

Towards Regional Peace Citizenship in Turkey: Identities, Rights and Conflicts...

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Towards Regional Peace a series of booklets by the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly

Citizenship in Turkey: Identities, Rights and Conflicts

We, as the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly, have been working on a civic platform which will contribute to the transformation and resolution of ethno-political conflicts. The program has been running since 2010 within the Karadeniz Peace Network supported by Crisis Management Initiatives (CMI).

We have determined two subjects of key importance for Turkey's democratization process. The bitter Kurdish issue, still on the agenda after all these years, and the century long awaited Turkish-Armenian peace were covered over five meetings held in 2012.

The most effective way to transforming social prejudices in these two conflicts is by supporting civil encounters and cooperation between parties. Our main objective was to discuss the ways to get the majority of the public to think and feel differently. We also wanted to contribute to the debate about the culture of living together through social negotiation.

This was our starting point for a collection of articles and meeting minutes for publication. Bahar Şahin Fırat, Cemal Uşak, Ömer Laçiner, Murat Paker and Yetvard Danzikyan shared their views through their articles.

The first section "Growing up in Turkey" addresses the problems of Kurdish youth in Turkey.

The second section questions "What Happened in 1915" and its aftermath. What the parties did following the events, and their ramifications on our everyday lives are discussed in three meetings in search of a resolution led by the civil society.

We would like to thank all our supporters.

Helsinki Citizens' Assembly

Growing up in Turkey: Kurdish Children and Youth

Meeting presentation

1 May 19th, 2012,
Helsinki Citizens'
Assembly, Istanbul

Everyday life presents a bundle of issues for the Kurdish youth of Turkey. Akin and Danişman's study focuses on children of the 1990s, their discrimination in the education system and how violence became part of their routine, many witnessing the exposure of friends and family members. The issue has current political, economic and social aspects as well as a deep historical context. We can conclude that Kurdish youth are becoming increasingly more disillusioned with the political institutions in the Republic of Turkey.

This increases their chances of being drawn into armed organizations supported by or fighting against the state. Rejection of the political process on the other hand is more common. Discrimination, poor education standards and the relative underdevelopment of the region all contribute to young people's withdrawal from political space.

The economic issues of the region, the ramifications of country-wide neo-liberal policies and the interstate migration of Kurdish youth present a range of socio-economic problems. Baysal indicates that many Kurdish youth have to travel to western Turkey for seasonal jobs. The South-east of Turkey continues to be one of the most economically underdeveloped regions. Poverty and

ongoing armed conflict have had a negative impact on the welfare of its residents. In 2007 16% of men and 44% of women in Diyarbakır were illiterate.

Globalization, the emergence of an international division of labour and its ramifications on the labour market have influenced even the highly educated, as Tanil Bora's "Bosuna mi Okuduk?" (Did We Study In Vain?) reflects. As the UNDP indicates, unemployment is a problem particularly for educated young women in Turkey. In 2006 only half of the female population was employed. 20% of the women were unemployed and 30% were not part of the labour force at all. Youth unemployment rate was 18.7%. In "Turkey and the Kurdish Question: Reflecting on Peace Building" the ECP outlined that poverty and unemployment pushed Kurdish youth into conflict. Baskin Oran's compilation examines the numerous miscarriages of justice as well as the tangible problems of the Kurdish youth.

These socio-economic problems have been aggravated by political ones. Yegen looks at the historical progress of the Kurdish issue in his book, "The Latest Kurdish Uprising" where he addresses democratic autonomy and education in the mother tongue. The political components of two critical

events in Turkish history, the Dersim Operation and the Eastern Rehabilitation Project, are also studied.

In “The Kurdish Issue in State Discourse”, Yegen discusses the official view that the Kurdish movement is reactionary, directed by foreign elements and associated with banditry, regional underdevelopment and tribal feudalism. He adds that this discourse is not developed to legitimize Kurdish policies but the state genuinely believes in it. The current relationship between the Kurds and the state is relatively less tense than it was in the past. Yegen adds that at the turn of the century the Kurds were more “supposed citizens” than “potential Turks”.

Cenk Saracoglu’s findings are similar in “The City, the Middle Class and the Kurds”. His study of the Kurds in Izmir concludes that the state and its local supporters don’t ignore the Kurds but exclude them from everyday life. The concept of exclusionary recognition and its references to citizenship are studied in “The Kurdish Citizen” by Hamza Aktan. He explores the difficulties faced by the Kurds while speaking their mother tongue and the social, political, cultural and class based discrimination they suffer. As a result they feel they should conceal their Kurdish identities. The clichés surrounding the Kurdish identity in the culture industry and the media are explored as well as Kurds as students, teachers and soldiers.

Aktan makes a number of observations on the Kurdish youth: They do not feel that Turkey is their homeland – the PKK is at the centre of the Kurdish youth culture since its increased popularity in the 1990s. Some Kurdish youth choose guerrilla warfare as a way of life. This divides the youth into those who are PKK members and others who are not. It seems that those who are not PKK members are also highly engaged in politics, much

more so than the other young people in the country. Kurdish youth also become politicized at an early age as a result of their resistance to the nationalist rituals within the education system. Aktan presents the testimonies of Kurdish youth who first became politicized when they refused to swear the oath of allegiance and sing the national anthem. Aktan concludes that this youth have forged what Anderson would call an imaginary community on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

As a result, the political participation of youth in the south-east is very low due to poor education. A UNDP report from 2008 indicated that levels of political participation were low throughout Turkey, with only 4.7% of Turkish youth active within a political party. The GAP Youth Survey similarly illustrated that the level of political participation of the youth in both NGOs and political parties was around 3%. Young people mistrust political institutions and are discouraged from political participation by their families.

The school drop-out rate is another problem. Only 35% of the youth in the region are currently at school. Nurcan Özdemir claims a correlation between labour force participation and political participation in Southeast Anatolia. 6.7% of the youth work actively for a political party and are employed, whereas the percentage drops to 1.9% among the unemployed. Similarly 41.1% of those who voted in the last national elections also had a job whereas 28.4% of those who voted were unemployed. Finally 3.1% of those who are a member of an NGO are also employed, while 2.8% of the youth of the region are members of an NGO and are unemployed.

Political exclusion and economic problems have deepened the conflict. The recent TESEV report “Coming Down the Mountain”, looking into ways

of resolving the conflict, explained that frustrated youth made for a prolific source for recruitment both for the PKK and for Turkish nationalist groups. As Insel explained, the so-called “stone throwing children” shows how the current conflict reproduces itself through the mobilized youth. The “lynch culture” as Belge, Bora and Gambetti have noted, contributes to an environment conducive to conflict. Ahmet Turk said to Asli Aydintabas of the Milliyet Daily on 29 May 2011 that the majority of Kurdish youth were not open to dialogue with the Turkish population.

Muzaffer Ayata identifies this as a severing of emotional ties with Turkey. Winrow and Kirisci suggested that the engagement of youth in the Kurdish conflict was due to the effects of urbanization, modernization and secularization. Magiya suggests that the clashing discourse created by the political dimension of the conflict is the crucial factor in youth recruitment. The recent arrests of Kurdish activists, under the pretext of preventing terrorism by the KCK, also reflect exclusionary recognition. The arrests have arguably had a deterrent effect on the engagement of youth in formal politics.

These may account for the affiliation of Kurdish youth with the ideology and guerrilla forces of the PKK.

Both Belge and Turk agree that unlike the previous generation of Kurds and the Kurdish political movement which flourished within the Turkish left, the current youth are much less likely to engage in dialogue with Turks. As mentioned in the ECP report social, political and economic factors all contribute to radicalization. This new generation of the Kurdish movement, not impressed by the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) leadership, consider Abdullah Ocalan as the only legitimate authority.

KONDA’s 2010 research “The Kurdish Issue – Perceptions and Expectations”

paints a more optimistic picture. It focuses on how the issue reflects on the day to day lives of individuals. The definition of identity receives special attention. Kurdish-Turkish marriages and neighbourly relations and how much the Kurds “like” Turkey are examined. Extensive economic data regarding the Kurds is presented. The research looks into the factors contributing to the conflict, as well as the ones which could alleviate it, including the institutions that can play an active role in its resolution.

Despite this bleak picture, there are many optimistic initiatives targeting the democratic resolution of this conflict where the youth make up one of the parties. For instance, Habitat, the UNDP, Teachers without Borders and Cisco Systems are working towards developing the online youth networks within Turkey. Improvement of inter-youth communication, development of young people’s computer skills and facilitation of data sharing among youth NGOs were the main aims. Young people living in different parts of Turkey, who would have limited means of meeting one-another would hence have a chance to get together and start a dialogue. A platform for sharing personal experiences is surely a real effort in the resolution of the causes of conflict.

Growing up in Turkey: Kurdish Children and Youth

Meeting minutes

May 19th, 2012,
hCa, Istanbul

The meeting was held to contribute to a civil platform to decode and resolve Turkey's ethno-political conflicts. Researchers, authors and academics discussed social conflict, violence and identity in various contexts (family, school, social life, Kurdish provinces vs. the West, different generations, etc.) and their impact on the lives of Kurdish children and youth. They addressed research, field and policy options based on their data, observations and experiences. The 23 participants of the meeting shared their findings in brief presentations followed by Q and A sessions.

The meeting started with Hale Akay's introduction of the Black Sea Peace Network Project. High school history teacher Mutlu Oztürk was the moderator. Brief presentations followed:

The educational experiences of various ethnic groups were explored through interviews in "Perceptions and Experiences regarding Identity, Conflict and Peace in Education". The field study is part of "The Role of Education as a Tool for Social Consensus Project" run by Tarih Vakfı (The History Foundation).

We focused on the ways in which political conflict impacted the classroom, social dynamics within

the school and the formation of identity in pupils. We held interviews with people of various ethnic backgrounds on their educational experiences. Our focus was the repercussions of political conflict on the school and its influence on the formation of identity.

We all have an opinion on the elementary problems of the Turkish education system. Kurdish children believe that the system discriminates against them, most significantly in their denial of the right to be educated in their mother tongue. They perceive this as a violation of their primary rights. They say, "Education in our own language would resonate with the ways in which we make sense of the world and our culture, increasing the success rate...", a youth from Yüksekova for instance stated that he was already 18 years old when he came to ask himself what lay behind the mountains he had seen his whole life.

The second crucial emphasis was on the Kurdish youth not finding a single positive remark about them within the education system. Kurds are only mentioned in the context of the Society for the Rise of Kurds (Kürt Teali Cemiyeti) in a list of "harmful associations" in a textbook. The information Kurds receive on a

specific subject at home or their general knowledge clash with that which they are taught at school. A worker from Bingöl, living in Adapazarı, stated that his father spat at him and pulled him out of school after he found out that Sheikh Said and his friends were presented as traitors in textbooks. The tension that politics provokes is constantly being reflected in the sphere of education in a way which gives negative connotations to Kurdish identity. Kurdish teachers are ill-equipped to deal with tensions emerging from the discussion of issues such as the Sheikh Said uprising or the Dersim issue. In general they just covered up the issues. The situation in the East is a bit more relaxed. Class discussions in Yüksekova can include a broader perspective.

The primary goal of the book which I co-authored, “Bildığın Gibi Değil” (Not Like You Know It) was to go through what happened from the perspective of the Kurdish youth, labelled “terrorists” by the state. None of them exaggerated their situation or made victims of themselves but were keen to bring the state to account.

Almost all families had lost someone in the conflict. For interviewees we went for people who lost more than one family member. We chose to speak to the youth who were young in the 1990s (born between 1975 and 1982) and continued to live in the cities they were born in, still passing through the streets in which, for instance, their fathers would have been killed. The “Kurdish opening” was on the agenda at the time which led us to ask “Will you be able to make up?” Everyone wanted an “honourable peace”, which would involve the safe return of guerrillas, the emptying of refugee camps, the return of exiles from Europe and the unconditional recognition of the primary demands for rights. Another question was “Would you be able to forgive the government?” We could only put 19

interviews in the book, but we spoke to 67 participants. Out of these 67, only 3 said that they will be able to forgive. Their rage is not directed towards the Turkish people, but rather to the system and the state...

Forced migration is a significant issue for the children and the broader Kurdish context. Although it does deepen the wound and contribute to the conflict, it has not been broadly investigated. The studies carried out have been limited to statistics, but forced migration affects everything. My story book, “Keje – Bir Gecede Büyüme” (Growing up in One Night) addresses the Kurdish issue, whereas my work on forced migration is an oral history project. The plunder of villages, the problems new migrants face in big cities and the subsequent tension is addressed. An insufficient compensation law was introduced, but NGOs need to put pressure on the government for a new law detailing compensation for pain and suffering as well as of material compensation. This law must also include a formal apology. The clause “should have no connection with terrorism” has considerably limited the scope of the previous law. The government considers the forced migration issue done and dusted. The law had no positive impact on the lives of children and youth. This is why we should re-address the issue, starting with an inventory.

My research assesses the view that Kurdish children have a separate narrative of childhood to that of other children in Turkey. How come Kurdish children suddenly became visible after 2006? I was in Amed from February-March 2011. The children I met were born between 1992 and 1993, so they experienced the terrible dirty war of 1990-1995 and the

acceleration of forced migration. These children define themselves as “existing in nothingness”... My findings were similar to Hardar Darıcı’s conclusions in Adana; the children were capable of recounting the forced migration stories of their families as if they were their personal experiences. Therefore, the process which has slowed down after 1996 is still very valid for Kurdish children. There are numerous quantitative investigations on the issue, but nothing on how the children’s quality of life has been impacted.

There is no education in the mother tongue in school, the teachers have limited skills for the issues faced by their Kurdish students who also feel they are not represented in the curriculum. In addition, I have identified the problem of police presence in schools. There is a “school police” force, made up of uniformed and plain-clothed police throughout the region. All of the children I spoke to felt irritated and oppressed by the police presence. They also argued that the police would frequently pull them out of class to speak to them personally, warning them against attending demonstrations. The apparatus of oppression at the site of education is a serious problem.

Moreover, the students are fed up with nationalist practices, mainly stemming from the presence of nationalist ideas in the curriculum and state that they do not feel that they belong in school and that they wish to leave. Most of my interviewees stated that feeling slightly at home in the system would encourage them to continue, but the feeling of object exclusion didn’t nurture them in any shape or form.

Migration is presented as if it is exclusive to Kurdistan. We should also note the

many Kurds appearing in different parts of Turkey due to migration. Migration is an ongoing process which reveals the ways in which Kurdistan is being reshaped.

I believe that it is problematic to limit the discussion about education to the school site. The streets, the home and the school are all pedagogical spaces whose relationship to each other is significant. Schools are sites of familiarisation-conflict where Kurdish and Turkish identities are played out.

My research of 2008-2009, where I interviewed 27 people from Bağcılar, showed that Kurdish men are oblivious to the experiences of Kurdish women. Especially the women who join the Kurdish political movement who are more open to the outside world and have increased contact with a greater number of social actors. Handan Çağlayan agrees with me. Although this may look like a contradiction to the outsider, in fact it is not, it is an ongoing negotiation between the actors of daily life.

I also witnessed that the Kurdish movement is perceived as a disciplinary mechanism by the Kurdish mothers. For instance, idle boys with bad habits are directed to the youth wings of the party, or the party is asked to give them a warning. Yes, it is a form of discipline, but one where actors of different generations speak to each other. It is important to consider the different ways in which those who come from different gender roles and from different generations experience forced migration at the local level.

As a lawyer, I carried out a more technical investigation. I also want to share my experiences as someone who has migrated to Diyarbakır from the West. Research

into Kurdishness is multiplying as a result of the confidence generated by the presence of BDP MPs in parliament. There is a problem here. The BDP has to face a number of issues that would normally have to be handled by the state. The BDP and the Kurdish youth, opposed to gentrification projects in the West, often find that BDP councils are supportive of such projects in Diyarbakır. This challenges the political legitimacy of the BDP and creates a problem of trust.

On the other hand, as Handan Çağlayan expresses in her book “Mothers, Comrades, Goddesses”, women have many issues of their own. Although there is the incentive to nurture Kurdish history and literature, there are also many problems when the details are considered. On the other hand, the political dimension remains highly monolithic.

Forced migration is not a problem endemic to the 90s. I have met a huge number of people who see forced migration as an extension or re-enactment of the 1934 forced re-settlement law. Moreover, the problem does not disappear when Kurds are settled in Western cities because their poverty forces them to re-migrate within the city due to urban gentrification. Education is a major problem. Having to work in unsafe workplaces as cheap labour adds to their exploitation.

The second part of the meeting looked at the different ways these problems could be interpreted and how they could be resolved.

- When I was reading “Bildigin Gibi Degil” I wondered if it would change the answer if the same question, “Can you forgive, can you make peace?” was

asked to children born in the 1990s and the 2000s. In my experience, there is a tripartite caste structure in every city; those who pay a price, those who do not pay a price and those who are aligned with the state. Do their different backgrounds affect the children? Village schools, for example, have kids from a wide range of backgrounds and political orientations. How do they all stay together? How do the intrinsic contradictions of Kurdish society have an impact on these children? How does the fact that children are increasingly included in political protests change the situation? When I was working in Dolapdere, some families were off to protests every Sunday as if they were picnics. The children are growing up in an unimaginably violent and politicized environment.

- I was born in 1981 and I was a child during the 90s. I have two brothers aged 15 and 13. I never cared where my teachers were from so I never asked them, but my brothers are very different. They want to know where their teachers are from and evaluate them accordingly. When they get a bad grade they believe it is because they are Kurdish. They think all negative treatment they receive is caused by the fact that they are Kurdish. When I was 12 years old my brother was killed in the middle of the street and I was the person who found him first. In hindsight, this was the threshold of political maturity for me. Every death turns into a picture on the wall and children grow up with them.

- What was previously mentioned as a contradiction for Kurds seems to be a view from a distance. If where the Kurds live is seen as a laboratory and Kurds themselves subjects of experiments, an intrinsic part of our lives seems like a contradiction. A lot of people said they couldn't sleep for a week after reading the book. OK, you couldn't sleep, but I have personally gone

through these experiences and keep on doing so. This is the difference between us.

Statements about Kurdish children being driven towards crime by their families are very offensive to Kurds. These children themselves are on a mission. There is no need for their families to direct them. They are fully aware of the situation.

- The children see themselves as political subjects and want to be recognized as such. For instance, they are very angry at the fact that the incident of the Galatasaray University student, Cihan Kırmızıgül is being reduced to the wearing of the pushi because they argue that they are in prison because they have directly challenged the Turkish Penal Code. They also have a problem with the amount of emphasis placed on the children in prisons because they see the prison as a place of struggle... Sometimes I do not know what to do as a lawyer and an educator.

- Anger accumulates in all aspects of daily life. For instance, a Kurdish student also has to work. This is explained with ethnicity, not from the socioeconomic class perspective. Kurdishness makes all narratives possible, expresses all victimhood. In order to cope with this trauma, they become political actors fuelled by their rage. This rage has a pedagogic aspect to it; it turns into an emotion which enables the child to hold on to daily life.

- Turkish teachers acknowledged that ethnic division was on the rise. Kurdish children do not feel they belong here. It is not easy to repair an emotionally

severed union. All these people want is to express themselves. They are full of rage because they can't and they tend to create their own zone for expression. This fury, encompassing several generations, is so strong that one cannot even imagine living together. For instance in Mersin the Kurds feel empowered and self-sufficient because they control the city council. The exclusion of Kurds from all supposedly public areas (hospitals, government departments, schools) is so severe that nobody attempts to establish relations with Turks. Kurds often have their own council and engage in trade between each other. Theoretically they "do not have a problem with Turks" but encounters increasingly end up in rage being directed towards Turks.

- My brother erased all of the Western provinces from his phone's weather app and made a separate list of cities in the area known as Kurdistan, adding Mersin. This was the latest thing I experienced. He is only 13 years old. You would be amazed to listen to the dialogue he has with his peers in the street.

- Many of the children and youth today are a lot more politicised than the previous generations most of them acquiring consciousness on their own initiative and not through education as we know it. Those who are younger do not have a lower level of consciousness; they simply express themselves differently. When I asked a very young child "Who do you think are fighting?" he replied "the Apos and the Atatürks are fighting". Mainstream psychology teaches us that anger is inherently negative and needs to be controlled. However, anger is also an emotion which can unify people. The anger of the children I spoke to is a reaction against the state's Turkification

policy. One of them said “If they crush my hand which holds the pencil, I will throw stones with the other one.” When I asked a child how became interested in such issues, he said “As I grew up, the number of pictures hanging on our wall increased”. One died when villages were raided during forced migration, one during a guerrilla operation, the other while working in the city.

- On the other hand, we should look into demonstrations separately. Why do children always take part in them? Many see them as a legitimate means of defending themselves against what is being destroyed. These children are very strong. I have never seen a political party’s (BDP) children’s assembly room being used so actively. They play Kurdish computer games, for instance. This is a group which perpetually strengthens and reorganises itself.

- What looks like political subjectivity is essentially an ongoing process of identity-building fuelled by anger. The Turkish state had been constructing its own enemy and strengthening Turkish nationalism with Diyarbakır Prison and the child victims of the TMK (Terrorism Prevention Act). What is there to do? The “us and them” divide is becoming routine and it’s getting harder and harder to understand one-another. The process of identity formation fuelled by anger has to be acknowledged but leaves a lot to be desired. Acceptance of the status quo will mean the formation of another nation-state. Yet another group of people with whom we lived will leave us. I am not only a Turk, just as Kurds are not only Kurds. If the Kurds only identify themselves as Kurds and if I only identify myself as a Turk, what will we gain from this? The separation process of is painful and I do not think that we are ready for it. In the past, every separation cost us a part of ourselves.

- The term “political subject” used for the “stone-throwing children” seems to be a bit of a heavy-handed definition. We have to see it as the natural evolution of a movement seeking its identity; otherwise we have nowhere to go.

- This is a tool for militancy as well as a process of socialization. It seems to me that they have established power relations among themselves more structured than those of grown-ups...

- It was mentioned that the formation of Kurdistan would impair us but what about Roboski and Van? The will to continue to live together does not seem strong. The state is not the only source of violence against Kurdish children and youth. We may think and feel otherwise, but there are only a few of us. It is important to remember that the police are not the only elements building up anger to this extent. We are no longer “inseparable”.

- If we had this discussion in the 1970s it could have been a lot more different. The current climate in Turkey is extremely de-politicised and de-socialised.

- I started off by providing mental health services to children. I do not think that child victims are going through identity formation. Children happen to possess many sad stories which are not their own. The relationship among the children is not hierarchical but chaotic and autonomous. The youngest get dragged into the Kurdish political movement haphazardly, through whatever life brings, on the basis of how

they feel or wherever it hurts on a given day.

- The extent to which people have been able to establish their lives cannot be a measure of their integration into mainstream society. I learnt Turkish at school. When we migrated to Mersin, it took us days to find a home. I was initially going to a high school in the city centre but after 6 months I had to move to the outer suburbs. Wherever the Kurds settled, all economic transactions occurred between Kurds. This is not “integration”.

- Kurdish children are not a homogenous entity. There are considerable differences between the children in Diyarbakır and the ones in Tarlabası. Input from groups like the Başak Culture and Arts Foundation and Çaça (Children under the Same Roof Association), who do field work with children, is valuable.

- In the aftermath of the earthquake in Van there was a political distinction between those who went to the tent towns and those who did not. We were wondering what would happen when the children from these two groups met at school.

- Istanbul is a very complex city with multiple identities. Nobody is really an “Istanbullu” (from Istanbul) when you look at it from this perspective. Although it should be easier to adapt to this city, it is not because the locals see the newcomers as a problem. Both sides perceive the arrival of migrants in Istanbul as a form of “visitation”.

- We are essentially separated. Maybe not ten years ago, but we are now emotionally separated. The Van earthquake was a clear example. Where does this lack of empathy come from? We need to look into this. As the Kurdish movement rises the process of exclusionary recognition also spreads.

- The BDP or the PKK perspective gives us a nascent political movement with 100 councils, which has organised itself in many areas, whose political language refers to autonomy and self-governance. It has the potential for widespread social mobilization. Why then should I seek to forge relations with the institutions of a state which has caused so much destruction and violence? The current political climate forces Kurdish children to follow the political agenda so closely. One of the greatest demands of the Kurds is to really be recognized. It does not make sense to ask the question “why can’t we think about living together?” in an environment in which the Kurds have their own economy, their own social life and their own family networks, are capable of reproducing all of these relations. What is it that holds us together? Living together peacefully is wishful thinking, but the objective conditions are completely different... The reality of everyday life needs to have an impact on the macro political scale... It is necessary to consider the projects of all political actors. Limiting our research to the youth, Kurds or children will get us nowhere. There are many different political actors, such as the religious community. Where there is a severing of emotional ties, national borders lose their significance. Places like Mersin or Istanbul are potential places for encounters between the Kurds and the rest of the Turkish society. Ignoring the demands

of the Kurds leads to mounting anger in these cities. The Kurds used to feel inferior in their adopted cities because at first they did not speak Turkish. However, as they became more and more organized, they started to believe that other people in the city should speak Kurdish as well. The political gains of the Kurdish movement have increased their confidence; they are now proud of what they were once embarrassed of. The use of Kurdish in the KCK trials also reflects this. In daily life, Kurds no longer care about Turks; they simply do not acknowledge them.

- Kurds have lately been determining their agenda on Twitter. The approach to the Kurdish issue has harshened. There is even a tendency to a more extreme stance than the PKK. If Kurdistan was formed tomorrow, Kurdish youth might say “yet another Kurdistan is possible” and take to the streets.

- We have talked so much about destruction, but what can we do and what can Kurdish children do for peace? As I have seen in my research, there are three different groups of Kurdish children; the first are a group which are loyal followers of the Kurdish political movement, the second have a political ideology which is more extreme than the PKK and the third speak more often about “peace”. This final group has been influenced by the village assemblies model, implemented throughout Kurdistan, and demands that similar “children’s homes” be established. They imagine these as places where they can meet and be with “Western/Turkish” children. They want the decisions that children make in these assemblies to be binding as well. There is a lot that can be learned from children. Ideally, children should organize and have meetings like this one. This will be more valuable than all of the meetings combined.

- The suffering continues to have an impact on everyone. We urgently need to create opportunities for people to vent and share their emotions as a coping mechanism for those who are experiencing suffering and those who are attempting to understand it.

- Turkish and Kurdish children have, of course, a lot in common. Schools and the education system could be where most commonalities can be built. During the debates on a new constitution in Diyarbakir, both Kurds and Turks were very curious about each other. Being children is a good starting point.

Growing up in Turkey: Education in the Mother Tongue

Meeting presentation
December 8th, 2012,
hCa, Istanbul

Language, a fundamental reference point for individual and social perspectives, is crucial in the shaping of the individual and the integrity of the society, in positive and negative ways.

Wallerstein emphasizes that almost all nation-states were adamant on compulsory education and uniformity of language for the creation and nurturing of national identities. Nation-States establish the core the legislative, executive, and judicial functions of the state in a single language at their foundation stages. The same language is conveyed to the entirety of social relations through education.

Education acquires a "national" character in nation-states with two basic expectations: creating a national identity superseding local, religious, ethnic and cultural loyalties and ensuring that the national identity is absorbed by the entire nation. In this context, national education is the founder, organizer and distributor of national identity.¹

Education was a profound element in the process of building the nation-State in Turkey. We can talk about continuity between the last period of the Ottoman Empire and the first period of the Turkish Republic.

States shape their language policies to legitimise their existence, to encourage or restrict participation and to create/reinforce a national identity. A scan of the literature on language policies yields a wide spectrum. There are many variables, such as the proportion of ethnic minorities in the general population, demographic characteristics, the degree of ethnic tension, the presence of ethnic conflict, (if so, how severe is it and does it still go on), the level of consciousness and organization of the ethnic minority, and whether the ethnic minority exists in another country. These variables determine the specifics of the language policy. UNESCO's MOST (Management of Social Transformations) study examines language policies in six main groups.

The recent language policies of Turkey could be analysed in three periods.²

The period of 1923-1950:

The laws of unity of education, introduction of the Latin alphabet, the surname and settlement laws may be used as guidelines for the examination of language policies.

The period of 1950-1980:

Specialized Board for Name Changing (Ad Değiştirme İhtisas Kurulu) was established by the

[1] V. Coşkun, Ş. Derince, N. Uçarlar, *Dil Yarası (Dışa Raporu 2010)*, s.22
[Immanuel Wallerstein, *Liberalizmden Sonra*, Çeviri: Erol Öz (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 1998), 130-131.]

[2] V. Coşkun, Ş. Derince, N. Uçarlar, *Dil Yarası (Dışa Raporu 2010)*, s.27-39

Democratic Party. Turkish Language Society encouraged the use of pure Turkish.

According to Assoc. Prof Harun Tuncel of Fırat University, Head of Department of Humanities and Economic Geography ("Villages Which Went Through Name Changing in Turkey"), 12,211 places have been renamed by the Ministry of the Interior since 1940. This is 35% of all villages. The total number of renamed settlements is about 28,000.

"... If villages have the words "red, bell, or church" in their names, they are renamed. If a village name contains "Kurd, Georgian, Tatar, Circassian, Laz, Arab, refugee etc." it is renamed to avoid separatism. Some were changed because they were not Turkish. Naturally there are many names in Arabic, Persian, Kurdish, Laz, Greek, Armenian, Georgian, and Circassian in Anatolia. A map of the renamed villages shows that they are spread all over the country. However there is no equality here. A significant concentration is in the Black Sea, the South East and Eastern Anatolia regions."

1980 and after: The Constitution of 1982, like its predecessors, states that Turkish is the official language. It adds that the official language cannot be changed, even a proposal to change it is prohibited. Article 26 of the Constitution on freedom of thought and expression and article 28 regulating the freedom of the press contain a phrase "language prohibited by law" and also punished expressions of thought in a prohibited language. Article 42 of the Constitution clearly states that "Turkish citizens cannot be instructed in any language other

than Turkish as their mother tongue at institutions of education and training."

In 1990, parallel to the demands of multicultural identities in the world, different groups in Turkey have protested against state defined identities and started struggles to reach their aims. This resulted in a partial relaxation of the state's oppressive identity politics. Turkey/EU relations intensified especially after Turkey's candidacy for full EU membership in December 1999. This process played a positive role in the partial relaxation of the prohibition in the Turkish legislation against expression in different identities and languages.⁴

In 2006, "Who Are We? A Social Structure Survey" was carried out by KONDA for the daily Milliyet. The results of using mother tongue-daily language:⁵

[3] Tunçel, Türkiye'de İsmi Değiştirilen Köyler, 28-29

[4] V. Coşkun, Ş. Derince, N. Uçarlar, Dil Yarası (Disa Raporu 2010), s.33-35

[5] <http://www.konda.com.tr/tr/raporlar.p>

	Mother Tongue	Whose Mother Tongue is the language	Whose Daily Language is the language
1	Turkish	84,54	87,46
2	Kurdish	11,97	9,76
3	Zaza	1,01	0,81
4	Arabic	1,38	1,05
5	Armenian	0,07	0,02
6	Romaic	0,06	0,04
7	Hebrew/Ladino	0,01	0,00
8	Balkan	0,23	0,13
9	Caucasian	0,07	0,03
10	Laz	0,12	0,07
11	Circassian	0,11	0,08
12	Turkic languages	0,28	0,34
13	Coptic	0,01	0,00
14	Western Europe	0,03	0,03
15	Other	0,12	0,17
	Total	100,00	100,00

Based on the above statistical information, it is obvious that the recent regulatory changes are positive in the short-term and unsatisfactory in the long-term.

The legal changes on “language” in the recent years;

◆ The law no. 2932 which classified Kurdish as a “prohibited language” was removed by Turkey. In 2001, the phrase "language prohibited by law" in the 26th and 28th articles of the Turkish constitution was also removed.

◆ The expression "forbidden language" was removed from the second Press Law Compliance Package on the 9th of April 2002.

◆ Freedom of radio and TV broadcasting in different languages was granted with the third Compliance Package of 3rd August 2002.

◆ Broadcasting in the different traditional languages and dialects used by Turkish citizens was allowed. The 2923 article of Foreign Language Education and Teaching was amended to enable the organisation of special courses for the teaching of these languages and dialects.

◆ Radio and television broadcasts in different languages and dialects acquired legal protection on the 19th of July, 2003. (Broadcast times were extremely limited and programs teaching language or targeting children were banned. Furthermore, this legal regulation included deterrent bureaucratic barriers such as simultaneous interpretation for broadcast organizations or daily reporting.)

◆ In June 2004, TRT began broadcasting television and radio programs in Bosnian, Circassian, Arabic, Kurmanji and Zazaki languages.

◆ From the 1st of January 2009, TRT-6 was on air for 24 hours in Kurdish. (However, children's programmes are still not allowed on TRT-6)

◆ In June 2009, the Ministry of Justice altered the regulations of Criminal Enforcement of Penal Institutions Management. Prisoners and convicts could talk on the phone in Kurdish.

◆ In April 2010, the 58th article of the Election Law was changed allowing the use of languages other than Turkish broadcast on radio or TV and in election propaganda.

Kurdish Language could be used thereafter. (However, the prohibition in Political Parties Law, at the article of 81/c is still in effect.)

Despite all the efforts to improve the situation, the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey is a crucial obstacle to "Mother Tongue Education". It not only hinders the discussion of the issue academically but also the development of applicable models.

The current situation in Turkey calls for tangible steps for a consistent peace environment. Language and education policy reform can accelerate the process. The experience of countries which have National / International literature and multi-identity / multi-lingual structure can shed light on improvement efforts.

It is hard to think that Turkey can solve its historical / cultural / political problems solely by constitutional amendments. The solution lies with the Sunni majority central to the Turkish society and especially their identity plan. A revision of their perception of the “other” and confrontation of their own prejudices are called for.

their own Educational Institutions” results in limitations in these areas.

*Turkey is not party to the **Council of Europe Conventions** about mother tongue instruction. The Constitution clearly states that Turkish is the language of the Republic of Turkey and “Turkish citizens cannot be instructed in any language other than Turkish as their mother tongue at institutions of education and training”. In short this means that Turkish is the mother tongue of all citizens living in Turkey apart from the ones defined by the Lausanne Peace Treaty and that no other mother tongue instruction is permitted. This prohibits the formation of education facilities for the minorities in their mother tongues.*

The Private Education Institutions Law regulating the framework for opening new schools should also be looked into. Only the specified Greek, Armenian and Jewish minorities are permitted to establish schools.

The Law on Education in and Instruction of Foreign Language and Special Education Institutions Law allow the establishment of institutions to teach different languages and dialects used by Turkish citizens in their daily lives. The Ministry of National Education authorises new institutions, prepares training programs and supervises all institutions. Certain lessons can only be taught in Turkish: History of the Revolution of the Republic of Turkey and Kemalism, Turkish Language and Literature, History, Geography, Social Studies and Religious Culture and Moral Studies. The Cabinet decides which foreign languages are to be taught in Turkey. Ministry of National Education controls the teaching of foreign languages at primary and secondary schools and non-formal education institutions. YÖK (Institution of Higher Education) is the authority on foreign language instruction at higher education institutions.

** Information on International Legislation:*

Turkey complies with international human rights treaties on language and education with some reservations. Turkey’s reservation on the article on protection of minority rights in the treaty of Lausanne limits the minorities only to those mentioned in the treaty. These groups are defined only as non-Muslims.

*Turkey is a member of the **UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**. A partial reservation on the article on “Freedoms of Individuals and Organizations to establish and manage*

Growing Up in Turkey: Education in the Mother Tongue”

Meeting minutes: The second of the "Growing up in Turkey” meetings organised by the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly was devoted to education in the mother tongue.
December 8th, 2012,
hCa, Istanbul

After a brief presentation and introduction by Ferhat Kentel, the moderator of the meeting, the participants shared ideas and suggestions. Discussion topics were determined:

Turkey is a country where the nation state and the society were created by decree and with considerable coercion. Mother tongues are neglected, marginalised and even prohibited. The 1982 Constitution, strangely enough, mentions “languages prohibited by law”. We are talking about a country where tens of thousands of villages have been renamed. In addition to all of this, the 90s have had some milestones. Firstly, whether you like it or not, there are the problems revealed by the Kurdish movement. The mother tongue issue draws attention to other peoples’ rights and languages in Turkey. Circassian identity and Circassian language education recently become an issue. Although a bit weaker, there is demand for Georgian and a miniscule one for Arabic.

These voices falling on deaf ears at the official level are growing louder and stronger. TRT6 started broadcasting exclusively in Kurdish and a number of language prohibitions have been removed. Even these positive moves have some sort of peculiarity. Broadcasting in Kurdish is allowed but educational programs for children are not. Teaching of another language is prohibited on all TV channels.

Broadcasting in other languages is just lip service. If education in the mother tongue does not become reality, these languages will disappear in the long term. There was a remarkable result in our study on the Armenians; many parents did not want to send their children to Armenian schools thinking “What’s the point?” This negative attitude has a prohibitive influence on the users of the language. TESEV’s research on the constitution included some questions such as “official language, native language and local authorities”. To me, the Turkish society is like a pendulum. On the one hand there is this incredibly statist, inhibited and fearful society craving security, terrified of insecurity. The Kurdish issue is a major insecurity issue. On the other hand, the same society wants to be free and to protect its cultural

identity, community and its values. Research results tell us about those who prefer to have Kurdish, Arabic, Circassian or Albanian on ID cards. 50% on the other hand don't want anything, including Turkish. About 80% have very strict views on Turkish being the official language and others being banned, whereas about 50% finds all these discussions normal. The Turkish society does contradict itself. The mere mention of education in the mother tongue implies Kurdish, whose terrorist connotations create apprehension.

Kurdish people make up 18% of the population. Although some segments of the non-Kurdish population do accept the use of languages other than Turkish, the rate falls dramatically when education in the mother tongue is mentioned. 76% of the population say that Turkish is the only mother tongue in education. In other words, almost 30% of the population is happy with education in other languages.

Over 30% approves of multilingual services in local government. They also agree that these languages should be picked locally. Issues which radicalise and polarise people also raise fear. These problems are not endemic to the Kurdish context, they belong to us all. On this note, let's start the debate.

We could also have a debate about interculturalism. Everyone can learn everyone else's language. Interlocking is suggested as opposed to an imposed socialisation.

We should also start talking about "multiculturalism". This concept was discussed in Europe after the 60s and 70s. Each identity self-governs, learns its own mother tongue along with the official language of the country.

Firstly, I am grateful to the organisers of this meeting. Discussion of these issues is important to people who were oppressed forced to assimilate because of their languages. Once the debate has wider participation, changes to the law will follow.

I want to talk about elective subjects at schools. The Federation of Caucasian Associations have worked long and hard on this issue. We wanted to do the Ministry of National Education's job and publish books. Our own people were the first to object questioning the usefulness of learning Circassian. The oppressive experiences of the past caused some people to react nervously "What do you think you are doing?" Some parents were also worried if their children would get a police record because of these electives. In the end, demand was well below our expectations.

The groups feeling oppressed will breathe a sigh of relief if the debates become more widespread and frequent. Let's have a look at the historical course of our mother tongue and culture. Girls and boys had been studying Latin together at the Committee of Circassian Union and Aid which was established in 1908 and dissolved in 1923 based on the Treaty of Lausanne. The Circassian language was prohibited on the basis of the Law on Unification of Education the same year (1923 to 1950). We were also forced to change our surnames. So, "how can we protect our mother tongue?" The electives offered by the government are a bit of a joke. There should be alternative solutions to keep our language and culture alive. There is always the need for pressure to change the laws but this issue should be addressed with academic, political and social support.

The concepts need clarification. Is it “mother tongue instruction” or “education in the mother tongue”? As far as I know there is mother tongue instruction in Sweden. You are free to learn your own language but education in the mother tongue is a totally different kettle of fish.

The Federation of Caucasian Associations has over 40 members. It does not represent all Circassians. What is the general tendency of your members and their communities? Yes, there is the fear of being blacklisted but what are your impressions? What are the demands regarding the mother tongue? Is it to learn the mother tongue or to be educated in the mother tongue as Kurdish people want? How many people chose Circassian as an elective? Could you please answer this question?

Reply to the question: In Düzce, Circassian was offered as an elective at two schools but finding ten students from six schools proved to be impossible. Every village used to have a school, but these days 7-8 villages are combined for education. Finding 10 students for the 5th grade was a challenge. Thousands of people live here but we still couldn't get 10 students. There is a village called “Panlı”, where we had 8 applicants for the elective offered so the President of our Association in Antalya went over and said he would not leave until he found two more. He begged a shepherd family to let their children join the classes. These are the types of problems we face. If I am not mistaken, the number of electives went up to 30 from 22. Unfortunately families do not believe these lessons have any relevance for their children's daily and future lives so they simply ignore them. Even those affiliated with the Association (around 2-3,000 people) had trouble explaining things to their own families. There are other problems too. While some of our friends were giving out leaflets on

electives in Taksim Square, they saw a counter-leaflet, putting elective courses down and seeing them as an insult to the Turkish language. Going back to your first question, we were unable to convince people that the public discussion of these issues would not cause them any harm. Practices are arbitrary; there was a high school principal who just would not accept any applications for electives. These are not issues we can fight alone. As I mentioned before, a more extensive discussion will give people more confidence.

Question on the subject:

How many people applied to elective courses in that high school you mentioned?

Answer:

There is only one person who said the principal rejected him. Putting a finger on what exactly happened was very tricky since getting the names of applicants and those who were rejected was impossible.

Question:

So you applied for an elective and the principal rejected your application, right?

Answer:

Yes, a student applied, the principal said “I do not accept this” and rejected the application. So no one else applied for that elective. In practice, the principals and the teachers tell applicants that they can't find a teacher for that elective and the student should apply for the Koran Studies course instead. The electives issue is very problematic indeed.

At a meeting last year, a Bosnian friend said that they did not demand education in their mother tongue but also mentioned that they organized Bosnian Language courses in Pendik. The official “No way” attitude affects people.

Question:

Does your federation fund programmes?

Answer:

The Association offers classes on two different dialects four times a week. We fund these ourselves and of course there is demand. We started a three year project on teacher training, curriculum preparation and use of technology. Donations are very hard to get unfortunately. This is where the state should come in.

I have an example. We have an elderly aunt whose father used to be the director of the land registry. Her father saved many Armenians during the massacres by enrolling them on the birth register of some local families. We asked our aunt to tell us the story and she did so, in great detail. She is 96 or 98 years-old, and has an impeccable memory. We took along a reporter to record her story in our newspaper. She would not say a word. I was bewildered and asked her why. Her daughter later told me that she was concerned for my safety. She remembered us being in trouble earlier. Her own daughter was killed on 12th of March (the coup of 1971 TN) so she does not want any of these on record because she is worried about us, not herself. It is hard for people to get over the past on issues to do with language and the mother tongue. We could call ourselves a "traumatised society".

I come from Dersim, where the situation is similar. When we were kids, mum and dad would talk about the massacre of 1938. We were curious. When we asked them what happened in 1938, they would get angry and tell us that nothing happened and to mind our own business. Up until the 1980s, we overheard stuff; we knew stuff but could not join the dots. It

all got clearer later. I speak Zazaki but still couldn't figure things out since mum and dad talked in code.

I recently bumped into a Laz friend of mine and asked him if he had heard of the Laz magazine called "Tambura". He said he had no idea. I offered him my copy. He was a bit irritated. A few days later, I saw his mother in the lift; she gave me a hug and asked me where I got the magazine. There certainly is apprehension but at the end of the day people cannot be totally indifferent to something close to their identity.

Assimilation and genocide are issues in many parts of the world but I do not know how many countries have language prohibition at this day and age. The French had it in the 17th century on their way to becoming a nation-state.

In addition:

It was the same in Italy in the 20th century up until the 1960s.

Language prohibition is not common at all, especially at the local level. It is not the same as assimilation. Using one's own language is a bit of an existential issue for people, isn't it? It is weird to think that other people will be offended or diminished when a person speaks their mother tongue. The majority fears for its social values, language, religion and culture when other mother tongues are used. We have to make an effort to change this. Claiming a right does not detract from someone else's rights. We have to get this message across.

Recently a friend of mine said, "It is not as if I am asking for a new language, I just want mine back."

Language is existential, it's not a right. If humans are social beings, then language is at the core of their society. I don't see much room for debate here. I find living in the mother tongue more meaningful than education in the mother tongue. Language should be present in every single area of life. The Kurdish issue, peace and resolution were covered at the international conference organised by the House of Peace two years ago. Experiences of different countries were discussed. Many countries are multilingual. We already know about Spain, the United Kingdom, and Ireland. Vietnam, Mozambique and other Central African countries were also mentioned at the conference. There are some countries which have 12 to 16 languages in daily life and education because their social structure is based on multiculturalism.

I recently had a meeting with İhsan Eliaçık on hunger strikes. He told me that he put on the TRT6 (Kurdish) channel at a coffeehouse in Kayseri to gauge people's reactions. An elderly man asked him what language it was. İhsan Eliaçık replied "It's a public channel TRT6 broadcasting in Kurdish." The elderly man, taken aback, asked "How come? Is Kurdish even a language?" In one of Ali Püsküllüoğlu's dictionaries, it is said that "The Kurdish language spoken in Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq is a creole language concocted from Turkish, Arabic and Persian." The entry on Kurds describes them as a "community who lives in this-and-that country." I checked the Laz entry which went "A community of the Caucasus who live in the Black Sea region". These definitions speak volumes.

I also have a few words on Zazaki. Up to the 90s, I did not know the word "Zaza". Some tribes of the Palu district of Elazığ – near Dersim- were called Zaza. After the 90s, I started coming across Zazaki and the Zaza identity. Our language was always called Kirmanjki but now Zazaki is

a more popular name for it. I am not sure if this was a deliberate step for separation from the Kurdish struggle.

The word of Zaza is supposedly derived from "zeze". The legend goes that they were labelled as such by their neighbours and eventually the name stuck. However, the Zaza call their languages Dimilki and Kirmanjki.

Can Kurmanji and Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speakers understand one another?

If people have a good command of one of these languages and have a scientific approach, they can see the connection. For example, there are two subjects in Zazaki. The past tense of transitive verbs is very similar to French. Kurmanji has the same thing. There are many similarities indicative of the same origin. Even some Kurdish people do not call themselves Kurdish anymore; they prefer Kurmanji. I think Zazaki is deliberately imposed. The origin of the word Zaza can be traced back to a powerful tribe which have been living in Palu for over 300 years. Of course this is a hypothesis. Another one argues that people called them Zaza to emphasize their superior fertility.

Kurmanji has eight dialects. They can be a bit tricky when you don't know them well, but you can work out the written form with some effort. My mother's language is one of a kind. She had to live in the West so she could not learn Turkish properly and she produced a new language. This is how I figured out how fast language could respond to change and circumstances. For example, if my mother wants me to shut the door she says "Sweetheart can you shut the door" (ciğeram kapı kapanke") the normal version "çever cade" is transformed.

The BDP's education in the mother tongue policy seems to exclude native language instruction. What is their policy on Zazaki? As you mentioned before even Kirmanjki is a rich language in terms of dialects, quite a few regions seem to have their own versions.

In response to the question: There was only partial awareness until recently. The perception that Kurmanji is the main language and Zazaki is one of its dialects is not supported anymore. Although less people speak Kirmanjki, it is gradually finding its spot in the Kurdish media. First thing you need is demand for a competent supply of well written, high quality research. Kurmanji is starting to get this sort of attention. The BDP's perspective is one of equality "both are Kurdish languages and both should be preserved".

What are the demands of the Kirmanjki speakers of Bingöl regarding their dialects? I have a feeling that a child who speaks Kirmanjki (Zazaki) at home will have a problem with the Kurmanji taught at school very similar to a Kurdish child's struggle with Turkish.

Response:

There are people working on this in Dersim and Bingöl but the party does not handle the issue directly. A working group called "Vate" does serious studies on the language. I can tell you that the Kurdish political movement did not deal with this issue in the past. Their view was that there is Kirmanjki and some other dialects. So the general attitude was to handle one and that the other would fall into place. The current approach treats both languages equally. Education in the mother tongue in both is supported as is the livelihood of both.

The political activities of the BDP and the Kurdish movement seem to target building of a cultural identity against cultural genocide. All these dialects are local and oral. The extent of standardisation is a crucial part of any language debate.

At a conference in Diyarbakır, the emphasis was on how all these local dialects – -languages of the street, home, school- can be incorporated into education rather than how they can be standardised.

Lack of contact between the standardized language and everyday language is an issue in waiting. Language debates predict that the incorporation of especially local dialects into education will enrich and improve the language.

The emphasis on "local" is politically crucial too. Theoreticians working on the Kurdish language agree that "As long as language is not standardized, we cannot talk about education, because it is not possible to incorporate the intricacies of every regional dialect into the language." There is an ongoing discussion on the origins of Zazaki and Kurmanji. Are they the same or different?

Kurmanji's Kurdish emphasis starts with the language and ends up in ethnicity. There is serious self-criticism within the Kurdish movement; speaking Turkish exclusively for a while has been criticised. Most Kurdish studies are on children.

In fact, there is a problem. It is said that, Kurmanji has 400 different versions in 400 different villages. What is the solution? A common highly standardised language? This standardisation should also allow for the originality of all the local languages. The key word here is fluidity, not protection.

The solution will emerge from the classroom. It does not matter how standardised your textbook is as long as all communication is in the local languages.

- Very much like it is in Turkish, where the Istanbul dialect reigns supreme.

Once a friend of mine a linguist, said "TDK is the most harmful institution to the Turkish Language". It does kill the language. Let us think of Yaşar Kemal, the language feeding his novels is all local. On September 12th (during the coup of 1980 TN) when we were exiled to Ankara, we had an accent we tried hard to get rid of. In hindsight, it was great. An accent is life itself. No one has to have the Istanbul accent.

Life in the mother tongue is vital. We could discuss the issue through Marx's theory of alienation. The workers are alienated from their friends and everybody at the factory. They are also alienated from their origins, their villages and accents within the modern capitalist lifestyle and national identity. We have to reverse this process of alienation. How are we to find authenticity after all this time in the course of modernity? A complete reversal is out of question but we can break the alienation.

The demand for the mother tongue is in fact a stop sign for isolated lifestyles. Maybe the emphasis on life in the mother tongue is the way out of alienation. I have a serious issue with standardization. Why should the Istanbul dialect be superior to others?

It is not just a matter of language either. Think of Selim Sırrı Tarcan;

they standardised all the folk dances. They were all renamed after cities and were then known as Artvin, Tunceli and Diyarbakır. This is where standardisation ends up.

I believe that the debate on living in the mother tongue should not be limited to a struggle for rights. The political component cannot be undermined. We have to consider Arabic, Circassian, Laz and all the other languages within this framework.

We should also bear in mind that the legal achievements on the mother tongue arena belong to the people who persevered in the political battle and paid the price.

Looking at where Kurdish is spoken will give us many clues as to how the government destroys people's ways of being and how it incorporates this into politics. The Kurdish demand for living and being educated in the mother tongue does not have a very long history. The recent presentation of DISA's report at Boğaziçi University pointed out the differences between the questions asked by the Turkish and Kurdish people. Most of the Kurds said "How do we talk about Kurdish without mentioning Kurdistan?" or "How do we talk about language without discussing politics?". The emphasis placed on the government, state violence and sovereignty by the Kurds was particularly striking.

We should avoid establishing a hierarchy between languages because languages do not have a problem with each other. We cannot separate language from politics and violence.-Besides being a basic human right-, language in itself is a political subject. This is what the Kurds are emphasizing. This is more of a form of political recognition, rather than socialisation. If you walk around in Van, Diyarbakır, Hakkari, Muş, you

will see multilingual leaflets on local government boards. For example, the Newruz Festival is promoted in Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian, Zaza and English in Diyarbakır.

The Kurdish movement should of course be considered when talking about Kurdish. We are talking about a movement where everyday life is entirely perceived through violence and political language, where recognition is still an issue and where demands are eventually turning into a fight for autonomy. From this perspective, how do we match the demands of the Kurdish language / struggle with the Caucasian and the Laz? How can we put a problem where everything has political undertones in the same basket as another one based on basic human rights and universal values?

Among the many groups working on languages and cultures in Turkey, the Kurdish movement is powerful in its own right and geographically prevalent. Is it right to talk about all the languages other than Turkish collectively? Where one is about rights and the solution lies in the field of positive law, the other is an issue of politics and political recognition.

The debate on the mother tongue issue in Turkey is taking place because of the Kurdish movement. On the same token, the Circassians involvement in the debate could create a more relaxed atmosphere for the discussions of education in the mother tongue. When the entire focus is on a single language, the discussion can be tagged as "separatist". If debates can be expanded to cover all the languages, we might end up saying "there is a constitutional problem in Turkey".

Minorities other than the Kurds do have a desire to study in their own language and although people believe it would be

conducive to join forces I cannot see any signs of solidarity. I mean, nobody wants to be Kurdish because they don't want to get in trouble. The struggle for existence and recognition is a scary road for the onlookers. How can we get over this? I have serious reservations on the issue.

On the other hand, I do not know if it is right to establish a hierarchy between languages both in moral and political terms. Is not there any difference between the demands of groups for the use of their mother tongues in their daily lives? Kurds want to spread their language to every aspect of life; it is not just about schools. They want Kurdish in the local government, councils, hospitals and in all their social interactions. Considering the basic arguments of the struggle, I am not sure if the same demand is voiced for example by the Circassians.

Many people are worried that if they support the Kurdish struggle, they will face the same oppression. Of course, it would not be quite right to put the demands of the Caucasian and Kurdish People in the same basket, but they are both movements struggling for rights against the same authority.

If I cannot speak my language, I cannot live my culture either. If we cannot speak in our own language - some of us already have this problem and it can happen to anyone tomorrow - we have to live in the culture of the dominant language.

Ultimately, we are talking about something political. The political history of the Kurdish movement was effective on the struggle for the "right to the mother tongue". On the 68th day of the hunger strike, people were ready to die for the right to education and defence in the mother tongue. We have Kurdish

broadcasts on public channels every other day, but also people in Kadıkoy shouting slogans "Mother tongue is a right, you cannot take it away" for two or three hours every day. We simultaneously live the extremes.

A self-criticism within the context of the Kurdish movement reveals a process of unification and nation building. TVs, Roj TV broadcasts have been pushing a single dialect forward for quite a while and now it has become the national language. After the 2000s the dominant tendency was to support every language without standardisation. If there are eight villages and eight different dialects, life and education in each and every one of them was encouraged. Education does ask for standardisation but the political approach within the Kurdish movement today denies any language superiority over the others.

In Diyarbakır, middle-class families strongly demanded their children to learn Kurmanji. The middle class is pragmatic. If the desired democratic autonomy provides a non- hierarchical survival framework for all the mother tongues (in life and education) in Turkey, that would be a great reference point. The democratic opening needs a clearer definition.

The Democratic Society Congress has a linguistic commission with several projects. These studies should be expanded to include the cities in the Western part of the country. I am not only referring to the Kurds, but to the studies covering all the other communities.

The Ministry announced that they received 20,000 applications for the electives but we all know that this does not reflect the actual numbers.

When an issue is associated with the Kurds it nearly always gets criminalised

automatically. It is not only a Kurdish issue. If the demands are legitimised, then the Circassians will not have a reason to be afraid either. Is it OK to say this?

The Kurds do not demand electives, some are against it and there was even a school boycott. When it comes to establishing a relationship with the government, there is a substantial difference between the language demands of other peoples and the Kurds. The work of The Conference of the Democratic Society is limited to the Kurds. The Laz, the Circassians and the Arabs are all struggling to make themselves visible and voice their own special requests. Will this mean new citizenship requirements? I find this very risky. The Kurdish political movement has certain forms of negotiation and certain limits. Electives would have been a major gain for the Circassian or Caucasian Societies but they are meaningless for the Kurds, they even get boycotted. How will these two movements talk to each other? What will happen, if the Kurds do not see the Circassians as political partners?

Your assessment is incorrect. We did not ask for elective subjects and they are insufficient. We see it as a contribution to the infrastructure. Our demand is for instruction of the mother tongue, not education in the mother tongue. The latter is not realistic for us due to lack of infrastructure. Our mother tongue is spoken in everyday life and used in education in the homeland, in the Caucasus.

The Kurdish movement demands education in the mother tongue, not mother tongue instruction. This is a requirement of living in the mother tongue anyway. As language overcomes the obstacles on its way, it will survive as

an organism or be reduced to a language spoken only in the home.

This is valid for so many communities living in Turkey. For example, the cohort asking for education in Arabic is big enough, but this is not the case for others. However, the situation is completely different for the Kurds. The path started by the Kurds will provide opportunities to many other communities this way or the other. Peoples do not have to face off against each other because of these demands, united they are strong.

Necmiye Alpay is persistent in underlining the distinction between “education in the mother tongue” and “education in one’s own mother tongue and mother tongue instruction” at Egitim-Sen’s (Education Union) meetings. Education in the mother tongue implies Turkish, the language of this country. We have to clarify these concepts.

Education in one’s own mother tongue implies uncertainty for some people. In fact it is not that difficult. There are models developed by DISA. They create a model for people who do not speak Kurdish at all and another one for Turkish/Kurdish bilinguals. For example, in one’s own mother tongue education in Kurdish, there are no Turkish lessons until second grade. Pre-school and first grade are exclusively in Kurdish. Other models could certainly be explored.

I just want to give an example about New York. I was there as a student and the city has a big Hispanic population. They struggled for education in their own mother tongue and it was decided that people whose mother tongue was Spanish would go to Spanish classes at school. There weren’t enough funds, teacher training was neglected. Those classes got closed down after 5-6 years since they turned into ghettos. The process

also hindered the children’s learning of English.

Pedagogically speaking kids can learn three languages at the same time. Models can be built for this. The first priority should be the fostering of a democratic, peaceful mentality. Sufficient resources are required for implementing the models in daily life.

Boğaziçi University and the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly ran the “Teachers as actors in the peace process” project where we interviewed teachers. Let me pass on a couple of anecdotes. A young female class teacher in Istanbul said she did not witness a Turkish-Kurdish distinction in her class. She also added that she treated everyone equally. In the middle of the conversation she remembered her Kurdish student Barış (the meaning of his name is peace in Turkish). His classmates made up a riddle for him “TRT ŞEŞ (the Kurdish channel) freebee for Barış ” -TRT ŞEŞ Barış’a beleş-. All of a sudden, the penny dropped for the teacher. These are the nuances of discrimination in class.

We had meetings with teachers in Muş and Van for the same project. Both Turkish and Kurdish teachers have had enough. They wonder what the children have been going through, what the contradictions in their lives are and what the solution is.

People were prepared to die in this country for the right of education in one’s own mother tongue. Such a hunger strike is unprecedented but the jury is still out on the granting of the right. The politics and solutions we witness in the Eastern part of Turkey don’t reflect on the rest of the country.

How can Turkey turn into a bilingual/multilingual democratic country? How can we turn the education system around? The language issue has to be tackled

within the Kurdish problem and the democratisation of Turkey.

Turkish is the dominant language of the nation and a bit of a big brother. It identifies itself as the continuous distributor of rights in the Constitution. Maybe we need to give the following message: “You are not a big brother or a father of any language. There is no difference between you and the others.” The majority of the population has lived through some sort of alienation. For example, I come from Thrace, and I have lost a lot. I used to have a place, I have an accent, a memory, my migrant’s story. Why should everyone have a single story geographically or historically? Kurds, Arabs, Armenians, Greeks have been here for thousands of years. Everyone should be entitled to their own memory and history. I cannot emphasize this enough.

We should seriously examine our description of language functionality. There is the general approach of how useful language is. If a language other than the mother tongue is to be learnt, there is demand for English or French. We should discuss what we mean by how useful a language is.

There are Armenian and Greek schools in Turkey which provide education in other mother tongues. These are bilingual schools with English classes. At the Jewish schools, education is in Turkish and English with Hebrew classes 2-3 hours per week. Hebrew classes start at kindergarten and continue all the way. Spanish is a second language and the children are exposed to all these languages. We can study the issues faced to get an idea on mother tongue education. In these communities only half of school age children have the chance to

go to minority schools. The rest prefers mainly private and other schools. These are small and conservative communities, even mixed marriages are scorned. But they do send their children to different schools. Families are sensitive to the correspondence of languages to social and political life.

The Minority Rights Group issued a report and we went to lobby The Board of Studies. The Vice President of the Board told me that he was a fluent Arabic speaker and knew of Kurmanji. He believed education in Kurmanji was not possible because the language did not exist. He also thought the children schooled in Kurdish languages would be disadvantaged compared to those in Turkish schools. If this approach is popular at the government level as well, it is only natural that people are influenced by it. We have to shift this atmosphere to embark on multilingual education.

Let’s have a look at school children in downtown Diyarbakir. The children studying Kurmanji or Turkish at school start the day saying “Happy is he who says ‘I am a Turk’”, and they are being taught about Ataturk and Turkish nationalism all day long. There is not a mere mention of their own culture and history, this is also the case at minority schools. This leads to a huge gap.

At minority schools, children go from kindergarten to high school without learning a single thing about their own history. This is the main issue for the communities who have expectations in mother tongue education.

A hierarchy among languages was mentioned. The Kurdish demands are political. Subscribing to a hierarchy among languages, saying they are not equal is not right. Some demands are similar and some are different but they are side by side.

In 2009, while the Minority Rights Group was writing their report, we had meetings with the Circassians, the Laz, the Assyrians, and the Kurds. We also talked to the principals of the minority schools. When we asked what the communities other than the Kurds demanded, they reacted “how many are they anyway?” and criticized us for putting everyone in the same basket. There are of course differences but if an advocacy group is representing a population of up to 100, their demands should be represented like the demands of 10 million people. Demands are different but rights are equal because these communities are equal.

Kurds demand education in the mother tongue, mother tongue instruction is entirely omitted. I am not sure if it is right to generalize it to this extent. Calling it the demand of Kurdish politics, is a more accurate description. It is not right for me to say, “This is the demand of all Kurdish people”.

DISA have developed models for education in the mother tongue. There are many challenges from the Kurdish perspective. Kurds are an overcrowded community. There are places of population density but they live all over Turkey. For example if 10 or 15 Kurdish families demand education in the mother tongue in a neighbourhood of Yalova, organising an elective might be a problem anywhere in the world, even in the most civilised of countries.

Some Kurdish families want their children go to a school providing education in Turkish and English but also teaching Kurdish. How come this demand is never acknowledged? Why is the “mother tongue instruction” option left out of the discussion? Is there a political motive behind it?

It is very important to hear what academics and experts such as the

representatives of Sabancı University Education Reform Initiative have to say. It is not the BDP, but these institutions which will popularise the information. A model based on a bigger number of research and reports will contribute to a healthier model.

We have demands at different levels which need to be correlated before presentation. The 10 Kurds in Yalova should be able to take elective classes in Kurdish and education in the mother tongue should be possible in Diyarbakir. Circassian should be an elective as well. Our main concern is their availability at the same time.

Of course, we would not have any objections to this. What matters to Kurds is their relationship with the government, how you imagine it, where you place it. There are only 21,000 applications for electives which indicate low demand. The Kurds, already in a political movement are powerful enough to determine politics, but we cannot isolate the issue from macro-politics. The democratic autonomy discourse has formulations on language and education, with emphasis on “self-sufficiency”. Councils, associations and NGOs feel they have the power to turn themselves into an alternative without help from the government. They oppose the limited electives offered by the government because it doesn’t work with their own agenda. Things would have been different if there were 300,000 applications for the electives. Such a low demand implies nothing but a political message.

If we look at the Kurdish movement from another perspective, there is data showing it turning into class conflict and politics of the poor.

In Diyarbakır, Mersin, Muş, Mardin, Van,

when you talk to people about language there seems to be a consensus with the AKP's line: "it is a right; everyone speaks his/her own language". However, politicians such as Galip Ensarioğlu accentuate conscience and culture to depoliticise the issue. This process increased support for the Kurdish movement from the lower income classes.

Some people participate in street fights, boycott education and engage in guerrilla warfare to support the Kurdish movement. It is their only option for freedom. The 20,000 thousand applicants for the elective courses give us clues about class distinction and indicate the size of the upper middle class in the Kurdish society. Lower classes also have ways of voicing their demands directly in the Kurdish movement.

There were 17,000 applicants from Diyarbakir. Most of the children come from families supporting the BDP. 21,000, the total number of applications speaks volumes.

Government services do not mean much if not accompanied by political recognition.

The presentation of the elective courses as a great favour is rather problematic. The approach of school principals is crucial too. They just say "Choose this one, not the other." The principal refuses what the government accepts. This is a real problem. On the other hand, there is a boycott call organised by the BDP. New demands would appear if the climate was a bit different and people were not afraid of paying the price. The Assyrians in Midyat might be questioning why they don't have bilingual education. Over time, demands could multiply, decrease or differ.

For example, when TRT 6 (ŞEŞ) first began broadcasting the Bosniacs reacted by saying "We do not want such a thing, we love our motherland and nation" in İnegöl. The government successfully fed this into politics. Many groups will feel freer to demand their mother tongues once the psychological barriers are removed. At the end of the day, it is something that belongs to them.

I am a Kurdish student working on Kurds and education. I think people believe that nothing good will come out of the government. Rights granted are distrusted. They are meaningless. If all of these happened in the 1990s they would have been significant. The Kurdish bar is really high up now. On the same token, their trust in the state and hope to live together have diminished significantly.

We talked to 16 teachers in Mersin. They all said "Kurds do not want to live with the Turks". These are Turkish, Kurdish and Arabic teachers. The slightest altercation ends up in the Turkish-Kurdish division so people tend to socialise separately. Some of the teachers said, "Kurds do not have any desire to live together; they have their reasons and the power for that. They never resolve any issues within the legal system. Their community has laws of its own. The government disappears completely and Mersin is not the only case. It became the norm all over Kurdistan and wherever there is a strong Kurdish population. In Mersin, there is "de facto" democratic autonomy because the government is non-existent. Shopkeepers attack police stations, children fight with the police and the police are kept away from the Kurdish neighbourhoods'.

This is a dual structure in political terms. To make a long story short, we can call it "dual power". This is not a formula for the whole country but for those communities strong enough to establish their own budget and tax systems.

I work for the Centre for Children and Youth within the Mersin Mediterranean Council. As a doctor, looking into the neurological, psychological side of the issue, I can see the confusion resulting from the way things are discussed. Last week I had a meeting with a student about his lessons. He left Pozantı and took two years off school. He then started high school. His English is bad and he gets by in the other subjects. When I tried to lift his spirits up by saying "you are bilingual, you can easily learn a third one. Western languages are similar to Kurdish", he told me that all languages derived from Kurdish. He also added that there is no such thing as the Turkish language and elaborated on a version of the Sun Language Theory. (TN A thesis developed in the 1930s claiming that all languages can be traced back to Turkic roots) He has a strong reaction against everything coming from the government including English lessons.

The functionality of language encompasses the human spirit, mind and integrity. A child from Hakkari who got into the Medical School said, "If the questions were in Kurdish, I would have done better." He was a shepherd boy and everyone wondered how he managed to get into the Medical School. We have to focus on the children here. They are the ones who are oppressed and neglected by policies.

Children are constantly developing. Their brains, speech centres and related faculties are growing non-stop.

If they perceive their mother tongue as illegal during the first years of their lives this will have an adverse effect on their development. As language loses its meaning and turns into a political demand, the world of meanings becomes vacuous. Many do not have a good command of Kurdish. They don't know its idioms, can't sing its beautiful songs and find this painful. We are talking about people who have been living in a state of war for many years. This is a very problematic geography where physical integrity is extremely undermined. For example, will psychological tests, IQ test be in Kurdish? Meaningful results can only be achieved only if they are in the mother tongue.

Egitim-Sen (Education Union) recently published "Social Justice through Multilingual Education". It is a resource about how these issues are discussed and resolved in the World.

Another issue attracted our attention while we were working with the teachers. The students did not accept the teachers if they did not speak Kurdish. The teachers had to try really hard to be accepted. On the other hand, Kurdish speaking teachers had their work cut out for them as well, because they struggled with the Turkish curriculum. The teacher training project should be taken seriously. There are so many teachers who have similar experiences to the teacher in the movie "İki Dil Bir Bavul"(Two Languages in a Suitcase). Teachers who do not speak Kurdish should not teach here. Like in Wales. We should support efforts of democratization in the education system and develop models.

The issue has a pedagogical side which needs attention. After many years in the U.S., I came back to Turkey and started

teaching at Boğazici University. In 1987 we were discussing "Mother tongue education, discrimination" at a sociology of education class. After class, a student told me he was worried I might get in trouble. We came a long way. Students no longer feel that way. We can discuss issues openly. There are so many examples in the world indicating a child can easily learn two or three languages.

Ten years ago, a friend of mine, a doctor took his mother to another doctor friend for an examination. His mother told him "Son take me to a real doctor, this one speaks Kurdish". When I visit women for training, especially elderly ladies are curious to see if I speak Kurdish or Turkish. Then they ask why I did not explain in Kurdish. The Kurdish-speaking doctor was not counted as a doctor.

When I started the school in Diyarbakır, my teacher slapped me because I mispronounced kâğıt. These

days teachers get depressed because they cannot speak Kurdish.

I have a similar story. When we came to Ankara we all had an accent. I did not get beaten up but one day in the class, my teacher made me read a text and I pronounced "vali" (governor) as "wali". The teacher spent 5 minutes correcting me. She had children the same age. Years later, we bumped into each other, just after the university entrance exam and she asked me how I went. "I got into the Marmara University, Faculty of Dentistry" I said. She looked at my face and said "hmm" because her daughter was without a spot. I remember feeling that I had evened the score. Nasty experiences in childhood leave deep scars.

The mother tongue issue hinders the transfer of oral culture by women. Elderly women cannot communicate with their grandchildren. Who will pay for this and how? Transfer of culture is so crucial. If I hadn't listened to my grandfather, if I didn't know about his relationship with horses I would be a different person.

Transfer of experience is significant in Mersin. The Kurdish women are at the heart of how the community reads the world. You transfer culture by talking about geography, stories, kinship relations. A woman told us "I am the school, I am the Kurdish Language". Later when we talked to her 15 year-old son he repeated the same stories as if they were his own. Many men do not speak Kurdish, and many women do not speak Turkish. It is the women who pass on the language, history and geography through the language.

Women put so much effort into the Kurdish political movement. For example, for the court case of the Union of Kurdish Communities (KCK Koma Ciwaken Kurdistan) it was women in front of Diyarbakır City Council. It cannot be undermined.

In a meeting, a Circassian woman who migrated here from Israel had said; "your anger, your emotions, your love, talk about them to your children in your own language."

Well yes, only if you speak your own language. For example, I speak Kurdish but it is not my first language. My English is better than my Kurdish so if I talk to my child in Kurdish I cannot express myself clearly. I think it is important

for mothers and fathers to express their cultures and experiences in the language they feel comfortable with. Of course, the mother is the carrier of the culture, if the mother is being assimilated, the cultural transmission will be interrupted.

As my family lives in downtown Diyarbakır, my observations are limited to Diyarbakır. I do not remember when I learnt Kurdish; I grew up bilingual. When I visit my family, firstly I remember a word in Turkish then English and eventually Kurdish. I never forget Kurdish, the words are always somewhere in my head. When I was a child, my mother used to always talk to us in Kurdish but now she does not. She tosses in quite a few Turkish words even when she speaks Kurdish. She is gradually forgetting her own mother tongue. I lived in England for a while, and then I came to Istanbul. Now, I don't have many opportunities to speak Kurdish but it is always with me. I clearly keep it as a package, whereas my mother gets to be assimilated in Diyarbakır. I find this very strange.

Language is such a natural concept but if you have to fight for it with arms or have a hunger strike, it turns into something else. Memory gaps and trauma change language.

Many cultural issues in Turkey are traumatic. Take the headscarf issue. How did the headscarf issue get top priority? When the headscarf was banned, people started marching saying "it is my honour". It is the same with Kurdish.

It is a bit like toothache, when I have it, that's all I can think of. We cannot talk about these issues as part of a whole, very much like the toothache analogy.

The debate on education should not be limited to schools. How about memory, history and geography? The immigration issue is not all done and dusted. What some people call "ghetto" in immigration jargon, I call, "Kurdistan". I use it for the Kurdish neighbourhoods in Mersin. For example, if you go to a wedding in that neighbourhood, it is the same as in Diyarbakır. Kurdish is immersed in daily life. If we take the language issue out of the schools, we will see how vital and indispensable the language is. It turns into a matter of dignity.

With the AKP, issues about religion, fundamentalism and secularism are more relaxed, but the Kurdish issue is still very radical. When things soften up a bit people will say "Actually, Kurdish is not a problem after all".

Violence in the Kurdish Issue and Reconsidering the Prospect of “Muhabbet” (*): “The Last Moments of Our Lives” or “There is Another Possibility”

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Introduction

In his review of Kazım Öz’s film *Bahoz* (‘The Storm’) on Kurdish university students in Istanbul during the stormy 1990s, Mesut Yegen says:

“If Bahoz was about Kurdish university students in today’s Istanbul, I am not sure if the film’s view would still be ‘Istanbul is... against all odds...’ It most probably wouldn’t and this in some way indicates that something awkward had happened in this country. The muhabbet that could be sustained through the stormy 1990s had somewhat faltered. Perhaps Istanbul is no longer as accommodating and the Kurdish headspace has moved on from ‘against all odds’.”

Yegen’s cogent analysis on the faltering affection of Kurds towards Istanbul/Turkey and Turks in general is undoubtedly not unilateral. The optimistic mood that prevailed in the early 2000s on the “Kurdish issue” seems to have been replaced by an “emotional break up” on both sides as frequently articulated by a multitude of actors. The Van Earthquake of October 2011 and the Roboski Massacre of December 2011 have already been recorded

as breaking points indicating how the Turkish society (everyone else but the Kurds) feels towards the Kurds. The democratization steps introduced through a series of legal amendments and regulations within Turkey’s EU membership process in the early 2000s and the expectations based on the AKP’s Kurdish initiative did paint a very positive picture at one point. How then, did we end up here? An age of catastrophes from the 1980 military coup peaked in the 90s and was followed by a silence in the early 2000s. I am now seeing this as another episode of the main story in itself and a deceitful silence before a much bigger storm. This view is more conducive to figuring out what’s happening today.

Within the modest scope of this article, I will try to explore the issues the Republic of Turkey (and the Turks) has with the Kurds, and not the “Kurdish issue”. To this end, I shall attempt to describe the socio-political and economic dynamics and discuss the future prospects of “muhabbet”.

Rethinking (non-)violence: When did the 90s start? Did they ever end?

In her opening statement at a recent workshop¹ on War, Memory and Gender, Cynthia Enloe questioned

(*) *Muhabbet is one of those Turkish words very hard to translate, it is conversation which has a positive connotation, so it implies love, affection or friendship.*

(1) 22-23 May 2012, Istanbul. Gender and Women Studies Forum of Sabanci University-Central European University Joint Academic Initiative.

the concept of ‘post-war’ in terms of the protracted nature of women’s experiences with an emphasis on the need to re-make chronologies of war. Enloe argues that even after the war is over on the “battlefield” the regeneration of trauma and damage lingers on particularly for women. It is always a challenge to define the end of a period and the beginning of the “post” era. Although it may look peripheral at first, Enloe’s approach is crucial in rethinking the stages of the “Kurdish issue” in Turkey. In this context, I argue that analyses which only take the recent (re) escalation of violence and different forms of state violence into account and which confine their scope to the fear of returning to the 1990s totally miss the point and fail to present the whole picture.

As Karl Marx pointed out in “On the Jewish Question”, “The formulation of a question is its solution”. Hence, as we assign periods to the Kurdish issue in Turkey, questions like “when did the 90s actually start?” and “did they ever end?” would be more helpful for a comprehensive assessment.

It is of course not possible to ignore the “uniqueness” of the 1990s. Thanks to a large cache of witness testimonies and research on this particular period, much light has been shed on the many events and incidents; the consequences of which we continue to suffer today. They covered arbitrary detentions, systematic torture, disappearance in custody, summary killings, the imposition of the village guard system, evacuation/destruction of villages, and unsolved murders. The egregiousness of state violence in the 1990s seems like fiction or rather a horror movie to the general

public; but it is very much the stark truth for those who experienced it. Bear in mind that the excessive violence rendered these events unspeakable for its victims, and we know is limited to what we are told. In their book, “Not as You Know It: Being a Child in the 90s in the Southeast (2011) Rojin Canan Akin and Funda Danisman convey the narratives of men and women who are currently approaching their forties and have experienced the violence of the 90s as children in a “blatantly obvious” style. Through reading their narratives, we not only understand what they mean by “forgiving is different to peace”, but also learn about how much the state has permeated all the intimate spaces of their lives. Yildirim Turker, in his preface to the book, asks the question “How can we live after Hazal? referring to Adorno’s famous dictum “There can be no poetry after Auschwitz.” Turker’s question holds two main concerns: the first is about the prospects of the relation between the State and Kurds in the aftermath of catastrophic events generated by the modern state apparatus and its technologies, the latter is about the future of dialogue between the Turkish society and Kurdish communities.

There is a library of political studies deliberating the central role of violence in both the formation and consolidation of modern states. (Gregory and Pred, 2007). Given the close relationship between the state and violence and to respond to Turker’s question, we must look into the period before Hazal. We have to place Hazal within a chronological and thematic continuum within the state’s relationship with the Kurds. Only then we can answer questions like “how did it all happen?” and

“What is the state’s action plan on the Kurdish issue?” Taking a step back from Hazal will take us to the infamous Diyarbakir Prison. Very much like the 1990s, Diyarbakir Prison is unique on one hand and part of the big picture on the other. Within the context of the history of the relations between the State and the Kurds, the Diyarbakir Prison experience cannot be described as a mere dismissible error, a moment of irrationality, or an isolated case of evil which became possible under the military regime following a coup. The contemporary mainstream perspectives tend to perceive Diyarbakir Prison as a finite and singular event or even as a fragment; in the same fashion they perceive the 90s.²

Victims of state violence may consider all aspects of their experiences at the Diyarbakir Prison unique, since bodily experiences of violence are different for each individual. They are registered in the memory in a multitude of ways and they are narrated differently by different witnesses. Yet, the basis of the trial of Kurds by state-inflicted violence is its continuity. A perusal of the period before Diyarbakir Prison will take us to other examples of state inflicted violence like commando operations, the Sivas Camp, Dersim, Zilan and Agri massacres, the Law on the Maintenance of Order (Takrir-i Sükun Kanunu), and the Independence Courts (İstiklal Mahkemeleri). So, the 90s actually started much earlier than the 90s and for reasons I will articulate in the following pages, they have never ended.

I hope my emphasis on continuity is not interpreted as an exclusion of changes generated by economic,

political and social dynamics at the national, regional and international levels. I am not assuming a static and linear understanding of the relationship between the State and the Kurds either. We all agree that this relationship has evolved through different stages throughout the Republic’s history. Yet, violence has always been a crucial component, even the leitmotiv. In his preface to the “Kurdish Question and the State: Policies of Discipline and Banishment 1925-1947”, edited by Tugba Yildirim, Zafer Toprak argues that the trauma of the World War and the fear of disintegration that prevailed over the Single Party Regime had caused the State to “adopt sweeping measures that grew into reckless displays of power against the subsequent Kurdish uprisings in the early years of the Republic.” He further argues that this fear was then translated into “policies of discipline and banishment.” But the policies of “discipline” and “annihilation” have been extended to other periods where the existence of Kurds was categorically denied, where “Kurdish reality” was acknowledged, and finally where “exclusive recognition”, as described by Saracoglu (2011), had become the dominant ideology. Kurds vis-à-vis the Turkish state, evolved from “potential Turks to so-called citizens” (Yegen, 2006), and today, I believe they are not counted as humans both by the state and the society.

A Retrospective Account of the State and Violence: Changes, Continuities and Social Ramifications

Although the perception of Kurds by the State and the State’s relationship with the Kurdish population have not always corresponded to social

[2] See: Şahin Fırat, B. and Mesut Fırat (2011).

perceptions and the society’s relationship with Kurds, it is clear that the former had a decisive role on the latter. The primary engine of the process is the education system, a central element of the State’s citizen cultivation project. The media, as another ideological apparatus of the State has had a crucial role in the production of perceptions and consent, sometimes at the expense of distorting reality. Hence the perceptions and feelings of a significant segment of the society are shaped by the hegemonic discourse of the State.

We should refer to “the lack of a social contract”, a constant variable since the first days of the Republic to assess the current state of affairs. My definition of this concept refers to the terms of sharing sovereignty and setting limits on it. The lack of such a contract is the defining element of the relationship between the Kurds and the State. Moreover, it is in effect, what led to the categorical denial of the existence of Kurds by the Republic and made violence a fixed element in its relationship with the Kurds. Changing forms, levels and intensities of state violence had not been limited to the Kurdish geography but became widespread across the country.

A detailed analysis of theoretical debates on violence is beyond the scope of this work but I will elaborate on several relevant definitions. I do agree with the approach that “even the very act of defining violence assumes some form of violence” and that there is a need to relate violence to things/acts that appear to be “non-violent” (Coronil & Skurski, 2006). Critical thinkers working on the close relationship between the state and violence point out that despite being

considered an agent of rationality and progress, the modern state is a structure that invokes, legitimises and normalises violence in order to establish and maintain order. Benjamin, for instance, distinguishes between violence that makes the law and violence that preserves it and highlights the inherent role of violence in the established (legal) order (1921). Žižek, on the other hand, distinguishes between subjective and objective violence. He defines subjective violence as the acts that disrupt the presumed peaceful order that are performed by identifiable perpetrators, whereas objective or systematic violence defines the inherent and invisible violence of the “peaceful and normal” order (2008). Within this perspective, violence is intrinsic to the establishment and existence of the Republic of Turkey and all other modern states. The history of suppression of Kurdish uprisings shows that violence has always been employed as the sovereign’s privilege to regulate the relationship between the state and the Kurds. These days, even at times of non-conflict, this violence with its unique forms and characteristics, determines Turkish society’s relationship with the Kurdish population. It is possible to explain this uniqueness by changes in the neoliberal form of governance and policies.

The AKP’s victory following the 2002 elections raised hopes in many segments of the society for the resolution of a set of protracted issues, including the “Kurdish issue” within a “conservative-democrat” perspective. However, as Cihan Tugal points out in his comprehensive study, *The Passive Revolution* (2010), the AKP abandoned the dissident side of political Islam

and established an order in line with nationalism and the market economy; systematically integrating itself with the old state mentality. In a relatively short term, the AKP retracted from its “social peace and brotherhood” projects, such as the “Kurdish Opening”, and started expressing determination to “eradicate the roots of terrorism”, a discourse that is reminiscent of the 1990s.

The current regime under the AKP is then marked as a period where the most “comprehensive” and “ambiguous” definition of terrorism has been applied. This situation is in exact parallel with the analyses of the “post-9/11” world. In Turkey, for instance, many groups including students demanding free education, peasants protesting against water dams, journalists, union members, academics, poets and painters were accused and charged as “terrorists” for dissent. Similarly across the globe, anyone perceived to be speaking or acting against the established order was quickly associated with terror in a climate of fear which perpetually generated enemies of the state. The state transferring its duty to provide for the fundamental needs of citizens to the market has used this neoliberal understanding of security as a primary instrument for the “Kurdish question. Violence acquired new dimensions, visibilities and perpetrators as an intrinsic component of the system even at times of non-conflict. Neoliberal globalization has given rise to multiple forms of exclusion from the labour and housing markets, social and cultural realms of interaction and politics. It has also created grinding poverty and delegated the inflicting of violence to private

citizens. All these factors have come to shape the social fabric of Turkey. Most particularly, policies based on generating fear and countless enemies together with an increase in lynching attempts resulting from the delegation of violence to the private citizens when “deemed” necessary, have led violence to diffuse into the relationship between the Kurds and the Turkish society.

As the government increasingly turned to ambiguity- a notion congruent with the neoliberal logic- in an effort to reproduce itself, practices of encouraging people to conform to predetermined norms and disciplining persons who violate laws through punishment (Foucault, 2007) were replaced by the generation of “those excluded from life”. In other words, the government which “killed” its subjects in order to re-create them the way it wanted has made way for a new form of power which constitutes itself through ambiguity and which leaves its “disposable” subjects for dead (Foucault, 2003). When the concept of the “deserving individual”, an element of the market economy is compounded with the vagueness of the notion of terror, this “deserving status” was given to those “left for dead”. Hence, market sellers, neighbours, classmates, earthquake victims, seasonal agricultural workers, construction workers, “smugglers”, voters of the BDP (i.e. Kurds of all ages and social positions) could be identified as terrorists and excluded from life. The practice of “excluding from life” was sometimes applied through lynching attempts by mobs that considered themselves as “sensitive and responsible” citizens.³ In many other occasions, state violence inflicted on Kurds was tolerated or deemed legitimate since

[3] PFor a regularly “updated” map of artist Hakan Akçura on “lynching/ lynch attempts” in Turkey between 1992-2012, see: <http://open-flux.blogspot.com/>

“Kurds as terrorists, deserved it”.

Practices of isolating people and leaving them for dead were not just literal. These practices, not necessarily physical were further extended to encompass all rights and practices. A quote from Cenk Saracoglu’s work illustrates how one aspect of the practice of “leaving someone for dead” could be grasped:

“I see Kurds in the markets. Before buying something, I ask them where they are from. If they are from Diyarbakir or Urfa or somewhere in that region, I walk away. But if the sellers are from Manisa or Akhisar, I buy with peace of mind. I do not want my money to be spent on them [Kurds]. When they [Kurds] make money, they go too far” (p.37).

This reluctance is not isolated. Konda’s research “Who Are We? Perceptions and Expectations on the Kurdish Issue” further indicates that there is a serious tendency in the Turkish society to “eradicate” Kurds from, at least, social and economic realms. The survey revealed that 57.6% of ethnic Turks said they would not marry a Kurd, while 53.5% said they did not want a Kurdish business partner and 47.4% said they did not want a Kurdish neighbour. In other words, despite the discourse of “brotherhood”, on average one in two ethnic Turks would not like to have anything to do with Kurds as spouse, kin, business partner or neighbour. In comparison, 26.4% of Kurds said they would not marry an ethnic Turk, while 24.8% said they did not want a Turkish business partner and 22.1% said that they did not want a Turkish neighbour. The difference between these rates is striking. We have to take a good hard look at ourselves,

at “brotherhood” or being “as close as a second skin” or accusations of “separatism, secessionism, and ethnic nationalism” as a response to the Kurdish struggle for recognition and rights.

Brothers and Sisters Whose Deaths Have Not Been Mourned and Breaking Points: Van and Roboski

*“As if nobody was dying,
As if those were stones falling on
the earth, or water on water.”⁴*

The State’s policy of “forsaking” its subjects instead of “aligning” Kurds in line with the dominant norms have paved the way for the dehumanization of the Kurdish population. An example of this shift is the Minister of Interior’s statement on the BDP deputies at a meeting in Diyarbakir on July 14, 2012.⁵ The Minister simply referred to BDP deputies as “18”. Ali Topuz’s criticism speaks volumes:

“When we speak Turkish (taught to the poor through reward and punishment), we do not use “numbers” for humans. We number things and animals, not humans. The Minister, maybe not explicitly, but with the help of a linguistic rule means to say : If those deputies are not “persons”, what are they?⁶

This transformation in the governing approach of the ruling party facilitated the positioning of Kurds as “non-humans” in the eyes of the Turkish society. Thus, for the first time, we were able to clearly observe the reflections of the structural and direct violence prevailing over the relationship between the state and the Kurds which impelled us to start a debate on an “emotional break up”. In her study Precarious Life: The

[4] Pablo Neruda, *Canto General*

[5] “Diyarbakır’da 18 tane zavallı milletvekili vardı”, 17 July 2012, *Radikal*. <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetayV3&ArticleID=1094435&CategoryID=78>

[6] Ali Topuz, *Adaletin İçinde Bir Zalim Oturur*, 21 July 2012, *Radikal*. <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalYazar&ArticleID=1094772&CategoryID=98>

Powers of Mourning and Life (2004), Judith Butler compares the losses in wars between Palestine and Israel as well as those in USA and Afghanistan and argues that while some losses are mourned by the whole nation, others have been neglected, even ignored. The decision over whose loss shall be mourned and whose will be ignored is primarily about who is normatively considered “human” and works as an agent to establish and promote exclusion. From this perspective, only those who lead a life worth living and whose death shall be mourned are humans. Kurdish deaths are not mourned in Turkey. In other words, they don’t count as “humans”. The disasters affecting the Kurdish population are socially legitimised and even supported. The most recent and striking examples of such dehumanisations are evident in the social, visual and print media responses to the Van Earthquake of November 23, 2011 and the Roboski Massacre of December, 29 2011.

When several waves of earthquakes hit Van, the eastern province of Turkey, a live, prime-time news bulletin informed the public as follows: “Even though it happened in Van, we are deeply saddened”. This sentence was initially interpreted as a “live broadcast blunder” and “a slip of the tongue”. However, another channel aired “Throw stones and hunt our soldiers like birds, and then ask for help. Everyone should know his place.” There is a direct overlap between Kurds and terror in the mainstream social perception. The earthquake in Van, 7.2 on the Richter scale, killed 600 people and left thousands injured and homeless. Even one week after the earthquake, the governor was hindering the city council’s (BDP) aid efforts. The limited number of tents and

other equipment were confiscated by the authorities. International agencies’ offers to send rescue teams were declined as the Government publicly announced that it “wanted to see the country’s potential”. The police attacked a group of locals who gathered before the Governor’s Office to protest shortcomings of the earthquake relief efforts. In addition, “aid boxes” full of stones and Turkish flags were sent to the victims from all over Turkey.

The following quote from an earthquake victim living in a container-city portrays how the Kurds as perceived to be “non-human” by both the state and larger segments of the society:

The second wave hit by the evening. There was a stampede. Our house is very close to the collapsed hotel. Somebody said the Minister had arrived. We thought we should visit and communicate our problems. The police were everywhere. We did not have stones in our hands. We had been frozen to death all night. I mean you could not have thrown a stone even if you wanted to. I was at the back. I heard a police officer swearing at us and then he sprayed tear gas. Would that have happened in Konya? No way. Why does he do it to us ? He does it because he simply does not consider us human. We are just provocateurs. This is the new trend. If you cry, you are considered a provocateur. If you laugh, you are a provocateur. Nothing changes if you are starving or an earthquake victim. (Express, November 2011, no. 123)

On December 29th, 2011, 35 people from the Roboski and Bujeh villages of the Uludere (Qileban) district of Şırnak province were killed in a bomb attack by the Turkish Air

Forces at the Turkish-Iraqi border.⁷ 17 of them were children. Very much like the earthquake in Van, the death of 35 people was not considered a catastrophe to be mourned by the nation. Since those killed were Kurds who were engaged in the illicit smuggling of goods, who had violated the border and who were most probably “terrorists”; they “deserved” to die; they “deserved” to be excluded from life. Mules carrying dead bodies of these young Kurdish smugglers, who neither had a life worth living nor a death worth mourning, inspired a “popular” columnist. His article started with: “A mule is an offspring of a male donkey and a female horse. The male donkey screws the female horse, and the mule is their offspring”.⁸ In Turkey, offering condolences and performing prayers for the deceased is considered as indispensable as accepting God’s greetings. The victims’ families were denied condolences. The Roboski massacre was “an operational mistake”. An official apology was not issued and the government announced that compensations will be paid as a form of redress.⁹ Those who perceived the killing of villagers from Roboski as part of the “anti-terror activities” of the State, on the other hand, publicly applauded this catastrophe.

“It is part of our anti-terrorism efforts. At last a successful one! We are already familiar with endless bombings of the mountains and the death toll was usually 5 or 10. The scale of this one is an enormous achievement.”
(duygusalwampir, 31.12.2011)
<http://www.uludagsozluk.com/k/29-aral%C4%B1k-2011-ka%C3%A7ak%C3%A7%C4%B1-pkkl%C4%B1-grubun-imhas%C4%B1/>

“It is a successful operation. Well done! In addition, smuggling is a criminal offense. Even if they were not smugglers, what were they doing at a border point in the middle of the night anyway? And finally, those were terrorists!”
(milyoner, 29.12.2011)
<http://www.uludagsozluk.com/k/29-aral%C4%B1k-2011-ka%C3%A7ak%C3%A7%C4%B1-pkkl%C4%B1-grubun-imhas%C4%B1/>

Columns, reader comments, and posts on social media on Kurds who lost their lives in the earthquake and air bombings reflect that Turkish society identifies Kurds with “terror”, “deserving”, “non-human” whose “deaths that are not worth mourning”. Recently, Muhyettin Aksan, a AKP deputy, proposed to use the verb “zapped” for members of the PKK who were killed in armed conflicts.¹⁰ Moreover, a brief glance over the social media posts and reader comments show that this proposal has already been welcomed by many.

Is it possible to make a U-turn?

The most terrifying outcome of this process is not the risk of “going back to the 90s”, but somewhere much worse. The lack of a social contract between the State and the Kurds on the definition and sharing of sovereignty made violence a basic and intrinsic element. It has now permeated all aspects of social life. The violence based relationship between the State and the Kurds is mirrored by the Turkish society. It is in the way people feel, act and speak.

Is it possible to turn things around? The dynamics of international politics, regional developments and

[7] See: Human Rights Association’s Report on the Roboski Massacre, January 2012 http://www.ihd.org.tr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2491:roboski-katliami-raporu-03-ocak-2012&catid=30:ortak-baslamalar&Itemid=80

[8] Yılmaz Özdil. Sayın Kaçakçı, 6 January 2012, *Hürriyet*. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/19614987.asp>

[9] For a record of the Parliamentary Speech delivered by BDP Deputy Gultan Kisanak, 3 January, see: 2012 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPOaFHqa2Hs>

[10] For the news, see: <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/printnews.aspx?DocID=21276012>

their actors should all be considered in a comprehensive analysis beyond the scope of this article. The following is critical to understand the social issues “Turkey and the Turkish society have with the Kurds”.

It is becoming increasingly more challenging to reverse the current state of affairs. A fresh start calls for a new understanding of power and a new political commitment, as well as a new intellectual/academic language. We must investigate the inherent and systemic nature of state violence and the ways it diffused into all aspects of social life. A pacifist policy ignoring these realities would be useless.

The continuity of violence determines the relationship between the State and Kurds. The Kurds perceive the incidents in Sirnak in 1992 as a recurrence of the events of Dersim in 1938, the 2011 Roboski massacre as a repetition of the 33 Bullets Incident of 1943, and forced displacement in the 90s as another form of the 1934 Settlement Law. The Pozanti Prison incident is reminiscent of Diyarbakir Prison. “Violence” does not have to yield “deaths”, nor does it require physical blows or bloodshed. *Politicide*¹¹ and *lingucide*¹² are forms of “violence” directly targeting the existence of Kurds. There is an ethical and political problem in expecting the Kurds to prove to the Turkish society that they have been subjected to violence. Their recognition as “humans” with rights and demands should not be linked to suffering or the number of deaths or the intensity of violence. Otherwise, *regarding the pain of others* runs the risk of becoming a highly pornographic act, the same way a non-violent approach could easily turn into an *empty signifier*.

Demanding Kurds to repeatedly reveal and narrate open secrets is another form of violence. “Tell us what you think, what you want” is a more conducive approach to dialogue. Finally, it is crucial to recognise Kurds not only as “humans”, but also as political/social players who fully enjoy the opportunities provided by language, platforms and instruments. Despite being good listeners to the victims’ stories; the “living together” discourse may still fail to recognize the capacity of the victims as independent players. In this connection, Wanbetan’s reply to a high-ranking union member who said “I no longer trust Kurds, they want education in their mother tongue, they shall separate this country” is telling for this context:

“When we were not aware of our identity, when we were your pets, when we did not mean anything for you; we were your brothers, your sisters. Now we have a language, we have an identity, and your trust is over, right? You liked us as “nobodies”, you liked our “non-existence”, but you do not like us with our rights and entitlements? No matter how hard we try, they cannot empathise with us. We were abused; we were raped in broad daylight, not you. I just do not want to talk anymore. Enough said. Hear us! As if it was us who destroyed your homes, as if it was us who forced you to eat your own excrement. But no, those people are not terrorists, that would be us. (Akin and Danisman, p.191-192)

Wanbetan’s response clearly demonstrates that once you don’t recognize your counterpart as a

[11] *The recent KCK operation must be explained as the “destruction or annihilation of a political, cultural and intellectual leading group or potential leaders of an oppressed community, nation or group” and re-evaluated as part of a state violence inflicted by the means of legal instruments.*

[12] *See: Hasanpour, 1997.*

“subject”, you run the risk of “de-humanizing” them and this is the same as outright violence. This response pinpoints the limits of “muhabbet” much better than many academic works. I think it is precisely for this reason that we must “vehemently” re-think violence.

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We are approaching the year 2015, the centenary of what is widely cited as the "Armenian Massacre" when the Ottoman Government forced Armenians of Istanbul and Anatolia to migrate with subsequent waves of events leading to genocidal proportions. Armenians around the world are expected to hold extensive memorials and it is anticipated that the efforts for the "recognition of genocide" will escalate. The Armenian state and the Armenian groups in France, USA and other countries have already embarked upon these efforts. Predictably, some Western countries will be pushing Turkey to recognize the genocide. The period leading up to 2015 will be a crucial threshold for all Armenians around the world.

The focus for all parties will eventually be Turkey and not because this is where the massacre took place. Genocide or any kind of massacre has been denied by the military and all the governments of the Turkish Republic. The majority of the Turkish public perceives the Armenian groups, especially those residing outside Turkey as enemies. Their efforts for recognition or even a simple apology is seen as part of a conspiracy carried out to the detriment of Turkey. AKP has also joined the ranks in adopting a policy line parallel to this position. As we

have moved from a policy of "zero problem with our neighbours" to a zero contact policy with Armenia - other neighbours are outside the scope of this article - the attempts for dialogue with Armenia have soured. Behind this change of policy lies AKP's ambition to protect the power it has recently consolidated. An authoritarian administrative approach has been added to these nationalist policies. The Turkish government now has strong surveillance especially over the media. The mainstream media owned by large capital can say very little criticising the AKP Government. The slightest disapproval has cost many journalists their jobs.

On the other hand, we know that AKP is pragmatic. Some token gestures could always be made to appeal to the sensitivity of the Obama administration. In an interview with a group of journalists, Ahmet Davutoğlu the Minister of Foreign Affairs mentioned the start of dialogue with Diaspora groups and that policies of denial would be relaxed. These attempts should be taken with a grain of salt. AKP's policy of denial will probably carry on with minor revisions. Even during relatively softer relations with Armenia, a harsh denial policy was implemented when needed. When "genocide" appears on the agenda of

Western countries or Armenia, it will be back to the good-old concept of "campaign against lies and slanders".

There are many intellectuals, journalists and NGOs in Turkey who have a fair approach to the issue. "We apologize to the Armenians" campaign initiated by a group of intellectuals around three years ago is a good example. Following the murder of Hrant Dink, many people previously uninterested in the issue and those who more or less adopted the official discourse wanted to know what happened in 1915. These people, including intellectual groups and NGOs from the Islamic circles started moving away from the official discourse.

The state, the government and the nationalist camp (groups which have been getting increasingly permeable) are expected to continue their reactionary attitudes. The mainstream media will follow them within the official framework.

The ceremony for the 20th anniversary of the Hocali massacre which took place during the Karabakh war contained signs in this direction. It was pretty alarming to see high level governmental representation in a place where Armenians were all out blamed in a severely nationalist tone and in a blatantly threatening manner. Istanbul was full of banners along the same lines and full-page announcements were in the papers. We expect this attitude to go on.

Considering all this, it is evident that the way towards 2015 will be tough for Turkish Armenians. Public authorities will not only maintain the denial policy, but they will also condemn and target those demanding the end of the denial.

There are surely ways we can combat this nationalistic hysteria and show that not everyone in Turkey subscribes to it. We could call on the Turkish government to

abandon its denial policy, acknowledge the tragedy the Armenians of these lands have gone through and make an apology. We will also demonstrate the strong Armenian heritage and presence in these lands to the rest of the world.

This legacy was uprooted by the official discourse and policies along with the people. Since many NGOs other than the hCa will also be holding events, exhibitions and conferences; publishing catalogues and books during this period, we will do our best to ensure everything is carried out in the most collaborative fashion possible.

We would like to be loud and clear in our call for the Republic of Turkey to abandon the policy of denial and accentuate the rich Armenian heritage in these lands and the devastation left behind. We also want to demonstrate that Turkey is not merely a block of nationalists, but communities of people who have a fair approach. We want to make sure that their voices resonate both in Turkey and around the world.

Towards 2015

Meeting Minutes

June 30th, 2012,
hCa, Istanbul

Leading to the centenary of the genocide, hCa has allocated the first part of the “Civic Resolutions on Conflict” meetings to the Turkey-Armenia Issue. The normalisation of debate and the rehabilitation of the “Turkish” society are interconnected issues many organizations and individuals are working on. We are here to share and discuss our action plans for the coming few years. How can we coordinate our activities strategically? What is the general framework of what we can do separately and collectively? Let’s not solely focus on the centenary of the genocide, but its lead up. What can we do until 2015? How can we join forces to move the Turkish society from the point of denial?

After the opening speech, ideas and suggestions about working together under an umbrella campaign were shared. Yetvart Danzikyan was the moderator.

We need to start working towards 2015 now. What can we do collectively? We need to work hard to help the Turkish society process this issue. All NGOs have different skills, we certainly do not have to do everything together; but we sure can have an umbrella organisation. Could we include the NGOs with Islamic sensibilities?

How about a model based on that of the Istanbul European Capital of Culture? A framework acknowledged by each participating project and a website displaying all the activities. It may have a logo and a motto. This could be our departure point. We can then hold another meeting in September hopefully with wider participation and see who wants to be included. We can announce our collaboration through a press release.

Let us also talk about what we will not do within this framework. We are not aiming for the peace process between Turkey and Armenia. The main objective is to create public awareness and understanding of the issue. People should come to terms with it as much as possible.

The Agos daily has not come up with a project yet. We focus on improving the newspaper. This is a very useful discussion though. Even though people around this table are prone to agree on issues, there would inevitably be some differences in style. We should smooth these out first. We need to determine some common principles and take it from there. For instance, will the genocide

be used as a term or will the emphasis be on what is lost –like Agos does-? We want Agos to be part of the discussion. We want to be kept in the loop.

The political argument of the process is certainly very important. We should determine the tone together. It is also possible to attend these meetings without taking part in the activities.

The Human Rights Association (HRA) has been working overtly for the recognition of the genocide and the issue of denial since its foundation. Although 25,000 Armenians have been slaughtered in Ankara, there has been no mention of Armenians in the Ankara entry of the Cumhuriyet Encyclopaedia of the 80s. Armenian existence has not only been denied by the state but also the society. The Gomidas Institute wants to open a branch office here and there is some good news about funding. HRA and Gomidas are working on a joint project on the real history of cities; it has not started yet; this project can be a part of the “Towards 2015” framework. And about the participation of organizations with Islamic sensibilities, I would suggest contacting individuals instead of organized structures. When the religious ceremony was about to take place in the Akdamar (Akhtamar) Church, members of Mazlum-Der made a welcome speech to the Armenians with quotations from the Quran.

This platform does not necessarily need a manifesto. We do not even have to carry out joint activities. Think of it as a communication platform not a decision maker. HcA’s aim is to run this like a three year [media] campaign. Some of us could visit MPs, do lobbying and others

could do publishing. Our objective is to take the Turkish public opinion and its representatives one step further. Think of a composite framework with large and small activities.

If there is going to be a campaign, let’s remember the “apology campaign”. This campaign created visibility abroad, but not in the Turkish society. It is important to learn what kind of vision everyone has about 2015. There are some people from the Islamic section of the society who would support such a campaign. On the other hand, 2015 is the centenary of Gallipoli as well. Anzacs fought here and so did Armenian soldiers. State authorities would be at the ceremonies. Commemoration activities are really precious. Can we do something like that for 1915? Armenia and the Armenian diaspora are also critical here too.

I find doing something in 2015 shameful, since we did not do much for a whole century. Anadolu Kultur is planning an exhibition at Tutun Deposu and a film project with the support of the Heinrich Böll Foundation whose details are still unclear. At the same time, we will continue working with NGOs in Armenia. This is the third meeting I have attended about “Towards 2015”. TESEV and similar organizations are also preoccupied with it. There were some people from Anadolu Kultur at the TESEV meeting which was good. All these groups should be in dialogue. About Muslim participation, why don’t they approach us for a change ?

What NGOs in Turkey can do about Armenia is becoming increasingly limited. It is easier to work with the NGOs in Armenia than working with the diaspora.

Starting a civic dialogue with the diapora is critical.

This is what we do at an existential level at the Hrant Dink Foundation. Nationalist discourse will be very full-on in 2015. We have to involve the society in the process and make sure that the nationalist discourse is not the only voice they hear. I do not see the use of talking only to the state, instead we have to do something to promote the human dimension of 2015. We have to find a way of including Muslims and the supporters of the Republican People's Party (CHP) in the process for a wider audience. The "Justice for Hrant" site was very useful for informing the public about progress in the case and various activities.

It is crucial that projects are not limited to big cities but are embraced in Anatolia, supported by local partners. Stories of individuals should be emphasised. For example, there is a church in Bitlis the locals want to restore.

2015 can become a year of conflict both for the diaspora and the state. A manifesto can fuel this. Focusing specifically on that particular year may increase tension. We, as Global Dialogue, are interested in the issue as donors, however there is a funding problem. The target group for the proposed activities/projects is important. There is no point in preaching to the converted. Participation from Anatolia is crucial.

I think it is hard to keep platforms alive, they are prone to controversy about whether a certain activity should bear the common logo or not. The website should pool resources as well as coordinating activities.

There seems to be no more denial if you say "deportation" instead of "genocide". There are justification efforts in this context. Counter arguments like "but the Armenians rebelled, massacred people and our dead and losses are not recognized" are common.

The Armenian Culture Association was established only two years ago. We feel this debate is very important. We organised a film screening and some of our Armenian friends were hesitant about even coming to that. There are still people who hide their identity in our community, let alone go to April 24th commemorations.

The Center for Truth, Justice and Memory is planning on an oral history project/workshop with Armenians. A website pooling research and past activities and acting as an information centre for new ones would be useful. We should target the "lay man" and go for simple, less academic data presentation. It may have some maps and answers to questions asked about this period. An e-bulletin can also be prepared.

The Hrant Dink Foundation is carrying out an oral history project with the diaspora. Let us talk to the Center for Truth, Justice and Memory about this. We are also trying to map places where Armenians used to live in Anatolia.

The map in the Genocide Museum in Armenia matches cities with printing presses and newspapers. We can do something flashy with a map on the internet. Or we can build up another map using literature or mass media.

There is a website named “houshamadyan.org” broadcasting information about the daily life of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. The translation of this website into Turkish would be very useful.

Tarih Vakfi (The History Foundation) is organising a conference on WWI in 2014. The 1915 issue will be covered there. Collaboration with universities for activities is an option.

Communication and sharing of information will be important towards 2015. I think a website would be very useful. Flexibility is debatable but logo is really important. If we are going to run this like a campaign, variety will add meaning. We should include Muslim NGOs and community associations. Let’s include the Assyrians since 1915 is the extermination of Christianity in Anatolia too.

There are lots of anniversaries until 2023. There will be debate about “the one in the Balkans was genocide, not the one in here”. There are claims that Muslims have also been deported since 1870.

As Kultur University GPot Center, we are focusing on dialogue. We are also interested in the legal dimension of the issue. Could we include associations like choirs and theatre groups from the Armenian community in this framework?

There is not much research into the Armenian history of Turkey, perhaps we can get funding for scholarships for M.A.

or PhD. students.

Muslim institutions might be hard work but we should keep trying. Who to approach is the problem?

We could support studies on the modification of school books , especially history books.

I think we need to create a space in every section of the society to get people to talk about what happened in 1915. Hrant Dink Foundation is working on such a project. It would be good if we can also bring up the information about Turks who resisted the deportation order and helped the Armenians (governors, district governors, soldiers,clergy etc.). Owning them up might relax the people about talking about it.

In the Genocide Museum in Armenia, a new section called “ones with a conscience” will commemorate the ones who resisted the deportations. Personally, I do not think remembering those good people is a job for the Turks. Let us leave this one to the Armenians, to their diaspora.

I do not feel it is right to commemorate “the good ones” when the names of the perpetrators of the genocide are given to public spaces. Participation of Muslims is important, let us talk about it. It is important to include the Muslims and the nationalists but so is the framework.

Approximately 14-15 branch office directors of Mazlum-Der visited Agos. We talked very easily and comfortably

about 1915 and the Hrant Dink case. Communication was not a problem with some members of the organisation.

Where do we go from here? Are we just going to exclude some NGOs from the start or make it all inclusive ? I believe we should make a call to everyone, whoever wants to work on this issue will stay and the others could leave.

Let us not forget the limitations of sticking with the usual suspects. We should include people of different backgrounds who care about these issues.

I feel we should meet at a common denominator and then invite others. I don't see us working together with institutions well versed in the discourse of hatred on an issue like "genocide".

We should say "Islamic Institutions" instead of "the Muslims". Our doors should be open to everyone sharing our principles and standing.

We should also remember that people/ institutions can and do change. We may think differently about an issue than we had in the past. Attitudes may change when awareness changes. We need to give people and institutions a chance. If we are talking about institutions with Islamic sensibility, let us not forget that they have access to the majority of the population. The same is true for Alawites. Let us break down the barriers. Yes, we have walls between us, but there are holes in the wall through which we can pass through.

hCa's raison d'être is to bringing dissimilar elements together. As an organization when we are making a call

it is for anyone and everyone. There are lots of groups and associations which are sensitive to the issue.

Going back to "the saviours of the Armenians" I think this rhetoric has negative connotations. Some people think that Armenian girls were saved by adoption, marriage or confiscation of their properties.

The majority of the people are not as informed as we are. It is important to show the big picture to the vast majority whose only source of information is the mainstream media. Examples would come in handy here. The stories of people who risked their lives to save others are also stories of the victims. Those kind of stories have an impact on people.

The phrase here is not "saviours". Terminology is of utmost importance. What is crucial here is to break down what fuels Turkish nationalism. We have to tell people that genocide is not something based on reciprocity. It is important to say that "We are not accusing Turks as a nation." That is why language is very important.

Hearing these positive stories are good for the Armenians too. We had a tremendous amount of great feedback from Turks and Armenians alike on our news story on the Governor of Konya at Agos.

We are here for "Towards 2015". How much the group will expand is dubious. Let's clarify a few things. As far as I gather, we are together on "having such a platform" and "having a website".

It would be problematic to look at whether

a group has already covered this issue, before inviting them along. Everyone is a newbie. Contact with the NGOs in Armenia has only started in 2004, so not many organisations had the chance to work on this topic before. Academic research is virtually non-existent on the subject; so do we exclude academics altogether? We should be more inclusive.

With or without a platform we can always come together and write texts. However, if we are talking about a platform, I believe it should be a structure that helps the work of people who do something, who want to do something about the issue. Ten people start working here and then an eleventh comes along, adds on something new and joins in. A relaxed, inclusive structure which encourages and coordinates would be great.

Let's include people who have been thinking about the issue. Journalists with a wide readership should be there too. They don't need to be part of an organisation.

We can focus on the denial of the existence of the Armenians without mentioning "2015". There is a fair bit of reaction against "2015". Maybe it's best not to use it in our call for participation.

Building a language of peace in the Armenian - Turkish dialogue

Cemal Uşak

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The father of the “Bohmian dialogue” Prof. David Bohm says that dialogue is like rowing a boat through a canal thick with sludge. You have to keep the oars shallow until you reach clean water. Otherwise the reek of the slime at the bottom will dissuade the sides from dialogue and the desired friendship cannot be formed.

The opposite has been going on for the Turkish-Armenian relations and dialogue for years. The Armenians start by insisting that the disaster of 1915 was genocide, the Turkish side mentions massacres carried out by the Armenian organisations, Daşnaksütyun and the Hinchak Committees, and they lead nowhere.

Plunging the oars to the bottom to scrape the timeworn slime is exhausting for both sides as David Bohm suggests. No politician would accept a formula that their communities would have a hard time processing. Building the tone and arguments to persuade the Armenian and Turkish nations is what common sense dictates.

In my humble opinion we should firstly focus on the fact that the pain is mutual. This requires talking about what happened without naming it.

The disaster of 1915 and the preceding political tragedies led to the Armenians losing their own

homeland and the Turks losing their neighbours, who were hardworking and loyal citizens. Is this not mutual pain?

The history of Turkish-Armenian relations spans 800 years. They managed to live together in relative peace and harmony for about 700 years. Now the events of the last century need to be re-evaluated. The evaluation of the last hundred years needs to focus on the reasons that have separated the Armenians from their homeland and deprived the Turks from of their wonderful neighbours.

We were on a TV programme with Etyen Mahcupyan who passed on the views of my late friend Hrant, who was treacherously and cold bloodedly murdered. He said: *“Of course both sides made big mistakes in the past but there is no need to dwell on them now and make them bleed again. We have to focus on this: What should we do today so the Turks start doing the right thing?”*

This is the approach that will build the desired language of peace.

I should say as a Muslim and a Turk, “What should I do and say so the Armenians do the right thing?”

I have been to the “near yet far country” Armenia twice and came

back with unforgettable memories. I often said to some friends who are there that:

“Your attitude and behaviour is no different to crossing Ararat, which is holy for you and a fertile mountain for us. I do not know any climber who crossed Ararat. I know a lot of people who pick flowers on the foothills of Ararat filling their hearts with love. Let’s lay them in front of the Monument of Shared Pain that we will build at the border.”

54

Let Fethiye Çetin, the dear lawyer of my friend Hrant, go to Habab (her grandmother’s village) in the spring and pick flowers from the edge of the fountain fed by the two small streams. Let’s all place them in front of the Monument of Shared Pain. I’m sure that inhabitants of the village who are delightful uncles and grandmas with white veins will help her pick the flowers.

Sadly, the idea of a Monument of Shared Pain was at the top of the agenda during the meeting the late Alpaslan Türkeş had with the Armenian president Ter Petrosyan 20 years ago in Paris. As far as I remember the monument that would be erected would have the inscription in Armenian and Turkish: *“We are sorry for shared pain we have suffered.”*

In 2012, building a new language of peace should be the duty of opinion leaders and conscientious writers in the Turkish and Armenians sides.

I declare that I’m ready to work at any stage of this project.

Our Humanity or Our Nation

Ömer Laçiner
Birikim, No.274,
Feb.2012

The special court has ruled that the murder of Hrant Dink involved an instigator and a hit man. This decision was unanimously criticised and condemned by nearly all political parties and forces including the ruling party and the government itself on the basis that it “didn’t sit well with the public conscience”. The only exception was the support of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) circles for the ruling as “the harshest penalty available in the current legislation”. This “unrest of conscience”, voiced by a wide spectrum from “Friends of Hrant” representing the hundreds of thousands of people tenaciously following the court case until justice is served, to the “socialists”, the Republican People’s Party (CHP) and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has one shared basis: the “organised” element of this crime was not addressed and convicted by the courts. The government, the AKP, the Islamist and conservative circles implicated “Ergenekon”. The CHP and some left wingers accused the administrators and police chiefs (all AKP supporters) who were not only protected but also promoted by the ruling party. The majority of the tens of thousands marching at Hrant’s funeral and at the fifth anniversary of his murder feel that both of the alleged “organised” elements contributed to the crime in varying degrees . They singled

out the organised force behind the hit men as “the state”. “Organised” in this context implies a shared ideology/mentality. We are not talking about a group of people networking around a common goal/deed. This explains why the Ergenekon cohort considers creating chaos and plotting coups as the main themes of the nationalist/Atatürkist ideology. The administrators and police chiefs in Istanbul and Trabzon - notorious government pets- ignored intelligence about murder plans received days ahead. This “laissez faire” attitude seems to coincide with the policies of their Islamist, conservative superiors towards non-Muslims.

The demand to reveal the organised crime links behind this murder case received the strongest overt reaction from the MHP despite the lack of any accusations directed at them. Our “Armenian problem” in general is a different matter. The MHP’s leader Devlet Bahçeli dismisses these demands as a “forced search for and artificial manufacture of an organisation” and angrily labels this as a “crime in itself” adding that he views the situation with “awe and angst”. He accuses the “opportunistic mob” yelling “We are all Armenian” of making matters worse by carrying the conflict to a more polarised position.

It is not hard to see the reasoning behind this warning. As the spokesmen for the MHP are well aware, despite their differences, competition and fights, the people, the organisation and the ideology behind the murder of Hrant Dink all boil down to the same common denominator, that is Turkish nationalism. Some of the accused represent the authoritarian/secular/modernist/elitist version of this nationalism and others the Sunni conservative/entrepreneurial blends. On the other hand the MHP, unable to blend into the top segments of the Turkish social pyramid, represents Turkish nationalism based on race. It relies heavily on the middle/lower segments of society and especially on those who live with the angst of not making it into the middle classes. In its current shape, Turkish nationalism is all it has. The AKP and the CHP (a perfect example of Marx's parallel to Hegel), the Workers' Party (İşçi Partisi) and the new TKP, the new versions of the reappearance of the TKP (all parties exploiting Turkish nationalism) expressed discomfort about the "We are all Hrant" slogan. This is exactly why the MHP showed the harshest reaction by condemning it as criminal. The slogan, in addition to its main function, points out the relationship between Turkism and other national identities.

This is a big blow to the MHP's one and only credo. One of many blows the party suffered in the last twenty years. The most effective and genuine among these, the one within the context of our Kurdish problem, caused extra anxiety to the MHP since the AKP cemented its power and positioned itself to reshape the state. The MHP feels pressure from two sides. The Republic of Turkey founded and shaped by Atatürkist

nationalism adamant about "eliminating" the Kurdish issue by assimilation, warfare and oppression counted on institutional support until the 2000s. The AKP and its Sunni conservative modernist ideology, on the verge of acquiring enough power to shape a new constitution are likely to cut this support. More importantly "autonomy" was granted to the AKP by Atatürkist nationalists in exchange for reserve forces 'in the service of the State'. Despite this, the AKP aspires to embrace Turkish nationalism to the degree of total assimilation. The MHP, who based its existence on the problem of anti-communist mobilization from its foundation years through to the 1990s, is open to such assimilation. The saying 'As Turkish as Tanrıdağ, as Muslim as Hira Mountain' sums up the MHP perspective on this. (TN - Tanrıdağ is over 7,000m high, whereas Hira is only 280m). The formation of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) in the early 1990's and the transfer of many party members to the Welfare Party (RP) and then the AKP show how busy this nationalistic route is. The AKP's prioritisation of the issue and its weakening of MHP's strongholds in central Anatolia should not be ignored. This resulted in the considerable narrowing of the party base after the 2007 elections.

The nationalists who tried to escape assimilation found that the more they distanced themselves from Sunni conservatism, the closer they would veer towards a form of nationalism with racist undertones labelled 'ulusalcılık'. As long as the left is reduced to a handful of policies to be implemented by the state, some form of 'etatism', it is not surprising that 'ulusalcılık' is embraced by a myriad of organisations from the Workers' Party to the new TKP and the freak

known as the Turkish Left. The crux of the MHP's worries is the position and the function of 'Turkishness' within a new Constitution and beyond which lies the –second – current reformation/revision of the Republic of Turkey.

Surely, despite variations in content and emphasis, this is an issue shared by every other party and movement in the country. It is also crucial for different ethnic identities. The AKP is not interested in a downright domineering Sunni conservative Turkishness oppressing, ignoring or assimilating other ethnicities. Rather, with the vastness of its electoral majority and its secure grasp of the country's resources and potential, the AKP has been pushing for a new regime/constitution where this type of Turkishness has a confident and competent hegemony. It has been taking steps to institutionalise its determination for a while. This redefined Turkishness will overlap extensively with the Atatürkist nationalism it will replace. The process needs to give the impression that it will erase historical stains and that it aims to pose as a "new, clean slate". The AKP could not even bring itself to put the blame for the Armenian massacre, the hardest of these stains to "clean", on the leaders of the Union and Progress Party. However, when the crimes committed in the name of Turkishness in the first years of the Republic were on the agenda, they were more open and determined to "cleansing", eventually targeting the cult of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

Despite the cracks, there was never disengagement, at times there was even co-operation (the deportation of Armenians is an example) between the Union and Progress ideology and the Sunni conservative modernism

of the time. This is the reason the AKP is now playing along with the now long in the tooth official view of the crimes against humanity (starting with the Armenian massacre) committed in the 1910s during the Union and Progress dictatorship considered to be one the pre-foundation stage of the Turkish Republic. For example, the AKP's tradition embraced Abdülhamit II's Armenian policies and applications, including the practices of Hamidiye Corps (TN Hamidiye Alayları, Abdülhamit II's armed , irregular corps) We could argue that the only difference between these and the deportation and massacre of the Armenians was the "conditions". The same tradition, on the other hand, claims to have been pushed to the opposition and complains of having been singled out as the biggest threat by the regime itself. They can even prove that many Kurdish revolts of the time were violently suppressed as reactionary/religious riots or that they got their fair share of punishments as a ramification of these events.

This is exactly why the very place/time for the AKP to start afresh is here and now. This is why, in an unprecedented move, the Prime Minister Erdoğan and his party have rather pathetically carried the Dersim massacre into the country's agenda. Smearing stains on "secular Turks" within the cleansing campaign of the Sunni conservative context would be supported by the local non-Turkish Muslim ethnicities as well as the Middle Eastern countries the AKP holds in high regard. This is hoped to evolve into a wide and prolific corridor where anti-Turkish sentiments - nurtured by the Sunni Islamic Arabic peoples' movements, the most important component in the opposition against their relatively

secular/modernist Arab nationalist dictatorships - can be eradicated. The AKP should be well aware that this is a linchpin ideological-political trump for its mid-term strategy in Syria and especially Iraq which is facing a crucial period in the coming months.

Greece, Bulgaria, Georgia and many other Christian/Orthodox nation states are very likely to spot the benevolence of these “fresh start” activities for at least pragmatic reasons. The AKP didn’t lift a finger to facilitate the requests for investigation into the 5 year Hrant Dink case, most of which were rejected anyway by the court. It made a point of protecting its own by stopping administrative investigations which the court felt obliged to approve. Playing its part perfectly in the final verdict, the AKP’s highest level spokesmen were quick to state that “the decision created an uneasy conscience“. This cannot be explained by hubris alone.

It also denotes a cunning, exploitative plot to make this event a useful component of the “operation” outlined above. As the insinuation that “What lies beneath the murder is good old Ergenekon” is emphasised, the misgiving is more of a scheme to manufacture useful material for the constitutional debate dominating the political agenda. This is the only option befitting AKP politics in its “master phase”. The CHP on the other hand looks defeated, flustered, drained and irate on this issue as well as many dark/taboo corners of the foundation of the Republic of Turkey. It surely is fully aware of a history too burdensome to be carried into the future. It neither has the energy nor the morale to continue to shoulder this weight which keeps the party together. Generating a new cohesive bond within the current

structure and staff doesn’t seem possible either. They cannot even acknowledge this shortcoming. They pin down a scapegoat, a specific group within in order to escape this operation of ‘turning a new leaf’ in history. Minimising structural damage along the way is impossible. They recognise this in their desperation and inability to change tracks.

Whether, under the burden of history, it will crash and burn or fritter away to become marginalised is yet to be seen. The AKP is clearly imposing its own version of ‘Turkishness’ and Turkish nationalism as a vital component of its revision of the republic and the regime. Is there any chance the CHP can form an alternative (rather than an effective opposition) to this? If the people calling themselves leftist and especially socialist in this country have pondered the meaning/mission of these labels within the framework of humanity and internalised their beliefs; then let them behold the tens of thousands of people marching with courage and conviction saying “We are all Hrant, we are all Armenian”. The resonance from this natural upheaval presents rich opportunities for transformation and a real hope and promise and consciousness for the future. What this requires is an awareness of the risks of ‘polarisation’, which values internationalism as a core value of the left and socialism against nationalism in any shape or form. This requires the constant prioritisation and nurturing of shared human values and objectives within the aforementioned ideology.

A movement to put up a front against nationalism should remember that the majority of the people in this front are open to internalise and

emphasise humanitarian values as the core of their being. This approach should persist no matter what. This vital point has another connection to the subject matter of this article: As I mentioned earlier, the AKP's "redefining, turning a new leaf" operation entails putting the blame for identity "stains/ crimes" onto a ruling elite/staff and maintaining the innocence of "our/ Muslim Turkishness". Parallel to that is a common denominator, a manifestation shared by all right wing political movements. This states that everything - good and the bad - comprising the history of any large group is the work of the intelligentsia, the rulers, the heroes. Although the masses had contributed to the history makers' efforts with their flesh and blood, they are mere objects. They may be praised as such but if the deed in question is eventually perceived as a crime, a stain, this is surely not their fault! The avoidance of even a mention of the crime would give the impression of putting the blame on those in power at the time or an organised entity.

To make a long story short, rendering the masses "innocent" and seeing them as a crowd devoid of responsibility and incapable of self-determination is the basic founding principle of right-wing policies and discourse. The signature slogan/ thesis of the left/socialist movements in modern times is that the masses made history and that they are capable of doing it more responsibly and consciously. This slogan/thesis of movements called left/socialist in modern history has been reduced over time to mere words on paper. Over time this has been one of the main reasons for their defeat. Now, at this vital juncture as the main parties are busy discussing what

sort of Turkishness should be at the core of the new Republic, the left-socialist parties have a chance to turn themselves into a real alternative by words and action breathing new life into that thesis/slogan.

As the history of Turkey and Turkishness is being rewritten to include the Central Asian and Balkan components, confronting the AKP with this attitude will create trouble for the party's ability to keep its own constituency as mere spectators who are "clean/ innocent anyway". When the masses used to asking the question "what sort of organisation was guilty" when "our historical crimes" were being committed are encouraged to think about what our parents and grandparents were actually doing when they happened, would at first evoke a strong reaction and trauma. They are both fostering and compulsory in the final analysis since they will lead to responsibility, an inner reckoning and a desire for purification. During the Dersim Massacre while tens of thousands of Alawites and Kurds were slaughtered like animals (according to their executioners) - with a fervour only possible through severe rage and humiliation - and sent to exile, what did the 30,000 soldiers, thousands of civil servants do? What about their families and the Sunni Muslim majority? Questioning how they acted may be very disturbing. But if we are really after a country, a society with a clean conscience, then every single member has to go through the painful but purifying process of self-reckoning, putting themselves in their ancestors' shoes. The process itself will be the main gauge of our self-respect and humanitarian values and our degree of internalisation. And if the left/socialists manage to be the enablers/encouragers of this process and manage to disperse it to

all, or at least a significant portion of all, the components and segments of Turkish society, Turkish society will within their presence see the light, understanding that nationalism and being “clean” are polar opposites of one another.

Steps Towards the Turkish-Armenian Peace Process

Meeting Minutes	Opening Speech by Emel Kurma	<p><i>familiarisation of the Turkish society with what happened in 1915 or getting them to approach these demonstrations with a grain of salt. We could also think about what can be done in terms of rehabilitating the public on a wider scale. Listening to the Armenian community on what had happened and attaining closure and instigating curiosity on the subject are all options we could explore in a way conducive to a positive impact on the social psyche.</i></p>
September 2nd 2012, Istanbul	<p><i>Hello and welcome. We organized this meeting to reflect on the Turkish Armenian reconciliation process, to create the space to brainstorm and hone suggestions collectively. The majority of the “Turkish” society has trouble acknowledging and confronting the Armenian issue. A language of denial has replaced turning a blind eye to the problem. All painful events have anniversaries laden with symbolism. There are times where commemorations turn into rampant expressions. An example is last year’s condemnation of the “Hocali Massacre” attended by İdris Naim Şener, where we encountered a well-funded organisation promoting an agenda not in the least interested in empathising with the victims and their families.</i></p> <p><i>We anticipate these nationalistic expressions to escalate and intensify towards 2015. We are distressed by these developments and many people here fight this discourse in their own way. We do create a language but it seems to fall on deaf ears in terms of the wider public. Joining our forces around an umbrella campaign seems like a good idea. The backbone of this campaign could be the</i></p>	<p><i>In preparation for this meeting, we put together a timeline of NGO accomplishments from 1993 to 2012. This includes some governmental relations as well. The list could be flawed, incomplete, or superfluous; it is work in progress. What we did notice however, was the recent upsurge in projects, meetings and publications regarding the Armenian issue. We don’t know how wide their audience is beyond the people who are particularly concerned with the issue, NGOs, etc. We believe in the more the merrier. The goal of this meeting could be to figure out ways of reaching a wider audience, getting more people involved in the healing process.</i></p> <p><i>Rather than a small group handling the Armenian-Turkish issue, we should reach other communities</i></p>

in the country encouraging various groups to come together. There are certain groups and individuals who are already involved with these issues by way of programs or otherwise. These meetings could be an opportunity for mutual awareness. It's important to connect groups which express a desire to work together. We should also reach people with a conscience. We could have a platform pooling and coordinating programs and organising the process towards 2015. A website would be instrumental for continuity and unity. This could open the floor to further discussion of these issues. We need a civil front to avoid leaving things in the hands of formal institutions.

One suggestion would be to organize regular meetings every 2-3 months, with the intention of connecting those working on related projects. Using these meetings as a starting point, we could design some kind of campaign.

Following the opening remarks, suggestions on approach and solutions were presented:

First of all, let me talk about my work on the Turkish-Armenian issue. I visited Armenia several times with a mixed group of people. There were people with nationalist/statist perspectives among them.

We organized a variety of visits and projects with the goal of creating a dialogue between Turkey and Armenia by way of youth culture. We brought 20-25 young people from Armenia to Turkey and vice versa.

Secondly, I'd like to say something about the title of this meeting. When we say "Turkey-Armenia Relations,"

governmental relations come to mind. My suggestion is that further meetings should avoid using a name with political connotations. We should use something like Turkish-Armenian relations, which implies a civil society basis. This is what we actually do anyway. There is an opportunity for civil society to accomplish what the government will not, cannot and are not required to do.

In terms of the Turkish-Kurdish issue, the need for the non-Kurdish population to be persuaded is one of the problems. If the solution is based on a "language of peace" every politician knows that the non-Kurds should join the party as well. This is also the case for Turkish-Armenian relations. I'm not saying that those here are not doing this; I'm just saying that in creating a "language of peace," major discussion headings should focus on the persuasion and participation of Turks. In discussing 1915, we can express ourselves without using the word "genocide". Words and phrases like shared pain, trauma, and tragedy can be used instead. I'm just using these as examples. If I were to use an analogy, let's say, we want to pass over the holy Mount Ararat. Perhaps climbing to the top isn't the solution, but rather, going around the base of the mountain is—as in, we can cross Ararat by going out the base of the mountain instead of climbing to the summit. We could take this into consideration when creating a "language of peace" as well. That's just my humble opinion.

In addition, there are conscientious Muslims out there who protested the events of 1915 and helped the victims. It's important to highlight cases like these in order to change public perception.

The Turkish-Armenian issue is a long process, and a lot can be said about it,

but the conversation should be non-governmental. Using a “language of peace” will surely have an impact, but changing public opinion is very difficult. These kinds of efforts and meetings will definitely contribute to the solution but changing the perception of the Armenians as the enemy is actually quite difficult. We do, however, still need to slowly move beyond this.

About 5-6 years ago, we thought about creating a radio station that would broadcast 12 hours in Turkish and 12 in Armenian. We wanted to convey Armenian culture by covering what Armenians eat, drink what kind of music they listen to, etc. Where there’s a shared geography, there’s also a shared cuisine, shared elegies. This rather expensive and tricky project never got up and running due to funding problems. Presenting Armenian art and culture through TV shows and newspapers would help change unfavourable perceptions. This radio project wasn’t even aimed at solving the Armenian-Turkish issue. Its sole focus was Armenian culture.

Politics don’t have to be involved in solution seeking efforts. Allowing societies to connect with and stop fearing one another does not require the “political” umbrella. The Armenian community should also work towards changing the existing perception. I don’t know if we can reach the Diaspora, but we need to remind/introduce the Turkish public to our culture, to our presence here. 2015 is approaching fast, and reactions are going to escalate as it draws nearer. But 2105 will pass. A committee consisting of Armenians and Turks can arrange recurring meetings. The Diaspora could participate in these meetings as well. Of course, there are radical viewpoints among those that make up the Diaspora, but there are also laid back people who want peace, and could easily participate

in an open dialogue. The Turkish public, the Armenian community and the Diaspora, all need to be taken into account. A permanent structure needs to be established. As 2015 approaches, a committee could be created, and this committee could meet with the government as well. By taking just a small step, the government could see some favourable results.

For the most part, those who participate in meetings like this are aware of the issues, but their approaches are different. It’s impossible to imagine those here having the same perspective as they do today as the year 2015 draws nearer. Think about this group as an umbrella, there are elements/individuals with conflicting viewpoints, but they can still meet under the same roof. A congruent perspective would be problematic. We keep on calling it the “Armenian issue” but there’s also the Turkish/Sunni majority in this society. Every “issue” be it Kurdish, Armenian or Alawite has a centre that’s responsible for its relations with other groups. As long as these centres project the opinions, prejudices, and responsibilities about themselves onto others and perceive the actions of others as an attack [on them], these issues will never be resolved. The majority group in the population, which make up these centres, must be shaken up. This might hurt a bit, but if they don’t—they won’t be able to come to terms with the events of 1915, and will just beat around the bush as we’ve done in the past. These aren’t new issues for Turkey; they’ve been around for 100 years. As far as we can tell, no one ever told –or could tell- the group that makes up the majority that the blame actually falls on them. People were always afraid of the reaction of the majority. We’re approaching a point where if the majority’s opinion of themselves and their

approach to certain issues isn't questioned or criticized in some way, we won't be able to take any steps toward a resolution. The majority's fabricated representation of themselves needs a serious shake up. I don't know if a [political] party, or a group will take this on, but I think the results will be beneficial for all of us.

Nothing is going to end in 2015; it's going to continue just the same. A short-term solution is not adequate; we should aim for projects with benefits in the mid-term or long-term. For mid-term solutions, there could be projects aimed directly at the public -not the government. During this deportation, there were heroic deeds done in Anatolia, there are people that Armenians talk about with the utmost respect. We've always heard stories about people protecting and hiding their neighbours and friends when Teskilat-i Mahsus (The Special Organization) came to town. Despite these atrocities, there are still people within the Diaspora who call this place home, who were born here and identify themselves as part of this landscape. A course of action needs to be prepared to arrange a reunion and the majority of the public needs to be convinced to support this.

My suggestion for this group today is; regarding this issue and others related to it, the Turkish public conception of identity needs to be shaken up, and reformulated into something more humanitarian identity. If need be, a harsher language could be used—to demonstrate that a solution can be found by more than one approach. All groups may not agree on a method, but they can at least agree that others are free to do as they choose, and can back them up anyway based on the premise that this right should be protected. I think a structural design like this would be beneficial—different viewpoints can be voiced, and various groups can support

one another without alienating others and avoiding polarisation.

The year 2015 is actually relevant to all political focus points. There will be a point at which extreme nationalists will attack those who defend the opposing viewpoint. Today, in the eve of 2015, we need to be talking about what precautions we should take, not what we should be discussing. People talking about "dialogue" and "confrontation" are going to become possible targets of these attacks.

We're talking about connecting people working on different tracks/projects/ areas, facilitating mutual support. Actually, this is exactly what we mean by campaign.

I am the child of a family who left the Ottoman territories as a result of the 1915 deportation. Currently, I'm living here as a working professional. I can offer a unique perspective because I've seen both sides. We used to speak both Armenian and Turkish at home. We can understand one another only by talking and listening. I think meetings like these will contribute to a resolution of these issues. It's not easy for the public to come to terms with certain issues. This is the case for every society.

Firstly, we need to discuss the rights of the Armenian population here. We are not a minority population here, we are citizens, with rights. So, could a fellow Armenian become a governor, consul general, representative, or prosecutor? This is a good starting point for conversation. There are instances of rights abuses in the past. For example, there are those who went to Aşkale, people who became physically ill from angst and stress after

the events of September 6th and 7th. In addition, we need to talk about groups who felt they were under serious duress during the “speak Turkish, citizen” campaign.

In order to discuss our shared history, we need to figure out a way to discuss events in the even more distant past. 1915 is an important year, but we need to discuss the period before that as well. We need to talk about the Ottoman Empire—in the Ottoman archives; there are names of 102 Armenian citizens cited in important positions. We could see how many Armenians held such influential positions from the 1879-1923 archives. There were consultants to the vizier, they died for the Ottomans at Gallipoli. We know that from 1879-1955 Armenians and Greeks were involved in politics. Look at all that and what we have today. What a huge difference.

No one is intrinsically barbaric; it all comes down the bad decisions of that period. We are all victims of the Union and Progress cohort.

The younger generation of the Diaspora grew up with stories of this brutality from their grandfathers who fled from Kayseri, Adana, Antep, Kilis, and the Black Sea. But they also tell stories about people who’ve helped them. An imam saved my grandfather.

Those of us living here right now are the neighbours of the grandfathers who lived here during the Ottoman period, not their enemies. We need to stay away from hatred.

There are people in the Diaspora who don’t even know Turkey. We need projects facilitating familiarity. There are groups on both sides that breed detrimental hatred. There should be some meetings or seminars aimed at dealing with these

types of groups. There’s actually a need for some sort of rehabilitation. We need to convince people with opposing viewpoints to be part of peace discussions.

Both sides ask what could possibly be achieved through peace. One side says “what are they going to give me,” and the other asks “are they asking me for money”? Will knowing the exact number of casualties make any difference? What’s in name? Call it genocide, deportation or tragedy, what happened matters, not what it is called. The problem is not here—the problem is that people need to be free themselves of hatred. We could get a motion through parliament, like France did and consider the problem solved. That is not how it works. I don’t approve of the French way of dealing with this.

There are certain steps that Turkey can take, like granting citizenship to the children of Armenian families living abroad, opening rehabilitation centres, and making changes to the constitution...

I think when these meetings first started; they were intended to enable us to create an informal, laid back framework. I full heartedly subscribe to this; we should do our best to nurture it. Our common denominator is 2015. What comes before is important, but what comes after is more important. 2015 is going to pass us by, without any miracles.

Therefore, this framework should encourage, nurture, facilitate and appeal to the memory. It really can’t do much more than that anyway. We should appeal to the memory of the majority. Those with a conscience come to mind first. The History Foundation and the Hrant Dink Foundation have projects along these lines. There are many anonymous people with a conscience in Anatolia. If it weren’t

them, not as many Armenians would have survived, anyway. We're not alone in these efforts, either—actually, the genocide museum in Yerevan is starting the “those with a conscience” exhibit in 2015. This is a major step and we have to ask ourselves why, if it's being done there, why can't it be done here?

We need to keep talking about the anonymous, publicise the invitation to share memories as much as we can. Who knows what we'll uncover. There are still many unknown objectors/opposers within and outside the government who opposed the orders of the Ittihat ve Terakki (Committee of Union and Progress) and the government of Istanbul, who are still unknown. Approaching the issue from this angle will eventually take 2015, the genocide, the Armenian issue to another level.

Another project at the Hrant Dink Foundation has to do with the “border” issue. It's an econometric project. We're researching what the cost of having a closed border is, particularly for Kars and Ardahan provinces stuck in the middle of it all. We're going to present our project in May [2013]. One of the goals of the Hrant Dink Foundation is to open the border. This would open other doors, for sure.

Once again, I want to highlight the fact that the structure of these meetings should remain informal, and broad. Regardless of how it's expressed [by the participants], our only commonality is that atrocious things happened in 1915. This “call to share memories” project can't be limited to large cities, this long-term project absolutely has to include Anatolia.

In August, TESEV and the History Foundation started a history project. There's an existing project in the History

Foundation that deals with the Armenian issue, and TESEV has some scepticism regarding the upcoming 2015—especially regarding the Armenians in Turkey. We'd like to do something about both the hate language being used, and the mounting tension. TESEV wants to bring the “Call to share memories” project forward.

The project we're doing with the History Foundation focuses on memory and remembering. We are thinking about publishing a report called “1915 in 100 questions”. Of course, the government will be out there with propaganda under the guise of “factual” knowledge. Our report will be an alternative to all that in 2015.

We're moving towards 2015 with a significant degree of asymmetry between Turks and Armenians. From a Turkish perspective, there has recently been some unfavourable progress and polarization in the Turkish-Kurdish issue, possibility of a civil war on the rise as issues like the government and elections continue to plague the public—things aren't looking good. There's no room for optimism in this situation. Turkey is moving towards a bloody and polarized 2015. The socio-political constellation in the horizon is where Turkish nationalism, sensitivity to certain issues and the authority of the Turkish-Sunni institutional machine will be severely inflated with power by 2015. Armenians, on the other hand are expecting significant progress, an opening after 100 years. The situation is Turkey is even worse than is 3-5 years ago. We certainly are not going in the right direction. We can't limit our efforts to the Turkish-Armenian issue. It is all about the general democratization and confrontation process. A Turkey that can't come to terms with or present a mature solution to the current, bloody, Turkish-Kurdish issue, is not going to

confront what happened in 1915. There are people who defend the opposite view, people who say that if the original trauma is resolved then others will subsequently follow—but this isn't really possible. In the context of Turkey, the "old trauma" fires up the defensive attitudes. I think that most of our energy should be spent on the democratization-confrontation process, namely the Kurdish issue and some on the Turkish-Armenian issue and 1915. To be honest, I'd suggest this to everyone—it would be a more prolific effort in terms of change and reformation for this society.

Emphasizing 1915 and disregarding current problems is going to result in the public ignoring you—or even having a nervous breakdown. It's good to shake things up a bit, yes, but we don't want full on paralysis either. We need to continue to open the lines of communication. Of course, the public isn't a lab—so we have a lot of work to do. As we approach 2015, the Armenian diaspora and Armenian nationalists are going the issue a good hard push. We're going to see some polarization. We can also assume that the number of "neutral" individuals is going to decrease—those who approach the issue in a fanatical way are inevitably going to increase. This could continue for many years with no resolution whatsoever. Armenians may be disappointed—and rightfully so. In spite of this, the next couple of years could be a period in which we can open the floor to different opinions. We should be able to point out the significance of 2015, without turning it into a milestone.

In the US, there are 5 or 6 projects conducted by Turkish and Armenian psychiatrists, focusing on the emotional aspect of the issue. The participants were Turks and Armenians going to school or working in the US. One of the most interesting observations was when asked how they felt after they spoke with one

another, the basic feeling the Turkish participants expressed was humiliation. Some people find it easier to deal with these feelings, especially if they have some social capital—this results in some sort of confrontation. This is a good thing. But a significant portion actually become more withdrawn and defensive, at times even resort to an offensive attack, in response. We can say that the latter response is more prevalent in the Turkish society. Any work on trauma is going to be considerably complex. Unfortunately, we're not going to make much headway in only two years, but coordinating, systematising projects is a good idea. If we look at the basic identification schemas of the Turkish majority, we notice that Ittihat Terakki (Committee of Union and Progress), Talat Pasa, and Enver Pasa are prominent and still highly respected. There are still ceremonies organized and streets named after them. Our first task is to discredit these institutions. We need to bring forward those who helped the victims of 1915, the hidden heroes. In other words, we need to flip the existing identification schema around completely. Rather than identifying with Talat Pasa, people could identify with Mehmet Aga, who saved 100 Armenians in Urfa, for example. We need to highlight stories of people who helped whether it was in the name of Islam or because they had a conscience. Mechanisms like this are extremely useful, and we haven't utilized them enough in the past. These stories could be uncovered more systematically and the media could be more instrumental in this. We need to create the mechanism in which people can reach these memories. Of course we'll always be confronted with the humiliation/inferiority issue. We're going to see a very defensive, even aggressive response from some segments of the society. The more we can reduce this kind of response, using alternative techniques, the better.

Rather than just isolating the issue, we should tackle it as part of the general democratization-confrontation process in conjunction with present-day problems. We can be more effective and loud this way.

There's also the danger of focusing on one painful incident in Turkish history, and being accused of being insensitive to others. The 2015 issue is not limited to 2015. The Balkan Wars need to be discussed as well. People who're able to talk about the Armenian issue must have a few words to say about the Balkan Wars too. For years, the Republic of Turkey has been trying to pass Gallipoli off as a battle of independence rather than a battle of imperial redistribution—and has been relatively successful in doing so. Turkey, whose entire political existence is based on an opposition movement to the Ittihat ve Terakki (Committee of Union and Progress) tradition, actually seems to identify with everything that was done during that period.

Talking about the humanitarian aspects of the Balkan Wars may increase the chances for some unconventional discussion of the Armenian issue as well as broadening the "audience".

The Hrant Dink Foundation and Yildiz Technical University will be organizing the Balkan War Conference in 2013.

It's obvious that the emphasis on 2015 is going to work against the existing Turkish mind-set. Those who support the official ideology are all set with their defences in hand. We got an inquiry at the History Foundation, about an international

project on the Armenian issue, which we had not yet publicised. So people are already keeping tally of what's cooking in the alternative projects department. These groups actually have projects dealing with the '93 war, the Balkan Wars—all with the ulterior motive of making sense of the events of 1915. Another contribution to the reciprocity argument.

We've gathered here to talk about 1915, not 2015. Of course we should also talk about what we need to do in 2014, and why we couldn't do more effective things in 2011—I'm sure there were some who did, but we should talk about what we were unable to do in the past.

There's a lot of weight attached to the centenary issue. A lot of people are thinking about how to just get through 2015, as if everything's going to be over with after 2015 comes and goes. The more important date here is actually 1915. Confronting recent history has been on the agenda in Turkey for the last 3-5 years, and in this context, 1915 could be emphasized. Though they may be few, there are people working fervently on this. These efforts are taking place in the same channels though—that is, we are talking and we are listening to one another. If 300 people are working on these issues, 3000 people are aware of it, but we're still having trouble reaching the 3001st person. Widening this net would be a great achievement.

The work regarding memory should be targeted at youth perhaps. There is a rough draft for this project. The Ministry of Education supports local, oral history classes for high scholars. Local is the key word here. Inspired students might dig into their own local and family histories. It doesn't always have to be about victimization. Good things happen in Turkey, too. There are positive stories waiting to be discovered. At the same time, attributing these events to only a few

groups like the Teskilat-i Mahsusa (the Special Organization) or Ittihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti (Committee of Union and Progress) and isolating the general public from what happened could also hinder confrontation.

After we get through 2015, are we going to go on to say we have another century to go? Armenians abroad have vast expectations about this—some are even romantic, exaggerated expectations. I can see three options for working out these issues:

1. For the long-term: The confrontation of the Turkish public with the Turks, Kurds and Armenians. This confrontation should acknowledge the tragedies and honour those who resisted them. Confrontation started really late in Turkey. It is a long-term effort, but still—it started too late, so did the debate about the Armenian issue. There are years between the events and the beginning of conversation about them. In addition, there's a great deal of organised, systematic resistance and misinformation in the current environment. We need to accept now that this is going to be a long-term goal. It is not one of those "Oh I said it, I feel much lighter now" moments. The Turks need to come to terms with their own history—that's what democracy means, actually. Once people make peace with their own EYLEM DUNYASI, they make peace with others. NGOs are working towards this, but they need to be supported, and the projects need to be coordinated, in order to bring some depth to the issue.

2. Secondly, there's the Armenian Diaspora. They look like a very introverted group dominated by Tashnaks, but it's important to establish a dialogue with them. This needs to be separate from the conversation with the Armenians

in Turkey, because we're all living here together anyway. You get into dialogue with another being, so it is sort of wrong to talk about dialogue with the Armenians in Turkey. It needs to be a more expedited, stronger discussion with the Diaspora—not by going to the US, or France—but by inviting them here, even the most outspoken groups. It needs to be an environment in which even the most highly opinionated on these issues feel comfortable airing their grievances in an open forum. I'm not talking about inviting them here, fuelling their hatred, and sending them back—but engaging in an uninhibited discussion. I cannot stress this strongly enough, it has to happen here.

3. This approach needs to, in some way, reach out to the government as well. This isn't something that needs to be put off until 2015 either—the government needs to—as soon as possible—make some sort of statement acknowledging this tragedy. What the PM said about Dersim should be said to the Armenians. As Turkish citizens, we need to urge the government to speak up about this, at least in the name of justice—and not just individually, but in actual, mobilized groups, outside the usual suspects. Not in 2015, now! We could make a call based on conscience with the right tone. We can voice or demands from the government. We need to emphasize that a significant portion of the Turkish public doesn't deny this tragedy..

We need to acknowledge the fact that when history teachers attempt to use some alternative material, or veer off the curriculum; they face a great deal of pressure from the administration. They are required to use materials that put forth only a biased and reductive narrative. Undoubtedly, teachers can

speak more freely amongst themselves, but even then these opinions are faced with a rhetoric of hatred. I don't mean to be pessimistic, but it's really difficult to introduce alternative resources to kids in the current public education system. Some high schools even invest in especially designed programs for students who will be studying abroad, so that they are prepared when faced with the Armenian issue.

However, middle school students may be more open to different viewpoints. They're more curious, more open-minded. We could think about projects targeting this age group. For example, we could organize a workshop where kids from Turkey and Armenia create a history book by themselves, without the interference of adults, teachers, and academics—with pictures, drawings, etc. This could be a long-term factor in helping to resolve these issues.

There are some projects with the *Başka Bir Okul Mümkün* (Another School Is Possible) Association. There are schools that are relatively free from administrative pressures.

A while ago we organized a competition for projects devised by middle school students. There were several interesting entries like computer class called "National [Court] Case, National Keyboard," and a project called "Greek Atrocities" in history class. One of the students was Rum [ethnically Greek Turkish citizen], and was subjected to questions like, "Are you Jewish?" from students who came from Anatolia. The prevalence of the "hate language" is dangerous. We need to be able to reach these students [from Anatolia], have our voice heard by them and encourage the creation of a children's language that

has sufficiently distanced itself from a discriminatory one.

There's a problem with the Ministry of Education. They're writing a book about Armenians. Teachers didn't hear about this project until it was too late—they were able to react to it, but more importantly, it made us think—we need to write a book explaining our perspective, opposite of "hate language". The History Foundation and similar organizations need to support such projects. Kids should get involved too of course.

TUBITAK has a project called "Milli Zeka Testi Uretme" (Creating A National Intelligence Test"). There's no way it's going to be taken seriously by the international scientific community.

A multi-layered approach is called for. Rather than focusing specifically on one event like 2015, we need to look at the whole picture. We need to analyse why Turkish-ness/Sunni-ness has been placed in such an authoritarian, totalitarian position—and importantly, what kind of fear tactics were used to achieve this. It's important to create some contact with this group in order to have a discussion about it.

An increasingly widespread language of hate currently dominates dialogue about these issues. The environment isn't really that different from when Hrant Dink was murdered. There's the Malatya case, the Rahip Santorini case—and when we look to the government, we don't see any internalised progress. The Prime Minister refers to "Kurdish" and "Turkish" citizens, but never "Armenian" citizens, for example. We really need to urge the government to change its language. There

are a number of ways to acknowledge the issue, and resolve it. For example— an “if walls could talk” type of thing—we could ask: who owned these buildings, who lived in them—we could learn a lot from this. It could make us think—where are these people [owners] now? Food for thought!

The issues being discussed here today are really important and similar meetings should be conducted in other cities. There are some interesting things going on under the guise of the city renewal projects—for example, all of the old buildings in Ankara are being re-dated to the year 1916. Who was living there, who owned these buildings before that date? Records indicate that a building became the Kamil Paşa Mansion in 1916 but the building is much older than that. My point is it’s not just the Armenians in Istanbul that are the issue, but in other cities as well. We need to spread these discussions to Malatya, Amasya etc.

It was anticipated that after Hrant Dink was murdered, the number of people who would commemorate him would decrease—but this didn’t happen. This is an interesting development. There is, however still a lack of effort in terms of confronting 1915. In fact, there’s a movement to do just the opposite—forget it.

How can you have a meeting with people who aren’t willing to listen?

To answer this question: If there isn’t a huge language gap between the Armenian Diaspora and those who are meeting with them, the interaction will be a lot smoother for both sides. There are still radicals on both sides who blatantly refuse an open dialogue.

An Armenian psychologist made a presentation at an international conference in 2001. The organizers, a left wing group asked that the word “genocide” be removed. Today they probably wouldn’t make the same request. Some things are discussed more freely but it took 10 years to get to this point.

During the hCa’s “Yavaş Gamats” summer school program, interaction did improve among the young participants after a very rocky start. Some have maintained these friendships.

The governor of Kars appeared sitting in front of a historical hamam in a TV show. We need to ask questions about the history of the building. Who were the previous owners? There are people who deal with these issues in Kars who are trying to establish an open border. We need to talk to these people and coordinate our efforts. Even the mayor and other city officials want to open the Armenian border.

Another example is from a travel show covering Malatya. They introduce a “new” neighbourhood where it has a widely known Armenian history. It would be meaningful to highlight further examples from all over Anatolia.

The Anatolian Cultural Foundation has some ongoing projects (since 2005) in conjunction with NGOs in Armenia. One project that started in 2009 is the Turkey-Armenia cinema platform, and another is a historical research project entitled “Talking to One Another,” involving youth camps and exhibitions. We plan on continuing this project through 2015, not because we see it as a milestone year, but because we can benefit from the international attention.

Organizing a massive event in 2015 is going to play into the hands of the Turkish nationalists. They will have a specific cause to oppose, and an “enemy” to engage with. This could just intensify the violence.

At the camp, the participants from Turkey were more likely to voice different opinions whereas those from Armenia were a bit harsher, almost on a mission to “teach” the truth. People coming in expecting “denier” Turks are surprised to find participants open to dialogue. Maybe we can use this as a starting point to organize some activities that can help merge these diverging viewpoints.

We organised an exhibition in Cyprus and Georgia and will do the same in Berlin in October, and Paris in November. There were people from the north and the south coming to see the exhibition in Cyprus. The ones from the south thought it was beneficial in the guestbook. Some liked the dialogue theme and some said “This is what the Turks did to us too”. Radical Greek Cypriots used works from the exhibition as an excuse to express their own grievances. There were actually a large variety of individualistic responses to the project—not just clear, segregated “blocks” as some might think. We also had a book project with individual stories. During the book launch, we gave out paragraphs from the book to participants and the protesters fell completely silent because the stories were so personal. I think it’s really important to articulate these stories. Anatolia is a well of handwritten books by witnesses of the events. Many families have these. They are such valuable sources, with the good stories and the bad.

As for Izmir, it had an Armenian population as well as a vast Rum [ethnic Greeks in Turkey] heritage. Some of the Armenians migrated overseas. The events

are referred to as “genocide” by Europeans who were living there at the time.

We organized a camp in Muş with 20 university students from Armenia and Turkey collaborating on a joint history book. There were some projects on oral history, photographs, etc. for two weeks. It was a very meaningful project, and was only covered by the local press in Muş, these events need much better coverage.

Every year, 100-150 young Armenian Americans whose fathers and grandfathers are from Turkey come back here. They organize historical tours in Kayseri, Yozgat, Nigde, etc. They’re here to reconnect with their past—we could meet with them and share these stories. Recently, the President of France Francois Hollande issued a formal apology for the Holocaust which was made possible by French security forces’ cooperation with Nazi powers. A formal apology from the government is crucial to resolution. Any step Turkey could take towards this would be extremely valuable. An interesting development was Davutoglu saying “we’re going to have contact with the Diaspora” last year. However, this turned into an invitation by ambassadors to Republic Day celebrations. The tone is not the best but it is still a step in the right direction.

On the website of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, there used to be an Armenian Buildings division. There is a restoration project sponsored by the ministry focusing on historical fountains. We could seek sponsorship for future projects on the documentation of buildings.

In small towns and villages, peoples' lives are intertwined with the history of buildings. Projects accentuating this should be conducted. Migrants to big cities who were detached from the collective memory of their hometown should be considered too. We should reach out to people who live in the outskirts of Western cities in Turkey.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs plans to grant mainly symbolic positions to some of its Armenian staff. This is just an attempt to have a more favourable facade.

More people have been sharing personal stories about Armenians in their families. Why did people feel the need to keep minorities in their families a secret during the initial periods of the Republic? Maybe they had to, military officers for example weren't allowed to marry minorities. How about a campaign to encourage people to come out with their family secrets?

During the Roma initiative people hid the fact that they were Roma. The EU projects, reform, etc. helped the Roma people gain some self-confidence. Now quite a few people are happy to, even proud to say they are Roma. The Ottoman Empire had many people from minority groups in influential positions. Well, we call them minority groups now, but they weren't called that during the Ottoman Empire. These people have made great contributions to literature, science and art. In an effort to educate the public we could create a document highlighting their contributions to our culture and acknowledge their significant role in our history. These people are not mentioned in history books, so young people have no idea who they are.

Works by Armenian composers where played at a concert organised by a group including Nazar Sahafyan. Could this be repeated in Malatya maybe?

Individual stories are important but there's also a collective memory. Turkey's self-perception is undergoing a transformation. These issues were widely and comfortably discussed in private during the 1970s. Obviously, some exceptionally private things weren't discussed, but people know what happened to which people in their own village. Of course, first-hand witnesses were alive back then, too. When these topics were introduced to the public, however, they took on a different tone. I think it's important to create a space free from political and social pressure for the sharing of these stories. If there's a space that hasn't been tainted by the past 20-30 years, we need to find it. We're faced with a society who doesn't feel comfortable speaking in front of a camera or at a public gathering. Our main goal, more than anything else should be to find and maintain a safe, comfortable environment for these memories to be shared by generations and dialogue to flourish. This is much more crucial than documenting people or buildings.

The issues being discussed 40 years ago were actually events of 60 years before that and eye-witnesses were alive back then. This was a time when people were accessible. The population dispersion during that period is important too. Most people unfortunately would not find a single soul who knew their family if they went back to their grandfather's or father's village. This leads to a gap or disjointedness in the collective memory.

During the Diyarbakir Prison project, there was another potential project that never came to life, but could be meaningful here. For example, if a university student is curious about what happened in 1915, since the printed materials are potentially difficult to access, we could design a Wikipedia-type website on 1915 and surrounding events with interactive materials. You click on “Talat Paşa” and get biographical and historical information. The site could be enhanced with photographs and articles. It could be a long term project accommodating different perspectives and growing organically. We need a team of site moderators as well as some funding. I think this kind of site could be really beneficial for Turkey.

After participating in a NGO forum, SETA began working on the Turkey-Armenia issue. We need to figure out how to deal with civil society and political culture separately. The majority of the public looks at 1915 as a government centred issue. People mirror the government’s silence. See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil. How can we convince politicians to confront 1915? I’m talking about everyone involved in politics here, both the government and the opposition. The same goes for dealing with the civil society. I think it’s possible for Armenians to work together with their own communities to correct misinformation about these events. In large cities in Turkey, the majority of people look at issues through the same lens as the government.

The offenders of the events of 1915 should be held responsible for their actions. We could form a commission of truth, or a real court that issues actual rulings by default. Witnesses could be called—could we do this based on documentation of the events? We could ask politicians

why they don’t distance themselves from the events and confront them since these events did not occur under their jurisdiction. We could elaborate on this concept and use it as a tool for planning a proper acknowledgement and apology. This should have preceded the apology campaign.

We have a program for SETA interns. Volunteers are given a set of reading materials which include novels on human rights issues, and personal anecdotes and memories instead of academic works. For example, two people read books about the Kurdish issue—like “It’s Not What You Think” or Began Matura’s “Looking Past the Mountain”. One of the books was “My Grandmother”. These books have profoundly changed the lives of these young people. Metin Aktaş’s “Last Derviş” talks about the Hamidiye Regiments and Muslim tyranny over the Armenians and Yezidis. People who define themselves as pious Muslims feel shame and start thinking about how they will account for these acts. Literature will do the job here, much more than history. As for the buildings project—we could have signage on each structure indicating the past owner, the architect, etc. We could do a test run in a couple of places, and take it from there. We also have to get the Muslim majority thinking about why these minority groups still feel the need to hide their family histories or ties with these events. We should be able to say in response to the “they changed their names, they’re using Muslim names” argument, that this is actually our own embarrassment. The fact that these people feel unsafe or unable to use their own names in the environment that we’ve created should actually be embarrassing for us.

We need to discuss people getting rich off

of Armenian goods, too. There are large financial institutions that support this, too—we need to bring these to light. In fact, a national bourgeoisie was formed from Ittihat ve Terakki's [Committee of Union and Progress] "there is no minority" politics. Armenian goods were confiscated. We need to take a look at how people in Adana and Kayseri actually acquired their wealth.

As a Turkish Kurd, I can say this about our next meeting—all victims use their victimization as a political vehicle. Their own victimization is the basis of their demand for rights. For example, if Dersim is on the agenda, those who are sensitive about it come forward. We could invite NGOs working on the Kurdish or Alawite issue to the next meeting. Together with those who work in human rights, or with the shared recollection issue? We have to work on strengthening the ties between different groups in society.

Hate language is on the rise. There's a trivia type iPad application with questions like "Which country wants Turkey to admit to a fake genocide and provide them with reparations?" or "Which country occupied Karabag?". This type of language is turning into some sort of indoctrination in our daily lives. We should reveal these.

Armenians are expecting an official apology but this is not going to happen. If we do start a website, people can put forth what they mean by an apology, or to issue their own apologies themselves. We could work together on a language of "apology".

Everyone here knows these issues are all related. In the middle of democratization, the Kurdish issue, the Armenian issue, lies the Turkish issue. Our goal is to confront what happened in 1915. We need to clarify our purpose as we coordinate our projects and continue to work on them. We could think about a platform that is sort of a meeting point of all ideas.

The website could be about 1915; a place where those who want to discuss the topic could find one another. But we already know it's going to elicit quite a reaction. We could temporarily call it "Platform for 1915," or "The 1915 Initiative. Maybe we should get these domain names.

As we wrap up the meeting, a few things have become quite clear. In the past, "Towards 2015," was an informal title we used amongst ourselves, but we've made a decision not to use this as the official heading for this project.

We're going to arrange for this group to meet again in the future—not necessarily often, but as we make progress. At the next meeting, rather than talking about what we intend to do, we should get together to discuss what we accomplished. With your support, we could organize some meetings in Istanbul or other cities that would include local participants or participants from the Diaspora. We could use "mapping" to set up the website (or a "Wikipedia" type of site). There are many different groups with their unique approaches targeting similar goals. We should continue to facilitate meetings to let them see one another, even work towards an alignment. We can easily achieve this without being inundated with emails or meetings. Many thanks everyone.

Yüzleşme¹ from a Psycho-Political Perspective

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In recent years” yüzleşme” has become a common term, a familiar concept in Turkish political life. A large number of politicians, commentators, writers etc. often state that Turkey must confront some issue or other. Some on the other hand explicitly or implicitly moan and groan saying "why confront?" What is this “yüzleşme” that has almost become a part of mainstream politics in Turkey? What is it like, what does it encompass and what are its components? Moreover, how is it done and does it do any good? The main objective of this article is to answer these questions from a psycho-political perspective.

Meanings of “Yüzleşme”

Yüzleşme is one of the finest words in the Turkish language. The TDK (Turkish Language Institution Dictionary, 2011) lists three different meanings:

- 1) People who claim the existence of an issue and come face to face with its deniers to reiterate their claim;
- 2) To come face to face with something;
- 3) To become aware of, to understand thoroughly. The most common and widely accepted meaning is: Two people who present different versions about an incident/situation/life experience (generally one being the claimant and the other the denier) come face to face, meet and confront one another. What will come out of this coming face to

face in the presence of witnesses or alone? They will look one another in the eye, if there are witnesses; they (the witnesses) will also look at these two faces and into these two pairs of eyes (the claimant and denier). What’s the point? To figure out who is telling the truth and who is lying – to search for the truth (to become aware of and thoroughly understand the truth). Because wisdom distilled and handed down from years of human history tells us that even minimal changes in our faces/eyes would reveal emotions.² Emotions are our subjective truths. It is harder to hide our emotions when we look at another’s face or into another’s eyes. If we think someone is avoiding reality or lying to us, we say “look me in the eye and talk” and carefully examine his/her face and eyes during the conversation.

We should also add that to look one another in the eye not only contributes to the unveiling of emotions and revelation of truth, but also increases the potential of bonding between two people. For the majority of people in all societies, it is very hard to hurt someone looking them in the eye. To continue to hurt someone despite seeing the hurt and the pain in the other’s eye is only possible if have a severely anti-social personality and/or if you can see the other person as a threat/enemy that needs to be hated/destroyed and thus as someone that can be perceived as a non-human being. For that reason

[1] “Yüzleşme” in Turkish does not have a perfect English translation, but can be translated as “coming to terms with,” or “facing up to,” or “confrontation.” It originally means “two people coming face-to-face to uncover the truth.” Since the article heavily relies on this face-to-face quality of the term, we prefer to leave it as “yüzleşme” throughout the article.

[2] “This wisdom is also confirmed by quite sophisticated scientific research. For example see Ekman & Friesen (2003).

many torturers cannot torture their victims unless they are blindfolded. Being recognized is not their only reservation; eye contact increases the possibility of establishing a bond; a human connection that severely reduces the capacity to torture. When we see pain in the eyes/face of another, our “mirror neurons”³ come into play and we somehow feel their pain in our system. Emotions (like empathy, affection and mercy which make us human) and our conscience all step in and prevent us from inflicting pain. Hence, if the first product of the act of *yüzleşme* is truth, then we can say that the second product is to create a relational field between each other through empathy and conscience. Naturally *yüzleşme* does not automatically ensure the emergence of these two products, however it significantly raises the possibility of their appearance. If a synthesis of these products is possible, then we can talk about a peaceful reconciliation in a re-established relationship based on truth.

Layers of *Yüzleşme*

In the act of *yüzleşme*, various layers of truth are confronted as if following a sequence:

1. Here comes the “Other” with a story that conflicts with our own.
2. The face, eyes and emotions of the Other: it may be shocking to meet a different subjectivity
3. Our own emotions: The emergence of intense and complex emotions can surprise us once we let them surface, once we trust. Relief will follow as they are expressed and processed.
4. The past, memories, facts and truth
 - a. Our crimes/misdeeds/offences and/or
 - b. Our traumas/pain/sufferings
5. Ourselves as a whole: Who are we? What have we been through? What were we exposed to as a victim?

Where are our vulnerabilities? How and whom have we hurt? How did all of this happen? At what cost? Answers to these questions can be quite shocking and transformative for both the victim and the perpetrator. A sincere and real *yüzleşme* process is revolutionary for those who go through with it. We look inside ourselves, confront the darkness within, the twists in our psyche. We gain insight and are renewed. *Yüzleşme* opens doors for the victims by repairing their sense of vulnerability and empowering them. The perpetrators get to re-enter the minimum ethical framework.

In short, “*yüzleşme*” which starts with the “Other” evolves into a process in which we look ourselves in the mirror. Done properly, it can give real and in-depth knowledge about us and the ability to transform ourselves. After this process, we can recreate the relationship with the Other, this time on the basis of reality in our new changed/recreated (in a sense purified) selves. In this sense *yüzleşme* is an opportunity.

From the Individual to Socio-politics

Since the history of disputes, conflicts and traumas is as long the history of humanity itself, the history of *yüzleşme* should be as long. In each culture various degrees of *yüzleşme* are a part of daily life and interpersonal relations. However, since the beginning of 20th century, as psychoanalysis and other psychotherapy schools – which emphasize the maturing and healing functions of *yüzleşme* with oneself (with one’s inner conflicts, fears, anxieties, weaknesses) – become widespread, it can be said that *yüzleşme* started to occupy a far more important place in cultural codes, particularly of the Western world. In this process, the person goes through a process of *yüzleşme* –

[3] Mirror neurons are special type of neurological cells in our brain which were recently discovered. Their basic function is to mirror the emotions or actions of others observed directly. It is thought that feeling of empathy is also related to this mirror neuron system. Through this system of mirror neurons, sections in our brain that cause pain are stimulated when we see a person in pain and we partially experience this pain (Decety & Ickes, 2009; Schulte-Rüther et al., 2007).

confronting deep levels of their inner self, unconscious mental and physical materials (repressed or ruptured desires, feelings, memories, traumas, relationalities etc.) – again and again. He learns more about himself and his life stories and makes sense of them, he reorganizes his memory, partially transforms himself, defines and establishes himself and his relations in a far more authentic and mature manner. (For more detailed information about psychoanalysis also see Mitchell & Black, 1996, Safran, 2012). Experiences in psychoanalysis and trauma studies teach us that we need to face our past traumas, vulnerabilities, deprivations and live with the ghosts inside us if we want to live and flourish today in a free, authentic and real, mature style. (Prager, 2008) It is hard and painful, but ultimately it is a process which matures a person increasing quality of life on so many levels.

The practice of *yüzleşme*, which entered the public imagination through psychoanalysis on an individual level, started to find a place in a socio-political level soon after the heavy destruction caused by World War II. Events like colossal war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity have left lots of knots in the public psyche that needed to be confronted by different sides on a number of levels. Japan and Germany, defeated parties of WW II, were not only defeated in a clear and unambiguous manner and surrendered, but were also caught red-handed. State officials were held responsible for the death of millions of civilians and were judged and convicted by the winners in the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials. This was an effort to achieve justice in retribution. There are also reparative/restorative justice initiatives which have been developed far more recently. These kinds of justice initiatives have been tried not only in societies where there

is a clear winner or loser and soft transitions are still possible, but also where the conflict and polarization is very serious and widespread punishment can create new waves of conflict/vengeance (for example South Africa). This style of justice is usually carried out through “Truth and Reconciliation Commissions”. The main objective is to uncover the truth about past crimes, to determine victims and perpetrators. As in the example of South Africa, if the perpetrators confess all and apologize looking into the eyes of the victims, they may be forgiven. This style of justice is thought to be more effective for uncovering and accepting the truth and for the healing of old wounds than the punishment of the perpetrators. As a matter of fact in South Africa sessions of “Truth and Reconciliation Commission”, where victims and perpetrators were heard, have been broadcast on TV and on the radio. They were the most widespread and comprehensive group therapy/*yüzleşme* realised in history (Barkan, 2001; Boraine, 2000).

No matter what kind of justice style there are also different combinations of styles - what we mean by *yüzleşme* is the same on an individual and socio-political level: The truth will be revealed, victim and perpetrator will be determined, deniers/perpetrators will understand the issue at hand in depth and a consensus of peace will emerge.

Only after this transformation can victims and perpetrators reach reconciliation within the framework of this truth regime if they want. For the resolution of historical/political conflicts, it is necessary to have not only information/enlightenment venues but also to have a comprehensive emotional praxis using channels like pleas, forgiveness, repentance and remorse and empathy as psychoanalytical

theory and psycho-traumatology teaches. (Amstutz, 2005; Auerbach, 2009; Biggar, 2001; Digeser, 2001). “Many dark pages in Turkish history were covered up, disregarded or mistaught. Certain segments of the society are still systematically victimized. It is not possible to move forward towards social peace and justice without facing those dark pages.

- 1) What is forced to be forgotten comes back as nightmares at some point in the future
- 2) The only way to reach the social maturity of “never again” is confrontation (yüzleşme)
- 3) If we want to integrate victimized segments of the society, we have to acknowledge the suffering and malice endured, apologize to the victims and comfort and honour them. (Paker, 2009)

“Facing the truth requires an intense and multi-layered struggle on many levels including memory, emotion, meaning and relationality. Things that are not remembered or remembered falsely, what we were made to forget, what we knew, what we were mistaught will have to be replaced with factual information. The emotional toll of this enormous change must be paid; consequently a new world of meaning will be established and new types of relationality will be developed. It is a tricky process both on the personal and social levels; which plays up as avoidance, fear and anger. A proper yüzleşme process however results in maturity. (Paker, 2009)

The Elements and the Stages of Yüzleşme

What kind of elements do yüzleşme and reconciliation processes involve? Are there specific stages?

Auerbach (2009) talks about a seven stage process for reconciliation:

- 1) Familiarise yourself with the conflicting stories about the events that form the basis of the conflict;
- 2) Recognise /understand the story of the Other even though it may not be accepted;
- 3) Develop empathy for the Other;
- 4) Take at least partial responsibility for the claims of the Other;
- 5) Express readiness for atonement/compensation of the crimes/mistakes of the past ;
- 6) Apologize publicly and ask for forgiveness for past crimes/mistakes;
- 7) Work towards a common story that can integrate different and conflicting stories and is acceptable to both parties.

According to **Wessels and Bretherton** (2000), there are three basic elements of reconciliation: 1) Make peace with the past (uncover the truth and apologize); 2) Resolve the conflict in a peaceful manner; 3) Social justice.

The various stages and elements of yüzleşme in literature do not seem to be very comprehensive. From a psycho-political perspective, the elements and stages for the peaceful resolution of a historical/political disagreement/animosity laden with trauma/conflict can be listed as follows:

1. Trust and security

Since it was conceptualized for post-conflict (transition to democracy) periods, the literature on yüzleşme/reconciliation literature generally takes trust and the need for security as given. The end of active armed struggle and the environment of violence facilitates the process for a comprehensive, high quality and permanent yüzleşme/reconciliation effort. For the majority of the public to confront itself, basic security needs have to be met and a minimum degree of trust should be felt towards the Other. However,

it is also possible that the *yüzleşme* starts off with a small minority in an unofficial capacity. They can eventually persuade the parties to enter a permanent reconciliation framework and declare a cease-fire. Reconciliation efforts carried out in an unofficial capacity can to a degree uncover the intent of both parties to reconcile and reach a framework agreement and cease-fire, resulting in a far more comprehensive and official step towards reconciliation.

2. Knowledge and Memory: Uncovering the truth

Yüzleşme is primarily an exercise in memory. It is necessary to uncover all factual truths in detail about the dark pages subject to disagreement in the near past and/or history of the society. What happened, when, how and why? Who are the victims and the perpetrators?

a. Unofficial channels

All initiatives, efforts carried out by the civil society about the dark pages in history like research, publications, campaigns etc. help to familiarise the public with the facts and pressure official channels for a more comprehensive *yüzleşme*.

b. Official channels

In order to have a more comprehensive *yüzleşme* and to produce permanent and tangible outcomes from this process, official channels need to be involved from the information/memory study stage onwards. At this point, there are basically three options

- i.** Retributive justice through courts
- ii.** Reparative justice through structures like Truth Commissions
- iii.** Mixed models to suit the country/society/conflict

Truth about the dark pages in history will be uncovered and registered on official records regardless of the path

chosen.

c. Socialization of knowledge: A new collective memory

Uncovering of the truth is not enough. This truth has to be acknowledged and accepted by the highest authorities (like the parliament) and disseminated widely for the socialization of knowledge. The public can access true information about the dark pages, carry out a thorough and healthy memory cleansing and end information deficit or information pollution.

3. Effect

“Being informed is necessary but not sufficient. It should not be assumed that every person sufficiently informed about dark pages would develop a feeling of empathy for victimhood and unjust treatment... As the public gets more informed about the dark pages and denial becomes impossible, it is quite possible for a section of the society to assume the “they deserved it” position. Understanding the Other and developing empathy requires going beyond the information stage. In this context, direct personal contacts, people from different sections of society working together on common projects and art form the most important links” (Paker, 2009). In order to involve the emotional dimension of *yüzleşme* in the whole process, the greatest task falls to artists, especially to those with mass appeal. Due to their popularity, movies and music springs to mind for the first phase.

4. Meaning

“Being informed and developing empathy with the victims are necessary but not sufficient. We need to make sense of the information and emotions. What kind of a state is this? What does it mean to be a citizen from the perspective of the state? What are the commonalities/connections between different dark

pages? For example, if we are talking about Turkey, what are the sources of the imposition of Turkishness and what is the cost? If Turkishness cannot embrace the whole society, what can? The answers to these questions are themes of a political struggle. Hence, the activity of *yüzleşme* does not take place in a political vacuum. Meanings extrapolated from *yüzleşme* are formed by the climate of political struggle” (Paker, 2009).

5. Apology and demand for forgiveness

After going through the previous phases and preparing the public in the process, a clear and sincere apology for the crimes committed is in order. The highest authority should demand forgiveness from the victims and their families. Denial of victimhood compounds the sense of unjust treatment. The cycle of trauma does not end unless victimhood is recognized and victims are honoured, hence the traumatic past lives on in the present.

A sincere official apology helps to differentiate between the past and the present (Prager, 2008). An apology can put the traumatic past behind, accomplishing closure. This is an absolute must for the possibility of a new and common future. The apology of the perpetrator has the potential to turn the hurt of the victim into forgiveness (Goldberg, 1967; Tylim, 2000). “If being hurt is a type of psychological captivity, forgiveness can be seen as a form of psychological liberation. Forgiveness as a form of liberation is built upon an increased capacity for uncertainty and our ability to mellow down the discontent of the past in return for a less destructive future ” (Tylim, 2005).

6. Restitution

During the *yüzleşme* process, the material and psychological losses

of victims should be compensated as much as possible. This shows the responsibility assumed for the damage and that returning the victim to its pre-trauma state is considered important. This might help the victims and their social milieu to restore their sense of belonging to the society.

7. Reparation

Mass political violence and the trauma of oppression can cause significant damage in victims. Reparation of those damages should also be a part of the *yüzleşme* process.

a. Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation services for medical and psychological damages should be provided to victims free of charge.

b. The significance of symbols

The most significant tools of reparation on the collective level are symbols. For example, the naming of various streets and buildings after people who were thought to be heroes but turned out to be murderers should end. The names of the victims, those who helped them and the people who resisted violence should be brought to the forefront instead. Monuments and museums – reminders of traumatic events honouring victims and warning future generations are tools of symbolic and collective reparation.

8. Redefinition of rights-Legal reforms

a. Evaluation of all oppressive/ discriminatory laws and legislation on the basis of an egalitarian and peaceful reconciliation

b. Assessment of all text books in the same vein

c. Legal regulations and framework deprecating hate speech and discrimination

d. Active education of the public about discrimination

9. Reassociation -Social Justice

“The ultimate objective of *yüzleşme* is to reassociate ourselves and the people we consider as the Other in a far more mature, ethical and sincere manner and to develop a human platform based on equality” (Paker, 2009).

“Peace is generally defined on two levels. The absence of overt violence is negative peace. Elimination of open violence is crucial and necessary, though not sufficient, to establish peace. Because if social injustice through discrimination and symbolic violence and structural inequalities laden with the possibility of overt violence persists, then there can be no peace. The existence of social justice is positive peace. [Galtung, 1969]....The truth and social justice are two aspects of the subject which should be taken very seriously” (Paker, 2009).

Status of *Yüzleşme* in Turkey

Turkish history from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire to contemporary Turkey has many dark pages awaiting *yüzleşme*. The state has used severe and powerful violence and oppression against various ethnic, religious or other socio-political groups perceived as a threat. None of these dark pages have been confronted properly on an official level. On the contrary, an active and intense denial policy has been pursued.

At the root of most of these issues that have produced an enormous amount of victims in the past and the present of the Republic of Turkey, lies the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. This invincible and mighty superpower of its time lost 90% of its peoples and territories in a century, a relatively short period. This main determinant of the dominant political culture in Turkey

[4] However, it should be also noted that due to serious legal mistakes and manipulation, this huge opportunity to address the recent, quite messy and dark history of Turkey has been almost missed to a large extent.

is still awaiting closure. A culture, long inclined to act in a paranoid and aggressive manner for its own survival, perceives religious, ethnic and linguistic differences as elements of threat that need to be assimilated or destroyed and acts accordingly (Paker, 2004, 2009).

“*Yüzleşme* has started in Turkey, but has a long way to go. Turkey’s unofficial *yüzleşme* process has been accelerating steadily over the last 10-15 years. The Kurdish, Armenian, Cyprus and minority issues, all putrefied and decades old, are already topics of public debate shaking the routine discourse of official ideology to an unprecedented degree. These unofficial efforts for *yüzleşme* will get stronger, speeding up the socio-cultural transformation process. They cannot, however, replace the need for a more structural and systematic official confrontation process. This is an issue of political struggle and transformation. On the official front, only the Ergenekon court process and developments in its periphery has become an important cornerstone.⁴ We should be adamant in the demand for an official *yüzleşme* process on other issues. (Paker, 2009).

“*Yüzleşme* is not a miracle solution. Supporting *yüzleşme* as a worthy and necessary process does not mean that it is the solution to all of our problems. *Yüzleşme* sometimes contributes significantly to the solution of some bigger issues, however even the successful completion of the process does not necessarily lead to a rosy picture devoid of political conflict” (Paker, 2009).

“Where do we start? So many dark pages, how do we put them in order? The socio-political context imposes prioritisation to a great extent; the choice is not really ours. However, as a general rule of thumb, we should

go for the darkest pages first. The ones with the highest degree of current relevance and bitterness; the greatest potential of touching the daily lives of real people should have priority. For Turkey these issues are, without a doubt, the Ergenekon type (deep) state activities and the Turkish-Kurdish issue” (Paker, 2009). “Yüzleşme is a process that is intertwined with democratization. We cannot confront without democratization and be democratic without confrontation. Hence, the democratization process is an integral part of yüzleşme” (Paker, 2009).

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Civilian Initiatives in the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Process

Meeting Minutes

December 15th, 2012,
hCa, Istanbul

Moderator Yetvart
Danzikyan

The 21 participants discussed ideas and solutions to the problem

Opening Speech

As we approach 2015, we decided to organize a series of meetings encouraging collaboration among the NGOs sharing an objective and fair approach to the events of 1915. These meetings will only be meaningful as part of a consistent, long term process. We hope to keep them up at least until 2015, with the scope of ending up with a platform.

Our initial perspective was to see if we can do things together, bring different groups under the same roof since the whole is worth more than its parts.

Many NGOs are already working on 1915. This initiative will hopefully grow bigger and stronger with input from its participants, encompassing Anatolia as well as Istanbul with meetings, conferences and seminars.

Many thanks for being here with us at our third meeting of this series.

After the opening speech, participants took the floor.

Turkey will face three significant elections in the coming couple of years. Unfortunately the atmosphere is getting harsher, more nationalistic and aggressive. The resignation of Taraf's (the daily) head staff and

the election of you-know-who as the ombudsman are signs in this direction. On the way to the election, we will witness the Prime Minister and the government reaching out more and more to communities. Under these circumstances, we should avoid provocation when addressing the major audience, the Muslim Turkish masses. There is no other way we can talk about problematic issues in a peaceful manner.

What the years 1915 to 2015 indicate is of utmost importance. I prefer not to use the term "genocide" when I am in Armenia or I am with friends from there. We can refer to "shared pain" or a "common tragedy". "Approaching 2015" is the title I have in mind. This is a good working title for my own community but we should reach out the wider public without mentioning 2015. Names and concepts are of utmost significance when tackling these issues. "Together for 800 years", "An age old friendship: fractures and pain" can all be used as sub-headings.

In political negotiations, simpler topics take precedence over the ones to be debated extensively. We should be careful with our wording. We don't want people leaving because they feel drained and discouraged. The name of the website or the titles we use should not provoke the general public. I am obviously not talking about a very naïve style either.

We can eventually have people and institutions from all walks of life in this platform including ones with more confrontational styles. Our main concern should be to prevent people leaving due to differences in style. We have consensus on this.

It was agreed to avoid “1915” and “2015, centenary” in naming events and the website.

86

I have an objection. The hairs on the back of my neck stand up when I hear “shared pain” within the context of 1915. I see the point of respecting the sensitivities of the majority but nothing happened to that majority. Honestly, even the debate on the hard and soft styles is really dangerous. Let's be aware of what everyone is doing; but reserve our right to participate in each other's events.

I share concerns about the current position of the government. We all saw what happened with the democratic opening process, there obviously was a national consensus. We have been conducting joint projects with Armenia since 2002 but we never thought about what the government, the people or the majority would say. Maybe we should have, maybe this was a mistake.

Meetings in Anatolia is a great idea. How about “city meetings” with historians, architects, academics etc. who work on 1915?

Then there is the recurring issue of style. Instead of debating which word is OK and which one should be avoided, we should find ways of communicating with one another. Do we always have to sugar coat tricky issues? We might work out the appropriate concepts further along the way. The current debate on wording proves that some people have not even heard of one another. Some academics say that they live in their little academic world where different views just don't get through. We should find ways to

improve communication. Some people say “genocide” for a reason, some can't for another. Why don't we try to understand the ones who can't? The Armenians should explain why they are hurt at the new communication platforms. For example, if we look at the genocide debate in Germany, their agenda is completely different. People cannot suggest how much of a certain idea or information can be shared. If they did, hell would break loose.

If we are to work together, we should express ourselves in a way everyone can understand. Some respond to stronger language, others do not. Finding the appropriate language is up to us. We can refine the language once we go ahead with the website.

I feel that I could not get my point across. People express themselves the way they want regardless of what decisions we make here. There is not much point making a decision. The name of a common platform should be receptive and comprehensive. I also want to emphasize once more; it should not be provocative to the larger audience.

Let's look at what happened with the Kurdish issue. If a solution is not convincing to the Turks, it will not materialize because no politician would support an argument unsupported by the general audience. I am concerned about the name of the website. Of course everybody can use their own style and they already do. I am not trying to influence what you are going to do; that would not make sense and I am not entitled to it.

When these meetings first began, what we had in mind was a more informal, welcoming, embracing, broad, non-imposing coalition. We do need a common denominator for that. Why don't we call the website “The Memory Website” or

“Grasp”, because memory is a crucial issue we need to address in this country.

I want to say something without taking the debate back to the beginning; I completely understand our friends who mentioned style as an issue but the stark truth should be told. It does not matter how softly we put it, the Yeni Akit newspaper and the likeminded cohort will understand whatever they want. We are always considering the sensitivity of Turks. We were at another conference a couple of days ago and listened to the Kurdish youth asking “Everyone talks about the Turks’ sensitivity, what about ours?” They are offended, they feel broken and their ship has sailed. Let’s look at recent history and see what the Armenians said instead of genocide. Words can be selected by looking at how Armenians described their own history.

Petrosyan and Türkeş had their first meeting in the early nineties. They agreed to erect a monument of shared pain along the Kars border. It would read “We are sorry for the common pain we went through in 1915” in Turkish on one side and Armenian on the other. In 1915 the Turks lost their wonderful, hard-working neighbours and the Armenians lost their motherland. The cost of this loss was huge for the Turks because the deported were well-educated, artist subjects of the Ottoman Empire. This was a great loss!

When we went to Diyarbakır for the meeting organized by the Hrant Dink Foundation, we witnessed what happened to the East after the genocide. To say the least, you can notice the deterioration of the division of labour. This could be one of the arguments to stimulate the laymen. Grasping what happened is so crucial.

In addition to this view; In the meeting with Ter Petrosyan, Türkeş said “the regrettable incidents” about 1915.

We all have a personal point of a view and the need for debate on the naming issue is rather obvious. I am not so keen on using “common pain”. In fact, you put a very realistic picture about the majority in this country. This is where the country is at.

When we talk about “common pain”, it sounds as if something had happened all of a sudden. In fact, what happened in 1915 in addition to loss of lives, and the confiscation of goods was a systematically planned ethnic cleansing. It was also political.

We worked on many projects with Anatolian Culture and our current collaboration is the “Yerkir Unions' Van Project” with participants from France and Armenia. What you just mentioned about the website project is so meaningful and has parallels with our project.

My understanding is that the main aim of the platform here is to help people in Turkey remember what happened in the past or encourage them to find out the truth. Yerkir’s project aims to make the diaspora and the people in Turkey and Armenia think. It is an internet platform and an online magazine project. Articles will be published in Turkish, French and Armenian around a different theme every 2 or 3 months.

As for the styles; it does not matter which one we choose to use, we should be inclusive and caring. Let’s not worry about naming right now. As the process acquires more power and maturity, a meaningful name might surface. Instead of starting off with a loud announcement, we should take small steps into the stage. In the mean time we carry on with our own activities.

After the last meeting, we felt that this platform missed some significant contributors. We since had a conversation with Faruk Ünsal (the head of the Ankara

MazlumDer). If we are to bring together our different tasks and support this platform, we should encourage other groups to join in. We should insist on calling our friends at Mazlum-Der. The widespread coverage of the platform will help with both legitimacy and impact.

What I gather is that the website will target the Turkish community and facilitate learning and remembering. On the other hand, there is talk about a multilingual website. So, I wonder what the target audience is, people in Turkey or others as well? We need to clarify this, since we are talking about different groups with different goals and needs. What they need to hear is totally different too.

Our primary aim as an open contact group is to help the Turkish majority -especially those who continue the shame of the Turkish/Sunni denial- see a different facet of the issue. These people are our first target audience. Secondly, we want to reach groups outside of Turkey. Actually, we started the movement as a campaign; not a project.

We all agree that the Turkish society pretends to be a patient on the Armenian issue; there is memory loss and denial. These meetings might get some people from completely different walks of life together, maybe they will even have an agreement. This won't happen instantly, it will take time, maybe a year. This is a process facilitating contact and developing mutual trust, it will mature along the way.

In Turkey, some government organizations, subscribers to the denial discourse, have already started taking measures in anticipation of their opponents' moves. This will materialize into a counter attack. "The argument of the Turks' sensitivity" will not be on the Armenians' agenda. Especially after the

death of Hrant Dink, the sensitivity issue lost its prominence. As people living in Turkey, as Armenians, Kurds and Turks, we will take into account the perception of the country but we will not do this by warping, stretching and softening history.

We will be clear, we will try to uncover the different components. We will redefine the collapsing of the Ottoman Empire, because people have the wrong perception of this period. They prefer the Malkoçoğlu (TN Turkish comic strip hero) version of history as a way of expression. Nobody can learn history through children's tales. All of these issues will be expressed in the short term. It is not only the Armenian issue; the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the republic should be addressed too. We need to explain that this country fought against its own oppressed people. Of course, there will be some Turks feeling uncomfortable about all these but also others who are willing to hear what happened and figure things out.

So how do we explain all that? We should definitely work on the method. Even our internal correspondence may cause us trouble in the future. A student was recently sentenced to eight years' imprisonment for being a member of an organization. The student had only participated in an International Women's Day Solidarity March. Participating in a completely legal, authorized mass demonstration may be counted as a crime in Turkey. Talking about 1915 is not the only issue; the attempt is to break the fascist mentality in Turkey. We are talking about a structure dominating the state's mind and the judicial system. Elections and fascism are not mutually exclusive.

We can organize round-table discussions and put them up on YouTube. People with mass appeal can take part in them. A debate platform with different groups and people will surely lure a wider audience.

I have an incident which shows where we stand today. An auditor visited our nursing home two months ago and talked to an employee. He carelessly noted in his report that “we talked to an employee called Bruno who speaks Turkish”. Bruno comes from a family which has been living here for generations. He is a Turkish citizen but is assumed to be a foreigner just because of his name.

The Prime Minister proudly stated at a meeting two years ago that buildings seized from non-Muslims would be returned if they were still in the hands of the state. If they belonged to third parties, the owners would be paid compensation. Three or four cases were settled out of approximately 150 applications, and unfortunately none had a positive result.

An MP responsible for preparation for 2015, said in his statement “We had been living in peace for centuries but they betrayed us in 1915 and paid the penalty. Now they live in their churches in peace”. Unfortunately this person had put a lot of time and effort into this project, most of it in Russian archives.

This is where we stand now and things will not change overnight. We should take some tangible steps.

"What do you suggest we do?"

In response:

Last week, there was a presentation of the inventory work "The Confiscated Properties of the Istanbul Armenian Foundations". This was a tangible study.

An inventory was mentioned at a meeting of the Hrant Dink Foundation; what is the Armenian population? How many schools and how many churches are left? How many Armenian orchestras do we have? If we take an inventory of these, and compare the figures with the ones in the past, no further comment will be necessary.

TESEV has history studies and the target audience is people who do not stand where we are but are very curious about the subject. We want to open the official history up for discussion and tell people what really happened in the past. We also want to bring up the historiography as a topic of debate. This project will be up and running once we solve issues regarding co-operation and resources.

We all contribute to a lot of projects but how can we carry out healthy assessments? What did we learn from our studies? Where did we fail? How often do we ask these questions?

As a group of four Armenian and four Turkish people, we embarked on a documentary project with the support of Anatolian Culture. Our point of view dramatically changed during the process. One of our friends said that “the Armenians want Turkey to recognize the issue of 1915 but they never talk about recovery, that’s why the wound never heals.”

There are very valuable youth projects but their conclusions and achievements do not go beyond chit chat and eventually disappear.

We could follow the "second track" method so we can work without saying "either one or the other". Like finding a needle in a haystack...

Someone mentioned the current situation and tangible studies etc. Let me give you an example. We asked the land registry office for some documents related to the Armenian Foundations and got 13 reports. Then we visited the district governor who denied us permission to contact the land registry office so we did not tell him that we already had the reports. They told us we needed a permit from a higher office, so we reapplied for the documents. They denied having them. They denied

everything in spite of the documents we already had. Very strange indeed.

I want to add two things to the tangible to do list; Updating and sharing the list which is prepared by hYc including the work done by civil initiatives. Secondly, with all due respect for the current participants, I offer to have a break until we have Mazlum-Der and other groups with us. If we do this now, without going any further, new people can easily join in and own the project. We can all start together with the people we want to include in the contact group. If do that, the host and the guest will be one.

That's all good but we are talking about 20 or 30 people. How can we all talk to each other? There is a conservative fraction who says "we do not want to talk about this and that". We should look for a way of talking to the opinion leaders.

We do not have a formula today; it will appear in the process.

Everyone knows everything, nobody knows how to talk to and listen to each other.

There are people who approach the issue quietly with their conscience, others see it close to their hearts, ethics etc. We can't expect everyone to join in. All we ask for is to raise our voices so that the circle of lies, the paralysis of the mind and conscience dissipates.

The participants of the meeting could expand this open contact group by inviting others.

In principle, we should canalize those who say yes in principle. We could invite conservative NGOs with a conciliatory attitude and aim to solve problems by talking. Some of them take part in the NGO platform and really believe in resolution through dialogue.

Last but not least, thank you so much to all participants.

The last word:

In 2013, Helsinki Citizens' Assembly will carry on working towards a civic foundation for the transformation and resolution of ethno-political conflicts in Turkey, within the Black Sea Peace Network Project which is supported by CMI.

We are thankful for all our supporters

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