting, but rather a photorealistic one" [4]. Wilfried Eggers takes his readers to the darkest corners of the Armenian past and present..... He has researched meticulously and with his crime novel he is putting his finger in a wound that is still open [5]. Reviews of the novel were published on the pages of "Cuxhavener Nachrichten", "Berlin", and "Der Freitag". Ekz book service (public library meeting service) saw the book as a challenge due to the fact that the author presents the fact of the Armenian Genocide with new possibilities of literary polemic [6].

In Wilfried Eggers' case, the search for the "natural connection" between the author's personality and his work in the biographical author-creative author relationship (a critic's main task, as noted by St. Beuve in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) [7] is linked to his work as a lawyer. Eggers invested his whole set of skills in the character of lawyer Schloder, expressing the traits of cold judgment, calmness, and circumspection. A recurring character in his crime novels, Schloeder, like the author, undertakes a long journey. The author's creative motivation stems from his humanistic worldview, shaped by contacts with Armenians during the trip to Turkey for "Paragraph 301", from his research various materials about the Armenian Genocide and impressions from reading novels about the Armenian Genocide by Fr. Werfel, Edgar Hilzenrath, Akram Aysli, Peter Dalakyan, Varuzhan Voskanyan [8, 16]. In this regard, "The Armenian Gate" can be considered a humanist novel that challenges systems that seek to exclude mass massacres from the realm of conscious

action making the exclusion a justification in itself [9]. Eggers' political perception of the topic is closely aligned to that of Edgar Hilzenrath, who in the novel "The Tale of the Last Thought" [10] portrays a diplomat in the "International Archive Department" who dusts off the Armenian case and brings it before the World Court. Meddah assumes the literary responsibility for making the Armenian Genocide known to the world. In 2008, Meddah art was included in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity [11].

## 2. Methodology

The subject matter of the work implies the use of analytical and comparative methods during the study. The main characters have been analyzed on the basis of features characteristic of political discourse, and have been compared at the level of discourse definition and perception. Innovative values have been identified in the character creation system.

## 3. Main Body

### 3.1. *Contrasting Conditions of the Plot*

The detective novel "Armenian Gate" by Wilfrid Eggers sheds light on the official policy implemented to hide the reality of the Armenian Genocide and the destructive criminal events that have been carried out on the same basis in the 21st century. The last pages of the novel announce the fact of integrating Artsakh into Azerbaijan. The first part of the novel serves as a study material, fitting into the genre of the story with its content and form, plot lines and the gradual development of characters. [12] The action takes place in the fictional small town of Hamstedt, which is located between the Elbe and the Weser. Here, a cold war is raging between Turks and Armenians, with Kurds, Zazas and Alevis involved in the hostilities. During the discussion on the denial of the Armenian Genocide initiated by the Turkish community, Anahit Petrosyan, an Armenian woman, submits an appeal. However, the discussion fails, and on her way home Anahit is raped by the Turks.

The novel can be viewed as an example of a forensic professional process that begins with the method of political discourse. As a mode of communication, the discourse is intended to facilitate the discussion of the views of the participants, therefore, it is guided by the internal logic of participants' knowledge and perspectives, thereby ensuring the impact of knowledge on the process.

W. Eggers introduces the discussions and debates organized by Turkish communities across different countries pertaining to the fact of the Armenian Genocide and seeks to present their essence in accordance with the definition of the discourse. These discussions, advertised under the guise of discourse, are, in fact, designed to propagate the ideology of distortion and denial of the Armenian Genocide. The next title is: "Turks and Armenians - a complicated relationship". A certain Ali Soylemyozoghlu, who frames the debate as a

dialogue for peace, must speak on the topic. The advertisement written in Turkish implies the mandatory attendance of all Turks. "For the first time in the history of Germany, we managed to organize an event within the framework of the state, in which we can reject the claim of the Armenian Genocide as it is: a fabrication and an affront to Turkism. We have an obligation to mobilize the institutions across the country to adopt similar measures. It is a patriotic duty for all Turks to be present tonight." [13] For her presence at the discussion the protagonist, Anahit Petrosyan, is thankful to her grandmother: it was the latter who taught her some Turkish. Her attendance aims to highlight the confrontational nature of the discussion, because they are organized by Turks in areas where Armenians are minority or absent altogether. Here the concerns of the main character and the author about Turkish politics coincide: the massacre of Armenians is not unique in this politics, they also remember Greeks, Jews, Kurds. "Armenians, Greeks, Zazas, Assyrians... all were slaughtered by the Turkish state. And everything was falsified. Nothing can be compared to it." [13].

### 3.2. *The Opposition of Truth and Falsehood Within the Discourse*

The collective perception of Anahit's character is established from the very first lines of the novel. First and foremost, she bears the name of the goddess of fertility and motherhood of the Armenian mythology, secondly, through her conscious flow, we are presented with images associated with the history of the Armenian people. But this is not at all a tendency to preserve one's past, it is a challenge to reflect upon and learn from it. As an existential character in a hostile environment, Anahit embodies the sense of loneliness and unlimited freedom in the face of falsehood and distortion. [14] The character abandons all religious and educational dogmas, and does not live in illusion. "When you belong to a nation that they try to exterminate, you cannot be an optimist." [13] This is considered the main polemical precondition which creates an opportunity to develop the character with new typical features. And it is quite logical that Anahit, as a collective image of the Armenian people, knows Soylemyozoghlu very well. "Anahit knows Soylemyozoghlu and his likes. He is a member of the army of Turkish supporters. Whenever the Armenian Genocide is mentioned anywhere, newspapers, radio programs and television discussions are flooded with their materials. Many people, journalists in particular, have even made it a means of livelihood, and Soylemyozoghlu is one of them" [13].

The exchange between Anahit and Ali creates an outrage among the crowd, provoking Ali's fury, but Anahit keeps her cool and calm. This was not the first time she faced such a front. From the point of view of the topic, the definition of discourse as an argumentative art is highlighted. Arguments are important in the logical structure of discourse. Anahit Petrosyan presents them convincingly without additional burden, each one more effective and precise than the

previous one. And all his questions, which are mostly repeated and allow to focus the attention of the audience on a certain part of the speech and increase the influencing power of the speech, are not aimed specifically at Ali Soylemyozoghlu, each wording seeks an accurate perception and assessment of the situation [15]; "Anahit stands up.

- I would like to ask you a question.

- Do, please, - Soylemyozoghlu smiles.

- There is a document in Mosul that belongs to a former German ambassador, Walter Halstein. He reports that in many parts of the road from Mosul to Aleppo, one could see so many severed children's arms that the entire road could be paved with them. You are familiar with this source. Have you studied the document?

- Err ...I ...

- I attest that you are not familiar with it then. You haven't studied it. Walter Holstein also reported that he had seen gendarmerie guards in Diyarbakir and Mardin asking the population to slaughter Armenians. Besides, all along the road to the south of Nusaybin one could see Muslims running around with spiked swords. *Ermeni* means Armenians. They kept shouting this word, as if that was their only concern. Are you familiar with the biography of Henry Morgenthau, the American ambassador in Istanbul? He had been to Talaat Pasha many times trying to make them stop the massacre of Armenians. Did you know about this? Did you do any research on this?

- Morgenthau? You mean the Jew? His assumptions are absolutely false. The data he brings forth is debatable, and it is obvious that he...

- And who can prove it? Can you?

- I...

- I attest that you can give no explanation of this. I understand that you don't want to deliberately claim here in Germany that a Jew cannot be trusted because he is a Jew. But there is something else. Have you heard about this form of torture still used in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey today? When a clamp is forcefully inserted into the anus of the victim...?

- What does it have to do with all of this?

- A lot. Martin Niepage, who was teaching at the German school in Aleppo in 1913-1916, reported everything the engineers at Baghdad railway had told him. In German, by the way. Everything happened under Wilhelm von Pressel. He told me everything related to Turkey. I know it by heart.

- And now name another non-Turkish historian who shares your statement. There is none, - he continued, before Soylemyozoghlu opened his mouth.

- There are only Turkish writers who deny the genocide of Anatolian Armenians and none of them tells the truth. But the worst is that they know the truth, they know it and they keep lying. And that is why they always have to justify themselves, organize such events in Hamstadt, where there are almost no Armenians with whom they could make friends.

Soylemyozoghlu craned his neck and opened his mouth but the Afghan pharmacist got ahead.

- Please, we are not historians. This woman's questions...

or at least assumptions... I am sorry, what is your name?

- My name is Anahit Petrosyan, I am Armenian and I ask you again, Mr. Soylemyozoghlu. Is there at least one non-Turkish historian who shares your views? Please, name at least one, give a name!

Soylemezoglu's neck became shorter again, he barely moved it back and forth like a turtle.

- The study of the archive, - said he, - is urgently needed because the factual foundations we've been given so far are incomplete.

The pharmacist, an earnest man, as Anahit now realized, interrupted Soylemyozoghlu and announced:

- So is there no one?

Soylemyozoghlu didn't answer at once causing a murmur in the audience [13].

The gradual exposure of deliberate lies and falsehoods with evidence-based arguments makes the audience quite engaged. The Italian lady sitting next to her covered her eyes with her hands and muttered, "Questo e terribile...". Someone from the back rows shouted. "Zur" which means "Lie". This sentence sets the polemical limit, which belongs to the functions of character in the art of debate. Anahit Petrosyan managed to reveal the lie and emerge victorious. The Turks' cold looks behind made her nauseous. "I am going to throw up if I stay here". Anahit stands up and makes her way to the exit through the people [13].

The establishment of justice in the opposition of the truth and falsehood, created by the two characters, Anahit Petrosyan and Ali Soylemyozoghlu, raises the issue of individual struggle in the novel. This is reminiscent of Spanish writer José Antonio Gurriaran's novel "The Bomb", which explores the personal experience of a Spanish journalist and the tragic story of survival of an entire nation. The bomb was meant to detonate human indifference towards the pain of Armenians, to achieve its recognition and the realization of considering someone else's pain as one's own. This is common for *tremendist* novels popular in Spanish literature in 1930s. The sense of justice is national characteristics for both Armenians and Spaniards when individuals strive to be judges in order to achieve justice. This received its artistic manifestation in the works of Spanish writers of the generation.

The fact that Anahit Petrosyan was raped by Turks on her way home after the debate not only documents the ideology of falsehood, but also marks the beginning of new atrocities. Despite the calm and cool demeanor, the character maintains throughout the novel, she fights a grueling inner battle against the society and herself. Anahit takes it upon herself to administer justice, because if Armenians do not fight, a hundred years later the Turks will prove to be right.

#### 4. Conclusion

The research shows that in W. Eggers' novel "The Armenian Gate", the theme of the Armenian Genocide has a conceptual definition which serves as a foundation for new perceptions of the novel's content, and paves way for further analysis. To highlight the imperative of condemning ethnic

violence, genocides and the politics of denial, the author considers the topic of Armenian Genocide from the point of view of political culture, public consciousness, cognitive and educational functions of societies, political thought and public discussions on the platform of political discourse.

The proponent of the "dialogue for peace", by discussing the issue of "Turks and Armenians – a complicated relationship", in reality, aims to promote the rejectionist ideology of the Armenian Genocide through the Turkish Commissioner Ali Soylemyozoglou. The latter, with his false ignorance and lack of awareness within the boundaries of discourse, argumentative art, tries not only to distract the listeners from the real perception of the genocide, but also to attribute a new sin of responsibility to Armenians, falsely claiming that they had the intention of slaughtering the Turks. In contrast, the other participant of the debate is Anahit Petrosyan, the sole Armenian woman who appeared there by chance. Through her questions, sources, persuasive arguments, precise formulations she presents a cold judgment, without emotional weakness and restraint. The truth voiced in a strict and demanding style leads listeners towards the reality of the Armenian Genocide, its accurate perception, the polemical victory of the Armenian woman and the defeat of the initiator of the discourse.

This analysis explores the internal urges of the Armenian woman for ethnic self-awareness and self-affirmation against the denial of the Armenian Genocide, and creates the challenge of individual struggle, teaching the importance of presenting a balanced truth against falsehoods within ignorant communities and societies in polemical conditions and regardless of the consequences. Within the internal struggle of the character, Anahit Petrosyan, the weight of catastrophic memories from the past clashes with the prevailing falsehoods, compelling her to critically reflect and abandon certain religious and educational principles. This process leads to a transformation in her character, expanding her traits beyond the initial ones of optimism, kindness, gentleness, sensitivity, and tolerance. She develops new characteristics such as coldness, severity, and pessimism. In this sense, the novel takes on an innovative significance.

Through the course of the study, a unique connection between the biographical author and the creator of fictional works emerges. This connection is rooted in the profound concern of the author, a great humanist, towards the perpetration of violence and genocides.

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