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During her first year of doctoral study, Hayrapetyan held the Howard Fromson Fellowship as she began researching the founding of the Turkish Republic and the issue of Armenian returnees during the period of 1918 to 1938. Her research concentrates on the difficulties facing the new nation state including the problem of minorities, the nationalist movement, the liberation war, the abolition of the sultanate and caliphate and the secularization of the state. On October 30, 1918, Ottoman Turkey and Great Britain signed the Mudros armistice, which ended the Great War in the Middle East. However, the war wasn't truly over and continued under the veil of strong nationalism and jihadi rhetoric. In the context of "the sacred fatherland," anti-Christian and later anti-Kurdish propaganda gradually became pervasive. While anti-minority messages differed for international and domestic audiences, Turkish President Mustafa Kemal blamed Armenians and Greeks for events that he never clearly defined.

Hayrapetyan examines how Armenian survivors who returned from the deportations were able to integrate into this new post-genocide reality. Approximately 250,000 Armenians returned to Turkey although many passed as Turks, Kurds and even Greeks. The implementation of a law requiring Turkish surnames meant Armenians were forced to obscure their identity. In addition, they experienced new waves of deportation due to ethnic cleansing. Even those who remained and rebuilt their lives lost their social identity and were sentenced to social death. Research in the Guergerian archive yielded 150 files documenting the situation of Armenians, reports from various provinces, complains about misdeeds and atrocities towards returnee Armenians.

