

THE AFTERMATH PROJECT

MEMORY DENIED

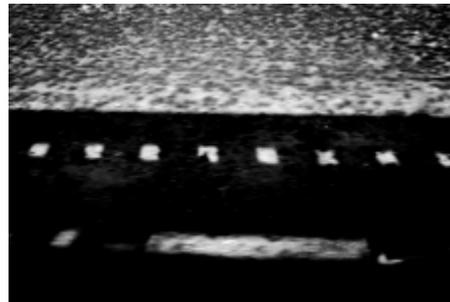
KATHRYN COOK, 2008 AFTERMATH PROJECT GRANT WINNER

INTRODUCING "MEMORY DENIED"

Kathryn Cook's project *Memory Denied: Turkey and the Armenian Genocide* explores the memory of the Armenian massacres that occurred during the decline of the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th century. Recognized as "genocide" today by more than a dozen countries, Turkey still vigorously rejects that claim. Cook's work follows the remains and traces of an ambiguous, dark history — the definition of which is still being fought over nearly a century later.

SHADOW OF A TRAIN

The shadow of a train that runs from Adana to Istanbul, Turkey, is seen projected on land between the cities of Konya and Adana, Turkey. A German company won concessions to build part of the railway back in the early 1900s, then called the Baghdad Railway, and in 1915 the Turkish government began to use it to deport thousands of Armenians to Syria. According to eyewitness accounts, concentration camps sprung up along the sides of the train track, particularly between the cities of Konya and Gaziantep. Defending themselves from bandits and starvation, thousands perished in the camps or en route to Syria.



- What do you notice about the composition of this photograph? What is the effect or purpose of the use of shadow and light?
 - Trains have become iconic imagery in relation to World War II, suggesting the deportation of millions during that period. Trains also played a critical role in the deportation of Armenians in 1915. What is Kathryn Cook suggesting by capturing the shadow of a modern train with a singular figure in the window?
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ARMENIAN BIBLE

A woman holds a small Armenian Bible during a service at the Holy Mother of God church in Vakifli, Turkey. About 30 Armenian families populate the small town and surrounding area, which is located near the Turkish border with Syria. Although Armenians are allowed to celebrate their traditions in Turkey, many fear asserting their ethnic origins, which means living in near silence to avoid trouble.



- Who is this woman? What does her gesture suggest? Why do you think the photographer did not include her face?
 - The caption tells us that while Armenians may practice their traditions openly, they do not feel safe “asserting their ethnic origins.” What role does worship play in maintaining one’s individual, ethnic, and cultural identity?
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JOURNALIST

A photo of slain Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink is seen in the reflection of the hearse carrying his flower-covered coffin during a funeral procession in Istanbul on January 23, 2007. Dink was shot in broad daylight outside of his newspaper’s office in Istanbul. Dink, a defender of his Armenian past, was charged with breaking Law 301 of the Penal Code which makes it illegal to “insult” the Republic or being a Turk. His killer admitted that he did it because Hrant had “insulted Turks.”



- It is reported that over 200,000 people attended Hrant Dink’s funeral in Istanbul, many carrying placards with such messages as “We are all Armenians” and “We are all Hrant Dink.” Who are these individuals we see reflected in the window? Why do you think Kathryn Cook chose to capture their reflections rather than their faces?
 - Photographer Kathryn Cook notes that her work “addresses how a premeditated act committed by ‘new Turks’ on the ‘old Ottomans’ has manifested itself in the country’s present.” In what ways does this photograph and the murder of Hrant Dink speak to this idea of the confrontation between past and present?
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DIYARBAKIR

A young girl stands on the ruin of an Armenian church in Diyarbakir, Turkey. A significant Armenian community once flourished in this southeastern city.



- Cook notes in her artist statement that her work is focused on “exploring the remains and traces of an ambiguous, dark history.” How does this photo graph give us a glimpse into a particular community and history through its remains and traces? What clues lead you to these conclusions?
- Why do you think the photographer chose to include a lone child in this image? What might she be suggesting?
- What loss is being captured in this photograph?
- Diyarbakir, a city in southeastern Turkey, was once home to a thriving Armenian community, and ruins from that time remain. What role do sites of memory, such as the ruins of this church, play in our understanding of a past that appears to have been forgotten?

LAKE VAN

Snow blankets the countryside along a road between Van and Dogubayazit, Turkey, close to the border with present-day Armenia. The region of Eastern Turkey is where the largest population of Turkey’s Armenians had been living for centuries. The region of Lake Van was hit hard by violence during conflicts between Armenians and Turks in the late 1800s to early 1900s, as well as during WWI. After the deportation decrees in 1915 were issued, almost all of the Armenian communities in the area were subsequently wiped out.



- Kathryn Cook states that her work “explores the remains and traces of an ambiguous, dark history.” With this idea in mind, what role do you think physical sites of memory can play in our understanding of a particular culture or history? What is included or missing in this photograph that supports your answer?
- Armenian Genocide survivor John Minassian asks, “What happens when those who harm others get away with it? What is the legacy of that silence?” How would you answer these questions?

- Imagine that you knew nothing about the context of this photograph. What would you see? How does knowing more about the historical context impact your interpretation of the image? What do you think the photographer wants you to see? What do you think she wants you to think about?

See the full project: <http://theaftermathproject.org.s166416.gridserver.com/project/memory-denied>