

Struggling for Memory:
Beyond Genocide Commemorations in Turkey
A Social Identity Perspective

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*The struggle of man against power
is the struggle of memory against forgetting.*

- Milan Kundera¹

INTRODUCTION

In 2012, I joined friends on my first trip to Turkey. We started off in Istanbul, flew to Kharpert (Harput/Elazig), explored Palu, spent a few nights in Diyarbakir, and took a dangerous day trip to the Kghi region. I was in the heart of Western Armenia, what many simply recognize as Eastern Turkey—a place that had only existed in my imagination. *My* Western Armenia had been mostly barren, save for some ruins dotting the landscape and the ghosts of people that resembled the characters in the stories I read as a child. I never imagined the millions of Turks and Kurds who lived there, and certainly not the hidden or Islamized Armenians.

I never imagined the level of destruction and erasure of Armenian traces. I never imagined that there were genocide survivors there too, and that the child of a genocide victim might also be the child of a perpetrator. I was emotionally drained.

Turkey is vast. How could one begin to dismantle the culture of institutionalized genocide denial in a place like that? Government policies, official discourse, history books, and most media outlets contribute to this rewriting of history. Streets and buildings carry the names of the masterminds of the genocide. Outside the cities, the sides of mountains are defaced with

¹ From Milan Kundera's book, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. The words are uttered by the character Mirek, on p. 4.

glaring white paint depicting the crescent and the star that hug the words “*Once Vatan*” (“Nation first,” in Turkish).

Then, I met Kurdish men and women who remembered the massacres, and retold those stories to their children and grandchildren. I made four more trips over the next five years, and met Turkish and Kurdish activists, academics, and journalists who were organizing in Istanbul, then Diyarbakir, then Ankara and elsewhere. And in 2015, I participated in the commemoration events in Istanbul and Ankara on the occasion of the Centennial of the Armenian Genocide.

These commemorations have not been without their challenges, internal struggles and politics, and shortcomings and pitfalls. They do however generate much excitement in the Armenian communities in the Diaspora. They also give rise to criticisms and questions. Some see the approaches problematic, naïve, misguided, and dangerous. Others see the participants as brave, passionate, fearless, and heroic.

I, too, was curious: What moves individuals to participate in these commemoration events in an atmosphere of hostility? What meaning do they derive from them? What are their anxieties and hopes?

This research stems from that curiosity.

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore what moves individuals to participate in the annual Armenian Genocide commemorations in Turkey. Through a series of interviews, my research investigates not only what my informants say motivate them, but also how their responses might differ based on factors such as ethnicity, gender, age, political affiliation,

occupation, etc. In the process, my research also explores the different emotions and frames of thinking that might help elucidate how my informants construct meaning.

Exploring motives will help analyze how participants view their own agency, and relate to others in the context of Armenian Genocide commemorations in Turkey. The study could also help us understand if and how broader solidarities, identities, and ideas of justice are built through involvement in these commemorative events.

The research data is the result of 14 in-depth interviews I conducted with participants of these commemorations between January and May 2017. I asked my informants about their experiences as participants in these commemorations, how they learned about these events, what moved them to participate, how they responded emotionally, and how they assess the potential impact of these commemorations.

BACKGROUND

After a century of silence and denial, in 2010, the first ever Armenian Genocide commemoration event was held in Istanbul, 95 years after the start of the Armenian Genocide (1915-1923) that claimed 1.5 million victims. This became an annual event which generally drew a few hundred individuals, including a handful of individuals from the Armenian Diaspora—the children and grandchildren of genocide survivors. The Istanbul events gained momentum in 2015, the centennial of the genocide, which saw thousands (some have claimed as many as 20,000 participants), including more than 250 individuals from the diaspora, gather for a series of commemorative events. The Istanbul branch of the Human Rights Association of Turkey, as well as the anti-racist Durde organization, both with a Turkish and Kurdish membership, spearheaded these events in Istanbul, in collaboration with others such as the

Istanbul based Armenian Nor Zartonk movement, the U.S.-based Project 2015 (comprised of diasporan Armenians), Anadolu Kultur, and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation².

Meanwhile, in the predominantly Kurdish city of Diyarbakir in the southeast of Turkey, the local authorities, in partnership with local activists and Armenian individuals and organizations, began to collaborate and embarked on a number of significant initiatives. First, Kurdish leaders publicly and unequivocally apologized for the part Kurdish tribes and guerrillas played in the execution of the genocide—these apologies came from elected officials and leaders of the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP). In 2015, the HDP ran in the Parliamentary election with a platform that included genocide recognition. Second, local authorities supported the reconstruction of the Surp Giragos Armenian Church (reopened in 2011)—the largest Armenian Church in the region—where Armenian language classes began to be conducted for both hidden or Islamized Armenians and local Kurds interested in the language. Third, starting in 2004, the city made a commitment to “multiculturalism,” and began erecting official signs in Armenian and Assyrian, along with the Kurdish and Turkish. Fourth, in 2013, the city officially unveiled a “Monument to Common Conscience,” which reads in six languages: “We share the pain so that it is not repeated.” And fifth, through the efforts of local activists like Kurdish human rights lawyer Tahir Elci³ and diasporan Armenian academics and activists, genocide commemorations began to be held in Diyarbakir in 2013. According to some organizers, the 2015 event drew close to 1,000 participants.

² Anadolu Kultur, with the support of the Gulbenkian Foundation, organized a large indoor concert on April 23, which drew around 5,000 guests.

³ Elci, who was head of the Diyarbakir Bar Association and founder of Amnesty International Turkey, was murdered while giving a press conference in November 2015, when he was caught in the middle of gunfire between Turkish Armed Forces and unidentified gunmen. Just before his murder he was appealing for an end to violence between the Turkish armed forces and Kurdish militants.

Commemorations were also held in other cities. In the capital, Ankara, a group of activists began organizing an annual event, and in 2015, held an event titled “*Soz Ermenilerin*” (“voice to the Armenians”)⁴. Other smaller events have been organized in places such as Ayntab and Bitlis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

GENOCIDE DENIAL IN TURKEY

In recent years, a number of books have been published that chronicle and reveal the extent and depth of genocide denial in policy and society in Turkey. In her 2016 book, *The Armenians in Modern Turkey: Post-Genocide Society, Politics and History*, historian Talin Suciyan consults an immense volume of archived Armenian newspapers, conducts interviews, and accesses archives to reveal the effects of denial, the forced complicity of the Istanbul Armenian community in the denial (book burnings and self-censorship), and the harassment and intimidation they endured in all levels of society between 1923 and 1950. She writes about the institutionalization of denial, which started with the founder of the Republic of Turkey Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and continues until today. Suciyan proposes defining the relational structures and conditions of denial as “the post-genocidal habitus of denial.” For Suciyan, the habitus refers to the discourses and practices that are produced from the subject’s relation to certain structures.⁵ Suciyan’s work sheds light on the forms and effects of this habitus of denial that continues to threaten Armenians in Turkey, which are estimated to be between 50,000 and 70,000.

⁴ I, along a number of diasporan Armenian activists, journalists, and writers, was one of the featured speakers.

⁵ Suciyan, T. *The Armenians in Modern Turkey: Post-Genocide Society, Politics and History*. I.B. Tauris (NY). 2016. P. 22.

In a similar vein, Suciyan and Ayda Erbal discuss the abandonment and self-alienation of the Armenian community in Turkey in an article titled, “One Hundred Years of Abandonment,”⁶ which details the lengths members of the community had to go to prove that they are “good” citizens of Turkey. For instance, they note: “when Armenians around the world gathered to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the genocide, the Istanbul Armenians found themselves in the middle of Taksim Square delivering wreaths to the Republican Statue in protest.” In other words, prior to 2010, not only were there no publicly held genocide commemorations, but often the opposite was true; Armenians were forced to publicly engage in denial. Suciyan and Erbal argue that “The never-spoken cost for Istanbul Armenians was the complete negation of their political identity and history.”

In terms of policies, historian Ugur Umit Ungor details the policies of the Young Turk government and subsequent governments in creating a homogeneous society, in what Ungor (and others) refer to as social engineering. In his paper, “Seeing like a nation-state: Young Turk social engineering in Eastern Turkey, 1913-50,”⁷ Ungor discusses efforts that included linguistic and cultural oppression, marginalization, intimidation, deportations, massacres, to outright genocide targeting non-Turkic groups in the country. Ungor argues that these policies are interconnected, whether affecting the Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians, Kurds, or other groups. He writes: “Listed one by one in this bookkeeping of violence, these campaigns may seem incidental and isolated events, sudden explosions neatly encapsulated in time and space. But a closer look reveals clear ideological, motivational, and organic links and interdependencies between them.”

⁶ Erbal, A., and T. Suciyan. “One Hundred Years of Abandonment.” *The Armenian Weekly*, April 2011 Magazine. Available at: <http://armenianweekly.com/2011/04/29/erbal-and-suciyan-one-hundred-years-of-abandonment/>

⁷ Ungor, U.U. “Seeing like a nation-state: Young Turk social engineering in Eastern Turkey, 1913-50.” *Journal of Genocide Research* (2008), 10 (1), March, 15-39.

Meanwhile, on the topic of denial, scholar Marc Mamigonian discusses how the Turkish government—in an effort to push back on the issue of genocide recognition in the international arena—has adopted measures similar to the way tobacco companies employed campaigns to manufacture doubt about the health risks of smoking. These efforts include stressing the “need for more research,” and funding scholars and research projects.⁸

Despite the century of silencing and denial, today, genocide commemorations are being held in Turkey. They are generally small events, mostly organized by Turkish and Kurdish activists and organizations, such as the Istanbul branch of the Human Rights Association of Turkey (HRA) and Durde, with some involvement by local members of the Armenian community, and—to an extent—members of the diasporan Armenian communities—particularly in North America. However, in large part, the Istanbul Armenian community remains wary, and often afraid to be too visible and too outspoken⁹.

There are of course exceptions, some with dire consequences. Journalist Hrant Dink, who was the founder and editor of the *Agos* newspaper that ran stories in both Armenian and Turkish, and who dared to discuss issues relating to the genocide, was dragged to the courts in multiple cases and prosecuted for “insulting Turkishness.” He was vilified and called a traitor by the mainstream media, received numerous death threats, and was finally gunned down in front of his *Agos* offices in broad daylight by an ultra-nationalist youth in 2007. Unfortunately, it took

⁸ Mamigonian, M. “Scholarship, Manufacturing Doubt, and Genocide Denial.” *The Armenian Weekly*, April 2013 Magazine. Available at: <http://armenianweekly.com/2013/05/02/scholarship-manufacturing-doubt-and-genocide-denial/>

⁹ Barsoumian, N. “WikiLeaks: Turkey’s Armenians Fearful of ‘Violent Backlash,’ Facing ‘Uncertain Future’” *The Armenian Weekly*. Sept. 10, 2011. Available at: <http://armenianweekly.com/2011/09/10/wikileaks-turkey-armenians/>

Dink's murder to shake society and jolt some into action. More than 100,000 people joined his funeral procession, holding signs and chanting, "We are all Hrant Dink; We are all Armenian."

However, diasporan Armenian journalist and scholar Khatchig Mouradian wrote in an editorial¹⁰ on the fourth anniversary of Dink's murder:

No one is Hrant Dink. Even Hrant Dink was sometimes not himself, because one cannot fully be oneself—as a public intellectual and, more importantly, as an Armenian—and get away with it in Turkey, where the pressure to tone discourse down, to criticize and lament within limits, to applaud the most insignificant act of dissidence as the paragon of heroism is overwhelming, insurmountable.

Mouradian is drawing attention to the precarious situation Istanbul Armenians find themselves in, where discourse is habitually censored, and language becomes ambiguous.

Following Dink's murder, Nor Zartonk, an organization of young Istanbul Armenians and Turkish and Kurdish activists, has become active and outspoken in demanding rights for the Armenian community and forging alliances with members of minority groups in Turkey. They have also participated in marches and demonstrations¹¹, as well as genocide commemoration events. Sayat Tekir, an outspoken member of Nor Zartonk, explained it this way: "we cannot live with this fear any longer, and as Nor Zartonk, we want to get past these boundaries. In the 100 years since the genocide, there have been many changes around the world regarding minority

¹⁰ Mouradian, K. "No One Is Hrant Dink: 96 Years of Solitude, and 4 Years of the Same." *The Armenian Weekly*. Jan. 14, 2011. Available at: <http://armenianweekly.com/2011/01/14/mouradian-no-one-is-hrant-dink/>

¹¹ "Istanbul Protesters Demand Camp Armen Return." *The Armenian Weekly*. May 22, 2015. Available at: <http://armenianweekly.com/2015/05/22/istanbul-camp-armen-protest/>

treatment and democratic rule. This shirt that we have been forced to wear—so to speak—does not fit us anymore...not since Dink's murder.”¹²

Perhaps it is worth mentioning another case that exhibits the realities of being an outspoken Armenian in Turkey. In 2014, writer, columnist, entrepreneur, and outspoken critic Sevan Nisanyan was prosecuted over illegal construction on his property and sentenced to jail¹³; his sentence seemed to extend for at least 17 years¹⁴. Nisanyan had spoken about the genocide on TV at a time when it was still taboo, and the airing station was punished; he had written a blog post on freedom of speech and the right to poke fun at the Prophet Mohammad.¹⁵ He said to me in an interview in 2013: “Although there is much willingness now among the Turkish elite to revise Turkey's traditional attitude toward minorities, the old habits die hard in the bureaucracy. There is instinctive hostility toward an Armenian. It turns rabid when that Armenian is also an outspoken critic of the Turkish system.”¹⁶

In recent years, there have been protests targeting Armenians. For instance in 2012, large crowds of tens of thousands gathered in Istanbul in support of Azerbaijan, which is at war with Armenia, chanting and carrying banners that read, “You are all Armenians, you are all bastards!”

¹² Barsoumian, N. “A New Awakening: An Interview with Nor Zartonk's Sayat Tekir.” *The Armenian Weekly*. Aug. 27, 2015. Available at: <http://armenianweekly.com/2015/08/27/interview-tekir/>

¹³ Barsoumian, N. “How to Silence an Armenian Maverick in Turkey.” *The Armenian Weekly*. Jan. 3, 2014. Available at: <http://armenianweekly.com/2014/01/03/armenian-maverick/>

¹⁴ On July 14, 2017, news broke that Nisanyan had escaped from prison, after serving more than three years. He is now rumored to be in Greece.

¹⁵ Barsoumian, N. “The Perpetual ‘Other’: Nisanyan Discusses Court Sentence, Minority Politics in Turkey.” *The Armenian Weekly*. June 4, 2013. Available at: <http://armenianweekly.com/2013/06/04/the-perpetual-other-nisanyan-discusses-court-sentence-minority-politics-in-turkey/>

¹⁶ Barsoumian, N. “‘Mad Vandalism’: Turkey to Demolish Hotels of Outspoken Armenian Entrepreneur-Scholar.” *The Armenian Weekly*. Sept. 1, 2010. Available at: <http://armenianweekly.com/2010/09/01/mad-vandalism/>

and “Today Taksim, tomorrow Yerevan: We will descend upon you suddenly in the night!” Member of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and Turkish Interior Minister Idris Naim Sahin was among the speakers at the demonstration.¹⁷ Three years later, in 2015, I wrote an article about chilling banners appearing in public spaces in some major cities in Turkey, celebrating the genocide and invoking the name of Ogun Samast, the ultra-nationalist youth who killed Hrant Dink in 2007. The banners read, “We celebrate the 100th anniversary of our country being cleared of Armenians. We are proud of our glorious ancestors.”¹⁸

Meanwhile, in 2015, Istanbul Armenian Garo Paylan was elected to the Turkish National Assembly (parliament) on the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) list, the pro-Kurdish party that champions the rights of minorities as well as the marginalized segments of society. Paylan has delivered fiery speeches in Turkish parliament about the Armenian genocide and called for the state to confront its past.¹⁹ He has been punished for his outspokenness with temporary suspensions. Following his election, reflecting on the challenges ahead, Paylan told me in an interview, “...We were concerned that people were not ready to hear about the Armenian Genocide. Yet, we are vocal about the Armenian Genocide. We also support LGBT rights, and

¹⁷ “Inciting Hatred: Turkish Protesters Call Armenians ‘Bastards.’” *Asbarez*. Feb. 28, 2012. Available at: <http://asbarez.com/101211/inciting-hatred-turkish-protesters-call-armenians-bastards/>

¹⁸ Barsoumian, N. “Banners Celebrating Genocide Displayed in Turkey.” *The Armenian Weekly*. Feb. 23, 2015. Available at: <http://armenianweekly.com/2015/02/23/celebrating-genocide/>

¹⁹ “Garo Paylan: ‘I Call It Genocide; You Can Call It Whatever You Want’” *The Armenian Weekly*. Jan. 17, 2017. Available at: <http://armenianweekly.com/2017/01/17/paylan-i-call-it-genocide/>

equality between men and women—everything that is considered radical about democracy. This is about [creating] a new world.”²⁰

Despite—or more likely as a response to—Paylan’s efforts, on July 21, 2017, the Turkish Parliament’s constitutional committee approved a provision banning the use of the terms “Armenian Genocide,” “Kurdish regions,” and “Kurdistan” inside parliament, as part of a new set of procedural rules. The bill, which notes that those terms amount to “insulting the history and common past of the Turkish people,” was advanced by the ruling Justice and Development (AKP) party and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP).²¹

While official Ankara is attempting to suppress memory, writers and activists are pushing back. It is worth mentioning the publication and translation of books by publishers such as the Aras Publishing House, the Hrant Dink Foundation, Anadolou Kultur, and Ragip Zarakolu’s Pencere Publishing. Among the books of significance that have been published is the memoir *My Grandmother* by Turkish lawyer, writer, and human rights activist Fethiye Cetin, which tells the story of her grandmother, an Armenian who was a young girl during the genocide, and was taken by a gendarme during the death marches and adopted. The book made waves in Turkey, since it broke a taboo. Other such memoirs were also published after 2004.

This discussion on Turkey’s denial has mostly focused on domestic policies and realities. Suffice it to say, that the government’s efforts do not stop there, but spill over onto the international arena.

²⁰ Barsoumian, N. “The Road Ahead: An Interview with Garo Paylan.” *The Armenian Weekly*. July 1, 2015. Available at: <http://armenianweekly.com/2015/07/01/the-road-ahead/>

²¹ “Turkey’s Parliament Bans the Use of the Term ‘Armenian Genocide.’” *Asbarez*. July 21, 2017. Available at: <http://asbarez.com/165042/turkeys-parliament-bans-the-use-of-the-term-armenian-genocide/>

Why do we commemorate past atrocities? Why do we erect sites of memorialization? Scholars have attempted to address these and related questions. Some have studied “dark tourism,” “victim tourism,” and “revenge tourism” that have been organized around sites of violence (for instance, Auschwitz, or the Atlantic Slave Trade). Some scholars, have argued that memorialization by victim groups can lead to the reinforcement of a mindset of continued victimization and while nurturing a sense of in-group solidarity, may harden an “us” versus “them” perspective.²²

Theorist Tzvetan Todorov in his book, *Memory as a Remedy for Evil*, challenges the way we remember atrocities and “evil.” He observes that in order to make sense of atrocities, we aim to neatly categorize individuals into four categories: the villain and his/her victim, and the hero and his/her beneficiaries.²³ In other words, memory serves to create categories of us and them, human and inhumane, which is problematic, argues Todorov. “There is something suspicious about this neat unanimity,” he writes. “What if the sterility of calls to remember was rooted in this constant identification with heroes or victims and the extreme distance we put between the miscreants and ourselves?” Todorov argues that the efforts of memory-driven societies (like France) have not reduced atrocities from happening, and that there is a different approach to memory that will be more productive and lies in recognizing the humanity of the victimizers and

²² See G.J. Ashworth. “The Memorialization of Violence and Tragedy: Human Trauma as Heritage.” In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*. Edited by Brian J. Graham, and Peter Howard. Ashgate Publishing Company (Burlington, VT: 2008). P. 239. He argues that memorialization by victim groups can lead to the “creation of a heritage through the memorialization of perpetual victimization,” where “internal solidarity is achieved at the cost of external divisiveness.”

²³ Todorov, T. *Memory as a Remedy for Evil*, translated by Gila Walker. Seagull Books (NY, 2010).

our own ability to victimize. “The memory of the past will serve no purpose if it is used to build an impassable wall between evil and us, identifying exclusively with irreproachable heroes and innocent victims and driving the agents of evil outside the confines of humankind. This, though is precisely what we usually do,”²⁴ he writes. He further argues that asking what gave rise to the “evil” deed is more useful than seeking punishment in the forms of revenge (private justice) or justice (public revenge).²⁵

What Todorov describes is present in most narratives, and one does not need to look hard to observe it in the discourse of some of my interviewees.

Since in this research, one of the main questions I ask informants is what moves them to participate in the commemoration events, it might be useful to also include Todorov’s thoughts on motives. Simply put, Todorov is suspect of the articulated motive in relation to the actual motive. In *The Morals of History*, he writes: “In some ways, collective behavior resembles individual psychology: there is no necessary relation between an action’s alleged motives and its true motives. Both the group and the individual often take action based on inadmissible motives; this is why other justifications—perfectly acceptable to individual conscience or public opinion—are advanced, even if they account poorly for the action, or are mutually contradictory.”²⁶ We may wish to keep Todorov’s assertion in mind as we—in a sense—receive the narratives of my informants.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 79-80

²⁵ Ibid. p. 63

²⁶ Todorov, T. *The Morals of History*, translated by Alyson Waters. University of Minnesota Press (Minneapolis, 1995). P. 47.

Finally, in talking to interested individuals about my project, I received many useful insights and tips. One name was repeatedly offered to me as a valuable source: Vamik Volkan. I had to engage with Volkan. And although I did not find his theory of chosen trauma helpful, nevertheless, I will briefly discuss it here.

Volkan, a Turkish American psychoanalyst, advanced theories on trauma and identity that gained traction in the field of psychoanalysis. Volkan argues that we maintain polarizations and create otherness in an “us” and “them” mindset, and create large group identities. Volkan discusses how large group identities are developed in childhood, and how individuals “*need to have large group enemies and allies.*” Meanwhile, “chosen traumas” and “chosen glories” become part and parcel of large-group identities. Volkan explains that “chosen traumas” are “shared mental representations of ancestors’ traumas at the hands of others – are more complicated, and stronger, large-group amplifiers.” In Volkan’s words, after suffering mass traumas, members of the group experience²⁷:

1. Shared sense of shame, humiliation and victimization.
2. Shared sense of guilt for surviving while others perished.
3. Shared (defensive) identification with the oppressor.
4. Shared difficulty or, often, inability to mourn losses.

When such experiences continue and the people cannot find adaptive solutions for them, people become involved in a fifth shared experience:

5. Shared transgenerational transmission of trauma.

Volkan believes that such psychological insights “may provide valuable data to help us understand the many hidden motivations, complicating international relationships and sustaining polarizations.”

²⁷ Volkan notes that not all mass traumas become chosen traumas.

In *Killing in the Name of Identity: A Study of Bloody Conflicts*, Volkan discusses his identity, involvement with the Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC)²⁸, and thoughts on the Armenian Genocide. When TARC was being formed, Volkan's friend Gunduz Aktan, a former ambassador of Turkey to the UN, a former under-secretary of the Turkish Foreign Ministry, and a member of TARC, approached Volkan and invited him to join the group. TARC had gathered six Turkish and four Armenian participants²⁹, mostly former high ranking diplomats, to discuss the Armenian Genocide or the "1915 events." According to Volkan, his participation in TARC, "highlighted to me the problems that one can encounter when apologies, forgiveness, and memorials are part of discussions between two groups."³⁰

A Rebuff to Volkan

Henry Theriault, who was recently elected as president of the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS), has heavily criticized postmodernist understandings of trauma and new approaches to genocide denial in an article titled, "Post Denial-Denial."³¹ Theriault rejects arguments that attempt to give equal weight and consideration to narratives, including narratives of denial, rooted in a pretense that all is relative and subjective. He also rejects the loose use of the term trauma, which no longer refers to the clinical conditions and symptoms that afflict the traumatized, but has been expanded to include any mild feelings of discomfort towards certain group relations. In Theriault's own words:

²⁸ I discuss TARC in more detail in a later section.

²⁹ Cheterian discusses this imbalance in the representation of the two sides in *Open Wounds*, which I discuss later.

³⁰ Volkan, V. *Killing in the Name of Identity: A Study of Bloody Conflicts*. Los Angeles: Pitchstone Publishing, 2006. P. 147.

³¹ Theriault, H. "Post-Denial Denial." *The Armenian Weekly*, April 2012 Magazine. Available at: <http://armenianweekly.com/2012/04/30/theriault-post-denial-denial/>

Similarly for “trauma,” which has become a vague and empty term as it spills out of the pens of many discussants of Turkish-Armenian relations. Following Itzkowitz and his co-author Vamik Volkan, “trauma” has been stripped of its proper clinical meaning as a specific, deep psychological reaction to destructive events, with serious psychological symptoms that can compromise the sufferer’s basic functioning, including such things as physical and mental hypervigilance, flashbacks, panic attacks, and so on. In discourse on genocide and particularly perpetrator-victim relations, the term is misused to designate lingering dislike or discomfort about some aspect of reality or intergroup relations one finds unpleasant or against one’s interests. The dissolution of the meaning of trauma undermines its clinical importance and reservation for those who have genuinely suffered, as opposed to those who might feel aggrieved because they are no longer a dominant empire or find unpleasant being faced with negative aspects of their past and the way that past affects conditions today.

MEMORY AND TRAUMA IN TURKEY AND THE DIASPORA

Contrary to what many believe, evidence suggests that for the people in Eastern Turkey, the memories are very much present and passed down.

Historian Ugur Umit Ungor has produced much new research on the topic of memory in Turkey, based on interviews and case studies of specific regions.³² Through interviews and narrative, Ungor has shown³³ how despite Turkish official discourse and textbooks, the Armenian Genocide is in fact alive in the memories of Turks and Kurds living in Eastern Turkey. They often pass down stories they have heard from witnesses or perpetrators—parents or elders

³² See for instance Ugur Umit Ungor’s chapter, “Recalling the Appalling: Mass Violence in Eastern Turkey in the Twentieth Century.” In *Memories of Mass Repression: Narrating Life Stories in the Aftermath of Atrocity*. Edited by Nanci Adler et al. Transaction Publishers (New Brunswick: 2009). P. 175-198.

³³ Üngör, U.U. "Lost in commemoration: the Armenian genocide in memory and identity." *Patterns of Prejudice* 48, no. 2 (May 2014): 147-166.

in their villages. Ungor looks at what he terms the “destruction and construction of memory,”³⁴ and discusses the reasons for genocide denial and relates it to identity.

Ungor writes, “The research results suggest there is a clash, not only between Turkish political memory and Armenian cultural memory, but also between Turkish political memory (the official state narrative) and Turkish/Kurdish social memory. In a nutshell: to some extent, the Turkish government is denying a genocide that its own population remembers.” Ungor’s findings are based on around 200 semi-structured interviews he conducted in Eastern Turkey between 2004 and 2007.

Oral histories are also preserved through other various efforts in Turkey. Recently, the Istanbul-based Hrant Dink Foundation published four books, part of “The Sound of Silence” series and the Oral History Project³⁵, that are compilations of testimonies of Armenians and hidden and Islamized Armenians who lived in different areas in Turkey. The interviews are with individuals in Turkey who continue to live with their Armenian identity, or who were born as Islamized Armenians but then reclaimed their identity, or with those who continue to live as Islamized Armenians³⁶. These testimonies deal with topics such as the effects of denial, the realities of being an Armenian in Turkey, the stories that were passed on to them, and various other themes. So far the books have focused on the areas of Izmit, Diyarbakir, and Ankara, as

³⁴ Ibid. 149.

³⁵ Balancar, F., ed. *The Sounds of Silence III: Ankara’s Armenians Speak*. Hrant Dink Foundation Publications (Istanbul, 2015). P. 1.

³⁶ Balancar discusses this in her preface to the *The Sounds of Silence IV: Izmit’s Armenians Speak*. P. 1.

well as one volume that includes voices from various places. The Hrant Dink Foundation intends to continue this project, focusing on other cities.³⁷

Another study³⁸, conducted by Johanna Ray Vollhardt, Lucas B. Mazur, and Magali Lemahieu, and based on four experiments, looked at the effects of acknowledgment of the crime by the perpetrators on the psychological wellbeing of victim groups. The studies were done in the context of the Armenian Genocide, the Kielce Pogrom, and the Holocaust. The study authors relied on online questionnaires that surveyed 33 Armenian and 45 Jewish Americans. The researchers found that reading about the perpetrator group's acknowledgment of the crime had a positive effect on the psychological wellbeing of the subjects, who were also more likely to support "reconciliation." In other words, and perhaps unsurprisingly, there appears to be a positive correlation between acknowledgment and reconciliation.

Others have studied the intergenerational transmission of trauma in groups affected by atrocities. For instance, Sarine Boyadjian's dissertation titled "Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma on Third-Generation Survivors of the Armenian Genocide,"³⁹ is the result of 16 semi-structured interviews with third-generation survivors of the Armenian Genocide living in the Diaspora. Boyadjian observed "direct impact" and "burden" and "responsibility" in her subjects. Her subjects felt they belonged to a "collectivist culture," and felt compelled to teach their children or others about the genocide, and to maintain their identity. She also noticed the ability

³⁷ Hrant Dink Foundation staff confirmed this during my visit to their bookstore in Istanbul in March 2017.

³⁸ Vollhardt, J.R., L.B. Mazur, and M. Lemahieu. "Acknowledgment after mass violence: Effects on psychological well-being and intergroup relations." *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 17, no. 3 (May 2014): 306-323.

³⁹ Boyadjian, S. "Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma on Third-Generation Survivors of the Armenian Genocide." Order No. 3707157 Alliant International University, 2015. Ann Arbor: ProQuest. Web. 21 July 2017.

of the third-generation survivors to “reframe their legacy” by “appreciating life,” having “pride in being a survivor,” and “creating meaning.”

SETTING: THE DENIALIST HABITUS

Before proceeding further, it would be useful to discuss the legacy of denial in Turkey. As I mentioned earlier, historian Talin Suciyan has consulted primary and secondary sources of information—from interviews to newspaper articles—to make the argument that in the post-genocide years (1923-1950), a system came into place, which she calls the “habitus of denial.”

After presenting the results of her research, Suciyan concludes:

...The post-genocide habitus of the Republic of Turkey set and legitimized a series of practices. With the establishment and institutionalization of denial on both the state and the society levels, a series of social and legal practices were normalized and reproduced after 1923: kidnapping Armenian women, pushing the remaining Armenians out from Asia Minor and the Northern Mesopotamia throughout the Republican years, prohibiting guaranteed rights such as opening schools in the provinces, confiscating properties, discriminating against Armenian children in school, daily harassment and physical attacks on the street, and lawsuits based on ‘denigrating Turkishness,’ among others. Official and social Republican policies were the leading reason for the extinction of Armenian cultural and social life in the provinces, which was noticeable from the 1920s until the 1950s, when there was still a significant Armenian population living in the provinces.

A second set of practices includes the state’s coercion of Armenians living in Turkey to endorse official policies, and their consequent isolation from other Armenian communities around the world, which were strictly dehumanized and demonized. The Armenian press was expected to support the Turkish official position and advocate Turkish international policy. The publication of historical accounts of the existence of Armenians in the pre-Ottoman period and histories of the early twentieth century was cause for bans or censorship. Not only was the press closely scrutinized, but also the private lives of editors too were kept under close surveillance. It would therefore not be wrong to say that there was a consistent, holistic perspective on the part of the state in its approach to Armenians all over the world as well as in Turkey. (Suciyan 2016, 200-201)

Suciyan demonstrates how the Armenian community in Istanbul was forced to become part of the denialist and anti-Armenian framework, since to function in an anti-Armenian structure also meant internalizing anti-Armenianness.

Suciyan, as have others, notes how Armenians have been categorized by the Turkish state as “good” or “bad.” The Armenians inside Turkey, those who have been conditioned to internalize the denial and discrimination, are the “good” Armenians. Those outside Turkey are the “bad” ones. Journalist and historian Khatchig Mouradian similarly observed in 2010 how in Turkish official rhetoric, Armenians are systematically categorized. Commenting on an interview then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan gave to an Istanbul Armenian newspaper, Mouradian noted that the Turkish state has formed three categories for Armenians: the good Armenians are the Istanbul Armenians, who are deemed “good” as long as they remain quiet; the “bad” Armenians are those living in the Armenian diaspora, and are regarded with distrust, as “sworn enemies” of the state of Turkey, who accuse it of genocide; and the “destitute” Armenians are those living in Armenia—impoverished beings who are willing to forget about the past amid their economic hardship (Mouradian 2010).

This observation has been echoed by others as well, and sheds light on the context in which these commemoration events take place, and how members of the Armenian diaspora are portrayed within Turkey—and by extension, how those who collaborate with them might be viewed. It also offers us a glimpse into the rift that the Turkish state intentionally created between the Armenians of Turkey and those in the diaspora, and consequently helps us understand the mindset of some of my Armenian informants, two of whom said that the tangible

outcomes of the commemorations for them had been connecting with the Istanbul Armenian community.

However, Suciyan reminds readers that the denialist habitus affects not only Armenians or other minorities, but also the majority population, as it affects all segments of society.

Suciyan's research sheds light on what forces affect and influence my informants, and how—through these commemoration events—they are struggling to give a space to the memory of genocide, all the while putting into motion mechanisms that may be giving rise to new social identities.

'RECONCILIATION' PROJECTS, DIALOGUE GROUPS, AND JOINT INITIATIVES

Finally, I will briefly discuss the “reconciliation” projects, dialogue groups, exchange programs, joint concerts and art shows, and policy papers and reports that have aimed to normalize relations between the states of Armenia and Turkey—often intentionally leaving the pesky diaspora out of it—or between Armenians and Turks in the last decade or so. This will help situate the commemoration events within these broader efforts, and help us understand the perspective of my informants, who—at times—refer to these broader trends and initiatives. Many of these efforts have come from Turkey, ahead of the 2015 Armenian Genocide Centennial commemorations.

In 2009, the U.S. attempted to broker the Turkey-Armenia protocols which aimed to “normalize” ties between the two countries, but instead erupted in domestic popular outbursts that condemned it. One of the leading issues for Armenians was the presence of preconditions on the creation of a joint historical commission to address the issue of genocide, which gave rise to demonstrations in Armenia and Armenian diasporan communities. Turkey, on the other hand,

wished for deals on Artsakh/Nagorno Karabakh to be included in the protocols. The deal fizzled and fell apart.

It is fair to say that most “reconciliation” projects have been subjected to scrutiny, criticisms, and mistrust in the pages of newspapers and by the general public in Turkey, Armenia, and the Diaspora.

Some of these efforts have had an economic focus, such as the Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council (TABDC). In other words, they have aimed to establish economic relations between business folks, and opening of the border. They hope the rest (memory, anxiety, fear, and mistrust) will fall into place in due time. Tepav, “The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey,” for instance, released a report⁴⁰ in 2014 titled “Strengthening Connections and Business Synergies between Turkey and Armenia towards a Roadmap for Confidence Building through Economic Cooperation.” The authors said the report was the result of a fact-finding mission to Armenia, which included some 25 meetings with NGOs, think tanks, and various institutes. Without any reference to the enormous elephant in the room, namely genocide denial, the report discusses various possibilities for establishing economic ties, such as tourism in this or that region, industrial cooperation, and new flight routes.

Another report, “Breaking the Ice: The Role of Civil Society and Media in Turkey-Armenia Relations,” by Susae Elanchenny and Narod Marasliyan, published by the Global Political Trends Center (GPoT) of the Istanbul Kultur University and partly funded by the U.S.

⁴⁰ Tepav. “Strengthening Connections and Business Synergies between Turkey and Armenia towards a Roadmap for Confidence Building through Economic Cooperation.” 2014. Available at: <http://www.tepav.org.tr/en/yayin/s/728>

State Department, discusses GPoT's initiatives of track two diplomacy, which include youth and journalism exchange programs, a "media reporting bus tour," and appearances on TV talk shows. This "dialogue building" project was funded by the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Democracy, Rights and Labor, and jointly implemented by GPoT and CAM film (both based in Istanbul), Internews Armenia and Yerevan Press⁴¹ Club (based in Armenia), and Internews Network (based in the U.S.). The report refers to the genocide through euphemisms like "the 1915 events," "deportations" and "massacres," and calls "Turkey-Armenia relations" an "anomaly" since "there is no direct war or violent conflict at present." The authors then present the dominant and official narratives as two sides of a story—not as genocide and denial. The report featured quotes by participants and politicians such as comments made by Bulent Arinc, deputy prime minister of Turkey, in 2012: "After the murder I went to Hrant Dink's home, and I saw that it was no different from an Anatolian home. In that home I smelled Anatolia."⁴² These sorts of "rapprochement" projects praise such comments that purportedly humanize the other—never mind that Dink was born in Turkey, his family roots were from that land, he lived in Istanbul, and was murdered by an ultra-nationalist in Istanbul—instead of exploring the racist ideologies that would give rise to such comments. One participant of the journalism exchange program, Muge Akgun, later wrote in an article titled, "To Look at Ararat from Yerevan," in the Turkish newspaper *Radikal*, "Turkey needs to remember its past while Armenia needs not to keep its pain alive and forget its past. It's time for the two societies to overcome the weight of the past." The authors recommend for the media to steer clear of "provocative" language, write

⁴¹ USAID supports the work of the Yerevan Press Club.

⁴² Elanchenny, S., and N. Marasliyan. *Breaking the Ice: The Role of Civil Society and Media in Turkey-Armenia Relations*. Global Political Trends Center Istanbul Kultur University (Istanbul, 2012). P. 13.

human interest stories, and focus on topics relating to tourism and “street reporting.” They also recommend that the Turkish Armenian community act as “mediators” between Turkish and Armenian societies—a tremendously problematic suggestion that instrumentalizes Turkey’s Armenians, who have been subject to a century of denial, oppression, and abuse.

Another report put out by the influential International Crisis Group⁴³ (ICG) in 2009, and titled “Turkey and Armenia: Opening Minds, Opening Borders,” reduces the issue to a “dispute” between two countries, urges U.S. President Barack Obama and the U.S. Congress to “steer the prudent middle course” and refrain from recognizing the genocide. The report was published on April 14, 2009, the year Obama took office and, on April 24, broke⁴⁴ his campaign pledge⁴⁵ to recognize the Armenian Genocide. The ICG, like Tepav, adheres to an approach that is rooted in economic development theory. Because of its approach, the ICG itself appears to engage in genocide denial in an effort to appear neutral, calling on the Armenian government to invite Turkish scholars to contribute to scholarship on the “events of 1915,” and recommends that both countries engage in “reconciliation” efforts through initiatives that “encourage region-wide interaction, heritage preservation and confidence building.” In an equivocating language, it argues that “Both peoples bear scars and trauma from this period, and the unresolved nature of

⁴³ The International Crisis Group, founded by Mort Abramowitz, former assistant secretary of state and ambassador to Turkey, is run by a former U.N. diplomat, and has a board that’s a who’s who of world political elites.

⁴⁴ Fisk, R. “Robert Fisk: Obama Falls Short on Armenian Pledge.” *The Independent*. April 27, 2009. Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/robert-fisk-obama-falls-short-on-armenian-pledge-1675197.html>

⁴⁵ Hitchens, C. “Telling the Truth about the Armenian Genocide: We Must Resist Turkish Pressure to Distort History.” In *Slate*. April 6, 2009. Available at: http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/fighting_words/2009/04/telling_the_truth_about_the_armenian_genocide.html

this history makes them feel still threatened by the other.” The report uses appeasing language, for instance referring to the properties forcibly confiscated⁴⁶ during the genocide as properties “abandoned by Armenians during the forced relocations.” It also sees “merit” in official Ankara’s proposal that a joint historical commission “sort out the events of 1915.” Finally, the report concedes that “Turkey would be wise not to renew the old policy of blanket denials of any Ottoman fault.”

Reports such as the one released by ICG have been heavily criticized in the Armenian media as attempts to whitewash history. An editorial that appeared in *Asbarez*, a widely read diasporan Armenian newspaper, accused ICG of issuing a “blueprint for further crisis.”⁴⁷ The editorial labeled ICG’s work “biased,” and went on to scrutinize the individuals—or as the author dubbed, “the pro-Turkish apparatchiks”—who make up the board. The editorial also quoted Aram Hamparian, the Executive Director of the influential Armenian National Committee of America, which is the largest Armenian grassroots lobbying organization in the U.S., who described the contents of the report as “little more than a reworked version of the Turkish Embassy’s latest talking points.” In short, projects like that of the ICG’s that are rooted in economic development theory often appear to miss the mark and fail to bring key players on board.

Other initiatives have focused on dialogue, such as the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC), which was an effort at track-two diplomacy lasting from 2001-4, joint

⁴⁶ Akcam, T., and U. Kurt. *The Spirit of the Laws: The Plunder of Wealth in the Armenian Genocide*. Berghahn Books. 2015.

⁴⁷ Khachatourian, A. “Crisis Group Issues Blueprint for Further Crisis.” *Asbarez*. April 14, 2009. Available at: <http://asbarez.com/60953/crisis-group-issues-blueprint-for-further-crisis/>

historical endeavors such as the “Workshop for Armenian/Turkish Scholarship” (WATS), which aimed to depoliticize the issue and create a “common” Armenian and Turkish history, and the failed apology campaign⁴⁸ initiated by Turkish scholars following Hrant Dinks assassination⁴⁹. In his book, *Open Wounds*⁵⁰, Vicken Cheterian chronicles how TARC and WATS came into being—the former at the initiation of the U.S. State Department and the latter at the initiation of two professors—and gives ample context to situate them in regional and national realities and politics. Cheterian quotes a Turkish member of the TARC, Ozdem Sanberk, whom he describes as a “career diplomat who had retired from the Turkish Foreign Ministry in the year 2000 to join TARC in 2001,” as saying:

The basic goal of our commission is to impede the initiatives put forward every year in the U.S. Congress and parliaments of Western countries on the genocide issue, which aim to weaken Turkey. The significant matter for us is that the genocide issue is not discussed by the American Congress any more. As long as we continue the dialogue, the issue won’t be brought back to the agenda of the Congress.⁵¹

TARC—which is the commission Volkan was part of—was meant to be a short term solution, writes Cheterian, who notes that it was also viewed with much suspicion⁵² by the Armenians, and soon the Armenian government had to distance itself from the initiative.

⁴⁸ Sassounian, H. “Turks’ Apology for Armenian Genocide: Good First Step, but not Good Enough.” *Huffington Post*. Available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/harut-sassounian/turks-apology-for-armenia_b_151959.html

⁴⁹ Cheterian, V. *Open Wounds: Armenians, Turks and a Century of Genocide*. Oxford University Press (NY, 2015). P. 169-189.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.* P. 174.

⁵² See for instance, Haroutiun Khachatryan’s article, “Armenian-Turkish Reconciliation Commission Encounters Skepticism.” *Eurasianet*. Sept. 9, 2001. Available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav091001.shtml>

Cheterian also notes that while the Armenian media closely followed the workings of TARC, the Turkish mass media “almost completely ignored [it].”

Similarly, WATS was unable to craft the “common” history it had envisioned. Its founders Fatma Muge Gocek and Ronald Grigor Suny shared: “While we are as yet unable to express a clear unanimity on whether or not the events of 1915 constitute a genocide, a shared sense of what happened and why has been established.”⁵³

Erbal focuses on one of these efforts, the Turkish intellectuals’ apology campaign in 2008 in her chapter, “Mea Culpas, Negotiations, Apologies: Revisiting the ‘Apology’ of Turkish Intellectuals,” that appeared in *Reconciliation, Civil Society, and the Politics of Memory: Transnational Initiatives in the 20th and 21st century*.⁵⁴ The apology campaign was started by four intellectuals, and signed by around 30,000 Turkish citizens. Erbal makes the distinction between “apologia” (defined as “an oral or written defense”) and “apology,” and argues that the text of the “apology”⁵⁵ amounts to an apologia. Bringing examples from the German apology statement to the Herero people of Namibia, Erbal posits, “It is not clear exactly what apologies accomplish in international or domestic politics or what other considerations within the domain of *realpolitik* make apologies necessary, not for their intrinsic value as sincere acts of contrition,

⁵³ Ibid. P. 179.

⁵⁴ Erbal, A. “Mea Culpas, Negotiations, Apologies: Revisiting the ‘Apology’ of Turkish Intellectuals.” In *Reconciliation, Civil Society, and the Politics of Memory: Transnational Initiatives in the 20th and 21st century*, edited by Transcript-Verlag (Bielefeld: 2012).

⁵⁵ The text of the “apology” read: “My conscience does not accept the insensitivity showed to and the denial of the Great Catastrophe that the Ottoman Armenians were subjected to in 1915. I reject this injustice and for my share, I empathize with the feelings and pain of my Armenian brothers and sisters. I apologize to them.”

but more for their value as one in a stash of self-serving diplomatic moves.”⁵⁶ Erbal contextualizes the campaign within domestic politics, political divides, and ideologies. Erbal also sheds light on the power dynamics at play, and the way the “apology campaign” in effect “muffled” the voices of intellectuals from the “historically powerless” Armenian side, who had written a letter of their own directed to the Turkish President. According to Erbal, the Armenian letter was significant because it was the initiative of Armenian intellectuals from Armenia, and challenged the cliché that genocide recognition was only important for the Armenian Diaspora. The letter was overshadowed by the Turkish campaign, and ignored by the Turkish and international media. Erbal explains:

In effect, by enlarging the scope of the campaign earlier than had been announced, the organizers of the campaign successfully, if not necessarily intentionally, blocked the Armenian text and the demand of the offended party. The historically powerless side’s voice—the voice of those to whom the I apologize campaign was ostensibly directed—was thus muffled, and the historically asymmetrical character of the Turkish-Armenian relationship, itself a result of the Genocide, reasserted itself.⁵⁷

Furthermore, Erbal stresses that the campaign was not an apology for the genocide or its denial, a fact that the initiators made abundantly clear, but the international media proceeded to misrepresent as an “apology for the Armenian Genocide.” Some notable Turkish and Kurdish leftist intellectuals refused to sign the statement, as they saw it problematic on various levels.

In contrast to these efforts, others have taken a multipronged approach that has included organizing conferences and dialogues, cultural initiatives, travel grants, documentation of oral histories and publications. The European Union has taken a leading role in this, supporting a long list of organizations. Two organizations that have been both active and successful are the

⁵⁶ Ibid. 60-61.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 64.

Hrant Dink Foundation and Anadolu Kultur⁵⁸ (Anatolian Culture). What sets Hrant Dink Foundation apart is their commitment to engage with memory, genocide denial, and oral narratives. The efforts of the Hrant Dink Foundation have been covered by the Turkish Armenian newspaper Agos, as well as newspapers in Armenia, the Diaspora, and at times Turkish newspapers in the country.

On the other hand, Kurdish intellectuals, activists, and leaders have been taking meaningful steps towards recognition, and struggling against the century of erasure of Armenian heritage. Bilgin Ayata, in an article titled “Critical Interventions: Kurdish Intellectuals Confronting the Armenian Genocide,” discusses an apology campaign by Kurdish intellectuals in 2004 (four years before the Turkish intellectuals’ campaign), which both acknowledged the “genocide” and asked for a confrontation with the past. Ayata contrasts the Kurdish campaign with the Turkish campaign.⁵⁹

Armenian newspapers in Turkey, Armenia, and the Diaspora have closely followed these efforts. Since 2009, the Boston-based English language Armenian newspaper *The Armenian Weekly* has even had a Kurdish correspondent based in Diyarbakir, Gulisor Akkum, who has

⁵⁸ On Oct. 18, 2017, Osman Kavala, the chair of Anadolu Kultur, was detained and taken to Istanbul’s Counterterrorism Police Department. After being kept in police custody for nearly two weeks, he was arrested on Nov. 1, charged with being the “leader and organizer” of the 2013 Gezi protests, as well as having played a part in the recent coup attempt.

⁵⁹ Ayata, B. “Critical Interventions: Kurdish Intellectuals Confronting the Armenian Genocide.” *The Armenian Weekly*, April 2009 Magazine. Available at: <http://armenianweekly.com/2009/04/29/kurdish-intellectuals-confronting-the-armenian-genocide/>

reported on issues or news relating to Armenians⁶⁰. The online archives of such newspapers are valuable in both gathering information and observing reactions to these efforts.

NOTES ON 'RECONCILIATION'

In this text, the word “reconciliation” is placed within quotation marks. First, “reconciliation” denotes a return to an earlier time of conciliation. In the absence of such a time, where the history of two peoples have continuously been marked by a power imbalance that has left one group disempowered and disadvantaged, the term “reconciliation” is simply imprecise. Genocide and its denial further exacerbate this. Tamara Starblanket (Spider Woman), co-chair of the North American Indigenous Peoples Caucus (NAIPC) and author of *Suffer the Little Children – Genocide: Indigenous Nations in the Canadian State*, articulated her own opposition to the use of the term in an interview: “A synonym for reconciliation is to pacify. The synonym for pacification is to vanquish, crush, subdue, extinguish, and tame,” she said, adding, “How do we reconcile a genocidal past and present that is not acknowledged as the root cause of the problem? When you start to look at it this way, it begins to become contradictory.”⁶¹

Meanwhile, Derek Rasmussen, a researcher and activist for Inuit rights, identifies⁶² two types of “reconciliations”: “reconciliation-to-forgive” and “reconciliation-to-forget.” He explains:

⁶⁰ Akkum’s articles can be found here: <http://armenianweekly.com/author/gulisor-akkum/>

⁶¹ Hansen, T. “Reconciliation Is the New Assimilation: New NAIPC Co-Chair.” *Indian Country Today*. May 2, 2016. Available at: <https://indiancountrymedianetwork.com/news/politics/reconciliation-is-the-new-assimilation-new-naipc-co-chair/>

⁶² Rasmussen, D. “Reconciliation-to-forgive v. Reconciliation-to-forget.” *Cultural Survival Quarterly*. Issue 25-1, “Mining Indigenous Lands.” Spring 2010. Available at: <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural->

Reconciliation-to-forgive has been pioneered and practiced by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Chair of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission; reconciliation-to-forget is represented to varying degrees by President Clinton in Vietnam, the Liberal government in Canada, and the Vatican apology for the crusades.

Reconciliation-to-forget is a process of denial, justification, excuse, minimal grudging acceptance, carefully worded and fiscally cautious apology, and minimal negotiated compensation, concluded by a final resolution to settle matters once and for all.

Through a discussion of various works, Rasmussen argues that this latter form of “reconciliation” has been promoted by the various forces of globalization. On the other hand, “reconciliation-to-forgive” is a process founded on empathy, remorse, public apology, practical amends such as restitution and reparations, and a commitment to never again. He also highlights three principles of dignity—spiritual dignity, dignity of civilizations, and political dignity—which also factor into this process.

MOVING FORWARD

In stark contrast to most initiatives discussed earlier, there is another kind of work being done between Armenians, Turks, and Kurds. It is the work of memory that places acknowledgment of the genocide front and center, and pushes against denial and the dominant identity construct. The genocide commemorations address the genocide, which others ignore or tiptoe around. These events are arguably contributing more to “normalization” because they aim to confront the past, the racist ideologies and tendencies that have been nurtured through denial,

[survival-quarterly/reconciliation-forgive-v-reconciliation-forget](https://survival-quarterly.com/reconciliation-forgive-v-reconciliation-forget) Rasmussen cites the work of John Conroy, author of *Unspeakable Acts, Ordinary People: The Dynamics of Torture*, and lays out the seven steps governments use to deny, justify, or excuse abuses that Conroy has identified: “(a) deny absolutely, (b) minimize the abuse, (c) disparage the victims and their supporters, (d) justify abuse as warranted under the circumstances (‘they deserved it,’ or ‘they were just as bad’), (e) argue that abuse occurred so long ago as to be irrelevant to the present (‘ancient history’), (f) grudgingly admit that if abuse did occur it was the action of misguided underlings (‘bad apples’), (g) urge victims to put it behind them, get over it, bury it.” For anyone familiar with the arguments and justifications used by the Turkish government over the years, this is a chilling list that could be a page from official Ankara’s policy handbook.

and the institutionalized violence that has saturated society. Above all, however, they make it possible for new social identities to emerge that reconcile past with present; this latter point will be addressed in the discussion section, following the data. This has not been a smooth sail for my informants; it has been a process of learning for many of the activists. And there have been problems and problematic approaches. The testimonies of my informants show that this work is difficult and sometimes scary; it causes doubt at times; and it requires those engaged to look inward, ask questions, and challenge one another. Sometimes, this type of engagement can also lead to organic collaboration and solidarity.

METHODOLOGY

DEFINING KEY TERMS

In this research study, “motive” refers to the rationale, ideas, beliefs, considerations, and purpose offered by the participants. I will report on what my informants *say* moved them to participate, their emotions ahead of and during the events, and their reflections on what can come out of these events. The limitations in this approach are that the memories of my informants may have been altered over time; and that they may have embellished, omitted, or exaggerated events or emotions. In the context of my research, “Participant” is defined as an individual who has attended a public genocide commemoration event in Turkey between 2010 and 2017. I was strictly interested in Armenian, Turkish, and Kurdish individuals of both genders, representing different age groups. Due to the scope of this project, I limited the Armenian respondents to those belonging to the Armenian Diaspora and residing in North America. Members of the Armenian community of Turkey and citizens or residents of Armenia were not included in this study.

RECRUITMENT

I recruited 14 individuals total: 7 Armenians, 4 of whom are men and 3 women; and 7 individuals from Turkey, which included 3 Turks (2 women and 1 man), 3 Kurds (1 woman and 2 men), and an individual of half Turkish and half Kurdish background.

Of the Armenian recruits, three had helped organize one or more commemoration events; four had been invited guest speakers at commemoration events; only one individual had participated without assuming the role of volunteer organizer or speaker. All of their names were publicized in articles and on websites. Five of them had written about their experiences, or published the text of their speeches following their participation in these events.

Of the Turkish and Kurdish recruits, three had acted as organizers, two of whom had written about their experiences in articles. Their names were available through public sources.

It is important to note here that some of these individuals had attended multiple commemoration events, sometimes during the same year.

I used the chain referral (snowball) sampling method to recruit the rest of my respondents. Of all the recruits, five individuals were recruited using the snowball method. Following each interview, I asked individuals if they could think of a friend or acquaintance who has participated in a commemoration event and who might like to share their experience with me. If the individual expressed willingness to participate to my informant, I would ask the informant to put us in contact with one another.

An information sheet, approved by the Institutional Review Board, accompanied my recruitment script in my emails sent to potential recruits.

TECHNOLOGY

The interviews were carried out over the phone or on Skype. One respondent from Turkey asked for the interview to be conducted in written form; I obliged. One of the interviews was carried out in person. Three of the interviews were carried out over the phone. One interview was conducted over Facetime. Eight of the interviews were conducted over Skype. Two of the interviewees required a translator (Turkish-English); the translator was a friend they trusted who was proficient in English. With the exception of the written interview, all others were recorded and transcribed by me. The shortest interview lasted 15 minutes; the longest 2 hours; most lasted between 40 and 50 minutes.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

I anticipated there to be minimal risk involved in participating in this study. Participants were assured that 1) their participation is voluntary, 2) they are free to skip any question they wish, and 3) their identity will remain confidential.

INFORMED CONSENT

Due to the type of research and the minimal risk posed to participants, a documentation of consent was not needed. Instead, participants received an information sheet.

CONFIDENTIALITY

While interviews were recorded with a digital recorder and transcribed, the interviewees are only identified by their pseudonyms in this study.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Topic domain: History and Influencers

Lead off question: How many publicly held Armenian Genocide commemoration events in Turkey have you participated in since 2010?

Covert categories: Year[s] participating in commemorations, factors motivating participation, individual or organizational influencers on decision making, effect of framing of ideas

Possible follow up questions

1. How did you first learn about these commemoration events?
2. How did [person/organization] raise your interest?
3. What was your initial response to the idea of participating?
4. Did you participate alone?

Topic domain: Motives as identified by respondent

Lead-off question: What moved you to participate in an Armenian Genocide commemoration event in Turkey?

Covert categories: How respondent assesses his/her motives; role of influencers; relationship between stated motives; satisfaction level in relation to stated motives

Possible follow up questions:

1. Have your reasons for participating changed with subsequent participations?

Topic domain: Emotional response

Lead-off question: Can you recall your emotions in the days or weeks leading up to the commemoration?

Covert categories: Expectations leading up to participation, emotional link between motives and potential impact, exploring why certain emotions were felt and how they might relate to stated motives

Possible follow up questions:

1. Why do you think you felt [*insert emotion identified by participant*]?
2. Please discuss your emotions *during* the commemoration?
3. Did you experience the same emotions during the second commemoration you participated in? Why do you think that is?

Topic domain: Personal agency, expectations, and choices

Lead-off question: What do you see as some of the potential outcomes of participating in these commemoration events in Turkey?

Covert categories: perceptions of personal agency to effect change; hopes; expectations; beliefs; reasons for participating; concerns; satisfaction level in relation to motives; importance of motives in shaping choices

Possible follow up questions:

1. Do you see these changes taking form?
2. Would you participate again? Why?

DEMOGRAPHIC AND BIOGRAPHIC DATA COLLECTION

I also collected demographic and biographic information on each interviewee to determine the profile of the sample, as well as to make comparisons and observe patterns, if any existed.

- **Age** (nominal)
- **Gender** (nominal)
- **Religion** (nominal)
- **Place of birth** (nominal)
- **City, province, and country of residence** (nominal)
- **Ethnicity** (nominal)
- **Education:** This was measured in terms of highest degree earned, and field of study.
- **Occupation** (nominal)
- **Political orientation:** This was measured in terms of self-identification as very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, or progressive.
 - **Engagement with social justice campaigns:** This was measured in terms of self-identification as very active, active, somewhat active, and inactive. The question identifies activism as participation in demonstrations or marches, letter writing campaigns, petitions, membership to human rights groups, and related activities.

ANALYSIS

I relied primarily on the coding software Nvivo to create coding categories. I simply read over the interviews, adding codes for each new concept I encountered. I then created sets of categories such as “emotions,” “expectations,” “influencers,” and “criticisms.”

In seeking to understand how my informants make sense of their decision to participate in these commemorative events, I conducted in-depth interviews and relied on my informants' narratives. I laid out my methodology in the previous section, but one may wonder whether the question, "What moved you to participate in a genocide commemoration (in Turkey)?" is a valid instrument for measuring how my informants come to understand their own motives.

I will argue yes. "What moved you?" is a neutral way of asking "What were your motives?" or "What were your reasons?" or simply, "Why did you?" The latter three questions, although they aim to get the informant to talk about their motives, are likely to instead make them feel defensive. "Motives" may imply a hidden agenda, while "reasons" presuppose the presence of distinct thought patterns and well-thought-out factors. Similar to "motives," "Why did you?" may also leave an informant stammering for a "right" response. "What moved you?" on the other hand appears gentle. Since the topic at hand is a taboo one in Turkey, I felt I needed to pose the question in as non-threatening a way as I could.

Credibility

I often preferred to conduct the interviews over Skype, as I believe that face-to-face communication tends to be more sincere. I followed my lead-off questions with follow-up questions. Periodically, I checked in with my interviewees by summarizing or paraphrasing some of the key points they would make to make sure I understood what they meant. I would also pause and ask if there was more they wished to say. The amount of information and the anecdotes told lead me to believe that my informants were at ease with the interview questions. Since I transcribed the interviews myself, I was already familiar with what they had said, and the

texts are true to the recordings. Furthermore, in discussing the data, when possible I include the original quotes by my informants.

Dependability

Finally, a note on memory and narration: The data collected for this study relies on self-reporting, which poses its distinct set of challenges. Memory can fail. At times events become distorted through the long lens of memory⁶³, or the influence of current events. However, even the way one remembers events is telling. As fragile and untrustworthy as memories may be, they are no less “real,” relevant, or telling. Arguably, stories are both valid and relevant in the fields of narrative construct and memorialization. Furthermore, one may argue that by their nature narratives are corrupt, subjective, and perpetually evolving through retellings, repetitions, interpretations, exaggerations, word choices, and omissions. And to push this further ahead, one may argue that at times it is the works of fiction that have the greatest impacts, shaping discourses and societies, inspiring minds, and nurturing wars. Think of the sheer force of religion, myths, and the distortions of human perception.

How we remember our stories, how we frame them, and how we tell them is subjective. Therefore, perhaps it is best to receive this data simply as narrative evidence lodged in a specific time and space, and between interviewer and interviewee. On the other hand, sometimes I found that certain experiences or anecdotes were corroborated by multiple narratives. At other times, two or more individuals reported having similar thought patterns or emotions.

⁶³ Czech-born French writer Milan Kundera beautifully captures the fragility of memory in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*.

Confirmability

As each researcher approaches the subject matter with their own set of biases, and interpretive tools and frameworks, my interpretation of the data is subjective. Given the chance, it is likely that another researcher would notice different connections and patterns, and I welcome any such endeavor.

Transferability

Finally, I am cautious not to generalize this data, as the sample size—particularly when taking Turkish and Kurdish participants separately—is too small. The data does however raise important questions and point to possible paths for further research.

MAIN DATA

PART I: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF INFORMANTS

Ethnicity and Gender: The seven Diasporan informants were Armenian, four men and three women. The seven Turkey informants were comprised of three Turks (2 Female and 1 Male), three Kurds (1 F, 2M), and an individual of half Turkish and half Kurdish background (F).

Participation: Diaspora: Two of the Armenian participants had attended commemorations during two different calendar years; during those two years, each had attended 4 or more commemoration events. The rest, five Armenian participants, had been engaged during one calendar year (2015). One had participated in three events; two in two, and two in one.

Turkey: Four of the participants from Turkey had participated in four or more commemoration events, including two organizers, one of whom had helped organize these events from the onset. The other three participants had participated three, two, and one time.

The commemorations attended by my informants included ones in Istanbul, Diyarbakir, Ankara, and Ayntab.

Age: The oldest informant from Turkey was 64 years old, the youngest 29. The average age of the Turkey respondents was 43.5. The oldest informant from the Diaspora was 63, the youngest 23. The average age of the Diasporan respondents was 44.

Religion: Diaspora: Three individuals indicated Armenian Orthodox as their religion (2M, 1F). One individual (F) said they were non-practicing Christian, and another (M) said they were “born Christian.” One individual (M) identified as an atheist, and one (F) as agnostic, though raised in the Armenian Evangelical Church.

Turkey: When asked whether they belonged to a religion, three individuals identified as atheists (2M, 1F); one (F) responded “none”; and one (F) said they were a non-practicing Muslim. One (F) said they were “from a Muslim, Sunni family”; and one (M) said they were Muslim.

Birthplace: Diaspora: Although all seven of the Armenian informants currently reside in the U.S. or Canada, they were not all born in North America. Of the seven, four were born in the U.S., one in Lebanon, one in Syria, and one in Turkey.

Turkey: All seven of the Turkey based informants were born in Turkey: three in Istanbul, three in Diyarbakir, and one in Samsun.

Residence: Six of the Armenian participants reside in the U.S. (CA, DC, MA, NY, WA), one in Canada. Five of the Turkey participants reside in Istanbul, one in Diyarbakir, and one in Urfa.

Education: Of the Armenian participants, two hold PhDs, three Master's degrees, and two undergraduate degrees. The fields of study include civil engineering, history, human biology, fine art and poetry, mathematics, and political science. They work as professors, human rights advocates, a civil engineer, writers, and researchers. Of the Turkey participants, three hold PhDs, one a Master's degree, and three undergraduate degrees. Their fields of study included English language and literature, global studies, humanities, social sciences and sociology. They work as professors or in academia, as translators and bookshop owners, as well as humanitarian workers. One individual is a politician, who formerly held a significant leadership position.

Political outlook: Of the Armenian participants, three identify as "progressive," one as "very progressive," one as "Marxist/progressive," one as "conservative," and one as "moderate." Of the Turkey participants, three identify as "progressive," one (Kurdish) as "Marxist/progressive," one (Turkish) as "liberal," one (Kurdish) as "socialist," and one (Turkish) as "Communist."

Level of activism: When asked to indicate their level of activism in social justice campaigns, four of the Armenian participants said they are "very active," two "active," and one "somewhat active." Four of the Turkey participants said they are "very active," and three "active."

PART II: INFLUENCERS

Informants were asked to recount how they were first made aware of these commemoration events. The purpose for this question was to glean what may have influenced the participant's decision making process, what may have informed their reasons for choosing to partake in these events, and what factors might have helped shape or frame the issue for them.

The overarching themes participants discussed when asked that question and at various points during the interview included influences from a friend or organization, media coverage, engagement with texts (history books, narratives, newspapers, even obituaries of strangers), the murder of Turkish Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, leftist politics, Kurdish identity and struggle for rights, a sense of duty towards an ancestor or community, and excitement to be part of something significant.

HRANT DINK (3 TURKISH, 1 KURDISH INFORMANTS)

All three of the Turkish participants, as well as one Kurdish participant spoke of the role Dink's assassination in 2006 and his newspaper Agos played in affecting change in Turkish society.

For Adem, the Turkish male informant, Dink's assassination served as the link to the Armenian Genocide. "I thought Hrant Dink's assassination was the continuation of the genocide," he simply stated.

For Sevda, one of the Turkish women informants, Dink's assassination prompted her to begin investigating the past. "I figured if this guy died for talking about this then there's got to be something to what he's talking about and I should read more carefully," she said, although

adding that the real change came later when she realized there had been atrocities and massacres even leading up to the genocide, and that her direct ancestors had played a significant role in those atrocities.

Asli, the Turkish activist, spoke about the role Agos played in her personal awakening. I will discuss Asli's case in the section titled, "Literature, Books, and Newspapers" (p. 53).

Meanwhile, Sakine, the Kurdish female informant, discussed the effect of Dink's assassination in her predominantly Kurdish region of Turkey, where—she said—Armenians had become a thing of myth and not reality. "Hrant Dink's assassination was a turning point. Before that, the people here thought of Armenians as legends. There was this conversation here that yes there were Armenians here; they were killed and destroyed; but they were like something mythical. It is only after the assassination of Hrant Dink that it became a more real issue for them," she said.

NETWORKS, FRIENDS, AND ORGANIZATIONS

All but one informant were connected to a network of people who are engaged with social justice and human rights issues more broadly, and the Armenian Genocide issue particularly. The participants I interviewed either belonged to an organization—whether nonprofit or political—that advocated for Armenian Genocide recognition, or were connected to one.

Five informants—Salpi, Maro, Simon, Asli, and Sakine—spoke about a friend who had influenced their decision or outlook in a deep and meaningful way. These informants partly credited these friends for their decisions to attend or organize these commemoration events.

Of the Armenian participants, Kevork, Salpi, Masis, and Levon had been invited as guest speakers; these individuals were well connected, and represented academics, activists, and community leaders; two of them had also helped organize the commemorations. Ani and Simon had helped Project2015 organize the commemoration events, opportunities that were created as a result of their social justice activism working with human rights organizations back home, as well as their ties to key organizers. Maro was first inspired by friends involved with Project2015, and secondly by a college friend who was now one of the key organizers in a commemoration outside Istanbul.

All three Kurdish participants were supporters of the HDP, the pro-Kurdish opposition party that advocates for Armenian Genocide recognition. Azad, a former high ranking elected official, had spearheaded efforts to build a monument to remembrance in his region (the only such monument erected in Turkey), advanced efforts to encourage multiculturalism, and was one of the key organizers of genocide commemorations in his region. Another Kurdish participant, Sakine, is an active community member who was one of the key figures in organizing the first and subsequent genocide commemorations in her city. Ferhat, the third Kurdish individual participated in one commemoration; he was inspired to attend through his work with the local Kurdish authorities who facilitated the genocide commemoration events.

Elmas, who belonged to both ethnic groups, became involved through her academic work which was in the field of history. She was also connected to networks of activists, and what she termed “pro-Armenian circles, pro-Armenian political parties, pro-Armenian intellectuals, social scientists, and historians.”

Of the three Turkish individuals, Adem belonged to a socialist Trotskyist organization, and found out about the commemorations through that organization. Asli had been heavily involved in organizing the first and subsequent commemorations in Istanbul (the first to take place in Istanbul was also the first of its kind in the country). She is a staunch advocate of recognition, as well as reparations. She is a member of an active human rights organization in Istanbul. Sevda, although being part of an academic network, did not report being influenced by her colleagues or nature of work. Hers was a personal journey of discovery and reckoning.

What this shows is the extent to which these individuals were connected to networks, communities, and organizations. In a sense, their decision to participate was supported or mirrored by certain networks and connections in their lives, albeit they may have faced pressure and intimidation from other sources.

IDENTITY, POLITICS, AND FRAMING (2 TURKISH, 2 KURDISH INFORMANTS)

Some of the participants discussed what they saw as being at the core of the issue. These discussions centered around political theory, history, and shifting political realities.

For instance, the Kurdish Sakine, who identifies herself as a Marxist and progressive, stressed that her involvement had mostly to do with her “leftist politics,” which saw the Armenian Genocide and subsequent Turkish government denial through the frame of an economic and class struggle. She explained:

Being a leftist is more important than being a Kurd. If I was a Kurdish nationalist, the Armenian issue might have been an important issue for me but not like it is right now. Right now, the Armenian issue is as important to me as the Kurdish issue. All ethnic and religious groups are of equal distance for me, are equal for me in terms of my connections. For instance in 2014, when the Yazidis were escaping, crossing to Roboski, I went there with a group of my friends to help them out as well. So I feel equidistant from all different groups who are involved.... Economic classes are more important than

ethnic identification for me. It's a very complicated thing but this is how I would simplify it. I see at the core of the genocide on these lands, the Armenian question, the Yazidi question, the Greek question, at the core of all this I see economic and class struggle.

In discussing her motives, Sakine merged her political beliefs with her personal reasons for participating and organizing. Others were not as explicit about the connection of the two, however they hinted at it.

Two other Kurdish informants spoke about the importance of multiculturalism and reviving the multicultural character of their city. These efforts at promoting multiculturalism were part of the vision of the local authorities in the Diyarbakir region, where both informants resided and participated in commemorations. Ferhat mentioned it in passing, but for Azad, it was a central theme and related to both his political as well as personal identity, since as a key elected official he had spearheaded or supported initiatives to restore Armenian cultural heritage and symbolic presence in his region. Azad explained:

As someone from Lice and Diyarbakir, as a Kurd in the lands that I lived on, I had heard from my ancestors and others that there were Armenians who lived here too, and as one Kurdish person has said, the state had the Armenians for breakfast and then they had the Kurds for lunch... Just like I believe and support the Kurdish language and culture, I believe in supporting and standing for the culture and language of all the other peoples, including the Armenians. When I had just become the mayor [REDACTED], an Assyrian person visited me and asked me, "Will you do to us what the state has been doing to you?" I told him, "I will not respond. I will let my work show what will happen." And in 2007 I started this campaign for the multilingual municipality which meant that apart from Turkish and Kurdish, things would be published in Assyrian and Armenian too—official documents, etc. Because I believe that if I had only done it in Turkish and Kurdish, my approach would not have been any different than the approach for 90 years that the state had adopted. Because I would have simply supported my own group, ethnic group, and that would not have been any different than what the state is doing. So for me, whatever I want for myself, I want for the Armenians, I want for the Greeks, the Assyrians, and all the other groups. Because my ancestors were fooled and because of their lack of knowledge, we were pushed to be part of the destruction and the genocide of the Armenians, and enemies were made between the Kurds and the Armenians, it was important for me to apologize for this. My effort has been to rectify what has happened in the past.

Although Azad frames the issue within the notion of multiculturalism, it is also an issue of rights for him, as it speaks to state and local policies towards minorities and evokes the principle of equal treatment.

For Elmas, who identifies as half Turkish and half Kurdish, Kurdish oppression by the Turkish state has allowed Kurds to empathize with the Armenians and confront their role in the crime. She said, “Thanks to the Kurdish suppression, they more or less can compare the state violence imposed on the Armenians and also on the Kurds, and their contribution in the execution of the Armenian Genocide in 1915 and afterwards.”

IDENTITY

Adem, the Turkish informant, connected his actions of commemoration to the actions of “good Turks” during the genocide. For him, identifying with these heroes was a way to make sense of the present. “As you know, there were Turks who committed murder during the genocide as well as Turks who saved the Armenian from death. I felt myself not the murderers [sic], but the continuation of these life-saving Turks,” he said.

Sevda, who is Turkish, expressed feeling discomfort at both commemoration events and in meeting Armenians, despite the fact that she said she had not had any negative experiences in the past. The issue lay in her identity, and her awareness of her own family history, with ancestors having been perpetrators and beneficiaries of confiscated properties.

In short, politics and identity play central roles for my Turkish and Kurdish informants.

LITERATURE, BOOKS, AND NEWSPAPERS (ALL 3 TURKISH INFORMANTS)

All three of my Turkish informants mentioned texts as having played a role in their own “awakening” and education on the Armenian issue. For these individuals self-educating had been instrumental. Asli, the organizer, noted the role of the Turkish Armenian newspaper *Agos* in really hitting the issue home for her. The newspaper was the first to be published in both Turkish and Armenian, breaking boundaries and reaching a Turkish speaking audience. *Agos* was founded in 1996; ten years later its founder and editor-in-chief Hrant Dink was gunned down. Asli recounts the impact this newspaper had:

Agos started to be published, and it was a blow; it was a slap in our face. Not because *Agos* was radical. Not because they said “genocide.” There wasn’t much genocide related articles or news, but I remember myself even reading the death advertisements, because the names of the dead ones and in brackets, they say “Kayseri,” “Sivas,” “Sassoun,” “Van”⁶⁴ because they always put—even though they lived in Istanbul—their parents’ and grandparents’ [birthplace]. I even was reading these. It was very powerful. And then Mgrditch Margosian’s books started to be published—he was from Diyarbakir and he told the stories of Diyarbakir Armenians, and whirlpool! It drew you into it! When you learn something, you want to learn more! It was an endless well or something. There’s no end. Still, there’s no end.

For Sevda, reading was also a way to reckon with the past more broadly, and particularly with her own family history. She said she was interested in reading about what happened, but after discovering in a book the involvement of ancestors in the genocide, “I started reading more and more and that is what got me interested in this.”

Adem also reported reading “a lot about the Armenian Genocide.”

⁶⁴ These are the names of once predominantly Armenian cities, towns, and provinces. These places, once historic cradles of Armenian civilization, do not contain any openly Armenian families today.

It is interesting to note that only Turkish informants noted the role of books in the process of their own transformation. Perhaps this could be explained by the fact that texts or discussion on the Armenian Genocide was strictly censored in all layers of Turkish society. School history textbooks continue to discuss the “treachery” of Armenians, and refer to the “Armenian allegations.” So perhaps, for Turkish informants, the process of reading and discovery was more significant for various reasons that is best left for another study.

Three of the other informants—Elmas, Azad, and Ferhat—who grew up in either Kurdish or half Kurdish households made references to having been aware of the atrocities committed against the Armenians from elders or through their own dark family histories—Armenian women taken in as wives during the genocide (Elmas). As for the Armenian informants, the Armenian Genocide had been a part of their identity—especially at the forefront in this setting—and therefore books and texts were not mentioned.

PART III: ‘WHAT MOVED YOU TO PARTICIPATE?’

So far we discussed the demographic profiles of the informants, as well as what may have influenced their decision-making process, such as friends, organizations, books, identity, and political ideology and leaning. These are all contributing factors to what brought them to the commemorative space, but when asked, the reasons given were often more personal and at times conflicted. It is also true that through the act of storytelling these informants identified multiple reasons, considerations, and circumstances that brought them here.

The question I asked was simply, “What moved you to participate?”

Some informants saw the commemorations as an act of resistance and defiance. Some saw their participation as an act of solidarity. For some, the issue was more personal and

involved a family member. Some were motivated by the impact they thought they could have. Below, we will delve deeper into the different types of responses. Most responses fell into multiple categories. And while most Armenians were primarily moved by resistance, defiance, shows of solidarity, and bringing back the Armenian voice to Turkey, most informants from Turkey were motivated by feelings of responsibility and shame, as well as ideas of confronting the past, and raising awareness in the rest of society.

AN UNPRECEDENTED AND NEW WAY OF ENGAGEMENT (4 ARMENIAN INFORMANTS)

The perceived “newness” or “significance” of these commemoration events were a motivating factor for some informants. Armenian participants saw these commemorations, particularly the Centennial commemoration in 2015, as a new way for engagement and a meaningful place to be at. In my experience, both as a participant and a journalist, I had heard the eagerness in the voices of those who wished to participate in these commemoration events. One acquaintance referred to it as “the ground zero of the crime.” Istanbul is the city where the first wave of arrests targeted the Armenian intelligentsia and condemned more than 250 leaders, writers, journalists, religious leaders, and politicians to death. The Istanbul commemorations occupied two main spaces: the Haydarpasa train station, the stop from which the intelligentsia were sent to the interior of the country and ultimately their death, and Istiklal Street near Taksim Square, the busiest street in the city in terms of foot traffic, once home to numerous Armenian businesses and offices.

Kevork, who had participated in the first ever genocide commemoration event in Turkey in 2010, felt he was participating in an “unprecedented” and “significant” event. He recalled his reaction:

This was really something very significant for anyone who has been interested in Turkish-Armenian relations, in having Turkey confront its past, and for anyone who's actually trying to engage with Turks and citizens of Turkey. It felt like [it was] not only the reasonable thing to do, but also the place to be, and a great opportunity to engage in this. Again, this was unprecedented at that point. 2010 was when very few people outside of Turkey were actually involved in these things.

As an invited guest speaker in the 2015 genocide centennial commemorations in Istanbul and Ankara, Salpi considered it a “unique” opportunity.

Simon, who also attended the centennial commemorations, said “Istanbul was going to be the most memorable location to be at, even more so than let's say Yerevan, possibly even more so than Der Zor⁶⁵, even though Der Zor was not an option at the time because of the conflict.”

Levon who attended the Diyarbakir event, said it was going to be the “first big event” held there, and therefore he felt the “impact” within Turkey would be greater.

For these informants, they were standing at the edge of something new and exciting, unprecedented and unique. These sentiments also belie feelings of excitement towards new possibilities and anticipation. Below I will further discuss participants' expectations, as well as their response—sometimes disappointment—to the realities before them. I did not hear these sorts of sentiments from the Turkey participants. However, Asli, the Turkish organizer, did discuss the significance and challenges around organizing the first of such commemorations in the country.

RESISTANCE AND DEFIANCE (5 ARMENIAN INFORMANTS)

⁶⁵ Der Zor, in the Syrian desert, was the final destination of the death marches. Simon is referring to the Syrian crisis.

For some Armenian participants their very existence and presence was an act of resistance and defiance. By simply attending these commemoration events in Turkey they felt they were relaying a powerful message to the authorities—a message of survival, resistance, and defiance.

For Salpi, it was the legacy of a great-grandfather that pushed her to participate. She felt it was her duty to represent both the ancestor and the Armenian community:

I had an ancestor who was so prominent in the Armenian community and put so much work into the Armenian question in the Ottoman Empire that the least I could do was go to Turkey to represent him and the rest of my family. That's what I felt moved me. I felt that had I been him, and had I sacrificed so much to further the Armenian cause and what resulted was genocide, the least I would want if I had any descendants would be to go there and be there not only to represent me but to represent the Armenian community. And to represent in the most symbolic—and it was almost poetic, the way that we survived. I think that's what it was for me that drove me to participate.

Salpi's need to represent is similar to Kevork's need to bring the “voices from the diaspora” to these spaces. Salpi's act of representing a deceased survivor and an uprooted community can be seen as an act of resistance.

Masis, who admitted to being mission oriented while on trips to Turkey, also wished to engage in an act of resistance, and a struggle. He said, “To keep our presence there. Our interest there. To let people know that even after 100 years we haven't forgotten. We haven't given up. We haven't given up our claims or desires for some sort of a just resolution. It's important to keep that process moving forward or at least keep a placeholder until some other major event comes along that will help push the issue forward.”

Simon also spoke about defiance as a motivating factor: “I thought it would be symbolic to stand in the middle of the city where everything started 100 years ago and kind of in defiance

of Ottoman Turkish orders and in defiance of ... or as a testament of the failure of the plan to eliminate all Armenians that the Ottoman Young Turks had set out to accomplish 100 years ago.”

Similarly, Ani saw her participation as “a form of resistance to erasure and denial. That’s what I felt like I was doing.”

Levon wished to commemorate the centennial anniversary in the city of Diyarbakir because of the horrifying magnitude of the massacres there during the genocide, and the presence of hidden/Islamized Armenians who call the city home today. In recent years, some of these “hidden Armenians” began to reclaim their Armenian identities, enroll in Armenian language classes, and some even became baptized in the Armenian Church there, which was renovated with the support of the local Kurdish authorities. Levon anticipated a large hidden Armenian showing at the commemoration event—and there was no other place he wanted to be but there. “Being there was very important for me not only to commemorate the victims but also to celebrate the rebirth of the hidden Armenians who had come out to find their roots,” he said. Reclaiming an identity, after decades of a policy of assimilation and social engineering, is an act of resistance, and Levon wished to be there to celebrate.

THE SPIRIT OF SOLIDARITY (4 ARMENIAN INFORMANTS)

Most Armenian informants said they wished to show solidarity with activists in Turkey. For some, that was the main motivating factor.

For instance, when asked about what moved him, Massis simply responded, “I decided on Turkey because I wanted to show solidarity with those in Turkey that were willing to take the chance, take the risk, and actually commemorate the genocide.” He later elaborated: “there were

key people that I wanted to show solidarity with that were taking these chances, that were willing to take the chance to commemorate the genocide because from their perspective they live there all the time, it's a much harder decision to make. I'm coming in for a week or a day or however long, a weekend, and that's it and I leave. They're there with all the repercussions that take place afterward." Massis went on to talk about the different ways he could show solidarity, writing, speaking out, but stressed that his presence was the strongest and most meaningful form, an act that uplifts and energizes the other.

Similarly, Maro said she wanted to commemorate the centennial in Diyarbakir to be with those who were doing the "heavy lifting." She said, "From the people I had met, the depth through which they were dealing with the traumatic memories of 1915, especially Islamized Armenians that I had met along the way, who told me and [REDACTED] their stories.... I just realized people had—you know, people talk about things like reconciliation, but really it's about doing this heavy lifting to deal with the weight of the memory. I felt like it was being done there in Diyarbakir." Later, reflecting on the current situation in Turkey, and the atmosphere of violence, persecution, and intimidation, she said in tears, "I think it's important to go and be present. I don't know who's going to stand with them now. They stood with us when we wanted genocide recognition. Who's standing with them now when they need solidarity? I haven't heard of anybody really shouting out about this to the Armenian community to be honest."

Although not a main motivating reason, Kevork too acknowledged the importance of the show of "solidarity between Armenians from all over the world and citizens of Turkey."

Simon too touched on the idea of showing solidarity. He said, “It was important for diasporan Armenians to show support to the great work that [local Armenians and local activists] have been doing in the last decade.”

STRUGGLING AGAINST DENIAL (2 TURKISH, 2 KURDISH, AND 1 KURDISH/TURKISH INFORMANTS)

Finally, struggling against denial seemed to be a key motivating factor for most—if not all—informants from Turkey. For Asli, Elmas, and Sakine, it was a leading motivating factor.

Asli and Elmas discussed at length a feeling of responsibility which was also closely tied to a feeling of shame. The responsibility entailed combatting denial through whatever means available. The commemorations offered a platform to engage in such a struggle.

Asli spoke about the “big feeling of responsibility” which propelled her forward. She said:

If I can reach one more person who is not aware, and if I can make him or her take a step towards learning, this will be the greatest victory. Because we know that we will not win. We know that the Turkish state will not recognize. But we fight not to win, because there are cases in history that even though you know that you will be defeated, you still fight. This is an ethical responsibility, a feeling of responsibility. And sort of saying, NO! Like the vote⁶⁶. Like screaming NO! The commemoration. I am here and I say NO! I am here and I’m...like a revolt. A personal revolt. Screaming NO! [her fist pounds the bed] It doesn’t matter much if I have very little effect. We are so handful. And our impact is so, so small. But it doesn’t matter much. Let it be small. Only one person is important. Because one person’s mind is a world. And her heart, her mind, you can capture. This is our victory. We are not seeking big victories. No. We will not. We will not be able. Only a radical crisis—very radical—shaping the foundations of the Turkish state and collapse of the state and the regeneration of the state... could make this country’s government recognize. And it means a big war. So, no recognition.

⁶⁶ “Like the vote” refers to the constitutional referendum that was held in Turkey in April 2017. The referendum would help expand the powers of the president. Many civil society activists mobilized with a vote “no” campaign, or “hayir,” in Turkish.

Elmas also spoke about the “responsibility” she felt to struggle against denial, and to change the Turkish psyche and identity construct, which is based on denial.

I just wanted to uncover an act of violence, an act of massive violence, which until now is denied in different ways. I just wanted to make a lie *be* a lie, you know, be revealed. And I wanted to make it public... I wanted to make it known. That’s one of the urges. In that sense, one of my audiences was the Turkish public, and the Turkish state—the audience underlying this urge to make something denied public because that denial is really unjust, and... denial is really a form of genocide as well, a different way of course. And it really hurts me. So I wanted to shout! I just wanted to rebel against that denial!

The feeling of “responsibility” requires two actions, argued Elmas: firstly a “recognition and acknowledgment of the absence [of victims],” and secondly a public struggle against the denial, which she believes can take many forms. “Let me open by what I mean by struggle because it is a very general term,” she added. “You may write about denial and how it contributes to the making of the Turkish psyche, the Turkish presence, the Turkish economy, the Turkish land structure, and everything, or you can write about how the denial of the Armenians is a founding part of Turkish identity... You can also make known the Armenian presence through demystifying the Turkish way of constructing its history and narrative.” For Elmas, the commemorations were one way of challenging that master Turkish narrative.

For Sakine, organizing and participating in the commemorations in Diyarbakir was a way to offer the Armenians an acknowledgement of the crime. Sakine believes that the Armenians *need* a “collective acknowledgment” on a wide scale. She said:

I believe in the Armenian cause and the importance of recognizing the Armenian Genocide; but it’s not just about a few people recognizing it. It’s important for the entire world to acknowledge this crime. Individual recognition doesn’t have much meaning. What matters is collective recognition and acknowledgement. The Armenians have a pain and suffering; they have the need for that collective acknowledgement and that is why I organized and took part in these commemorations.

For Azad, the Kurdish politician, and Adem, the Turkish activist, confronting the past and learning from the past were the motivating factors.

Adem said that the genocide was one of the greatest crimes against humanity, that Hrant Dink's assassination had been a continuation of the genocide, and that "No people who commit such a crime can be liberated as long as they do not confront it." For him, participating in these commemorations—four over the course of four years—was a way to bring about that sort of reckoning.

Azad the Kurdish politician said his motivation rests in ensuring that such a crime is not repeated again. By educating the public and raising awareness, by embracing a multicultural vision, he hopes to rectify the past. "Our intention is to learn from our mistakes of the past so that we can live in a better way in the present and the future," he said. "I will always take part and participate. And the main reason is that I want to make sure that people remember so that it's not repeated again."

For others, raising awareness was an outcome, a byproduct of the commemoration events. I will discuss those viewpoints in a later section (p. 85).

BRINGING DIASPORAN ARMENIAN VOICES TO TURKEY (2 ARMENIAN INFORMANTS)

For two of the Armenian participants, Kevork and Massis, in traveling to Turkey to commemorate the genocide, they aimed to bring with them distinctly diasporan Armenian voices/message.

For Kevork, who participated in the first ever commemoration in Turkey in 2010 and again in 2015, this act of carrying a voice that had been missing from that land was the main motivating factor. He explained:

What moved me was this firm belief that it is important to bring this discussion [on the Armenian Genocide] to Turkey, and of course that had been happening for many years—for at least a decade, now may be more—but to bring it to Turkey also with an Armenian voice, and particularly with a diasporan Armenian voice, and voices. I believe that’s important because that discourse, discussion on the Armenian Genocide in Turkey was primarily conducted by Turkish intellectuals and activists with some Turkish Armenians, Istanbul-Armenians participating. But the Armenian voice, the diasporan Armenian voice, the voices of people who actually—whose grandparents, ancestors were dispossessed, deported, forced out, were not actually represented. So in that context, I think that was the most important motivation for me, and it stayed that way ever since.

By 2015, when the level of Diasporan Armenian participation had expanded with around 250 Diasporan Armenians having flown to Turkey to participate in the Istanbul commemorations just through Project 2015⁶⁷ alone, Kevork shifted his attention to commemorations held in other parts of the country, where the diasporan voices were absent or few. He said, “So although my central focus had not changed, one thing did change and that’s my attention to other parts of Turkey, where, again, commemorations were generally held, but Armenians—the Armenian voice, and particularly the diasporan Armenian voice—were not necessarily represented.”

Massis too talked about the importance of bringing the diasporan Armenian perspective to the events. He said, “I felt that it was important to get our message out in Turkey, in a place where the least amount of people were hearing about it in that capacity, where the information is hardest to break through.” Massis went on to recount a particularly powerful moment for him

⁶⁷ Interview with a Project2015 organizer.

when he heard the words of a young diasporan Armenian woman from a stage—and that image made an impact on him, stayed with him.

JUSTICE (3 ARMENIANS)

Interestingly, the two individuals who spoke about the importance of carrying the diasporan Armenian voice were also the two who also emphasized the importance of the pursuit for justice. For them, it wasn't just a matter of acknowledgment and remembrance, but also a demand for some form of justice.

Kevork explained that bringing the diasporan Armenian voice is important for him because in Turkey the discussion around the genocide “is framed in a context of democracy and democratization, while it is also important to frame it in a context of justice.”

Kevork was wary that the issue of the genocide was being instrumentalized for the purposes of democratization. He explained:

Many Turkish activists and intellectuals engage in this because they see it as yet another way of pushing Turkey towards more democracy. Although that's a good thing, but at the same time I do not believe in using cases of mass violence—whether it's the Holocaust or the Armenian Genocide—as simply the means for another end. I believe that they should receive attention and justice should be served first and foremost, and if that process brings democratization to those lands, then even better.

Massis also stressed that it is important “To let people know that even after 100 years we haven't forgotten. We haven't given up. We haven't given up our claims or desires for some sort of a just resolution.”

Simon also stressed the importance of pursuing justice, and expressed his disappointment at others who he did not believe were of the same mindset as him. “...Looking around me, the faces of people were more in a mourning mode as opposed to defiance mode and rebellious

mode, and I'm the latter type of person. I don't see any point in mourning at this point the victims of the Armenian Genocide. I think it's our duty and obligation to pursue justice for the crimes that have been committed," he said.

FEELING SHAME, GUILT, RESPONSIBILITY (3 TURKISH INFORMANTS)

Note: I will discuss the notions of shame and guilt in more detail in a later section (p.72).

Asli, the Turkish activist, said it was the feeling of shame that drove her to be active. Shame is what moved her to organize and participate in these commemoration events. However, shame had to do more with her silence on the issue for most of her life rather than a "national shame." "Knowing this, starting to know about this, and being aware of how late you are, it was a shame. The most compelling feeling was the shame," she said.

When asked about the motivating factors, Adem too noted that "Naturally, I felt guilty."

For Sevda, it was the discovery of the role of her ancestors as perpetrators what motivated her to participate. "Until 2014, I wouldn't have actually called it genocide. And then when I first started reading more in 2014, I learned a lot more and it was clearly what it was and at that point I felt that I had to be there," she said, admitting that for nearly 40 years she had given the topic no real thought. For Sevda, it was something she had to do; "I had to be there," she said. Arguably, the knowledge of the past gave her that responsibility.

RECTIFYING THE PAST (1 KURDISH INFORMANT)

For Azad, the Kurdish former elected official, rectifying the past was the motivating factor. For him, the commemorations were part of a multi-pronged approach to address the crime and find a way forward. He had not only helped organize the commemoration events, but he had

also made public announcements of apology, as well as initiated the construction of a monument to remembrance.

Azad said, “Because my ancestors were fooled and because of their lack of knowledge, we were pushed to be part of the destruction and the genocide of the Armenians, and enemies were made between the Kurds and the Armenians, it was important for me to apologize for this. My effort has been to rectify what has happened in the past.”

Azad also seemed proud of his work in this regard. I will discuss pride in a later section (p.70).

‘THESE ARE OUR PEOPLE’ (1 KURDISH INFORMANT)

Finally, for Ferhat, the Kurdish man who grew up in Diyarbakir, participating in the commemoration appeared to be almost something natural because of his family’s connection to the genocide. He explained:

I heard a lot about the Armenian Genocide when I was a kid. My grandmother’s mother was a witness and it was a traumatic story in my family. So we all had this kind of... sympathy towards Armenians, and we knew that these are our people, our neighbors, brothers, etc. We grew up with this. I think it was nice to regain the character of the city, because the city is multicultural.

Ferhat’s assertion that his grandmother’s mother was a “witness” most likely means that she was an Armenian.

PART IV: THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS

When asked to remember their emotions in the days or weeks ahead of the commemorations, as well as during the events, my informants recounted anecdotes or general feelings that they remembered experiencing. These emotions included fear, anxiety, pride,

happiness, guilt, shame, hope, mourning, sadness, relief, excitement, anticipation, and disempowerment. Some of these feelings were shared by members of an ethnic group, while others were experienced by informants of different ethnicities. Guilt and shame, for instance, were emotions that were experienced only by the three Turkish informants, as well as the informant of half Turkish and half Kurdish background. Three of the four male Armenian informants said they felt no emotion. Meanwhile, the most reported emotions were anxiety and fear (6 informants).

Emotions are revealing. In some cases, emotions experienced ahead of the commemorations enhance our understanding of motives and mindsets. For instance, all my Turkish informants noted that guilt and shame were motivating factors for them. Some of the Kurdish participants said they felt pride and happiness ahead of and during the commemorations. They felt pride that Kurds in Diyarbakir were taking steps like apologizing and commemorating. As for the Armenian males, the suppression of emotions raises some questions for further study.

ANXIETY AND FEAR (4 ARMENIAN, 2 TURKISH INFORMANTS)

Kevork reported feeling “very nervous” ahead of a scheduled commemoration in the Western part of Turkey’s southeast where he was a guest speaker at a first ever commemoration event there.

Ani, who was in Istanbul for the centennial commemorations in 2015, remembers an instance when she and those around her began “flipping out” and crying when they heard voices chanting in Turkish approach during the event.

Meanwhile, Levon, although he was excited to participate in the Diyarbakir commemoration, couldn't help but also have "some apprehension and fear that the concert would be interrupted or disturbed by protests or some other way." He noted that there were also rumors that the Governor of Diyarbakir, who is appointed from Ankara and is allegedly anti-Armenian and anti-Kurd, would try to disrupt the events.

Salpi reported feeling nervous, anxious, and fearful. Salpi's feelings were heightened every time she would spot the Turkish flag, which is omnipresent in Istanbul. "Every five feet was another Turkish flag. And any time I had seen the Turkish flag before was very sporadic and it would just give me a bad feeling, but now every single second I was walking I was constantly reminded of where I was. I feel like the flag represents the more oppressing side of Turkish culture and government, the more negative side, the nationalistic side. That's why there were constant spouts of anxiety and fear," she said. Salpi, who describes herself as a talkative person, said she remained quiet during most of her trip as she did not want to "say something wrong" and because she didn't know "what kinds of rights" she had. Salpi said she was even more fearful in Ankara, a less cosmopolitan city, where she participated in another commemoration event. "The fear and confusion of being amongst everyone who was so obviously Turkish was overwhelming to me. It was a very obviously Turkish city. It was their capital city. I was just so confused because I couldn't turn to anyone and have them either be from the international community or the Armenian community."

Two of the Turkish participants also expressed feeling anxious or fearful. Sevda reported experiencing "worry" ahead of the Istanbul commemoration event "because you never know what the Turkish police are going to do."

Meanwhile Asli said she becomes quite scared at times, when she “freaks out” thinking she could be arrested at any moment because of her activism and outspokenness.

PRIDE AND HAPPINESS (2 ARMENIAN, 2 KURDISH INFORMANTS)

Four informants reported feeling proud during the commemorations. For Salpi, pride came at a moment when she looked around her and observed other fellow diasporan Armenians standing with her. “Especially when we would go to the gatherings, the protests, or the concerts, it was this sense of pride and group accomplishment that wow, all of us have made it here,” she said. Another cause for pride for her was witnessing young members of the Armenian community of Istanbul, particularly members of the activist organization Nor Zartonk (“New Awakening” in Armenian), taking to the streets with banners and slogans.

A feeling that appeared to be similar to pride but which he did not name seemed to have consumed Levon as he witnessed a large number of hidden Armenians (what he assessed to be the vast majority of a “thousand plus” crowd) having “shown the courage” to openly commemorate the genocide. Levon felt he was there not just commemorating but also “celebrating” what he saw as the “rebirth of the hidden Armenians.” In sum, he felt it was a “triumph.”

For Sakine, the Kurdish activist, it was her city that which caused her to feel proud and happy. “In 2013, I was extremely happy; I was very happy that it was taking place in Diyarbakir... When I saw that here in Diyarbakir the Kurds are commemorating the Armenian Genocide, then I thought that this is a good development and there may still be hope for the future.”

Azad, the Kurdish politician, had similar feelings. After recounting the efforts of the local authorities, among them an apology and the building of the memorial monument, he said, “In Diyarbakir I was feeling the feeling of a person who had paid his dues and he was happy because of that.”

HOPEFUL (2 ARMENIAN INFORMANTS)

Maro, who had attended the commemorations in Diyarbakir in 2015, and had forged friendships with local activists, recalled her emotional state during the events: “I didn’t spend a lot of time crying or feeling weepy. I felt hopeful. I felt very hopeful. ...Now I’m emotional because of what happened⁶⁸—but I felt that I was bonding with people and it was going to be a bond that was going to be there for the rest of my life. [She is crying]. Yeah.”

Levon too felt hopeful in Diyarbakir, observing the hidden Armenians who were now openly commemorating, the procession with Turks, Kurds, and Armenians walking and holding cut-outs of the forget-me-not flower (the symbol adopted for the centennial commemorations worldwide), the Kurdish leadership and the head of the HDP, Selahettin Demirtas (now imprisoned), and other politicians who gave speeches and “spoke quite freely and openly and kind of in a hoping way that Turkey may change.” Levon added, “It was like a window which opened up for a few years.”

SAD AND MOURNFUL (1 ARMENIAN, 1 KURDISH, 1 TURKISH/KURDISH INFORMANTS)

⁶⁸ The day before the interview, news of a wave of arrests and purges in Turkey had been in the headlines again.

For Salpi (Armenian) it was the most emotional she had ever been during a commemoration. “It was very sad at moments... The one in Taksim Square—I had never been that emotional on April 24 ever in my life and I just remember I cried so much,” she said.

Ferhat (Kurdish) said he felt a sense of “*taziye*,” which means expressing condolences. He elaborated, “Like having a funeral owner’s feeling. It was quite complicated,” adding that a piano concert in the church almost moved him to tears.

Enveloped in a slew of emotions, Elmas (Turkish-Kurdish) also said she felt sadness.

GUILT AND SHAME (3 TURKISH, 1 TURKISH/KURDISH INFORMANT)

All three Turkish participants—Asli, Sevda, and Adem—said they experienced guilt. Asli and Sevda, as well as Elmas who is half Turkish and half Kurdish said they also felt shame.

For Sevda, the feeling of guilt is accompanied by a feeling of dread. It was a powerful emotion that made her feel out of place at the commemorations, like she did not belong there.

She said:

I don’t feel very good at the commemorations. I feel a little guilty not because I did something but also because of the 40 years I didn’t attend anything or know anything—nothing was happening, of course, probably in the 35 years out of those. But all of that sort of goes into being there, and I know it’s a good thing to have more people at the commemoration but at the same time I always feel like... ugh, do I really belong here? I mean, I’m on the other side. I’m one of the... I’ve been with the bad guys for a long time. So that kind of a dread. I know it’s good to be there. It’s good to have more people. But still, that [feeling] still remains.

Adem simply said, “Naturally, I felt guilty myself.”

For Asli, the feeling of shame was not only present, but necessary. She spoke about the embarrassment and shame she feels for being so late in acknowledging the genocide and for her

“participation” in the denial. “If you are not curious—*oh, the Armenians, what happened to their parents?* If you are not curious, you see what you want to see, you know what you want to know. If you don’t want to know, you can’t know. It’s not an excuse. So it was a shock. And the result was shame.” Asli went on to stress that this notion of “shame” is important. “We have to feel this shame... As a product of this denialist state, we are responsible for the denialism. We didn’t do anything. We are so late. Shame is very, very important. The core of it... I’m embarrassed that all my years was gone without being aware of this, and learning, and reading the micro histories, not only the big genocide history. Shame,” she said.

Elmas had similar thoughts. When asked about her emotions around the commemorations, she said, “Shame and sadness. Resentment. Anger. Sadness, anger, shame, resentment, these kinds of things. Also memories of...” She asked if I knew the main town near where her family hailed from. The town was home to a large Armenian population until the genocide virtually cleansed it of all trace of Armenians. I said I did. “There was a huge Armenian presence there. I’m from... a neighboring town. Being a remnant also makes one feel ashamed a lot. That is also one of the feelings, having some ties with the Armenian past. You know. In our family, we also have Armenian women... so, voila,” said Elmas. Those Armenians who survived the genocide and remained in Turkey—most by being abducted as children or taken as wives or slaves—were referred to by the wider public as “remnants of the sword.” Elmas has such “remnants” in her family—and it appears that she even identifies as one.

I asked Elmas if she would elaborate. How did she make sense of this feeling of shame? She said:

At a certain moment even being alive, continuing your life in a normal way makes one feel bad. Can you imagine? Is it possible that in the U.S., an American woman or

man would feel bad because they are living? ... When it comes to the Armenian issue, it's also like that. It's too heavy, the genocide... mass killing your people, mass confiscation of their material [property], mass denial of their once presence, mass silencing. So one can hardly carry all that heavy history, and feels kind of ashamed because of living a middle class or a peasant, whatever your life is like, because your presence, your material presence and your breath—you continue living, you're a citizen here, you travel, I am an academic in the university, my parents own some land, house, etc.—it is all based in the absence of Armenians basically. That is how I feel.

EXCITEMENT, POSITIVE ANTICIPATION (1 ARMENIAN, 1 TURKISH INFORMANT)

Both Levon and Sevda reported feeling excitement. Levon's "positive anticipation" and excitement was mixed with anxiety and fear ahead of the commemorations. Sevda's excitement was mixed with feelings of "dread" and guilt, and was a response at seeing the large number of diasporan Armenians who had flown in to partake in the events.

RELIEF (1 KURDISH INFORMANT)

Ferhat reported feeling relief. He simply stated, "I was of course feeling actually kind of relieved and comfortable."

FEELING INSIGNIFICANT, SMALL, DISEMPOWERED (1 ARMENIAN INFORMANT)

Simon, on the other hand, felt small, insignificant, and disempowered during the commemorations in Istanbul in 2015. He spoke at length about how he felt insignificant in such a large city as Istanbul, where voices and protests are lost in the bustling city. He remembered feeling "completely pointless" as he observed those around him either mourning, singing, or praying—he couldn't tell which—instead of in a "defiant mode." Here is an excerpt from his reflections:

It was underwhelming in terms of the personal gratification that I received from the event because we were so small in such a huge area and in such a huge city. And I

remember at the commemoration event I was just thinking, so what does the Turk that's walking across Taksim Square who doesn't even know what we're chanting or why we're gathered there for—what's the message that they're going to get out of it, if any. And because the number of people gathered there—even though it was larger than any other genocide commemoration event that has happened in Istanbul... but it showed also how small and how underwhelming it was. And how insignificant it was. It was significant symbolically, but in terms of impact, direct impact on the long term agendas or objectives that Armenians have, I don't think we managed to fulfill those; I don't think we were ever in a position to be able to fulfill those.

CHALLENGING RELEVANCE OR PRESENCE OF EMOTIONS (4 ARMENIAN, 1 KURDISH INFORMANTS)

Three of the four Armenian male respondents—Kevork, Massis, and Simon—said they were not emotional. Kevork and Massis argued emotions would hinder the task at hand. The fourth Armenian male, Levon, discussed his emotions (anxiety, excitement), but also noted that there were periods of time where he intentionally tried to “keep memories away” to suppress his emotions since he had to appear on stage. One of the Kurdish males, Ferhat, also denied being emotional—“I'm not that emotional of a guy”—although he later spoke about feeling “mournful,” and reported having been moved almost to the point of tears during a performance in a church, but coughed it up to the general “ambience.”

Kevork said that every commemoration he has attended has been “personally very rewarding, inspirational, and often also redeeming,” redeeming because he had for years advocated for greater diasporan Armenian involvement with voices of dissent in Turkey. Reflecting on the centennial commemorations in Istanbul, he said, “I had very few feelings.” He explained his mindset thus:

...Ultimately, I don't see this as something that has to do with emotions and personal emotions at this point. I see this as ultimately not something that I do to get

some kind of satisfaction; satisfaction will come as a result, but it's not why I do these things. And why I want to do these things or join people who are doing these things has to do with trying to change a mindset, trying to change policy, trying to change a century of enshrined structural violence and denial. And that is a very cold reality, and if I don't treat it with the same cold clinical manner that it treats its victims, it would be more difficult to accomplish anything. So yes, at this point these commemorations are rewarding, but I don't do them for those emotional rewards per se. And I do them in a very rational way that tries to accomplish and see results no matter how small they are.

Massis expressed having a similar mindset. He said he is often task-oriented when in Turkey, where he feels he needs to keep his guard up, and emotions are of no use to him in that setting. Sometimes, he said, he would be reminded of the significance of the present moment through the reactions of others that he forces himself to take a step back and reflect on the moment. This is how he explained it:

I mean when you're going through it, it's really a blur. I'm not sure you're able to really digest things in the moment. It's only afterwards that you can reflect on things. So from that perspective it was more about the task at hand. What am I supposed to be doing? Where am I supposed to be? What am I trying to accomplish? ...I have such brief moments of time there and so much that I want to accomplish that all of my mental capacity is focused on that and not the emotions of the moment. It's rare that I can take the time to reflect while I'm there. That's very difficult to do. Sometimes it happens at the end of the day when you can sit down with your friends, and have a beer and reflect on what happened.... So usually during these times it's very difficult for me, and I try not to. I try to contain emotion as much as possible so I can stay focused on what I want to accomplish there. There's always a little bit of cautiousness anyways about how much you open up to yourself where you're in that environment with people sometimes you don't know, you don't know their background, you don't know where they're coming from, so you're going to be cautious as well...

However, Massis later went on to recount two incidents that were "emotional" for him. One involved listening to a speech by a diasporan woman, and the other an encounter with a Turkish participant, a descendent of a perpetrator.

Massis recalled:

I remember being next to a woman whose ancestor had participated on the perpetrator side, and how uncomfortable they felt being amongst Armenians even though obviously

this person commemorates and acknowledges the genocide, and obviously is not of the mindset of the perpetrator, is not a denialist. She was very uncomfortable, and I went to them and I just said, “You’re one of us. Don’t look at it... don’t feel like you’re part of the perpetrator. You’re participating in this, you’re commemorating. You’re memorializing. You’re honoring the victims.” And I remember that was a pretty moving point. Again that happened at a place where crimes had been committed. So I know for that person—I mean they began to cry—and I know that it was important for them to hear that from somebody that was Armenian. That it wasn’t about whether you are Turkish or not. Whether you’re a denier or not, whether you embrace the perpetrators or not, that’s the dictating factor. And that involves non Turks and sometimes even Armenians that fall into that category. So that’s the classification, not ethnicity.

When asked to recall his emotions during the commemorations, Simon said, “I wasn’t [emotional].” He went on to explain that had it been his first time in Turkey, he might have been more emotional, however, due to his humanitarian work, he had traveled to Turkey on a number of occasions to work with refugees, and was in the south of the country in the days leading up to the commemoration. “It was more of a shock on the day of April 24,” he said, and went on to discuss his disappointment at the mindset of the participants and the realization that the event was small and insignificant in that vast city.

THE ROLE OF AUTHORITIES

The role of the local or central authorities is significant. On the one hand, authorities can intimidate participants, disrupt commemoration events, or just cast a long ominous shadow that constricts the work of organizers. On the other hand, authorities can show support, encourage participation, and even play a key role in helping organize such events. My informants witnessed both types of engagement on the part of authorities. The anecdotes they told involved the intimidation by Turkey’s central authorities and the police, and the supportive role played by local Kurdish authorities.

In his discussions, Azad, who was himself an important Kurdish elected official before the purges swept the country, spoke about how as an elected official it was important for him to apologize for the genocide and take steps to rectify the past. “We even received threats when we were constructing this memorial, [organizing] these commemorations, and for the first time we apologized. We said that we Kurds apologize for what happened, and we demanded that the state also apologize from all the people that they victimized. Our intention is to learn from our mistakes of the past so that we can live in a better way in the present and the future,” he said.

Azad also noted that Kurdish Muslim religious leaders also attended the commemoration events in Diyarbakir.

Sakine, who also resides in the predominantly Kurdish city of Diyarbakir, noted that people who were members of or supported the politics of the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), which has tremendous support in Kurdish regions, found out about the commemorations through the party and felt encouraged to participate. This is in stark contrast to the central Turkish government policy of denial and intimidation.

“The role of the municipalities and the parties is great. So for example right now, because those two are suppressed, it’s become more difficult,” she said. Sakine is referring to the Turkish government’s military operations in the Kurdish regions which started in 2016, and the ensuing violence, oppression, and mass arrests of Kurdish politicians and elected officials that particularly affected the southeast.

TURKISH AUTHORITIES

In contrast, at least four informants noted feeling intimidated by Turkish authorities or the police. Asli, the Turkish activist, reported constantly feeling the presence of the authorities. She

recounted how in organizing the commemoration events, she and her colleagues had to be mindful of the Armenians attending when deciding the location of the commemoration event. In her words: "...Some of our colleagues said they will round us up, and it is OK if they round us up, but if Armenians come, it is different for Armenians. We have to think of their safety. Armenians are already in a very, very bad... [Her voice trails off]."

Sakine, the Kurdish activist, remembered how her first attempt at organizing a genocide commemoration in Diyarbakir had resulted in the police intervening and dispersing the crowd. "In 2012, for the first time, we were organizing the commemoration with some civil society groups but the police essentially stopped it. They intervened, and essentially separated everybody," she said.

Three years later, the police in Diyarbakir still had a menacing presence. As she walked in a silent procession through the streets, Maro, the diasporan Armenian, remembers the presence of a tank that signaled the military might of the Turkish forces. "We had basically riot police lined up and there was a tank type car right there, sort of trying to intimidate us, but we still did it," she said.

For Levon, the Armenian informant, the threat came from the governor of Diyarbakir, who was rumored to be anti-Armenian. Levon said he feared the governor would disrupt the commemoration event.

A NOTE ON THE THREAT OF COUNTER-PROTESTS (4 ARMENIAN INFORMANTS)

Through the course of my interviews, I realized that for some of my informants, the presence and threat of counter-demonstrations appeared to bring about an emotional climax, which could be explained by the presence of an immediate identity threat. In these instances, the

informants felt their actions had been impactful. The opposite was also true. In a sense, the lack of counter-protests appeared to be demoralizing to a degree. I will let my informants' testimonies demonstrate what I mean.

For Kevork, the first commemoration he participated in in Istanbul was also the most impactful—and “impact” was directly related to the counter-demonstrations, which made the issue “raw” for him. He recounted:

The very first time I was at a commemoration was at Haydarpasha, on April 24, 2010, and then at Taksim Square... There were a couple of counter demonstrations; there was a police chain around the people who were commemorating at Taksim Square; there were a couple of groups of nationalist Turks who were trying to break through the police chain and were chanting things like, “Death to the Armenian Diaspora!” Being one of the few Armenian Diasporans at that commemoration, that was a very chilling moment for me and those people were essentially calling for the death of people like us. So, clearly that hit home how raw this is and how serious and problematic this is, but it didn't deter me from wanting to do this.

Kevork went on to talk about how these events had since been “normalized” and how less and less people “cared” about it:

I don't think there is enough people who actually care about it anymore in a way they did when it first happened; in a sense that you would see fewer and fewer counter demonstrations, and the others where it was the police that prevented it, or on the location where this is happening you would see less media coverage of many of these commemorations.

In other words, for Kevork, the counter-demonstrations meant that the message of those commemorating was getting out into the general public, that on some level they were being heard. Now, it seemed to him, the commemorations are disregarded. He went on to talk about how it has been the new policy of the government to ignore these events by discouraging counter-protests and media coverage.

Simon appears to be in agreement with Kevork. Speaking about why he felt the events were “underwhelming” for him, Simon talked about the lack of counter-demonstrations, which he also saw as a sign that the commemorations were failing to impact the larger public. He said:

The fact that there weren't any counter protests by Turks... I guess we weren't even being loud enough to trick them to try to silence us [laughs]. So, there were no counter protests. The Turkish security forces had everything under control and that's why I think it was a lot more underwhelming and it lacked the emotional impact on me, but also the impact that I was expecting in terms of impacting local Turks' emotions about this issue, or even awareness of this issue.

Meanwhile, both Salpi and Ani found themselves in a situation where they erroneously believed a crowd of counter-protesters were moving towards them. Salpi remembers:

We were standing next to a woman who was from [Istanbul] and we had been hearing these Turkish chants get closer and closer and all of us who didn't know Turkish were getting a little nervous—who is this [group]? What are they saying?—and then as they got closer, the woman next to us was tearing up and saying ‘oh, those are our boys.’ They finally felt safe enough to be able to chant that they wanted the genocide to be recognized. She was crying, and I started crying, and my mom started crying.

Salpi talked about clinging to her mother as the voices neared. She experienced a sharp rise in anxiety and fear, and then a sudden realization and calm. Her tears could have been a mix of relief and pride, which she mentions feeling towards the group of Istanbul-Armenian activists. Arguably, the exaltation was closely related to the moment of perceived crisis.

In almost an identical fashion, at the same commemoration event, Ani experienced the same emotions. She recounted:

We didn't realize that [Nor Zartonk⁶⁹] had planned a march from the other end of the street and so we heard this chanting coming from that direction. People were flipping out because someone in the crowd told us that it was the counter demonstrators—the

⁶⁹ A group of young Istanbul Armenian activists

Grey Wolves⁷⁰ assholes who were trying to get towards us—so we just started crying. I was crying. [REDACTED] the singer, she was with us, she was crying. [REDACTED] was flipping out. We were all flipping out. Until we saw them and we saw that they were carrying the signs that said “*Menk hos enk*” [“We are here” in Armenian]. But before that we were like, “Oh my God!”

It appears, the counter demonstrations serve two needs: 1) the need to be noticed, heard, and make an impact; and 2) reaffirm a sense of group belonging, connection—essentially, identity.

PART V: POTENTIAL TANGIBLE OUTCOMES OF PARTICIPATION

In order to understand how my informants view their own agency, what hopes and expectations they hold, what possibilities they see ahead of them, and to see how their motives may relate to their expectations, hopes, and vision, I posed this question to them: “What do you see as some of the potential outcomes of participating in these commemoration events in Turkey?” This also led to another question: Would they participate again? Without an exception, all my informants said they would participate again—even my three Turkish informants who felt utterly hopeless, and even Simon who had felt “insignificant” and disempowered. However, many expressed some degree of hesitation or concern regarding the current political climate and oppression in the country that has targeted dissenting academics, activists, and politicians, and particularly the Kurds. What would motivate these informants to participate again? The answer may lie in how they assess the potential outcomes and what their motives were to begin with.

Although I detail their responses below, I wish to draw attention to a couple of phenomena. First, all three of my Turkish informants said they had no hope for any tangible

⁷⁰ An ultra-nationalist, neo-fascist Turkish group

outcomes. Only Asli conceded that there may be some awareness raising. From the other informants, one Armenian also felt hopeless.

All three of my Kurdish participants expressed hope for the future, that a better vision for the future could be crafted, that awareness could be raised, and that Kurdish leaders would be able to help spread awareness. Here it might be important to note that my Kurdish informants come from the southeast of the country that's at the receiving end of Turkish military operations; and one informant had been imprisoned for activism and only recently released. Their hope was somewhat perplexing to me, especially when juxtaposed with the hopelessness of my Turkish informants.

Meanwhile, my Armenian informants seemed to be focused on forging connections with the Istanbul Armenian community and Turkey's civil society activists, and collaborating with Kurdish and Turkish activists. Some of my informants were also quite critical of the commemoration events, and I summarize their arguments in a later section (p.93).

DISMANTLING STEREOTYPES (2 ARMENIAN, 1 TURKISH INFORMANTS)

For Salpi, the Armenian informant, the commemorations offered an opportunity to interact with Turkish and Kurdish individuals, and to be more “open minded” about their culture and identity. She said that she also believes it has helped other Armenians be less “hateful” of Turks. She said:

I think that these events... getting a lot of Diasporan Armenians to be in Istanbul... enlightened them to being open minded towards the Turkish culture, the Kurdish culture, and hopefully towards reconciliation. I think it's not productive to be hateful because there is no progress in hate... I always thought—even when I was young—it's really sad that we hate them because we are so similar; and that was very much emphasized when I first went to Turkey for these commemoration events. I remember looking around and they kind of look like Armenians, and their music kind of

sounds like Armenian, and their food definitely tasted Armenian, and it was like, wow, the kind of closest people to us are the ones that we historically despise and I thought that was really sad.

Sevda, the Turkish informant, also felt that some of the prejudice against Turkish people was dissipated during conversations that were made possible by these events. “I think very good friendships came out of those conversations. I think also some kind of prejudice against Turkish people and prejudice with—it’s a fair prejudice because that’s what the majority... When I was in the States at first, when I was in college, if someone told me they were Armenian I would probably go into the self-defense mode.” Sevda said she believes talking about her own story of coming to terms with her family’s dark past, acknowledging the genocide, attending commemorations, and having honest conversations with other participants will help in this respect.

Kevork, the Armenian activist, simply noted that the commemorations created opportunities for individuals from different ethnic backgrounds to work together, which in effect broke “some of the stereotypes that have been lingering for a century.”

CONNECTING WITH ISTANBUL-ARMENIAN COMMUNITY (2 ARMENIAN INFORMANTS)

For two participants, Salpi and Simon, the commemoration events made them aware of the struggles of the local Istanbul Armenian community, and gave them a desire to be more engaged with them. For Simon, that was one of two tangible outcomes.

Salpi said that the commemorations “opened her eyes” to the Istanbul Armenian community; she felt connected to them. She observed similar reactions in others around her age. She said it was a “beacon of hope” seeing young diasporans and Istanbul Armenians connecting there. “I feel a connection to Istanbul like never before, and that’s why I want to be there for that,

and also to stand next to our Armenian brothers and sisters there. That was the most overwhelming feeling of pride I had next to a group of people,” she said, admitting that now she considers herself partly Istanbul Armenian, as her family hailed from there. So for Salpi, it appears the commemorations also served as a way to reclaim a lost part of her identity.

For Simon, diasporan Armenian engagement with the Istanbul Armenian community is of utmost importance, and the commemorations helped in that respect. “I think historically there have been a lot of stigmas that have been associated with the community in Istanbul. I think the more we engage with the Armenian community in Istanbul, it’s clear that they have been as heroic if not more heroic than a lot of the Armenians who have ended up spread across the diaspora, because they have had to live with not only the burden of genocide and the memory of genocide, but they have also had to deal with an oppressive government for the last 100 years,” he said.

RAISING AWARENESS, REDUCING DENIAL (3 ARMENIAN, 3 KURDISH, 1 TURKISH, 1 TURKISH/KURDISH INFORMANTS)

A total of eight informants believed raising awareness was one of the tangible outcomes of these events.

For Kevork, one of the important outcomes of these commemorations is inching towards normalizing genocide recognition in Turkey, whereas in the past those who have been outspoken have been stigmatized, ostracized, punished, prosecuted, and—like Hrant Dink—even killed. He talked about the importance of continued collaboration and work towards genocide recognition outside of commemoration events. He elaborated:

I do think that one of the things that can come out of this is creating a different kind of normalization, which makes it difficult in Turkey to engage in denial without at the same time confronting the fact that there's an overwhelming opinion out there, there's an overwhelming position out there that counters this position of denial; and a different kind of normalization that makes it difficult for teachers in schools—despite the policy and the state's position—to actually engage in denial. It's very difficult to change the state's policies, so I'm not talking about that at this point. What I'm talking about is that even if you are in the most oppressive state, as an individual you have agency, and there's a way of normalizing the issue of the Armenian Genocide that would make individuals, like decent citizens of Turkey, to not really dirty their hands in this business. I think that is the first step of shattering the state's policy and that can be done by constant connections, communication, and constant exposure to the story of the Armenian Genocide and the 100 years that followed it, which was a century of suppression, denial, and persecution of minorities.

Salpi echoed Kevork's sentiments, although she also expressed doubt about whether the commemorations would in fact succeed in raising awareness. She said:

I think it's definitely about trying to raise awareness in a place that is so resistant to it... I think to have such a big group of people in Istanbul for example rally behind the cause—it begins to normalize something that for people in Turkey is so abnormal. To them, it's so ridiculous that there's this claim, that there was this genocide, but to have that many people stand behind it and be there to support it, I think would cause some people to think that may be what they are saying isn't a total fallacy. May be there is some sort of truth behind it. I'd like to think very romantically that may be it would get them to look into this history and analyze this missing chapter of their country's history. The realistic part of me is [thinking] sometimes people are going to believe in whatever they want to believe in, no matter how obvious the truth is. So I don't know how productive that is on that end.

For Levon, the commemorations serve as a “reminder” for the people of Turkey, and help “break down the denial.” He said:

I think genocide commemorations are a good reminder for the Turkish people—not the Turkish government, but the people—and Diaspora Armenians should do everything possible to make that happen in Turkey through cooperation with the local Armenians or local Turkish human rights associations, NGOs, who are organizing these events in Turkey.... I think when the situation improves a bit in Turkey, again we should make every effort to be in cooperation, in dialogue with these democratically inclined Turks and Kurds to encourage the events from happening because every little bit breaks down the denial more.

Asli believes the only possible outcome is raising awareness bit by bit. She expressed her hopelessness at the current situation which she said erased any other “concrete” possibility. “As long as the present state of affairs continues, there won’t be a concrete step. Only it will raise awareness, a bit more awareness, a bit more awareness,” she said.

Elmas also spoke about raising questions in the minds of members of the general public who would witness these commemorations. She said she did not think this would directly lessen denial, but would prompt people to ask questions. She said:

That audience is not necessarily attendees. The attendees might be transformed in different ways. And they may get the general public to come, to hear, to see, which I think is very, very important—as important as the transformation of the attendees. So that is I think very, very important, which does not contribute to the lessening of denial, but [raises] small question marks in peoples’ minds. I think I value that.

Sakine, who has helped organize and attended the commemorations in Diyarbakir, believes the commemorations can have a real impact, particularly if they are attended by respected members of the community. She said:

The PKK [Kurdistan Workers’ Party] had a pro-acknowledgement position already. However, once these public commemorations were held, and the people actually saw that Kurdish intellectuals themselves are commemorating and are part of this, in their minds it became something like ‘OK if they are acknowledging it, so therefore this must be true.’ That created some sense of relief and connection to the issue by the locals.

Azad, the Kurdish politician, believes the commemorations both raise awareness and reaffirm a commitment to “never again.” “The least that happened is this realization that the idea of the genocide and knowledge of the genocide spread, and the idea of never again being established—this feeling that this should never happen again,” he said.

Ferhat said he believes the commemorations raise awareness, to “be aware of reality,” which will help plan a “more reasonable” vision for the future.

RECONNECTING WITH ARMENIAN SPACES, MAINTAINING PRESENCE (2 ARMENIAN INFORMANTS)

For Ani, reconnecting with the Armenian spaces in Istanbul was the most significant tangible outcome. The Istanbul commemorations included vigils and memorializing acts at places of significance to the Armenian presence there, such as churches, cemeteries, and the home of renowned Armenian composer and priest Komitas⁷¹. “For me, the tangible outcomes were reconnecting to... spaces whence my grandparents had come, reconnecting to the Armenian spaces that are still existing in Istanbul; so, reconnecting to a heritage.”

Massis, on the other hand, saw the commemorations as a way “to keep our presence there. Our interest there. To let people know that even after 100 years we haven’t forgotten. We haven’t given up. We haven’t given up our claims or desires for some sort of a just resolution. It’s important to keep that process moving forward or at least keep a placeholder until some other major event comes along that will help push the issue forward.”

PAVING WAY FOR COLLABORATION, CONNECTIONS (3 ARMENIAN INFORMANTS)

Although most informants spoke about the importance of forging bonds, collaborating, and showing support to members of the other ethnic group, Kevork, Simon, and Ani saw these as the concrete outcomes of these commemoration events.

Kevork believes the commemorations may lead to other types of collaboration and “struggle.” He said:

⁷¹ Komitas, a priest, composer and musicologist, was among the intelligentsia arrested on April 24, 1915. He survived but lost his mind. He spent the rest of his life in a mental institution in France until his death in 1935. He continues to be a cultural icon, and the most celebrated Armenian composer.

Maybe the most successful commemoration event is not about what happens on April 24, but what potential there is—what is created there through connections, through meetings, through encounters that would go beyond that and would manifest itself on April 25 and 26 and June 5 and 7 and on all these days that are not April 24, so that’s another thing; and I have seen that, to be fair. I believe that with every single commemoration, with broader participation from the diaspora, these connections are going to grow, and there’s going to be more and more initiatives on random days of the year that deal with bringing Turks and Armenians together on different issues and different fronts and also bringing up the issue of the Armenian Genocide and justice for Armenians. That would be another important thing.

Although Simon’s experience at the commemorations had left him feeling that the events were “small” and “insignificant” within the vastness of Istanbul—if not Turkey—nonetheless he still felt that small inroads could be made in the form of connections. He said:

I think there are tangible outcomes in terms of developing relations with civil society groups inside Turkey who have adopted the issue of Armenian genocide recognition within their wide range portfolio of advancing democracy and human rights inside of Turkey... So there are clearly some tangibles when you look at it from I guess not as an overarching goal of recognition, restitution, retribution, justice. So the tangibles are that. You have to establish relations.

Ani said the connections she made were the tangibles, which, as an activist organizer, she seemed to be content with.

I did make some very solid, important connections to academics who work in Turkey, like this artist [REDACTED]. You know, so it was the connections to the people that I made there that was tangible.

TRANSFORMATION (1 TURKISH/KURDISH PARTICIPANT)

Elmas saw the commemorations as a space that allowed for not only connections, but personal transformations. This was a space where the people one encountered in the pages of books, in stories told by elders, or in political rhetoric, were now in front of the participant, and the participant could connect and communicate with individuals he/she had been capable of only imagining previously. She explained:

There are some personal get-to-knows. You come to know a person about whom you have come to read about in novels, very few novels, about whom you have come to hear about in some political discourse, about whom you came to hear about in the private space in your house from some grandmothers and grandfathers. So there is a real flesh-and-blood get-to-know, and some exchange of ideas, exchange of information, conversation, and through the small space, public space that is being created by the commemorations, a non-Armenian Kurdish, Turkish, Alevi, whatever, may be transformed... Transformed in the political sense.

Elmas was also quite critical of certain approaches that fall within the definition of contact theory. I cover her critical views in a later section on criticisms (p. 93).

'RECONCILIATION' WORK (2 ARMENIAN INFORMANTS)

Walking away from the commemoration events, Salpi felt that the commemorations may bring Armenians and Turks closer to “reconciliation.” “May be there is this hope for reconciliation of relations between young Armenians and young Turks,” she said. She also spoke about the change in mindsets among participants (see above in section on stereotypes).

For Maro, who participated in the Diyarbakir commemorations which saw a large show of support by the local Kurdish population, the commemorations hit a deep chord, created the space for deep bonds, and helped participants engage with the memory of the past. In the passage below Maro, who is a historian, talks about visiting the site of a mass killing during the genocide. The site, which is near Diyarbakir, is called Dudan Gorge. Around 10,000 Armenians from the area were brought there, stripped of their possessions, murdered, then thrown in this ravine.⁷² She recounted:

The ravine is where they killed everybody, and I've read the histories. I mean, they just slit throats. People in the local area refer to that ravine as the “heads cut off.”

⁷² I have visited this ravine on at least three occasions. When locals learn we are Armenian, they proceed to acknowledge the crime that took place there, and recount what they have heard from their elders.

And so it has a collective memory. People know what happened there even if it's not in the formal historical record. And in that ravine, we ended up having a ceremony. We collected flowers, and by that time we had over 200 people because all these Kurds from Diyarbakir had joined us. And so what I'm saying about this bond... people you perform that kind of ritual with you're never going to forget their faces; you're never going to forget them. When you do commemorations like that... [at] sites of memory, so to speak, and you're creating ritual with people who acknowledge what happened there, who are not from your tribe, so to speak, it does a kind of reconciliation work that no dialogue group can get at I think. Even by showing up and being present there's a level of acknowledgement than somebody just saying "Oh yeah"—the way Erdogan, his form of denial—"Armenians suffered, Turks suffered, we all suffered." I mean for many Turks he's acknowledging what happened, but for us it's not resonating because the level of acknowledgement like going to the site of massacre and laying down flowers or a Kurdish bard, somebody singing in Kurdish to commemorate the dead.

Maro ends her thought by referring to Turkish President's "condolences" message to Armenians, which focused on the notion of "our shared pain," equating the losses from genocide with Turkish losses during World War I. Erdogan's message was rejected widely, as many saw it as a refined form of genocide denial. For Maro, the singing of the Kurdish bard, or locals placing flowers at the site of mass murder is immensely more meaningful and hope inspiring than the words of the President.

Later, at night, Maro found herself with participants listening to a group of musicians that were of Armenian, Kurdish, and Turkish background, singing a song for Diyarbakir. "They were singing a song for Diyarbakir and everybody was trying to mouth the words to sing along with the Armenian and dancing. It was really pretty phenomenal... If you want to talk about dialogue and reconciliation, I think it was being done through the music that night," she said.

At another point in the discussion, Maro repeated, "People talk about things like reconciliation, but really it's about doing this heavy lifting to deal with the weight of the memory. I felt like it was being done there in Diyarbakir."

NOTHING TANGIBLE—NOT NOW (3 TURKISH, 1 ARMENIAN INFORMANTS)

When asked about the tangible outcomes, the three Turkish informants, Asli, Sevda, and Adem, said they saw nothing coming out of the commemorations. One Armenian participant, Levon, had similar thoughts. They all expressed having no hope due to the climate of the past two years, which is on a continued decline.

“Nothing,” said Asli when I asked her about potential outcomes. She went on to explain that what she would have hoped for was “abolishing” the “Turkish history authority.” She said:

The Turkish History Authority was founded in the first years of the Turkish Republic and it was the cradle of denialism and it is still this... they always reproduce denialism with books and with everything, with conferences. Only it would be a [concrete] result, but it can't be. As long as the present state of affairs continues, there won't be a concrete step. Only it will raise awareness, a bit more awareness, a bit more awareness. There's nothing concrete.

Had I asked Levon immediately after the centennial commemoration he attended, he might have had a much different answer for me. Now, he says, his hopes have been slashed. Before, he believed that if there continued to be an open environment in Diyarbakir, many more hidden/Islamized Armenians would come forward and reclaim their identity. With the declining situation, particularly the violence targeting the Kurds in the area, his hopes are being crushed.

He lamented:

If this civil war didn't interrupt the evolution of the hidden Armenians coming out, I'm sure hundreds or thousands more would come out and there would be greater impact in their lives as well as in the acceptance of what happened in the past or facing history... It was a good start to genocide commemoration events in Diyarbakir and elsewhere. Unfortunately, these are all now disrupted, interrupted for the foreseeable future. There was another genocide commemoration in Istanbul in April 2017 but it was a relatively minor event. I don't have hope right now that what has started will continue.

Sevda too felt hopeless. I conducted the interview just a week after the Turkish Constitutional referendum in April of 2017, which saw the powers of the President increase. She

was still shaken up by it, though she said she was not surprised with the results. “I don’t know. I used to be more optimistic about this,” she said. “The way things are turning the last two years in Turkey...[The commemoration in] 2015 was very crowded, it was great, but at that point we could also talk about this more. There had been great change from 10 years before that, and now it’s almost like it’s going back in that direction of denial and Turkey closing onto itself. So I’m not sure if a group of people attending an event yearly is making any change, or will make any change going forward.”

Similarly, Adem had lost all hope. He had recently lost his job in academia because of his political views, and saw no light at the end of the tunnel. “Unfortunately, there is no suitable environment for these memories to give good results. Turkey is now a dictatorship. For example, I was kicked out of a state university where I work because I was against Erdogan. There is no hope for Turkey,” he said.

PART VI: CRITICISMS AND CONTRASTS

Four of my Armenian informants—Kevork, Maro, Simon, and Ani—Asli the Turkish organizer, and Elmas, the half Turkish and half Kurdish participant, were critical of certain aspects of the commemorations; be they approaches, mindsets, choice of spaces, or expectations. Some of the participants spoke at length about these aspects that they considered negative or problematic; others spoke about the struggles between organizers and the clash of mindsets. At times, these criticisms shed light or clarify the motives of participants, the various strategies employed by activists, in some instances they indicate why participants choose a particular

commemoration to attend but not another, and they also show the reservations some have in participating.

FEAR GENOCIDE IS INSTRUMENTALIZED

Kevoork believes that there are those in Turkish civil society for whom the issue of genocide recognition is primarily an issue of democratizing the country. That, he finds problematic. He believes the issue of the Armenian Genocide is a matter of justice, nothing less.

He said:

Many Turkish activists and intellectuals engage in this because they see it as yet another way of pushing Turkey towards more democracy. Although that's a good thing, but at the same time I do not believe in using cases of mass violence—whether it's the Holocaust or the Armenian Genocide—as simply the means for another end. I believe that they should receive attention and justice should be served first and foremost, and if that process brings democratization to those lands, then even better.

PROBLEMATIC MINDSETS AND CULTURAL REDUCTIONISM

Referring to the commemorative spaces—commemorations, conferences, and concerts—and what she called “genocide week,” Elmas said she does not believe they will contribute to real acknowledgment and recognition. She noted that there are different discourses around the issue of the Armenian Genocide, and they try to frame the issue as one between two states, not nations, with the blame resting on the Committee of Union and Progress⁷³ (CUP). This discourse, she said, rests on the notion that “we are brothers and sisters,” and those who come at the issue with that lens muse about the food of the Armenians, the music, the artistic

⁷³ The Committee of Union and Progress was the central committee of the Young Turk Party, and the masterminds of the genocide.

contributions, and lament about “losing them,” she said. This portrays the Armenians as middle class and urban, she said, adding, “This is problematic. This political analysis is that there’s no problem, no conflict between the people, between different religions, ethnicities, but the state is the underlying reason of all the problems. It is also cultural reduction—‘oh nice food, nice piano, nice artist’—this is also quite problematic.” She said:

I think a real recognition, a real confrontation, or a more sincere confrontation can only take place with personal questionings where one questions his or her contribution directly or indirectly to the continuation of the genocide denial. I think the real confrontation should start with self-confrontation and we should escape from these reductionisms...this populist liberal understanding of ‘we are sisters and brothers’ kind of thing. Most of the time these reconciliation projects... leave some of the questions that I very briefly and roughly put forward aside and they think that just coming at it through theater, art, cinema, and these kinds of commemorations, or acquaintances will be enough, so that I get to know Nanore and Nanore will get to know [REDACTED], and oh how nice I came to know an Armenian and you came to know someone from Turkey and these kinds of correspondences between the states will be enough, a kind of very formal and very limited perspective. They will not contribute to real confrontations with the past and real recognitions.

Elmas finally added, “Any reconciliation which disregards the unequal power relationship is going to turn into a project where partners gain some money from the UN, but nothing real and sincere and transformative.”

The issue of power relationships is also of concern to Asli, who said there have been many “reconciliation” projects that aim to deal with a “conflict.” She said, “The Turkish state is aiming at reconciliation without recognition because many of these projects use the word

reconciliation. But [for there to be reconciliation] there should be a conflict on equal grounds. There is no conflict in Turkey on equal grounds.”⁷⁴

GENERAL CRITICISMS

Kevork, who attended centennial commemoration events in two cities within days of each other in 2015, said the Istanbul events fell short of his expectations. He said they were “anti-climactic.” He explained:

I think on the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, I expected something more, something bigger, and at the same time I expected something less rehearsed. The 100th anniversary commemorations in Istanbul were nothing different really; they were just bigger—say— than the 99th commemoration. They had a larger Armenian constituency participating, yes, but for a country that has spent a hundred years denying the Armenian Genocide, and for the size of civil society and people and dissident voices, I expected a lot more.

Maro, who attended the Diyarbakir commemorations in 2015, said part of the program had a “level of kitschiness to it.” However, she conceded that those around her, particularly members of the local community, seemed to appreciate it. “Although I was in the back of my head very critical of it, people loved it, and people came out for it.”

Maro, who has spent lengthy periods of time in Istanbul, was also critical of a certain mentality she said she encountered there. Talking about why she decided to attend the Diyarbakir events over the Istanbul commemorations, she took a deep breath and explained: “There’s a lot of people who are very critical of white Turks, and it’s like there’s this kind of—not quite liberal—still latent nationalist Turk who can go and say ‘Oh yeah, poor Armenians this bad thing happened’ but when you start digging under the surface, you realize that you’re still dealing with

⁷⁴ For a discussion on “conflict,” the use of the term, and presupposed power dynamics, see Palestinian novelist Susan Abulhawa’s article titled “Occupied Words: On Israel’s Colonial Narrative,” published in Aljazeera. Available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/10/occupied-words-israel-colonial-narrative-151026115848584.html>

somebody who has these [inaudible] feelings and can't quite let go of that. And that takes work," she said. "So it's really the Kurdish civil society movement inside Turkey that's been doing the heavy lifting and really unpacking what it means to be living in Turkey today."

Ani, who attended the centennial commemoration events in Istanbul and had also helped organize them, had mixed reactions to certain aspects of it. "Some parts of it I felt like it was kind of whitewashed, really watered down sort of thing. And some parts of it were powerful," she said, referring to a large concert she attended leading up to the main centennial commemorations. She elaborated, "I did feel like there was this greasy film of condescension over the whole thing. It was sort of like, 'We're liberal Turks, and look how great we are because we're letting you speak Armenian here.'"

Asli, the Turkish activist, on the other hand, detailed some of her own struggles while organizing the commemoration events over the past seven years. She explained that there have been different approaches adopted by the different groups that have been working on organizing these events. She talked about the choices some organizers made that were offensive and problematic—from choices in music to language. She said that ahead of the centennial, some civil society groups came together in closed door meetings to discuss how to commemorate the centennial. She said she "felt bad" because at these meetings, academics, writers, and columnists were exploring how to find a language that would be "free from hatred and anger" and would essentially "not offend Turkish people." She said, "When it was my turn, I said, 'Can you imagine a Jewish organization, Jews, trying to find a language about the Holocaust in a Germany denying the Holocaust, and a Jewish [person] trying to find a language that would not offend Germans. Can you imagine that?' So I said, 'It's nonsense' ... 'You are Turks!' I wanted to say,

‘You are still Turks! You still think like a Turk! You still feel like a Turk! You are not mad at this mentality!’”

As I discussed earlier, Simon was disappointed with the centennial Istanbul events, even though he helped organize them. I discussed at length his criticisms while discussing emotions in an earlier section. Simon said he felt his actions were “pointless” and aimless, and the impact was lost on the larger public since they were in a sense invisible, “insignificant” and “small” in size as compared to how large and populated the city is. “We were in a very narrow street, on Istiklal, surrounded by Turkish police officers from both sides of the area where we were gathered. And it’s like we’re a group of a few thousand sheep, who are there, standing there, lighting candles, saying a few words here and there. It’s like there is nothing emotionally charged about it,” he said.

NEED FOR NEW APPROACH

For Kevork, the commemorations in Istanbul have been routinized, and function within a mold, a confined space. It has become a predictable event, where participants go through the motions, so to speak. He talked about the first ever commemoration he was part of in 2010, which was both a powerful experience and left him feeling like his actions had impact. He said:

I don’t want to be harsh about this, but having seen these commemorations, having seen the first one, I just don’t think that doing these things the same way in a similar routine, may be a little bigger with a little broader participation, really is doing much. Most of the people who attended these [centennial] commemorations did it for that emotional journey and they probably will never go back again. Some people were in this for April 24, 2015—they just dipped their feet in the water and they got their fix, and walked out.

For me unless there is another more meaningful, stronger demonstration of the will to confront the past, I don’t have much interest in participating. I definitely would attend, take part in, organize, help organize commemorations all over Turkey. Not so much in Istanbul, unless, as I said, there’s something significantly different being done—

even if it's something as simple as trying to get tens of thousands of people on April 24 to light a candle at their houses and turn off the lights. Anything that really tries to push this outside of that little space that people are just given more out of pity than anything else.

Kevork indicated that in recent years and moving forward, he has been drawn to commemorations in other parts of Turkey, where he feels he can have an impact by bringing the diasporan Armenian voice to these events.

As she had attended both over the years, I asked Elmas to compare the Istanbul events with the Diyarbakir ones. Elmas talked about the participation of the ordinary folks in Diyarbakir, and the spaces where the commemorations were held. In regards to the spaces, she said the commemorations were held in Armenian spaces that imparted a sense of history such as churches, the cemetery, or the old Armenian neighborhood, as opposed to Istanbul's "anonymous and synthetic out-of-nowhere places." She stressed that in Diyarbakir the participants came from all walks of life; they were "ordinary" folks. She said although the size of the attendees was smaller when compared to Istanbul, nonetheless the popular participation was higher. "I mean normal people who know about the Armenian Genocide through their grandmothers or through their houses, through the stones, through the remnants—material or non-material remnants. May be some of them⁷⁵ are there," she said. She noted that because it was the first, the Diyarbakir event she attended was "amateurish," but she said it was "important."

Finally, when I asked Azad the Kurdish politician to compare the different commemorations he had attended (Diyarbakir, Istanbul, and Ankara), he said with some pride:

⁷⁵ The "them" here refers to individuals who are referred to as "remnants of the sword," in other words, Armenians who have remained and often conceal their identity. In this context, she is most likely referring to hidden or Islamized Armenians.

“In Ankara and Istanbul the commemorations were at already existing sites, while in Diyarbakir it was at the memorial⁷⁶ that *we* had built.” Note the sense of ownership and pride in Azad’s response.

DISCUSSION AND THEORIES

A NOTE ON MY INFORMANTS AND THE DATA

First, I wish to draw attention to a few facts. In this study, there are equal number of men and women; all my informants are college graduates, with 9 out of 14 of them holding graduate level degrees (5 PhDs and 4 MA degrees); with the exception of one “moderate” and one “conservative” Armenian informants, the rest of my informants described themselves as being in the political left field: Marxist, socialist, progressive, and very progressive; and among my Turkey informants only one said they are Muslim (without using qualifiers such as “born Muslim,” or “from Muslim family”) and only three Armenians said they were Armenian Orthodox Christian (without using qualifiers).

Does this say anything about the commemorations? Are more non-religious individuals motivated to participate in the commemorations than religious ones? This particular data seems to suggest that about this group of informants. Are “progressives” more likely to participate in such events? It seems so. Are the participants of these events mostly academics or highly educated individuals? Again, that seems to be the case for *this* group of informants.

⁷⁶ The memorial he is referring to is the Monument of Common Conscience, which reads in six languages: “We share the pain so that it is not repeated.”

However, it could also be that had I interviewed a different set of 14 informants, a different demographic profile would emerge. In other words, I wish to draw attention to these identity markers not to draw generalizations about who participates in these events, but simply because they are relevant to how *this* particular group of informants approached the topic. My data is simply not large enough to engage in generalizations.

It is also important to note that although the Armenian, Kurdish, and Turkish respondents sometimes appear to have different priorities and motivations, we must bear in mind that all these issues might be important or relevant to some who did not vocalize them. Some issues might be important to all.

And finally, one should bear in mind that the identity of the interviewer—a female diasporan Armenian—might have influenced the responses of some of the participants. In addition, some interviews lasted longer than others, and one informant conducted the interview in writing. In other words, some may have had more time to recount events and articulate their thoughts than others.

KEY THEORIES AND CONCEPTS

In looking at the commemoration events and how my informants make sense of the context and their role in it, it is first useful to identify and understand the relationship between the actors, groups, and audiences. How do my informants act? Why do they act the way they do? How do they make meaning of their actions? And what informs their actions? In attempting to explore these questions, I will utilize social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), the social identity

model of deindividuation effects (SIDE), the concept of identity performance (Klein, Spears, and Reicher, 2007), and intergroup emotions theory (Smith & Mackie, 2010, 2017).

For now, as a backbone to the concepts to be discussed, I offer a brief definition of social identity theory. First conceptualized by Tajfel and Turner, the theory is based in social psychology and proposes that people's self-concept is related to their membership of social groups and categories, which is born out of their identification of themselves as part of a group(s). This identification has cognitive and social interactive implications, and influences the individual's interaction with others, as well as intergroup behavior and relations and the social identity of groups. The theory enhances our understanding of group-decision making, leadership, stereotyping, and even emotions, among other areas (Jackson & Hogg, 2010; Hogg, 2007).

As I proceed ahead with the discussion, keep in mind the social context (Suciyan's discussion of Turkey's modern history in the context of the genocide issue, as well as the discussion of the various "reconciliation" efforts) outlined in the opening pages of this research study.

COMMEMORATIONS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

How can we come to understand these commemoration events? Fundamentally, the commemorations are an avenue for collective action. Merging two fields, social movement research and social identity approach, two types of pathways can lead to such a collective action: 1) cost-benefit calculations, and 2) collective identification as an activist. In these cases, the goal of the collective action is a "collective good." (Sturmer, Simon, et al., 1998)

According to Sturmer et al., three types of motives spur action from cost-benefit calculations: 1) collective motives that are tied to the collective goals, as well as the likelihood that the goals will be met; 2) the presence of social motives, which may be influenced by the reactions of others such as family members and friends; and 3) the reward motive that considers the benefits or costs of participating, which is based on practical losses or benefits, such as actual financial costs, time lost, friendships gained, or potential health risks (Sturmer, Simon, et al., 1998, p. 647).

On the other hand, the collective identification approach suggests that social movements can be understood as “efforts by large numbers of people, who define themselves and are also often defined by others as a group, to solve collectively a problem they feel they have in common, and which is perceived to arise from their relations with other groups” (Tajfel 1981, p. 224, in Sturmer et. al, 1998). In their research, Strumer et al. found that strength of identification as an activist is a positive predictor of the willingness to participate in social movements. The authors of the study note, “Apparently, a specific activist identity is particularly conducive to social movement participation, and this may be so because of specific implications for action inherent in such an identity” (Sturmer, Simon, et al., 1998, p. 656).

Sturmer et al. juxtaposed the predictive values of motives (collective, social, and reward) and identification. The work of Strumer and his colleagues can serve as a guide in analyzing the data collected from my informants.

Collective motives: The collective motives of the participants can mainly be summed up as genocide recognition and remembrance. This was mainly framed as struggling against denial and raising awareness by my Turkey informants (2 Turkish, 2 Kurdish, and 1 half Turkish/half

Kurdish informants). Sub-motives for the Armenian participants included showing solidarity with activists in Turkey (4 respondents), becoming acts of resistance and defiance through their presence (5 respondents), and bringing Armenian voices to Turkey and seeking justice (2 Armenians). These collective motives were identified by my respondents when they were asked what moved them to participate.

Social motives: In terms of the social motives, the data confirms that social and organizational networks played a key supportive role. All but one informant spoke of their membership or involvement with an organization or network of people engaged with social justice and human rights issues, including the Armenian Genocide. They either belonged to an organization—whether nonprofit or political—that advocated for genocide recognition or were connected to one (see section on “Networks, Friends, and Organizations” on p. 49). This suggests that my informants (with the exception of Sevda, who did not mention the role of such a network, but who nonetheless was part of academic circles) by virtue of being connected to such networks had access to support structures that reinforced and championed activism.

Reward motives: In the context of the Armenian Genocide commemorations in Turkey, the reward motives appear to overlap with the collective motives. They include: increased public awareness; building of interpersonal or intergroup connections; personal transformation; and identity performance (more about this on p. 106). Also bear in mind that 9 out of 14 informants had participated in more than one commemoration event (all but one of my Turkey informants, and 2 out of 5 of my Armenian informants; note that all but one of my Armenian informants had been to Turkey more than once). The reason I mention this is because presumably the motives of

many of my informants may have evolved over time, and their reward motives may have been influenced by prior experience.

Collective identity as activist: Although coming together for the purpose of genocide commemorations, my informants identify with different ethnic groups, organizations, and political ideologies. Regardless, when asked about their “activism” level outside the commemoration events (ie. Protests, marches, letter writing campaigns and petitions, etc.), all informants indicated that they had a history of activism; and all had college degrees. The response options were “very active,” “active,” “somewhat active,” and “inactive.” The majority—eight respondents—said they were “very active”; five said “active”; and one person said “somewhat active.” Similarly, seven said they were “progressive,” two “Marxist/progressive,” one “liberal,” one “socialist,” one “Communist,” one “moderate,” and one “conservative.” Both the “moderate” and the “conservative” were Armenian informants. All of my informants from Turkey subscribed to leftist politics. For instance, recall what Sakine said: “Being a leftist is more important than being a Kurd. If I was a Kurdish nationalist, the Armenian issue might have been an important issue for me but not like it is right now. Right now, the Armenian issue is as important to me as the Kurdish issue. All ethnic and religious groups are of equal distance for me, are equal for me in terms of my connections” (See section on “Identity, Politics, and Framing” on p. 51). In short, most—if not all—my informants have an “activist” identity, which is a pathway to collective action, the commemorations.

COMMEMORATIONS AS POWER STRUGGLE OVER MEMORY AND IDENTITY

Given the historical, political, and geographical context, the commemorations are resolutely political acts. Sturmer et al. (1998) note, “Collective strategies include not only

militant forms of intergroup behavior or collective action such as revolts and strikes but also more moderate forms such as signing a petition or attending a group meeting” (p. 646). We can understand these commemorations as a power struggle between the participants and the Turkish authorities and society at large over memory—or as some participants have noted, the struggle is with the Turkish mentality, or “psyche.”

Elmas, for instance, was explicit in this regard. Speaking about the nature of genocide denial in Turkey when speaking about the different forms of struggle, she said: “You may write about denial and how it contributes to the making of the Turkish psyche, the Turkish presence, the Turkish economy, the Turkish land structure, and everything, or you can write about how the denial of the Armenians is a founding part of Turkish identity...” Highlighting the connection between genocide denial and perpetrator group identity is Elmas’s form of struggle. Elmas believes that Turkish identity is intimately intertwined with “denial of the Armenians.” In other words, she is observing that the negation—or erasure—of the outgroup (Armenians) has meant the validation and cohesion of the ingroup (Turks). Then what about her own identity? Elmas identifies as half-Turkish and half-Kurdish, but she communicated feeling a persistent nagging guilt and shame that haunted her as she was acutely aware of the absence of the Armenians. I will discuss these emotions and Elmas’s reaction more in a later section (p. 131).

In the following sections, I will also discuss how identification plays a central role in collective mobilization and even emotions.

IDENTITY PERFORMANCE

How can we make sense of the behaviors of my informants, their positions, needs, and how they gave meaning to their actions? Klein, Spears, and Reicher (2007) argue that an

individual's or group's relations of visibility to an audience can have an effect on identity performance, which can in turn have two functions: identity consolidation and identity mobilization. Groups act because they are able to act and because they have the motivation/"cognitive instigation" to act. For an identity to persist, it must be expressed and it must be acknowledged by others, note Klein et al. The authors argue that identity performance may be constrained by how the actions of the group members are perceived by their audience. For instance, often acts that may be punishable by the out-group are avoided. In the case of genocide recognition in Turkey, activists have the urge to be visible, but simultaneously they must act in ways that are not punishable. Recall here our Turkish activist Asli's assertion: "...some of our colleagues said they will round us up, and it is OK if they round us up, but if Armenians come, it is different for Armenians. We have to think of their safety" (see section on "Turkish Authorities" on p. 78). In other words, when deciding on where to hold the commemorations, the Turkish activists had to weigh the "punishability" of their decisions against the "safety" of the Armenians. In that sense, they were constrained in where and how they were going to hold their collective action. Kevork and Simon, the Armenian activists, felt this constraint on their ability to perform their identity; they felt they had limited access to their audience. Kevork complained about the "little space" that had been designated for them "more out of pity than anything else," while Simon felt like they were being "herded" like "sheep" on the narrow Istiklal Street, blocked at both ends by police (see section on "General Criticisms" on p. 96). These two Armenians certainly felt "safer" than they would have had they been subject to arrests or verbal and physical assaults, but did they feel heard, and does that matter?

Here, before continuing further with our discussion, it is important to identify and define a few key items in the context of these commemoration events. First, in this context, the **"in-**

group” is in fact comprised of multiple groups that have congregated under the banner of the genocide commemorations. These groups have multiple identities, their own as well as the superordinate “activist” one that strives for genocide awareness. My Armenian informants belong to groups like Project2015, or are academics and activists that also function as part of other various groups with their own collective goals. My Kurdish informants are members or supporters of the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), and have socialist and Marxist leanings. My Turkish participants are members of human rights organizations (like the Istanbul branch of the Human Rights Association of Turkey), or members of academic networks or other organizations (like the Communist-Trotskyist party). My informants have their ethnic identities, some have strong political identities as well (at times these two identities are intertwined, and at times they come into conflict with one another), and some have crafted strong superordinate identities (discussed on p. 120). The **out-group** in this context is the Turkish authorities, the source of repression, as well as Turkey’s society at large, viewed as complicit in the repression. There are a number of **audiences** in this context: The primary audience is the public within Turkey, which is a witness in the physical sense (foot traffic near the commemorations) or virtually (through technology and the media); another audience (particularly in Diyarbakir) is Turkey’s Kurdish population; the international community is yet another audience whose announcements can have a bearing (positive or negative) on the activists; and finally, the Armenian community of Turkey, the Armenian Diaspora, and society in Armenia form three additional audiences (the first two more consequential to my Armenian informants since they all hail from the Diaspora, and because they interact with and function within the context that weighs heavily on the Armenians of Turkey).

Going back to Klein et al. (2007), their study focused on how social identity performances are affected by the available audiences, and how that in turn affects the group social identity. Identity performance in this context refers to social identities that are expressed through behaviors, rhetoric, and appearances (such as signs and symbols) with an intended audience in mind. For instance, when Kevork speaks of “bringing the Armenian diasporan voice” to Turkey, he is in effect engaging in identity performance through rhetoric. Other examples would be the signs carried by Nor Zartonk (the group of Istanbul Armenian activists) during the commemoration events that read, “*Menk Hos Enk*” (“We Are Here!”), or the signs and slogans used by the Turkish and Kurdish activists (“Genocide! Compensate!”), the various symbolic gestures such as the tying of cloths on the cardboard “wishing tree” during the centennial commemoration in Istanbul (discussed by Ani), the piano recital in Diyarbakir (discussed by Levon and Ferhat), the ritualistic visit to the Dudan Gorge near Diyarbakir by Armenian and Kurdish activists (discussed by Maro), the speeches by Kurdish leaders in Diyarbakir (discussed by Azad, Levon, and Maro), and the donning of the “forget-me-not” flower pins and cardboard cutouts (a symbol of the centennial genocide commemorations worldwide) by activists (visible at the centennial commemorations in Istanbul and Diyarbakir, discussed by Maro).

Below, I will take a closer look at my Armenian, Kurdish, and Turkish informants. The rhetoric, behavior, and circumstance of each ethnic group, taken separately, will paint a clearer picture of the social identities and identity performances at play.

THE ARMENIAN CASE: BECOMING RESISTANCE, SEEKING SOLIDARITY, AND OTHER MODES OF ENGAGEMENT

When I asked my Armenian informants what moved them to participate, five of them said they wished to take a stand and become acts of resistance and defiance, two of them wished to bring the uprooted diasporan voices back to Turkey, three sought “justice,” and four wanted to stand shoulder to shoulder with the activists in Turkey, to push back together. In participating, my Armenian informants wished to shake the status quo by challenging the dominant narrative and supporting and emboldening activists in Turkey.

Resistance, defiance, presence, and survival are key markers of the social identities of my Armenian informants. They in effect saw themselves as acts of resistance who would then “perform” their identities by verbalizing their stories, including bringing the Armenian diasporan voice to Turkey (Kevork); representing ancestors or their communities (Salpi); reconnecting with spaces, Istanbul Armenians, and hidden Armenians (Ani, Levon, Massis, Simon, and Maro); reclaiming identities, like Salpi’s newfound “Istanbul-Armenian” identity; and physically occupying spaces that made them visible and “present.”

Klein et al. (2007) argue that, “Identity performance, like self-presentation, is by its very nature a creative act by purposive agents. It is as much a function of the way in which these agents imagine—and seek to create—the future as of the nature of the present,” (p. 38). They also hypothesize that identity performance is likely to be more common among powerless groups (Klein et al. 2007, p. 40).

It is clear from their responses that my Armenian informants were driven by an urge to perform their identities, which in essence they equated to acts of resistance and defiance. Through their “performances,” they wished to raise awareness and move their audiences. For instance, Salpi needed to represent her ancestors, to stand in their place. Kevork and Massis

needed to bring the Armenian diasporan voice to Turkey. Ani wished to become a “form of resistance to erasure and denial.” Levon would literally perform and through his performance connect with hidden Armenians. Maro wished to be present and engaged in the “heavy lifting” being done in Diyarbakir. And Simon, wished to be a symbol of defiance; recall his words:

I thought it would be symbolic to stand in the middle of the city where everything started 100 years ago and kind of in defiance of Ottoman Turkish orders and in defiance of ... or as a testament of the failure of the plan to eliminate all Armenians that the Ottoman Young Turks had set out to accomplish 100 years ago.

Simon had taken on a monumental task. He wished to stand in the middle of the city—where the first orders of genocide had been carried out—as a symbol of defiance. This action merged timelines—the then and the now. He would stand in defiance of the Ottoman Turkish orders of a century ago—the orders of erasure which extend until the present day. His presence would communicate, “I am here”—similar to the signs held by the Nor Zartonk activists that read, “Menk Hos Enk,” (“We Are Here!”). Simon’s symbolic stand that translates to three simple words, “I-am-here,” holds within it the perpetuation of a gravely threatened identity. The question then becomes, who was he communicating that to?

Klein et al. (2007) lay out four conditions that are necessary for identity performance:

1. The individual must identify with a social category.
2. The social identity must be salient in the present context.
3. An audience must be psychologically present.
4. Actors must believe themselves to be visible to the audience. (p. 38)

The first two conditions were present for all my Armenian informants. The latter two, however, were not always there. For those informants who participated in the Diyarbakir commemorations, visibility was not an issue. One of the Armenians who attended the Diyarbakir commemoration had been given the stage to perform—quite literally. Laymen, politicians, and

religious leaders alike had attended the commemorations in Diyarbakir. The presence and involvement of the city's Kurdish leadership alone signaled that they were visible.

When recounting his experience, Levon repeated that he felt his actions had an impact.

Here is a passage of his testimony:

The Turkish TV, internationally from different places media, covered that event, and it was also quite interesting for the Kurdish people who had an opportunity to reflect on what had happened 100 years ago, [Diyarbakir] being a center of Kurdish population there. Some of their family, their grandparents were involved in the massacre of Armenians. Despite most Kurds [being] empathetic to Armenians as well as Kurds who worked against Armenians in the past, they had come together for these commemoration events in Diyarbakir. It was quite a scene to see all these Kurds—hundreds if not thousands carrying that symbolic flower, the forget-me-not flower. The organizers had prepared these flowers on sticks, and all these people on the streets of Diyarbakir had these flowers in their hands and thousands of Kurds and Turks they had them and came to the church with them, and for the commemoration ceremony in the open church the next day. Thousands were walking with these, and even though there were security precautions, nothing bad happened. So it was quite an impact. This was all covered live on TV and in newspapers the next day. So it made an impact within Turkey and that was more important for me. I didn't care much about the impact on Armenians, or internationally, but within Turkey for Kurds and Turks to be able to see this in Diyarbakir, it was even better than what I had expected, what I had hoped.

It is clear that Levon had felt heard and seen. Here were hundreds of Kurds and Turks engaging in the act of commemorating, performing a different sort of social identity, one that they performed through speeches and symbols. As a premise, it harbored a different vision for the present and the future. I will discuss this further in a section on the Kurdish case (p. 120).

In stark contrast, in the case of the Istanbul commemorations, visibility was an issue at least for two of my informants. Simon, for instance, who had wished to stand in the “middle of the city” as a symbol of defiance, felt his actions were “pointless,” and that he was “insignificant” and “small.” He said: “We were in a very narrow street, on Istiklal, surrounded by Turkish police officers from both sides of the area where we were gathered. And it's like we're a

group of a few thousand sheep, who are there, standing there, lighting candles, saying a few words here and there. It's like there is nothing emotionally charged about it." Simon was not able to become that symbol of defiance he wished to be when he had decided to participate; instead, he felt like sheep. What he wished to become and what he felt he had become are at two ends of a spectrum. The "symbol of defiance" contains within it agency, power, and above all visibility. A sheep, on the other hand, encapsulates the qualities of meekness, subjugation, and obscurity. What was it that had prevented him from performing his identity? What had caused the rift between his vision and possibility? How had he gone from a symbol to a sheep? The answer may lie in the physical space: Simon did not find himself "in the middle of the city," he did not have a space, a figurative stage, where he could become the symbol; instead, he found himself on a narrow street, with other participants, surrounded by buildings and the police, with no contact with the city and its people he wished to affect. In other words, Simon felt he had no audience.

Similarly, Kevork echoed Simon's sentiment when he said:

I definitely would attend, take part in, organize, help organize commemorations all over Turkey. Not so much in Istanbul, unless, as I said, there's something significantly different being done—even if it's something as simple as trying to get tens of thousands of people on April 24 to light a candle at their houses and turn off the lights. Anything that really tries to push this outside of that little space that people are just given more out of pity than anything else.

For Kevork, there were a few conditions at play. First, he contrasted his participation at the first-ever commemoration in Istanbul in 2010 to his participation in the 2015 centennial commemorations. The experience was markedly different. In the former, counter-protesters appeared, and the media widely covered the event. In 2015, although there was media coverage, there were no counter protesters, and the commemoration happened on a narrow street, sandwiched between buildings and the police. Moreover, in 2010, Kevork was one of a handful

of diasporan Armenians who were present—and visible in that sense—whereas in 2015, through Project2015 alone, more than 250 diasporan Armenians had made their way to Istanbul. As a diasporan Armenian, he was less visible, his “identity performance” less impactful. On the other hand, Kevork discusses participating in other commemorations in other places in Turkey, where his actions were more impactful, and that is directly related to his feelings of being heard and seen. He was not lost in a crowd of diasporan Armenians on a narrow Istanbul street. Instead, he felt his actions mattered outside Istanbul. The Istanbul commemorations did not allow Kevork and Simon to perform their identities; or, more accurately, identity performance meant little in that context without an audience that served to confirm (regardless of whether the reception was positive or not) that identity. In the cases of both these informants, the reward motive was thus diminished, which wasn’t enough to discourage further involvement as they both indicated that they would continue to participate in the future, but—at least in the case of Kevork—this propelled them to seek different spaces and even modes of engagement that promised more visibility.

Similarly, the reaction of four of my Armenian informants to the presence or absence of counter-demonstrators is telling. In assessing the impact of their actions, my informants were more likely to report satisfaction and see potential positive outcomes when counter-protests were present. To them, it signaled that they were being seen and heard, that they had an audience in the wider society in Turkey. One may ask then whether the “psychological presence” of an audience means that the audience needs to be empathetic to the in-group. No, that is not a condition. Furthermore, Klein et al. note that, “an audience that is physically present need not be psychologically present”; the opposite is also true—through technology like cameras, a psychologically present but physically absent audience is also created.

Related to this, ensuring the absence of an audience may be a strategy employed by the powerful out-group (Klein et al. 2007). “One of the marks of extreme power differentials is that the powerful group can act in front of the powerless group as if they were invisible or not there,” write Klein et al. (2007, p. 40). Kevork believed that was the case in Istanbul. He said:

...The Turkish state, the Turkish government has defined a lot of what can happen in Turkey in this regard. So if it defines a particular space, and says, “You know what? You can gather in this area from this time to this time, and this is the space that you have,” which essentially means that there’s only a few hundred or a thousand people can fit in that space—that’s it! That’s your commemoration! [...] Ultimately at this point, their policy is not to shut down events, because if they do that, there is a lot more attention to the issue. Their policy is to define that little space where you can do whatever you feel like doing and saying and its ripple effect would be minimal. And for that, you also wouldn’t allow counter demonstrators to come to that space. They would tell the counter demonstrators to demonstrate somewhere else in order not to bring attention to what’s going on there. There’s two ways of fighting something. One is that you go and you attack and you ban and you stop and you fight; the other is you completely ignore, and you make sure that the media and everybody else ignores as well. I think that that shift has happened by the Turkish state and the Turkish government in recent years. ... The Turkish state will make sure that from here until the 200th anniversary, you get the tiny little space and you do your commemorations and you give your glorious speeches.

Kevork’s assessment is based on his personal observations and his reaction to how visible he has felt to his audience. He is assessing that the lack of an audience is the result of a strategy employed by the state. The sentiment described by Kevork is also what gives rise to Simon’s feelings of “insignificance.”

In short, my Armenian informants had a need to perform their identities through rhetoric, presence, and symbolism. They needed to communicate their identities, to perform their resistance, to stand as symbols of defiance. They also wished to perform acts of solidarity with their fellow activists in Turkey. Their actions were rooted in their identities as Armenians and their identity as activists. For this to happen, they needed their audience to be either

psychologically or physically present. For some, their audiences energized them, for others their audiences were absent, which prevented them from feeling satisfied and withheld the “reward.”

LANGUAGE, RHETORIC, AND AMBIGUITY

As we saw in the previous section, the interaction between actor and audience plays a crucial role in the expression and development of social identities. Language and discourse too are affected by this interaction, and therefore often become precise and calculated. When speaking and writing, activists are communicating with multiple audiences—the in-group *and* the out-group. “...Identity performance often depends on the use of ambivalent messages that will be read in different ways by different audiences,” write Klein et al. (2007). The authors call this skill “the strategic uses of ambiguity to manipulate multiple audiences” (p. 39) that groups engage in. In other words, linguistic ambiguity becomes part of the arsenal of individuals performing their identities for multiple audiences.

A clear example of this is the use of the term “*Medz Yeghern*” (“Great Calamity” in Armenian) by former U.S. President Barack Obama in his Armenian Genocide remembrance message. Obama was attempting to appease multiple audiences, while performing the identity of the U.S. leader concerned with human rights. Although his campaign pledge had promised to unambiguously call the crime “genocide,” once he took office he scrambled for a third way. And so, when Remembrance Day rolled around, he steered clear of using the term “Genocide,” but instead uttered “*Medz Yeghern*,” a term sometimes used by Armenians (although the term “*tseghasbanutyun*,” meaning genocide, is used commonly). The message was welcomed by some; however, it caused an uproar in most Armenian circles, and so for the next eight years of his presidency, Armenian American newspapers declared, “Obama reneged on his promise.” The

reception in Turkey was no better; the Turkish Foreign Ministry said the statement was “saddening,” and called on the U.S. Administration “to adopt an objective, prudent and constructive approach, which takes the sufferings of all sides into consideration.” Ambiguity failed to save the day. Similarly, some of my informants objected to how language was used within the context of these commemorations, as some Turkish organizers and activists wished to find a soft and convenient language that spoke to multiple audiences, and minimized anger and hostility.

Recall the story told by Asli, the Turkish activist. She had become enraged when she had perceived how other Turkish activists were attempting to devise a language that would “not offend” the wider Turkish society, the out-group. She said:

...Two years before the centenary, some organizations organized closed meetings to discuss how to commemorate. And in some of them I felt bad because I saw academics and writers and columnists and important people there saying we have to find a language which is free from hatred and anger, we have to find a language that will—something like—not offend Turkish people. [laughs] They didn’t say this, but all the things they said, “Let’s not offend”... I said, when it was my turn, and everybody agreed, I said, “Can you imagine a Jewish organization, Jews, trying to find a language about the Holocaust in a Germany denying the Holocaust, and a Jewish [person] find a language not to offend Germans? Can you imagine that?” So, I said, “It’s nonsense!” *You are Turks, I wanted to say, You are still Turks! You still think like a Turk! You still feel like a Turk! You are not mad at this mentality!*

Asli was infuriated. She had rejected the use of ambiguous language; and, in fact, her organization pushed back and—at the Centennial commemorations—used a language that was direct, unambiguous, and unapologetic. In the above quote, observe Asli’s words: “You are still Turks! You still think like a Turk!” What did she mean by that? Asli is also Turkish. Did she mean that there are two ways of being a Turk? I think that is likely. Arguably, her outrage is directed at the “Nationalist Turkish” identity—the identity rooted in genocide denial—what Elmas similarly calls “the Turkish psyche.” I will discuss this further in a later section (p. 129).

Like Asli, when Kevork, the Armenian activist, objects to the use of the language of democracy in lieu of a “language of justice,” he is rejecting how the issue is being framed by many Turkish intellectuals, who package the issue of the genocide with the wider democratization efforts. Arguably, the cry for democracy will find greater sympathy and relevance for the masses living in Turkey, whereas the quest for “justice for the Armenians” may be met with hostility. In the following passage, Kevork discusses the importance of “bringing diasporan Armenian voices” to Turkey:

I believe that’s important because that discourse, discussion on the Armenian Genocide in Turkey was primarily conducted by Turkish intellectuals and activists with some Turkish Armenians, Istanbul-Armenians participating. But the Armenian voice, the diasporan Armenian voice, the voices of people who actually—whose grandparents, ancestors were dispossessed, deported, forced out, were not actually represented. So in that context, I think that was the most important motivation for me, and it stayed that way ever since. I have always been adamant on making sure that the Armenian voices are included in this discussion, because in Turkey often this discussion is framed in a context of democracy and democratization, while it is also important to frame it in a context of justice. Otherwise it would become very self-serving. Many Turkish activists and intellectuals engage in this because they see it as yet another way of pushing Turkey towards more democracy. Although that’s a good thing, but at the same time I do not believe in using cases of mass violence—whether it’s the Holocaust or the Armenian Genocide—as simply the means for another end. I believe that they should receive attention and justice should be served first and foremost, and if that process brings democratization to those lands, then even better.

Kevork noted that what moved him to participate in the commemorations was this attempt to “bring the diasporan Armenian voices” to Turkey. What drove him was the desire to frame the issue in a way that was acceptable to him and to those on whose behalf he felt he was acting. He wished to shape the discourse through his participation. He felt it was his mission—ensuring those voices were represented. Kevork wanted to bring the systemic efforts at the erasure of his identity to the forefront of the discussion, as a primary issue and not as a footnote in the democracy building trend. Furthermore, Kevork emphasizes the act of bringing his

Armenian diasporan voice to Turkey because for him it is symbolic in itself: For a descendant of genocide survivors—especially in that context of denial and ambiguity—having a voice signifies having agency, validating an identity, and regaining dignity.

Ambiguity also affected Ani, the Armenian activist. She spoke of the concert held in Istanbul on the Centennial of the genocide, and recalled her disappointment, as well as the disappointment of a fellow attendee. She said:

I had mixed feelings because some parts of it I felt like it was kind of whitewashed, really watered down sort of thing. ... I did feel like there was this greasy film of condescension over the whole thing. It was sort of like, “We’re liberal Turks, and look how great we are because we’re letting you speak Armenian here.”

In Ani’s testimony, we get the sense that the message put forth through the event was blunt and diffused. Who did the organizers have in mind as their audience(s)? What was their strategy? How did the discussions surrounding the language and message unravel? Who was consulted during the planning stages? Without engaging in an analysis of the concert, we can only deduce with confidence that the concert failed to enthuse at least some diasporan Armenian members of the audience.

What Ani does not say but she certainly implies is that it was not enough, that the concert fell far short of her expectations, and that it only served to validate the identity of the organizers. Ani says, “It was sort of like, ‘We’re liberal Turks, and look how great we are because we’re letting you speak Armenian here.’” Arguably, what Ani means to say is that she believes the “liberal Turks” organized the concert to validate their own liberal identities rather than having in mind the dignity and needs of the Armenians. In that sense, the Armenian language and culture (the concert featured songs and dances) were confined and appeared through a narrowed frame adjusted and used only to validate the liberal Turkish identity.

The examples contained in Asli's, Kevork's, and Ani's testimonies shed light on the power struggle centered around language and framing; while some attempt to tread lightly, ambiguously, cautiously, others push forward unapologetically, unambiguously, boldly. The strategies, principles, and approaches are different, and sometimes they clash. This has a direct effect on identity performance: Neither Asli nor Kevork could fully perform their identities without outright challenging fellow activists and affecting the group language. Ani, on the other hand, was confined to becoming part of an audience, while in reality she was also there to perform her identity; and as a member of the audience, she had perceived a condescension and was offended—the concert had seemed to be an assault on her identity. Meanwhile, the audiences react differently, with disappointment, anger, enthusiasm, and even hostility. Activists discuss, confront, negotiate, and compromise, with the intent to affect their audiences.

THE KURDISH CASE: THE VISIONARY ENTREPRENEURS OF IDENTITY

Through the course of analyzing my interviews, it became clear that my Kurdish informants had assumed a distinct social identity. Although the Kurdish role in the Armenian Genocide is widely documented, and many ordinary Kurds acknowledge it and discuss it, my Kurdish informants seemed to share a mindset that was distinctly different than that of my Turkish informants. In the Kurdish regions, memory has also been just outside the reach of the state, where despite the official narrative, oral histories that remember the genocide are still passed down. The Kurds share the realities in Turkey, and are one of the main targets of the military operations, the social engineering, and denial. However, they are also part of a different reality, where in the predominantly Kurdish region of Diyarbakir a different struggle is

underway—the Kurdish struggle for rights and autonomy. Furthermore, it was in the city of Diyarbakir where the multicultural experiment and vision was piloted. The Kurds had a glimpse of that vision, and that is the source of their hope. In other words, the Kurdish leadership in Diyarbakir was attempting a social justice approach to peace based on a new social identity, and—although the projects were stopped in their tracks due to the purges, arrests, and resumption of violence—the effects of it linger and cause hope.

Klein et al. (2007) note that “One of the major ways in which identity performance relates to collective mobilization is through the definition of *social identity* itself.” They write:

...It is precisely because social identity shapes collective action and thereby provides a source of social power for shaping the social world that those who are interested in shaping society will be interested in defining identities. Indeed, effective activists and leaders need to be skilled “entrepreneurs of identity” (Besson, 1990). (Klein et al. 2007, 35)

The authors stress that self-categorization relies as much on “becoming” as on “being.” In other words, as the Kurdish leadership began to champion a multicultural identity for Diyarbakir, they were in effect working to create a multicultural social identity; they sought to “become” that which they envisioned. Incidentally, Kurdish leaders, like Azad, were in a sense “entrepreneurs of identity.”

Klein et al. further note:

...If people who share a common identity are liable to follow prescriptions about that identity from those who represent the identity, then the task of successful entrepreneurs of identity is threefold: first, to define the audience they seek to mobilize as part of a common category; second, to construe their proposals as consonant with the meaning of that identity; and third, to construe themselves as prototypical category members.

[...]

There is a fourth point, however, which is presupposed in all these analyses. That is, the construction of an identity through such rhetorical means is performative (Bayart, 1996;

Bourdieu, 1982; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001a). The identity exists by being enunciated. (Klein et al. 2007, 35)

In short, the authors hold that in order to create a new social identity, leaders would have to define the parameters of the potential members of the group/audience; their actions and initiatives would have to be framed in relation to the new social identity; they would have to strive to become prototypical members of the newly defined group; and they would continue to perform that identity through verbal enunciations.

All three of my Kurdish informants mentioned multiculturalism. They spoke with pride about the inroads they made in their city: the apology, the multilingual signs, the monument, the commemorations, and the support of their leaders for these initiatives.

The construction of a social identity can be done through language, ceremonies, rituals, and material artifacts. In Diyarbakir, the multilingual signs, the monument, the ritualistic commemorations, the speeches, the language used are all part and parcel of this identity creation. The Kurdish leadership had defined, and was beginning to consolidate the new identity, and mobilize the public into collective action. Klein et al. (2007) argue that “One of the key ways in which large social categories of people can be mobilized to create social change is through the strategic performance of social identities” (p. 36). The Kurdish leadership understood that and labored towards it.

The Kurdish case is interesting because as an in-group, they were subjected to negative views by the dominant out-group, the Turkish authorities and society at large. Klein et al. note that in such situations, “group members may engage in identity performance to change the out-group’s stereotypes and treatment of the in-group.” In other words, the Kurdish leadership in Diyarbakir created a social identity that was inclusive and tolerant; it was a social justice and

peace approach. And it stood in stark contrast to the decades of oppression by the state and the fighting between the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the Turkish Armed Forces. This new social identity was also an attempt to create a space for the marginalized and oppressed groups in the country, and—as Azad puts it—to “rectify the past” by extending a hand to those who had been grossly wronged in the past. It would not be wrong to assume that this new social identity also appealed to Western audiences in that it promised peace and tolerance in a region so often marred by intolerance and violence. Having all this in mind, it can be argued that Diyarbakir’s Kurdish leaders—whom we can consider the prototypical leaders—were sage “entrepreneurs of identity.” They engaged in the identity performance: They made speeches; called for genocide recognition; extended apologies; and led the processions and commemorations.

Recall what Sakine said:

The PKK [Kurdistan Workers’ Party] had a pro-acknowledgement position already. However, once these public commemorations were held, and the people actually saw that Kurdish intellectuals themselves are commemorating and are part of this, in their minds it became something like ‘OK if they are acknowledging it, so therefore this must be true.’ That created some sense of relief and connection to the issue by the locals.

Sakine observed how by embracing this identity and performing it, the leadership also influenced and affected public perception. And how did Sakine express her emotions? “In 2013, I was extremely happy; I was very happy that it was taking place in Diyarbakir... When I saw that here in Diyarbakir the Kurds are commemorating the Armenian Genocide, then I thought that this is a good development and there may still be hope for the future.” Why did Sakine relate the commemorations to “hope for the future”? Arguably, because for her it is one of the guarantees that the city could truly be inclusive and multicultural—collective goals that she has internalized.

Elmas, the half-Kurdish and half-Turkish informant, who had participated in commemorations in both Istanbul and Diyarbakir, spoke about the centennial Diyarbakir commemoration, which she attended, thus:

There were less people [than in Istanbul]; the popular participation—I'm not talking about activists and intellectuals—but popular participation was more, which is good. I mean normal people who know about the Armenian Genocide through their grandmothers or through their houses, through the stones, through the remnants—material or non-material remnants. ... Political participation, political representation was also more because religious multiculturalism is very much praised by the pro-Kurdish political party [HDP] and, in that sense, Kurds in general—not activist, not the political Kurds, but ordinary Kurdish population—is also more politically and socially aware of the Armenian cause and the genocide, etc. And thanks to the Kurdish suppression, they more or less can compare the state violence imposed on the Armenians and also on the Kurds, and their contribution in the execution of the Armenian Genocide in 1915 and afterwards.

There are a few points in Elmas's testimony that I wish to highlight. Elmas draws a comparison between the profile of the participants at the Istanbul commemoration and those at the Diyarbakir commemoration, and observes that the participation of “normal” people was more in Diyarbakir, as was the participation of political leaders. She also highlights how “religious multiculturalism” is valued by both the political leadership and the Kurdish public. Elmas offers this latter point partly as an explanation of the much larger public participation in Diyarbakir. The other explanation she offers is the living memory of the Armenian Genocide in Kurdish households. Elmas is echoing the testimonies of Azad, Ferhat, and Sakine.

Here, it would be also useful to observe the reaction of one of my Armenian informants, Maro, who had attended the Centennial commemoration in Diyarbakir. Following the day of commemoration events on April 24, Maro found herself among Armenians and Kurds, listening to a folk band that is made up of Armenian, Kurdish, and Turkish performers. They were singing in all three languages, while those present danced and sang together. That made an impact on

her, even though she noted that she had at first felt uneasy about the festive mood on such a somber occasion. In the following passage, note her impressions:

They were singing a song for Diyarbakir and everybody was trying to mouth the words to sing along with the Armenian and dancing. It was really pretty phenomenal... If you want to talk about dialogue and reconciliation, I think it was being done through the music that night. They were also singing in Turkish and Kurdish and so it was very much this moment where they'd start up with an Armenian song and all the Armenians are jumping up and down and the Kurds are kind of watching, trying to figure out what's going on and what are the steps to the song, and then they'd sing a Kurdish song and all the Kurds are singing along. It was perfect—really, the perfect ending to the story.

It is noteworthy that the song Ani remembers from that night is the “song for Diyarbakir.” It is a song that is either about the city or dedicated to it—she doesn't make that clear. The singing switched between Armenian, Kurdish, and Turkish. The performers and attendees were Armenian, Kurdish, and Turkish. In a sense, that moment crystalized and brought to life the concept of “the multicultural city”—and it did not go unnoticed; it made an impact on Maro, a diasporan Armenian. In our interview, Maro went on to stress that what she had witnessed marked something phenomenal, a sincere engagement with the past—with memory. She said, “People talk about things like reconciliation, but really it's about doing this heavy lifting to deal with the weight of the memory. I felt like it was being done there, in Diyarbakir.” The Kurdish leadership and activists were able to integrate memory with the present through embracing a new identity that perhaps will lead to a future that is defined by the multicultural city.

When I asked my Kurdish informants what moved them to participate, their responses centered on confronting and rectifying the past, and sympathy for the Armenians. Two of them made a reference to growing up with knowledge about the Armenians. When I asked my Kurdish informants about the potential outcomes, they all spoke about raising awareness and bringing

about a collective acknowledgment. Meanwhile, their emotions betrayed their hope, which despite the recent violence they don't seem to have abandoned. Yes, one informant reported feeling mournful during a church concert, but that is not unusual. The other emotions my Kurdish informants reported experiencing were happiness, pride, and relief—these stand in stark contrast with the emotions discussed by my Turkish informants.

My Kurdish informants had an alternate social identity, the “multicultural city” project, where history was being confronted and where the leadership (albeit currently imprisoned or purged out of office) had a commitment to “rectifying” the past injustices. In essence, the city itself was beginning to take a stand against injustice and denial, members of the public had *performed* this new social identity, and therefore my Kurdish informants, who had a role and input in bringing about this change, felt empowered and hopeful. I will explore the role of emotions in the following section.

INTERGROUP EMOTIONS THEORY AND MY INFORMANTS

According to Intergroup Emotions Theory, when individuals identify with an in-group, membership to the group brings with it emotional significance, and the individual becomes part of the group's “psychological self” (Smith & Mackie, 2010). In effect, the group member reacts to “social objects” (for instance, sports teams) and events in terms of their implications on the group identity. The emotions, in turn, lead to certain actions, argue Smith and Mackie (2010), who note that “The unique aspect of this conceptualization is that emotions are produced by appraisals of situations in terms of their implications for the in-group as a whole, not implications for the individual group member.”

The theory holds that emotions play a central role in prejudice and intergroup relations, and that—like individual emotions—they may be focused (response to an object or event, such as joy at group gain, or guilt at group’s historical wrongdoing) or generalized (feeling depressed, proud, or anxious in relation to group membership). According to this theory, distinct patterns are observable in terms of group emotions. Furthermore, for individuals who strongly identify with the group, positive group emotions and anger are experienced more strongly, while negative emotions (with the exception of anger) are experienced weakly. “This suggests, as other research has shown, that people who identify strongly with the group are motivated to reappraise and reevaluate situations in order to avoid feeling negative group emotions such as anxiety, dissatisfaction, or guilt,” note Smith & Mackie (2010). In addition, when individuals are asked to report on their emotions as members of a group, they tend to report feeling “group-typical” emotions. “Thus, group emotions are socially shared to some extent: Levels of happiness, anxiety, guilt, and so on are more similar when people report their emotions as members of a common ingroup than when they report the same emotions as individuals,” argue Smith and Mackie (2010), who maintain that “group emotions play a regulatory role by motivating and reinforcing appropriate group-relevant behavior.” The authors note that when anger, for instance, dissipates and is replaced with satisfaction when group members engage in confrontational action. However, in the absence of such action, anger within group members remains high and may even be directed towards the in-group. Finally, the group emotions theory holds that emotions may change based on the saliency of a given social identity. Meanwhile, Roseman, Wiest, and Swartz (1994) hold that different emotions have distinct action tendencies and goals; and that they have a “behavioral component,” that may be controlled or suppressed by nonemotional processes in different contexts (Roseman et al., 1994, p. 216).

Coming back to the testimonies at hand, we can observe a few distinct patterns. Four of my seven Armenian informants (Kevork, Ani, Levon, and Salpi) reported feeling anxiety and fear, as did two of my Turkish informants (Sevda and Asli), while none of my Kurdish informants mentioned those emotions. One Armenian (Salpi) and my Turkish/Kurdish informant (Elmas) reported feeling sad. One Armenian (Simon) reported feeling insignificant and disempowered. These were negative emotions, and—interestingly—such negative emotions did not possess my Kurdish informants. These emotions are congruent with the social identities of the participants within the context of the commemorations.

For my Armenian informants—Kevork, Ani, Levon, and Salpi—fear and anxiety speak to the risks of being an Armenian in Turkey. The emotions are punctuated by the collective memory of the genocide, and the realities of being an Armenian, particularly an outspoken Armenian, in Turkey. Massis, on the other hand, had tried to fend off his emotions since he felt they would render him vulnerable in a surrounding he did not trust—arguably, suppressing emotions was his way of addressing his anxieties. For my two Turkish informants, fear and anxiety were emotions that accompanied the realities of being an activist in Turkey. And although my third Turkish informant, Adem, did not mention those feelings, he said he felt hopeless because of the intimidation activists and academics like him were facing; Adem had lost his position at a university for expressing himself against Erdogan.

Two of my Armenian informants (Levon and Salpi) and two of my Kurdish informants (Sakine and Azad) reported feeling pride and happiness. Two of my Armenian informants (Maro and Levon) reported feeling hopeful. These were positive emotions, and none of my Turkish informants reported experiencing them. The closest to a positive emotion a Turkish informant

came to was Sevda, who experienced “excitement” while at the same time being enveloped by “dread” and “guilt.”

Instead, all three of my Turkish informants, as well as my half Turkish and half-Kurdish participant reported feeling guilt and shame. The pattern is glaring, and we will discuss guilt, as well as the absence of guilt in the Kurdish case, in later sections.

Finally, it is fascinating that all four of my male Armenian informants, made some reference to either not having emotions or suppressing and disregarding their emotions in order to accomplish the task at hand. Was that a gendered pattern of response to the commemorations in Turkey, where their social identity as Armenians was marked by vulnerability and anxiety? Perhaps.

THE TURKISH CASE: FROM RESPONSIBILITY, SHAME, AND GUILT TO HOPELESSNESS

When I asked my informants what moved them to participate in the events, two of the Turkish informants and my half Turkish and half Kurdish informant said they had been moved *primarily* by feelings of guilt and shame. The third Turkish informant also reported feeling guilt. Two of the Turkish informants also said struggling against denial was a primary motive. Both Asli and Sevda identified their own ignorance and contribution to denial as the reason for their shame and guilt; Adem simply said he “naturally” felt guilty, although he did note that on a personal level he chose to identify with the “life-saving” Turks during the genocide.

The range of emotions of my Turkish informants, as well as my half Turkish and half Kurdish informant who lives in Istanbul, were on a spectrum of guilt, shame, anxiety, fear, anger, resentment, and sadness.

I noticed the almost visceral responses to the denial shown by my Turkish informants. I observed how the faces of Asli and Sevda contorted in pain when they discussed their feelings of shame. Once they “discovered” the truth, their reaction to the denial was sharp. Recall, for instance, Asli’s reaction: “This is an ethical responsibility, a feeling of responsibility. And sort of saying, NO! Like the vote⁷⁷. Like screaming NO! The commemoration. I am here and I say NO! I am here and I’m...like a revolt. A personal revolt. Screaming NO! [her fist pounding the bed].” What was Asli revolting against? What was she saying “no” to? And what did she mean by, “*I am here* and I say NO”? The last sentence reminds us of Simon and his wish to become a symbol of defiance. We can assume that Asli is revolting against the ongoing denial and erasure. Much like Simon, she too is taking a literal stand. Asli, however, is burdened; she feels a sense of responsibility—it’s not that she wants to take a stand but that she *has* to. Note how emotionally charged her words are; and even though she does not explicitly say so, she is angry

The murder of Dink made my Turkish informants question their own identities. For Adem, it signaled “the continuation of the genocide,” for instance. All three of my Turkish informants, as well as one Kurdish informant spoke of the role Dink’s assassination in 2006 and his newspaper Agos played in their personal awakening, as well as in affecting change in Turkish society. Dink’s murder prompted many to confront the various forms of violence that threatened and targeted Armenians in Turkey. Books and networks (both academic and activist) played an important role in the process as well, challenging the myths that held denial together.

⁷⁷ “Like the vote” refers to the constitutional referendum that was held in Turkey in April. The referendum would help expand the powers of the president. Many civil society activists mobilized with a vote “no” campaign, or “hayir,” in Turkish.

For all three of my Turkish informants, Asli, Sevda, and Adem, it is the sense of being overawed that rendered them hopeless. When I asked them what tangible outcomes they saw, all three of my Turkish informants said “nothing.” One said perhaps a reduction in stereotypes; and one added that perhaps awareness would be raised. My half Turkish and half Kurdish informant said personal transformations. The prognosis by my Turkish informants seemed much gloomier than that of my Kurdish or Armenian informants. They all see no hope for the future as they live in a constant state of intimidation—the clearest manifestation of which are all the purges and arrests targeting academics like Adem, and the fear in which activists like Asli live in.

On the one hand, my Turkish informants, coming face-to-face with denial, made a conscious choice not to contribute to it by taking a stand. On the other hand, the persistence and ruthlessness of the system is creating a hopeless atmosphere for my informants.

‘WE HAVE TO FEEL THIS SHAME’: GROUP GUILT AND SHAME AMONG TURKISH INFORMANTS

Let us now unpack the feelings of guilt, shame, and responsibility that seem so central to the testimonies of my Turkish informants. On an individual level, shame and guilt occurs when an individual behaves in a way that deviates from the set of rules or standards of egalitarianism that he/she has internalized; this also motivates individuals to make reparations and right the wrongs (Doosje et al. 1998). On the other hand, when the feelings of guilt stem from a wrong that is ascribed to the actions of the group, individuals who acknowledge their membership to the group also experience feelings of guilt, guided by the in-group standards and norms, irrespective of their personal actions (Doosje et al. 1998). When we analyze the testimonies of my informants, the standards and norms apply to the beliefs and norms that inform my informants’ activist identities: Asli, the human rights activist with the “progressive” outlook; Sevda, the

“liberal” academic; Adem, the “Trotskyist/communist” academic; and Elmas, the half-Turkish and half-Kurdish “progressive” academic who is part of “pro-Armenian circles, pro-Armenian political parties, pro-Armenian intellectuals, social scientists, and historians.” At least two of my informants felt both types of guilt: individual guilt and group guilt. Sevda and Asli felt individual guilt—and, in the case of Asli, shame—because of their previous individual engagement in genocide denial. Sevda said, “I feel a little guilty not because I did something but also because of the 40 years I didn’t attend anything or know anything...” All three of my Turkish informants as well as my half-Turkish and half-Kurdish informant harbored general feelings of guilt and shame rooted in their group membership. Doosje et al. (1998) hold that “personal guilt can be experienced at the personal identity level as a result of a discrepancy between humanitarian values and one's own personal behavior, whereas group-based guilt can occur at the social identity level as a result of a discrepancy between those values and the behavior of other members of one's in-group” (p. 873). Meanwhile, Roseman, Wiest, and Swartz (1994) have shown that thoughts associated with guilt include feelings that one was in the wrong, that one shouldn’t have done what he/she did; the action tendencies prompt individuals to want to undo what they have done and to want to punish oneself; the action that may come about is apology; and the emotivational goals include wanting to make up for what one has done wrong and wanting to be forgiven. Likewise, they showed that shame led individuals to feel self-conscious and small.

Three of my informants discussed the guilt and shame they felt as a witness to the continued genocide denial by members of their in-group. Asli insisted that shame was a necessary emotion. “We have to feel this shame... As a product of this denialist state, we are responsible for the denialism. We didn’t do anything. We are so late. Shame is very, very

important. The core of it... I'm embarrassed that all my years was gone without being aware of this, and learning, and reading the micro histories, not only the big genocide history. Shame," she said.

Similarly, Elmas spoke of the shame she felt. She recounted fragments of her own story, of the presence of survivors ("remnants") in her family. She said:

At a certain moment even being alive, continuing your life in a normal way makes one feel bad. ... It's too heavy, the genocide... mass killing your people, mass confiscation of their material [property], mass denial of their once presence, mass silencing. So one can hardly carry all that heavy history, and feels kind of ashamed because of living a middle class or a peasant, whatever your life is like, because your presence, your material presence and your breath—you continue living, you're a citizen here, you travel, I am an academic in the university, my parents own some land, house, etc.—it is all based in the absence of Armenians basically. That is how I feel.

We can observe how Asli and Elmas are burdened by feelings of shame and guilt. Asli clearly states that she finds it necessary to feel the shame. Arguably, Elmas also does—we can observe that she has given it much thought, and that she is justifying and necessitating the emotion. For Elmas, her presence—her life—and comforts are directly related to the absence of the Armenians.

Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, and Manstead (1998) have found that group members felt a collective guilt when their group had systematically "undervalued" a group in the past. They felt this guilt even if they themselves had not engaged with the out-group in that way. The researchers concluded that "making salient" the mistreatment of a group by another was enough to make members of the in-group experience collective guilt. Their research suggests that individuals who highly identify with the in-group will experience less guilt, as long as the group's history contained some level of "ambiguity," which meant, for instance, that a group member could then argue that not all had been involved in the mistreatment. The authors give the

example of a white southerner who is a high identifier who would resort to such arguments as, “not all White Southerners supported the clan,” or “slave owners also did some good things for slaves.” This is similar to what Adem, the Turkish activist, said: “As you know, there were Turks who committed murder during the genocide as well as Turks who saved the Armenian[s] from death. I felt myself not the murderers [sic], but the continuation of these life-saving Turks.” Adem noted that he felt guilt, but he also highlighted that there had been heterogeneity in the group and that he shared an identity with the “good ones,” and not the “bad.”

On the other hand, an individual who identifies with the in-group to a lesser extent is likely to feel more guilt. Furthermore, the researchers noted that the feelings of collective guilt motivated group members to make reparations to the out-group; the authors noted that “collective guilt may also be conceptualized as a behavior-regulatory emotion.” This point directly speaks to the steps taken by certain activists and organizations in Turkey, who call for genocide reparations. Asli, for instance, described how she and fellow activists decided that “every commemoration we will organize should give some learning points and some specific, concrete message... We said [the] Turkish state should recognize [the Genocide], reparations, everything!” She stressed that the commemorations should serve to bring about further action; she wanted the events to educate the public, to make a public call for recognition by the state, to demand reparations, and even more.

Doosje et al. (1998) note that it may also happen that members of the in-group, when faced with information about their group’s mistreatment of another, may feel threatened by the information, may point to the heterogeneity of the in-group, and even “downplay the relevance

of the information provided.” These high-identifiers are also more likely to challenge information, and to stress the unity of the group. The authors write:

...If the emotion is a consequence of a high group-image-threatening situation, we argue that high identifiers are less willing to accept the threatening information as objective or true and, as a result, may be expected to display defensive strategic behavior. Such defensive behavior may prevent high identifiers from feeling negative group-based emotions. (Doosje et al., 1998, p. 884).

Low identifiers, on the other hand, are more likely to accept the negative information and are less likely to defend the image of the group. Perhaps, it is this last point that may help explain the persistence and prevalence of genocide denial in Turkey. Denial is but one symptom of identity threat, which brings to mind the words of Elmas, who, in discussing how one could struggle against denial, said: “You may write about denial and how it contributes to the making of the Turkish psyche, the Turkish presence, the Turkish economy, the Turkish land structure, and everything, or you can write about how the denial of the Armenians is a founding part of Turkish identity... You can also make known the Armenian presence through demystifying the Turkish way of constructing its history and narrative.” Elmas observed a direct link between her presence and the absence of the Armenians. She observed that Turkish identity was constructed on the negation and erasure of the Armenians, the outgroup. The forms of struggle she discusses target the Turkish identity construct through “demystifying” and deconstructing it, and through raising awareness.

In conclusion, in the context of the commemorations in Turkey, we have—on the one hand—Turkish activists who are moved by a feeling of collective guilt and shame, some of whom are pushing for reparations and—on the other hand—a virulent adherence to a Turkish identity that is intensely rooted in genocide denial and sheltered by state institutions. Once again, the omnipresent Turkish flag that frightened Salpi, the portraits of Kemal Ataturk—the “father”

of modern-day Turkey—gracing public spaces, and the inscription, “*Once Vatan*” (“Nation first,” in Turkish), on the slopes of mountains and hills, come to mind; what are these symbols but a persistent attempt to sow unity, to construct an identity, and to instill in the public a sense of that social identity?

PRIDE, RELIEF, AND THE ABSENCE OF GUILT AMONG MY KURDISH INFORMANTS

In stark contrast to my Turkish informants, my Kurdish informants experienced pride and happiness (Sakine and Azad), and one (Ferhat) reported feeling relief, as well as mournful, like the emotions of a funeral-goer. The emotions felt by my Kurdish informants complement the new social identity they had come to embrace, which I discussed above, as well as the behavior and actions of the Kurdish leadership. Yes, the Kurds—particularly those living in the country’s southeast—are subjected to repression and violence, at times more so than other groups in Turkey. However, for my Kurdish informants, something else was keeping them emotionally afloat.

In discussing the findings of two studies, Doosje et al. (2006) in an article titled, “Antecedents and Consequences of Group-Based Guilt: The Effects of Ingroup Identification,” found that when leaders offered apologies, the act alleviated feelings of guilt among members of the group who were low identifiers; whereas for high identifiers, the apologies gave rise to stronger feelings of guilt. “Those lower in identification are likely to cope with their group’s past by feeling relieved (as indicated by showing low levels of group-based guilt) when their group has offered apologies to the harmed outgroup,” wrote the researchers (p. 336). Here we may be reminded of Ferhat, who reported feeling “relief” at the Diyarbakir commemoration event. Similarly Sakine said that the public’s reaction to witnessing the Kurdish leadership participate

in the commemorations was, “‘OK if they are acknowledging it, so therefore this must be true.’ That created some sense of relief and connection to the issue by the locals.” Again, “relief” was tied to acknowledgement by leaders.

On the other hand, the researchers concluded that, “People whose national identity is not a central aspect of the self may be relatively willing to accept possible negative aspects of their nation’s history. Consequently, they are more likely to express feelings of guilt and offer apologies.” None of the Kurdish informants expressed feeling guilt or shame. Were they low identifiers? Perhaps. Sakine, for instance, whose identity hinged on her leftist political identity, was clear when she said:

Being a leftist is more important than being a Kurd. If I was a Kurdish nationalist, the Armenian issue might have been an important issue for me but not like it is right now. Right now, the Armenian issue is as important to me as the Kurdish issue. All ethnic and religious groups are of equal distance for me, are equal for me in terms of my connections.

We can make the argument that Sakine was a low identifier. Then what about the politician Azad and the humanitarian worker Ferhat? They had both spoken about multiculturalism. Azad had stressed that the wellbeing of Armenians, Assyrians, and other groups was as important to him as the wellbeing of the Kurds. He had said:

As someone from Lice and Diyarbakir, as a Kurd in the lands that I lived on, I had heard from my ancestors and others that there were Armenians who lived here too, and as one Kurdish person has said, the state had the Armenians for breakfast and then they had the Kurds for lunch... Just like I believe and support the Kurdish language and culture, I believe in supporting and standing for the culture and language of all the other peoples, including the Armenians.

He spoke like this for some time. He wanted to make it clear to me that he was committed to egalitarian principles, to the rights of the various marginalized groups, and to the vision of the multicultural city—a sort of promised land. He was also communicating that—

although Kurds had played a key role during the genocide—they had also been victims in later decades up until the present. He spoke about the importance of guarding the rights of all ethnic groups in Turkey, noting that otherwise, his actions would not be any different than the actions of the state. Azad wanted to convey that the commitment to “multiculturalism” truly meant something and—above all—marked a turning point and a break with the old way of governing that was driven by ethnocentrism. Finally, he had said: “...My ancestors were fooled and because of their lack of knowledge, we were pushed to be part of the destruction and the genocide of the Armenians, and enemies were made between the Kurds and the Armenians, it was important for me to apologize for this. My effort has been to rectify what has happened in the past.” Azad stressed the apology he had extended. As I noted earlier, Roseman et al. (1994) argue that apologies are the action tendencies of the emotion of guilt. So although, Azad never mentioned feeling guilt, the apology points to the possibility that guilt had once been there, but which had now been replaced by satisfaction.

When I had asked Ferhat about why he personally took part in the commemoration event, he had responded:

I heard a lot about the Armenian Genocide when I was a kid. My grandmother’s mother was a witness and it was a traumatic story in my family. So we all had this kind of—I don’t know—like kind of sympathy towards Armenians, and we knew that these are our people, our neighbors, brothers, etc. So we grew up with this. So I think it was nice to regain the character of the city, because the city is multicultural.

“Multiculturalism” is there again, and this time, for Ferhat, it is something that needs to be “regained.” It is perhaps like a lost identity that is now on the horizon once again. Yes, being a Kurd, is part of Ferhat’s and Azad’s identity, but working towards this new social identity seems to be a persistent internalized goal. So perhaps, all three of my Kurdish informants are low identifiers because they possessed a superordinate identity that was molded in the politics of the

pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), which championed the rights of the marginalized, including ethnic and religious minorities, the LGBTQ community, and women. The HDP, whose leaders had made public utterances of apology, had a strong presence in Diyarbakir—and all three of my respondents were supporters.

'YOU'RE ONE OF US': IDENTITY CONSOLIDATION

Pinned against the symbols of a unified Turkey—the flags, the portraits of Ataturk, and the slogans—are the efforts of the activists to create a different social identity, whether in Istanbul, Ankara, or Diyarbakir. Sevda's case is especially interesting and speaks to how group identity is negotiated and consolidated. The way in-group members treat one another is key to how group social identity, and a sense of belonging and intimacy are shaped—identity depends on it (Klein et al., 2007). For instance, Sevda had come to find out that a direct ancestor had been a perpetrator and profiteer in the genocide. Sevda had a deep sense of guilt and shame associated with her own denial and ignorance of the genocide. When I asked her about her guilt, she said: “I don't feel very good at the commemorations.... I know it's a good thing to have more people at the commemoration but at the same time I always feel like... ugh, do I really *belong* here? I mean, I'm on the other side. I'm one of the... [She corrects herself] I've been with the bad guys for a long time. ...” This passage illustrates how Sevda is struggling to reconcile her identities: She is commemorating the genocide, but she used to be someone who engaged in denial in the past, who was one of the “bad guys.” Although she has participated in commemorations for two years, still she feels out of place, perhaps like an imposter—like she did not belong. Researchers have shown how the need to belong is a powerful and persistent motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). When I asked Sevda if she had spoken about her past and family history to others, she said:

First it was very difficult to talk about it and I wasn't sure what kind of reaction I would get. ... I mean from the Armenians it's been very positive. I think it's not very common that people talk about this stuff. From the Turkish people, it's also been quite positive but I've realized that I've been talking about it mostly to people who would be positive about it. I did have one incident where the person said, "Why do you even care?" Why? How could I not care about this? I think that would be the majority—the reaction from the majority, and I'm not sure how that's going to work out.

Asli too discussed in her interview how she transformed from one who denied the genocide ever happened to one of the main organizers of the commemorative events. And although Asli has transformed her identity, she still harbors emotions of guilt and shame.

Another anecdote that illustrates beautifully how a social identity is consolidated is the story relayed to me by Massis, one of my Armenian informants. His words:

I remember being next to a woman whose ancestor had participated on the perpetrator side, and how uncomfortable they felt being amongst Armenians even though obviously this person commemorates and acknowledges the genocide, and obviously is not of the mindset of the perpetrator, is not a denialist. She was very uncomfortable, and I went to them and I just said, "You're one of us. Don't look at it... don't feel like you're part of the perpetrator. You're participating in this, you're commemorating. You're memorializing. You're honoring the victims." And I remember that was a pretty moving point. Again that happened at a place where crimes had been committed. So I know for that person—I mean they began to cry—and I know that it was important for them to hear that from somebody that was Armenian. That it wasn't about whether you are Turkish or not. Whether you're a denier or not, whether you embrace the perpetrators or not, that's the dictating factor. And that involves non Turks and sometimes even Armenians that fall into that category. So that's the classification, not ethnicity.

Massis was essentially extending a sense of belonging to the person. He was retracing the parameters of the in-group, literally saying, "You're one of us." Furthermore, Massis stresses that ethnicity does not dictate who is a member of the "in-group," but positions matter, and perhaps even identity performance matters (and by performance, I mean participation in the acts of commemoration, presence, rhetoric, various forms of activism). In this anecdote, note how Massis is creating an identity beyond ethnicities while also stressing, "I know that it was important for them to hear that from somebody that was Armenian." That utterance hints to a

degree of identity performance. Massis was speaking *as an Armenian*—in his eyes, the emphasis was equally both on the message and the messenger.

Klein et al. (2007) note, “...If group membership depends on in-group validation, it is particularly hard to maintain multiple identities if those who sustain them (a) would see the identities as incompatible and (b) are socially visible to each other” (p. 34). Above, the reason Sevda felt she did not fully *belong* at the commemoration, was the presence of dual identities that appeared to be incompatible—she was struggling to reconcile them. Similarly, in the case Massis described, multiple identities appeared to prevent the Turkish participant from feeling comfortable at the commemoration. What Massis did however, was essentially create a third category: (in his own words) those who choose to commemorate, memorialize, and honor the victims. Massis, in other words, recognized the Turkish participant’s need to belong.

Here, it might be also appropriate to recall the words of Elmas, the half-Turkish half-Kurdish informant, who hoped the commemorations would bring about a sort of transformation in the participants, and raise “question marks” in the minds of the audience. Those question marks could also pave the way for transformation. She said: “...Through the small space, public space that is being created by the commemorations, a non-Armenian Kurdish, Turkish, Alevi, whatever, may be transformed... Transformed in the political sense.” What could a political transformation mean but a radical change in outlook that brings with it a set of identity performances and mobilization potentials?

These examples demonstrate how a social identity is shaped and consolidated, and how individuals of Turkish and Armenian background negotiate an inclusive identity that allows for identity mobilization/collective action. It also shows how identity performance can help reaffirm

and consolidate an identity. Sevda was participating because her new identity—unlike her old one (“one of the bad guys”)—dictated her to do so. She felt an urge to be present at the commemoration. Furthermore, this identity performance also reaffirmed her new identity, which was also validated by her positive reception by members of the out-group, as well as those participating in the commemorations.

NEED FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has its shortcomings and limitations, and the voices of important groups are missing. A larger study that works with a larger pool of respondents will help determine whether the observations noted in this study are generalizable. In addition, it is necessary to expand this study, and to include additional groups and categories. Istanbul Armenians, hidden/Islamized Armenians, Kurds, and Turks need their own distinct categories.

CONCLUSION

My study has shed light on the different factors that drive individuals to participate in the publicly held genocide commemorations in Turkey. I observed how collective guilt and shame affected my Turkish informants; hope and pride colored the narratives of my Kurdish informants; and an urge to resist and a need to connect and collaborate drove my Armenian informants. Above all, I demonstrated how through participating, my informants wish to perform, consolidate, and reaffirm their identities. My Armenian informants had a desire to become symbols of resistance and defiance; my Kurdish informants were driven by a new social identity that had at its core the new multicultural identity of their city and politics; and my Turkish informants, weighed down by collective guilt, needed to affirm a different identity, rejecting the dominant nationalistic one. My informants also had a need to be heard and seen. We

took a closer look at the dissatisfaction of some of my informants and related it to their lack of visibility, linguistic compromises, and their incapacity to effectively perform their identities. The discussion offered in this study also suggests that there may be patterns to why participants harbor certain emotions, and are even moved to act by certain notions unique to their social identities.

Arguably, these commemorations help craft relations based on identity performances, evolving social identities, and even power struggles surrounding language and approach. The commemorations don't seek to alter Armeno-Turkish and –Kurdish relations necessarily—the collaborations, feelings of solidarity, and the desire to connect are simply byproducts. So perhaps, we need to reconsider what may be the role of commemorative spaces in the fields of human security and the work for social justice and positive peace.

“We must embrace struggle. Every living thing conforms to it. Everything in nature grows and struggles in its own way, establishing its own identity, insisting on it at all cost, against all resistance.”
–Rainer Maria Rilke (*Letters to a Young Poet*, 1934)

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