

# **Contesting Armenianness:**

Plurality, segregation and multilateral boundary  
making among Armenians in contemporary  
Turkey

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## **ABSTRACT**

During the last three decades, Turkey's Armenian landscape witnessed an unprecedented process of diversification, triggered by developments on the national and regional levels. Whereas members of the Christian Armenian minority had traditionally been the sole representatives of Armenian identity in Turkey, they now find themselves next to two other groups of Armenians: first, officially Muslim and hence 'non-Armenian' citizens of the Republic of Turkey who, drawing on their Armenian ancestors Islamised or Alevised decades or centuries earlier, have recently started to publicly identify as Armenians in growing numbers and to approach the established Christian Armenian community; and second, citizens of neighbouring Armenia who engaged in a labour migration towards Turkey after the independence of their country and its sinking into a political, economic, and energy crisis in the early 1990s. Going beyond the official categorisation of Armenians in Turkey, limited in scope and imposing a particular interpretation of Armenianness, this ethnography studies the various people self-identifying as Armenians in contemporary Turkey, revealing their plurality, heterogeneity and internal divisions. It studies the often-differing meanings, interpretations, productions and experiences of Armenianness among the Christian Armenians, the Muslim/Alevi Armenians, and the migrant Armenians. Furthermore, it not only describes and illustrates, but also aims to understand and explain their segregation and internal boundary making processes. In that endeavour, it argues that the making of symbolic and social boundaries between the three Armenian factions is conditioned both by irreconcilable differences between each one's understanding and expectations of Armenianness, and by practical factors related to interest and security. Finally, broadening its scope of analysis, the dissertation argues that the making of intra-Armenian boundaries is also influenced or conditioned by the particular Armenian factions'

relations and boundaries with third parties (e.g. the Turks, the Kurds, the Turkish state), thus advancing a theory of multilateral social boundary making.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures.....	7
Acknowledgements.....	10
Note on Translation, Pronunciation and Transliteration.....	14
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>15</b>
Between External Labelling and Internal Contestation: Armenianness in contemporary Turkey.....	15
The Thesis: On Armenians, Turkey, and more.....	20
The Theoretical Context.....	23
Historical Background.....	35
The Structure of the Thesis.....	46
<b>CHAPTER 1: In the Field: Experience and Methods.....</b>	<b>47</b>
The Field: Timing, locations, limitations, opportunities.....	47
Language, Methods, Ethics.....	57
Positionality: Advantages and disadvantages.....	65
<b>CHAPTER 2: The Traditional Christian Armenian Community: An ethnoreligious identity, a religious boundary.....</b>	<b>70</b>
Demographic and Sociological Information.....	71
The State’s View: A religious categorisation from above.....	75
Religious Discrimination and Violence.....	80
Suppression of Suprareligious Armenianness.....	89
A Christian-Armenian Experiential Pairing in the ‘Community System’.....	94
Conclusion: A Christian-Armenian cognitive pairing and a religious boundary of Armenianness.....	104
<b>CHAPTER 3: Turkey’s Armenian Landscape Diversified.....</b>	<b>111</b>
The Challenge from within: Ethnicisation and secularisation.....	112
Muslim and Alevi Armenians: Challenging traditional Armenianness.....	119
Non- <i>Türkiyeli</i> Armenians in Turkey: Migrants from the Republic of Armenia.....	128

Conclusion.....	133
<b>CHAPTER 4: Muslim and Alevi Armenians: <i>Öz</i> (essence) as a boundary.....</b>	<b>134</b>
The Subjects: Historical background, issues of definition, sub-groups, and demographics.....	134
Armenians by <i>Öz</i> : ‘Racial essence’ and patrilineal descent.....	142
<i>Öz</i> -based Discrimination and the <i>Aşiret</i> Culture as Conditioning Factors.....	148
‘Returning to the Essence’: Identification beyond or against interest.....	164
Conclusion.....	176
<b>CHAPTER 5: The Migrants: Blood, homeland, morals and the Turkish Others....</b>	<b>177</b>
Demographic and Sociological Information.....	178
‘Armenians by Blood’: Biological boundaries of Armenianness.....	186
Transnationalism and Patriotism: Armenia as a home, homeland, and boundary marker.....	188
A Moral Nation: Kinship and gender roles as properties and boundary markers of Armenianness.....	205
Migrants and the National Others: Anti-Turkishness defining Armenianness.....	212
Conclusion.....	226
<b>CHAPTER 6: Intra-Armenian Boundary Making and Struggles over Armenianness</b>	
<b>(1): Local Christian Armenians and Muslim/Alevi Armenians.....</b>	<b>228</b>
‘Muslim <i>or</i> Armenian? Let Them Make a Choice!’: Christian Armenians rejecting Muslim/Alevi Armenians.....	229
The Muslim and Alevi Armenians’ Response.....	247
An Alternative Stance: The progressive current welcoming the Muslim/Alevi Armenians.....	254
Conclusion.....	261
<b>CHAPTER 7: Intra-Armenian Boundary Making and Struggles over Armenianness</b>	
<b>(2): Migrants and Armenians of Turkey.....</b>	<b>263</b>
Local Christian Armenians Facing the <i>Hayasdants’i</i> Migrants: Institutional openness, interpersonal closure.....	264
Discovering the ‘Turkified Armenians’: Migrants’ take on the locals.....	280

Migrants and the Muslim/Alevi Armenians.....	297
Conclusion.....	302
<b>CONCLUSION: Armenians and Other Armenians in Contemporary Turkey.....</b>	<b>304</b>
Armenians in Contemporary Turkey: Community, group or category?.....	304
Social Boundary Making: Summary and theoretical considerations.....	314
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>323</b>
APPENDIX A: List of Interviewees.....	353
APPENDIX B: Christian Armenian Institutions and Organisations in Turkey.....	362
APPENDIX C: Anthem of the Hrant Dink School.....	363

## List of Figures

<i>Figure 1. Map of Turkey’s Provinces. Adapted from Bipartisan Policy Center (2017: 9) .....</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>Figure 2. Map of Istanbul districts. Source: Dörrbecker (2018). .....</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>Figure 3. Map depicting the journey from Kurtuluş, where I used to reside like many Armenians of Istanbul, to the Kınalıada island in the sea of Marmara. Retrieved and adapted from Google Maps. ....</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Figure 4. Photo of an old identity card mentioning the bearer’s religion as ‘Armenian,’ taken by the author in Istanbul. ....</i>	<i>76</i>
<i>Figure 5. Screenshot of the ‘Türk Polisi’ unidentified Facebook account’s post, depicting an alleged member of the Turkish Special Forces making a Turkish nationalist hand sign in the Armenian Apostolic church in Diyarbakır. Retrieved from Agos (2016). ....</i>	<i>85</i>
<i>Figure 6. Ex-MP Hayrettin Çakmak’s social media post in support of the 2017 constitutional referendum’s ‘Yes’ campaign, reading: ‘Yes to Presidentialism for Turkey. Don’t stamp as if hitting the paper, stamp it as if hitting an infidel.’ Retrieved from Yumul and Kan (2017). ....</i>	<i>87</i>
<i>Figure 7. A photo of a ‘Yes’ voter posted on social media, with a note echoing Çakmak’s call and reading ‘I stamped it as if hitting a gavur.’ The tattoo shows the Turkish-Islamic far-right symbol of the three crescents. Retrieved from Denizli 20 Haber (2017).....</i>	<i>88</i>
<i>Figure 8. Screenshot from a transcription of an interview, where the transcriber replaced the term soykırım (genocide), with ‘(...)’. ....</i>	<i>93</i>
<i>Figure 9. A stone with Armenian engravings at the demolished Armenian Church of Malatya. Photo taken by the author on 2 June 2016. ....</i>	<i>97</i>
<i>Figure 10. A tombstone with Armenian engravings in Malatya’s Christian Armenian cemetery. Photo taken by the author on 2 June 2016. ....</i>	<i>97</i>
<i>Figure 11. The Getronagan Lyceum surrounding the St Gregory the Illuminator Church, as seen from the main road. Photo taken by the author.....</i>	<i>102</i>
<i>Figure 12. Photo taken by the author picturing the contiguity of the Getronagan Lyceum (on the right) and the St Gregory the Illuminator Church (on the left). ....</i>	<i>103</i>
<i>Figure 13. The dome and cross of the church constantly appearing from within a classroom of the Getronagan Lyceum. Photo taken by the author.....</i>	<i>103</i>
<i>Figure 14. Photo of a note taken by the author, depicting the Christian-Armenian cognitive connections on the linguistic level.....</i>	<i>109</i>
<i>Figure 15. A screenshot of a Facebook comment, reading ‘My Jesus, my Christ [be] with you.’ .....</i>	<i>110</i>
<i>Figure 16. A screenshot of a Facebook comment, reading ‘may the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.’ .....</i>	<i>110</i>
<i>Figure 17. Asadur’s family tree, drawn by himself. Photo by the author. ....</i>	<i>149</i>
<i>Figure 18. Photo of official archival document showing a list of Armenian converts (source: Onaran 2014). Redacted for confidentiality in original.....</i>	<i>156</i>

<i>Figure 19. A letter, in Turkish, sent from Beirut to relatives in Adiyaman. Found and photographed by author in Kahta</i> .....	162
<i>Figure 20. Photos of relatives sent from Beirut to Adiyaman. Found and photographed by author in Kahta.</i> .....	162
<i>Figure 21. Screenshot of an Alevi Armenian's Facebook status after his visit to Armenia: 'My soul belongs to Armenia.'</i> .....	166
<i>Figure 22. The HD School's main corridor that hosts the directors' and teachers' desk. Still photo from Harutyun Gevorgyan's documentary (2017).</i> .....	185
<i>Figure 23. The HD School's teaching staff. Photo retrieved from the school's Facebook group with permission.</i> .....	185
<i>Figure 24. Students posing with their teacher at the HD School. Photo retrieved from the school's Facebook group with permission.</i> .....	186
<i>Figure 25. The owners of the 'Lavash' bakery in Kumkapı. Photo by Jamanak newspaper, retrieved from Arelk (2016).</i> .....	190
<i>Figure 26. Graduates of the HD School posing in the Republic Square of Yerevan, Armenia, after successfully passing their examinations. Photo retrieved from the school's Facebook group, with permission.</i> .....	194
<i>Figure 27. The 'Armenia' football team, posing before a match in Fatih, Istanbul. Photo taken from one of the members' Facebook page with permission.</i> .....	196
<i>Figure 28. Pupils at the HD School singing the Armenian national anthem while staring at the Armenian flag. Photo retrieved from the school's Facebook group with permission.</i> .....	200
<i>Figure 29. Collection of 'Far from the fatherland, the fatherland in one's heart' assignment works by students at the HD School. Photo retrieved from the school's Facebook group with permission.</i> .....	201
<i>Figure 30. 'The Wish of the Patriot,' by a student at the HD School. Photo retrieved from the school's Facebook group with permission.</i> .....	202
<i>Figure 31. A HD School student reading a text dedicated to the Armenian Army Day. Photo retrieved from the school's Facebook group with permission.</i> .....	203
<i>Figure 32. Screenshot of a post by the 'Muslim Armenians' Facebook page. Note the usage of the word 'race.'</i> .....	249
<i>Figure 33. Screenshot of a post by the 'Muslim Armenians' Facebook page.</i> .....	250
<i>Figure 34. Tombs in the Armenian cemetery of Malatya. Photos by the author, taken in June 2016.</i> .....	251
<i>Figure 35. Screenshot of a Facebook post by Metin, where he had written: 'brother Hrag has forgotten the Hemshins!' in both Hemshin Armenian and Turkish.</i> .....	252
<i>Figure 36. Screenshot of a post by the Muslim Armenians Fb page. It reads as follows: 'We hope that the Christmas holiday of our Armenian Apostolic relatives, friends and followers contributes to their well-being. We are rich in our diversity.'</i> .....	253
<i>Figure 37. Screenshot of a Christian Armenian friend's Facebook post.</i> .....	260
<i>Figure 38. The Gedik Paşa Armenian Evangelical Church's pastor prays in the HD School. Photo retrieved from the school's Facebook group with permission.</i> .....	270

<i>Figure 39. Screenshot of a Facebook post by the HD School's principal, in which she thanks a local Armenian family for its gifts sent to the students. ....</i>	<i>272</i>
<i>Figure 40. Seta Demirci being hospitalised after the attack on 6 February 2016. Retrieved from Asbarez (2016). ....</i>	<i>275</i>
<i>Figure 41. HD School's teachers and students visiting the grave of Hrant Dink in September 2016. Picture retrieved from the school's Facebook group with permission. ....</i>	<i>282</i>
<i>Figure 42. The Armenian flag in the Migrants' HD School vs. the Turkish flag and the bust of Atatürk in the Istanbulite Armenian Getronagan school. Picture on the left retrieved from the HD School's Facebook group with permission. Photo on the right by the author.....</i>	<i>293</i>
<i>Figure 43. Screenshot of an Instagram post by a Christian Armenian acquaintance protesting against an anti-Armenian graffito in Yüksekova. ....</i>	<i>313</i>
<i>Figure 44. Screenshot of a Facebook post by an Alevi Armenian acquaintance protesting against the same anti-Armenian graffito. The Alevi Armenian writes: 'We have been on these lands before the Kurds and the Turks... For 2,500 years, or even more... Even though we're Armenians, we're everywhere, get used to it.' (My translation) .....</i>	<i>313</i>
<i>Figure 45. Photo of a poster on which the HD School's logo and anthem appear on a background depicting the Armenian national flag. Retrieved from the school's Facebook group with permission.....</i>	<i>363</i>

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*To the memory of my grandparents*

## Note on Translation, Pronunciation and Transliteration

Being ethnographic in nature, this dissertation often directly quotes interlocutors from the field. Although most quotations are translated from Turkish and Armenian to English by myself, some particular words and expressions appear also in their original form.

In the case of Turkish words and expressions, modern Turkish orthography is preserved. In Turkish, all letters in a word are usually pronounced. Here are the sound values for letters that are unique to the Turkish alphabet or are pronounced differently than in English.

İ, I [dotted i]	as “ee” in “tree”
I, I [undotted i]	as “e” in “sister”
Ö, ö	as in German “ö”
Ü, ü	as the French “u” in “tu”
C, c	as “j” in “job”
Ç, ç [c-cedilla]	as “ch” in “church”
G, g	as “g” in “go”
Ğ, ğ [soft g]	not pronounced, but lengthens preceding vowel slightly
S, s	as the “ss” in “press”
Ş, ş [s-cedilla]	as “sh” in “she”
Y, y	as “y” in “yes”

Only a few expressions in Kurmancî Kurdish are quoted in the respective latin-script alphabet, and their pronunciation is explained in footnotes. Finally, both Eastern Armenian (used by the migrants from the Republic of Armenia) and Western Armenian (used by the Christian Armenian citizens of Turkey) are transliterated using the Library of Congress system (ALA-LC).<sup>1</sup> Whenever necessary, their pronunciation is explained in footnotes.

<sup>1</sup> Available at: <https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsd/romanization/armenian.pdf>, last accessed: 24 September 2019.

# INTRODUCTION

## **Between External Labelling and Internal Contestation: Armenianness in contemporary Turkey**

### *A stereotypical label*

It was the beginning of my fieldwork in Turkey, sometime in the last quarter of 2015, when clashes between the Turkish state and Kurdish militias had been flaring up again for a few months. I and Sarin, a Christian Armenian citizen of Turkey, were chatting to each other in the back seat of a taxi in Istanbul. ‘Which language are you speaking in?’ the driver asked us. ‘Armenian,’ we replied. ‘Are you Armenians?’ he asked. We both affirmed and, denying him the opportunity to comment, I hastened to ask about his own identity. It was naïve of me to think that I had thus shifted his attention away from us Armenians.

‘I’m Muslim,’ he proudly said.

‘A Turk? A Kurd?’

‘Definitely not a Kurd.’

‘What makes you say that?’

‘I don’t like Kurds...’

‘But there is good and bad in every people, no?’

‘Well... I don’t mind the *Kürtçüks*,’ he elaborated, using the diminutive Turkish suffix ‘-çük’ to allude to the faction of Turkey’s Kurds who remain loyal to the Turkish regime, and continued, ‘but I don’t like Apo [Abdullah Öcalan, the jailed leader of the Kurdish militant organisation PKK] and Demirtaş [the now-jailed leader of the pro-Kurdish parliamentary party HDP] I don’t like them... because they’re Armenians.’

Being an Armenian myself,<sup>2</sup> I was naturally insulted by the driver's audacious remarks and discrimination. Realising that I was willing to react, Sarin tapped me on my knee, suggesting to keep silent. 'You'll get used to this,' she told me later when we had come out of the taxi, 'don't try to change these people, just ignore them... don't put yourself at risk.' We both knew that Abdullah Öcalan and Selahattin Demirtaş identified themselves as Kurds, were symbols of the Kurdish political struggle in Turkey, and have dedicated their political lives to the Kurdish question more than anything else (see, for example, *BBC* 2019 and *Bianet* 2019a). The driver's comments were simply based on Armenian-related conspiracy theories that are quite widespread in Turkey. But before further commenting on this matter, I present another vignette from my experience in the field.

At the very end of my fieldwork in Turkey, in early April 2017, I was in a taxi again, trying to chat with the driver. The country was politically polarised around the constitutional referendum that was to be held on 16 April. If approved, as it eventually was, a presidential system with an executive presidency would replace the then existing parliamentary one. I asked the driver about his opinion. He answered decisively that he supported the constitutional amendments proposed by the leading political party AKP and its leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. I asked for the reason behind his stance and received an equally decisive answer: 'The proposed constitution will make our country much stronger, especially in view of the recent internal and external threats.' I probed further: 'Why then, if that's the case, is the leading opposition party CHP campaigning against the proposed new constitution?' 'The CHP? Because they are Armenians,' he quickly replied. The CHP (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* – Republican People's Party), founded by the legendary founding father of the Turkish

<sup>2</sup> Comments on my own positionality as a Lebanese-Armenian descendant of survivors of the Armenian Genocide appear in the following chapter.

Republic Kemal Atatürk, had no Armenians in its leadership and only one ethnic Armenian, Selina Doğan, amongst its 133 members of parliament at the time.

But I came across this strategy of labelling political opponents as ‘Armenians’ not only during such personal encounters, but also on Turkish media. On 15 July 2016, some factions of the Turkish army launched an operation in several cities, trying to orchestrate a military coup. Staying awake all night like millions of others, I also waited for the outcome of that apparent turning point in contemporary Turkish politics. The coup failed and was soon blamed on Fethullah Gülen, a powerful preacher and businessman living in self-imposed exile in the US. Although the coup did not achieve its goal, it was to have negative repercussions on various sections of society: a state of emergency lasting until July 2018, more than 50,000 citizens arrested, and 100,000 others sacked from their jobs (see *Al Jazeera* 2017a; Human Rights Watch 2019: 588-589). But the Armenians of Turkey were to carry a different, symbolic-psychological burden that was almost exclusive to them. A short time after the coup, Turkish nationalist figures, parliamentarians, populist historians and media outlets in general started labelling Gülen as an ‘Armenian.’ They ‘argued’ that his father was an Armenian, his mother a Jew (the second-most unpopular ‘other’ in Turkey), and even that he is an ‘uncircumcised Armenian.’<sup>3</sup>

Like the parties ‘accused’ of Armenianness by my taxi drivers, Fethullah Gülen has never identified himself as an Armenian. In fact, the important factor here is not even whether these targets of dislike and hatred have any Armenian origins or not. The issue, as it should already be clear, is the powerful label ‘Armenian’ that always emerges as a tool to discredit, stigmatise and blame political opponents in Turkish politics.<sup>4</sup>

The ‘Armenian’ in Turkey is thus first of all a carelessly used discriminatory label.

<sup>3</sup> For examples, see *Yeni Akit* (2016a; 2016b; 2017) and *Avrupa Türk Gazetesi* (2016). For reactions by the Armenian side, see Kılıçdağı (2016) and *Agos* (2017a).

<sup>4</sup> See also Özdoğan and Kılıçdağı (2012: 26) and *The Armenian Weekly* (2010) for similar uses of the label on the part of high-ranking Turkish state representatives, respectively in 1997 and 2010.

It might be directed at anyone, even ethnically non-Armenians, but mainly sheds light on Armenians' otherisation, vilification and the existing 'Armenophobia' in Turkish society (Özdoğan and Kılıçdağı 2012: 23), the roots of which have been studied elsewhere.<sup>5</sup>

But apart from that external categorisation, who are the Armenians of Turkey and how do they interpret their Armenian identity? Does Armenianness have a single definition agreed upon by its different bearers in Turkey? Is it as unitary and simple among them, as the externally-ascribed stereotypical label 'Armenian' is?

### *A jewellery han6 in Istanbul*

Beril, a woman in her forties, works with her brothers in their family business – a jewellery workshop in a *han* in the Grand Bazaar of Istanbul, one of the largest and oldest covered markets in the world. She is a Christian Armenian, a citizen of Turkey, born in a village in Turkey's Batman province, or in *Sasun*, as she prefers to call it by its historical Armenian name. One day she invited me to their workshop, a vast and obscure space on the third floor.

We had just entered when Karen, a young craftsman seated at his worktable, greeted Beril in Eastern Armenian. Beril replied in the Western Armenian dialect. It was easy to guess: Karen was one of the many migrants from the Republic of Armenia. He was born and raised in the city of Ararat in Armenia and moved to Istanbul only in 2012. Just a few more minutes passed before the picture became even more diverse. A young man entered through the door and, smiling through his beard, greeted Beril and Karen in a broken, pidgin

<sup>5</sup> For more on the historical roots of anti-Armenianness in Turkey see Göl (2005), who looks at its development in the Ottoman era and during the construction of the Turkish nation in the beginnings of the twentieth century. See also Suciyan (2016:198) who explains the phenomenon through the lens of Turkish denialism of the 1915 genocide: 'Why do Armenians so easily become targets for and victims of various physical or verbal attacks? The answer lies in the historical context that has constituted the 'social' environment for the majority in Turkey, the post-genocide habitus of denial.' For the phenomenon's further development in more recent times, especially during the decade from 1975 to 1985 that witnessed assassinations of Turkish diplomats on the hand of Armenian militant groups, see Göçek (2015: 429-457). For the contemporary vilification of Armenians through various means in the educational system, see Göçek (2015: 463), Ekmekçioğlu (2016: 7-8), Akçam (2014a), and *Civilnet* (2017).

<sup>6</sup> *Han* is the name given to large commercial buildings in Turkey.

Armenian, then offered me his hand and pronounced his name: ‘Mehmet’. At a convenient moment Beril told me with caution: ‘tartsadznerēn ē’ (‘he’s one of those converts’). Later on, I would learn that he was the grandson of an Armenian of *Sasun* who had converted to Islam. He worked one floor below, at his family’s jewellery workshop.

Beril, Karen and Mehmet are thus three Armenians—as they all identify themselves—working in the same *han* and engaged in almost daily communication. However, they not only have different religious (Islam, Christianity) and national (Turkish citizen, Armenian citizen) denominations, but also, and crucially, different understandings and ‘imaginings’ (Anderson 1983) of ‘Armenianness’ and even reservations about the Armenianness of one another. These were revealed during my conversations with each of them.

Beril explained that she keeps her distance from the Muslim Armenians and questions their Armenianness: ‘They are like branches detached from the mother tree and only time will tell whether they will develop into separate trees or be able to reconnect with their origins again.’ The ‘mother tree,’ for her, is *Christian* Armenianness, or simply Armenianness, since, for her, ‘they’re the same thing after all.’ Mehmet, on the other hand, thought of Armenianness as independent from religion and, rather, inherited through one’s lineage.

Karen, to my surprise, didn’t even know that Mehmet was an Armenian. Moreover, he considered the majority of the local Christian Armenians (though not Beril in particular) to be Turkified: ‘What kind of Armenians are they if they don’t regard Armenia as their homeland?’ Beril, on the other hand, would criticise the ‘laziness’ and ‘bad habits’ of the migrants from Armenia, thinking of those as consequences of the latter’s ‘Sovietisation’, and would complain about ‘their negative impact on our reputation in this country.’

This picture appearing in the jewelry *han* is the product of a historically

unprecedented process of diversification of the Armenian ‘landscape’ of Turkey. That process, which I describe and analyse in detail in Chapter 3, began in the 1990s, and was itself partly the product of larger modifications in the sociopolitical context of the country. As a result, whereas the members of the Christian Armenian minority, like Beril, traditionally used to be the sole representatives of Armenian identity in Turkey,<sup>7</sup> they now find themselves living alongside (if not in opposition to) two other kinds of Armenians. The latter are, first, Turkish citizens belonging to the Muslim majority, be they pious Muslims like Mehmet, Alevis,<sup>8</sup> or the non-religious; and second, citizens of the Republic of Armenia, like Karen, who have engaged in labour migration to Turkey after the independence of their country in 1991 (hereafter referred to as ‘the Migrants’).

### **The Thesis: On Armenians, Turkey, and more**

This thesis is about the internal segregation of Armenians residing in contemporary Turkey and the diversity and contestation of the idea of ‘Armenianness’ among them, a miniature of which appears in the jewelry *han* in the Grand Bazaar of Istanbul. It is, in other words, a study of intra-Armenian relations and boundary making in Turkey, which deals with several thematic questions.

Beyond the label, who are the Armenians in Turkey? Beyond representing a *category*, are they a coherent *group* having a more or less agreed upon collective internal definition (Jenkins 2014: 104-119)? How do they, in their diversity, imagine ‘Armenianness,’ experience it in their everyday lives, and construct it through their institutions? What are the boundary markers of Armenianness for representatives of each of the three Armenian factions (Christians, Muslims/Alevis, Migrants)? In particular, how are

<sup>7</sup> The Apostolic, Catholic and Evangelical sub-groups of the Christian Armenians and their differences and mutual relations are discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>8</sup> The difference between Alevi and Muslim Armenians is discussed in Chapter 4.

these boundaries imagined in relation to Turkey and the Turks? Furthermore, how do members of the three Armenian factions perceive and treat each other? And most importantly, what lies at the heart of the making of symbolic and social boundaries between them? In other words, how can we explain the intra-Armenian segregation in contemporary Turkey?

Being an ethnography of Armenians, this thesis first of all makes a contribution to the field of Armenian studies in general, and, in particular, to the literature studying Armenians and Armenian identity in Armenia or the diasporic communities through sociological and anthropological perspectives (see, for example, Amit Talai 1989; Dudwick 1994; Pattie 1997 and 2013; Tölölyan 2001 and 2002; Tölölyan and Papazian 2014; Karageozian 2015; Adriaans 2016, 2017, 2018a, 2018b and 2019; Shirinian 2018; Bandak 2019). The recent emergence of intra-Armenian diversity, I believe, has made Turkey a unique place for the study of contemporary Armenian identity. Nowhere else, to my knowledge, is Armenianness as diverse and as contested as it is in today's Turkey, particularly Istanbul, with its variety in terms of religion, citizenship, and much more that will be covered in the upcoming chapters. Scholars have recently looked at one or two particular factions of Armenians in Turkey (see, for example, Taşçı 2010; Körükmez 2012; Özgül 2013; Papazian 2015 and 2016a; Tchilingirian 2016; Sheklian 2017; Öztürk 2020). However, to my knowledge, this is the first study to ethnographically approach *all three* main factions of Turkey's Armenians (Christians, Migrants, Muslims and Alevites) and their relations with and boundary making against one another.

On the other hand, this dissertation also aims to make a contribution to the anthropology of Turkey. In fact, the external labelling and negative treatment of Armenians on the part of the Turkish state and majority, described in the opening section, is not to be dismissed at all. At first sight, the issue of the label 'Armenian' might seem separate from

the intra-Armenian segregation and boundary making, as the former concerns the Turkish-Armenian boundary, whereas the latter is about the Armenian-Armenian ones. However, in this study I examine how the ‘boundary work’ (Gieryn 1983) on each level depends on and affects the other. Intra-Armenian boundary making, as it will appear, is often highly dependent on different Armenians’ relations with the Turkish state and their boundaries with the Turks and other Muslims in Turkey. The Turkish state and majority, thus, with their ideology, practices of classification, and everyday politics, are very much present in this ethnography, just as they are in the lives of Armenians in Turkey.

This dissertation is thus situated at the intersection of several important themes that emerged in the anthropology of Turkey especially as of the 1990s: Islam, Islamism and its tension with secularism (see Gürsoy 1991; Navaro-Yashin 1999; Houston 2001a; White 2002; Özyürek 2006, and, through a rather sociological lens, Tuğal 2002, 2006, 2008, 2009a and 2009b); ethnic minorities and identity politics (see Seufert 2000; Houston 2001b; Wedel 2001; Çelik 2005; Yılmaz 2008; Aras 2014); the state and its critique (see Alexander 2002; Navaro- Yashin 2002; White 2002; Houston 2005; and Ozyürek 2006); and migration and transnationalism (see Yüksek 2002, 2004, 2007; Akalın 2007; Daniş 2007; Demirdirek 2007; Yüksek and Brewer 2008; Özdiil 2008; Parla 2007, 2009, 2011, 2019; Biehl 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2017; Bloch 2017). This is in fact a study of one of the ‘minoritized’ populations of Turkey (Ekmekçioğlu 2016), which has gone through a recent process of unprecedented diversification in which Turkey’s Islamisation, its internal sociopolitical developments and intensification of identity debates, and Istanbul’s becoming a city hosting international labour migration have played a crucial role (see Chapter 3).

Finally, I situate this study in larger anthropological debates that go beyond the particular cases of Armenians and Turkey. In fact, the coexistence of several groups identifying by a single ethnonym and sharing partly-common histories, but having lived

separately under diverse social/institutional settings and inside different national borders for around a century, deserves to be investigated in terms of wider anthropological questions about identity and boundary making, and those phenomena's relations to history, institutions, states and politics. In particular, by proposing and applying a thick, multilateral analysis of boundary making, I strive to bring a theoretical contribution to the existing literature on the topic. I examine how the two phenomena of internal segregation and external categorisation by the state and ethnic/national/religious 'others' are crucially interrelated. In other words, this study argues that inter-ethnic (Armenian vs Turk) and intra-ethnic (Armenian vs Armenian) boundary making mechanisms are organically interconnected and thus mutually affect each other. That said, I maintain that in order to understand the making of a boundary between given groups A and B, the broader context of group relations and boundaries (i.e. group A vs *group C*, and group B vs *group C*) should also necessarily be taken into consideration. Boundary making, in other words, is often multilateral and thus should be studied and analysed accordingly.

## **The Theoretical Context**

### *Boundary making*

Many of the questions this dissertation asks and the main theoretical argument it advances concern boundary making.

The research tradition on which this dissertation is based, then, goes back to Max Weber 'who conceived ethnicity as a mode of drawing boundaries between individuals and thus creating social groups' (Wimmer 2008a: 985). Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth's contribution has perhaps been the most influential in this school of thought. In his attempt at 'explor[ing] the different processes that seem to be involved in generating and maintaining ethnic groups', he proposed to 'shift the focus of investigation from internal

constitution and history of separate groups to ethnic boundaries and boundary maintenance’ (Barth 1969: 10).

Whereas the early works in this tradition, including the collection of essays edited by Barth (1969), dealt mostly with the boundaries themselves, their features and at most their maintenance, later works introduced the notion of ‘agency’ to the field and the emphasis gradually shifted towards the processes of social and symbolic construction of group boundaries. An array of social scientists studied the same phenomenon under various synonymous titles, such as ‘boundary change’ (Horowitz 1975; Tilly 2004), ‘boundary processes’ (Wallman 1978, 1986; Alba 2005), ‘boundary work’ (Gieryn 1983; Lamont 2000), ‘boundary dynamics’ (Loveman 1997), the ‘making and unmaking [of boundaries]’ (Loveman 1997; Wimmer 2008a, 2008b, 2013a), the ‘delineation of boundaries,’ ‘boundary negotiations’ (Zolberg and Woon 1999), and the ‘production of boundaries’ (Lamont and Molnar 2002). This constructivist tradition claimed that ‘ethnic boundaries are matters of process in every case’ (Wallman 1986), and posited itself against primordialist approaches to ethnic or racial groups and their ‘ever-existing’ boundaries. It warned against ‘tak[ing] for granted the existence of these groups as such and miss[ing] the dynamic process whereby they were fabricated at the cost of a complex work of *group-making* that inscribed ethnoracial boundaries in the objectivity of social space and in the subjectivity of mental space’ (Wacquant 1997: 225, emphasis in original).

Although most of the work on boundary making has emerged from within and as part of the broader literature on ‘ethnicity,’ as it appears from some of the quotations cited above, this dissertation does not deal with ‘ethnicity’ *per se*, does not attempt to explain or theorise it, and certainly does not aim ‘to bring it continually into being’ (Banks 1996: 186; see also Eriksen 2010: 214). Although the term and notion of ‘ethnicity’ had become a ‘ubiquitous presence’ in the 1970s (Cohen 1978: 397), not only did its usage gradually

decline (Banks 1996: 1), but it also came under criticism for being over-used, insubstantial, and for having little analytical value because of ‘resist[ing] definition’ (ibid.: 9-19, 179; see also Just 1989: 76).

Scholars have rightly suggested to go beyond ethnicity and study ‘other kinds of [social] interfaces, [...] other kinds of marginality’ (Hannerz 1992: 133), other ‘modes of consciousness’ and related ‘sets of relations’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 54), and a more encompassing ‘social identity’ (Eriksen 2010: 214; Jenkins 1994: 218), in order to be able to comprehensively account for identification, group formation and boundary making as general processes of the phenomenon of ‘classification of people,’ to which ‘ethnicity’ should only be subsumed (Chapman 1993: 21–22). I concur with that approach and study not only boundaries between groups that may be categorised as ‘ethnic,’ namely the Armenians and the Turks, but also boundaries at a ‘lower’ level, between different factions of the Armenians of Turkey themselves, hence studying *social* boundary making as a general phenomenon.

Furthermore, I contend that it is particularly beneficial not just to look beyond what might be termed ‘ethnic’ boundaries, but to look *at them and beyond them in parallel*. My methodological approach of studying Armenian-Turkish and Armenian-Armenian fault lines as part of a complex whole reveals causal relations between the boundary processes on those two distinct levels, and allows me to advance a general theory of *multilateral boundary making*, which could be applied, I hope, to cases totally detached from ethnicity as well.

### *In search of explanations*

A first important task undertaken by authors in this tradition consisted of recording and categorising the different mechanisms of boundary making or ‘directions [that] boundary change could take,’ as put by Horowitz (1975: 113).

Several scholars have singled out, described and analysed particular types of boundary making mechanisms since at least 1975 (see Horowitz 1975; Wallman 1978; Loveman 1997; Bauböck 1995; Zolberg and Woon 1999; Lamont and Molnar 2002; and Tilly 2004). But perhaps the most important work in this regard is that of Andreas Wimmer who delved into a ‘taxonomical exercise’ (2008b: 1046; 2013a:78), where, based on a survey of the preceding works, he put together a typology of ‘strategies,’ as he prefers to call them, of ‘ethnic boundary making.’<sup>9</sup> He listed and explained a variety of such strategies: boundary expansion, achieved through fusion (incorporation or amalgamation) or emphasis shifting; boundary contraction, achieved through fission or emphasis shifting; transvaluation, achieved through normative inversion or equalisation; positional moves, including individual boundary crossing through assimilation or reclassification and collective re-positioning; and blurring (2008b: 1031-1041; 2013a: 50-61).

Some of these strategies are employed by Armenians in Turkey in their boundary making, and will be referred to whenever necessary. But a more important analytical task for this dissertation, and perhaps in general, is to understand and explain *why* and *how* boundary making happens. It is necessary to analyse the ‘particular social processes and particular structural conditions that trigger certain boundary dynamics,’ as put by Mara Loveman (1997: 897), in order to answer one of the main questions in this dissertation: What guides the Armenians of Turkey in their making of intra-Armenian boundaries?

It is possible to distinguish between two theoretical traditions in the existing literature that explains boundary making. Some authors have embraced both, while others have particularly dwelt upon one of them.

The first approach, following the theoretical tradition of instrumentalism (Cohen

<sup>9</sup> This limitation to the field of ethnicity characterises most of Wimmer’s writings. It would have been more helpful, I believe, to advance a more general ‘theory of social boundary making’, as he has also termed it once (2013a: 177).

1969, 1974a; Glazer and Moynihan 1975; Brass 1974), explains particular choices of boundary making strategies by actors' pursuit of their interests. Thus, economic or prestige gains often seem to guide boundary mechanisms of incorporation and proliferation, argues Horowitz (1975: 138). Looking at the case of 'South Asians' in London who have otherwise internal boundaries based on their countries of origin, different vernacular languages, non-common food taboos, and the fact that they almost never intermarry, Wallman records a 'boundary shift' from 'Punjabi Sikh-ness,' 'Mirpuri-ness,' 'Pathan-ness' and other lower-level identifications towards 'Asian-ness.' She explains the shift by the fact that the English hold resources in opposition to those they categorise as 'Asians.' As a result of that fact, she argues, "'Asian-ness" begins to have currency in the Asian ethnic repertoire also.' Abstracting from this particular case, Wallman's conclusion is that a group's 'range of inclusion expands' and a boundary shift could occur whenever a minority 'begins to recognise that there is political and economic capital to be gained from new forms of togetherness' (1978: 211).

In a similar vein, Gieryn's analysis of ideological 'boundary work' performed by scientists in Victorian England, in early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Edinburgh and in modern times, posits professional interest as the main motivating factor: 'construction of a boundary between science and varieties of non-science is useful for scientists' pursuit of professional goals: acquisition of intellectual authority and career opportunities; denial of these resources to "pseudoscientists"; and protection of the autonomy of scientific research from political interference' (1983: 781). This interest-based approach is also present in more recent works, including in migration studies, where the imposition and maintenance of social boundaries by native majorities vis-à-vis immigrant minorities is also explained as a 'way of creating social distance and preserving privileges' (Alba 2005). Finally, I shall return to Wimmer (2008a; 2013) and review his work more closely than the previous ones, not only because

his work is the freshest in this direction and perhaps the most detailed and multifaceted, but also since it specifically takes the search for boundary making explanations as its intellectual task.

Wimmer singles out three basic features of social fields that, as he argues, are factors determining which strategy of ethnic boundary making actors will pursue. The first feature of his trilogy is the institutional setting of the social field, which ‘determines which types of boundaries—ethnic, social class, gender, villages, or others—can be drawn in a meaningful and acceptable way’ (2008a: 973; 2013a: 80). Wimmer provides the example of the institution of the nation-state, which bears incentives to emphasise ethnic, rather than other divisions.

The second factor presented by Wimmer is the distribution of power in a social field, which defines individuals’ interests, which in turn determine their strategies of boundary making: ‘an actor will prefer that level of ethnic differentiation that is perceived to further her interests, given her endowment with economic, political, and symbolic resources’ (2008a:993; 2013a:93). To provide examples, Wimmer refers to the ethnographic works of Michèle Lamont and her collaborators, which reveal African Americans’ boundary making strategies that intend to counter stigmatisation and exclusion. Those are sometimes strategies of normative inversion (Lamont and Molnár 2001), other times that of blurring and emphasising broader social divisions (Lamont and Fleming 2005), but always affected by actors’ disadvantageous position in the social-political hierarchy.

Third, Wimmer puts forth the factor of political networks as a characteristic of the social field that determines ‘*where* exactly will the boundaries between “us” and “them” be drawn’ (2008a: 995; 2013a:95). He gives the example of nation-building, noting that in the early period of nation-state formation elites’ political networks determined the location of the boundary separating the nation and the minorities. As he argues by referring to Anthony

Marx (1999), the facts that people of African descent were included in the Brazilian nation but excluded from the American nation-building project could be explained by the presence of trans-racial socio-political networks in the former case, and their absence in the latter (Wimmer 2008a: 995-997; 2013a: 95-97). Despite being somehow de-contextualised, the argument seems plausible. However, separating this factor from that of hierarchies of power seems to be an *analytical* boundary making strategy that complicates Wimmer's argumentation and task. Do not 'political networks,' or 'networks of alliances' influence hierarchies of power? Aren't the African Americans situated in a disadvantageous position in the hierarchy of power also excluded from those networks? Or, if they were part of those alliances, wouldn't they occupy a completely different stratum in the distribution of power? While separating these two factors, Wimmer also makes a distinction in the questions each answers. Whereas hierarchies of power explain individuals' choices of the 'level of ethnic differentiation,' networks target the question of '*where* exactly will the boundaries between "us" and "others" be drawn? Which individuals will be classified into which ethnic groups' (2008a: 995; 2013a:95). But this distinction remains equally vague and unclear. In the very same Brazilian case, the inclusion of 'blacks' in the 'nation' can be described both as classifying individuals in a group (both 'blacks' and 'whites' in the 'nation') and as choosing a specific level of differentiation (nation vs non-nation, rather than 'white race' vs 'black race').

Thus, Wimmer's trilogy seems artificial in a way. He himself draws boundaries—analytical in this case—between 'institutional order,' 'distribution of power,' and 'networks of alliances,' which unnecessarily complicate his argumentation about explaining particular choices of boundary making. It seems rightly possible to shrink that trilogy into a single factor, that of *interest*. In fact, interest is the only variable (in Wimmer's discussion) which directly influences boundary making mechanisms. In other words, what I propose here is an

expansion of the boundaries of Wimmer's 'power and interests'—as he chooses to title his section on the second determining factor (2013a: 93)—in order to assimilate 'institutions' and 'networks' in it. Wimmer himself mentions the 'constellation of interests produced by institutional patterns, hierarchies of power, and structures of political alliances' once (2008a: 1001), though he interestingly omits this linking phrase in the otherwise almost exact reproduction of his article as a chapter in his monograph (2013a: 101). To conclude, Wimmer essentially offers an interest-based, that is instrumentalist, explanation of social boundary making.

However, the existing literature fortunately offers other explanations of boundary making, which go beyond actors' interest-motivated 'choices,' 'calculations,' and 'strategies,' and socially, culturally and historically contextualise people rather than offering a one-dimensional interest-based understanding of what it means to be human. This alternative approach explains boundary processes by groups' and their members' subjective characteristics, cultural traits, ideological standpoints, moral norms and even cognition, which it perceives as yet other determinants of the directions that boundary processes take. Boundary making, as this theoretical tradition shows, can also be disinterested. The argument here is that the already existing cultural material—in its broadest sense—of a group has a natural effect on its self-positioning I other groups.

This research tradition pays particular attention to *symbolic boundaries* that imply conceptual distinctions and categorisations and usually *precede* and are a necessary condition of social boundaries that produce social difference and unequal access to and distribution of opportunities and resources (Lamont and Molnar 2002: 168-169; Lamont 2014: 815). For instance, drawing on social psychological and psychological literature, some authors have analysed micro-level intra-individual cognitive processes that often

subconsciously and automatically construct or reify symbolic group boundaries, and condition related social behaviour (Fiske et al. 2002; Massey 2007; Pager and Shepherd 2008; Ridgeway 1997 and 2011).

Horowitz, who also offered instrumentalist explanations, clearly balances his analysis and considers individuals' 'perceptual judgments of the relatedness of some groups (but not others),' or in other words, the perception of strangers 'as possessing varying degrees of likeness and difference' as a variable that is 'influential in shaping and altering group boundaries' (1975: 121). Thus, aside from strategic and instrumental calculations, individuals often draw symbolic boundaries between 'us' and 'them' in a more instinctive manner, by interpreting patterns of similarity and difference, such as phenotype, language and culture, which are 'ready markers of exclusion from or inclusion in systems' (Wallman 1978: 205).

Zolberg and Woon explain the rigidity of the boundary between native Europeans and Muslim immigrants not by 'interest,' but by the fact that European identity is rooted in Christian tradition, which makes 'visible "others"' out of the Muslim immigrants (1999: 7). They argue, thus, that group membership and the loosening or tightening of boundaries are linked to the essential questions of 'how different can we afford to be?' and 'how alike must we be?' (ibid.: 8). Through a comparative analysis of boundaries between natives and immigrants in the US (Mexican immigrants), Germany (Turkish immigrants) and France (North African immigrants), Alba (2005) goes further to show how difference, similarity and people's perceptions of them are in turn dependent on institutional, legal, and historical factors. Pelkmans makes a similar argument about how the 'mobilization of culture' contributes to the creation of difference (2006: 45-46). Institutionalised and legally inscribed distinctions maintain their relevance and engender 'bright,' rather than 'blurred,'

boundaries, which are less prone to change, argues Alba, concluding that boundaries are 'path-dependent' (2005: 22, 41), rather than situationally 'strategised.'

Michele Lamont, another important author in this tradition, particularly focuses on individuals' cultural understandings of morality and establishes a direct link between those and their boundary work. Moral norms, as she argues through her comparative analysis of the 'mental maps' (2000: 3) of American and French working men, are one of the most important criteria on which people base their perceptions of similarity and difference. Morality is the 'structuring principle' of those workers' worldviews (ibid. 51). 'Workers assess the world in moral terms, and this results in different patterns of social boundaries in France and the United States,' she argues succinctly (ibid.9). For instance, in her argumentation, white American working men's drawing of boundaries against blacks and the poor is conditioned by the moral principles of work ethics and discipline, which they do not find among the latter (ibid. 60-73; 131-142). In turn, black working men of America draw a boundary against whites because they judge the latter's personalities as domineering and lacking humanity, spirituality and solidarity which they highly value (ibid. 73-83). On the other hand, black workers are generally more understanding of the poor and advocate solidarity and compassion with them 'in keeping with their emphasis on the collective aspects of morality' (ibid. 144). Thus, both racial and class boundaries that workers draw are interpreted as 'direct extension[s] of their broader moral worldview' (ibid. 146), which not only generates, but also bridges or blurs boundaries ('there are good and bad people in all races') (ibid. 241-242).

Lamont also clearly establishes the fact that moral worldviews are themselves cultural products. For instance, whereas white workers' stances on blacks' moralities is influenced by the 'cultural repertoires provided by the Republican Party,' that of the blacks on whites' moral 'failures' is nourished by the 'continuous supply of Afrocentrist

repertoires' (ibid. 93-94). However, the validity of disinterested boundary making based on factors such as culture, ideological worldviews and moral norms appears even more clearly when Lamont compares the American case with the French one. In contrast to their American counterparts, French workers draw stronger boundaries against the upper and middle classes, whereas they consider the poor as 'part of us,' thus not drawing any boundaries against them (ibid. Chapter 6). This is conditioned, again, by a morality centred on cultural discourses of class struggle and class solidarity that are far more prominent in France than in the United States (ibid.). In a similar vein, Lamont finds striking differences between French and white American workers' boundary work I the blacks and immigrants and explains those by differences in moral worldviews (ibid. Chapter 5). All these allow Lamont to conclude that groups in relatively similar structural positions – a factor on which Wimmer bases his instrumental analysis – can draw very different boundaries because of the difference in the 'institutionalised cultural repertoires' existing in their environments (ibid. 7; 243). Without denying the importance of individual agency and mentioning in passing some interest-based boundary making cases – black workers' boundary drawing against the poor for 'tactical, pragmatic purposes' (ibid. 101-102) – Lamont nevertheless mainly stresses the fact that individual agency is itself bounded by the '*differentially structured*' context in which people live (ibid. 244, emphasis in original).

Finally, in a more recent paper, Lamont and her co-authors theorise inter-subjective 'cultural processes,' such as racialisation, stigmatisation, standardisation and evaluation, that 'take shape around the creation of shared categories or classification systems' and 'involve a sorting out of people, actions or environments that requires the creation of group boundaries.' Drawing again on cognitive social psychological approaches, they argue that classification systems and linked cultural processes are not necessarily instrumental because people do not necessarily consciously choose one system or level of categorisation over

another, ‘as they are rarely conscious that they inhabit a categorization system’ (Lamont et al. 2014: 11).

*My intended contribution: reconciling the two approaches and suggesting a multilateral analysis of boundary making*

This dissertation undertakes the same task of analysing and explaining boundary making. It does so in a balanced way, following and building on both traditions reviewed above and attempting to reconcile them.

The analysis of my ethnographic material will reveal that Turkey’s Armenians’ different factions are engaged in boundary making processes that are guided by both interest-based calculations and disinterested cultural, cognitive and affective factors. It will show that, in addition to and even before material and/or political incentives, people’s and groups’ imaginations and interpretations of their selves and identities, especially if these have a historical legacy, produce cognitive and emotional incentives for making certain boundaries toward others who are different and thus incompatible with their identities.

Furthermore, in addition to reconciling the two approaches, I try to further develop and elaborate on them by suggesting a multilateral analysis of boundary making. In fact, as suggested in the previous sections, this thesis will look into the interrelations between different boundaries and their makings, thus striving to find the motivations or conditioning of boundary makers in a broader multilateral context. Rather than looking only at linear relations (be they symbolic or of power) between two given groups on the two sides of a boundary under consideration, I propose to look at the relations of each of these groups with *third* parties as well (the Turkish state, ‘Turks,’ or ‘Islam’ in this case), thus advancing a *multilateral theory of boundary making*.

By doing so, and generally throughout this dissertation, I hope to contribute not only to the fields of Armenian and Turkish Studies, to selected works of which I will refer, but

also to scholars', policy makers' and ordinary people's understanding of why and how group boundaries emerge, are maintained, become more salient, lose significance, or get dismantled. Such boundaries, be they national, ethnic, religious, class-based, gender-based, ideology-based and so on, continue to immensely affect people's lives by positioning them in privileged or disadvantaged positions, by subjecting them to moral or physical violence, by prompting them to migrate, to revolt, to join militant organisations, and even to kill or be killed. Expectations of or declarations about a post-ethnic, post-national(ist) emerging global order of cosmopolitan solidarity brought by increasing globalisation<sup>10</sup> have been proven to be too optimistic, exaggerated and misleading both by scholars (see Joppke 1998a; Koopmans and Statham 1999; Favell 2006; Calhoun 2007; Eriksen 2007 and 2010; Hansen 2009; Wimmer 2013b: 203-4) and, more importantly, by empirical evidence. In our contemporary world witnessing a rise of exclusionary ethnonationalism both in Turkey and elsewhere, civil wars and ethnic/religious violence, as in Africa and the Middle East, national(ist) independence movements like in Scotland and Catalonia, the rise of far-right movements and anti-immigrant discourse in Europe and the US, and other similar phenomena that speak of social division, fission and tension, the symbolic construction of difference and similarity, their social relevance, and the making or unmaking of social boundaries remain real-world phenomena of immense importance and practical consequence.

## **Historical Background**

This section briefly presents parts of Armenians' history that are particularly relevant to this dissertation. Apart from convening basic information on the origins of Armenians, it pays

<sup>10</sup> Prominent works sharing such visions include Soysal (1994; 1998), Held (1995), Archibugi and Held (1995), Jacobson (1997), Archibugi, Held and Köhler (1998), Cheah and Robbins (1998), Habermas (2001), Vertovec and Cohen (2002), Archibugi (2003), Sassen (2002; 2003), Bosniak (2006) and others.

special attention to Christianity's historical role in the formation and maintenance of Armenian identity, to the historical east-west divide of Armenian identity, and to Armenian-Turkish relations in history.

### *Origins*

Historical literature suggests that a distinct Armenian collective existed as early as the sixth century BC (Panossian 2006: 33). Some historians speak of Armenians' presence in even earlier times, such as the seventh century BC (Foss 1992: 251), or even in the late second millennium BC as a people 'speaking [its] own language' (Russell 1997: 26). Armenians are said to have emerged from the fusion of Hurro-Urartean peoples indigenous to Anatolia and Indo-European tribes which had originated from Europe. The territory on which they lived in those early times was situated between the Kur River to the east, the Pontic mountain range to the north, the Euphrates River to the west and the Taurus Mountains to the south (Panossian 2006: 33-34). In contemporary geo-political terms that corresponds to eastern parts of the Republic of Turkey, the Republic of Armenia, western parts of Azerbaijan and southern parts of Georgia.

### *Armenians and Christianity*

A history of relations between Armenians and Christianity is relevant for the study of Turkey's Christian Armenians' interpretation of Armenian identity, like that of Beril for whom Armenianness is always and naturally Christian (as will be discussed in Chapter 2), and of their stance toward the Muslim/Alevi Armenians whom Beril described as being 'detached from the mother tree' (discussed in Chapter 6).

Armenian historians argue that a separate Armenian people with its own cultural markers existed before Armenians' conversion to Christianity in the fourth century. Back in 400-401 BC, for instance, Greek historian Xenophon recorded observations about the

distinct customs, politics and language of Armenians (Panossian 2006: 36). The Armenian language had already become predominant among the people of the Artashesian kingdom of Armenia by the first half of the second century BC (Garsoïan 1997a: 50). By the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, shortly before Armenia's Christianisation, there was a distinct Armenian identity, which was a 'unique synthesis of local, Persian and Hellenistic/Roman elements' (Panossian 2006: 40).

However, that distinctiveness was under heavy pressure in the early fourth century on the part of the Sasanid Persians who tried to enforce their Zoroastrian religion, customs and culture on the Armenians. In response, the leaders of the Armenian Arshakuni dynasty decided to adopt Christianity as the kingdom's official religion and initiated a campaign of replacing their Zoroastrian and Hellenistic temples by Christian ones in AD 314-315. This became one of the most important events in the history of Armenian identity, as it secured its distinct nature vis-à-vis the surrounding cultures (Panossian 2006: 42-43; Garsoïan 1997b: 81-4). Christian faith thus became an important marker of difference for the Armenians and drew a rigid boundary for Armenian identity, which was stubbornly maintained by the Armenian political elites during the subsequent centuries. In 451, in particular, the decisive Battle of Avarayr was fought against the Sasanid Persians who were trying to re-impose Zoroastrianism on Christian Armenia (Panossian 2006: 46-48).

Moreover, Christianity appears to have provided the Armenians not only a sense of difference and particularity, but also, conforming to the argument of Adrian Hastings, a template for nationalism through its biblical idea of the 'chosen people' (1997: 195-198). Such ideas in fact appeared among Armenian nationalist historians and political figures in different periods of history. Armenia, as the first state believed to have officially adopted Christianity, has been described as 'where God's grace has been manifested' by ancient Armenian historians (see Panossian 2006: 44). Armenian royal families have even claimed

to be descendants of the Jews, the original ‘chosen people’ (ibid.). Even as late as the 1780s, historian Father Chamchian argued that the Armenian language was the language of Adam, Jehovah, Noah, and thus the original language of humanity (Panossian 2006: 104-105). Thus, although the Biblical idea of a ‘chosen people’ is mostly no longer relevant among contemporary Armenians, and I have not witnessed it among the Armenians of Turkey either, it has nevertheless fed into Armenian national consciousness in history: ‘the notion of being the first Christian people who originally received the word of God directly from the apostles has remained with the Armenians throughout the centuries; it became a core element of their national identity’ (Panossian 2006: 44).

Furthermore, with Armenia’s official Christianisation, the Armenian Apostolic Church emerged as a powerful social and political institution and started playing an active role in the development of Armenian identity. Not only did it remain an autonomous institution vis-à-vis the Armenian kingdoms, but also seceded from the Byzantine branch of Orthodoxy after 451 and became autocephalous in 554, thus maintaining its independence from other non-Armenian Christian Churches (Panossian 2006: 43-44), which was crucial for its mission of constructing a distinct national identity. In fact, in his famous book where he argues that Christianity has been instrumental in the construction of nationhood, Hastings mentions the autocephalous character of churches as one of the important factors through which Christianity has succeeded in playing that role (1997: 196). He actually mentions the Armenian example several times (e.g. pp. 194, 198, 205).

As Panossian writes, ‘the church provided a powerful new cultural and institutional framework that transformed and strengthened Armenianness into a unique *ethnoreligious identity*’ (2006: 43, emphasis mine; see also Garsoïan 1997b: 84). A crucial contribution of the Armenian Church to Armenian culture and identity, for instance, was the creation of the Armenian alphabet between 400 and 405, which was directly conditioned by the Christian

mission, since a script matching the sounds of the Armenian language was needed for the translation of Christian writings and their dissemination among the population. ‘Church leaders,’ Panossian writes, ‘were also producing a uniform literary tradition,’ which was instrumental in “‘creating” Armenians’ (2006: 45). They were thus indirectly enhancing some national consciousness by diffusing a previously absent vernacular literature, and their work had thus a nationalising effect similar to that of other clergymen in different historical contexts (Hastings 1997: 193-196). Moreover, that ‘creation of Armenians’ by the Armenian Apostolic Church was also accomplished through historiographical work. In fact, it was an Armenian Apostolic bishop, Movses Khorenatsi, who first wrote a manuscript on Armenian history, the *Hayots Patmutiun* (History of the Armenians),<sup>11</sup> still widely referred to by Armenians (Panossian 2006: 51).

Apart from the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Mekhitarist brotherhood of Armenian Catholic monks based in Venice has also played an immense role in the production of Armenian identity and nationalism, despite its much later creation (1717) and smaller number of followers. Their work and contribution were mainly intellectual, as they researched and published about Armenian history, literature, language and geography. They were instrumental not only in the formation of the ‘linguistic basis of modern Armenian identity’ (ibid. 104), but also in the production of historiography. Chamchian, mentioned above, was in fact a member of the Mekhitarist order. His work was the first to have comprehensively and systematically treated Armenian history in its entirety since that of Khorenatsi (ibid). Through the dissemination of their knowledge and information through their own printing presses and, later on, schools, the Mekhitarists ‘encouraged the

<sup>11</sup> Khorenatsi claimed to be a student of Mashtots, thus placing his work in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Although that claim is usually taken at face value, Robert Thomson (1978) argues that Khorenatsi actually lived in the middle of the eighth century.

development of a consciousness of national ideals and a general desire for a re-awakening’ (Sarafian 1930: 153-154).

Thus, whereas the Armenian Apostolic Church played a fundamental role in the crystallisation of Armenian identity in earlier times, the Armenian Catholic Mekhitarists helped to ‘reshape [the Armenian nation] for the modern period’ (Panossian 2006: 107). Given this influence, if not monopoly, of clergy on its production over the centuries, Armenian identity could not but have an ethno-*religious* character.

Last but not least, the ethno-religious nature of Armenianness was officially institutionalised in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the Ottoman and Russian Empires of which Armenians had become subjects.<sup>12</sup> In the Ottoman case, the *millet* system was designed to categorise the non-Muslims into different self-governing *millets*, i.e. communities distinguished by their religions. The Ottoman state recognised the highest-order leaders of the religious groups (chief rabbi, patriarch) as the heads of those *millets* and granted them special powers and responsibilities, like collecting taxes and recruiting soldiers from their communities for the state, and settling the internal affairs of the communities (Özdoğan and Kılıçdağı 2012: 13; Panossian 2006: 69-70). The Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople, in particular, used to function as the administrative and spiritual centre of Ottoman Armenians (Ekmekçioğlu 2016: 24-25). Thus, Ottoman rule, as Panossian concludes, ‘gave Armenians a structure through which their collective identity as a (*religious*) ethnie could be maintained’ (2006: 71, emphasis mine).

A similar system was established in the Russian Empire, where the *Polozhenie* (Statute) of 1836 granted autonomy to the Armenian Apostolic Church, gave it control over community education, freed it from taxation and allowed it land ownership for income.

<sup>12</sup> By the sixteenth century the Ottoman Empire had established its control over the western parts of the Armenian highlands (Panossian 2006: 66). On the other hand, with the signing of the treaty of Turkmanchai in 1828 the eastern parts of the Armenian lands had come under the control of the Russian empire (ibid. 120).

Relations between the Armenian community and the imperial state were regulated by the *Polozhenie* and secured through the medium of the Church. Thus, similar to the Armenian *millet* in the Ottoman Empire, ‘a “people” emerged whose *ethno-religious identity* was augmented by unifying administrative structures, a school system and semi-autonomous community organisations’ in the Russian-dominated east (Ibid. 122-123, emphasis mine).

To conclude, Christianity and the Armenian Churches have played a crucial role in the construction, consolidation and maintenance of Armenian identity and the Armenian nation since the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Hastings wrote: ‘the survival of the Armenian national identity [...] is surely one of the more remarkable things in human history. The kingship did not survive, what did so was the Armenian Bible, liturgy and related literature’ (1997: 198). The Armenian version of Christianity unified Armenians for centuries, secured their cultural and organisational distinctiveness, and, importantly for this dissertation, gave traditional Armenian identity a religious character and boundary.

### *The East-West divide*

Covering the historical east-west divide of Armenia and of Armenian identity is relevant for the study of contemporary relations between Migrants and Armenian citizens of Turkey in Chapter 7.

Especially as of AD 300, Armenia was positioned between two – sometimes three – major regional powers, and throughout most of its history was subjugated by them (Panossian 2006: 40). That subjugation often meant partition, which led to the emergence of the notions of Western and Eastern Armenia. The cleavage was first between the Byzantine and Persian empires, later the Ottoman and Persian Empires, and finally the Ottoman and Russian Empires, after which the Armenian presence in the West was almost extinguished during the genocide of 1915.

The partition between the Russian and Ottoman empires requires particular attention, since it is the most important in terms of its historical impact of diversification on Armenian identity. In fact, the nationalisation of the Armenian people in the modern sense occurred in the middle of the nineteenth century, that is during that period of separation between the Western (Ottoman) and Eastern (Russian) parts of historical Armenia (Panossian 2006: 73).<sup>13</sup> Armenian national(ist) and mainly secular intellectual movements emerged separately in both Empires. The movement of Western Armenians was mainly based in Constantinople, whereas that of Eastern Armenians was centred in Tbilisi. As a result, the Armenian national identity that emerged from this ‘multilocal awakening’ (ibid. 128-188) was accordingly ‘divided into two overall linguistic and cultural patterns’ (ibid. 129).

Two vernaculars were institutionalised and promoted: Western Armenian, to be used and taught in the Ottoman empire, based on the dialect of Constantinople, and Eastern Armenian based on the dialect of Yerevan to be used in the Russian side. To date, the former is used and taught in Turkey and other diasporic communities originating from the Ottoman Empire, whereas the latter is the language of the Republic of Armenia and other eastern Armenian communities. Hence the difference of dialect between Beril and Karen that appeared above. Furthermore, the two intellectual currents established two distinct literary and cultural traditions (ibid.138-146). Whereas contemporary Armenian citizens of Turkey are mainly bearers of the Western Armenian tradition, the Migrants have come from Armenia which follows the Eastern Armenian one.

<sup>13</sup> Panossian’s approach to the ‘nationalisation’ of Armenians in the modern period contradicts Hastings’ view on the matter, which, as it appears above, argued for a birth of a ‘nation’ and ‘national consciousness’ amongst the Armenians since the 4<sup>th</sup> century. However, that debate about whether nationalism is a modern or much older phenomenon is not central to my argument here. For more on the ‘date of commencement’ of the Armenian nation in the context of the broader debate between the modernist and non-modernist approaches on nation formation, see Panossian (2006: 24-31). The aim of this section is simply to provide a historical narrative. Both Hastings’ and Panossian’s works shed light on the historical development of Armenian identity, and particularly on Christianity’s influence on its formation.

### *Armenians and Turks*

Finally, a history of Turkish-Armenian relations is necessary for this study of Armenians in contemporary Turkey.

The first important contacts between Armenians and Turks developed during the Turkic invasions of Armenian-populated territories, which began with the Seljuk Turks' occupation of the cities of Ani in 1064 and Kars in 1065. Those invasions marked the beginning of Turkish domination over Armenians, characterised by 'almost uninterrupted woe and disaster' (Walker 1990: 31).

Armenians eventually became the imperial subjects of the Ottoman Turks, since by the sixteenth century the Ottoman Empire controlled not only major cities like Constantinople and Smyrna where Armenians resided, but had also expanded its territories towards the east, reaching the historical Armenian territories where most Armenians still lived (Panossian 2006: 66). Under Ottoman rule the Armenian peasantry (approximately 75-80 percent of the Armenian population) was not only heavily taxed by the state in a discriminatory fashion, but also was at the mercy of oppressive official or non-official local rulers including Kurdish and other tribes. In urban centres, Armenians were similarly treated as second-class subjects and experienced raids, massacres and pogroms (Panossian 2006: 160-161).<sup>14</sup> Conditions especially worsened after 1876, with the coming to power of Sultan Abdul-Hamid II, who initiated a period of regular repressions (Libaridian 1987: 178).

From the 1860s onwards, Ottoman Armenians started to resist that state of arbitrary rule and violence, and by the 1890s that evolved to a clear revolutionary movement with armed militants and a political leadership. Among other activities, Armenian revolutionaries assassinated local government officials, Kurdish chieftains and other oppressors (Panossian 2006: 217-218). The rebellions and revolutionary acts were met with further massacres of

<sup>14</sup> For more on Armenians' treatment under Ottoman rule see also Barsoumian (1997). For travelers' accounts see Lynch (1901) and Walker (1997).

Armenians by the Ottoman state, and the systematic nature of those mass killings increased in the 1890s. At least 90-100,000 Armenians were massacred in 1895-6 (ibid. 162).

An important phase in Ottoman history, but also in the history of Armenian-Turkish relations, was the coming to power of the Young Turks in July 1908. At that time the political leadership of the Armenians, namely the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, was cooperating with the Young Turks, believing that constitutional reform granting autonomy to the Armenian provinces would be possible. But less than a year later, in April 1908, 20,000 Armenians were massacred in the city of Adana. As Panossian writes, ‘by 1911 Young Turk ideology had shifted from the concept of “Ottomanisation” as understood by the Armenians and other minorities — which at least theoretically entailed the equality of all subject people — to ‘Turkification’ of all the subjects and the inherent superiority of the Muslims’ (2006: 225).<sup>15</sup>

*The Genocide: A last moment of shared history*

That intention of Turkification, coupled with the Young Turk leadership’s conviction that Armenians would become instruments of Russian policy and duplicate the successful liberation struggles of the Balkan Christian nations, was to result in what is widely accepted to be the first genocide of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the 1915-1923 genocide of the Armenians. Set in motion by the adoption of the ‘Dispatchment and Settlement Law’ (*Tehcir* Law) under the pretext that Armenians had sided with enemy forces, the genocide first annihilated the intellectual and political elite, then targeted the population in a planned and organised way on a national scale. Between one and one-and-a-half million Armenians were killed. By 1923, that is the foundation of the Turkish Republic, there were hardly any Armenians left in the once-Armenian provinces of the Ottoman Empire (Hofmann 2002: 13; Özdoğan and

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed history of the relations between Armenian political leadership and the CUP, see Kevorkian (2011)

Kılıçdağı 2012: 16; Panossian 2006: 228-242).

Leaving a further exploration of the history of the genocide to the reader,<sup>16</sup> I shall comment on its historical importance for the subject of this dissertation in particular. First, and understandably, the genocide occupies a central place in Armenians', including my interlocutors', collective memories. It is the main historical reason why its perpetrators, 'the Turks,' have occupied the position of the 'Other' in Armenians' imagination and discourse (Panossian 2006: 240-242). Second, the genocide could be regarded as the last moment of a shared history between most members of the different factions of Armenians studied in this research. It is a moment separating their historical paths. The contemporary Christian Armenian citizens of Istanbul (like Beril), are mostly descendants of those who survived the genocide, remained Christian and did not emigrate; the Muslim Armenian citizens of Turkey (like Mehmet) are mainly descendants of those Armenians who were forcibly converted to Islam during and soon after the genocide and thus got 'detached from the mother tree,' as put by Beril; finally, not all, but many of the Migrants from the Republic of Armenia (like Karen), are at least partly descendants of those hundreds of thousands of escapees from the genocide who reached Russian (subsequently independent, then Soviet, and finally once again independent) Armenia.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, I end this historical overview at this moment of separation. The three factions lived through separate histories during the following century, until their re-convergence in contemporary Turkey, specifically Istanbul. Those histories have also been instrumental in the formation of the particular interpretations of Armenianness by each of the three Armenian factions, and will be reviewed in the upcoming chapters.

<sup>16</sup> For further historical literature concerning the genocide see Hovannisian (1986; 1991; 1999; 2003; 2007); Melson (1992); Sarafian (1993); Dadrian (1989; 1995; 1998; 1999a; 1999b); Akçam (2004; 2007; 2012); Robertson (2009; 2014); Kévorkian (2011); Dadrian and Akçam (2011), Suny (1993a; 2015), Suny, Göçek and Naimark (2011), Walker (1997).

<sup>17</sup> In fact, one quarter to one half of the population of the first Republic of Armenia (1918-1920) – the predecessor of today's Republic – were refugees from the Ottoman Empire (Panossian 2006: 244).

## **The Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis is organised as follows. Chapter 1 exposes the research methods and my experience in the field. Chapter 2 ethnographically studies the traditional and mainstream Christian Armenians of Turkey, the production of their ethno-religious Armenian identity, and their boundaries with the Turkish/Muslim majority. Chapter 3 describes and analyses the recent diversification of the country's Armenian landscape in the context of socio-political changes within the Turkish context, and discusses not only the advent of Migrants and Muslim/Alevi Armenians, but also the emergence of an alternative secular-leaning branch within the traditional Christian Armenian community. Chapters 4 and 5 are dedicated respectively to the study of Muslim/Alevi Armenians and the Migrant Armenians, analysing their interpretations of Armenianness and experiences in Turkey. The two last ethnographic chapters (6 and 7) deal with the intra-Armenian relations, boundaries and segregation. Chapter 6 analyses and explains the various boundary making mechanisms occurring between the Christian Armenians and their Muslim and Alevi counterparts, whereas Chapter 7 examines those between the Migrants and the local, mainly Christian, Armenians. Finally, the Conclusion provides answers to the research questions set in this Introduction, stresses yet another important concept, that of nominal identity (Jenkins 2014), exploring its potential effects on individual and collective lives, and expands the dissertation's main theoretical argument regarding the multilaterality of social boundary making.

# CHAPTER 1

## In the Field: Experience and Methods

### **The Field: Timing, locations, limitations, opportunities**

I arrived in Turkey in mid-September 2015 to gradually immerse myself in my fieldsite and to find there that ‘uncertain space of dialogue and encounter with people in their ordinary circumstances of life’ (Back 2007: 9). I stayed until mid-May 2017.

During the initial planning of my research, I had envisaged spending about ten months in Istanbul, and then travelling to eastern and south-eastern provinces of Turkey such as Diyarbakır, Tunceli, Hatay, Muş, Batman and so on (see map in Figure 1 below). It was clear to me that Istanbul was the best location to begin my research. In fact, it is there that most Christian Armenian citizens of Turkey and the Migrants from the RoA reside, their institutions operate and their communal activities and public events take place. In addition, it is in Istanbul, Turkey’s largest and most vibrant city, that most important socio-political developments, especially concerning Armenians, have taken place during the last few decades (see Chapter 3). Moreover, Istanbul and its Christian Armenian community was not unfamiliar to me, as I had previously spent a month there doing fieldwork for my Master’s dissertation, which focused on the social suffering and politics of visibility of the city’s Christian Armenian population (Papazian 2015).

On the other hand, though, I knew that large numbers, if not most, of Muslim and Alevi Armenians lived in the eastern provinces, where they had during recent years slowly started to bring Armenian public presence back, about a century after the genocide. In early 2015, Alevi Armenians had established an association, ‘DERADOST,’ in Tunceli (Çıray 2015). Muslim Armenian residents of Muş had established theirs in 2014 (Gültekin 2014),

whereas the St. Giragos church of Diyarbakır had become a site of gathering for the city’s Muslim Armenians since its restoration and reopening in 2013 (Türkay 2016). I initially planned to spend considerable time in those three particular provinces, visiting those centres and encountering the people attending them.



Figure 1. Map of Turkey’s Provinces. Adapted from Bipartisan Policy Center (2017: 9)

### *Unpredicted difficulties*

Unfortunately, my field research coincided with the deterioration of Turkey’s political climate. An atmosphere of insecurity, instability and general pessimism in the country and naturally among my interlocutors reigned throughout the period of my research.

First, the fragile Kurdish peace process, initiated by the AKP government since 2009, effectively ended in June 2015 (Unver 2016), i.e. a few months before the start of my research. Both sides resumed active hostilities, hundreds were killed and the country was severely destabilised, mainly in the south-east, but also in major cities like Istanbul and Ankara that became targets of bomb attacks by Kurdish militant organisations (*Al Jazeera* 2017b). Second, violent ISIL attacks targeted Turkey beginning in early 2015 as well (ibid.). Third, the coup attempt on the evening of 15 July 2016, and the subsequent state of

emergency that lasted two years and witnessed a wave of repressive measures by the state (see Özyürek 2019: 9; Yildiz 2018), came to immensely increase tensions in the country. Fourth, a month later, on 24 August 2016, Turkish military invaded Syria to start their seven-month-long Operation Euphrates Shield against ISIL and Kurdish militias in northern Syria (Shaheen 2016; *Al Jazeera* 2017c), thus further enflaming both Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms back home. Fifth, the 2017 constitutional referendum, that passed with only a narrow and contested margin of 1.4% (*Reuters* 2017), brought Turkey's drift towards authoritarianism almost to completion, as it 'condemn[ed] Turkey to the elected dictatorship of President Erdogan' (*The Economist* 2017; see also Çalışkan 2018; Kaboğlu 2019: 199-200).<sup>18</sup>

The developments described above produced general turmoil, polarisation, and feelings of insecurity and fear in the country. This naturally had an impact on the lives of my research participants, the Armenians of Turkey, not only as citizens or inhabitants, but also and especially as Armenians in the ways exemplified in the beginning of my Introduction. Armenians were once again becoming the scapegoats for Turkish ethnonationalism. This was, on the one hand, ironically opening opportunities for the researcher in me to witness anti-Armenian public discrimination and observe and analyse Armenians' reactions to it. On the other hand, however, the tense atmosphere greatly constrained my research because increased anxiety at times made research participants more reluctant to speak and rendered me less confident and less daring in turn. Most importantly, however, the unpredicted deterioration of the country's political climate seriously impeded my mobility and put spatial constraints on my field work.

<sup>18</sup> The country's slide into authoritarianism had already started to make its way during the previous years, with the gradual weakening of judicial independence, restriction of freedom of expression, and centralisation and monopolisation of power in AKP's Erdogan's hands (David 2016; Kaya 2015: 50; Özel 2014:20, Özbudun 2014; Özyürek 2019). The referendum was thus the finishing touch to institutionalise authoritarianism and the 'one man rule' (Taşkın 2019: 77).

In fact, particularly the collapse of the two-year peace agreement between the Turkish government and the Kurdish armed group PKK in late July 2015 (just two months before the start of my fieldwork), greatly affected the Kurdish-populated eastern and south-eastern regions of the country where I had initially planned to spend months of research. Curfews, aerial bombardments, assassinations and guerrilla fighting were reigning in those areas. According to statistics gathered by the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, 218 officially confirmed curfews, many of them open-ended, were imposed in those regions between August 16, 2015, and June 1, 2017 – a timeframe that almost coincides with my research period. The province of Diyarbakır, an important intended research site for me, witnessed 127 curfews alone (HRFT 2017). The very same St. Giragos Armenian Church located in Diyarbakır’s Sur district, where I had planned to conduct observations and interviews, literally became a battlefield and was even expropriated by the Turkish state (Yeginsu 2016; *The Armenian Weekly* 2017). Muş and Tunceli, my two other important sites of interest, witnessed respectively four and five curfews (HRFT 2017).

The issue of my personal security on the one hand, and the impossibility of traveling freely in those regions because of curfews on the other, made my trips to those areas very risky, if not impossible. Both friends and other research participants in Istanbul and the website of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the UK were advising me against travel to those areas. Last but not least, I was aware that reaching Armenians in those eastern provinces where terror was reigning again and convincing them to open up and speak would have been very difficult and even ethically problematic. That concern was confirmed and reinforced by friends in Istanbul, especially those who had relatives and friends in the eastern provinces: ‘to be identified as an Armenian is definitely not the most desirable thing in those places these days...’ As a result, I ended up geographically limiting my research to Istanbul,

with the exception of two short trips of condensed research to the east, to which I will shortly return.

### *Istanbul*

However, the first months of fieldwork revealed that Istanbul was a rich enough and diverse field in itself, promising to give answers to the research questions I had in mind. Particularly, it turned out that Armenians residing in Istanbul constitute, demographically speaking, a representative sample of all of Turkey's Armenians, as internal migration has brought many of them there, whether Christians, Muslims or Alevi. In other words, I encountered in Istanbul not only Christian and Migrant Armenians, as I had initially expected, but also numerous Muslim and Alevi ones, at times even in clan-like large families who had migrated from Muş, Diyarbakır, Tunceli, Batman, Sivas, Malatya, Hopa, Artvin, Adıyaman and so on during the last few decades.<sup>19</sup>

The main neighbourhoods of Istanbul where I conducted my research were to be dictated, naturally, by Armenians' presence and concentration in them. Neighbourhoods such as Bakırköy (Bakırköy-Merkez, Samatya, Kumkapı), Beyoğlu and Şişli on the European side of the city and to a lesser extent Üsküdar and Kadıköy on its Asian side, are areas where local Christian Armenians reside and where many of their important institutional centres are located. Migrants are mainly concentrated in Kumkapı, a truly cosmopolitan labour migrants' neighbourhood (see Biehl 2015b), but also reside in Şişli and Bakırköy. As for Muslim Armenians, they are rather scattered throughout the city, in the abovementioned neighbourhoods, or elsewhere like Zeytinburnu, Bahçelievler, Ümraniye, Maltepe and so on (see map in Figure 2 below).

<sup>19</sup> Chapter 3 discusses the internal East-West migration in Turkey, which also brought many Muslim and Alevi Armenians to Istanbul thus further diversifying the city's Armenian population.

I based myself in Şişli where, after a few weeks' stay with a local Christian Armenian artist, I rented three different apartments, all located very near to the Kurtuluş boulevard, known for having a quite high concentration of Armenians. There, I could easily reach homes of research participants or meet them in neighbourhood cafés, attend the Sunday mass at the Feriköy St. Vartanants Armenian Apostolic Church or that at the Armenian Catholic Church of Pangaltı, pay visits to the offices of Armenian newspapers *Agos* and *Jamanak*, or one of the three Armenian schools close by, or the association of Armenians from Sivas where I would eventually teach Armenian on a weekly basis. I was also a regular at two specific cafés where, while writing up my fieldnotes, I often had the opportunity to meet other Armenians and especially the owners, one of them a Muslim Armenian from Hopa, the other an Alevi from Varto having serious suspicions about his possible Armenian roots and always eager to chat with me about his family history, Turkish politics, or his amateur poetry and music. All of these were within walking distance from the apartments I rented, which allowed me to have at times three or four meetings or encounters in a single day. Naturally, I could not limit my fieldsite to Şişli, especially if I wanted to reach more Migrants and Muslim or Alevi Armenians. I would thus very often commute to one of the many neighbourhoods cited above and spend hours there as well.

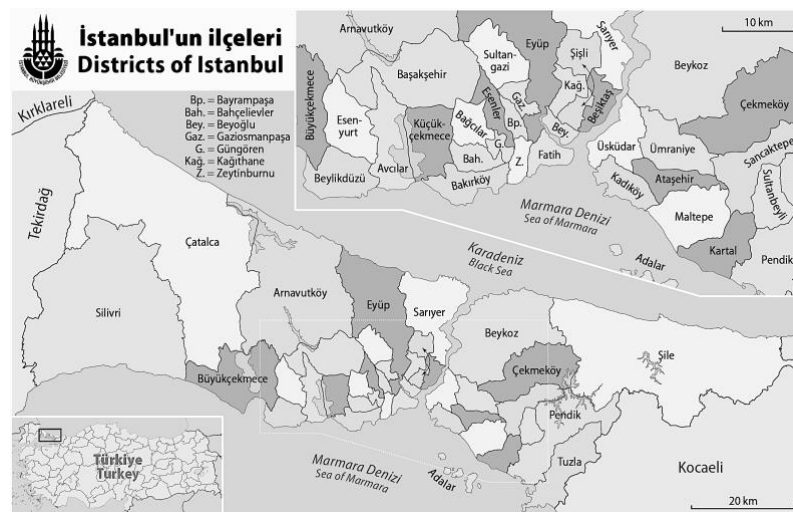


Figure 2. Map of Istanbul districts. Source: Dörrbecker (2018).

Finally, the island of Kınalıada was an important research site during the summer months (September 2015 and June – September 2016). Around an hour away from Istanbul by ferry (see map in Figure 3 below), it has traditionally served the Christian Armenian community, mostly its rich or middle-class members, as a refuge from the summer heat. The majority of residents in the summer houses of Kınalıada are Armenians. The island not only hosts Armenian community meetings and events, an Armenian boarding summer school, and the Saint Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Apostolic Church, but the high concentration of Armenians there makes ready-made observation sites out of its cafés, beaches and streets. Compared to mainland Istanbul, the probability of randomly encountering Armenians anywhere on the island was incomparably higher. Furthermore, its very large proportion of Armenians and its village-like life where almost everybody knew each other clearly made interlocutors more relaxed and more open to conversing in Armenian, for those who knew the language, and about Armenian-related issues in public, at the beach or in one of the several cafés facing the pier. As I became increasingly aware of this particularity, I also became more confident and daring to approach people and talk to them. Last but not least, a considerable number of Migrant women were part of the ethnographic landscape of the island as well. Many of them worked as domestic servants in the summer residences of the local Armenians, and I managed to reach and talk to them in the evenings, during their hours of rest.



Figure 3. Map depicting the journey from Kurtuluş, where I used to reside like many Armenians of Istanbul, to the Kınalıada island in the sea of Marmara. Retrieved and adapted from Google Maps.

### *Reaching the East*

Despite the Istanbulite field's richness, I decided to pay short visits to key locations in the East, in order to get a first-hand general idea of Armenians' lives and conditions there. In summer 2016 I travelled to Malatya, Adıyaman and Hatay, on two week-long trips. The choice of these three destinations was not random of course. The province of Hatay hosts the Vakıflı village, which is known to be 'the last Armenian village of Turkey,' though that expression is based on a dismissal of non-Christian Armenians. Malatya, I was told by Istanbulite research participants, hosted around hundred Christian Armenians and an unknown number of descendants of Islamised Armenians. Finally, Adıyaman was said to have the highest concentration of descendants of Armenian converts, some of whom had recently started to convert to Christianity and even send their children to Armenian boarding schools in Istanbul.

During my trip to Malatya and Adıyaman, in June 2016, I was guided by a friend, Kamer, an Armenian man in his late fifties, who was born in Adıyaman as a Muslim, but converted to Christianity after arriving in Istanbul in his early twenties. His presence was crucially helpful. He personally took me to the homes of his Christian Armenian relatives in Malatya with whom I spent a full day, and Muslim or recently Christianised Armenian relatives and acquaintances in Adıyaman. His company saved me time and increased the security of my research and myself. Moreover, since Kamer was a Christian Armenian, his mere presence created moments of contact and interaction between Muslim and Christian Armenians during our six days in Adıyaman, which greatly enriched my research.

My trip to Hatay's Vakıflı was in August, the month when the village comes to the centre of Turkey's Christian Armenians' attention. The village's church, named after Saint Mary the Virgin, becomes a pilgrimage site not only for the villagers, but also for Armenians from Istanbul and even from abroad. It was on those particular days, when Armenianness

and Armenian Christianity were to be explicitly performed, that I travelled there. I spent part of my time in the village itself, speaking to locals, and part of it with a group of Istanbulite Armenians touring not only Vakıflı, but also the previously Armenian-populated villages in the surrounding countryside, thus becoming a witness to their conversations, thoughts and sometimes emotions.

These two short trips thus served as opportunities for ‘rapid’ (Millen 2000), ‘focused’ (Knoblauch 2005) or ‘short-term’ (Pink and Morgan 2013) ethnography and complemented the Istanbul-based long-term research. In order to make them as productive as possible, I naturally attempted to maximise the opportunities of fruitful encounters and contact with people. That entailed some planning in advance, ‘more focused observation’ (Millen 2000), which was literally continuous especially with Kamer in Adiyaman, and ‘better selection of informants’ (ibid.), such as the formerly-Muslim Armenians of Adiyaman sending their children to Armenian boarding schools in Istanbul, the only Armenian priest of Hatay, and Vakıflı Armenians who were active in the village’s communal and administrative life. The intensity and heavy load of those short-term ethnographic experiences made them at times exhausting, and left me ‘overwhelmed by the depth and intensity of [my] research encounters’ (Pink and Morgan 2013: 356), but it also made them ‘data intensive’ (Knoblauch 2005), with numerous pages of fieldnotes and a dozen recorded interviews.

Finally, while in Istanbul I always kept an eye out for Armenians coming to visit there from the eastern provinces. Communicating with such people beforehand and explaining my research to them, I even explicitly asked them to inform me before arrival and set meetings, if possible. Whereas some of them refused or preferred not to reply, those whom I had reached through a common acquaintance agreed to let me know, and at least three such encounters occurred. All three were Muslim Armenians, one had come from Rize,

another from Tunceli and yet another, the seventy-year-old Asadur whose story I shall cover in Chapter 4, from Malatya. Thus, this method also helped me to reach the East, or rather its Armenians, and partly compensate for my inability to accomplish long-term research there.

*Beyond national and time limits*

A final point concerning the location of my fieldwork has to do with its extension to outside Turkey and beyond my twenty months of residence there. Established friendships with research participants in Turkey were to secure this dimension of my research.

For instance, I had the chance to welcome and spend a few days with one of my Muslim Armenian friends, Ergün, and his two Christian Armenian cousins in Beirut, my hometown, during the Easter holiday of 2017. Ergün later paid a visit to Yerevan, Armenia, where I was based while writing up this dissertation. Similarly, I spent time with two other Muslim Armenians and two Alevi Armenians who travelled, on four separate occasions, to Armenia, alone or with family members. Those short visits, whether in Armenia or Beirut, were important opportunities for observation, since Armenianness was directly woven into them. In fact, the cousins had visited Beirut ‘to see how Lebanese Armenians live and celebrate Easter,’ as they explained, whereas the visits to Armenia were motivated by a will to further discover Armenian history and culture. Together with Hüseyin, one of my Muslim Armenian guests in Armenia, we even reached and met with his distant relatives, Christian Armenian citizens of Armenia whose ancestors had fled, during the genocide years, from the very same Muş where Hüseyin had grown up and used to live until around ten years ago.

Finally, and unsurprisingly, Facebook was and even now remains a virtual fieldsite for my research. Posts and comments by interviewees and acquaintances from the field, be that on their personal walls or on those of groups and pages, often presented significant material for analysis. Unlike the physical one, this field of observation had virtually no limits

in time and continued to feed my research even during the phase of writing, thus making of this research endeavour a truly ‘long-term and open-ended commitment’ (Ingold 2014: 384).

## **Language, Methods, Ethics**

### *The language of research*

The languages used during my research were Turkish and Armenian. Whereas the latter is my mother tongue, the former was still almost unknown to me when I first arrived in the field. Learning Turkish was thus a precondition.

Armenophony is in fact almost non-existent in the Christian Armenian community. Many Christian Armenians do not know Armenian at all, whereas some know it only as a second language learned at school and are thus not fluent in it. Turkish is the language of the overwhelming majority. Muslim and Alevi Armenians, in turn, have naturally lost the language of their ancestors mainly because of being deprived of Armenian schools in the East and the legal right to attend those in Istanbul (see Chapter 4). Only some Hemshin Muslim Armenians speak an archaic version of Armenian, which was only partly intelligible to me.<sup>20</sup> Some other Muslim Armenians speak primarily Kurmancî Kurdish, others Turkish, and still others a dialect of Arabic, depending on the exact region where they live or have migrated from. Some Alevi Armenians from Dersim speak primarily Zazaki. In any case, most of the Muslim and Alevi Armenians also know Turkish, the only official language of the country.

Thus, without Turkish I could only research the Migrants, all Armenian-speaking, and a small portion of the Christian Armenians. I thus hastily got in touch with a private tutor and started following an intensive language course on a daily basis, meanwhile limiting my research to the Armenophones of the field. After three months, I was ready to embark

<sup>20</sup> More on the history and particularities of the Hemshins is discussed in Chapter 4.

upon interviewing and conversing in Turkish, at first accompanied by my partner, an Istanbulite Christian Armenian, and eventually on my own. Thus, in this dissertation, all excerpts from conversations with Migrants have originally been spoken in Armenian. All other quotations come from interviews or conversations in Turkish, unless stated otherwise.

### *Interviews*

Apart from numerous unrecorded conversations, a total of 105 individuals were formally interviewed as part of my research. 35 were Christian Armenian citizens of Turkey, of whom 31 were members of the Apostolic community, three of the Catholic community and one was a protestant pastor. 27 of the interviewees were Migrants. 30 interviewees were Muslim Armenians, of whom 25 were from Sunni and five from Alevi environments. Nine of the Sunni interviewees were part of the Hemshin group, which has social and historical particularities, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, and were mostly not religious. Finally, eight currently Christian Armenians who had recently converted from Sunni Islam and five who had converted from Alevism were also interviewed.

The interviewees were of different ages in all categories mentioned above, ranging between twenty and eighty-three years old. In the case of the Migrants, the number of interviewed women (18) outweighed that of male interviewees (9), which is a reflection of the simple fact that the vast majority of Migrants are women (Ozinian 2009: 17; Mat 2012). On the other hand, only 10 of the 32 Muslim Armenians, and three of the 10 formerly-Muslim Armenians were female. This turned out to be the case because, first of all, Muslim Armenians are a rather 'hard-to-find population' (Bernard 2006: 190-192), for reasons of caution and secrecy that I will discuss in Chapter 4. That being the case, the only sampling strategy I could rely on in order to reach them was snowball sampling. Most of the time Muslim Armenian research participants linked me to male potential interviewees, which

resulted in the gender imbalance. Finally, among the Christian Armenian interviewees, males heavily dominated in number, with 30 of them against only six females. This, however, should not deceive the reader, as the interviews were not the only research method used, and women were highly present in my observations and informal conversations during everyday meetings. In fact, female members of the Christian Armenian community were present in my most intimate circle of friends during my stay. Given the prevalence of other everyday opportunities to understand ordinary Christian Armenians' interpretations of Armenianness and their stances toward other 'types' of Armenians, I scheduled most of my formal interviews with selected leading figures in the community, thus using the approach of 'purposive' or 'judgment' sampling in this case (ibid. 189-191). The reality of the field was that these people, clergymen, newspaper editors, acclaimed journalists, heads of foundations and presidents of associations, were mostly males, betraying an issue of gender inequality in the community itself.<sup>21</sup>

My interviews were either unstructured or semi-structured, depending on the level of intimacy between the interviewee and myself, on the amount of time they could provide and on whether I would have another chance to interview them again or not. With interviewees that had already become friends, for instance, less structured and open-ended interviews in cafés were suitable. Interviewing the Patriarchal vicar of the Armenian Apostolic Church or the Armenian Catholic Archeparch, on the other hand, required a more structured style with an interview guide and a more 'professional' and impersonal attitude at least at the beginning: 'What is the position of your Church towards...?' I did, however, try to cautiously unveil such interlocutors' representational mask in order to reach the person beneath.

<sup>21</sup> Further information about the interviews, including dates and locations, interlocutors' ages, their genders, birthplaces, provinces of residence, and their belongings to one of the Armenian factions can be found in Appendix A.

Apart from the techniques of phased assertion (Kirk and Miller 1986), or baiting (Agar 1996:142), that is showing that I already know something in order to make interlocutors more comfortable to speak about it (Bernard 2006: 222), I would also overtly ‘agree’, for instance, with a Muslim Armenian’s interpretation of Armenianness whenever listening to them, and similarly ‘agree’ with a Christian or Migrant Armenian’s explanations whenever talking to them, although those often contradict each other. As much as this affirmative approach could be fruitful, I was aware that challenging some of the interlocutors’ ideas could also be productive. However, I always tried to bring in challenges and criticisms through other voices, not mine, in order not to discourage my interviewees from opening up. Thus, without taking the risk of putting my interlocutors in a defensive position vis-à-vis myself, I would introduce other, often contradictory theses advocated or defended by representatives of the other Armenian factions in Turkey. This not only enticed interlocutors to further open up and detail their worldviews and assessments, but also produced knowledge about their relations with, and judgments of, those ‘other’ Armenians.

### *Participant Observation*

Apart from those explicit interviews, I also very frequently engaged in innumerable informal interviews, that is friendly but relevant conversations with people in the field: such as Ani, the migrant woman doing the cleaning of one of my local friends’ house; Hovsep, the Christian Armenian waiter at a café in my neighbourhood; or Hakan, my Muslim Armenian friend’s cousin who had just arrived in Istanbul from the eastern province of Muş for a few days and joined us for a coffee. Those conversations were only one facet of the second important research method aside the interviews, that is participant observation.

Participant observation, or ‘living attentively with others’ (Ingold 2014: 389), was particularly helpful since it gave me the opportunity to compare what people said in

interviews with what they actually did, and opened up banal spaces in everyday life that provided knowledge equally important as that produced through interviews. Most importantly perhaps, it was the only method that could actually catch the moments, no matter how rare, of interaction between representatives of two or more factions of Armenians in Turkey.

Observing the local Christian Armenians was the easiest, mainly because of two factors. First, I already had established contacts and friendships with some members of the community thanks to the month-long research I had conducted in the summer of 2014 for my Master's dissertation. Thus, I started by reaching those friends and through them I easily met others, often finding myself at family dinners or other social gatherings. Especially my friend, Sarin, a local Christian Armenian herself, is to be acknowledged here. This initial network was very helpful even before I arrived in the field, as it gave me opportunities of long-distance observation, an instance of which appears on the first page of my field diary, written a few days before my arrival in Istanbul:

September 11, 2015:

Important developments are occurring in Turkey during these last 2-3 days. As the armed clashes between the Turkish army and the Kurdish guerrillas are getting more and more intense in the East, Turkish nationalist crowds are gathering and marching in different cities, including Istanbul. Anti-Armenian feelings are resurfacing on media and social media again, nationalist politicians and columnists are once again absurdly equating the Kurdish guerrillas with Armenians. Marches are taking place in Armenian-populated neighbourhoods as well, often at night, and, as it appears in videos circulating on social media, the mobs are chanting Islamist and Turkish nationalistic slogans. [My friend] Ari told me to have heard them chant that 'Turkey will become Armenians' graveyard'! Just half an hour ago Sarin called me on Skype and showed me another such mob marching and chanting right on their street. Her mother was afraid and asked her to stay away from the window...

Second, the Christian Armenians of Istanbul have quite an active community life, which provided me ready-made observation sites where I could go: concerts, talks, conferences, feasts or celebrations at schools, dinners or breakfasts organised by hometown associations, and of course Sunday masses at any of the several Armenian churches in Istanbul.

But things were rather difficult when it came to researching the Migrants and the Muslim/Alevi Armenians. They had, compared to the local Christian Armenians, many fewer social or cultural public events, and I initially had almost no connections with them. In these cases, thus, like in the case of other research fields, ‘the setting did not readily produce informants [and] provided [almost] no context to participate in or to observe’ (Malkki 1995: 49). It was thus up to me to create sites of interaction and observation, to ‘laboriously construct’ the ethnographic field (Amit 2000: 6).

To reach Migrants, I first paid a visit to their underground school (described in Chapter 5), the only institution run by them in Istanbul, and thus the only ready observation site provided by the setting. After two visits, aimed at interviewing the principal and vice-principal of the school, I realised that I needed a pretext to be there more often and regularly. Knowing that chess is valued in Armenia and part of the education system there, I proposed to teach it in their school. My offer was met with excitement. For a few months, I spent a few hours every week in that school teaching chess to the children. That gave me the opportunity of spending time with the teachers, all of them Migrants, during lunchbreaks and outside class time in general, and to participate in or just listen to their conversations. Moreover, through that voluntary work I developed a friendship with the vice-president, Tiran, a young and intelligent man, who eventually became a key research participant introducing me to other Migrants and keeping me updated with news from and developments in the Migrant community.

As for the Muslim Armenians, it was clear to me from the beginning that there were at least three sub-categories of them to be approached: Alevis from Tunceli/Dersim (mostly Muslim only by official categorisation), the Hemshins whose particularities were a much older date of Islamisation than the others and the fact that they still speak an archaic version of Armenian, and finally all other Muslim Armenians originating from Sunni families (more

on these differences will be discussed in Chapter 4). I made initial contacts with individuals from each of these sub-categories either by finding them in the media or social media, or with the help of some Christian Armenians who had such friends or relatives. This paved the way for some friendships and regular contacts. For instance, the store of two Muslim Armenian brothers, Ibo and Ahmet, became a place where I was welcomed many times. The Hemshins had an active association, called Hadig, in the Kadıköy neighbourhood of Asian Istanbul. For some time, I paid weekly visits to Hadig and participated in their class of the Hemshin Armenian dialect.

However, all this was still not enough, and I still felt the need to establish a more regular observational site, where I could be in touch with Muslim Armenians from all sub-categories and over a longer period of time. I thus started actively looking for the opportunity to teach Armenian, for free, to all those who would be interested. Teaching Armenian would bring to me, I thought, people who in one way or another were engaged with their Armenianness. In March 2016, I heard that the Association of Sivas Armenians and Friends in Istanbul and that of Dersim/Tunceli Armenians were together looking for a teacher of Armenian for weekly classes. I immediately agreed and thus began a new phase in my research. Not only Christian Armenians, through the channel of the Association of Sivas Armenians, but also Alevi Armenians, through that of the Dersim Armenians, and even a young Muslim Armenian came together in the same classroom on a weekly basis. A few months later, I formed another group of students, this time independently from any association, in which non-Christian Armenians formed the majority this time. There were two Hemshins originally from the city of Adapazarı, a young Muslim man originally from Muş, another young Alevi man from Bingöl, and two Istanbulite Christian Armenians. I kept meeting with the 15-20 adult students of both classes on a weekly basis until the very end of my research, i.e. May 2017. These weekly observation sites not only gave the opportunity

to watch and hear my students' conversations about their daily lives and imaginations and experiences of Armenianness, but also witness moments of interaction between Christian and Muslim Armenians.

### *Issues of research ethics*

Whether during interviews or moments of participant observation, I was always careful to abide by ethical norms of anthropological research. Given the sensitivity of the topic, especially for Muslim Armenians some of whom are still heavily engaged in 'passing' as non-Armenians in their everyday lives (Goffman 1963), I always made it clear that I would not mention the names of interviewees or any information that could easily be traced to them. I often even did not ask their names, intentionally, for them to feel secure. Thus, except a few more or less public figures who gave their consent to being quoted by name, all other interlocutors are referred to by pseudonyms in this dissertation. As for participant observation, things were more delicate. I might have occasionally applied 'passive deception' (Bernard 2014: 443) in public spaces, but I did not conceal my research objectives from people who surrounded me on a regular basis. However, I could not explicitly remind them about my researcher's identity each and every time we would pass time together. But it was virtually impossible to draw a rigid boundary between 'research mode' and 'friendship mode', as a single unexpected word or action was sometimes extremely significant and impossible to ignore and dig further in. As a result, this was sometimes unpleasant to close ones, like a friend who started to suspect, at a certain point, that I was joining their family gatherings for research purposes (whereas I was obviously not). But I simply could not do anything about it. What I could do and did, however, was to respect the privacy of subjects, never force my research on them, and keep my promise of anonymity.

## **Positionality: Advantages and disadvantages**

Finally, my positionality has had its influence on my research, in both negative and positive terms. Being a diasporic Armenian myself, and the grandchild of survivors of the genocide who had been forced out of their towns in contemporary eastern Turkey, I was not a total foreigner in the field. I was somehow a ‘halfie’ anthropologist (Abu-Lughod 1991; Narayan 1993; Subedi 2006), not local, but not totally ‘other,’ somewhere ‘in-between.’ This had its advantages and disadvantages for my research. I shall start with the description of the latter.

### *Disadvantages*

My positionality affected the practical undertaking of my research in the sense that it made me more cautious and less of a risk-taker in the field, especially in light of the growing tensions in the country described above. Two factors were at play: my own, perhaps socially inherited sense of cautiousness vis-a-vis Turkey and the ‘Turks,’ whether rational, emotional or a mix of both, and the continuous warnings and calls for carefulness by other Armenians in the field. Many interlocutors in Istanbul, in fact, advised me to be cautious because ‘as if your topic wasn’t sensitive enough, you happen to be an Armenian too...’ One told me about how a group of nationalists had recently harassed a diasporic Armenian journalist in the north-eastern province of Rize following news depicting him as a ‘spy of the Armenian diasporic lobbies,’ and advised me to always be careful in choosing where to go and whom to meet.

These warnings, coupled with my awareness of the popular anti-Armenian feelings and stances in Turkey and the psychological burden of my familial and collective history of genocide, persecutions and exile ‘by the hands of the Turks,’ as I grew up being told, sometimes acted as an additional factor that restrained me from diving into unfamiliar environments, such as the eastern provinces, or held me back from approaching particular

individuals, such as a Muslim Armenian man whom I did not want to meet again because, as another research participant suspected, he could be a member of an outlawed Kurdish militant organisation. Putting my research at risk was the last thing I wanted to happen. The sensitivity of the topic itself could have affected any researcher from any background – in fact, ethnic Turkish writers and journalists such as Orhan Pamuk, Elif Şafak, Taner Akçam and Hasan Cemal, have also been targets of hate speech, accusations and some were even prosecuted for digging too much into the ‘Armenian issue’ (see Reuters 2005; Birch 2006; Akebi Berlin 2014). But being Armenian was simply an extra burden.

Furthermore, being a *diasporic* Armenian in particular, and especially Lebanese, further complicated matters for me because the *Ermeni Diasporası* (‘Armenian Diaspora’) is portrayed as one of the foremost enemies of the Turkish nation in Turkish populist media and political discourse. That is so because Armenian diasporic organisations have historically been the proponents of the international campaign for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, and diasporic Armenian militant groups even assassinated several Turkish diplomats in Europe and elsewhere between 1975 and 1985, demanding genocide recognition and reparations. Lebanon, in particular, had been identified as the base of those groups by the Turkish government (Göçek 2015: 447). All these not only added up to my awareness of not being the most ‘welcomed’ type of researcher working on an Armenian topic in Turkey, but also, though to a limited degree, affected my relationship with the Armenians of Turkey, whether Christians or Muslims. Targets of that same media propaganda for years, some of them were, I could at times feel, cautious towards ‘that young Lebanese Armenian doing research about us.’ But I directly sensed this only a few times, as in the case of a Muslim Armenian young man thinking that I was secretly recording his cousins’ discussion on my phone, whereas, of course, I was not.

Finally, another disadvantage of my positionality, this time not related to my being

an Armenian, concerned my gender as a young man. This, as mentioned in the discussion about the interviewees above, probably had an influence on the fact that most Muslim Armenians referred me to other men, their brothers, uncles, friends, but almost never to women. I could personally feel the conservatism of many of my research participants, especially Muslim Armenians, in gender matters, which held me back from asking them to meet their female relatives. Every time I visited my friend Hüseyin's tea house, for instance, I found it crowded by his relatives who were exclusively men. I simply did not dare, in that environment, to ask them to introduce me to their female relatives.

### *Advantages*

On the other hand, my Armenian positionality had significant advantages for my research, not least because it gave me a prior general understanding of many issues I encountered in the field. I believe the historical and cultural knowledge I already had saved some significant time in the field, which I would have otherwise spent researching or asking about many stories or traditions surfacing during conversations with interlocutors.

Moreover, sharing an ethnonym with the research subjects generally facilitated my research. I found out that people were often interested in meeting an Armenian from abroad, like myself, and asked about Armenians and conditions of Armenianness in Lebanon: 'how many Armenians live there?', 'have your ancestors gone there from here?', 'how do locals treat you there?' Such introductory questions would not only break the ice, but also reveal people's interests and give me hints about where to begin. I eventually ended up actively using my positionality in order to give more confidence to interlocutors. Perhaps the best tactic, as I learned after several meetings, was speaking about my grandparents and their original cities in contemporary eastern Turkey. Mentioning that I am originally from Kemaliye, or more broadly speaking the province of Erzincan, would often make me a

‘local’, at least to an extent, in the eyes of some and help me and them in finding a common ground and shared history. Last but not least, my being an Armenian from Lebanon once even contributed to my understanding of the importance of lineage among Muslim Armenians: a family I visited in Adıyaman asked me to help them find their distant relatives in Beirut, who turned out, by amazing coincidence, to be the family of my Lebanese-Armenian friends (see Chapter 4 for more detail).

Speaking with the Migrants, on the other hand, I would use their own Eastern Armenian dialect and often explicitly ‘exhibit’ my knowledge of and interest in the Republic’s internal social and political issues, which I would probably not have if I were not Armenian as well. If being a Lebanese Armenian was sometimes a bit of a handicap whenever meeting local Armenians, it was, as I was to realise soon, a privilege when meeting Migrants. In fact, many of them had a positive image of Lebanese Armenians and viewed them as ‘good Armenians’ (i.e. Armenian-speaking, interested in and supportive of Armenia, etc.) especially in opposition to the Armenians of Turkey (see Chapter 7).

Moreover, I would often use my own Armenianness as a tool to engender challenges and questions for my interviewees. Christian Armenians, for instance, would assume that I was Christian and accordingly gain some confidence to criticise Muslim Armenianness or to argue for the definitional importance of Christianity for Armenianness. That was useful in itself. But it was even more useful when I would confront them using my very own example: ‘I’m baptised, but I’m now an atheist. I don’t consider myself a Christian. And according to what you just said I shouldn’t be classified as an Armenian. Am I not one, then?’

Finally, my Armenian positionality in the field created many instances where I could feel myself in the shoes of my research subjects. Experiences, emotions and thoughts which I reflected on and even noted down in my fieldwork diary have had comparative value which

helped me in understanding the subjectivities of Armenians in Turkey. This was mainly twofold. On the one hand, the twenty months of residence in Turkey and the longer exposure to Turkish media helped me understand the experience of being subjected to verbal discrimination, otherisation and psychological violence as an Armenian, as exemplified in the beginning of the Introduction above. Reflecting on such first-hand experiences of being targeted *as an Armenian* was, ironically, a ‘privilege’ for the researcher within me. It helped me to more closely understand my research subjects’ everyday social suffering and the related responses: anxiety, suspicion and cautiousness. On the other hand, reflections on the making of boundaries by myself toward various Armenians in the field, on my coping with their differences in terms of Armenianness and on my own judgments about them, also had a comparative value for my understanding of the drawing of various intra-Armenian boundaries by my research subjects.

## CHAPTER 2

### **The Traditional Christian Armenian Community: An ethnoreligious identity, a religious boundary**

One evening in July 2016, I was invited to the birthday party of a local Armenian friend. All of the invitees, about twenty of them, were Christian Armenians except two Muslim Turkish women, classmates of the party host. I was lucky to be seated near them, as I would witness a significant conversation soon. One of the Turkish women had learned a few Armenian words and was using them to surprise her Armenian friends. Shirag, an Armenian man in his mid-twenties, jokingly told her: ‘I see that you’ve learned some Armenian... let me call a priest to baptise and make you a true Armenian!’

Christianisation, thus, was perceived as a necessary rite of passage towards Armenianness by Shirag. None of his local Christian Armenian friends were surprised by his remark. On the contrary, they all laughingly validated it, as being Christian is widely perceived as a fundamental, essential, even definitional characteristic of being Armenian amongst most Christian Armenian citizens of Turkey. The ‘true Armenian,’ ‘ideal Armenian,’ or simply ‘the Armenian’ for them is inevitably and unquestionably Christian.

The ethnoreligious nature of Armenian identity is not a new phenomenon at all. As overviewed in the Introduction above, it has deep roots in Armenian history. Turkey’s Christian Armenians’ knowledge of and identification with that history is of course one of the factors contributing to their religious interpretation of Armenianness. For instance, when a very religious Christian Armenian man was disappointed to hear that I wasn’t religious at all, he reminded me that we, *as Armenians*, ‘were the first nation to adopt Christianity!’ Moreover, he tried to convince me that I, *as an Armenian*, ‘should not turn my back to the

Battle of Avarayr,' which Armenians had fought in AD 451 in defence of their Christian faith (see Introduction).

Being inherited from the past, the relationship between Armenianness and Christianity exists also, to different degrees, in other Armenian communities in the world.<sup>22</sup> However, among the Christian Armenians of Turkey the convergence of nation (Armenianness) and religion (Christianity) seems to have attained a further level, where the two notions have almost amalgamated. This chapter analyses the additional factors that are particular to the Christian Armenians of Turkey, and that have historically contributed and still contribute to that strengthening of the Christian-Armenian identificational pairing among them. I shall examine those factors in the following order: the official categorisation of Armenians by the Republic of Turkey; the century-long religious discrimination against Armenians by the Turkish state and society; the suppression of suprareligious manifestations of Armenianness among them; and the Christian-Armenian experiential pairing in contemporary everyday life. Finally, I will further elaborate on the imagined 'Armenianness' by the Christian Armenian citizens of Turkey, revealing a deeply rooted Christian-Armenian cognitive pairing amongst them. But first, an exposition of the general demographic and sociological conditions of the community would be helpful.

## **Demographic and Sociological Information**

### *General information*

The population of Christian Armenian citizens of Turkey is estimated to count between 60-70,000 (Hoffman 2002: 6; Özdoğan and Kılıçdağı 2012: 18), although some estimates take it to as low as 40,000 (Komsuoglu and Örs 2009: 345; Doğan 2017).

More than 95% of them live in Istanbul (Komsuoglu and Örs 2009: 330; Özdoğan

<sup>22</sup> See for example, how a Russian Armenian author writes about "being Armenian ethnically, politically and religiously" (Atanesian: 2017, emphasis mine).

and Kılıçdağı 2012: 18), mainly concentrated in the neighbourhoods of Bakırköy, Samatya and Şişli on the European side of the city, and more sparsely in Üsküdar-Bağlarbaşı and Kadıköy on its Asian side. It is estimated that around 3,000 Christian Armenians also live in provinces further to the East (Komsuoglu and Örs 2009: 335), or in Kavar (Province) as Istanbul Armenians prefer to call it in Armenian.<sup>23</sup> Relations between Istanbulite Christian Armenians and their provincial counterparts are mainly limited to annual visits of clergymen from Istanbul, which sometimes become pilgrimage-like group visits. Some provincial Armenians who have migrated to Istanbul have recently established hometown associations, such as those of Vakıflı, Malatya, Sivas and *Sasun* (contemporary Batman), which also financially support the communities they have left behind, in the examples of recent Church renovations in Vakıflı and Malatya.

The number of Armenians in the Eastern provinces has fallen not only as a direct consequence of the genocide between 1915-1923, but also as a result of what historian Talin Suciyan calls a ‘perpetual exodus’ in the Republican period (2015: 44). The latter was realised through, first, daily harassments, social pressures and migration policies (Komsuoglu and Örs 2009: 335),<sup>24</sup> and a ‘systematic institutional obstruction’ which consisted, for instance, of forbidding the re-opening of Armenian schools in those provinces (Suciyan 2015: 44-45; 200). As a result, Armenians of those provinces continuously migrated and still migrate to Istanbul where, on the contrary, there is a relative institutional

<sup>23</sup> The *Church Calendar* published by the Patriarchate of the Armenian Apostolic Church lists the following cities in the eastern provinces as containing Orthodox Armenians: Kayseri, Diyarbakır, Mardin, Iskenderun, Vakıflı village in Hatay, Gümüşhacı village in Amasya, Ankara, Antalya, Adana, Adıyaman, Yalova, Boğazlıyan near Yozgat, Elazığ, Tunceli, Tokat, Malatya, Mersin, Bitlis, *Sasun* (Batman), Sivas, Kastamonu and Ordu (2017: 172-179). My interlocutors living in or having relatives in some of these places provided the following estimates: ‘20-30 people’ in *Sasun* (Batman); ‘135 individuals’ in Vakıflı village of Hatay; ‘100-110 people’ in Iskenderun; ‘20-25 families’ in Malatya. Catholic Archbishop Zekiyan, in turn, mentioned about 270 Catholic Armenians in Ankara (Turkish-speaking) and 52 Catholic Armenians in Mardin (Arabic-speaking).

<sup>24</sup> One example of such policies was the “Settlement Law” (No. 2510), dated 14 June 1934, which settled Kurds and recent Muslim immigrants from the Balkans in those eastern provinces, simultaneously dislocating non-Muslims from the very same areas (Aktar 2000; Bali 2000; Çağatay Okutan 2004).

completeness with Armenian community schools, churches, cemeteries, associations, hospitals, orphanages, charity foundations, newspapers, and a publishing house.<sup>25</sup>

Most of the Christian Armenians of Turkey are believed to be middle class. Most men are merchants, businessmen, or work in handicrafts, while the number of Armenian women working outside their homes is smaller than that of men (Komsuoglu and Örs 2009:339). It has been noted, and confirmed by many of my acquaintances in the field, that unemployment and economic hardship have recently been rising in the community (see Doğan 2017).

#### *Denominational sub-divisions*

Apart from the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Armenian Catholic Church and the Armenian Evangelical Church also function in Turkey, though with far fewer followers. More than 90% of Turkey's Christian Armenians are Apostolic (also known as Orthodox). The two other Armenian Churches are relatively recent in Armenian history. The Catholic one was established in 1742 and recognised as a separate *millet* by the Ottoman government in 1830, whereas the Evangelical one was established in 1846 and recognised as a *millet* in 1857 (Ekmekçioğlu 2016: 25).

Although these divisions between the Christian Armenians have historically been quite sharp and politicised, that is no longer the case. Archbishop Zekiyan, the current spiritual leader of Turkey's Catholic Armenians, told me:

Today Istanbul could serve as a great example for the Armenian world, of how the different [Christian] Armenian communities live together not only in peace, but also in deep cooperation in all areas of life. I am respected by both the Apostolic and Evangelical Armenian communities as much as I am by the Catholic one. There is no such discrimination anymore, we are all equally Armenians, though there may be some nuanced differences in terms of identity and belief on the individual level...<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> See Appendix B for a list of Turkey's Armenian institutions and organisations.

<sup>26</sup> Original in Western Armenian.

Clergymen from the other two denominations had similar opinions. In fact, not only are children of one denomination educated in schools belonging to the others, but, as I witnessed, even people from one Christian Armenian branch at times go to the masses of the other Churches.

Nevertheless, there still occasionally appears a phenomenon of equating ‘Armenian’ to ‘Armenian Apostolic.’ People from all three denominations would sometimes say ‘Armenian Church’ rather than ‘Armenian Apostolic Church,’ in contrast to ‘Armenian Catholic Church’ and ‘Armenian Evangelical Church’. But this is mainly a linguistic issue inherited from earlier times in which those divisions were more salient in the eyes of both Armenians and the state.<sup>27</sup> During my whole stay in Turkey, only once did I witness a more extreme manifestation of this phenomenon, when a young Catholic Armenian woman born and raised in the southeastern city of Mardin told me: ‘We are not Armenians. We are Catholics.’ Thus, unlike other intra-Armenian boundaries that will be thoroughly discussed later on in this dissertation, these denominational boundaries are, at the most, inconsistently appearing symbolic boundaries and almost never social ones (Lamont and Molnar 2002: 168-169). Perhaps more importantly, being Apostolic, Catholic, or Evangelical did not make any significant difference in my research participants’ understanding of Armenianness, which was, as already stated, ethnoreligious in the vast majority of cases.

Having thus briefly delineated the general contemporary conditions of the Christian Armenian citizens in Turkey, I now pass to the different factors that contribute to their ethnoreligious understanding of Armenianness.

<sup>27</sup> For instance, in at least one of the population censuses organised by the Turkish state (1926), Armenian Apostolic Christians are simply mentioned as ‘Armenians’, in contrast to ‘Armenian Evangelicals’ and ‘Armenian Catholics’ (Dundar 2001: 56).

## **The State's View: A religious categorisation from above**

Armenians in the Republic of Turkey have always been officially acknowledged and treated as a *religious* minority, as one of the country's 'non-Muslim minorities.' The legal basis of this approach is to be found in the famous treaty of Lausanne, signed in 1923 between the newly established Republic of Turkey and the Allied forces. In articles 38-45 of the Treaty's Section 3 titled 'Protection of Minorities,' the term 'minority' is always preceded by the adjective 'non-Moslem,' thus stressing the religious nature of minorities.<sup>28</sup> During the meetings preceding the Treaty, the Great Powers had insisted that Turkey should recognise all its non-Muslim, non-Turkish and non-Turkish speaking citizens as 'minorities' and that it should guarantee to respect the latter's religious, cultural and linguistic rights. Worried that the recognition of minority rights, especially in the proposed format, might hinder its nationalist plan of creating a homogeneous Turkish nation, the Turkish delegation tried to resist the Allies' insistence on minority protection. As a result, a compromise was reached and minority status was granted only to the 'non-Moslems' and not to Muslims who were of non-Turkish ethnic backgrounds, such as Kurds, Lazgis, Georgians, and Pomaks. Those non-Muslim minorities were not explicitly named in the treaty, but in practice the Turkish state has always considered the Armenians, Jews and Greeks as eligible for that status and to the respective 'minority rights,' such as control over their own schools, institutions and family laws, free practice of their religion and languages, and maintenance of their religious institutions, on the condition that these act merely as spiritual centres devoid of any of the political and administrative authority they used to enjoy in Ottoman times (Ekmekçioğlu 2016: 13, 90-94; Oran 2004: 36-40; BİHDK 2004: 1-2; Secor 2004: 355; Grigoriadis 2007: 423; Kurban 2007: 12; Örs and Komsuoğlu 2007: 408-409).

<sup>28</sup> Treaty of Lausanne available at: [http://sam.baskent.edu.tr/belge/Lausanne\\_ENG.pdf](http://sam.baskent.edu.tr/belge/Lausanne_ENG.pdf), last accessed: 2 October 2019.

Thus, the ‘minoritization’ of the Ottoman Armenian *millet* by the Republic of Turkey, as Ekmekçioğlu puts it (2016: 8), preserved the Ottoman *religious* perception of the community: ‘Many of these new minority rights eerily resembled the entitlements *dhimma* [non-Muslims under Muslim rule] enjoyed under the Ottoman Empire, rights they received in exchange for their agreement to defer to Muslims at all times’ (ibid. 13). Thus, in this new Republican era of ‘secular dhimmitude’ (ibid. 18), religious difference was officially and legally made the most important pillar of the boundary between the Muslim state and majority and the non-Muslims, including the Christian Armenians. Ekmekçioğlu writes:

...even though sect, linguistic, and ethnic differences would remain relatively bridgeable, religious difference remained fixed. (...) religion remained the dividing line between “us” and “them” in the new Turkey. The state saw Muslims as Turks (or future Turks) but did not consider and treat non-Muslim Turkish citizens as true Turks, and did not trust that one day they could become fully Turkifiable. (2016: 106)

During one of my regular visits to the centre of the Association of Sivas Armenians and Friends in Istanbul, I was surprised to find the photo of an old identity card, said to be from the 1950s, in which the bearer’s *religion* was mentioned as *Ermeni*, i.e. ‘Armenian’ in Turkish (see Figure 4 below).

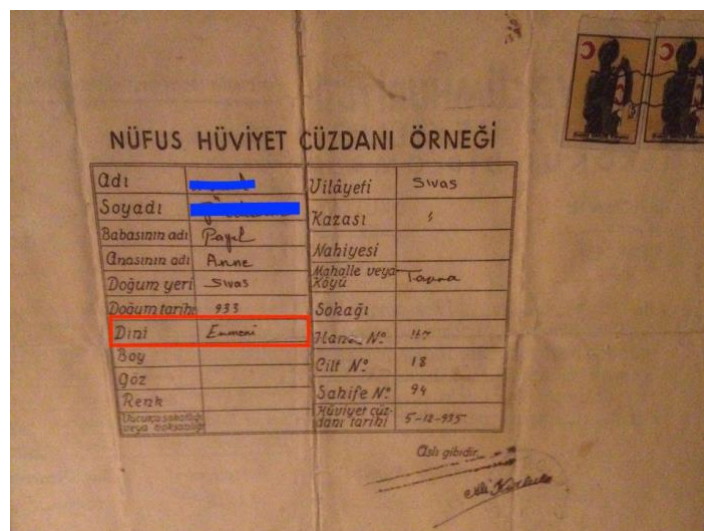


Figure 4. Photo of an old identity card mentioning the bearer’s religion as ‘Armenian,’ taken by the author in Istanbul.

It is hard to imagine a more pertinent example attesting to the fact that Armenianness has

been perceived and, importantly, presented as a religion by the state. Research participants confirmed that many Armenians' 'religion' used to be marked as 'Armenian' until a certain date (the 1980s according to one). Clearly, thus, the Republic of Turkey categorised Armenians as a religious minority and presented Armenianness as a religion. Whereas contemporary IDs mention Christian Armenians' religion as 'Christian', rather than 'Armenian', the practice of limiting Armenianness to Christianity has not been waived yet. Jennifer, a young Christian Armenian woman from Istanbul, recalled how a state-appointed Turkish teacher of Turkish language and literature in the Armenian school she used to attend had told her and her classmates that they, as Armenians, were simply 'Christian Turks.' The fact that Nayira, another Christian Armenian friend, was told the same by her physician, suggests that this conception of Armenianness is also shared and propagated by at least some ordinary Turkish citizens as well.

I argue that this clearly *religious* categorisation of Armenians by the Turkish state is a first factor contributing to Christian Armenians' foregrounding of Christianity in their Armenian identification. In fact, the notion of 'categorization from above' (Brubaker 2004: 207) and its influences on the 'below', i.e. on the categorised people's self-identification, is a quite extensively studied topic in the social sciences. Influenced by, among other ideas, Bourdieu's notion of the state's symbolic power 'to produce and impose categories of thought that we spontaneously apply to all things of the social world' (1994: 1), this tradition of research has studied how systems of classification and practices of categorisation 'from above' (official labelling, naming, counting, national censuses) can potentially affect the self-understandings and self-identifications of those very same labelled, categorised and classified individuals and groups,<sup>29</sup> to the extent of 'making up people' (Hacking 1986) or

<sup>29</sup> See, for instance, Geertz 1963; Karpas 1973; Horowitz 1975: 129-130; Hagan 1976; Young 1976; Sanjek 1977; Levine and Wolfzahn Levine 1979; Cohen 1981; Braude and Lewis 1982; Anderson 1983, chapter 10; Alba 1985; Horowitz 1985; Hirschman 1986; Starr 1987; Petersen 1987, 1997; Levine 1987; Cohn 1987; Dirks 1992; Jackson and Maddox 1993; Brubaker 1994; Slezkine 1994; Nagel 1995; Appadurai 1996;

‘nominating [them] into existence’ (Goldberg 1997: 29-30) in most extreme cases. My own research comes to present a fresh example in which a state-imposed categorisation affects the self-perception of the categorised, i.e. the Christian Armenians, who have ‘internalised’ the terms in which others externally define them (Jenkins 1994: 216).

Apart from the cognitive influence of this categorisation from above, to be further explored below, there is a practical one. In fact, as Brubaker writes, external categories are particularly powerful and influential for the categorised ‘when they are linked through public policy to tangible benefits’ (2004: 67). Similarly, Christian Armenians at times act in accordance with the way they are defined in the legal-official realm with instrumental purposes. This mainly has to do with the special ‘minority rights’ they have as a religious minority (Oran 2004: 37), the most apposite example of which is related to community schools.

The right to have community schools and control over them is clearly expressed in the Treaty of Lausanne. The 5580<sup>th</sup> Law on Special Educational Foundations states that ‘minority schools’ are ‘special schools’ established by the Armenian, Greek and Jewish minorities, secured by the Treaty of Lausanne, and, importantly, ‘attended by students that are citizens of the Republic of Turkey and members of those very same minorities’ (translation).<sup>30</sup> Thus, only officially recognised members of the Armenian community have the right to attend Armenian schools, and self-identifying as an Armenian is not sufficient.<sup>31</sup> As several school principals and teachers explained, until very recently parents wishing to enrol their children in Armenian schools had to approach the Ministry of Education and ask for an official paper confirming the child’s membership of the Armenian community.

Noiriel 1996; Jackson 1999; Bahm 1999; Gorenburg 1999; Torpey 2000; Martin 2001; Brubaker, Loveman and Stomatov 2004; Koopmans et al. 2005, chapter 4; Mullen, Calogero and Leader 2007: 613; Wimmer 2008b: 1034-1035 and 2013a: 91-92).

<sup>30</sup> *Özel Öğretim Kurulları Kanunu 2007*, available at:

<http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.5580.pdf>, last accessed: 22 August 2019.

<sup>31</sup> This issue will show up again in chapters 4 and 7 discussing Muslim and Alevi Armenians.

But recently that practice was abolished and the task of checking one's eligibility was left to the schools. In response, the patriarchate of the Armenian Apostolic Church has come up with an informal internal law that asks for children's Baptism Certificates as 'proof of Armenianness.' Tellingly, high ranking clergymen from the patriarchate explained to me that decision not only by the belief that 'Armenians can only be members of one of the three Armenian Churches,' but also by the fact that this procedure, they thought, would comply with the state's approach to the matter: 'the state does not recognise Armenians in any other way.' One particular clergyman also expressed the concern that had they dismissed the condition of religious belonging, they 'could have invalidated the Treaty of Lausanne and thus stabbed ourselves in the back...' Thus, the Christian Armenian leadership reifies and reproduces the official *religious* categorisation of Armenianness because of being 'constrained [...] by the institutional environment that makes it appear more plausible and attractive to draw [a] certain type of boundar[y]' (Wimmer 2013a: 89), which is in this case clearly religious.

To conclude, Christian Armenians of Turkey have been and are categorised, perceived, somehow forced to organise and even encouraged to think of themselves as a *religious*, rather than ethnic or national group on the part of the Turkish state. 'There is no Armenian community in Turkey. There are the Armenian-Apostolic, Armenian-Catholic and Armenian-Evangelical communities,' the leader of the Religious Council of the Armenian Apostolic Church explained to me while playing with his beard. The situation on the ground would at most allow us to slightly generalise that statement and conclude: there is no Armenian community in Turkey—there is a *Christian-Armenian* one.

## **Religious Discrimination and Violence**

Drawing on ideas from Goffman's *Stigma* (1968), Richard Jenkins writes: 'Others don't just

perceive our identity, they actively constitute it. And they do so not only in terms of naming or categorising, but in terms of how they respond to or treat us. In the dialectic of individual identification, the external moment can be enormously consequential' (2014: 98). On a similar note, Wimmer argues that 'discrimination powerfully affects the way individuals define themselves and represents a more effective tool to enforce a specific distinction between... "us" and "others" than categorization and symbolization' (2013a: 66). Hence, looking at the way the Turkish State and majority treat the Christian Armenians, in addition to how they name and categorise them (as discussed above), will also help in the endeavour of understanding the bases of Christian Armenians' *religious* self-identification and understanding of Armenianness.

My discussion of the special 'minority rights' for which Armenians of Turkey are eligible might have generated a misconception about their treatment in Turkey. In fact, rather than being privileged and respected, they have been and are subject to serious discrimination and violence through both state policies and instances of everyday violence by ordinary members of the Muslim majority.

#### *Religious discrimination and violence by the state*

Not only have non-Muslim citizens' Lausanne rights not been fully respected, as mentioned even by the Prime Minister's Human Rights Advisory Committee (BİHDK 2004: 2), but those citizens have also been relegated to the status of 'step-citizens' (Ekmekçioğlu 2016: 106). In fact, since the early 1920s, the non-Muslims have found themselves in a Republic declared to be a 'Turkey for the Turks' where the 'real/main citizens' (*öz vatandaş*) were perceived to be 'those who are Muslims of the Hanafi sect and speak Turkish,' in the words of a then leading MP Celal Nuri (Ekmekçioğlu 2014: 668-670; 2016: 17, 105-106). The remainder, including the Christian Armenians, have never been considered equal with the

Turks (Örs and Komsuoglu 2007: 410), and have ‘become the natural other, the natural enemy of the nation’ due to their lack of Islamic identity on which Turkish national identity was fundamentally based (Aktar 2008). The following is an overview of the most important policies and events that have targeted Armenians from a *religious* perspective.

Until the 1940s the non-Muslim citizens of Turkey were officially registered as ‘foreigners’ (BİHDK 2004: 3). Today, although that is no longer the case, the non-Muslim minorities’ foundations are listed among ‘foreign legal entities’ by the Office of the Presidency of the Republic (Tchilingirian 2016: 134), which basically maintains the very same approach of othering the non-Muslim citizens. Even worse, in a 1931 edition of the Citizenship Education book, the non-Muslims were literally included in a section called ‘Bad People’ (Ekmekçiöğlü 2016: 125). Moreover, non-Muslim minorities of the Republic, similar to their treatment by the Ottoman Empire in the pre-*Tanzimat* (1839) era, have been openly discriminated against by formal or informal laws banning them from careers in civil bureaucracy and the military, and even from traveling freely in the country (Ekmekçiöğlü 2016: 107; BİHDK 2004: 3; Örs and Komsuoglu 2007: 410). With the exception of the ban on travel, the other mentioned bans are still in practice applied. In fact, the non-Muslim citizens of Turkey have the right to apply for military posts, but are deliberately eliminated during the exams on grounds of ‘national security’ (Örs and Komsuoglu 2007: 427).

Two important discriminatory state policies targeted the religious minorities, including the Armenians, during the WWII period. In 1941, exclusively non-Muslim citizens of Turkey were conscripted to special troops to be known as ‘The Twenty Classes’ (*Yirmi Kur’a*). Comprised also of elderly, unhealthy, and even blind individuals, these non-Muslim regiments were not provided weapons and often not even military uniforms. They were simply used as labour battalions in such impoverished conditions that even caused deaths (Örs and Komsuoglu 2007: 411; Suciyan 2015: 73-77; Melkonyan 2010: 65).

In November 1942, Law 4305 or the Property Tax Law (*Varlık Vergisi Kanunu*) was introduced by the Turkish government and taxed enlisted citizens according to the following rates: 232% of the value of fixed assets for Armenians, 179% for Jews, 156% for Greeks, and only 4.94% for Muslims. Those unable to pay the tax were sent to do forced labour to the town of Aşkale. All of the people sent to Aşkale were non-Muslims, and at least 21 of them died. This policy, qualified as an ‘economic genocide’ by Akar (2006), is a typical example of ‘legalized discrimination’ (Wimmer 2013: 67), which caused the economic ruin and emigration of thousands of non-Muslim citizens of Turkey, including Armenians (Ökte 1951; Aktar 2000; Hofmann 2002: 16; BİHDK 2004: 4; Kuyucu 2005; Akar 2006; Örs and Komsuoglu 2007: 411-412; Melkonyan 2010: 65-66; Guttstadt 2013).

A third important anti-non-Muslim event in the history of the Turkish Republic took place on 6-7 September 1955 when a violent pogrom targeted the non-Muslim communities of Istanbul. Although its initial target was the Greeks, as the event happened in light of the escalations of Greek-Turkish tensions over Cyprus, other non-Muslims were also heavily affected due to their religious identities. In particular, four Armenian churches and eight Armenian schools were either set on fire or looted and desecrated at the time (Hofmann 2002: 18; Kuyucu 2005; Örs and Komsuoglu 2007: 412; Melkonyan 2010: 66-67).

The incident of the Twenty Classes, the Property Tax Law, and the pogroms of 1955 thus constitute the most traumatic events for the Christian Armenians in the Republican era, and constitute an important part of their collective memory (Halbwachs 1980; 1992). Contemporary Christian Armenians of advanced age carry them as ‘personal’ or ‘autobiographical’ memories, as they ‘remember what [they themselves had] seen, done, felt, and thought at [those] time[s]’ (Halbwachs 1980: 51-52). For instance, Ararat, my then-partner’s great-uncle, told me the story of how, as a result of the Property Tax Law of 1942, his family was forced out of their house in Sivas, which was confiscated by the state and

given to a Muslim family of migrants from Bulgaria. On the other hand, the younger generation acquires that memory of anti-non-Muslim discrimination in the form of ‘historical memory,’ i.e. ‘a borrowed memory, not [one’s] own,’ a ‘baggage load of historical remembrances that [one] can increase through conversation and reading...’ (ibid.) My then-partner, for instance, already knew of her great-uncle’s story when he told it to me. On another occasion, her brother, 19, asked his mother, in my presence again, about the reasons why a once rich Armenian family they were friends with were not well-off now. His mother’s answer was clear-cut and simple: ‘Varlık Vergisi.’

The memory of these policies adds itself onto that of the genocide, which is often interpreted and remembered, again, through a religious prism by many of my interviewees. The doorkeeper of the hometown association where I used to teach Armenian, a man in his fifties from Sivas, argued: ‘If we consider [the genocide of] 1915, we see that those Armenians who converted to Islam were not killed... it all started when Muslims alleged that Armenians were preparing attacks on mosques, and that’s how they incited the massacres... they promised heaven to those who would kill more than seven “infidels”...’ Yet another man qualified the genocide as ‘a sacrifice for Christianity.’<sup>32</sup>

Finally, the republican years witnessed a wave of destructions or confiscations of Armenian Churches and cemeteries, particularly in the provinces (Suciyan 2016: 33; Hofmann 2002: 39; Özdoğan and Kılıçdağı 2012: 65-66). The destruction of those ‘place[s] of memory’ (Küchler 1999) was part of a politics of erasure that intended the ‘Turkification of space and time’ (Öktem 2005: 183). Kevork, a man born in a village in Batman, remembers the ruins of his village’s church and how the elders would recount that it used to function until 1945, 8 years before he was born, when ‘the state destroyed it and used its

<sup>32</sup> There is historiographical debate regarding the religious dimension of the Armenian Genocide (see Suny 2011). However, what is important here is the fact that it is interpreted and remembered as such.

stones to build a military post...’

Contemporary times witness similar events too, at least three of which occurred during my research, at a time of violent clashes between the Turkish police and the Kurdish guerrillas in Diyarbakır. In September 2015, the Armenian Catholic church in Diyarbakır was stormed, desecrated and pillaged allegedly by the Turkish special forces (*Ermeni Haber* 2017); in February 2016 the photo of a Turkish Special Force member standing in the Armenian Apostolic church and making the Turkish far-right ‘Grey Wolves’ hand salute was circulated on social media, with a caption mentioning ‘the infidels of the Church’ (Gültekin 2016) (see Figure 5 below); in April 2016 the state officially seized the Armenian Apostolic and other churches in Diyarbakır (Yeginsu 2016); a few months after I left the research field, the site of a historical Armenian cemetery in Erdemit was desecrated by the town’s municipality, which built on it toilets and changing rooms for a nearby public beach (*Turkish Minute* 2017). All of these caused more than resentment amongst my Christian Armenian interlocutors and friends, which I witnessed during conversations and on social media platforms.

The significant aspect of all these state policies and acts of violence and discrimination, whether historical or contemporary, whether directed specifically towards Armenians or more generally the ‘religious minorities,’ is that they have affected the Armenians either in a straightforwardly religious way (desecration of churches and cemeteries), or through discriminating against them as non-Muslims – that is, again, on religious grounds.

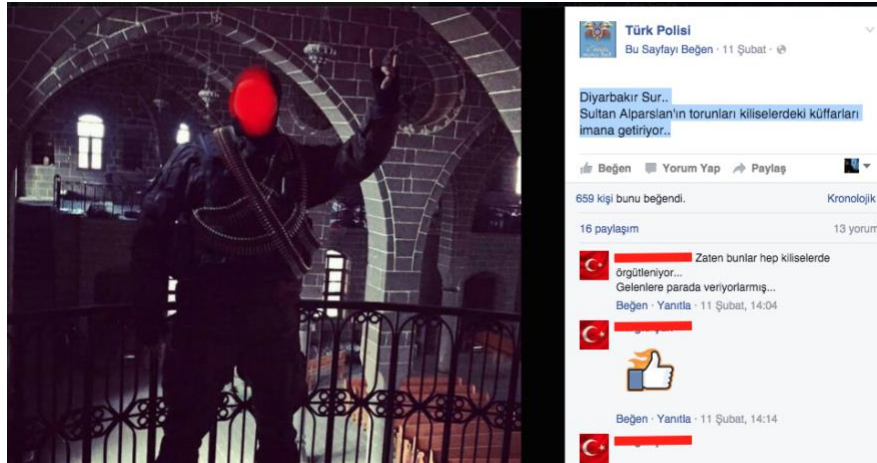


Figure 5. Screenshot of the 'Türk Polisi' unidentified Facebook account's post, depicting an alleged member of the Turkish Special Forces making a Turkish nationalist hand sign in the Armenian Apostolic church in Diyarbakır. Retrieved from Agos (2016).

### *Everyday religious violence by non-state actors*

Aside from these official policies, Armenians have been and still are subjected to religious 'everyday violence' (Scheper-Hughes 1992, Das 1995, Kleinman 2000), accomplished through the 'soft knife of routine processes' (Kleinman et al. 1997: x) and acting on at least their 'moral experience' or 'moral economies' (Kleinman 2000: 226, 238). That everyday violence manifests itself mainly in the form of hate speech, quite extensively present in daily life, in the media and in the political discourse of the country. Out of innumerable such instances noted in my fieldwork diary and mentioned in interviews, I shall present only a selection here.

The key concept at play is that of the 'infidel,' the *gavur* in Turkish, which is a derogatory word used for non-Muslims. Its usage, again, is not new and has been in existence throughout and even before the Republican era. Especially in the Provinces, where Armenians lived in smaller numbers than in Istanbul, those anti-'infidel' feelings and everyday violence seem to have cost Armenians more dearly, my findings suggest. Many of my interlocutors who were born in the provinces but migrated to Istanbul stated that the main reason for their migration was the 'Islamic pressures,' in their words. 'The same mentality that was at work during the genocide has continued to exist among the local

Muslim populations there. They think they have rights over the *gavur*'s property, over his women... yes, that's why we came here, first we sent my sisters when they matured, and then the whole family joined them,' a man born and raised in a village in Batman told me.

For those who still live in the provinces, the term *gavur* is an epithet they experience almost daily. In many cities, such as Diyarbakır, Malatya, Adıyaman and others, the neighbourhoods where Armenians live are still informally called 'gavur mahallesi,' i.e. 'infidel neighbourhoods.' During my visit to Adıyaman, Ohannes, one of the last Christian Armenians of the city, explained to me over a cup of tea: 'Giving the name of the neighbourhood or the street does not really help when I try to explain to people where I live. Descriptions and details are to no avail. In the end, I give in and tell them that it's the *gavur mahallesi*, and that's when they get it...'

The compulsory military service is a particular lifestage when anti-'infidel' discrimination comes into play. A man originally from Sivas told me the story behind the scar on his head:

The lieutenant called us, only the few Armenians in the whole regiment. He said that we were 'spies' and that we should convert to Islam and be circumcised according to the Islamic tradition... We told him that circumcision is not part of our traditions and that we could not follow his 'order.' For that we were heavily beaten...

A much younger Christian Armenian man, member of the pro-Kurdish parliamentary party HDP, recently told the following story in an interview: 'You get a bit older and you have to go to the military service. "Are there any uncircumcised amongst you?", the lieutenant asks, and you're done...' (Mihçı 2017).

Apart from these personal and direct experiences of everyday anti-'infidel' violence, Christian Armenians experience it also in a more indirect way, through media and public discourse. Examples, again, are numerous, but I will limit myself to only the most important ones that occurred during my research. On 10 February 2016, many media outlets in Turkey announced a 'scandalous' revelation on their front-pages, which was the simple fact that the

spokesperson of the main opposition party *CHP* was a ‘baptised Christian’ (*Evrensel* 2016). When, during my short visit to Malatya, the German Parliament officially recognised the Armenian Genocide on 2 June 2016, expressions such as ‘German infidels’ appeared in Turkish media and obviously worried Karun, a Christian Armenian woman in Malatya: ‘Look at that! What could we expect to happen to us here when they keep speaking about ‘infidels’ on TV?’ In December 2016, then Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmuş publicly defended the usage of the term *gavur* (*Ermeni Haber* 2016). In late March 2017, in the context of the ‘Yes’ campaign for the April 2017 constitutional referendum, Hayrettin Çakmak, former MP and member of the leading Islamist political party AKP, published a campaign poster that read: ‘Stamp [‘Yes’] as if you are hitting a *gavur*’ (Varjabedian 2017) (see Figure 6 below). Finally, on August 18, 2017, a Turkish theologian wrote a newspaper article entitled ‘Gavurdan dost domuzdan post olmuyor,’ meaning ‘You can’t make an infidel your friend, as you can’t make fur out of a pig’ in Turkish (Karaman 2017).



Figure 6. Ex-MP Hayrettin Çakmak’s social media post in support of the 2017 constitutional referendum’s ‘Yes’ campaign, reading: ‘Yes to Presidentialism for Turkey. Don’t stamp as if hitting the paper, stamp it as if hitting an infidel.’ Retrieved from Yumul and Kan (2017).

Many of these declarations in the media are quickly popularised and widely shared

on social media, thus eventually reaching the Christian Armenians. The latest article by the theologian, for example, was criticised on Twitter by a famous Istanbulite Armenian journalist. The call by the ex-MP Çakmak was echoed by a voter who posted a photo of his ballot together with a note reading ‘I stamped it as if hitting a *gavur*’ (see Figure 7 below). That was, again, widely distributed on social media and criticised by some of my Christian Armenian friends.



*Figure 7. A photo of a ‘Yes’ voter posted on social media, with a note echoing Çakmak’s call and reading ‘I stamped it as if hitting a gavur.’ The tattoo shows the Turkish-Islamic far-right symbol of the three crescents. Retrieved from Denizli 20 Haber (2017)*

Thus, in addition to encouraging a religious understanding of Armenian identity through official classification, the Turkish state, in tandem with other actors in society, discriminates and applies moral-symbolic violence against the Christian Armenians on religious grounds, as a result of which the latter retain a consciousness of being religiously different. Sarkis, a Christian Armenian man in his thirties, argued during one of our conversations:

They constantly remind us of our identity. When ‘don’t befriend Christians’ was recently written on a mosque, even many of my non-politicised friends started to react: ‘Why did they write that? What did we do against them?’ So, you see? We have no other choice but to react and defend [our identities] when attacked...

The example given by Sarkis and all of the policies and discriminatory instances mentioned above have clearly religious characters. This process of religious othering of Turkey's Armenians 'reminds them,' in Sarkis' words, of their *Christian-Armenian* identities and naturally reinforces the religious side of them. Thus, the Turkish state and majority, to return to Jenkins's words with which this section began, 'don't just perceive..., [but also] actively constitute' (2014:98) the Christian Armenian identity and its religious boundary through religious discrimination.

### **Suppression of Suprareligious Armenianness**

The Turkish context not only encourages and sustains the religious inclination of Armenian identity, but also applies considerable pressure to prevent any activation and politicisation of suprareligious dimensions of Armenianness. Forced to recognise at least the 'non-Muslim' minorities at Lausanne, the Turkish nationalist elite had to ensure that those would not transgress their religious definitions and would not hinder the project of a homogeneous Turkish nation. As Ekmekçioğlu argues, 'the Turkish Republic's attitude toward minorities has been paradoxical' (2019: 168). Whereas on the one hand religious minorities have been treated as non-Turks, as foreigners and second-class citizens, as it appears in the section above, on the other hand the state has attempted to assimilate and Turkify them culturally and ideologically in the goal of thus neutralising the perceived 'internal enemies' (Mardin 1993: 367-71; Baer 2004: 703). Similar to Jews who were expected to be 'Turkish citizens of the Mosaic persuasion' (Museviler) rather than ethnic Jews (Baer 2004: 703), Armenians were and are expected and coerced to remain within the narrow circles of a religious community, in the following ways.

First, Armenians were openly discouraged from using the Armenian language. An important policy in this regard was the *Vatandaş Türkçe konuş!* (Citizen, speak Turkish!)

campaign, initiated in 1928 and occasionally re-invoked until the 1960s, which forced non-Turkish speakers to use only Turkish in public (Aslan 2007: 245-246; Ekmekçioğlu 2016: 116; Yıldız 2001). It had its important share of responsibility in the fact that Armenians of contemporary Turkey are almost never Armenophone, as parents stopped teaching Armenian to their children fearing that they would use it in public. This was especially the case in the less secure eastern provinces such as Malatya, Sivas, and Yozgat, where Armenian schools did not exist either. Similarly, as several interlocutors recalled, banners reading ‘Turkish is the most beautiful language on earth’ used to be hung on the walls of their Armenian schools in Istanbul. Furthermore, a former principal of an Armenian Catholic school attested that ‘there were times, 20 or 25 years ago, when Armenian was under pressure even in our schools. A state inspector once asked me to remove the photographs of our alumni and “keep them in a museum” because their names were written in Armenian...’

Second, a collective Armenian historical consciousness has been undesirable for the Turkish state. Even today, Armenian history is not taught in Armenian schools in Istanbul. Its Turkish counterpart, taught only by ethnically Turkish teachers, is based on schoolbooks that ‘do not include any information on the history and culture of Turkey’s minorities’ (Özdoğan and Kılıçdağı 2012: 43). One of my interlocutors, a woman in her sixties, remembered her experience: ‘The history textbook mentioned the Accadians and Assyrians as peoples who lived on these lands in ancient times, but not the Armenians... It mentioned Babylonia, but not Armenia. I knew it should have been there, my father had told me so! I started searching for it on the map, in the pages, but in vain... as if there have never been Armenians here...’ In addition, Armenians in Turkey are also forced to deny the Armenian Genocide and adopt the official Turkish view on it,<sup>33</sup> which often contradicts the inherited

<sup>33</sup> Historian Taner Akçam provides some explanations for the Turkish denial of the genocide: first, the accusation of genocide engenders feelings of guilt and thus hurts the nationalist pride of many Turks (2004: 233); second, there is a fear of punishment which could be realised, for instance, in the form of paying reparations (Ibid.:236- 237); third, the issue of the genocide shakes the foundations of Turkish national

memory they have acquired through their families. Natan, a man in his thirties, recalled:

The history teacher, a Turk, used to intentionally ask us about the ‘1915 events’ in the exams. That was a serious psychological trick. ‘What happened in 1915?’ If you wrote that the Turks committed genocide or massacred the Armenians, as you knew it from your grandparents, you would simply fail the exam since that would contradict the information in the textbook, i.e. that the Armenians, together with the Russians, massacred the Turks. Even worse, ‘Armenians betrayed the Turks and stabbed them in the back’... I had to write this when I was sixteen or seventeen years old.

Publicly speaking about the Armenian Genocide has long been forbidden in Turkey. In 2008, for instance, Arat Dink and Sarkis Seropyan, then co-editors of the Armenian *Agos* weekly, were found ‘guilty of insulting Turkishness’ for having re-published a piece by the assassinated ex-editor of the weekly where he had explicitly written about the genocide (BBC 2007a). There was a positive shift in this regard during the recent period of relative democratisation (see Chapter 3), but the old traditional approach is now being adopted again. In fact, Garo Paylan, an Armenian MP in the Turkish Parliament, was temporarily suspended from the Parliament on 13 January 2017 for having mentioned the Armenian Genocide during parliamentary discussions (*Hürriyet Daily News* 2017). Later on, in July 2017, the usage of the term ‘Armenian Genocide’ was officially banned in the Turkish Parliament (*Asbarez* 2017).

Such bans on and persecutions for Armenians’ use of their own language and their interest in Armenian history add to an already existing fear and cautiousness which leads Armenians towards self-censorship. That fear, described as ‘inserted in our brain cells,’ as ‘a trauma residing in our subconscious’ and as ‘having penetrated our chromosomes’ by my Christian Armenian interviewees, is the result of the ever-present discrimination and violence, only the religious side of which was discussed above.<sup>34</sup> As a consequence of that

identity, since many officials in the founding generation of the Republic, which is known to have forged that new identity, had been ex-members of the Committee of Union and Progress – the committee accused of having organised the genocide (Ibid.: 237-241).

<sup>34</sup> Anti-Armenian hate speech in fact exists also independently from religion. That is to say, Armenians are targeted not only as ‘infidels’, but also on rather broader ethnic or racial terms. My introduction bore witness

fear, Christian Armenians often suppress the unwanted facets of their identity. For instance, as early as the 1930s, Armenians used to ‘burn, bury or hide... “dangerous” books’ that dealt with Armenian history and especially the genocide (Ekmekçioğlu 2016: 117). Such practices resurfaced in the 1980s which were years of political turmoil. Several research participants recalled how they or their relatives had destroyed maps of Soviet Armenia and burned Armenian books or cassette tapes brought from there. Others, like a man in Vakıflı, remembered how his cousin was taken and detained at the police station for days for having a collection of Soviet Armenian newspapers.

In a similar vein, Turkey’s Armenians have always distanced themselves from pro-Armenian causes taken up by Armenians in the diaspora, especially when these dealt with the genocide and anti-Armenian activities in Turkey (Ibid. 114). Even today, political activity is usually discouraged by Armenian parents who advise their children to avoid topics like that of the genocide and urge them not to show any signs of support toward Armenia. A friend, for instance, told me how her mother was worried when she had transferred some donation money to the Government of the second Armenian state, i.e. the Republic of Artsakh.<sup>35</sup> ‘You live in this country... Why are you making yourself a target?’ her mother had asked. Another woman, aged 20, who had agreed to do some of the transcriptions of my interviews, phoned me to state that she was not willing to continue her work ‘because there are some illegal expressions in the interviews’. I had guessed right. She was feeling complicit in the ‘crime’ of typing the words ‘Armenian Genocide’. I was to notice, later on, that she had replaced the word ‘genocide’ with ‘(...)’ every single time it had appeared in the interview (for an example see Figure 8 below).

to some manifestations of that ‘Armenophobia’. For more on the different types and methods of anti-Armenian violence in contemporary Turkey, see Papazian (2015: 12-45)

<sup>35</sup> More commonly known by its former name Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, the Republic of Artsakh is an unrecognised Armenian-populated Republic that declared its independence from Azerbaijan in 1991.

To conclude, my point here is that the activation, performance, and certainly the politicisation of suprareligious dimensions of Armenianness have systematically been refused and suppressed by the Turkish state. There is, as we saw, anti-Armenian *religious* discrimination also. But the difference is that an Armenianness that does not surpass its religious definition and limits is *otherised*, whereas an Armenianness that goes beyond that and challenges Turkish nationalism's goals of homogenisation and Turkification is *suppressed* and *sanctioned*. Armenians are discriminated against as infidels, but not banned from being so. They have been nevertheless banned from using their language in public, suspended from the parliament and have faced legal persecution for 'denigrating Turkishness' by speaking or writing about a tragic episode of their history. Books dealing with Armenia and its history have been burned or hidden, but Bibles have not. Children are encouraged to take part in the Church rituals and activities, but not in Armenian-related political activism. And finally, Armenian Evangelical preacher Hrant Güzelyan was arrested in 1981 not for his religious activities, but for the 'crime' of 'bringing orphaned Turkish children to Istanbul and vaccinating them with Armenian nationalism' (see Tchilingirian 2016: 146). The *Christian* Armenian, though disliked, can fit in the project of Turkification. Indeed, and as I have shown above, Armenian children have been told that they were 'Christian Turks,' and that 'the Armenian is the Christian counterpart of the Turk.' But an Armenian-beyond-the-Christian could only oppose that project.

Thus, the Turkish context not only facilitates (through classification) and sustains (through discrimination), but also *imposes* a religious interpretation of Armenian identity by discouraging and suppressing all other options.

H: Ya da bazıları Hrant'ın şeylerine gidiyorlar ya da (...) hakkında şeyler yapmak istiyorlar filan. Bir şekilde ermenilikle bağlantıları var.

Figure 8. Screenshot from a transcription of an interview, where the transcriber replaced the term *soykırım* (genocide), with '(...)'.  
with '(...)'.

## **A Christian-Armenian Experiential Pairing in the ‘Community System’**

This section will ethnographically depict how Armenianness and Christianity are experienced in tandem and parallel in the everyday lives of the Christian Armenian citizens of Turkey. That Christian-Armenian experiential pairing, as I call it, manifests itself in what the Christian Armenians call the *hamaynkayin trut'yun* (‘community system’ in Western Armenian). Composed of churches, schools, charitable organisations, and cemeteries, the ‘community system’ constitutes the social arena in which ‘Armenians relate... to other Armenians’ (Ekmekçioğlu 2016: 13). The organisational pillars of the ‘community system’ are the *vakıfs* (foundations) which legally own and manage the churches, schools, and other institutions. In most cases, those foundations are particular to neighbourhoods and their boards of directors are elected once every four years.<sup>36</sup> Only individuals who are registered ‘members of the community’ – that is, baptised into one of the three Armenian Churches – and residing in the given neighbourhood can elect or be elected as board members of the foundations belonging to one of the three communities. As discussed above, boundaries between the three denominational communities are now so permeable that they attend each other’s institutions, thus in practice leading a single community life, that of the Christian Armenians.

The Churches and schools are the most important institutions through which Armenianness is experienced and lived. They are perceived as ‘the two pillars that sustain our nation,’ as Armenian Apostolic Archbishop Ateşyan put. Thus, I pay closer attention to them in order to describe ‘Armenian community life’ and reveal the Christian-Armenian experiential pairing, which is, I argue, yet another factor contributing to Christian Armenians’ ethnoreligious understanding of Armenian identity.

<sup>36</sup> However, for the last 14 years this electoral system has been impeded by the government, which is often interpreted by community members as a strategy aiming to deprive them of a representative leadership.

### *The Churches*

The Churches, as institutions, are perhaps the most influential social venues at which Christianity and Armenianness are experienced as inseparable parts of a coherent whole. This is mainly conditioned by the fact that their activities are not limited to the purely religious sphere of community life. The notions of ‘Armenianness’ and *azk* (‘nation’ in Western Armenian) are essential parts of the discourses and agendas of the Armenian Churches. The Churches, thus, are links to and homes of Armenian identity as well as Christianity. That is why Father Mateos, a young priest in the Apostolic Church, asked me: ‘How could you serve the *nation* without being a Christian and a member of the Church?’ Similarly, an Armenian Evangelical pastor in Istanbul told me that it is his mission to do his best ‘for our nation, for our people,’ and an Armenian Catholic priest made explicit that ‘the Church strives to preserve Armenianness.’<sup>37</sup>

In fact, the Churches play a crucial role in linking Christian Armenians to the Armenian culture and language. For instance, several of my interviewees who had been born in the provinces told stories of how clergymen had organised, even initiated, their migration from provincial towns to Istanbul ‘in order for us to attend Armenian schools and learn the Armenian language.’ A priest serving at the Catholic Church of Pangaltı recalled how in the 1960s his predecessor had convinced his father to send him for education from the province of Sivas to Istanbul, and concluded: ‘So it is with the decision of the Lord that I found my identity, my Armenianness, myself, my history... had that priest not come and had I remained in Sivas, none of those would be available to me.’ For Armenians remaining in the provincial cities and villages where no Armenian schools exist, clergymen partly accomplish the same mission during their short visits there. For instance, in the southeastern village of Vakıflı, I was told that the villagers’ basic knowledge of the Armenian alphabet

<sup>37</sup> Both of them, like most Armenian clergymen in Istanbul, spoke in Western Armenian.

is to be attributed to some priests visiting from Istanbul. In a similar way, I separately met a priest and a deacon who taught lessons on Christianity to Muslim Armenian adults willing to convert to their ancestors' religion (cases to which I shall return in Chapter 4), and they both told me that they also pass on some information about Armenian culture and history to their students. Finally, as one interlocutor related, when books on Armenian history did not exist in Turkey and importing them was banned, it was only through priests coming from Jerusalem or Beirut that he and his classmates were exposed to such historical knowledge.

Not only are the clergy a medium of Armenian culture and identity, but also the churches, as buildings, are spaces of Armenianness themselves. That is partly a consequence of the pressures described above, which have sometimes made people insecure to speak or be Armenian in public. Having no other community space where they could safely be themselves, Christian Armenians of Istanbul have, as Ekmekçioğlu notes, 'turned to the church for a sense of normalcy, ritual, and perhaps even survival' since the beginning of the Republican period (2016: 88). Istanbulite Hamo, a Christian Armenian man in his sixties, remembered the 1980s when Turkey was under military rule: 'The military had banned the activities of all of our cultural groups and associations. Only the churches were allowed to continue functioning, and that thanks to the Lausanne Treaty. Churches were the only places where the community could come together.'

Things were similar in the East. The childhood memories of Father Avedis, the current Armenian priest of Iskenderun whom I met in Vakıflı, reveal how Armenianness was actively experienced only in the church: 'Iskenderun was so small and our Armenianness was limited to small areas of life: we only *knew* that we were Armenians and we only experienced "Armenianness" in small rituals and prayers at the church. Almost nothing outside of it.' Arsen, in his seventies and originally from Kayseri, recalled that the church was the only place where Kayseri Armenians could hear Armenian words and see

their alphabet on Armenian newspapers sent from Istanbul. To date, the only places where the few dozen Armenians of Malatya see Armenian letters, though they cannot read them, are again religious spaces: the Christian Armenian cemetery and the old Armenian church in restoration at the time of my visit (see Figures 9 and 10 below).



*Figure 9. A stone with Armenian engravings at the demolished Armenian Church of Malatya. Photo taken by the author on 2 June 2016.*



*Figure 10. A tombstone with Armenian engravings in Malatya's Christian Armenian cemetery. Photo taken by the author on 2 June 2016.*

In Istanbul, where Armenian is only learned at school but almost never used in daily life any longer, people not only hear Armenian prayers in the churches, but some also read and sing them as part of the church choirs. For many if not most of such choir members, these are among the rare instances when they read Armenian. In one particular canticle, titled *Der Voghormya* ('Have pity Lord'), they ask God to give 'love and unity to the *Armenian nation*.' Finally, churches become sites of Armenian culture beyond language as well. The Apostolic Church on Kinaliada Island, for instance, occasionally hosts concerts of Armenian traditional songs in its courtyard, which sometimes also becomes a stage for Armenian folk dances (see S. Krikor 2017).

Moreover, the Churches are institutions that connect Christian Armenians of Turkey to each other and with other Armenians abroad. In some provincial cities and villages in particular, churches are often the only meeting point for the few dozen Armenian families. The small community in Malatya, for instance, only gathers and really becomes a community, both Christian *and* Armenian, in the small chapel at the cemetery. Furthermore, the Apostolic and Catholic Churches often organise pilgrimage trips from Istanbul to eastern cities and villages, through which Armenians from Istanbul meet with their counterparts there. Those who do not join the trips nevertheless see the poster ads hung in the courtyards of the churches and thus are able to cognitively include the Armenians of those other cities in their 'imagined' Armenian community (Anderson 1983), once again thanks to the Church. These Church-initiated bonds sometimes pass beyond Turkey as well. I had the opportunity to join the annual dinner of the Association of Armenians of Sivas and Friends, on 10 December 2016. At one point a priest made a public announcement and informed the invitees that the Patriarchate had formed a commission to support Syrian Armenian refugees entering Turkey as a result of the Syrian conflict, and suggested organising a fundraiser. The

request was met with wholehearted support, and invitees accomplished the fundraising ‘for our brothers from Syria’ on the spot.

Furthermore, the Apostolic Church stands as the only Turkish-Armenian institution that has direct organisational links with Armenia, through her institutional connection to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin located near Yerevan. It thus secures at least a symbolic bond between its congregation and Armenia. During the recent and still ongoing patriarchal election crisis of the Armenian Apostolic church of Turkey, high-ranking Istanbulite Armenian bishops were called to Etchmiadzin by the Catholicos of All Armenians, in order to find solutions to the problem. Many of my research participants were waiting for the ‘decisions *from Armenia*,’ in their words, which could potentially be crucial for the fate of their own community. Thus, Armenian Churches in Turkey play a unique role of bonding Turkey’s Christian Armenians with each other and even with Armenians elsewhere. Importantly, Christian Armenians of Turkey experience this bonding with other Armenians through the medium of the Churches and thanks to their *religious* identity shared with other Armenians elsewhere.

Consequently, the Christian Armenian citizens of Turkey perceive the Churches as *azkayin garuyts’ner* (*national* institutions) and their leadership as the *azki bederě* (the leaders of the *nation*). That is exactly why many of my atheist local friends respect the institution of the Church and even visit churches for the sake of *Armenianness*, as they explain, rather than Christianity. That is why the patriarchal elections are often described as ‘a national activity’ and the fact of not having an elected patriarch for years now as a ‘national problem’ by Christian Armenian interlocutors. That is the reason why the first two activities of the newly established secular Association of Armenians of Malatya in Istanbul consisted of, as its irreligious president stated, building the chapel and repairing the Church in Malatya.

As a result of this respect towards the Churches, lay Christian Armenians willingly involve them even in non-religious Armenian spaces. Not only do the three Armenian newspapers regularly provide news on the internal developments of the Churches, with one of them, *Jamanak*, even having a separate section for ‘Church life’ on its website,<sup>38</sup> but almost all essentially non-religious Armenian cultural and social events have clergymen as part of their invitees and let them make either the opening remarks of the event or its closing with a prayer.

In this way, not only are the Churches and their activities clearly imbued with suprarreligious Armenianness, though still limited in scope, but also initially non-religious Armenian social spaces are imbued with religious symbolism. As a result, Christian Armenians experiencing any of those two generally experience the other in tandem. Christianity and Armenianness thus become closely interrelated parts of one holistic Christian-Armenian experience.

### *The schools*

Schools, institutions of crucial importance for the formation of their pupils’ identity and transformation of their habitus (Bourdieu 1977: 87), are the other important site where Armenianness and Christianity are experienced and imbued in tandem. Until 1924 Armenian Schools were officially under the auspices of the patriarchate, but with the Unification of Education Act they were put under the control of the Ministry of Education (Ekmekçioğlu 2016: 124). Nevertheless, Christian education is part of the schools’ curricula, in which the ‘Religious Culture and Moral Education’ course, is, unlike in state schools, concentrated on the teaching of Christianity and, importantly, of *Armenian* Christianity.

<sup>38</sup> Web page available at: <http://www.jamanak.com/tags/Եկեղեցույուլս>, last accessed: 29 August 2017

In addition to purely religious themes, the curriculum of that course contains the following: ‘Christianity and Armenians;’ ‘The Patriarchate of Turkey’s Armenians and its history;’ ‘Followers of Saint Krikor Lusavoritch [who converted Armenians to Christianity] and the discovery of the [Armenian] alphabet;’ ‘Armenians’ transition from Paganism to Christianity;’ ‘Armenians defending Christianity;’ ‘Our religion’s influence on our culture;’ ‘The Armenian Church in contemporary times.’ The curriculum of this course on religion clearly includes a history, though partial and ‘innocent’ from the point of view of Turkish nationalism, of Armenians, Armenia and Armenian culture.

I attended a few sessions of this course in Getronagan Varjaran (Central Lyceum) in Istanbul. Seated in the last row of the classroom, I watched the teacher speak of Armenian mythological gods and goddesses, Armenian kings, the Battle of Avarayr as a struggle for *national* autonomy and self-determination (see Introduction), the phonetic characteristics of the Armenian letters, and even of ‘contemporary Armenia which is a portion of Ancient Armenia’ and memories of his own visits there. He later told me: ‘I am not a religious preacher. My responsibility is to awaken the children’s interest towards their culture and identity...’ Through this course, thus, Armenianness and Christianity are ‘served’ to teenage Christian Armenians as parts of the same historical narrative.

The fact that the production of Christian Armenians, rather than only Armenians or only Christians, is the goal of the Armenian schools was also explicitly stated by many of my high-ranking interviewees. ‘The students shall learn our religion, our language, and [thus] grow up as Armenians,’ stated then patriarchal vicar Archbishop Ateşyan, himself speaking in Western Armenian. Thus, the Christian-Armenian conceptual pairing is constructed from early ages at school. ‘Via the example of the Battle of Avarayr, we are taught that we are a *nation* who sacrificed themselves for *Christianity*,’ a graduate from Getronagan Lyceum told me.

Finally, the physical reality of the schools is also significant in this regard. All of the Armenian schools in Istanbul are situated directly next to church buildings. Figures 11 and 12 below picture the Getronagan Lyceum, which is physically annexed to the St. Gregory the Illuminator Church. Heading to that ‘Armenian school’ every morning, students literally advance towards the church with all its symbolic associations. Meanwhile, in the middle of their classes in Armenian language and literature, they can see the imposing dome and cross of the church almost filling the frame of their classroom window, thus experiencing and observing Armenianness and Christianity, once again, in tandem (see Figure 13 below).

Thus, Christianity and Armenianness are part of one consistent experiential whole in the ‘community system’ of the Christian Armenian citizens of Turkey. I argue that this Christian-Armenian experiential pairing is yet another factor contributing to a highly religious interpretation of Armenianness among the Christian Armenian citizens of Turkey, more details of which I provide below.



*Figure 11. The Getronagan Lyceum surrounding the St Gregory the Illuminator Church, as seen from the main road.  
Photo taken by the author.*



*Figure 12. Photo taken by the author picturing the contiguity of the Getronagan Lyceum (on the right) and the St Gregory the Illuminator Church (on the left).*



*Figure 13. The dome and cross of the church constantly appearing from within a classroom of the Getronagan Lyceum. Photo taken by the author.*

## **Conclusion: A Christian-Armenian cognitive pairing and a religious boundary of Armenianness**

I argue and conclude that the several factors discussed above, i.e. the official religious categorisation of Armenians, the religiously oriented discrimination against them, the suppression of suprareligious, especially political, manifestations of their Armenian identity, and the existence of an everyday Christian-Armenian experiential pairing in their lives, add up to the historical legacy of close relations between Christianity and Armenian identity discussed in the Introduction, to produce a Christian-Armenian inseparable cognitive pairing in the minds and imaginations of many if not most Christian Armenian citizens of Turkey. In other words, Christianity and Armenianness are strongly intertwined parts of Christian Armenians' 'symbolic universe,' an expression by Berger and Luckman (1967), reformulated as 'the story which a collectivity tells about itself, the world and its place in the world' by Jenkins (2014: 163). Furthermore, this pairing underpins the religious character of the boundary of Armenianness as conceived by members of this group.

### *Sameness*

The most extreme type of this cognitive pairing was hinted at in the discussion above. It is the case of Armenians directly accepting, adopting and reifying their religious categorisation from above, and seeing Armenianness and Christianity as synonyms. It is a matter of interchangeability rather than pairing here. To my question about the nature of Armenianness, the answer of Ohanness, the old man living in the 'Infidel neighbourhood' of Adıyaman, was clear-cut: 'It's a religion.' Many Christian Armenians would think of baptism as a rite of passage to *Armenianness*, as it appeared in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter. '(S)he became Armenian,' is a phrase I've heard many times from people speaking about the Turkish husband or wife of their Armenian relative who was baptised in the Armenian Church usually to please the family of his/her spouse. This approach was

openly embraced by even then-highest-ranking clergyman of the Armenian Apostolic Church of Turkey, patriarchal vicar Archbishop Aram Ateşyan, in the interview he gave to me.

Archbishop: Sometimes individuals want to become members of the Armenian Church although they have no link with Armenianness at all. They complete a 6-month-long religious education period to become eligible for baptism. Once baptised they are members of the Armenian Church.

Hrag: Do you consider them Armenian, then?

Archbishop: Of course.

Hrag: Even if they're not 'Armenian by birth'?

Archbishop: That's not an obstacle.

Hrag: So, if a Turk, an African or a Chinese person comes to you and you baptise him, you count him as an Armenian, right?

Archbishop: Of course, he's a member of the Armenian Church.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, it is clear that for at least some members of the Christian Armenian community, Armenianness is a *congregational* identity. Christianity and Armenianness are interchangeable. This is generally more present in the provinces (see Ohannes's example above), where education levels are generally lower than in Istanbul. As Sarkis, a man in his late thirties confessed, he also thought of Armenianness as a religion when in Batman, until he moved to Istanbul where he 'understood that Armenianness, unlike Christianity, is not a religion, but a nation.' During breakfast in the courtyard of a Christian Armenian family house in Malatya, my hosts explained that they used to perceive no difference between Armenianness and Christianity until recent years when visitor priests from Istanbul gave further explications. But this phenomenon exists in Istanbul also. Murat, an Istanbulite Armenian, takes this approach even further: 'We perceive Armenianness as our religious duty... Otherwise I am a Turk living in Turkey. I did everything, even my military service for Turkey.'

<sup>39</sup> Original in Western Armenian.

*An inseparable pairing*

It would not be accurate to generalise the phenomenon of completely equating Armenian and Christian identities, although it is not particular to only a few individuals either. However, the phenomenon of the Christian-Armenian cognitive pairing is indeed much more common. In fact, many, if not most, of my Christian Armenian research participants who otherwise make a distinction between Armenianness and Christianity can nevertheless *not* imagine the former without the latter. That is, they see both identities as the two sides of the same coin. Father Shahe, a priest in his early forties serving on the Asian side of Istanbul, admitted:

F.S.: We are Armenians and Christians. An Armenian should necessarily be Christian.

H.: Necessarily...?

F.S.: Yes... this feeling is something that comes from within [oneself]... that Armenianness and Christianity constitute a unity. Well, of course, Armenian[ness] is a nation whereas Christian[ity] is a religious belief... but still...

Father Mateos, a young Armenian Apostolic priest approached the issue through a theological lens: ‘As Paul the Apostle has taught us, we cannot separate the body from the soul. In an identical way, we cannot separate Armenianness from Christianity. Armenianness is the body, Christianity is the soul. They form an indivisible unity.’

By extension, an ‘Armenian-like’ life for most Christian Armenians necessarily entails living as a Christian. Seated around a table in the courtyard of Vakıflı village’s church, I was telling some locals and their guests about a tiny village near Adıyaman which I had recently visited and which was populated only by Armenians, some of whom had recently converted to Christianity, whereas others were still Muslim. I was thus trying to challenge the traditional label of Vakıflı as ‘the last Armenian village of Turkey.’ One of the guests and a villager complemented each other as follows:

Guest: I think ‘the last Armenian village’ means the last one where life is Armenian-like, with a Church...

Villager: With a priest, the [religious] feasts, a village-head...

Guests: So, there may be other Armenian-populated villages [in Turkey], but [life] is Armenian-like only here...

Villager: There are Armenians living in Sivas, Elazığ, Yozgat... but [unlike in our village] there are no churches, at least working ones... no priests, no parishioners... so I consider ours as the only Armenian village, as the last Armenian village indeed...

In a similar vein, ‘Armenian culture’ for most Christian Armenians is first and foremost comprised of religious customs and traditions: attending church, being a member of its choir, celebrating Christmas, Easter, Palm Sunday and other such feasts, holding baptism, marriage and funeral ceremonies in and through the church, and so on. Sibel, a woman in her thirties, said that she would definitely baptise her future children, although she is not really religious: ‘I would do it as a cultural practice... baptism doesn’t really have to do with becoming Christian for me, you know? It’s rather one of those rituals that make one Armenian...’

#### *Manifestations at the linguistic level*

The seriousness and extent of the Christian-Armenian cognitive pairing could be also revealed through some discourse analysis. Indeed, this pairing clearly manifests itself on the linguistic level, thus validating cognitive approaches to linguistics arguing that discourse is a ‘realization of... underlying processes,’ and is ‘driven by cognition’ (Edwards 1991: 517). In fact, the analysis of my research participants’ everyday speeches and interviews reveals two significant phenomena in this regard. First, the words ‘Armenian’ and ‘Christian’ are often used interchangeably, both in Armenian and in Turkish. This does not appear only amongst those who think of Armenianness as a religion. It is also widely present amongst those who *do* differentiate between the two notions but nevertheless find them inseparable. Such a friend, for instance, once answered, ‘No, I’m Armenian’ to someone asking whether he was a Muslim. Making things more absurd, another Christian Armenian friend who transcribed some of my interviews first said that she was ‘surprised that for many of the interviewees Armenianness is [perceived as a] religion, as if it means “Christianity”,’ but a

few minutes later pronounced the following sentence: ‘I’d like to listen to other interviewees also, whether Muslims or Armenians.’ I jumped in: ‘You meant “Christian” there!’ ‘Yes... Armenian or Christian, it’s the same thing for me,’ she surprised me even more. She quickly realised her internal contradiction and, perplexed, she could only laugh. In many cases this phenomenon appears as an immediately rectified slip of the tongue. For instance, Aris and Kamer saved their sentences from oxymora: ‘the non-Armenian, uh, I mean the non-Christian Armenians...’; ‘it is not religion that holds us together in Christiani-... in Armenianness...’ Others, like a priest in one of the provincial cities, were less successful:

Priest: All Armenians became Armenian.

Hrag: Sorry, I didn’t really get that...

Priest: In 301 A.D., all Armenians were converted. They all became Armenians. Uh no, Christians...

A second linguistic phenomenon revealing the deep cognitive connections between the two notions and identities, is the fact that Christian religious words are most of the time written or pronounced in Armenian within texts or during conversations where otherwise Turkish is used. This occurred to me first through a note left on a kitchen table at one of my local Christian Armenian friends’ house (see Figure 14 below). The note reads as follows: ‘I am going to the church of Kuruçesme. It is Palm Sunday today. Jesus is entering Jerusalem. (Each one of us is a Jerusalem, let us let him come and enter also our hearts).’ Significantly, whereas all else was written in Turkish, the religious words ‘church,’ ‘Palm Sunday’ and ‘Jerusalem’ (twice) were written in Armenian (the first three also in Armenian letters). Asked about this particularity, the author of the note told me that she had written like this unconsciously.

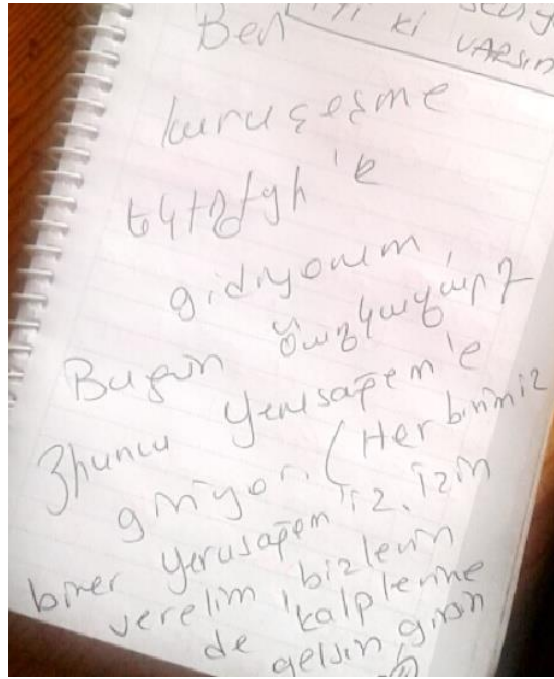


Figure 14. Photo of a note taken by the author, depicting the Christian-Armenian cognitive connections on the linguistic level.

In a similar vein, an interviewee kept using the words ‘baptism,’ ‘religion’ and ‘Christian’ in Armenian during our conversation in Turkish. In Facebook comments reading ‘may the Lord Jesus Christ be with you’ and ‘My Jesus, my Christ [be] with you,’ the words ‘Lord,’ ‘Jesus’ and ‘Christ’ were in Armenian but everything else and even the suffixes joining those words were in Turkish (see Figures 15 and 16 below). When I asked a local Christian Armenian friend about the reason why not only the word ‘Armenia,’ but also the word ‘church’ are almost always used in Armenian by otherwise Turkish-speaking Christian Armenians, she replied: ‘simply because “Armenia” and “church” are Armenian things.’

Finally, if the sacred is written in Armenian by those who know the language, on the other hand Armenian text could automatically be thought of as religious by some who are unable to read it. In fact, I heard two stories about provincial Christian Armenians who, years ago, had found old pieces of Armenian newspaper in a street or in a corner of their homes and, unable to read, thought of them as pages of religious manuscripts. They had kept them for years and treated them with the necessary respect.

Hisusum Kristosum beraberinde

Figure 15. A screenshot of a Facebook comment, reading 'My Jesus, my Christ [be] with you.'

Der Hisus Kristos beraberinde olsun 🙏🙏🙏  
reply · 1 · August 29 at 11:43am

Figure 16. A screenshot of a Facebook comment, reading 'may the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.'

### *A Religious Boundary of Armenianness*

Naturally, not *all* Christian Armenians locate themselves and their identities in this Christian-Armenian pairing. Exceptions to this norm shall be studied in the following chapter. However, as this chapter demonstrated, for most Christian Armenians of Turkey Christianity and Armenianness are perceived as two organically interdependent facets of a single identity. Christianity is considered to be an indispensable characteristic of Armenianness by the vast majority of them, and is thus a boundary producer of immense importance. As such, other religions and particularly Islam, as the dominant one in Turkey, become the natural 'others' on the opposite side of the boundary of Armenianness. An old man visiting Vakıflı village with us explained the label of 'the last Armenian village of Turkey' by the fact that 'there is no one from *outside* here, no one from *Islam*...' Baruyr, an Istanbulite man in his seventies, argued that 'being a Christian in Turkey is a *must* because it is the most essential difference that can impede our assimilation into *Turkishness*...' Whereas Archbishop Maşalyan noted that 'the mere fact of knowing that one is not Muslim is a very important factor in the Armenian identity of many here.'

All identification, as Jenkins argues, is based on an interplay of similarity and difference (2014a: 75). For Christian Armenians of Turkey, Christianity is the most essential characteristic that secures similarity amongst themselves and difference from the Turkish majority. It is thus the most important pillar of their identification. The boundary of their Armenianness has a clearly religious character.

## CHAPTER 3

### Turkey's Armenian Landscape Diversified

Beginning in the 1990s, Turkey witnessed an unprecedented diversification of its Armenian landscape. Whereas the Christian Armenian community had traditionally been the sole representative of Armenianness in the country, that is no longer the case. The ethno-religious and communitarian model of Armenian identity has been gradually challenged during the last two or three decades. First, a vociferous minority within the established community started to break away from conventional Turkish-Armenianness by proposing a secular, ethnicity-based and politicised Armenian identity as an alternative to the religious, communitarian and self-enclosed traditional one discussed in the previous chapter. In addition, and parallel to that internal challenge, two new categories of Armenianness emerged from outside the established community, greatly diversifying Armenian identity in Turkey. Those were the previously-dormant Muslim or Alevi Armenian citizens of Turkey on the one hand, and labour migrants from the Republic of Armenia on the other.

As later chapters will reveal, Armenianness became a contested notion as a result of this diversification, and a still-ongoing intra-Armenian boundary making process was triggered. How and why exactly did this diversification occur? What were the factors causing a reconfiguration of one of Turkey's 'minoritized' identities (Ekmekçioğlu 2018)? What community-level, country-level and regional developments paved the way for it?

This chapter introduces the contemporary heterogeneous landscape of Armenianness and sets the context in which the diversification occurred, looking at the broader structural changes that paved its way.

## **The Challenge from within: Ethnicisation and secularisation**

The previous chapter exposed how the majority of the established Armenian community has internalised the state-promoted version of Armenian identity. Armenianness is often identified as a religious, at best as an ethnoreligious notion of belonging, and its experience mostly limited to the religious-congregational sphere. Although some Christian Armenians are conscious of the Christian-Armenian definitional pairing's limitations, they nevertheless do not really challenge it because 'the state does not recognise [us] in any other way...'

However, a growing minority within the community has initiated a process of breaking away from the state-imposed limitations, attempting to secularise, ethnicise and politicise Armenian identity. Representatives of that progressive circle challenged both the conservative community leadership and the Turkish state, by producing and enacting an Armenianness that goes beyond religion, the church and the *cemaat* (congregation), an approach which has, as shown in the previous chapter, traditionally been suppressed by the state.

*Aras* publishing house<sup>40</sup> (est. 1993) and *Agos* newspaper<sup>41</sup> (est. 1996) have been important players in this regard, as they have started to publish books and articles dealing with taboo issues such as the discrimination and persecution of Armenians in Turkey and even the officially denied Armenian Genocide. Importantly, their publications were in Turkish and thus addressed the non-Armenian citizens of Turkey as well, which was unprecedented in the history of the republic. Hrant Dink, the editor-in-chief of *Agos* was assassinated by a 17-year-old Turkish nationalist in January 2007, after receiving several death threats for his articles and statements challenging the nationalist state narrative. However, rather than shying away from their activism, the Armenians within the 'Agos

<sup>40</sup> Website available at: <https://www.arasyayincilik.com/>, last accessed: 17 January 2019.

<sup>41</sup> Website available at: <http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/anasayfa>, last accessed: 17 January 2019.

circle,' as the progressive-secularist current has often been labelled, pursued it in new and more vociferous forms.

The Hrant Dink Foundation,<sup>42</sup> established only months after Dink's murder, organises conferences, research and publications around topics such as the history of Armenians and other minorities within Turkey and the Ottoman Empire, their cultural heritage and its destruction during republican times, the genocide, and so on. Another direct consequence of Dink's killing was the establishment of the first-ever Armenian political organisation in the history of the Republic of Turkey, in the name of Nor Zartonk, meaning 'new renaissance.'<sup>43</sup> Run by a handful of leftist Armenian youths, Nor Zartonk has been very active in publicly confronting the authorities in defence of Armenians, against both historical and contemporary injustices, but also in non-Armenian progressive and democratic causes as well (Papazian 2016a).

This recent politicisation of Armenian identity goes beyond the religious-congregational traditional boundaries of the Armenians of Turkey. The aforementioned people and groups clearly demand ethnic-cultural rights and historical justice for Armenians, in addition to the religious rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Treaty of Lausanne. They thus expand the boundaries of Armenianness beyond religion, and attempt to counter the decades-long nationalist project of cultural assimilation aiming at reducing Armenianness to a merely religious identity and Armenians to 'Christian Turks' (see Chapter 2).

Significantly, they reject being categorised as '*Trkahay*,' an Armenian word traditionally used to refer to the Armenians of Turkey and literally meaning Turkish-Armenian. Instead they use a new term, '*Turkiats 'i Hay*' in Armenian, or '*Türkiyeli Ermeni*' in Turkish, meaning 'Armenian from/of Turkey.'<sup>44</sup> Whereas *Turkiats 'i* or *Türkiyeli* connote

<sup>42</sup> Website available at: <https://hrantdink.org/en/>, last accessed: 17 January 2019.

<sup>43</sup> Website available at: [www.norzartonk.org](http://www.norzartonk.org), last accessed: 17 January 2019.

<sup>44</sup> And this is the reason why I also refer to them as 'Armenians of Turkey' rather than 'Turkish-Armenians' in this dissertation.

citizenship or territorial belonging, the words Turk or Turkish connote ethnic belonging. Robert Koptaş, former editor-in-chief of *Agos* explained the distinction as follows: ‘The state has tried to impose Turkishness upon us, on all the peoples of Turkey. But they failed. Challenging their approach, now we say that we are not Turks, we are not Turkish in that sense, we are Armenians. But we can be considered “*Turkiats’i*”s. I call myself a “*Turkiats’i Hay.*”’<sup>45</sup> As Örs and Komşuoğlu affirm, the usage of ‘*Türkiyeli*’ ‘implies a reaction to the ethnic emphasis on Turkish national identity’ (2007: 418). The ‘*Turkiats’i Hayer*’ or ‘*Türkiyeli Ermeniler*’ thus identify themselves as ethnically Armenian citizens of the Republic of Turkey, rather than ‘Christian Turks.’

That ethnicisation is coupled with an attempt at secularising both Armenian identity and the Armenian community. These progressive organisations and activists represent a challenge to the Armenian Patriarchate, which has traditionally been the sole representative of the community. Perceiving themselves to be more than a religious group, they think they should not be represented by the Church. Hrayr, a journalist-activist in his early thirties expressed his discontent towards the official status and related traditional organisation of the Armenians as follows:

A religious institution cannot represent the Armenians of Istanbul. Why should a bearded man with a huge cross on his garment represent me before the state? I respect them, OK, but it’s really problematic to declare them the representatives of an *azk* [meaning ‘ethnic group’ or ‘nation’ in Western Armenian]. It’s really debatable because the Armenians of Istanbul are an *azkayin* (ethnic or national) minority. Reducing ourselves to a religious community is equivalent to conceding part of our rights. Why should we?

Others nourish hopes of constituting a secular representative body for the Istanbulite Armenians, though nothing of the sort has been created yet. The recent phenomenon of burgeoning hometown associations that regroup Armenians originating from particular provinces or cities of Anatolia, like the Association of Sivas Armenians and Friends, Mutki and Sason Armenians Solidarity Association, the Association of Malatya Armenians, and

<sup>45</sup> Original in Western Armenian.

so on, has given hope to the pioneers of a secular community. The former president of the Association of Malatya Armenians explained:

Religion is one thing, politics is another. I hope that these associations can form the basis of a future secular representative body of the Armenians in Turkey. Ours had proposed to the others, a few years ago, to come together and start some political initiatives, like organising a symposium about the state-confiscated Armenian properties and submitting our demands to the state. But the others did not welcome the idea, thinking about potential negative repercussions.

This emerging new current within the established Armenian community of Istanbul thus internally challenges the conventional ethnoreligious, congregational and apolitical understanding of Armenianness and status of Armenians. Although it does not necessarily oppose the Church, it nevertheless criticises the latter's monopoly over the representation of Armenians and Armenian identity in Turkey (see also Tchilingirian 2016: 129). But what factors or larger developments triggered and facilitated the current's emergence? And why has it emerged at this particular period after decades of submissive compliance?

#### *Recent changes in the Turkish socio-political context*

The emergence of the progressive current was triggered by and made possible thanks to unprecedented changes in the Turkish socio-political context. In fact, two crucial, interrelated and mutually supportive processes evolved in Turkey during the last three to four decades: a reconfiguration of identity politics and a process of gradual democratisation – though the latter subsequently began to rapidly crumble in the late 2000s (see Chapter 1).

Since the founding of the Republic in 1923, Turkish nationalism was characterised by an internal contradiction. 'Turkishness' was interchangeably used in civic and ethnic terms (Kadioğlu 1996; Poulton 1996; Secor 2004). Although all citizens of Turkey, no matter their background, were ideally considered to be 'Turkish,' the state was constructed as 'the nation-state of the Turks' (White 1999), of the Turkic people of Anatolia whose language and culture was adopted as that of the state. As mentioned in the previous chapter,

all Muslim but ethnically non-Turkish and non-Turkish-speaking minorities remained unrecognised by the Treaty of Lausanne. Only the non-Muslims, including the Armenians, were recognised as (religious) minorities. This meant that all people in Turkey would be culturally Turkified, and no separate ethnic identities would be allowed to persist. The Kurds, for instance, the largest non-Turkic ethnic group, were simply categorised as ‘Mountain Turks’ (Secor 2004: 355). Even the word ‘Kurd’ was not to be pronounced in state discourse (Yeğen 1999). In this context, any suprareligious activation and politicisation of Armenian identity was, as seen in the previous chapter, also suppressed.

However, the increasing politicisation of Kurdish ethnic identity from the late 1970s onwards and the launch of a guerrilla movement by the outlawed Kurdish party PKK in 1984 gradually changed the equations of identity politics in the country (Secor 2004: 355; Grigoriadis 2007: 423). Although met with repression, the Kurdish movement was ‘successful in laying bare the fundamental weakness of the official ideology of ethnic homogeneity’ (Kasaba and Bozdoğan 2000: 4), and instrumental in having ethnicity recognised as a fault line in the country (Secor 2004: 356). This ethnic turn in Turkish identity politics has naturally had its influence on some Christian Armenians who now advocate a non-religious, ethnic and secular Armenianness. Several of them have in fact told me about being influenced by the Kurdish movement and resistance to Turkish assimilationist policies.

In parallel, Turkey was slowly moving towards democratisation. The 1980s were characterised by the emergence of new actors, new visions of modernity, and a change in political mentality. In addition to ethnic demands, a discourse on democratisation, civil society, and civil rights was gradually emerging (Keyman and Icduygu 2003: 222-223). The state-centric hegemony continued to be challenged in the 1990s by multiple and diverse claims of group and individual rights, based not only on ethnic and religious belonging, but

also gender and sexuality (Selek 2014: 22). Finally, to these internal developments was added an external pressure by the European Union, after Turkey was declared an official candidate for full membership of the EU in December 1999.

To meet the ‘Copenhagen Criteria,’ Turkey was asked, among other points, to achieve democratic stability and respect for human and minority rights (Keyman and Icduygu 2003: 224). Incited by the EU harmonisation process, the AKP, the political party still in power since 2002, launched a series of democratisation packages and implemented legislative reforms on rights and freedoms (Grigoriadis 2007: 424-426; Şen 2010: 76). As a result, ethnic and religious minorities, including the Armenians of Istanbul, gained ‘unprecedented leverage’ for articulating and defending their concerns (Bacik 2010:50). Rober Koptaş set the rise of the progressive current within the Armenian community in the context of the simultaneous internal (Kurdish) and external (EU) pressures on the Turkish state:

...the European Union started to increase pressure on the Turkish authorities regarding issues such as democracy, minority rights, and other Copenhagen criteria... In parallel, the struggle of the strongest minority in Turkey, the Kurds, had been advancing during the last decades. Consequently, the identity problem reached unprecedented levels of importance in Turkish politics, and through the way initially paved by the Kurds we Armenians also started to walk, though much more timidly. The establishment of *Agos*, for instance, was the result of this [context]. Speaking about these issues was somehow getting normalised...<sup>46</sup>

Even the terms ‘*Turkiats‘i*’ and ‘*Türkiyeli*’ used by representatives of this current were products of the changing context. In fact, even a 2004 report prepared by the ‘Working Group on Minority and Cultural Rights’ under the Office of Turkey’s Prime Minister suggested to base the state identity on ‘*Türkiyelilik*,’ i.e. on being from Turkey. It argued that the traditional monolithic approach to Turkish national identity was undemocratic as it denied the existence of different ethnic identities and alienated citizens of non-Turkic ethnic origin (BİHDK 2004). The proposal was both criticised and welcomed by different factions

<sup>46</sup> Original in Western Armenian.

of society, intellectuals and statesmen. During the first few years of their rule, the ruling AKP and even prime minister Erdogan distanced themselves from ethnic nationalism and promoted ‘Türkiyelilik’ as a civic supra-identity for all citizens (Grigoriadis 2007: 427-430; Grigoriadis and Dilek 2018: 290-1, 299).

Finally, when it comes to the paradoxical influence of Dink’s assassination on the progressive Armenian current described above, it has to do, again, with how Turkey’s changing society reacted to the crime. In fact, on the very same night of the assassination and on the day of the funeral a few days later, tens of thousands of mainly non-Armenian citizens demonstrated against the killing and stood in solidarity with Dink and Armenians in general, chanting ‘We are all Hrant, we are all Armenians!’ (BBC 2007b). The movement was unprecedented and constituted yet another turning point in Turkish identity politics. The highly pejorative label of the ‘Armenian’ was now publicly embraced by tens of thousands, thus challenging hegemonic Turkish nationalism and anti-Armenian discrimination and violence. For many Istanbulite Armenians those protest marches constituted important ‘agentive moments’ (Daniel 1997: 347-348), which empowered them immensely. ‘The time I got the most hope was the day of Hrant’s funeral (...) I realised that we were not alone,’ a member of the political organisation Nor Zartonk told me.

Broader changes at the national level, to conclude, contributed to the emergence of a progressive current within the established Christian Armenian community of Istanbul. With the opening of a democratic space, especially one supervised by the European Union, and the dismantling of the myth of the mono-ethnic Turkish nation, some members of the Christian Armenian community found the courage and possibility to challenge conventional religious-congregational limitations of Armenianness with an ethnic-secular alternative.

## **Muslim and Alevi Armenians: Challenging traditional Armenianness**

A more serious challenge to the conventional interpretation of Armenian identity in Turkey was the public emergence of ‘Muslim Armenian’ and ‘Alevi Armenian’ identities,<sup>47</sup> which also mainly occurred during the 1990-2010 period. The mere fact of not being members of the Christian Armenian congregations makes these ‘new Armenians’ challenge not only the established community’s perceptions about Armenian identity, but also the Lausanne-based traditional classification of Armenians. In fact, how to categorise these citizens who are, as Muslims, officially members of the Turkish majority according to the Treaty of Lausanne, but claim to be part of the Armenian population, officially acknowledged as a non-Muslim minority according to the internal logic of the same treaty that laid the foundations of Turkey? Their interpretation of Armenian identity, reasons and processes of identification and boundary making, and experiences as Armenians shall be studied in Chapter 4. Here, I account for their emergence in the context of broader developments in the country.

At least three structural developments in Turkey have contributed to the gradual public emergence of Muslim and Alevi Armenians, previously silenced descendants of Christian Armenians who converted to Sunni Islam and Alevism in different periods of Turkish and Ottoman history (see Chapter 4).

### *Internal migration*

The first factor consists of Turkey’s internal migration from eastern rural areas, where most of those descendants of converts used to and probably still reside, to western urban centres, such as Istanbul.

Beginning in the 1950s, economic modernisation, industrialisation, and urbanisation caused millions of peasants to leave their villages and find work in western Turkish urban

<sup>47</sup> The difference between Muslim and Alevi Armenian identities will be dealt with in Chapter 4.

centres (Hemmasi and Prorok 2002: 400-402; İçduygu 2004:89, 97-98; Kirişci 2008: 189-195; Biehl 2014: 58; Biehl 2015b: 598; Tolay 2018: 207-208). From the 1980s onwards, emigration towards the west increased from the mostly Kurdish-populated south-east of the country as a result of neoliberal policies that caused the living standards in the region to further deteriorate (Saraçoğlu 2011b). Matters soon became even worse in the south-east with the beginning of the Kurdish insurgency in the second half of the 1980s, which turned into an armed conflict between the Turkish army and Kurdish guerrillas lasting until a temporary ceasefire in 1999. During those years, entire villages were destroyed in the south-east by the Turkish military, and millions of people were forced to migrate to western cities, first and foremost Istanbul (Hemmasi and Prorok 2002: 401; Ayata and Yüksek 2005; Yüksek 2006; Kurban et al. 2007: 83; Kirişci 2008: 184–185; Saraçoğlu 2011b; Bahar 2017: 545; Tolay 2018: 2014-2015).

Many descendants of Islamised Armenians naturally participated in that internal migration and found themselves in cities like Ankara, Izmir, and especially Istanbul. This migration, in turn, became a factor facilitating the revival or establishment of some of those people's links with Armenian identity. First, those in Istanbul were now in proximity to the established Christian Armenian community and its institutions. They had Armenian neighbours, co-workers, and in some cases even relatives who had remained Christian and came to Istanbul much earlier. 'We learned about Armenianness from the Armenians coming to the café in our neighbourhood,' said Mesut, an Alevi Armenian man who was born in Dersim in 1960 and migrated to Istanbul in the late 1970s.

Second, they soon discovered that being Armenian in cosmopolitan Istanbul was easier than it was in their villages or small towns in the east. In addition to having moved to a relatively diverse, educated, and tolerant environment, they were now in a large city where their Armenianness, if they so desired, could be expressed situationally and still remain

unnoticed – whereas in the village, any such manifestation would jeopardise their relations with the small number of co-villagers on which their economic sustainability and daily security was highly dependent. ‘Openly engaging with my Armenian roots would be risky back in the village, but it became possible here in Istanbul,’ stated Berivan, one of my students of Armenian language who grew up in a village in eastern Anatolia.

However, although important, this migration was not enough for the public emergence of these Armenians. In fact, all those arriving before the 1990s, like Mesut and Berivan, started to actively and publicly engage with Armenianness only at the turn of the century, when Turkey was witnessing the above-mentioned process of democratisation and changes in identity politics.

#### *The effect of the ethnic revival and temporary democratisation*

As explained above, Turkey was experiencing a change of its political climate in the 1990s and 2000s. The AKP-led Turkish state had started to loosen its grip on minorities, including the largest Kurdish one, and the idea of a national identity based on citizenship, rather than ethnic-cultural Turkishness as it had always been, was being pushed forward by the state’s highest echelons (Yeğen 2015:161, 165).

As Ayşe Gül Altınay (2014) argues, what followed were unprecedented public discussions about the fate of the Islamised Armenian Genocide survivors and their descendants, linked to the post-nationalist critical narrative on the Armenian Genocide of 1915, which itself developed thanks to the changing political climate (Göcek 2006: 121). A few years after publications and conferences on the Armenian Genocide, a literature on those ‘forgotten’ Armenians started to emerge in Turkey, especially after the ground-breaking publication of *Anneannem* (My Grandmother) by Fethiye Çetin (2004), a memoir telling the story of an Islamised survivor of the massacres. Altınay (2014) counts 17 books and three

documentary films published and produced in Turkey between 2004 and 2014 dealing with the topic of Islamised Armenians and their descendants. It is surely not a coincidence that a revival of discussions on another previously dormant population in Turkey, i.e. the *Dönme* descendants of Islamised Jews, and the public coming out of such individuals occurred at the same time (Nefes 2012).

The emergence of such discussions on Islamised Armenians and their descendants was soon coupled with and perhaps even encouraged actual public claims of Armenian identity by citizens who were officially members of the Muslim majority. Since the 1990s, applications by individuals of Armenian descent to Turkish courts asking to change their religion to Christianity and their names to Armenian ones started to gain unprecedented popularity, with hundreds of applicants (Özgül 2013: 1). Other people, during the same years, started to publicly claim Armenian identity while not becoming Christian, thus coming forth as ‘Muslim Armenians’ and ‘Alevi Armenians.’ Media appearances of such individuals became increasingly common especially after the turn of the century (for recent examples, see Ziflioğlu 2011; Ertani 2014; Eski 2015). The last two decades even witnessed attempts of self-organising by these newly emerged Armenians, who have come together and established cultural associations, first in Istanbul, and then even in eastern regions like Tunceli and Muş (see Metin 2010 and Gültekin 2014). They have started to organise and attend Armenian language courses in cities like Diyarbakır, Tunceli and Istanbul (see Ziflioğlu 2015: 47-48; *Demokrat Haber* 2015; *Musulman Ermeniler* 2017). A Facebook page named ‘Muslim Armenians,’ opened by one of my research participants in September 2013, became more and more popular with more than 17,000 followers today.<sup>48</sup>

As with the emergence of the secular progressive current within the established Christian Armenian community, all of this was made possible by the positive change in the

<sup>48</sup> Page available at: <https://web.facebook.com/musulmanermeniler/>, last accessed: 27 November 2018.

Turkish political climate, characterised by relative democratisation and a growing respect for minority rights. Without that, the historical Armenian church in the city of Diyarbakır, for instance, would probably not have been renovated and reopened in 2011. Consequently, the city's Muslim Armenians would not have had that unprecedented space to which they could relate as Armenians and where they started to gather and form a community (Türkyay 2016). Not only other researchers in the field (Özgül 2013; 2014; Kaya 2014: 16-18, 56-57), but also my interlocutors themselves confirmed that those broader contextual changes have truly empowered them and facilitated their daring engagement with Armenianness, which I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 4.

In fact, Kerim, a Muslim Armenian young man, said that he told his children about their Armenian past encouraged by Turkey's positive internal political developments during the last two decades. 'But now that anti-Armenian attitudes are intensifying once again, people might prefer to return to silence and secrecy,' he added. Hagop, officially named Ilhan, was previously Muslim until he moved to Istanbul from Acar village in the eastern province of Batman. Answering my question about the factors contributing to the recent rise of Muslim Armenians, he noted the Kurdish PKK's decades-long fight in their regions as being an important factor: 'People started to express their identities more easily after the PKK. It became easier to say "I am Armenian," "I am Kurdish." Also, people started to question themselves and their identities. "Who are we? Where do we come from?" we all started to ask' (see also Oran 2015).

Finally, several Muslim and Alevi Armenians also attested to being empowered by Hrant Dink, his writings about descendants of Islamised Armenians like them, his courage, self-sacrifice and the mass 'We are all Armenians' movement that emerged after his assassination. 'It was the final trigger. I could simply not hold myself back from Armenian activism after Hrant['s assassination],' said Alevi Armenian Mesut, 'especially after seeing

that there still are people among the Turks and the Kurds who are ready to support our cause.’

*Islamisation of politics and society*

Yet another important factor has been dismissed, to my knowledge, by authors studying the emergence of the ‘Muslim Armenian’ identity in Turkey. I argue that the recent foregrounding of the previously suppressed Islamic identity in the country and the Islamisation of Turkish politics and society have also played a role in the activation of the ‘Muslim Armenian’ identity, mainly by empowering its bearers. This factor has particularly encouraged the Sunni Muslim Armenians, rather than the Alevi Armenians who usually do not consider themselves to be followers of Islam (see Chapter 4).

Secularism was one of the key principles of the Republic of Turkey since its establishment. Atatürk himself, the founder of the Republic, had actively sought to expel Islam from state and politics and even weaken and limit its influence in Turkish society. He abolished the Ottoman-inherited Sultanate and Caliphate in 1922 and 1924 respectively, replaced the Islamic Sharia with a secular legal system, closed down many religious institutions, outlawed Sufi religious orders, and removed the constitutional article declaring Islam to be ‘the state’s religion’ in 1928 (Esposito et al. 2016: 27; Tapper and Tapper 1987: 59). These efforts did not, of course, eradicate Islam from Turkish society, and being a Muslim of the Hanafi sect remained as the precondition for being considered a ‘real and authentic Turk’ and a ‘reliable’ citizen (Ekmekçioğlu 2014: 670; 2016: 105-106). But the state succeeded in limiting Islam to the private sphere (Özyürek 2006: 2), and made its public visibility ‘primarily religio-cultural, not political’ (Esposito et al. 2016: 29) until the 1980s. For the first six decades after the foundation of the republic, the relationship between the Kemalist regimes and Islam had even been openly conflictual (Kaya 2015: 52), and

secularism was ‘the [Turkish] state’s preferred self-representation or selected idea about itself’ (Navaro-Yashin 2002: 6).

But things started to change in the 1980s. In fact, the strongest current to emerge as a result of the general reconfigurations of identity politics in Turkey was Islam(ism). This was conditioned by the willingness of the military elite, risen to power through the 1980 military coup, to gradually ‘accommodate conservative and Islamist sources of culture in the homogeneous modern Turkish national identity’ in order to prevent further fragmentation and polarisation within the nation (Kaya 2015: 53; Sakallioğlu 1996: 245-246). The Turkish-Islamic Synthesis (TIS), an ideology developed during the previous decade, was thus adopted by the political elite in the 1980s (Şen 2010: 61-66). Islam gradually gained further public visibility (Öncü 1995; Göle 1996; Bartu 1999; Çınar 1997; Navaro Yashin 2002), and returned to politics (Gülalp 2001; Tuğal 2002; White 2002), as a result of which in the 1990s Kemalist secular ideology increasingly became the object of ‘nostalgic attachment’ by many citizens still faithful to it (Özyürek 2006: 3) and a ‘secularist/Islamist conflict’ became distinguishable in public life (Navaro Yashin 2002: 7).

The Islamist movement prevailed and the politics of Islamisation was further enhanced and developed with the rise to power of an Islamist political leadership, eventually under the name of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) which won the 2002 elections and has remained in power ever since. The AKP became a leading agent of identity politics by proposing a ‘new type of modus vivendi between the state and Islam’ (Bacik 2010: 51). It claimed to represent previously excluded societal values, mainly Islamic ones, and to return those to power (Kaya 2015: 54). Devout Muslims were appointed to ministries and bureaucracy (Saraçoğlu 2011a: 44), the headscarf ban in Turkish universities and in civil service were lifted in 2007 and 2013 respectively (Kaya 2015: 56), the legal discrimination towards the religious Imam Hatip schools was terminated in August 2009 (ibid.), and,

importantly, the national curriculum was also increasingly Islamised (Turkmen 2009; ERG 2013). Through such legal reforms, a resurgence of Islamic discourse and values (empowerment of family, faith, charity, etc.), and a parallel weakening of the Turkish military's legitimacy as 'the guardian of national unity and the laicist order,' the AKP gradually contributed to an unprecedented 'islamisation of society and politics in [Republican] Turkey' (Kaya 2015: 63).

Furthermore, during that metamorphosis of traditionally secular Turkey into a 'Muslim Nation' (Çınar 2018), the identificational/categorisational boundaries were at least partly redrawn according to the mechanism of 'emphasis shifting' (Wimmer 2008b; 2013: 50-55). The ruling AKP party, as discussed above, had first moved away from Turkish ethnic nationalism and emphasised civic identity or *Türkiyelilik*. However, this was abandoned in 2009 with the government's policies of the 'Kurdish Opening,' and the emphasis this time shifted to Muslim fellowship, still bypassing ethnicity, and remained so at least until the violent re-deterioration of Turkish-Kurdish relations in 2016 (Yavuz and Özcan 2006; Çiçek 2013: 160; Grigoriadis and Dilek 2018: 291, 296; Uluğ and Cohrs 2017: 247). Prime minister Erdogan, for instance, adopted the theme of religious fraternity between Turks and Kurds in his electoral rally speeches in Kurdish-populated areas of south-eastern Turkey (Grigoriadis and Dilek 2018: 293-294). Some AKP parliamentarians, similarly, have argued that the Turkish-Kurdish conflict was a result of nationalist ideology and proposed, as a solution, to drop ethnic nationalism and reassemble under a *superordinate Muslim identity* (Uluğ and Cohrs 2017: 259). Although this discourse still had its 'nationalist limits' and ultimately in practice did not succeed in bridging the Turkish-Kurdish gap (Çiçek 2013; Türkmen-Derrişođlu 2016), it nevertheless achieved some success and gained some ground in society (Çiçek 2013: 160).

In this new context where ethnic differences were downplayed in favour of religious commonality, people would naturally find it easier to come out as ‘Armenians *but Muslims*.’ Social psychological research has proven that a stronger identification with the common, rather than differing identity, enhances trust between people differing in terms of their less salient identities (Çelebi et al. 2014; Gaertner and Dovidio 2000; Noor, Brown, Gonzalez et al., 2008; Noor, Brown, Prentice, 2008). Despite the AKP’s reversion to a nationalist rhetoric beginning in 2016 (Çağaptay 2016), the discourse foregrounding Islam in the preceding years had already had its positive influence on the Muslim Armenians who, in the ‘Muslim Nation,’ had become more confident with their identities and more trusting toward their Muslim brothers and sisters from whom they expected—and at times received—positive treatment as fellow Muslims.

Erhan, the founder and administrator of the ‘Muslim Armenians’ Facebook page described the situation as follows:

Declaring that one is ‘Armenian but also Muslim’ has become easier with society’s becoming more religious and conservative. Because religion has a decisive influence on people’s behaviour. Once I tell them that I am also a Muslim, they cannot react maliciously toward me. It is religiously forbidden—a Muslim is a Muslim no matter his ethnic or national belonging. ‘Ok, you are Armenians but you’ve become Muslim, you are our brothers,’ they say. They are thus obliged to act respectfully, even if some do not really feel comfortable with my being Armenian.

Although still a long way from being eliminated (see Chapter 4), the risk of being stigmatised or mistreated as an Armenian thus decreased thanks to the shared superordinate Muslim identity, which acted as a buffer between ethnic opponents. At least, people identifying as Muslim Armenians were now able to use the official discourse in their own favour. Whereas the previous Kemalist ideology, based on ethnic Turkishness, could only serve to exclude them as Armenians, the new ideology developed and disseminated at the turn of the century had to include them as Muslims. Their chances of being recognised as legitimate members of society were now higher than ever. The fact that Erhan was invited

to speak about Muslim Armenianness and his Facebook page in 2016 on a talk show on the famous Akit TV, known for its Islamic fundamentalism and close ties with president Erdogan, is yet another indicator of this change (Müslüman Ermeniler 2016). Under the Facebook posts of the ‘Muslim Armenians’ page, I have personally come across several positive and welcoming comments by non-Armenian Muslims of Turkey directed to their Muslim brothers identifying as Armenians.

Thus, the migration of descendants of Islamised Armenians to Istanbul, where they felt relatively safer and gained access to Armenians and their institutions, the temporary democratisation of Turkey which empowered previously peripheral and (self-)censored ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, including the descendants of converted Armenians, and the Islamisation of Turkish national identity, politics and society, all contributed to and facilitated the public emergence of officially Muslim citizens of Turkey identifying as Armenians. That emergence, in turn, diversified and complicated the landscape of Armenianness in contemporary Turkey, giving the lie to statements such as ‘all Armenians living in Turkey are Christians’ (Komsuoğlu and Örs 2009: 331).

### **Non-*Türkiyeli* Armenians in Turkey: Migrants from the Republic of Armenia**

Finally, yet another category of Armenians emerged in Turkey during the same period. This time, though, the new Armenians were truly newcomers, immigrants from the neighbouring Republic of Armenia, and thus not *Türkiyelis*. More about their experiences in Turkey, their (extra-)legal status, their understandings of Armenianness and relations with the other Armenians will be discussed in later chapters. Here, I shall briefly introduce their arrival and the macro-level developments paving the way for it and, consequently, for the further diversification of Turkey’s Armenian landscape.

### *Crisis in the sending context*

Migration from Armenia to Turkey should be considered in the wider context of a large-scale emigration that has hit Armenia since the early 1990s. A devastating earthquake in 1988, political and economic remodelling as a result of post-Soviet independence and a largescale war with neighbouring Azerbaijan brought forth a period of serious economic, energy and social crisis in Armenia, thus setting the scene for a significant migration process.

By the late 1980s, two political issues were developing and setting the ground for destabilisation in Soviet Armenia: a movement towards independence from the USSR and increasing tensions with neighbouring Azerbaijan. A ‘quiet nationalism’ was on the rise and exploded in 20 February 1988 when the local Soviet of the mostly Armenian-populated Nagorno-Karabakh Oblast voted to request its transfer from the Azerbaijani Soviet Republic to the Armenian one. Around a million Armenian protestors in Yerevan echoed their ethnic brethren’s demand and called for the unification of the Karabakh Oblast to their republic (Panossian 2006: 384). This agenda would not only eventually result in an open military conflict with Azerbaijan between 1992 and 1994, but further fuel the pro-independence sentiments of the Armenian people who were increasingly convinced of the inability of the Soviet regime to solve the Karabakh issue and defend Armenians from retaliatory pogroms in Azerbaijan.

The independent Republic of Armenia was finally reborn on September 1991 (ibid.). But economic restructuring and large-scale privatisation in the immediate post-independence period brought further economic hardship, as they did in other post-Soviet countries (see Bloch 2017: 14), and further aggravated the conditions of the country that, in addition to political instability, had recently been hit by a major earthquake on 7 December 1988. Together with the advent of war and the subsequent economic blockade by Turkey

and Azerbaijan and the resulting energy crisis, the abrupt metamorphosis of the economic system with a transition to a free market economy soon brought ‘a cataclysmic paralysis of the urban and industrial infrastructure’ (Platz 2000: 114). Only between 1992 and 1994, i.e. the war period, an estimated one fifth of the country’s population emigrated (Taşçı 2010: 37).

Armenia’s political situation stabilised by the turn of the century and its economy took the path of slow redress. Emigration rates decreased compared to what they were during the crisis years of ‘catastrophic demodernization’ (Platz 2000: 124). However, the migration balance has still not shifted and labour migration is still a widespread phenomenon due to the inability of consecutive corrupt governments to fully take the country out of its economic nightmare. It has been stated that many migrants have left Armenia by illegal means and without registering their departure, which makes it difficult to estimate the actual number of emigrants since the crisis years (Ishkhanian 2002: 389). However, it is generally believed that their number is around a million (ETF and CRRC 2013: 9; Hakobyan 2018).

The stories of individual Migrants I met and interacted with during my research in Istanbul are situated in this general context of migration. They have come to Turkey at different times during the post-Soviet period, and from different towns in Armenia. I have met people from Yerevan, Gyumri, Ejmiatsin, and Vanadzor. Except for a few students and a handful of Migrant brides, all had come as labour migrants, choosing—or rather being forced to adopt—the ‘transnational survival strategy’ of post-Soviet Armenians (Ishkhanian 2002: 405).

#### *Turkey as a destination: attractive developments in the receiving context*

Surveys suggest that only a small portion, about 1%, of post-Soviet Armenian migration has had Turkey as its destination (ETF and CRRC 2013: 12, 53). As interlocutors explained,

Turkey has usually been the choice of the financially least privileged of all migrants from Armenia. Its proximity, relative cheapness and the relative abundance of jobs made it a more affordable option when compared to the main destinations of Armenian emigration, i.e. Russia, other CIS states, USA and Europe. I discussed this issue in a conversation with two Migrants, Ovsanna (59, female) and Hakob (30, male):

Hrag: Why Turkey? Why not Russia or Europe?

Ovsanna: Look, my daughter got married and moved to France. Of course, I would have loved to be near her, but traveling and living there would require a large amount of money, for which I would have to sell my house. I couldn't get rid of that last corner of mine in this world, so Istanbul was my only option.

Hrag: And is Russia that expensive as well?

Hakob: Hrag, let me intervene. First, finding a job here is much easier than in Russia. Even if one doesn't speak Turkish, one still gets something, although with bad conditions. Then there is also the difference in housing fees, which are incomparably cheaper here. And finally, you can always easily go back from here as buses cheaply travel through Georgia...<sup>49</sup> all these advantages are exclusive to Turkey.

The relative abundance of job opportunities, as expressed in Hakob's comment, is perhaps the most crucial factor of all. That abundance, of course, was the result of changes and developments that occurred in Turkey during the same period of time. In fact, scholars argue that Turkey had acquired an economic 'pull' factor when political and economic crises were shaking the adjacent post-Soviet region, which made the former a suitable receiving country for migrants from the latter (Akpınar 2010: 5-8; Bloch 2017: 10).

The very first Armenian migrants to Istanbul are said to have been shuttle-traders<sup>50</sup> who arrived in the early 1990s (Körükmez 2012: 109). Closer to the turn of the century, however, Armenian migration towards its western neighbour had already gained further popularity, mostly at the expense of extra-legal labourers (Taşçı 2010: iv; Körükmez 2012: 86). Not only had the introduction of Chinese products and the monopolisation of shipment companies hit the shuttle trading sector (Körükmez 2012: 45-46), but an increasing demand for low-paid and undocumented labour in the growing sectors of service and informal

<sup>49</sup> The Turkish-Armenian border is closed by Turkey since 1993 (see Chapter 5).

<sup>50</sup> Shuttle trade refers to the activity of buying goods in a country and selling them in street markets or small shops of a neighbouring country. It often circumvents customs declaration (OECD 2002: 89).

manufacturing had made irregular labour migration towards Turkey particularly appealing to post-Soviet, including Armenian, financially vulnerable people (Akpınar 2010: 5-8; Bloch 2017: 10).

The opening of the Turkish labour market to undocumented workers was first and foremost conditioned by economic structural rearrangements. Neoliberal economic policies were adopted by Turkey in the 1980s, and these resulted in privatisation, de-unionisation and the loss of jobs, all of which in turn paved the way for extra-legal labour exploitation which soon incorporated migrants as well (Akpınar 2010: 5-8). However, in particular economic sectors sociocultural factors of the receiving country were also at play. Namely, live-in domestic work was left relatively ‘unoccupied’ by locals not only because its domestic nature is considered as unsuitable for men in Turkey, but also because its ‘live-in’ factor often makes Muslim Turkish and Kurdish families not permit their daughters to be employed in that sector (Kalaycıoğlu and Rittersberger-Tılıç 2001; Bora 2005; Akalın 2007; Özyeğin 2000:3, all cited in Öztürk 2020: 257). This and other sectors were thus left unattended, and migrant women, including Armenians, were the ones to fill the gap.

Thus, the dire economic situation in the Republic of Armenia coupled with the development of an economic pull factor of Turkey, the latter’s proximity, relative cheapness and accessibility,<sup>51</sup> generated waves of Armenian labour migration towards Turkey. Thought to be the financially least-risky destination, Turkey is where many Migrants left Armenia for, some without even having precise plans, job offers or invitations. This migration, in turn, further diversified the Armenian population of Turkey, adding to the Christian Armenian established community, its internal progressive current, and the Muslim

<sup>51</sup> Citizens of Armenia are eligible for 30-day-long visas granted online or at ports of entry. See: <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/visa-information-for-foreigners.en.mfa>, last accessed: 17 March 2018.

and Alevi Armenians yet other Armenians with their own interpretation of and expectations from Armenianness, to be discussed in Chapter 5.

## **Conclusion**

In the last three to four decades, the Republic of Turkey witnessed political, economic and sociocultural transformations that had a crucial though unintended effect on the character and nature of its Armenian population. The evolution of identity politics in the country, the process of democratisation pushed for by both internal and external parties, and the neo-liberal economic policies have all paved the way for a diversification of Turkey's Armenian landscape. In addition, geopolitical developments and structural transformations in the neighbouring Republic of Armenia have also played a role. The state-promoted traditional Turkish-Armenian identity, apolitical and minimised to a religious-congregational status, gradually found itself facing both internal and external challenge(r)s as described above.

How do the Muslim, Alevi and Migrant Armenians relate to Armenianness? What is the nature of their relations with Turkishness and the Turkish state? How do the different Armenians within the contemporary diverse palette relate to each other? What are the boundaries that emerge from this unprecedented coexistence of multiple Armeniannesses? These are questions that I take up in the remaining chapters of this dissertation.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Muslim and Alevi Armenians: Öz (essence) as a boundary**

Whereas the Christian Armenian citizens of Turkey are officially acknowledged as Armenians by the Turkish state, the Armenians appearing in this chapter are officially not categorised as such. Rather, formally they make up part of Turkey's Muslim majority and usually have Turkish/Muslim names. They are the descendants of Armenians who converted to Islam in different periods of Turkish and Ottoman history. Unlike the local Christian Armenians and the Migrants, they lived most of their lives distantly from Armenian institutions, such as the Armenian state, Churches, and organised community of Istanbul, that define and produce a particular understanding of 'Armenianness.' They recently have become more vociferous and active than ever, publicly claiming to be Armenian and engaging in Armenian-related activities.

On what, then, do they base their claims to Armenian identity? Beyond categorisation, how are they actually treated by the Turkish state and Muslim majority? What has motivated them to embrace Armenian identity in a country where, as I have already shown, being Armenian is one of the least favourable identities one can have? This chapter will answer those questions. But first, some further information about the subjects.

#### **The Subjects: Historical background, issues of definition, sub-groups, and demographics**

##### *Historical background*

Muslim and Alevi Armenians of contemporary Turkey are descendants of Islamised Armenians who converted during different periods of Ottoman and Turkish history.

The oldest of those conversions to which my interlocutors traced their familial histories took place from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards in the historical Armenian canton of Hamshen, roughly corresponding to the contemporary province of Rize situated in the eastern Black Sea region of Turkey. Fiscal oppression by the Ottoman state and persecution by local Muslim warlords are believed to be the main factors leading to the gradual Islamisation of Hamshen Christian Armenians between the mid-seventeenth and early-nineteenth centuries (Simonian 2007a: 20; 2007b: 55-67, 88). Many, though surely not all, descendants of those converts identify as ‘Hamshen/Hemshin Armenians’ today.

The next mass conversions, to which only a few of my research participants traced their familial histories, occurred during the Armenian massacres of 1894-1897, the prelude to the 1915 Genocide (Akçam 2014b: 101-111; Dadrian 1995: 113-171; Deringil 2009; Melson 1982; Özgül 2013: 31-39). 456 Armenian villages are said to have been forcibly converted by 1896 (Lepsius 1897: 330-331, cited in Hovannisian 1997: 224).

Most of my Muslim and Alevi Armenian research participants’ ancestors converted during or immediately after the genocide of 1915. Historians perceive mass Islamisation as a fundamental, structural element of the Armenian Genocide, which, in parallel to physical annihilation and deportations, was meant to serve the goal of demographic homogenisation (Akçam 2014b; Kevorkian 2011; Sarafian 2001). Islamisation was carried out through direct conversions, the abduction of young children and their induction into Muslim households or Turkish orphanages, and the abduction of Armenian girls and women and their forced marriages with Muslim men (Sarafian 2001; Köker 2007; Kevorkian 2011; Akçam 2014b; Kurt and Uçaner 2015; Melkonian, A. 2015; Melkonian, D. K. 2015). Those converted during the genocide through the second and third methods alone are estimated to number around 200,000 (Akçam 2007).

Finally, Islamisation also occurred during the Republican era, as the surviving Christian Armenians in the eastern provinces were forced to convert during different periods under state or societal pressure. Notably, the last Christian Armenians of the central Anatolian province of Tunceli, previously called Dersim, were targeted as part of the 1937-8 army offensive in the region: some of them were killed, and others had to officially convert to Islam and eventually assimilate into the local Kızılbaş Alevi religion (Gündoğan 2016). Moreover, conversions have also occurred in the second half of the 20th century, as some of my interlocutors recalled. The latest entire-village Islamisation cases of Armenians in the east are said to have happened after the military coup of 1980 (Özgül 2010: 27).

*Issues of definition and categorisation: 'Crypto,' 'Islamised,' or 'Muslim' Armenians?*

In media and the burgeoning literature on the subject, several labels and terms have been used to identify the bearers of this newly-emerging Armenian identity. The most common of those are 'Hidden Armenians,' 'Crypto Armenians,' 'Islamised Armenians,' 'Descendants of Islamised Armenians,' and 'Muslim Armenians.' I shall briefly address these terms and the different (mis)categorisations they produce, in order to distance myself from most of them, clarify my own approach and elucidate who exactly are the subjects I call 'Muslim Armenians' and 'Alevi Armenians.'

The 'hidden' and 'crypto' adjectives are mostly used in non-academic spheres, and are problematic because, first of all, they often have political connotations. Turkish nationalists often depict a conspiratorial image of the *gizli Ermeniler* ('secret/crypto Armenians' in Turkish), presenting them as the 'embedded enemies of the Turkish Republic' working in disguise within terrorist organisations (Özgül 2013: 163).

The notion of the hidden is also compatible with essentialist understandings of identity that are inclined to categorise all people with Armenian ancestry as Armenians and

dismiss their claims of *non*-Armenianness as mere acts of concealment or denial. In particular, some Armenian authors have a clear tendency to ‘reveal’ a hidden Armenianness among descendants of Islamised Armenians. In his recent book, Argentinian Armenian journalist Avedis Hadjian recalls his visit to a family in Turkey whose members acknowledge having Armenian origins, but, based on an ethno-religious approach, state that they are Muslims and thus not Armenians anymore. Nevertheless, the author does not refrain from categorising them as the ‘Voskedzar Armenians,’ by identifying their village, also significantly, by its old Armenian name (2018: 29-30). He even describes encounters with people to whom he has bluntly said, based on his belief about their Armenian origins, that they *were* Armenians, even when they did not consider themselves as such (ibid.: 313, 428-429). The title of Hadjian’s book, *Secret Nation: The Hidden Armenians of Turkey*, is in full harmony with that essentialist and romantic approach, which categorises not only individuals but also a whole ‘nation’ as ‘secretly Armenian.’

A similar approach is noticeable among some Armenian journalists and researchers working on the Hemshin people. Although some members of the Hemshin community, including many of my interlocutors, really consider themselves to be Armenian, many others either vehemently reject that categorisation or simply find it unfitting for them (Kaya 2014). However, as Simonian notes, there exist some simplistic views presenting these people as ‘authentic crypto-Christians waiting for the first opportunity to revert to Christianity and feeling a strong sense of solidarity with Armenians’ (2007c: 135). Some historians and researchers in Armenia in fact construct a heroic and homogeneous Armenian history of the Hemshin (Kaya 2014: 34-42), and even suggest strategies for bringing them back to the ‘bosom of [the] Armenian people’ (Harutyunyan 2007: 24). In a clip prepared by a TV channel in Armenia, although a man clearly states that he is ‘a Homshetsi,<sup>52</sup> *not* an

<sup>52</sup> ‘Homshetsi’ is the ethnonym Hemshins use for themselves.

Armenian,' he is presented as 'an Armenian inhabitant of Hopa' (Kentron Channel 2015: 0'47'').

This essentialist approach to the 'crypto-Armenians' manifests itself also in censuses claiming to provide definite numbers. The title of Kentron's video clip states that 'there are between 700,000 and 1 million Hamshen-Armenians in northeastern regions of Turkey' (ibid.). Similarly, Turkish journalist Söylemez (2007) counts more than 37,000 'crypto-Armenian' families living in different Turkish cities, referring to 'ongoing research' which he does not specify, and Armenian researcher Khanlari provides his own numbers based on the figures of Söylemez and other unofficial sources (2010: 235). Such numbers could not be based on individual claims of 'hidden Armenianness' of course, especially if the identity in question is kept secret. At best, those numbers could refer to descendants of converted Armenians, who might not necessarily share the identity of their ancestors

The remaining terms employed in the existing literature are more objective and less controversial, but have their own limitations. I consider 'Islamised Armenians' to be a totally valid term when used to describe Armenians baptised as Christians but converted, often by force, to Islam at a certain point in history. Whereas its usage is generally accurate in historical studies (Altnay 2014; Demir 2015; Marsoobian 2015; Aleksanyan 2015; Tachjian 2015; Melkonian, D. K. 2015; Chiftjian 2015; Sarıkaya 2015), it is often misleading and anachronistic in journalistic, sociological or anthropological works studying contemporary people who have not converted to Islam themselves, but are rather descendants of such converts (Anahit 2014; Atay 2016; Özgül 2013; Ritter 2015; Ritter and Sivaslian 2012; Vardanyan 2015) . Hence, expressions such as 'second and third generation Islamized Armenians' (Atay 2016: 60), or 'people who were born as Islamized Armenians' (Balancar 2015a: 1), are simply inaccurate. 'Descendants of the forcibly Islamized Armenians' corrects the mistake (Özgül 2013), but that would be a category covering probably several

million Muslims in Turkey (Altnay 2014), who might not necessarily identify as Armenians.

I use ‘Muslim Armenian’ as a classificatory term for Muslim citizens of Turkey identifying as Armenians. It is neither essentialist nor conspiratorial, nor anachronistic or too broad and vague like the others mentioned above. One thing to note in this regard is the inappropriate application of the term to the case of the Alevi Armenians of Tunceli/Dersim (RFE/RL 2013; AFP News Agency 2013).

### *Alevi Armenians*

Although Alevi Armenians are officially classified as Muslims in their identity cards like all Alevis of Turkey (Karolewski 2008: 455), they usually do not identify as such, as they consider Alevism to be distinct from Islam (Beyinli 2015: 379). There are competing definitions of Alevism, ranging from that of a heterodox sect within Islam to that of a syncretic religion having elements of Islam, Christianity and Shamanism (Koçan and Öncü 2004: 473; Öktem 2008). The Alevis of Dersim, in particular, are said to be even more distant from Islam than those of other parts of Turkey (van Bruinessen 1997; Koçan and Öncü 2004: 477).

Despite the cultural and religious differences between Muslim and Alevi Armenians, I analyse them in a single chapter as one of the three main sides of the contemporary Armenian triangle of Turkey, the Christian Armenian citizens and the Migrants constituting the two others. This analytical grouping does not intend to downplay the Muslim/Alevi differences. But presenting and analysing them as separate groups in the context of relations and boundaries between the different main representatives of Armenianness in contemporary Turkey would not be appropriate either. In fact, the Muslim and Alevi Armenians share the ambiguous status of being non-Christian, thus unclassified, Armenians

in Turkey, a history of racial discrimination on the part of the state and society, and the conditions of having lived detached from Armenian institutions. Perhaps most importantly, they are not really distinguished from each other by the other Armenians in Turkey, and thus clearly stand as one block in the intra-Armenian boundary making processes.

### *The Hemshin*

The Hemshin Armenians are yet another distinct sub-group within the Muslim Armenians. They stand out thanks to their historical, cultural and linguistic uniqueness. As reviewed above, their Christian Armenian ancestors were subjected to gradual Islamisation between the mid-seventeenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Thus, the contemporary Hemshin Armenians' history of Islamisation is much older than that of the other Muslim and Alevi Armenians. Second, they are still partly Armenophone, as especially those who live in the Hopa and Borçka counties of Artvin speak *Hamshetsnag*, considered to be a dialect of Western Armenian (Vaux 2007: 257).<sup>53</sup> Historians hypothesise that the language has survived thanks to the marginal existence of the pastoral Hopa Hemshins, which kept them apart from other peoples and governmental pressure (Simonian 2007b: 81; 2009: 377-378). Similarly, the Hemshins preserve some cultural traits, such as the non-Islamic practice of burying the dead with coffins, or feasts such as *nor dai* or *vartivor* that are said to be survivals from their Christian-Armenian past (Vaux 2001: 7; Hachikian 2007: 310).

Experienced in a particular geography, this linguistic and cultural singularity has produced a particular group identity called 'Hemşinlilik,' which is generally foregrounded by the Hemshins. Although many of these people, even among the Armenophones, simply identify as 'Hemşinlis' rather than Turks or Armenians, some have started, increasingly

<sup>53</sup> Although Vaux (2007) uses the term 'Homshetsma' in order to refer to the Hemshin's language, some Hemshin interlocutors told me that a more accurate glossonym for their native language is 'Hamshetsnag.' Accordingly, I use the latter term in this thesis.

during the last decades of ethnic identity boom in Turkey, to self-identify as Armenians, in which the aforementioned historical links and cultural similarities play an essential role (Kaya 2014: 60-70).

#### *Socio-demographic information*

It is difficult, because of the lack of official classification and the purely self-identificational nature of the Muslim and Alevi Armenian identities, to obtain demographic and sociological data on this group of people. The impossibility of providing objective numbers and censuses has been already mentioned above. Some general socio-demographic information based on my experience in the field and the existing literature might nevertheless be helpful for contextualising the ethnography.

Alevi Armenians are mostly concentrated in Tunceli, formerly Dersim, located in the middle of Eastern Anatolia. Muslim (Sunni) Armenians are more dispersed and can be found in virtually all of the Eastern Anatolian provinces and the large cities of Turkey. In Istanbul, unlike the local Christian and Migrant Armenians who are concentrated in particular neighbourhoods, the Muslim and Alevi Armenians are scattered throughout. Being internal migrants, many of them reside in the suburbs, like Bahçelievler, Zeytinburnu, Maltepe, Ümraniye, and so on (see map in Figure 2).

The economic status of those living in Turkey's less or underdeveloped southeastern cities and villages naturally corresponds to the local conditions. As for those residing in Istanbul, the situation is generally not much better, as they are mostly internal migrants, at best second-generation, originating from that same geographical area. Most of my Muslim and Alevi research participants were either manual workers, or middle-class businessmen and professionals. A few were even unemployed. University graduates were scarce among them, and several had not even graduated from high school.

Those living in or originating from Kurdish-dominated areas such as Diyarbakır, Muş or Adıyaman, spoke Kurmancî (Kurmanji), the northern dialect of Kurdish, in addition to Turkish. Some of my Alevi Armenian interlocutors knew Zazaki, a commonly used language in Dersim/Tunceli. Moreover, a dialect of Arabic was spoken among some research participants coming from Arab-populated areas of Batman. Last, but not least, at least two dialects of Armenian are still spoken by some Muslim Armenians: Hamshetsnag by some Hemshins and the Armenian dialect of historical *Sasun* (the contemporary province of Batman) spoken by some elderly people from that area.

### **Armenians by Öz: ‘Racial essence’ and patrilineal descent**

Whereas most Christian Armenians understand Armenianness as an essentially religious or at best ethnoreligious category, Muslim and Alevi Armenians have a different approach to it. Armenianness for them is primordial, patrilineal, and independent from religion—a conception that greatly challenges Turkey’s official ethnic/religious categories and boundaries anchored in the Treaty of Lausanne.<sup>54</sup>

#### *Primordiality*

Whereas most of the Christian Armenians, state representatives and the media usually refer to the Armenians as a *cemaat* (religious congregation), my Muslim or Alevi Armenian interlocutors reject that term in favour of one of the following: *kavim* (nation, tribe, people), *halk* (people), *etnik grup* (ethnic group), *soy* (lineage, ancestry) and *ırk*, the most widely used. *İrk* has two definitions in Turkish dictionaries: first, it is defined as ‘a group of people having common and inherited physical and physiological characteristics’ (my translation), and thus translatable to ‘race’ in English; second, it is said to be synonymous with *soy*, that

<sup>54</sup> As I will discuss below, the state’s categorisation of Armenians *in practice* is more ambiguous and at times öz-based itself.

is ‘lineage.’ Using the word *ırk*, and translating it to ‘race’ in English whenever need be, the Muslim and Alevi Armenians suggest that Armenians are a lineage, and accordingly Armenianness is an inherited, pre-ascribed, primordial, even ‘genetic’ characteristic, though they rarely explicitly ascribe visible phenotypical properties to it, on which ‘race’-based categorisations are essentially based in other parts of the world (see Banks 1996: 54). Muslim and Alevi Armenians argue that they are Armenians, even if officially not categorised as such, because of being ‘genetically Armenian,’ because of ‘possessing Armenian veins and blood.’ Armenianness, for them, is a matter of *öz*, literally meaning ‘essence’ in Turkish, a concept they consistently evoke.

The Armenian *öz* is imagined to be always and already there, even if its bearer is not aware of it. Thus, Muslim/Alevi Armenian informants spoke about ‘learning’ about their ‘true identity’ at a certain stage in their lifetimes. It is not, importantly, about *becoming* Armenian like it is in the case with baptism for many Christian Armenians, but about unveiling the identity believed to already be there. ‘That’s what I am then, that’s what I am,’ exclaimed the aunt of Erhan, owner of the ‘Muslim Armenians’ Facebook page, after he told her about the result of his DNA test suggesting that their family was of Armenian descent. One Hemshin woman asked *me* whether they were ‘truly Armenians.’ To my answer that being Armenian was, in my opinion, a matter of subjectivity and self-identification, she retorted: ‘But there is *one truth*, right?’ And she wished that my research could reveal it.

#### *Patrilineality*

*Öz* and descent have one limitation though: sex. *ırk*, for these ‘Armenians by blood,’ is patrilineal. In other words, one’s maternal ancestry does not determine one’s lineage. Although the results of Erhan’s DNA test also showed that he was the grandchild of Islamised Greeks, he never identifies himself as Greek because that connection is through

his maternal side: ‘Just as I took my “Y” chromosome from my father, I take my [Armenian] identity from him,’ he explained.

That patrilineal transmission of racial/ethnic identity is the reason why Muslim Armenians prefer to use the term *dayı* (maternal uncle), instead of the more common *amca* (paternal uncle) when addressing elderly Muslim people, in order not to ‘accuse’ the latter of being Armenian by suggesting a possible patrilineal relation (Özgül 2013: 121-122). Yet another such strategy, in my opinion, is applied by Hemshins rejecting their categorisation as Armenians, who refer to a popular theory about a *female* Armenian ancestor from whom their people learned the Armenian language (Hadjian 2018: 520; Kaya 2014: 75).

This patrilineal understanding of lineage is not peculiar to this group of Armenians, but is common in Turkey and the regions where they reside (Altınay 2014). Until recently, even the state used to recognise patrilineal descent as the only criterion to determine a person’s ancestry, with all legal and practical implications. For instance, children could be recognised as members of the Armenian community and attend Armenian schools only if their father was Armenian (Özgül 2013: 116).

#### *An inescapable identity*

Being a matter of ‘truth’ and ‘essence,’ Armenianness, once ‘inherited,’ is perceived to be inescapable and undeniable by most interviewees. Several of them in fact dismissed claims of non-Armenianness by other descendants of Islamised or Alevised Armenians. ‘They could deny it, but that does not change anything in their genes,’ explained Şevket, aged 60, from the town of Kahta. ‘*Trk* is unchangeable,’ exclaimed Ahmet, aged 26, and argued that since his grandfather was Armenian he is Armenian as well whether he wanted it or not. When I told a Hemshin Armenian that I have met other Hemshins who did not identify as Armenians, he ‘advised’ me not to take them seriously. All Hemshins were relatives, he

explained, and if he was an Armenian, the other members of his *soy* (lineage) could not be otherwise.

Serhat, one of my students of Armenian language in Istanbul and later my guest in Armenia, was born in 1986 in a village near Erzincan, north of Dersim/Tunceli, to an Alevi family. Since childhood he sensed, as he explains, that his family did not really belong to Alevism: ‘Something was missing, something was just not right.’ No matter how unintelligibly to me, he insisted that he had started ‘feeling Armenian’ without any particular clues. Stumbling upon Armenian music, for instance, he felt some emotional connection to it, he stated. Only then he embarked upon some research and found out that his maternal grandfather was an orphan whose past was unknown, and his paternal grandmother was rumoured to be of Armenian origin. That was all he knew when I met him on the registration day for the Armenian language courses. He told me that he was completely sure, based on his feelings, about being Armenian. He was planning, nevertheless, to take a DNA test with the US-based Armenian DNA Project,<sup>55</sup> so that he gets a ‘tangible proof’ of his Armenianness and is able to substantiate his claims. A month later, he excitedly showed me the results, which stated that he belonged to the lineage of the Mirakyans, an Armenian clan of Dersim. ‘I am like those salmon that eventually return to their birthplace,’ he said, suggesting that I should not look for rational explanations and that his journey was completely natural and inescapable.

### *Racist manifestations*

The *irk*-based, genetic understanding of Armenianness among the Muslim/Alevi Armenians sometimes has racist manifestations as well. Selo from Dersim is convinced that the success of Mimar Sinan, the world-renowned Ottoman architect rumoured to have had Armenian

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.familytreedna.com/groups/armeniadnaproject/about/background>, accessed on February 4, 2019.

origins, was a matter of his genes more than of his education: ‘Because Armenians are creative.’ Pelin, a Hemshin Armenian woman spoke about ‘purity’ and ‘hybridity.’ The Hemshins, she insisted, were ‘genetically Armenian’ because they were endogamous. That was the reason why, according to her, the Hemshin looked phenotypically similar to the Istanbulite Armenians. A Muslim Armenian man from Batman claiming to ‘instantly recognise Armenians based on their physical appearance’ told me that I did not look Armenian at all. Moreover, one of my interlocutors from Muş decisively announced that he would not marry except a woman of Armenian lineage ‘in order not to corrupt the *ırk*’ (original in Turkish: ‘*ırkı bozmamak için*’). When I asked, confused, about what he meant, he calmly explained that the goodwill and honesty of Armenians was not to be found among other *ırks* in the region.

#### *The irrelevance of religion*

Unsurprisingly, this essentialist approach considers religion to be irrelevant when it comes to categorising Armenians. ‘Being a Muslim does not change our *ırk*,’ I was often told by my informants. One elderly Muslim Armenian man from Muş metaphorically explained their situation as follows: ‘We changed our milk, but not our blood,’ the milk symbolising nourishment, spiritual in this case, and blood referring to the *ırk*. It is this differentiation itself that cognitively allows such people to self-identify as Armenians. Kerim, for instance, has started thinking of himself as a Muslim Armenian rather than as a formerly-Armenian Muslim once he realised that *ırk* and nation are not conditioned by religion. ‘After learning that Turks had come to Anatolia as non-Muslims and became Islamised but did not cease to be Turks, I started to think that we should not have ceased to be Armenians after Islamisation either,’ he explained.

### *Challenging Lausanne-based boundaries*

All this, importantly, leads these Armenians to challenge and even seek to dismantle the state's Lausanne-based traditional categorisation of themselves and of Armenians in general. If the small number of 'reconverts' to Christianity, to be addressed later in this chapter, 'render even more visible the entanglements of religion and ethnicity in Turkey' (Özgül 2013: 629), those who claim Armenianness while remaining Muslim or Alevi begin to disentangle that pairing. 'I do not belong to any of the state's categories,' Gül, an Istanbulite Armenian woman who has only recently converted to Islam,<sup>56</sup> said straightforwardly, and added that rather than a religious *cemaat*, the state should officially accept Armenians as a race and accordingly endow them with minority rights without discriminating based on religious belonging.

Muslim/Alevi Armenians raise and even demand a solution to the problem of not being able to enrol their children in Istanbul's Armenian schools because of the official understanding of minorities and minority rights defined in the Treaty of Lausanne. As already described in Chapter 2, only Turkish citizens that are 'members of the minority' can attend a school belonging to a given minority (see also Palakoğlu 2015). However, Muslim or Alevi Armenians are legally not members of the Armenian minority, which has a religious designation.

Thus, the various structural changes in Turkey presented in Chapter 3 facilitated the public manifestation of the Muslim and Alevi Armenian identities, which in turn became a phenomenon challenging the state's Lausanne-based classifications and official definition of Armenians. It is perhaps ironic to realise that the further Islamisation of the previously secular majority identity had the unintended opposite effect on one of the minority identities by indirectly paving the way for its secularisation and ethnicisation. If not for the

<sup>56</sup> Such cases are extremely rare, and represent private and individual matters of belief, rather than collective political issues.

foregrounding and empowerment of Islam, at least some of the Muslim Armenians would probably not have come out as Armenians and presented a living alternative to the religious definition and delimitation of Armenian identity.

I shall now turn to the historical and sociocultural factors that have played an influential role in the production of that *öz*-based interpretation of Armenian identity among the Muslim and Alevi Armenians.

### ***Öz*-based Discrimination and the *Aşiret* Culture as Conditioning Factors**

A closer look at the Turkish state's and society's treatment of Armenians and Armenianness reveals its ambiguous nature. Despite the religious classification of Armenian identity and the discouragement of suprareligious interpretations and manifestations of it (Chapter 2), racist and essentialist discrimination against the country's Armenians has commonly characterised the practice of the state and other societal actors. This mostly manifests itself in the treatment of Muslim and Alevi Armenians who, despite letting go of 'official' Armenianness, were often not welcomed into the Turkish nation and its Muslim majority, and were still stigmatised and (mis)treated as Armenians by descent.

#### *The example of Seyfeddin/Asadur*

I first met Seyfeddin/Asadur in the courtyard of an Armenian church in Istanbul, where he had come to attend an event organised by the Compatriotic Union of Sasun Armenians. Anush, an Istanbulite Christian Armenian woman, introduced him to me as Asadur. A 71-year-old, thin, timid man, raised and classified as a Muslim, Asadur was a resident of Malatya, a city in eastern Turkey, and had come to Istanbul for only a few days. 'I'm Armenian,' he said in a low voice, took a paper out of his pocket, unfolded it, and showed me his hand-drawn family tree as a proof (see Figure 17 below). He gave me an appointment and promised to tell his story.

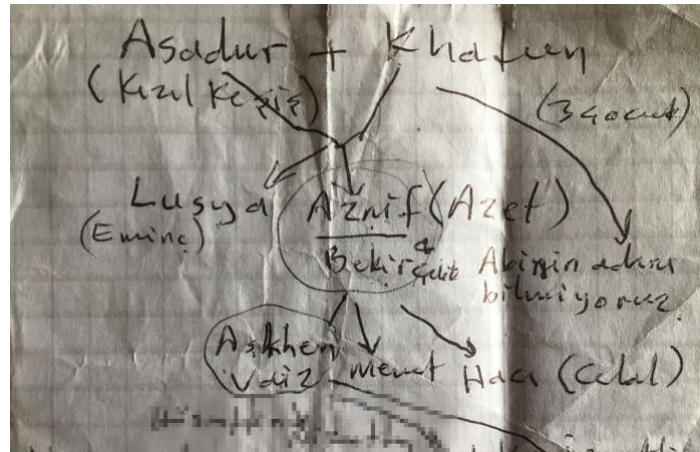


Figure 17. Asadur's family tree, drawn by himself. Photo by the author.

A week later, I journeyed for two hours to Maltepe, a district in the suburbs of Asian Istanbul, in order to interview him. He took me to a nearby working-class café/pub and we sat at a table. Minutes later, he changed his mind and took me to the second floor where the likelihood of being overheard was lower, he said. Seeing a security camera right above our table, he asked the waiter whether it could record any sound. Not fully trusting the waiter's negative response, he took me to yet another room where there were no cameras. Then he asked the waiter to turn some music on, to further decrease the 'risk' of being overheard, although there was literally no one around us. Despite these precautions, he spoke to me in an extremely low voice, to the extent of causing difficulties when it came to transcribing the interview. However, the one and only 'controversial' and 'dangerous' theme in his whole story was simply his being of Armenian descent and his recent work toward 'regaining Armenianness.' This cautiousness was not unique to Asadur and was shared by many of my Muslim or Alevi interlocutors, though to differing degrees. It has one main source: their experience of discrimination and harassment as *Ermenioğlu Ermenis*, *Ermeni dölüs*, or *Ermeni picis* (respectively meaning 'Armenian son of an Armenian,' 'Armenian spawn,' and 'Armenian bastard' in Turkish).

Asadur was born in 1945 as Seyfeddin, an Islamic name of Arabic origin meaning 'the sword of religion,' in the city of Malatya. He remembers having an Islamic lifestyle

during his childhood, and ‘growing up according to the Turkish-Islamic synthesis.’ He knew nothing about his family’s past until he was sixteen, when a friend made fun of him by calling him *dönük*, a Turkish adjective meaning ‘turned,’ often used as a label for converts. ‘I felt like I’d been shot in the heart,’ recalls Asadur, ‘and ran home to my mother asking for explanations.’ Succumbing to his insistence, the mother advised him to go to his uncle Mehmet, saying that ‘he might know the story.’ A few days later, the uncle called him after the Friday Islamic prayer, and asked him to ‘promise not to tell what you will hear now to anyone, and that for at least twenty-five years.’

After promising to abide by his uncle’s condition, Seyfeddin learned their familial history of Islamisation. His ancestors were Armenians. Some were Islamised in the nineteenth century under economic pressure, and others during the 1915 genocide as orphans bought by a Kurdish tribesman. Nevertheless, Seyfeddin continued to self-identify and live as a Turkish Muslim, until a much later stage in his life when he realised that his Armenian past and the related stigma was inescapable. In fact, he has experienced a whole series of *ırk*-based discriminatory acts since that first insult of *dönük* in high school. When he applied to the military school, he was rejected for no obvious reason at all and was told that he had ‘Armenianness in [his] genes’ (original in Turkish: ‘*genlerinde Ermenilik var*’). Still not giving up on his will to be welcomed into Turkishness, he studied Turkish Language and Literature in Ankara.

During his university years, however, he became acquainted with leftist political movements and eventually joined the Kurdish political movement. He still did not identify as an Armenian, but rather looked at the world ‘through the lens of humanism,’ he recalls. He was jailed for his political activities in the 1990s. In 2006, already 61 years old, he suffered a third discriminatory attack, which became a decisive turning point for him. A friend showed him a news piece on a Turkish nationalist media outlet, where his name

appeared in a blacklist of pro-Kurdish political activists. Unlike everyone else though, he was abscribed an epithet: *ermenî dölü* ('Armenian spawn' in Turkish), a derogatory term used for Muslims of Armenian descent. Faced with this act of public discriminatory labelling, Seyfeddin realised that his Armenian heritage was inescapable, and finally decided, under the pressure of life-long hateful categorisation, to internalise Armenian identity and call himself 'Asadur,' drawing on his great-grand father's Armenian name (see Figure 17 above).

Öz-based discrimination was thus a key factor convincing him that he could never fully become a Muslim Turkish Seyfeddin, and that what counts after all is his 'essence,' his *ırk*, his 'genes' and 'genealogy,' rather than his religion, political belonging and self-identification. He was the grandson of Asadur, whether he wanted it or not.

#### *Ancestry-based discrimination as a widespread social phenomenon*

Origin- or ancestry-based anti-Armenian discrimination and hate speech is not peculiar to Asadur's case. It is rather a generalised phenomenon in Turkey and has targeted almost all of my Muslim/Alevi Armenian acquaintances, similar to other *dönme* ('converted' in Turkish) communities of non-Muslim origins (Neyzi 2002). For several of them, that discrimination has even been the first hint about their Armenian past and an entry point to Armenianness.

Whenever she's angry at them, my Muslim Armenian friends Ahmet and Ibo's Kurdish mother 'insults' them by calling them 'Armenians.' Their father, Irfan, is labelled a *pis ermeni* ('dirty Armenian' in Turkish) every time he goes to ask a former friend to pay back his old debts. Fikri, a Muslim Armenian man living in the town of Kahta in Adıyaman, is so aware of his socially fragile condition that he prefers to take the initiative and let new friends know about his roots, so that they don't hear about it from others: 'I'm sorry but my

roots are Armenian.’ An interlocutor’s brother in Gaziantep had no other option but to close down his shop after the inhabitants of the neighbourhood learned that he was of Armenian origin and started boycotting his business. Even the Hemshins whose ancestors converted three centuries ago and who mostly do not identify as Armenians, are labelled as such by the Laz, their neighbouring ethnic group (Akyüz 2013: 195 and Hann 2007:339-340).

That anti-Armenian racism sometimes appears in even more primitive forms referring to bodily or moral characteristics believed to be hereditary. For instance, a particular expression used by the Laz against the Hemshins is *kalın kaburgalı Ermeni* (‘stubborn Armenian’ in Turkish). ‘Kanı bozuk’ is another expression in Turkish, commonly used against Muslims having Armenian ancestry, and it literally means ‘someone whose blood is corrupted.’

This ancestry-based anti-Armenian approach has in some places reached the extent of producing social hierarchies with practical implications. Hüseyin/Dikran, another Muslim Armenian friend who has self-assigned an Armenian name, has been told by the elderly in his family that Kurdish or Arab tribes of *Sasun* had adopted Armenian orphans during the genocide, including his own great-grandfather, in order to make servants out of them. Those children were treated as possessions and called ‘benim Ermenim,’ literally meaning ‘my Armenian’ in Turkish, or ‘my *filleh*,’ *filleh* being a derogatory term for Armenians in Kurmancî Kurdish.<sup>57</sup>

What’s worse, however, is that these titles and the related expectations and treatment have been transmitted to the descendants of the original servants. Hüseyin/Dikran has personally heard Kurdish or Arab people talking about ‘our Armenians,’ or ‘our *bavfilleh*s,’<sup>58</sup> the latter meaning ‘son of a *filleh*.’ ‘What about prophet Muhammad’s ban on

<sup>57</sup> The ‘i’ in *filleh* reads as the ‘e’ in ‘sister.’ The ‘h’ is silent.

<sup>58</sup> The ‘v’ in *bavfilleh* is silent.

slavery?’ retorts Hüseyin/Dikran referring to his Islamic education. ‘Even now Muslim Armenians have their *ağas* (‘masters’ in Turkish),’ he explains, adding that some issues cannot be solved in villages in the East without the blessing or permission of the latter. One cannot invite members of a tribe to one’s wedding, for example, if that tribe is in conflict with the *ağa* ‘whose Armenian’ one is.

Muslim Armenians, more so than the Alevi ones who live in relatively tolerant societies, are always reminded of their ancestors’ *gavurluk* (infidelity), are labeled *gavurs* (infidels) themselves, and are not trusted as true Muslims no matter how sincere in their faith they are.

Hüseyin/Dikran’s grandfather recalls that the first mosque in the whole region of Batman was built by their own family, converted to Islam in the 1920s. The local *mufti* had advised them to build a mosque in order to further prove their allegiance to Islam and thus escape the discrimination and pressure that still persisted after their official conversion. After its construction, the local Arabs and Kurds had initially started to attend the new mosque. However, they soon learned about the identity of the builders and stopped going there, stating that they would not bow in prayer ‘behind the *fillets*’ (see also Ziflioğlu 2011:103). The name *Gavur Camisi*, meaning ‘the mosque of the infidels (i.e. non-Muslims)’ in Turkish, was then coined for the mosque.

I have also heard about other *Gavur Camisis* in other Anatolian towns, such as Kahta and Varto. But the term *gavur* is also used to label individuals with Armenian origins. ‘Gavur Hasan,’ ‘gavur Ahmet,’ ‘Gavur Mehmet,’ are a few examples of Muslim Armenians having clearly Islamic names but singled-out by the label ‘gavur.’ ‘Sünnetsiz’ is yet another insult commonly used against people having Armenian origins, and meaning ‘uncircumcised,’ a fact that questions one’s Muslimness. I have even been told about the story of a Muslim Armenian man’s grave being desecrated in a Muslim cemetery of

Adıyaman because locals could not accept the fact that ‘a gavur is lying next to our ancestors.’ *Gavurluk* is thus applied even posthumously. It’s important to note that the word *dönme* (convert) is used also for descendants of converts, thus making conversion, religion and the associated discrimination essentialist and hereditary as well.

*Ancestry-based discrimination on the part of the state*

As seen in the introduction to this thesis, the label of the ‘secretly Armenian’ is often ascribed by Turkish media to political figures with the aim of vilifying and discrediting them. However, conspiracies about the ‘Armenian origins’ of political rivals find their way into the discourse of state representatives as well. For instance, an MP from the ruling AKP party also made declarations about the Armenian ancestry of Fethullah Gülen, the self-exiled Turkish cleric accused of orchestrating the 2016 coup attempt (*Yeni Akit* 2016a). Around a decade earlier, former president Abdullah Gül had sued another politician for having ‘insulted’ him by ascribing him Armenian ancestry, and the latter received an 11-month prison sentence for that ‘libel’ (*The Armenian Weekly* 2010). In the 1980s, state authorities tried to portray the newly emerging Kurdish militant PKK and its leader Abdullah Öcalan as Armenians, and an academic was even commissioned to study Öcalan’s family tree with the hope of finding Armenian ancestry that could discredit him and the Kurdish movement (Oran 2006: 129).

Moreover, the state-endorsed essentialist discrimination against people with Armenian lineage is official and institutionalised. ‘The state knows it,’ has been often said to me by many interlocutors, arguing that the state has information about people of Armenian descent. Apart from Asadur, at least two other research participants told me that their applications to the Turkish army had been rejected only because of their Armenian ancestry. Similar cases have been noted by other researchers in the field. One applicant, in

particular, was able to see a document from the Ministry of Interior Affairs explaining his rejection as follows: ‘The applicant is a converted Muslim Armenian’ (Özgül 2013: 177).

That institutionalised anti-Armenian racism appears during contact with the police and judiciary as well. Several Muslim Armenians from Hamshen told me how they or their relatives have been labelled ‘Armenian’ when arrested by the police for participating in protests that had nothing to do with Armenian issues (see also Kaya 2016:33). Berivan, an Alevi Armenian woman from Dersim/Tunceli was threateningly told, ‘We know you’re Armenians’ by a policeman who had come for inspections during the 1980 military coup. On the very same occasion, Muzi, a Muslim Armenian in Malatya, was arrested for being a leftist militant. During his trial, he was advised not to resist, or otherwise the court would also touch upon his Armenian identity. Hadi Gümüş from Diyarbakır has also told *Al Jazeera Turk* (2014) that he learned about his Armenian past only when he was taken into custody as a ‘separatist’ after the 1980 coup. He was told by interrogators ‘not to think that we don’t know about you,’ and ordered to undress in order to be checked for circumcision. Last but not least, even reports about Ankara authorities ordering gendarme officers to uncover ‘Armenian separatists’ in the south-east have been leaked to WikiLeaks, suggesting that state officials are not only aware of the Armenian ancestry of many citizens in those regions, but that they actually perceive and treat them *as Armenians* dangerous to ‘national security’ (Cheterian 2015: 213).

The aforementioned cases suggest that the Turkish state has some concrete information about the descendants of the Islamised Armenians. The controversial remarks made in August 2007 by the former head of the Turkish Historical Institution, Yusuf Halaçoğlu, have been significant and revelatory in that regard. He claimed that the Turkish state had enumerated the converted Armenians after the genocide household-by-household and made

a list (Onaran 2014). During the subsequent years, historians found material proving the veracity of Halaçoğlu's claims.

The practice of monitoring Armenian converts had started at least in the late Ottoman period, during the genocide that led to most of those forced conversions. As Turkish historian Taner Akçam writes, Armenian converts were subjected to close surveillance and were not allowed to travel. In order to be able to control their movement, the central authorities had asked local governors to mark those people's identity papers such that they become identifiable as Armenian converts (Akçam 2014b :142-144).

This practice of tracing down Muslims with Armenian ancestry continued in the Republican period. Turkish researcher Nevzat Onaran (2014) found important documents from within the Turkish Prime Ministry State Archives, dating from the late 1920s and the 1930s, which reveal the occurrence of 'secret population censuses' counting citizens who were 'not of the Turkish *ırk*' and had converted to Islam in the immediate aftermath of 1915. One of the published documents clearly states that it 'consists of a list of the converts' (*Mühtedilere mahsus listedir*'), and contains both their new (Muslim) and old (Armenian) names such as Agop, Haykanuş, Artin, and so on (see Figure 18 below).

DEVLET ARŞİVLERİ GENEL MÜDÜRLÜĞÜ  
CUMHURİYET ARŞİVİ  
Ordu Vilayeti muntahasında bulunan  
mühtedilere mahsus listedir. (Mülhakata dahil)

S.NO.	Fig. NO.	Adı soy adı	Eski adı	Saba adı	Doğumu
1	4		Ohanes	Karabet	323
2	10		Agop	Boğus	290
3	53			Kalasa	324
4	79			Artin	327
5	96		Hanan	Kavarak	325
6	02			Kifork	
7	68		Ermez	Haymad	325
8	33		Ohanes	Ohannes	319
9	26			Abdullah	318
10	27		Haykanuş	Faik	931
11	04		Koyata	Fusa	321
12	70		Istipan	Akup	312
13	74		Artin	Agup	
14	9		Artin	Haçık	323
15	8		Süren	Avak	312
16	80		Sinorik	Ohannis	332
17	43		Sekaen	Haçık	325
18	51		Artin	Aliran	314
19	95		Yabık	Karabet	
20	97		Ortan	Artin	327
21	66		Banfa	Bartina	310
22	15		Karabet	Artin	300
23	24		Kazakos	Apkar	323
24	89			Yanık	

Figure 18. Photo of official archival document showing a list of Armenian converts (source: Onaran 2014). Redacted for confidentiality in original.

### *Racism in the Republic of Turkey*

All of the above betray a significant presence of lineage-based racist thinking in Turkey's state ideology and society, a brief overview of which is necessary in order to set the context. In fact, as Xypolia argues, contemporary ancestry-based discrimination and xenophobia in Turkey can only be understood in light of the racist elements in Kemalism, the foundational ideology of the Republic of Turkey (2016: 121).

Although Kemalism officially recognised the principles of citizenship and universal rights, its nation-building process was founded on racist approaches to Turkishness (Gökay and Hamourtziadou 2016). A state-endorsed 'scientific' project aimed at proving that Turkish and European 'white' races were identical and the Turks were in fact the true ancestors of the Aryan race (Gökay and Aybak 2016: 108-109). In the 1930s, the Turkish Historical Society was established, two Turkish Historical Congresses were organised, and even physical anthropological research was conducted. As a result, the Turkish History Thesis placing the 'Turkish race' of Central Asia at the root of human civilisation was put forth and 'Turkish blood' was recognised as pure and supreme (Xypolia 2016: 116, 119; Gökay and Hamourtziadou 2016: 179).

This approach was soon adopted by the state apparatus and became part of the official discourse (Onaran 2014). 'Race' was used as an evaluative criterion for Turkish citizens since the 1930s, and even the term 'Turkish blood' was used in state documents. The ideology of racial Turkishness was spread through conferences, publications and national education (Xypolia 2016: 116-120). In the following decades and up until contemporary times, the Republic's various minorities, be they non-Muslims or non-Turkic Muslims, have been treated as inferior 'races' (Gökay and Hamourtziadou 2016: 180). The 'Turkish history' taught at primary and secondary schools still starts with the Huns of Central Asia as the ancestors of the Turkish nation. Populist nationalist politicians still speak

about the ‘pure Turk’ and incite racist hostility against Armenians, Jews, Kurds, and recently Syrian Arab refugees (ibid. 181).

Clearly, thus, racism and *ırk*-based discrimination have always been and still are part of Turkish nationalist ideology and discourse, which has naturally had its influence on citizens’ worldviews and systems of thought, including the Muslim and Alevi Armenians. These Armenians thus live in and are themselves part of ‘racialized societies’ (Bonilla-Silva 1997: 469), where *ırk* might understandably often be the ‘master status’ in interpersonal relations (Hughes 1945; Becker 1963: 31-39). They are, moreover, constantly otherised on the basis of their *ırk*, as the previous sections revealed. It is thus not surprising that they perceive Armenianness as a hereditary, *ırk*-based, *öz*-based identity.

The reader might fairly ask here about the influence of this ideology on the Christian Armenians who share the same context to some extent. My observations suggest that they are usually quite immune to it, and, as discussed in Chapter 2, have a primarily religious conception of Armenianness, rather than an *ırk*-based one. That is probably so because their religious categorisation, unlike the *ırk*-based one, is official, even legal. They have indeed been religiously discriminated often on ‘legal’ grounds. Whereas Turkish ethnonationalism has no other ground but *ırk* and ancestry for excluding the Muslim Armenians, it has the officially ascribed religious boundary to apply against the Christian Armenians. For instance, the Christian Armenians were, as members of a ‘non-Muslim minority,’ formally treated as ‘non-Turks’ and as such banned from careers in civil bureaucracy and the military during the early Republican years. Although the ban was eventually lifted, the practice survived (see Chapter 2). As a result, Christian Armenians usually do not even bother to apply. But Muslim or Alevi—i.e. *unofficial*—Armenians do apply, especially since some of them do not know about their Armenian ancestry. And in the absence of any formal restrictions, they face the *ırk*-based discrimination and boundary, which in turn shapes their

identities and conceptions of Armenianness accordingly. In other words, the Christian Armenians are usually less prone to *ırk*-based discrimination compared to the Muslim and Alevi ones. They are first and foremost otherised as religious minorities.

#### *The aşiret culture as an additional factor*

Furthermore, a complementary factor feeding the *öz*-based approach to Armenianness among Muslim and Alevi Armenians is the cultural and social relevance of *aşirets*, that is ‘tribes’ in Turkish, in eastern and southeastern Anatolia where a considerable proportion of these Armenians live. The *aşiret* is an important type of social organisation, and, importantly, is believed to be based on common lineage (Van Bruinessen 2000:11). Even if relatively weakened after the politicisation of Kurdish identity (Erdem 2006), tribal identities, social structures, boundaries, values and relations still remain noticeable in the region (Algan 2009; Harris 1997; Tekdemir 2018). As Van Bruinessen argues, Kurdish *aşiretçilik* (‘tribalism’ in Turkish) has even survived internal migration to urban centres (2000: 10). Even the Directorate of Culture and Tourism of the Kurdish-populated South Eastern Hakkari Province states, on its website,<sup>59</sup> that the Hakkari people’s ‘feeling of belonging towards their *aşirets*... is still very strong.’

Many Muslim Armenian interlocutors have told me about having previously lived as *aşirets* in Eastern Anatolia. Some Muslim Armenian families still practise the *aşiret* culture and are perceived and treated as *aşirets* by others, even if their numbers have decreased due to migration. For instance, Kamil explained that their larger family is still recognised as *mala B.*, meaning ‘the *aşiret* of the B.s’ in Kurmancî Kurdish. He explicitly uses the term *aşiret* when referring to their larger family. My couple of visits to the members of *mala B.* were sufficient to notice the survival of some *aşiret* norms and customs in their

<sup>59</sup> Website available at: <https://hakkari.ktb.gov.tr/TR-159353/asiret--ve-asiretcilik.html>, last accessed: 5 October 2019.

lifestyle. They live in a small south-eastern village, which is exclusive to them. Several generations, brothers and their families cohabit. They practise partial endogamy, cultivate their collective land together and share the profit between themselves. During conversations, almost all of my interlocutors from the *mala B.* proudly remembered and traced their origin to B. Ağa, the great-grandfather their *aşiret* originates from.

The extended family of Hüseyin/Dikran is another such example of a Muslim Armenian '*aşiret.*' Originally from a village near Muş, they have now partly moved to Istanbul and all live close to each other mainly in the Zeytinburnu working-class neighbourhood. They estimate their number to be above a thousand. Again, it did not take me long to realise how important their extended patrilineal family, referred to as an *aşiret*, was for them. Hüseyin/Dikran's tea house was almost exclusively attended by male members of the *aşiret*. The first time I paid a visit, there were about twenty people from different generations. Hüseyin/Dikran introduced me as a friend researching Armenians in Turkey and interested in their history. Soon, the men became engaged in a proud and enthusiastic effort to introduce their lineage to me. A piece of paper was produced and one of Hüseyin/Dikran's cousins started to draw the *aşiret*'s family tree. Every now and then another cousin would jump in and remind them of yet another brother or son who was being forgotten. They would praise those who have had many sons, and wish further sons to the youngsters. Daughters and women, in general, were absent from the genealogy and discussion.

A cousin asked whether I could count my ancestors at least seven generations back. I was able to go until six, until my great-grandfather's grandfather, which truly disappointed them. They started to draw my own lineage tree, asking me for names. 'It's sad,' said one of them, 'you've become so small... you should work better to enlarge the lineage, like us, the Anatolian Armenians.' And those were not empty words. The value they ascribed to

their *aşiret* was so great that they had searched for a branch of it that migrated to Armenia after the genocide. They had actually found their fourth and fifth cousins in Yerevan and the city of Talin and even exchanged visits with them, one of which I personally witnessed in August 2017. Furthermore, on learning that I am from Lebanon, they sought my help in finding another branch of their lineage, the Simikyans, who had migrated to Lebanon during the genocide.

Whereas I could not help Hüseyin/Dikran's family in their search, thanks to a remarkable coincidence I was delighted to be able to satisfy the similar request of yet another Muslim Armenian family whom I visited in the south-eastern town of Kahta near Adıyaman. They told me about a branch of their family that had migrated to Beirut, and showed me the last letter they had received from them in 1963 (see Figure 19 below). The letter, to my surprise, was signed by someone with the same name as the father of one of my childhood friends in Beirut who used to tell me that his grandfather had uncles who had remained in Adıyaman and become Muslim. My hosts also showed me a photo of family members sent from Beirut (see Figure 20 below), which I photographed and immediately sent to my friend in Beirut. Surprised, the latter asked where I had found the photo from and said that they had its exact copy at home. The two sides were distant cousins. The Kahta branch was far more excited than the Lebanese one. The father of the family kissed me on the forehead, saying that I had finally made their dream come true. In fact, their son had even travelled to Beirut a few years ago, gone to the Armenian-populated neighbourhood and looked for the lost members of the lineage, though with no success. As in the case of the *mala B.* and the *aşiret* of Hüseyin/Dikran, this Muslim Armenian family, although not identifying as an *aşiret*, still immensely valued its lineage and extended family.

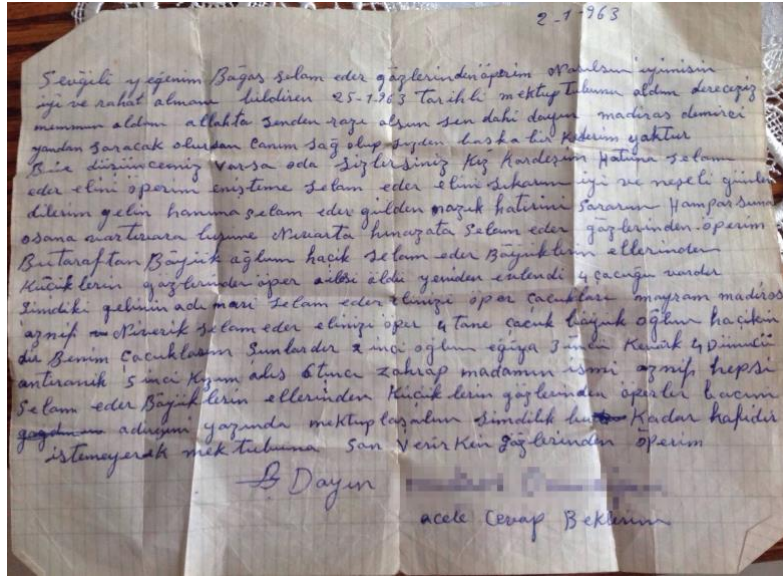


Figure 19. A letter, in Turkish, sent from Beirut to relatives in Adyaman. Found and photographed by author in Kahta.



Figure 20. Photos of relatives sent from Beirut to Adyaman. Found and photographed by author in Kahta.

These Muslim Armenians thus share the *aşiret* culture and worldview of the regions they live in or come from. As a result, lineage and ancestry are extremely important for them, which further explains why their approach to identity and belonging in general would

be centred on these notions. This culture is mostly absent among Christian Armenians of Istanbul, except only a few families who have migrated from eastern Anatolia very recently.

Last but not least, the fact that outsiders approach them through the same prism of *aşiret* identities constantly reminds the Muslim/Alevi Armenians of their Armenian past and the inescapability of it. As the *aşiret* culture is dominant in those eastern Anatolian regions and among recent migrants from these regions in Istanbul, asking someone about his *aşiret* belonging is very common. And when Muslim or Alevi Armenians answer to that question, most of the time the interlocutor will know that the *aşiret* in question is ‘of Armenian lineage.’ Ferid, a 25-year-old Muslim Armenian living in Muş, told me during his visit to Istanbul that he previously did not identify as an Armenian, and still does not ‘feel Armenian’ because he neither knows the language, nor the history or culture. Whenever asked, he used to say that he is an Arab, since his family was Arabic-speaking and lived in an Arab-populated area. However, the second question would often be about the *aşiret* he belonged to, and that would eventually reveal that ‘in reality I am not an Arab, but an Armenian.’ After a few such embarrassing experiences, Ferid has decided to answer straightforwardly that he is an Armenian. Consequently, what else could Armenianness mean for Ferid and others like him if not lineage and ancestry, based on which it is externally ascribed to them by others?

Several factors have thus contributed to the emergence of a mainly essentialist, *ırk-* and *öz-*based interpretation of Armenianness among the Muslim and Alevi Armenians: The culture of racial/racist thinking in Turkey, persistent *ırk-*based categorisation and discrimination against them on the part of the state and larger society, and the *aşiret* culture and the related almost obsessive interest in lineage and ancestry.

## **‘Returning to the Essence’: Identification beyond or against interest**

Having discussed and analysed the Muslim and Alevi Armenians’ conception of Armenian identity and the structural and sociocultural reasons behind, I now turn to the experience and processes of, and motivating factors behind their Armenian identification at the first place. If Christian Armenians’ Armenianness is practised within the ‘community system,’ by attending the churches, the schools and other organisations, how do the Muslim and Alevi Armenians enact and practise their Armenianness? Perhaps more importantly, what triggers and motivates them to actively engage with Armenianness and ‘become Armenian’ when they could simply go on with their lives (for the most part) as members of the Muslim majority?

### *‘Regaining’ and practising Armenianness*

Learning about their Armenian ancestry, some descendants of Islamised/Alevised Armenians have eventually made the decision to ‘become Armenian again,’ or *özüme dönmek* (‘to return to my essence’ in Turkish) as many of them said. In other words, they have started to self-identify as Armenians, present themselves to others as such and, in many cases, actively engage in activities related to Armenianness.

Several of my acquaintances, for instance, have decided to substitute their Turkish/Islamic names with Armenian ones, either officially by applying to courts, or using their self-ascribed new names informally and situationally. Others are in the process of learning the Armenian language. A few such courses were organised during the last few years, mainly in Istanbul but also in eastern cities such as Diyarbakır, Muş, and Dersim/Tunceli. I alone had six Alevi Armenian and four Muslim Armenian students in my courses that lasted for around a year. Asadur, living in Malatya, could not follow a course but had acquired a book and learned a few words and sentences at the age of 70.

Some even try to symbolically re-Armenise their familial past by writing the original Armenian names of their parents or grandparents on their graves. Others aim to transmit their Armenianness into the future generations of their lineage. A few young Muslim and Alevi Armenian friends stated that they would like to marry an Armenian so that their children ‘live as full-fledged Armenians and not like us.’ One friend even asked me to help him find an Armenian bride.

Some who are not pious Muslims or Alevis are even ready to baptise their children in order for them to meet the criteria for attending Armenian schools. I have encountered such cases even in Adıyaman where a few brothers have converted to Christianity and now send their children to Armenian boarding schools in Istanbul. Yusuf, who never had the chance to learn Armenian because he grew up in Aintap is now proud and happy that his daughter Asmin attends an Armenian school: ‘I find it sacred when the Armenian language is spoken at home.’ At the end of the interview, he asked his seven-year-old daughter to recite the Lord’s Prayer in Armenian and contemplated her with a smile, although he could not understand a word.

Whereas a few of these new converts professed to having converted in true faith and guided by religious motivations, most have stated that the true incentive behind the conversion was the will to ‘regain Armenianness.’ Getting baptised, they thought, was the only way to get full access to the Armenian community of Istanbul, become acknowledged as Armenians by everyone, including the state, and thus be able to ‘fully live as an Armenian.’ One particular convert had told journalists that she would ‘feel more Armenian’ after the conversion (*Haber Vaktim* 2016).<sup>60</sup>

<sup>60</sup> For a detailed study on the subjective, legal and political implications of conversions of Muslim and Alevi Armenians to Armenian Christianity see Özgül (2013 and 2014).

Socialising with ‘mainstream Armenians’ is yet another strategy serving the aim of ‘returning to the essence.’ The most immediate environment for doing that is the Istanbulite Christian Armenian community. But going to Armenia has also been an important experience for many who aimed to not only see the country and experience its culture, but also get to know ‘how and who the Armenians are.’ Most of those visiting Armenia said that their visit resulted in quite strong emotional ties with the country and they were determined to return there again. ‘My soul belongs to Armenia,’ wrote one of my students in broken Armenian after his first visit (see Figure 21 below). Ergün, another of my students, not only paid a visit to Armenia, but also travelled to Lebanon during an Easter holiday with the particular motivation of seeing the Lebanese Armenians: ‘I wanted to see how the Diaspora Armenians are. I chose Lebanon this time, but I’ll go and see the Iranian Armenians as well.’

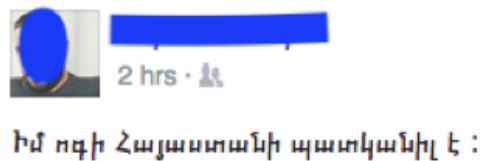


Figure 21. Screenshot of an Alevi Armenian's Facebook status after his visit to Armenia: 'My soul belongs to Armenia.'

Still others not only interact with Armenians and Armenian culture, but also try to have a social impact by taking their personal and familial stories to the larger society. Sevag, originally Serdar, was studying history and planning to write a thesis on the Islamised Armenians of Batman, or *Sasun*, as he prefers to call it by the historical Armenian name: ‘I want people to hear about what we went through.’ Berivan was studying sociology at Arel University in Istanbul and was composing her MA dissertation about the collective memory of the Muslim Armenian women in her family. Huriye Şahin, a Hemshin Armenian author, researches and publishes about the state-imposed assimilation of the Hemshin Armenians and the loss of their language (2014).

Finally, some Muslim and Alevi Armenians even engage in pro-Armenian activism. I have seen several of them at protest marches on 19 January, the day of Dink's assassination, and on 24 April, the commemoration day of the genocide. Erhan's social media activity through his *Muslim Armenians* page is also a form of activism as he aims at 'encouraging others like me to stop denying their origins and come out as Armenians.' As for M. P., one of the first Alevi Armenians who was baptised and established the Association of Dersim Armenians in the late 2000s, he does not conceal his intention of 'saving the Dersim Armenians, finding them, encouraging them to identify as Armenians.' Erhan and M. P., thus, take the work of Armenisation beyond their personal selves.

Thus, Muslim and Alevi Armenians proactively engage in a process of cultural and social Armenisation, 'trying to replenish our emptied pool of Armenian identity,' as one of them put it. Deprived of the necessary knowledge about Armenianness, and lacking an Armenian social environment and accessible Armenian institutions at hand, they have to take the often costly initiative and actively practise Armenianness.

*Reasons and Motivations: quests for belonging, recognition and justice*

But what exactly triggers these people's daring Armenisation? Why has Seyfeddin become Asadur? Why does Erhan actively advocate Armenianness through his Facebook page? Why have my students decided to learn the language, and why have many visited Armenia? Why does it matter for them, after all, that their ancestors were Armenians?

As I will further detail in Chapter 6, some Christian-Armenians of Istanbul judge the Muslim/Alevi Armenians as insincere and motivated by pure interest and profit: becoming Christian, asking for financial help from the community, getting access to the Armenian schools and other institutions, applying for asylum in Europe as members of a persecuted community, and so on. Although I have personally not met anyone of whom I had such an

impression, I cannot rule out the possibility of the existence of such particular cases. I have met only two people who used or tried to use their Armenian identification as a social capital for securing a job, but I find it superficial and unethical to suspect that the main motivation behind their embracement of Armenian identity was the vague potential of financial profit.

On the contrary, for most of my Muslim and Alevi interlocutors coming out as Armenian has been quite difficult and brought with it social, psychological, or financial losses, rather than profits. How could, in fact, declaring Armenianness be easy in a society where anti-Armenianness is widespread? The Muslim and Alevi Armenians are, needless to say, completely aware of these difficulties. In fact, almost all of them show signs of fear or cautiousness associated with their Armenian identity.

Asadur's extreme anxiety that appeared during our meeting in the café at Maltepe might be a bit extreme, but it is not at all exceptional. Several of my interviewees would clearly lower their voice whenever pronouncing the word *Ermeni* (Armenian). Two of them have asked me not to record their voice 'because you never know when the state would decide to come after us.' During the genealogical discussions with Hüseyin/Dikran's family in his tea house, he asked me to put my phone away because some cousins had become uncomfortable, thinking that I might be secretly recording their conversations. Yet another research participant's father had warned her about me, thinking that I might be sent on behalf of the state in order to 'check whether we have forgotten the history of the genocide or not.'

Collective memories of the genocide and forced Islamisation are important sources of those fears. Admitting to having grown up with a 'trembling personality' (original in Turkish: '*titrek kişilik*'), Asadur gave detailed descriptions about his ancestors' suffering during both the Hamidian massacres of 1894-1896 and the Genocide of 1915. His brother-in-law, he explained, was abducted at the age of seven, beaten, forced to memorise the Koran and become a Muslim preacher. Similarly, Irfan of Batman remembered how his parents,

Genocide survivors, would stay awake for hours at night, recall the massacres and silently weep.

Secrecy and denial are inherited as well. Many of my Muslim/Alevi interlocutors were told about their family's past only after reaching adulthood. They were cautioned not to disclose their Armenian ancestry just like Asadur was by his uncle. Yusuf of Kahta recalled: 'My grandfather used to tell us that everyone and everything, including the soil and stones, are our enemies. This had produced an unconscious tendency of secrecy among us.' Even in more recent times, the father of Ercan, a Muslim Armenian university student in Istanbul, used to warn him in a similar vein: 'If you want a future in this country, tell no one that you're an Armenian... even your closest friends should not know about it.' The disidentification with their Armenian past of many descendants of Islamised Armenians is probably partly conditioned by these fears and the urge to secrecy and denial.

Moreover, when these people decide to break the taboos and openly self-identify as Armenians, for reasons that shall soon be discussed, they often immediately face negative consequences. When Ayşe started to express her Armenian identity more openly, giving interviews about it to local media outlets, her employers warned her, arguing that she was putting their organisation at risk by portraying a 'bad image' of them with her Armenian public identity and discourse. Similarly, a woman who had converted to Armenian Apostolic Christianity had soon witnessed her shop being boycotted by Muslims of the neighbourhood, I was told by a priest. Ertürk, an Alevi Armenian pop singer, received messages from some of his fans who wrote about their 'disappointment' after he had shared Armenian-related material through his social media account.

Peer and family pressure are other serious negative consequences. Although as we have seen the Kurdish mother of Ibo and Ahmet labels them 'Armenian' whenever she's angry with them, she gets seriously upset when they self-identify as such. Every time her

daughter asks her Armenian father about Armenianness and their familial past, the mother gets irritated, interrupts the conversation and blames the father for corrupting the children. The children explain to her ‘that religion and *irk* are separate things and we might be Armenian but that does not make us less Muslim.’ However, the pious mother fears that her children would eventually also become Christian.

Other cases have had even more unpleasant consequences. Meral, for instance, told me about losing her friends at school after she dared to declare that she was an Armenian. Alevi Armenian Gül’s co-villagers had started to treat her parents badly after she appeared in a documentary film and spoke about the suffering they had endured as Armenians. Serdar/Sevag, a Muslim Armenian from a village near Batman, had to pay an even higher price. He learned about his family’s Armenian past after finding letters in an unintelligible language at home. On hearing that they were sent, years ago, from distant relatives in contemporary Armenia, he decided to pay a visit to them. His first journey to Armenia had a serious impact on him, prompting him to travel again for a longer period and learn Armenian there. During his year-long stay in Armenia, he not only learned Armenian, got closer to his relatives, and researched Armenian history and culture, but also gradually started to identify as an Armenian. That is when he chose the name Sevag, an Armenian name, for himself.

Upon his return to the village, however, he was to discover that his Armenisation was to have serious social and emotional consequences:

In an interview published online, I had spoken about our family’s Islamisation by force. Members of the Kurdish *aşiret* of our village, whose ancestors were the ones who had exerted those pressures on ours—and to whom we were forced to give two of our women in order not to be expelled from the village!—had somehow read the interview and were unhappy that I had mentioned that fact. ‘You’ve said that we Islamised you by force,’ they complained. ‘Go and ask your grandparents,’ I retorted. But it was already too late: the villagers’ conduct towards our family had changed, which in turn had a direct impact on how some family members started treating me. Some cousins, uncles and aunts cut all ties with me; ‘How could you do that to us?’ they thought. But it’s my older sister’s reaction that breaks my heart the most. ‘Why did you go to Armenia? How could you do that? People are speaking so badly about you now that I am really ashamed,’ she told. ‘Are you ashamed of

me?’ I asked her three times. ‘Yes,’ she answered every time. ‘Then forget about me,’ I said, and that’s how we cut ties months ago... [His eyes teared up and he asked me to interrupt the interview.]

By choosing the path of Armenian identification and social/cultural Armenisation despite the often-predictable difficulties, these Muslim and Alevi Armenians present a challenge to theories of political ethnicity, instrumentalism and interest-based boundary making.

It may absolutely be the case that Cohen’s Hausa traders of Ibadan (1969), Stoller’s French-speaking West African traders (2002), or MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga’s Congolese traders (2000) had used, reinforced or even cultivated ethnic ties primarily for instrumental reasons. Resource competition might have played a crucial role in the emergence of the category of ‘Asians’ in London (Wallman 1978), and ‘preserving privileges’ might have been a motivating factor for the maintenance of boundaries between natives and immigrants in different countries of the world (Alba 2005). The need and search for social capital could have truly been the push factor behind these peoples’ ethnic/religious identifications and related boundary making.

But the cases of the Muslim and Alevi Armenians of Turkey clearly differ from those and cannot be explained by purely political and instrumentalist approaches to identity and group formation. Theoretical generalisations such as ‘an actor will prefer that level of ethnic differentiation that is perceived to further her interests, given her endowment with economic, political, and symbolic resources’ (Wimmer 2008a:993; 2013:93) or ‘men stick together [...] only because of mutual interests’ (Cohen 1969: 200) simply do not hold true when it comes to Serdar/Sevag, Seyfeddin/Asadur, Hüseyin/Dikran, Erhan and many others, whose motivations transcend calculations of material profit.

What then, if not interest-based strategising? First of all, these people's Armenian identification consists of a quest for belonging and recognition. According to Charles Taylor (1994: 25),

[...] our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.

Taylor's claim about the social recognition of identity being a vital human need (ibid.: 26) proves itself true, once again, in the case of Muslim and Alevi Armenians. For many of them, in fact, the need for recognition and fully acknowledged belonging to a certain social category is an important, emotional rather than instrumental, factor prompting them to publicly identify as Armenians despite the risks of further discrimination and pressures.

Serhat, the originator of the salmon metaphor discussed above, explains his Armenisation attempts in psychological terms: 'Because I was suffering from an identity crisis. I used to feel incomplete.' The impression of being 'imprison[ed] [...] in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being' (ibid: 25) is clearly visible among other Muslim or Alevi interlocutors as well. 'Belonging to nothing is increasingly bothering me,' a man from Kayseri wrote to me in an anonymous email. 'Turks think I am a Circassian, while Circassians do not accept me as one of their own... What can one do when no single *ırk* treats him as a member? He either returns to his origins—like a bird that has lost its flock—or remains permanently in-between and becomes miserable like us.' Ertürk explained that he simply 'did not succeed at being an Alevi' because he permanently felt himself to be acting a role and being in a *boşluk*, i.e. 'emptiness' in Turkish. 'You tell them you're an Alevi. But they ask about your family's *pir*,<sup>61</sup> and you don't have one! They ask whether you follow the rituals, but you don't! We have pictures of the Prophet Ali at home but that's

<sup>61</sup> *Pirs* are founders/leaders of religious orders among the Alevis.

also a mere formality.’ Holding his phone with the tip of his fingers Ertürk started swinging it in the air: ‘You’re in a *boşluk*, they’ve hung you in the air and you’re swinging like this, but going nowhere.’

Many Muslim and Alevi Armenians’ liminal condition and the resulting ‘structural invisibility’ (Turner 1967: 98) is thus a subjective-psychological factor prompting them to ‘long for hard lines and clear concepts’ (Douglas 1966: 163) and self-identify as Armenians. In other words, it is a matter of choosing stigmatised but solid belonging over mis-categorisation and misrecognition that are not, as seen above, really exempt from discrimination anyway. The Muslim and Alevi Armenians’ daring Armenisation validates Lamont’s argument that, apart from profit, ‘the quest for recognition’ can also be ‘a motivation for human action,’ and group formation and identification can be dependent on ‘quest[s] for... dignity, especially in the face of racialization and stigmatization’ (2014: 816).

Second, Armenian identification for many of my Muslim and Alevi Armenian interlocutors consists of a moral-political project resisting discrimination and assimilation. Aslihan learned about her Armenian ancestry only in her late teenage years. After a certain period of confusion and anxiety, she gradually started to immerse herself in Armenian history, culture, and eventually identity, which now she claims as her own. Asked about the most important reasons leading her to the internalisation of that identity, she answered:

They killed my ancestors, they stole an identity from them and me. The Der Garabedian name disappeared, and not in a natural way. That’s why I feel I have to change my family name back to it. There is injustice involved, you see? Otherwise my Armenian past would not really matter to me. If there were no genocide, no forceful assimilation, I would probably be indifferent because I don’t really care about nationalities.

Asadur’s Armenisation at a very late stage in his life has also been a direct reaction to ongoing discrimination that reached its peak with the newspaper labeling him ‘Armenian spawn.’ According to his own interpretation, it was the state itself that had pushed him

towards Armenianness. The never-ending chain of *öz*-based discrimination against him reached a point where claiming Armenian identity became a matter of pride and morality for him. Similarly, Irem, a Hemshin Armenian woman in her early thirties, recalls that the moment when she first ‘felt Armenian’ was when a coworker, unaware of the Hemshins’ historical links with Armenians, said that ‘the best Armenian is a dead Armenian.’

Furthermore, in addition to being a reaction to discriminatory categorisation and othering, Armenian identification and the initiation of the process of socially and culturally ‘returning to the *öz*’ is also a conscious choice aiming at resisting the politics of assimilation which they think have alienated them from their *öz* and dropped them in the *boşluk* or void described above. That is the reason why Seyfeddin changed his name to Asadur, which was his grandfather’s name before forced Islamisation. That is why Hüseyin wants me to call him Dikran, since that was the pre-Islamisation name of his great-uncle Hüseyin after whom he was named. That is why Sevag decided to spend a year in Armenia, learn the language, and is now determined to marry an Armenian in order to ‘re-Armenise’ the lineage which was ‘Kurdified by force’: ‘I am trying to emancipate myself from that culture that is not ours but was forced on us, and replace it with the Armenian one with which I should have been living now were it not for the genocide, Islamisation and assimilation.’

Even Christianisation, for most of the new converts I talked to, has been more a political act of resistance than a religious act of conversion. Devrim, a Marxist and atheist since his early youth, decided to get baptised in the Armenian Church and become Hagop in order to ‘correct the historical wrong.’ By becoming Christian he could send his children to Armenian schools now and ‘relocate them in the normal path of the lineage that was violently deviated two generations ago.’ He felt this to be his responsibility vis-à-vis his lineage and *ırk*, especially a few years ago when the political climate was better than ever and he had no excuses for not doing so.

These reactions to discrimination and assimilation are mostly triggered by personal emotions of humiliation and psychological pain, which often manifested in the trembling voices or the eyes welling with tears of interviewees of different ages and genders. For some, however, there is an additional factor encouraging them to counter anti-Armenian discrimination and assimilation with Armenian identification: ideology. For Erhan, for instance, accepting his Armenian roots and openly speaking about it is also a condition for being a good Muslim because Allah urges his followers to be sincere and speak the truth: ‘Denying your origins and yourself is a sin according to our religion. If Allah created me as an Armenian, then I have to accept that reality wholeheartedly, otherwise I would be opposing his will.’ For others, their leftist, revolutionary, anti-nationalist or anti-state ideologies play a similar role. ‘Culturally I am not, but ideologically I am Armenian,’ states Mustafa, a leftist columnist-activist who learned about his ancestors’ Armenian identity, suffering and assimilation a few years ago.

Thus, with their affective and ideological motivations for identification and boundary making, the Muslim and Alevi Armenians make yet another case for identification being also an affective and disinterested domain (see also Leach 1964; Epstein 1978: 96–7; Shneiderman 2014: 284; Parkin 1978; Werbner 1980; Amit Talai 1989: 154-161). They validate Victor Turner’s criticism of Cohen’s reduction of social actors to ‘one dimensional men’ and ‘political animal[s]’ (Turner 1975: 139-140; Cohen 1974b). Armenisation for these people constitutes not so much a tactical move in pursuit of political, economic or social capital, but a quest for belonging and recognition and a ‘metasocial symbolic action’ driven by moral and ideological obligations (Turner 1975: 140). As a result, despite all the suffering, the loss of social capital and the breaking of familial ties, Sevag’s closing remarks were ‘*ermeni olmayı seviyorum*’ [I like being Armenian].

## Conclusion

The Muslim and Alevi Armenians, to conclude, have come to diversify the Armenian landscape of Turkey. In fact, they understand Armenianness not as a ‘non-Muslim minority’ identity, but rather as a primordial, inherited, essential, *öz-* and *ırk-*based identity that can be neither changed, nor, eventually, denied. Several of them have indeed lived for years either unaware of or neglecting their Armenian ancestry. However, they eventually realised that their *ırk* was inescapable and would keep categorising them as *gavurs*, ‘Armenian bastards,’ ‘Armenian spawns,’ with an array of practical negative implications. Some, perhaps many, of this state-endorsed essentialist discrimination’s targets have probably chosen the path of submissive endurance and remained invisible to the larger society and to this research. Those coming out as Armenians, however, have embarked upon an affective, moral and political project against injustice, discrimination and assimilation.

## CHAPTER 5

### **The Migrants: Blood, homeland, morals and the Turkish Others**

On the morning of 11 November 2015, I entered the courtyard of the Armenian Evangelical Church in the Gedikpaşa neighbourhood of European Istanbul. After taking a few steps into the church building and just before entering the ceremonial hall, I took the narrow stairs on my right in order to reach the basement. That was where acquaintances had advised me to go if I wanted to find and study migrants from the Republic of Armenia in Istanbul. Walking through the silent corridor, I saw a few sofas, a desk, and a young man behind it. I greeted him and explained why I had come. He welcomed me and offered a seat, speaking in the eastern dialect of Armenian. It was my first meeting with Tiran, an educated, calm and intelligent man of my age, who would soon become a good friend and an extremely helpful research participant.

The evangelical church's basement is where he used to be on a daily basis during the time of my fieldwork. But he was neither a pastor, nor a worshipper. In fact, the church's basement was his workplace. Tiran was a teacher of history and geography, and the vice principal of an unregistered school, the Hrant Dink School, attending the educational needs of Migrant children in Istanbul. He was a Migrant himself:

This is the fourth year that I'm living and working in Istanbul. I was born in Yerevan in 1988. After getting my university degree in law, I did my military service for two years. Then I continued my studies and got a Master's degree. I couldn't find a decent job and in 2011 I left for Istanbul, where my parents were already residing since 2000. Two or three months after my arrival I heard about this school and finally got employed.

This chapter explores the concept and experience of 'Armenianness' amongst Migrants like Tiran. How do they imagine and define Armenian identity? Where do they draw its boundaries? What are their parameters of sameness and difference? How is their

Armenianness experienced, put to the test and reimagined as migrants in Turkey? The forthcoming sections will unpack the various definitional concepts, perceived boundary-markers and expectations of ‘Armenianness’ widely shared among Migrants I encountered in Istanbul. But first, I begin with a general exposition of demographic and sociological conditions.

### **Demographic and Sociological Information**

Demographic and sociological quantitative knowledge of the Migrant population in Turkey is unfortunately limited. Not only is accessible government research missing, partly due to the absence of diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey (Ozinian 2009: 10-11), but independent research findings are also rare (see *ibid.* and Muradyan 2015 for examples). Nevertheless, it is possible to draw a useful sketch based on surveys and estimates by the few existing researchers, and the knowledge of my interlocutors in the field.

#### *Legal status and numbers*

There exist no censuses counting the Migrant population, and preparing them is indeed a difficult task given the irregular nature of Armenian migration to Turkey. As different researchers attest (Ozinian 2009; Taşçı 2010; Körükmez 2014; Muradyan 2015; Uras 2015), as in the case of migrants from other post-Soviet countries in Turkey (see Bloch 2017: 6), the proportion of undocumented ones among the Armenian migrants is considerable. Measuring undocumented migration, which has become a universal phenomenon as a result of increased border restrictions coupled with increasing transnational labour demand (Joppke 1998b; Massey et al. 2018), is in fact extremely challenging (see Massey and Capoferro 2004).

I personally have encountered many Migrants who did not hold residence permits and even heard stories of leaving Armenia and/or entering Turkey through extra-legal means. ‘They threw me out through the door, I entered through the window,’ a Migrant woman, Marta, told me once. Although some, like Marta, are said to have crossed the Georgian-Turkish border illegally, most of the undocumented migrants have entered through legal means but overstayed their visas.

According to Turkey’s current entry requirements, Armenian citizens are eligible for 30-day visas on arrival, which can be renewed for the same duration. However, they are forbidden to stay more than 90 days in a 180-day period.<sup>62</sup> Those who intend to stay and work for periods longer than three months thus have two options: either to join the ranks of their undocumented compatriots, or to apply for a short-term (one-year) residence permit. However, the latter option entails a yearly payment, proof of financial capacities for sustaining oneself and details about accommodation, which are often burdens that many of the migrants cannot cope with and are thus obliged to take the extra-legal route.

Though earlier regulations were looser and used to allow the renewal of 90-day visas without any limitations such as the current 90-in-180 one, migrants still had to leave and re-enter the country for every single renewal. Whereas Öztürk states that during the pre-2012 period the number of Migrants who overstayed their visas was minimal due to the possibility of renewal (2020:90), Ozinian’s survey of 150 Migrants conducted in 2009 revealed that 95% of them were undocumented (2009: 12).

In addition to extra-legal entries and over-stayed visas, unregistered births and deaths in Turkey further complicate the task of estimating the number of Migrants. Marta, quoted above, was the mother of three Istanbul-born children who, like others I met and taught at the Hrant Dink School, had neither Turkish nor Armenian passports or residence permits,

<sup>62</sup> See: <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/visa-information-for-foreigners.en.mfa>, last accessed: 17 March 2018.

thus constituting merely ‘bare lives’ (Agamben 1998) or ‘naked’ lives ‘bereft of all the qualifications for properly political inclusion and belonging’ (De Genova 2010: 37).

Nonetheless, there are different estimates ranging from 12,000 to 100,000. As I will further explore below, Turkish political figures have often mentioned numbers close to the higher end of the spectrum in clearly political contexts, which make those estimates unreliable. On the other hand, Armenian or Turkish independent research sources usually agree on figures close to the lower end (Ozinian 2009; Körükmez 2014), and Armenia’s Ministry of Diaspora estimates the number to be ‘around 20,000’ (Sudagezer 2017).

Just as with the overall number of the Migrants, the documented-to-undocumented ratio among them remains at the level of estimates. Among the Migrants with whom I personally had contact, the ratio was rather a balanced one, similar to that in Muradyan’s research (2015: 77). I have often met people who said that they were ‘already legal’ after having previously been otherwise. However, neither being on a visa nor having a short-term residence permit allows Migrants to work in Turkey. It is thus possible to more confidently state that the vast majority of Armenian migrants, whether documented or not, are engaged in extralegal work. I personally never met nor heard of Migrants possessing work permits during my 18-month stay.

### *Gender balance*

The existing literature widely agrees that women make up the vast majority of the Migrants (Ozinian 2009; Taşçı 2010; Körükmez 2012; Muradyan 2015; Öztürk 2020; Erdoğan and Semerci 2018: 16). My observations confirm this gender imbalance too, which is conditioned by several factors.

First, women’s socioeconomic condition is particularly dire in the sending context. In fact, the economic restructuring processes of the early post-Soviet period hit first and

foremost women labourers of Armenia (Ishkhanian 2002: 390), as in the case of other post-socialist countries (Ashwin and Bowers 1997: 35; Keough 2006: 12; Stecklov et al. 2010; Hofmann and Buckley 2013: 514). For instance, according to reports on the 2002-2007 period, women in Armenia were highly underrepresented in the private sector and mostly employed in state bodies where wages are lower (Taşçı 2010: 58). Women who are unmarried, widowed, divorced or deserted by their husbands are even more vulnerable. I came across such cases several times in my field, and other researchers have noted that such women constitute a majority (Körükmez 2012: 88; Taşçı 2010: 81), thus reaffirming the negative correlation between marriage and women's migration observed elsewhere (Kanaiaupuni 2000; Feliciano 2008).

Second, where could these Armenian women migrate to with the prospect of finding a job? While Russia is the top destination of Armenian migration overall, women's participation in this is very low. For instance, between 2005 and 2007, only 6,000 to 8,000 Armenian women had migrated to Russia versus 96,000 to 121,000 of their male counterparts (Minasyan et. al 2007: 18). This is also conditioned by the fact that the construction sector in Russia, believed to be more fitting for men, seems to be one of the most attractive ones for migrants (see, for example, Human Rights Watch 2009). The opposite picture exists in Turkey where men's labour is much less in demand than that of migrant women who are needed especially in the service sectors of domestic work, entertainment and sales (Bloch 2017: 8).

It has been noted that most Armenian labour migrants who have subsequently left Turkey were men who could not find jobs (Körükmez 2012: 174). Lastly, this gender imbalance is not unique to Armenian migrants, but is characteristic of the broader post-Soviet migration to Turkey (Bloch 2017: 6), which is thus a feminised one.

### *Employment niches and economic conditions*

Naturally the demands of the local market have a decisive impact on the types of work the Migrants do. The vast majority of Migrant women are extra-legally employed as domestic workers, cleaning houses and/or caring for children and elderly people. Many of those also live with their employer families, and the lucky ones have one rest day per week. According to a survey conducted around ten years ago, domestic workers usually earned between \$500 and \$650 per month (Ozinian 2009: 20). Some Migrant women also work as clerks in shops or hotels and a handful of them are teachers at the unregistered Hrant Dink School, which will be described below. Also, news and rumours about women Migrants involved in sex trafficking often emerge in Armenian media (see, for example, *Yerkir* 2016), and were repeated by several of my Migrant interlocutors.

On the other hand, while a few of the men I met worked on construction sites, most were employed in shoe or textile factories. In both cases they usually received lower salaries than Migrant women working in the service sector. Finally, shuttle trading is apparently still practised by some Migrants, as I used to regularly see some of them selling probably smuggled products, like Armenian brandies and Russian vodkas, on the streets of Kumkapı or Kurtuluş where I used to reside.

Not surprisingly, the economic condition of the Migrants working in such sectors and under extralegal conditions is generally dire. The fact that many of them have to send remittances to their families in Armenia and/or pay debts back there becomes an additional burden. As a result, most of the Migrants live abstemious lives. Anahit, a 63-year-old woman working as a teacher at the Migrants' school, shares a flat with her daughter, her husband, and one of her student's family members. 'Otherwise we cannot pay the rent,' she explained of her situation, which is quite common among Migrants (see Muradyan 2015: 53).

Last but not least, there is a very small number of non-labour migrants from Armenia in Istanbul, some of whom I also interviewed. A few of them are women who migrated to Istanbul after marrying Istanbulite Armenian men, and a few others have temporarily come in order to study in local universities. These Migrants live in quite different social and economic conditions of course, and are all legal residents. However, their conceptual approach to Armenian identity and their relations with and stance towards local Christian Armenians generally did not differ from those of the labour Migrants.

### *Geographical distribution*

The vast majority of Migrants live and work in Istanbul. They are mostly concentrated in Kumkapı, an inexpensive neighbourhood home to migrants from other countries as well. As Biehl (2015b), drawing on Vertovec (2007) argues, Kumkapı represents a context of superdiversity where different religions, ethnicities, nationalities and migration histories meet. Some of Kumkapı's streets are so highly populated by Armenian migrants, that some interlocutors have jokingly described them as 'Armenia.' Other Istanbul neighbourhoods where migrants reside are Feriköy, Samatya and Bakırköy, where Istanbulite Armenians live in large numbers and employ Migrant women in domestic work. Last, but not least, many live-in domestic migrants reside on Kınalıada Island during summer months, as they join their employer families.

As research participants noted, Migrants also live and work in other cities of Turkey, although in smaller numbers. Tiran, my key Migrant research participant, the vice-principal of the Migrants' school and a lawyer by profession, was asked by the Hrant Dink Foundation to prepare a report on the Migrants' general conditions. In his unpublished report, he cites the following Turkish cities as hosting Migrants: Izmir, Alanya, Antalya, Adana, Trabzon and Samsun (Khachatryan 2017: 5). However, my research deals only with Migrants in

Istanbul where they are not only more numerous and easily accessible, but also in direct contact with local Armenians.

*Migrants' sole institution: The Hrant Dink School*

The Hrant Dink School (henceforth HD School) is an elementary school established, run and attended by Migrants. It is of particular interest to my research not only for being the sole institution serving and run by Migrants, but particularly as a place where identities and boundaries are (re)produced. I selected it as my main site of observation from the beginning of my research, volunteering there as a chess teacher.

Heriknaz Avagyan, a Migrant woman in her late forties, is the founder and principal of the school, and thus the best source to hear the story of the school from:

It all started 15 years ago, in late 2003. The Migrant families already had school-aged children who could not attend the local Armenian schools according to the Turkish law back then. Some mothers had implored a local Armenian man to help them to organise their children's education. The man had told them that he could help with securing a space, on condition that they could find teachers... I am a graduate of the Yerevan State University's Department of Philology, but I had come to work as a domestic servant like all the [Migrant] Armenians. These women approached me and asked to organise the school, as they had already secured a space. I agreed to give it a try and started all alone, with seven students, in 2004. We received ten more students the next year and became 17. Thus, year by year our number increased and today we have around 150 students and 15 teachers.

The school is located in the basement of the Gedikpaşa Armenian Protestant Church in Kumkapı. Several small, dark, and unventilated rooms host classes that range between kindergarten and ninth grade. Due to a lack of space, the Church's main hall is also used (see Figures 22, 23 and 24 below).<sup>63</sup> The school follows the national curriculum of Armenia, which recognises its students' qualifications. It is not officially registered in Turkey, but the authorities are well aware of it, and have been lenient to date. The monthly tuition fee is the equivalent of 60 USD, but not all parents can pay it. All of the students and staff (except

<sup>63</sup> See a video by Gevorgyan (2017) for more details about the physical conditions of the school.

myself during the period when I volunteered) are Migrants. As later sections will reveal, the Hrant Dink School is a ‘little Armenia’ par excellence.



*Figure 22. The HD School's main corridor that hosts the directors' and teachers' desk. Still photo from Harutyun Gevorgyan's documentary (2017).*



*Figure 23. The HD School's teaching staff. Photo retrieved from the school's Facebook group with permission.*



Figure 24. Students posing with their teacher at the HD School. Photo retrieved from the school's Facebook group with permission.

### **‘Armenians by Blood’: Biological boundaries of Armenianness**

The primary definitional characteristic of Armenianness, as perceived by most of my Migrant interlocutors, is *genetic* Armenianness. If one is Armenian, it is believed, then she or he carries – and must carry – ‘Armenian genes.’ ‘What makes one an Armenian? Religion? Language? Blood? Culture?’, I asked a group of middle-aged and elderly Migrant women on Kinaliada Island. They quickly replied without any hesitation: ‘Blood comes first. The person should carry Armenian blood.’ Tiran, much younger and educated, also gave enormous importance to Armenian genealogy while speaking about his conceptions of Armenian identity and argued for the existence of a rigid and unchanging ‘Armenian genetic code’ that has survived among Armenians since ‘ancient times.’

I argue, thus, that a primordialist biological approach to ethnic or national identity, and by extension to Armenianness, is shared by the vast majority of the Migrants. Their discourse about ‘Armenian blood’ and the importance given to it when it comes to drawing group boundaries is not unique to them, of course, but resonates with other ethnographic examples, such as the Greeks and their *elliniko ema* (Greek blood) in history (Just 1989) or in contemporary times (Herzfeld 2016: 107), the Bosnian case with its tragic outcome

(Bringa 1995), or the popular belief about ‘black blood’ in North America (Banks 1996: 63). In fact, the central concept of ‘blood...as a marker of social inclusiveness,’ as Herzfeld notes (2016: 115), has a long history in Semitic and Indo-European cultures – to the latter of which Armenians are related (Russell 1997: 24-25).

Migrants have not developed this belief in Istanbul of course, but have imported it from Armenia. In fact, around three decades ago Dudwick noticed a ‘biologicistic reasoning’ among many Armenians in the newly independent Republic of Armenia (1994: 64). Ethnic and cultural characteristics were often believed to be the result of physiological and genetic traits among her research participants (ibid.). That biologicistic reasoning seems to have survived into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, since I too have noticed it in Yerevan. *Hayu ken* (‘Armenian gene’ in Eastern Armenian) was sometimes invoked during conversations I had with Armenian citizens, and often appeared in Armenian media outlets and the social media. In early 2017, for instance, Armenian (social) media were flooded by the news of an interracial marriage between an Armenian woman and a foreign black man, which was perceived by many as a ‘threat to the Armenian gene.’ Racist comments were written by a school teacher on social media, and the principal of the school defended her employee arguing that he had only ‘presented valid arguments that interracial marriages can contribute directly to the extinction of a species,’ thus indirectly categorising Armenians as a ‘species’ (*Epress* 2017).

Seeing interracial marriages as a ‘threat to Armenianness’ betrays the fact that ‘Armenian genes’ are a clear marker of the boundary separating Armenians from Others. The same fear was also expressed by Tiran: ‘The issue of children from mixed marriages is a very serious problem for our genetic code.’ Preventing interracial marriages, for Tiran, meant protecting the boundaries of Armenianness.

Thus, for Migrants, ‘Armenian genes’ and ‘Armenian blood’ are believed to make a person Armenian in the first place. But then there is the ‘*ideal Armenian*’ for which yet

other, this time practice-related and ideological rather than physiological conditions they expect to be met. Tiran, in fact, stresses that one's conduct, one's way of life should also be 'Armenian-like' in order for one to be loyal to the Armenian identity initially established through his/her lineage. It is these ideological, moral, cultural, and practical expectations that Migrants have from Armenians that the following sections will discuss.

### **Transnationalism and Patriotism: Armenia as a home, homeland, and boundary marker**

Approaching Migrants to hear about their lives and experiences in Istanbul but finding myself in conversations revolving around Armenia was quite frequent during my fieldwork. For most, if not all, of the Migrants I met and spoke with, Armenia was not a matter of the past. It was in many ways a still-living entity for them and a cornerstone of their future. Armenia was not only an essential unit of their transnational existence, but also an important constituent of their imaginations, identities, and systems of meaning.

#### *A Transnational Existence*

The notion of transnationalism has been coined to define migrants' relations that go beyond national borders, linking the country of settlement with that of origin (Schiller et al. 1992: 1). The Armenian Migrants are engaged in transnational processes spanning Turkey and Armenia. Their fragile extralegal statuses and mutually problematic relations with the Turks, with the Turkish state (see below), and the local Armenians (see Chapter 7), further impede their social, cultural and economic integration, which increases the necessity of maintaining transnational ties with their country of origin (Schiller et al. 1992: 9). Both material/physical and virtual/imaginary ties with Armenia characterise the Migrants' transnational positionality.

Material transnational connections are first and foremost manifested in the form of

financial remittances. Since many of the Migrants have come to Istanbul in order to either repay debts in Armenia or provide financial assistance to their families left behind, they send significant parts of their monthly salary back across the border. Buying cheap goods in Istanbul and sending them to relatives in Yerevan, Gyumri, Vanadzor or elsewhere in Armenia is also a quite common practice of ‘commodifying love’ and ‘overcompensat[ing] for [one’s] absence with material goods’ (Parrenas 2001: 372). Verjin, a Migrant domestic worker employed by my then-partner Sarin’s family used to send shampoos, soaps, chocolate bars and the like with Sarin everytime she travelled to Armenia (See also Körükmez 2012: 113, Muradyan 2015: 30-31).

These remittance flows naturally influence the Migrants’ savings and affect their living standards in Istanbul. Verjin continuously gets requests from her children and grandchildren in Yerevan whom she cannot disappoint, although she lives in poor conditions and is already physically and morally exhausted. She thus has to carry the additional burden of remittances, which is often part of the experience of labour migrants (see Lindley 2007: 19-20). These remittances, however, contribute to the maintenance of social ties extending to Armenia and keep the Migrants in a state of transnational existence.

Furthermore, material transnational flows exist in the opposite direction as well. Whereas the value of goods and gifts remitted by Migrants is first and foremost financial, that of items sent to Migrants by their friends and relatives in Armenia is rather cultural (cf. Gardner 1993: 11-12). The latter, in other words, helps to make life in Istanbul as similar to that in Armenia as possible, thus contributing to the maintenance of imaginary and affective ties with the homeland. Armenian coffee, the famous *lavash* bread and other Armenian culinary products consumed by Migrants (and served to me during interviews) are products that put the Migrants in daily contact with home and its culture. These goods are either sent as (return) gifts by relatives left behind, or are imported and even produced in Istanbul. For

instance, a Migrant couple had established a bakery in Kumkapı, where they produced *lavash* and sold it mainly to other Migrants in the area (see Figure 25 below). Elena, whom I met in Armenia in March 2018, used to import and sell *Jermuk*, an Armenian mineral water, while in Istanbul. And last but not least, educational textbooks sent to the HD School by the Republic of Armenia’s Ministry of Diaspora suggest clearly more than merely material transnationalism.



Figure 25. The owners of the ‘Lavash’ bakery in Kumkapı. Photo by Jamanak newspaper, retrieved from Arevelk (2016).

Finally, physical transnational mobility between Turkey and Istanbul is not an option open to all of the Migrants. Paying visits to Armenia is not only financially demanding, but also legally risky and costly for all those who do not have legal residence permits. I have met Migrants who have not been back to Armenia since their initial entry to Turkey many years ago. However, those who have legal residence permits and can afford the airfare or bus tickets are usually keen to pay visits. Tiran, who feels out of place in Istanbul and excluded from any form of social life except his work at the school, is one example: ‘I do my best to go there twice a year. I need to go back to “refuel” myself...’

Similarly, the HD school administration does its best to organise trips to Armenia for its students and teachers in order to sustain organic ties with the homeland. For instance,

it enrolls a few of its students in educational and touristic summer programs happening in Armenia, like *Ari Tun*, i.e. ‘Come Home,’ organised by the Ministry of Diaspora of the Republic of Armenia. Similarly, it has sent some of its teachers to participate in the *Diasporic Armenian Teacher’s Training* summer program in Armenia organised by the Republic’s Ministry of Education and Science (see Jamanak 2016; Agos 2017b: 1).

Aside from the material and physical links, the Migrants are actively engaged in intangible forms of contact with Armenia. The most obvious of those are virtual links established on a daily basis through technological means of communication. Migrants are not only in such communication with their family members and friends left behind, but also with the wider Armenian public through Armenian online newspapers or satellite TV broadcasts (see also Körükmez 2012: 114). Tiran, for instance, always had Armenian news websites open on the computer used for work at the HD School. He would often communicate news from Armenia to his colleagues: ‘Did you hear who has passed away?’, ‘There are protests again...’, ‘Another soldier killed at the border [with Azerbaijan] ...’

Apart from such forms of communication, I noticed that the Migrants were often thinking of Armenia even without any particular trigger. I witnessed, numerous times, how the teachers at the school would start impromptu discussions about Armenia. They would discuss recent news, the country’s political situation, criticise past or current political leaders, or simply ask about the weather there.

These imaginary links were perhaps the most active during the four-day war between Armenia and Azerbaijan in early April 2016. The worrying developments in their home country had obviously preoccupied and troubled many of my Migrant interlocutors. I entered the school four days after the ceasefire, and seeing Hovo, the young drama teacher from the northern Armenian city of Gyumri, I greeted him and asked how he was doing. ‘Not much,’ he replied, ‘I can’t stop thinking about Armenia these days.’ Arineh, a woman studying at

one of the universities in Istanbul, told me that those latest developments had made the separation from Armenia unbearable for her, and that she would be returning soon in order to be there with ‘my people.’ Finally, Karen, the worker at the jewelry shop whom I presented in the Introduction to this thesis, revealed an even deeper, subconscious level of transnationality:

I’ve been following the news more frequently since 2 April. It’s sad that we had too many losses. My brother is currently doing his [military] service, you know? And I had this strange dream last night, where I was also going to the frontline to fight. We were fifteen men, all young like me, and an older general. All fourteen of them departed towards the trenches, whereas I couldn’t. How could I? Part of my uniform was missing! I had my boots, my trousers, but nothing for the top. ‘Give me thick clothes, give me a cap so I can go to the frontline,’ I told the general... my brother was there... all fourteen soldiers left, and I was still waiting when I woke up and told my wife: ‘I had a dream, I was heading to the frontline.’

Thus, whether at ordinary times or during days of political escalation in Armenia, many Migrants’ mental state seems to be identical to that of their counterparts in the US, whose transnational existence has been described as ‘such that even though they live and work in the United States, they think and feel as if they were still in Armenia’ (Ishkhanian 2002: 383), and to other transnational people elsewhere having a ‘bifocality’ or a ‘dual perspective’ (Rouse 1992) in their everyday lives (see, for example, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997 and Remennick 2013).

An active maintenance of social, emotional and imaginary transnational links with Armenia is also both the cause and the effect of a will to return. Although the difficult conditions that have propelled them to migrate in the first place might have fostered resentment towards Armenia among some Migrants, like a woman who had lost her apartment during the earthquake and never got the promised compensation by the state, most of those I met were nevertheless keen to return sooner or later and were thus fostering and feeding on a ‘myth of return’ (Anwar 1979; Bolognani 2007).

A newly married young couple explained that their goal was to make some money in Istanbul, purchase a house in Armenia, and return. For Karen, the jeweller, the will to

return is not as much an issue of not liking life in Istanbul as much as it is ‘the longing, the fact that I miss it back there. One’s own land is always different, you know...’ For most Migrants, their migration had been intended to be temporary from the very beginning: ‘We all come thinking that we will work for a year and then return, but we all get caught in the same trap and one year becomes three, three becomes five, and so on.’ These cases clearly resonate with those of other transnational migrants whose ‘myths of return’ legitimised their ‘temporary’ sufferings to be endured until the needed capital was accommodated (ibid.).

The will to return is mainly conditioned by the fact that most Migrants have left their children and families behind. Those who have come with children, however, are not necessarily less inclined towards the idea of return, especially since there is a serious lack of conditions for integration in the receiving country. Children’s education is perhaps the most obvious issue in this regard.

The very foundation of the HD School was a result, as the founding director explained in her quote above, of the lack of educational options for the Migrant children. Since Armenia does not have any diplomatic relations with Turkey, Migrant children do not have access to Turkish public schools, explained Tiran. On the other hand, the local Armenian schools are by Turkish law designated for ‘students that are citizens of the Republic of Turkey and members of those very same minorities’ (my translation).<sup>64</sup> Although a 2011 decision by the Turkish Ministry of Education allowed Migrant children to attend local Armenian schools, that option still remained undesirable for many Migrant parents because the Migrant children could only attend local Armenian schools as ‘guest-pupils,’ thus not getting any kind of graduation certificates that would allow them to attend universities in Turkey or elsewhere (Muradyan 2015: 57; Khachatryan 2017: 4).

<sup>64</sup> *Özel Öğretim Kurulları Kanunu 2007*, available at: <http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.5580.pdf>, last accessed: 22 August 2019.

Attending the underground HD School, however, is a partial solution to the problem, since the Armenian Ministry of Education and Science recognises diplomas obtained from there, allowing students to continue their secondary education in Armenia (Kuyumciyan 2015). After completing the ninth grade at the HD School, students can travel to Armenia and sit for an official exam that allows them to continue their education there (see Figure 26 below). The HD School's unique position of being a transit point for the return journey, symbolically but clearly appears in a game in which children make an imaginary train, and hear the driver (another student of course) declare: 'This train goes to Armenia!' (Ozinian 2011).



*Figure 26. Graduates of the HD School posing in the Republic Square of Yerevan, Armenia, after successfully passing their examinations. Photo retrieved from the school's Facebook group, with permission.*

Armenia, thus, holds an important place in the Migrants' life. It is part of their memories, their social webs, their everyday thoughts and concerns. It is a home where Migrants have left their families, friends, and, importantly, often times their future.

#### *Patriotism: imported and reproduced*

For many Migrants, Armenia is also an ideological entity. It is not only a home environment with emotional and social connections, but also a national homeland of the collective 'us.' In other words, being a community of migrants 'firmly rooted in a conceptual "homeland"'

(Brubaker 2005: 2), the Migrants thus constitute a diaspora (see Safran 1991; Bauböck and Faist 2010). Following the constructivist tradition in diaspora studies which criticised the essentialist approach of taking diaspora formation for granted in the presence of a shared original homeland (*contra* Safran 1991) and argued that diasporas are actively constructed by their members' 'diasporic stances' towards the homeland (Brubaker 2005: 12, see also Hall 1990; Gilroy 1997), in this section I look at how the Migrants actively imagine, praise and (re)construct their homeland Armenia under transnational conditions in Istanbul.

Patriotism is clearly expressed in Migrants' interviews and acts. Tiran equates Armenia with his personal pride: 'I would treat any disrespect towards my fatherland, the Republic of Armenia, the way I treat any disrespect towards my own pride.' For Satik, a woman teaching at the HD School, 'Armenia is sacred and has always been so to me...' She explains, like many others, that she has left Armenia against her will and, importantly, against her convictions which she thinks she has betrayed. Sharing that pain of having left Armenia behind, the director of the school, Heriknaz, nevertheless sees the solution in the empowerment of the homeland: 'Our goal should be having a powerful fatherland that would hold people back from this road of exile.'

Migrants' patriotic nationalism goes beyond merely speaking about it. They overtly exhibit it through public symbolic work. For instance, around a dozen Migrant young men, including Tiran's brother, have come together and established a football team which participates in tournaments organised by the Fatih municipality. They have called their team 'Armenia,' and prepared a uniform that is decorated by the name of their team (and homeland), an Armenian national flag, and the Republic's coat of arms (see Figure 27). This, of course, has no links whatsoever with the Armenian national football team or federation. It is a grassroots initiative by Migrant amateur footballers who have come together under their national flag and have decided to represent their homeland.



*Figure 27. The 'Armenia' football team, posing before a match in Fatih, Istanbul. Photo taken from one of the members' Facebook page with permission.*

Such patriotic/nationalistic public manifestations also occur on individual levels, often in improvised ways. In late April 2016, I attended a dance performance by the State Dance Ensemble of Armenia and the Istanbulite Armenian Maral Music and Dance Ensemble. Most of the audience was composed of Istanbulite Armenians, but some Migrants had also come. At a certain moment during the show, a man from the audience ran up to the stage, ceremonially waving the Armenian national flag. Security guards had to approach and escort him out of the hall. Publicly waving the Armenian flag in Istanbul, at an event organised by local Armenians whose wariness of overt manifestations of Armenian patriotism was discussed in Chapter 2, was clearly an exceptional act of defiance. I immediately suspected that the author was a Migrant, as it was hard to imagine a local Armenian acting in that way.<sup>65</sup> As my Migrant friends later confirmed, he was, in fact, a Migrant, and the brother of an employee at the HD School. At least two other similar acts of public patriotism were relayed to me by interlocutors in the field. But how to account for these manifestations?

<sup>65</sup> The Migrants-vs-locals facet of such acts will be explored in Chapter 7.

The fact of having emigrated from one's homeland and lacking real prospects of integration in the receiving country might serve as an additional factor triggering those public expressions of patriotic and nationalist feelings. Furthermore, the fact of having come to *Turkey*, widely seen as the enemy country in Armenia, and of being maltreated and alienated by the Turkish state (both to be further explored below), might also have their positive effect on Migrants' diasporisation and embracement of Armenia as the fatherland where they belong (cf. Silva 2009). Nonetheless, the Migrants' patriotism is not a product of their transnational existence per se. Rather, it has been imported from Armenia, where all except the child Migrants have lived most of their lives and where, as Tiran noted, their 'individualities were shaped.'

In fact, unlike the local Armenians in Turkey whose history had been one of oppression, suppression and de-ethnicisation in the Turkish Republic of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Chapter 2), the Armenian population in what is the Republic of Armenia today has lived through historical developments that have fostered Armenian territorial nationalism.

Intellectual literary activities in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Eastern Armenia, i.e. the Armenian populated territories that were part of the Russian Empire where the current Republic was to be born, were already concerned with the glorification of the Armenian nation and the idea of 'national liberation,' which were far less discussed in Western Armenian literary movements developing in Constantinople (Panossian 2006a: 145-146). A year after the fall of the Tsarist Empire, the independence of the Republic of Armenia was declared on 26 May 1918. The first Armenian state was established since the fall of the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia in 1375 (Suny 2001). Importantly, though short-lived, that independence contributed to the territorialisation of Armenian national identity,

and transposed the focus of Armenian nationalism from communal rights and autonomy to independence and statehood (Panossian 2006: 255).

Although the Armenian authorities ceded independence and joined the Soviet Union in December 1920 (Suny 2001), that loss of independence did not result in the fading of national(ist) sentiments. In the long run and despite the stated goals of the Communist party, the Soviet Union became an ‘incubator of new nations,’ rather than a melting pot (Suny 1993b: 87). The early Soviet years witnessed two structural processes that played a key role in the making of nations. The first was the process of territorialisation of ethnicity. Territorial administrative units were established according to the geographical concentration of nationalities and the idea of nations fixed to territories was promoted (ibid.: 110). The second and parallel process was that of ‘nativisation’ (Russ.: *korenizatsiia*), which institutionalised ethnicity in the state apparatus, supported native languages and created national intelligentsia in each of the Soviet republics (ibid. 102). The Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic acquired institutions and symbols of national statehood: a parliament, a flag, an anthem, etc. National opera houses, national academies, and even national historiographies were established and produced during Soviet times, becoming structural tools for nation making in addition to propagating Soviet ideology (Suny 1993b, 2001; Dudwick 1994). Especially after the death of Stalin nationalistic forms of expression became even more permissible. Children, for instance, were increasingly educated in a national spirit in national schools (Suny 2001). In short, the Soviet experience further fostered territorial nationalism amongst Armenians of Soviet Armenia. As Panossian concludes, ‘by 1988, Armenians had a clearly articulated and strong sense of national identity’ (2006b: 227).<sup>66</sup>

Finally, a nationalist movement for independence matured and eventually succeeded at getting voters on its side and ousting the Communist leadership. A Declaration of

<sup>66</sup> For more on Armenian nationalism under Soviet rule, see also Dadrian (1977) and Suny (1993a).

Independence issued in August 1990 outlined Armenia's intention to secede from the USSR (Panossian 2006b: 228). This whole movement, needless to say, gave fresh impetus to state-oriented and territorial Armenian nationalism. Nationalist discourse resurged and the nation was actively 'reinvented' (Dudwick 1994). Furthermore, the independence process was twined together with the Karabakh movement which aimed at the secession of Karabagh, a mostly Armenian-populated autonomous oblast, from Soviet Azerbaijan. The movement, again, had a territorial-nationalist discourse and mobilised the population around the promise of a unified Armenia (Platz 2000: 135). It resulted in a victorious war halted only in 1994, and the proclamation of a still internationally unrecognised second Armenian independent state, the Republic of Artsakh. Nationalist discourse, terminology and imagery continued to prevail in Armenia even in the subsequent years of relative peace, and Armenians of Armenia generally remained profoundly committed to their *hayrenik* ('fatherland' in Armenian) (Panossian 2006b: 236, 243).

The Migrants bear and belong to this history. Their state-oriented territorial nationalism is thus first of all imported from Armenia where it has been developed since at least the late nineteenth century. However, they are also engaged in its active reproduction in Istanbul.

Observing the activities of the Hrant Dink School, one realises that it not only strives to meet Migrant children's educational needs, but also actively aims at forging them as individuals that love and care for Armenia and consider it to be their sole, irreplaceable homeland. In an interview given to an Armenian media outlet, referring to the accreditation of their graduate students by the Armenian Ministry of Education and Science, a teacher at the HD School expressed the aforementioned intention in a very forthright way: '... most importantly, they will continue their studies in the homeland – [which is] one of the pillars

of the School's ideology. Connecting pupils and their families to Armenia has always been one of the major and cherished goals of the School' (*Hayern Aysor* 2017).

In contrast to the local Armenian schools where the Turkish national flag is displayed and manifestations of Armenian nationalism have always been (self-)censored (Chapter 2), the HD School classrooms, corridors and Facebook page display only one flag, that of the Republic of Armenia. In Figure 28 below, pupils are asked to sing the Armenian national anthem while gazing at a huge Armenian flag.



*Figure 28. Pupils at the HD School singing the Armenian national anthem while staring at the Armenian flag. Photo retrieved from the school's Facebook group with permission.*

An analysis of the HD School's anthem<sup>67</sup> reveals how the school produces categories of homeland and exile, the former being Armenia and the latter Istanbul. 'My school... born on a foreign land,' it starts with, already portraying Istanbul as a place where Migrants do *not* belong. The anthem describes the children as 'far away from [their] fatherland,' and urges them to act in such a way that would make them 'remain deserving of [their] land.' Armenia, thus, is produced as a sacred, exemplary, moral entity to strive for as 'long-distance nationalists' (Schiller and Fouron 2001: 20-24).

<sup>67</sup> See Appendix C for the school anthem in full and in translation.

That figure of Armenia is also promoted through educational activities. On a wall in the school corridor, for instance, were displayed students' artworks in which the same discourse appeared. As the teachers explained, the artworks were the final product of an assignment that had asked the students to compose pieces under the theme of 'Far from the fatherland, the fatherland in one's heart' (see Figure 29). One of them, shaped in the form of a pomegranate, a symbol of Armenia, and representing the Armenian tricolour, reads as follows (see Figure 30):

**The Wish of the Patriot**

When we are forced to leave our fatherland, inexplicable emotions are born in us. When you live in exile, you start missing your homeland. There is no better country than one's own. I wish that no single Armenian kid will ever live his/her childhood on foreign shores.

M. H. (6<sup>th</sup> grade) [My translation]

The fact that the other texts are quite similar to this in content suggests that the teachers guided the students through the texts, thus explicitly investing in the production of notions of homeland, fatherland and exile among them.



Figure 29. Collection of 'Far from the fatherland, the fatherland in one's heart' assignment works by students at the HD School. Photo retrieved from the school's Facebook group with permission.

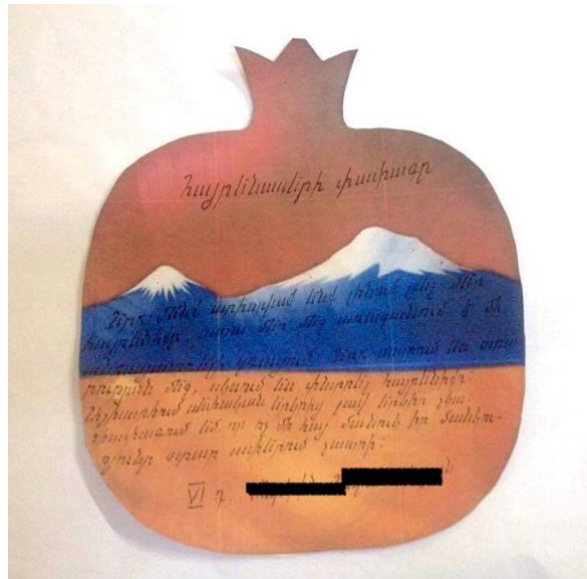


Figure 30. 'The Wish of the Patriot,' by a student at the HD School. Photo retrieved from the school's Facebook group with permission.

In a short documentary about the school, a girl stands in the classroom and recites a poem written by Armenian poet Hovhannes Shiraz (1914-1984), famous for his overt patriotism. 'My holy fatherland, you're in my heart,' she exclaims looking right into the camera (Gevorgyan 2017: 3' 50"). The teachers not only have taught her the poem, but obviously asked her to recite it for the video. The video, in fact, is made by none other than the drama teacher at the school.

The patriotic-nationalistic education reaches the extent of promoting the Armenian national Army in the school. As I witnessed, patriotic military songs, such as 'You're going to war, may you be blessed!', were played at the school during the days of the short Armenian-Azerbaijani war in April 2016. Whereas the latter was reactive and triggered by the events 'back home,' there were instances of proactive promotion of the Armenian Army as well. Around two months before the war, the HD School was celebrating the Day of the Armenian Army on January 28. The student in Figure 31 below, reads the following lines:

28. 01. 2016

**Congratulations for the glorious day of your nation's pride: The Armenian Army is 24 years old.**

The world knows very well that the Armenian soldier doesn't claim what belongs to others. But the Armenian soldier will not allow others to claim what is his own. The Armenian soldier has armed himself for the sake of peace, for the sake of his Fatherland's dignity and existence. **And woe to those who forget that!**

(emphases in original; my translation.)

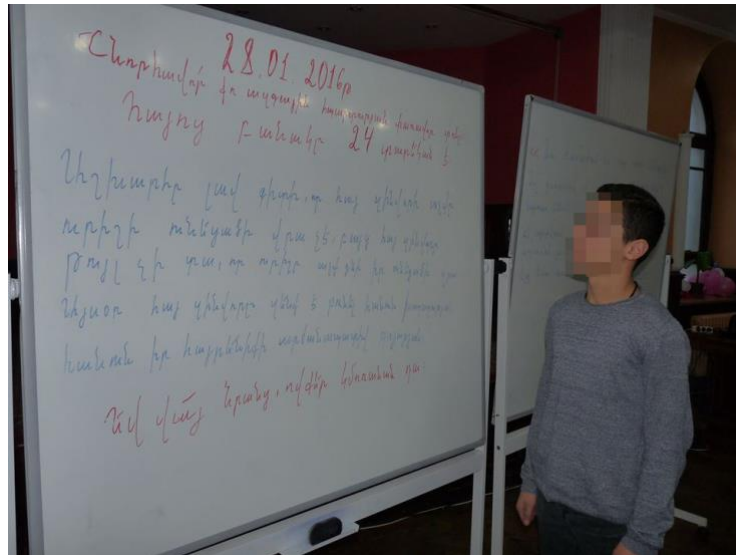


Figure 31. A HD School student reading a text dedicated to the Armenian Army Day. Photo retrieved from the school's Facebook group with permission.

This reproduction of patriotism among the younger generation, I argue, contributes to the production of transnational patriots and long-distance nationalists. Furthermore, it contributes to the diasporisation of the Migrant Armenian community in Istanbul, as it creates and sustains Armenia's 'homeland' status among the younger generation.

Lastly, what is most relevant for this dissertation is that these patriotic stances vis-à-vis Armenia are often seen as essential conditions for the 'ideal Armenianness' expected by most Migrants. Narineh, for instance, a Migrant woman in her late thirties, understands that 'it's not someone's choice to be born in Armenia or not,' but nevertheless defines the 'real Armenian' as 'he or she who shows concern for Armenia.' She finds it difficult to understand and imagine the Armenianness of people who do not care about Armenia, do not recognise it as their fatherland, and are not interested in participating in its development.

Mikayel, in his mid-twenties, criticised Syrian Armenians for ‘having remembered and come to Armenia only after the start of the Syrian war... otherwise what was Armenia for them?’ His wife, Ani, interestingly turned the Armenia-centred boundary making inwards toward the Migrant community. She found it very problematic that some Migrants, unlike the majority and the teachers and students at HD School, bad-mouth Armenia and do not want to return, ‘yet claim to be Armenian!’ Her comment clearly betrays a perceived contradiction between Armenian self-identification and ‘betrayal’ of Armenia.

This Armenia-centred identification and boundary making is, again, not a result of migration per se. It exists, and is imported from, the home context. In fact, as Shirinian notes, for people in contemporary Armenia ‘being Armenian [...] necessitates *doing* for Armenia’ (2018: 51, emphasis in original). I also witnessed manifestations of that phenomenon in Yerevan. I was asked by a local, for instance, about the number of times I had visited Armenia. When I answered that I had been there at least seven times and had now moved there for a longer period, he was pleased and half-jokingly said: ‘Ah! you’ve already become a real Armenian!’

More of this phenomenon will be revealed in Chapter 7, and will partly explain, in line with the dissertation’s main objective, tensions and the erection of boundaries between the Migrant and local Christian Armenian communities. For now, however, I shall restrict myself to postulating that feelings and acts of belonging, support and reverence toward the Republic of Armenia are perceived, by many if not most Migrants, as important factors consolidating one’s position on the Armenian side of the Armenian/non-Armenian symbolic boundary. Therefore, lacking these feelings and stances might push one closer to that boundary—and even beyond.

All this said, I argue that Armenia, for the Migrants, is not only a home left behind,

but also a national ideological homeland. It is not only a past, but also the present and desired future. It is, finally, not only a characteristic of, but also often a decisive condition for ‘Armenianness,’ a tool for categorisation, inclusion or exclusion. It is, in other words, a boundary marker.

### **A Moral Nation: Kinship and gender roles as properties and boundary markers of Armenianness**

Another important element which most Migrant Armenians perceive as essential to being an Armenian is a set of ‘traditional’ values and moral norms which are thought to be Armenian and which define the *Kargin Hay*, i.e. the ‘proper Armenian.’ Specific manners are expected from people to satisfy the preconditions of Armenianness as Migrants perceive it. Behaviours diverging from the widely shared moral worldview are portrayed as *och’ hayavari* (not Armenian-like), as harmful to *hayi namus* (Armenian’s pride), as against *Haykakan ment’ alitet* (Armenian mentality), as unfit to *hayi kargavichak* (Armenian status), and as breaking the *haykakan orenk’* (Armenian Law), to cite terms and expressions, in Eastern Armenian, that my interlocutors used. Armenianness, thus, has ‘moral boundaries’ for the Migrants (Lamont 2000).

Behavioural features thought to characterise Armenians and Armenianness are several, ranging from hospitality to hard work, all preceded by the adjective ‘Armenian.’ There are two socio-moral areas, however, that are seen as particularly important by and for the Moral Nation, as I like to call it. Kinship responsibilities and gender-related expectations are in fact essential criteria by which Migrants often judge one’s Armenianness.

#### *Kinship and Armenianness*

In the imagination of many of my Migrant interviewees, ‘Armenian law’ demands that its followers give the family an important place in their lives and conform to its rules regarding

hierarchy, roles and responsibilities. They have told me about the importance of kin relations in their lives, stressing their 'Armenian' nature. As a middle-aged female domestic worker explained, *hayi kargavichak* ('Armenian status') requires living for others, especially for your kin, and never for yourself alone. Migrants stressed their loyalty to 'Armenian standards of kinship' despite often being away from their own families. Like other migrant women who leave their families behind (Parrenas 2001: 371; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Keough 2006; Hofmann and Buckley 2012), the Migrants emphasised that the temporary separation from their parents and/or children was aimed at securing the needs of the latter. Migration was thus portrayed as an act of sacrifice for one's kin, which was in total conformity with the moral expectations of the nation.

'The Armenian traditional family' was not only a model Migrants invoked in order to affirm their own Armenianness, but also one that they constantly used in order to judge that of others, mainly the local Armenians. As I will explore in further detail in chapter 7, alleged disrespect of parents and grandparents, or neglect of children and their moral manners, are clearly used by Migrants as criteria for evaluating, even denying the 'Armenianness' of others. This clearly resonates with observations in Migrants' homeland environment, where young men violating the customary laws of respect towards age and familial authority are qualified as 'non-Armenian,' whereas authoritative fathers, husbands or father-in-laws are praised as 'authentic Armenians' (Platz 1995: 31).

This polyvalence of the family in the discourse of Armenianness is thus, again, a cultural phenomenon imported from the homeland, where kinship is seen as a symbol of national character and many of its practices, such as patrilocality, considered to be characteristic of Armenian ethno-national culture (Platz 1995: 30-31). The traditional importance given to the family has in fact survived the Soviet policies of modernisation and urbanisation. Armenian society as of the end of the Soviet period was still characterised by

an inclination to large families in comparison with the Soviet average, and a propensity to reside in multi-generational family households (Dudwick 1994: 10-11). Moreover, the Soviet system further strengthened the material value of kinship ties, since goods, resources and even jobs and political offices were often secured through family networks in Soviet Armenia, just like in other Soviet countries of the time (Ishkhanian 2008, 167; Aliyev 2014). The term *Kh-Ts-B*, an acronym standing for *khnami* (in-law), *tsanot* (friend), and *barekam* (relative), used to describe those networks of social capital, is a legacy of Soviet times still in use in contemporary Armenia (Shirinian 2018: 50).

The attachment to the institutions of kinship and lineage is linked, of course, to the nationalist longing for a continuity with the national past (Platz 2000: 122). On the other hand, meeting the family's socio-moral requirements, such as care and respect, is in turn perceived as mandatory for the survival of the *azg*, an Eastern Armenian word meaning 'nation' and, significantly, also lineage/kin.

### *Gender and Armenianness*

Gender is another important social and behavioural field believed, by most Migrants, to characterise Armenianness. Among the vast majority of the Migrants I've met, there were particular behavioural expectations of Armenian men and women, diverging from which would make one non- or at least less Armenian. The concepts of *Hay tghamard* and *Hay kin* (respectively 'Armenian man' and 'Armenian woman' in Eastern Armenian) have quite finite properties. Among others, an important demand from the *Hay tghamard* is being courageous, taking matters into one's own hands and actively defending his pride. Otherwise, he is neither a *tghamart* (man), nor, consequently, a *Hay* (Armenian).<sup>68</sup>

<sup>68</sup> The 'a' in 'hay' is pronounced as the 'a' in 'father.'

Tiran, the vice-director of the HD School, once told me about his future plans. After stating that he planned to go and live in Europe (thus falling a bit short of expectations vis-à-vis the homeland) he stressed that he would nevertheless not let go of his Armenianness, just as he hadn't done so in Istanbul. As a proof of his claim he added: 'For example, if someone insults me here, I fight, I teach them a lesson... I haven't given up on our Armenian traditional ways...' Preserving his 'manliness,' thus, was cited as proof of preserving his Armenian identity. In a similar vein, another Migrant man, Heno, once told me that he might soon have to revert to the 'Armenian way' of solving a problem with his neighbour, which could involve, as I understood, some show or use of force.

The counterpart of courage and pride for the 'Armenian woman' is *amot* ('shame'). As understood by the Migrants, *amot* entails modesty, correctness, and is strictly expected from women. As one Migrant woman put it, *amot* comes at the top of the list of the 'Armenian traditional laws.' Tiran once explained to me about the different cultural strata back in Armenia. One of them, according to his classification, is a minority engaged in a fast-paced 'Westernisation'. Confirming that he is open-minded himself and 'Western-oriented' to an extent, Tiran nevertheless found that some – especially unmarried – young women in that current are going 'too far' (original in Eastern Armenian: '*ch'ap'nerē ants'num en*'), especially when it comes to relations and manners with men. Their behaviour, characterised by 'a total lack of shame and limitations,' he worryingly noted, often diverges from the 'traditional Armenian way.'

This 'national' censorship exerted on young women and their conduct was shared amongst most Migrants from both sexes. Some gave quite detailed definitions of the 'Armenian Woman.' One woman told me, for instance, that a *Hay kin* should not smoke. 'But is the fact of smoking or not related to being Armenian?', I asked, and got an unshakeable response: 'Yes. That a woman should be decent is [a law] in Armenianness.'

Thus, just as falling short of the expectations of ‘manliness’ could call one’s Armenianness into question, diverging from *amot* would do the same to Armenian women. When a Migrant woman was explaining to me that ‘Armenian women should keep a distance between them and unrelated men’ and I asked whether, according to that definition, migrant Armenian women reportedly engaged in sex work in the neighbourhood of Aksaray/Kumkapı would not be considered Armenian, her response revealed the extent to which gender-related ‘morality’ is a boundary marker for ‘Armenianness’: ‘They aren’t Armenians of course! There can be no talk of Armenianness when there is no Armenian *namus* and *tasib*...[both words meaning ‘honour’ in colloquial Eastern Armenian] What Armenian?! Where have they left the traditions, the laws that we Armenians should abide by?’

#### *Gender within the ‘Armenian traditional family’*

Gender and kinship roles intersect at the level of relations between husbands and wives, where the former are expected to oversee the latter’s behaviour and make sure that it stays within the limits of *amot*, and the latter have to respect and even obey to the former. The best way to illustrate this gender-based morality within kinship would be through presenting a section of a conversation I had in the field. It was a summer evening on Kınalıada Island near Istanbul, and I had gone to join a group of Migrant domestic workers at their daily meeting point on the corner of a street. There were around eight women that night, aged between 45 and 60, and all employed as domestic servants by Istanbulite Armenians. At one point in the conversation, we dwelt upon the conceptual links between morality and Armenianness:

Hrag: Could you describe those traditional Armenian manners you say you find in Armenia but not here?

Woman 1: First of all, *amot*. Respecting the elders. Respecting one’s husband. Here husbands are wives and wives are husbands! [Laughter] I’m serious, in many of the houses

where we work husbands don't have the right to give commands to their wives, but wives have it!

Hrag: But wouldn't you like it to be so in your lives?

The women (collectively): No, we wouldn't!

Hrag: Are you happy that your husbands are dominant over you?

The women (collectively): Of course... yes... that's how we are educated...

Woman 2: That's how a woman becomes a *wife*.

Hrag: And has this anything to do with Armenians and Armenianness?

Woman 1: Of course it has! Because in families in Armenia –

Woman 3: The Armenian of Armenia would never call her husband a 'jackass'!

Woman 1: She wouldn't call her husband an 'idiot,' no matter how much of an idiot he was...

Hrag: But is this a matter of Armenianness? Or rather of human qualities, such as respect?

Woman 3: Traditions! The traditional family of Armenia would not accept such manners...

Woman 4: Armenianness expects from a woman to be loyal to her husband, to listen to what he says... That's what makes her a *wife*, do you get it?

Woman 2: Whenever the husband speaks, the wife should shut up and listen

Hrag: But according to which law? Whose verdict is this?

Woman 1: According to Armenian law! that's how Armenian mentality works.

Migrant women thus clearly accept and even reinforce the traditional gender hierarchy, which they perceive as characteristically Armenian. Unlike other cases where women's economic migration has contributed to the restructuring of gender roles and spousal hierarchies (see Pessar 1986; Ui 1991; Eastmond 1993; Kibria 1993; Hirsch 1999; Matsuoka and Sorenson 1999; Gamburd 2000; Hansen 2008; Bloch 2017), these migrant Armenian women do not betray such signs, at least when it comes to their conversations with me, a male and Armenian researcher. The vast majority of the Migrant women I met still relied on traditional ideologies and moralities and judged their and others' manners from within 'the moral universe of home,' similar to the case of female Armenian economic migrants in the United States (Ishkhanian 2002: 384, 405-406).

Only a separate research programme focusing specifically on gender issues among the Migrants could provide comprehensive explanations for this seemingly unchanging nature of gender hierarchies in the thinking of Migrant women. My research, however, allows me to draw a link between 'national obligations' and gender-related 'moral obligations.' These women, in other words, seem to accord their gender-related thoughts

and conduct with a particular discursive tradition (see Mahmood 2001: 210), the national one, in order to ‘attain a certain kind of state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection [...]’ (Foucault 1997: 24, cited in Mahmood 2001: 210).

As I witnessed through our conversations, they are aware that their migration to Turkey could, especially back in Armenia, be easily associated with sex work, since some Migrants are involved in that activity. They are aware, moreover, that the mere fact of their migration and leaving the family behind is itself problematic in terms of their positionalities as wives and mothers, and is often perceived negatively in Armenia (see Taşçı 2010: 59), where women are usually relegated to the family and the home, a phenomenon amplified in the post-independence period (Fertaly 2012). These women thus find themselves in very similar conditions as other migrant women who are blamed, in their origin countries, for ‘abandoning’ their maternal and wifely duties (see Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Parrenas 2005; Keough 2006).

By closely following the Armenian discursive tradition on gender and kinship the Armenian Migrant women of Istanbul are immunising themselves against the criticism arising from the home country, reaffirming their compliance with the traditional morality, and thus reasserting their belonging to the nation and to the homeland where they will, as the ‘myth of return’ gives them hope, eventually return.

To conclude, an imagined ‘Armenian traditional morality’ marks the boundaries of the Migrants’ ‘imagined [Armenian] community’ (Anderson 1983). Similar to the white and black workers who applied ‘moral boundaries’ when drawing their racial and class boundaries in France and the United States (Lamont 2000), the Migrants in Istanbul make use of their own ‘moral boundaries’ in order to draw those of the Armenian nation as they imagine and understand it. There are particular ‘Armenian’ moral norms, values and

manners with which a *Kargin Hay* ('proper Armenian') has to comply. Although I have dwelt on gender and kinship, as those were the most important moral fields for my interlocutors, there nevertheless exist other spheres and instances in which the discourses on morality and Armenianness converge: hospitality, friendship, physical appearance and style, etc. The Migrants indeed comply with Shirinian's observations of Armenians in Armenia, whom she describes as an intimate 'nation-family' in which almost everyone considers everyone else her or his 'kin' and allows oneself to point out to and 'correct' others' 'moral' behaviour in defense of the shared genealogy, its continuity and survival (Shirinian 2018). As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 7, those stepping out of the boundaries of 'Armenian morality' might be perceived by Migrants as having stepped out of 'Armenianness' itself.

### **Migrants and the National Others: Anti-Turkishness defining Armenianness**

In her anthropological study of Armenia during the years of transition to independence, Nora Dudwick asserted that Turks continued to occupy, even decades after the genocide of 1915, the main role of the 'Other' in the Armenian imagination (1994: 66-67). As my research reveals, a quarter of a century after Dudwick's study that identificational dichotomy still maintains its validity and appears among a considerable number of the Migrants.

#### *The Turks as the Others: A historical legacy*

Before looking at the contemporary encounter between Migrants and Turks/Turkey and its impact on the image of the latter amongst the former, this section aims to briefly go through the phases and events that have been historically significant for the production of that image in the region corresponding to the territory of contemporary Armenia, i.e. the Migrants' departure point. After setting that historical context, I shall return to the Migrants and their

encounters with the ‘Other’, in order to see whether the latter maintains its symbolic position, or loses its significance for ‘Armenianness’ as a result of those encounters.

Many citizens of the Republic of Armenia are historically linked to the traumatic Genocide of the early twentieth century to which Ottoman Armenians were subjected by the Young Turks government. In fact, the ancestors of many of them originate from Ottoman Armenian towns and villages. Historians note that hundreds of thousands of Armenians escaped from the Ottoman empire to Russian Armenia in the wake of the genocide, as a result of which, in 1920, about half of the population of the newly independent Armenian Republic were refugees who had survived the massacres (Suny 1997: 347; Panossian 2006a: 241, 244). Most arriving refugees became permanent settlers in Armenia, thus forming an important proportion of the current Armenian population’s ancestry (Körükmez 2012: 70). Moreover, Soviet Armenia received several waves of genocide-survivor Armenians at later stages in history: nearly 40,000 refugees between 1922 and 1936; another 100,000 a decade later from diasporic communities established as a result of the genocide; and many descendants of survivors in the last migration flow (1962-1973) from the diaspora (Taşçı 2010: 23-24). In fact, many Migrants told me they had familial roots in Ottoman towns and villages, such as Muş, Van, *Sasun*, Kars, etc. Thus, there clearly exists a historical link between the Migrants and the genocide believed to have played a crucial role in the production of the notion of the ‘evil Turk’ in Armenian popular culture (Panossian 2006a: 240).

The Armenian-Turkish polarity in the imagination of the Armenians was sustained during the Soviet years (1920-1991). ‘Anti-Turkishness was rooted in the official Soviet[-Armenian] view, popular culture, and sense of history,’ writes historian Razmik Panossian (2006b: 227). In fact, Soviet Armenian historiography nurtured the idea of being victims of the Turks (Panossian 2006a: 241), and reinforced claims to Turkish-controlled territories

from which Armenians were exiled during the Genocide (Dudwick 1994: 107). It was during the Soviet period that Mount Ararat, dominating over Yerevan but situated right across the Turkish-Armenian border, was transformed into a popular symbol of Armenian territorial losses and demands (ibid.: 88). These anti-Turkish territorial stances reached their peak in the wake of the World War II, when Stalin made a demand for the historical Armenian territories of Ardahan and Kars from Turkey, which was, of course, fully supported by the Soviet Armenian leadership, but withdrawn after Stalin's death in 1953 (Panossian 2006b: 244, footnote 7).

The commemoration and politicisation of the genocide were also set forth under Soviet rule, though only 50 years after the events. On April 24, 1965, an unofficial demonstration marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Genocide in Yerevan. The authorities conceded to Armenian national sentiments and erected a monument to the memory of the victims on a hill in Yerevan, which still stands today (Suny 1993b: 122). Thus, as of 1965, the Genocide came to occupy a more central position in Eastern Armenian identity (Panossian 2006a: 241). Thus, by the twilight of the Soviet Union, the Turks were the most disliked and feared Others in Armenia, together with the Azerbaijanis with whom they share political and ethno-linguistic ties (Dudwick 1994: 67).

Moreover, the growing enmity, tensions and eventually full-scale war between Armenians and Azerbaijanis during the transitional period to independence became yet another factor for rising anti-Turkishness, not only because Turkey sided with Azerbaijan and closed its border with Armenia, but also because Armenians would often conflate Azeris and Turks, even using, as they still do, the same ethnonym 'Turk' for both (ibid.: 68; Panossian 2006b: 227). In present-day Armenia the 'Turk' remains the main national Other, the enemy and antithesis of the Armenian. The Turkish-Armenian border remains closed and the two countries have no diplomatic ties. 'The memory of the Genocide is regulated by

a national policy of remembrance' (Firat et al. 2017: 18), and the continued denial of the genocide by Turkey is perceived to be cynical, insulting and inimical.

I met Eleni, a returnee Migrant in her fifties, at a farm near Vagharshapat, a city about 18 km west of Armenia's capital Yerevan. Because of legal issues, she was forced to leave Istanbul and return to Armenia after ten years of work and marriage there. She now lives in poor conditions with her mother, sister and two children, born in Istanbul to a Turkish man. It struck me that she explicitly stressed that 'their father is a Yugoslav.' For anyone not knowledgeable about Turkey's demographic history and not sensitive to the Turkish-Armenian context, this detail would not raise any questions. But knowing that many Turkish citizens who consider themselves Turks have Yugoslav origins, I asked whether Eleni's husband was one of them. Her response was affirmative. I highly doubt that the children's father would identify himself only as a Yugoslav and not as a Turk in Turkey. Eleni's explicit categorisation of her children's father as a Yugoslav rather than a Turk most probably involved an attempt to avoid the stigma associated with Turkishness in the Armenian context in which they now lived. I hesitantly asked whether her children faced any discrimination in Armenia because of their father being a Turk. Eleni was not quick to respond, but her sister conceded: 'At the beginning yes... the other children used to label them "Turkish bastards."'

Thus, in Armenia, the Migrants' sending context, the Turks have historically been and still are the despised, feared, unwanted Others, the principal occupants of the other side of the boundary of Armenianness. But because of the lack of any actual contact with them, they have remained 'vague and abstract, albeit sinister, figure[s]' for Armenians of the Republic (Dudwick 1994: 68). How, if at all, have Migrants' encounters with the traditional Others in Istanbul affected their perceptions of the latter? Did such encounters affect the Turkish-Armenian identificational dichotomy among the Migrants?

*The positive effects of encounter*

Here I shall embark upon an ‘ethnography of encounter,’ a genre that studies the making and remaking of cultural meanings, identities and subjectivities in the context and as a result of everyday encounters and ‘engagements across difference’ among members of different groups (Faier and Rofel 2014: 364).

Among several of my Migrant interviewees, I, like other researchers (see Ozinian 2009: 28; Muradyan 2015: 12), noticed that the negative stereotypes about Turks had softened and at times even broken down as a result of encountering and interacting with the latter. In particular, those who work with or for Turks noted that they soon realised that their initial enmity towards and fear of the latter were exaggerated, even unnecessary or absurd. ‘In the end, I became convinced that they don’t treat us in an unusual, inhumane way... no one hurt my feelings or threatened me,’ said a middle-aged female domestic worker. ‘I used to think that Turks were far worse, but then I understood that it really depends on the particular individuals... Armenians can also be bad... Turks can also be good... both types exist everywhere,’ said another Migrant, a baker in his late 30s. The inherited or taught stereotypes about the ‘bad Turk’ thus start, even if to a limited extent, to fall apart in Istanbul.

In addition to the lack of expected hostility, a few Migrants have even witnessed pro-Armenian stances of solidarity by the ‘Others,’ the effects of which have been even sharper. This almost exclusively happened among young Migrants who had come to Istanbul either for university studies or to work as journalists, researchers, or interns with progressive organisations of the civil society. This category constitutes a very small portion of the Migrant population, whereas the majority are labour Migrants. Lara, a Migrant researcher and young scholar of Turkish Studies, confessed to having had a totally different perception of Turkey and Turks before her arrival in Turkey, which was ‘the enemy’s country’ at the time. The turning point for her was an annual protest march in commemoration of *Türkiyeli*

Armenian journalist Hrant Dink's assassination, where she saw thousands of Turks demanding justice for Dink and Armenians in general. She recalled:

I started to realise how unjust we've been towards some [Turkish] people who knowingly risk themselves by organising or joining those protests every year since the assassination. And my attitude toward Turks started to change, I started to think that we need to start by recognising and understanding each other if we ever want to reach reconciliation. I stopped generalising and started respecting the work of many [Turkish] people, which I had failed to do before.

Thus, encounters with Turks in Istanbul seem to have partly softened the anti-Turkish feelings, stereotypes and stances among some Migrants. But how widespread are such encounters among the Migrant community and, consequently, how general is the depolarisation effect?

#### *The 'Other' surviving Istanbul*

The phenomenon of depolarisation discussed above cannot be generalised and ascribed to all or even a majority of the Migrants. Reports by some Turkish media outlets might create the image of a carefree Armenian Migrant who adores Turkey, loves and is thankful to the welcoming Turks for being treated amazingly, and does not want to return to the poor, miserable and weak Armenia (see Kaplan and Ozinian 2006; Öztürk 2010). Nevertheless, my research, like that of others to be cited here, demonstrates that discomfort, fear, enmity and sometimes hatred toward the Turks survive many Migrants' encounter with Turkey.

First it should be mentioned that encountering Turkey does not, for all Migrants, necessarily mean encountering Turks. Many Migrants, in fact, have very little contact with the 'Others.' Tiran, the vice-principal at HD school, for instance, admits that the only contact he has is in the market and at the barber shop. Otherwise he does not have and does not think he would ever have any Turkish friends. The domestic worker Migrants, similar to those working at the HD School, are deprived of the chance to encounter Turks as they are mostly

full-time employed by local Armenian families. A woman in her sixties clearly portrayed most of the Migrants' isolated situation:

I personally never worked for Turks and thus never got in meaningful contact with them. All of my neighbours here, all of my friends, are Armenians from Armenia. Our daily life begins Armenian, ends Armenian... we never communicate with them [the Turks] because we really are isolated. We live as if we were still in Armenia...

Moreover, the mere fact of coming to Turkey should not be interpreted as a sign of decreasing hostility towards it. Many Migrants, in fact, kept showing symptoms of uneasiness and even guilt for having come to 'the enemy country.' When I asked Hovo, a teacher at the HD School, about the reasons that brought him to Turkey, he replied:

We keep justifying ourselves, easing our conscience, thinking that this is, after all, a piece of land belonging to all, given by God: 'Is it important under which state's supervision it is?'... but we keep feeling bad! Even if a thousand years pass, [that enmity] stays in your conscience, just like it stays in theirs. I and a Turk might salute or smile at each other here, but deep down that feeling of past enmity persists and is always ready to burst... I don't know how it works, the call of blood? But it's always there, it's irremovable...

The persisting enmity is, as Hovo's comments clearly show, closely tied to historical memory. And in fact, although K r kmez, a Turkish sociologist, claims to have observed indifference toward the issue of the genocide among the Migrants (2012: 166), my observations reveal a different picture. Even if differentiating between the contemporary Turks and their ancestors and accepting that the former are technically not guilty for the murder and exile of their people, the Migrants I've spoke to were never indifferent toward the genocide and stressed the need for Turkey to recognise the crime, finding its official denial unacceptable and insulting. Hovo, again, recalled his embarrassment in regard to the denial of the genocide by a Turk with whom he had once conversed. 'He kept insisting that it was war and what happened was a peaceful deportation for the sake of Armenians' security,' he resentfully presented his interlocutor's stance before arguing for the contrary through the usage of his own familial memory: 'What peaceful deportation? I can recount in concrete factual details what our family went through in 1915. My mother's grandmother,

a child at the time, was saved by hiding under clothes from where she watched how they butchered her family...’ His colleague, a much older woman, jumped into the conversation to support his case by her own story. Yet another Migrant woman, also a teacher at the school, told us about her own debates with her Turkish colleague when she used to work at a jewelry shop: ‘We were close, we had a good relationship, but that topic was always there and I always argued that the genocide had undeniably happened.’

Although, as shown above, the exaggerated fear of the abstract image of the ‘Turk’ and the expectation of daily abusive treatment by it are alleviated after a certain period of time in Istanbul, a certain level of anxiety and circumspection clearly persists among many Migrants. ‘At the end of the day we’re in Turkey, and they’re Turks, so you never know what could happen to you,’ explains Karen, the worker at the jewelry workshop. Astghik, a young woman teaching at the HD School, explains that she never hides her Armenian identity from Turkish strangers despite the fact that she is ‘totally aware of the risk that I can get hurt at any time for that, or that they might reply very violently, insult me, etc... although that has never occurred yet.’ Astghik, thus, acts with courage and pride according to the moral requirements of the nation, but still perceives some risk and antagonism between herself and the Turks. Similar instances of cautiousness on the part of the Migrants have been observed by other researchers as well (Muradyan 2015: 54; Ozinian 2009: 17, 26, 28; Körükmez 2012: 165). Ozinian (2011) cites a particularly illustrative reminiscence by a Migrant teacher at the HD school: ‘once a fruit seller brought some fruit for the children. At first, I thanked him and accepted the gift, but later I became afraid and threw the fruit away’ (my translation).

In addition to a degree of fear, the negative stereotypes about Turks also persist among many Migrants, even after years of residence in Istanbul. Turks were often categorised by Migrants as unproductive, unintelligent, uncivilised people who owe their

contemporary economic, military and other advances to their historical barbarism, crimes and appropriations of others' goods. Interrupting our conversation about Turkish-Armenian relations with the Migrant owner of a small bakery in Kumkapı, a client, a Migrant himself, shared his views: 'This might sound rude, very rude, I know... but the Turks have a lot of riches but no intelligence at all. Whereas Armenians, even if poor, are worthy with their ability and wit. I'm serious, I've often seen them unable of doing very basic tasks at the workplace. All they have is money and the sea... and it's *our* sea that they have.' I have heard similar comments by other Migrants as well, and Muradyan has also recently recorded around a dozen stereotypical aphorisms about Turks recited by Migrants, such as 'there are no good Turks,' 'Turks aren't good even for themselves,' 'a Turk is a Turk,' and others (2015: 25-26).

The negative image of the Turks is very closely tied to that of Turkey. As it appears in the quotation of the client at the bakery above, the Migrants generally perceive Turkey as a state occupying 'their' land and sea. 'Turkey, how should I say, is an occupied land... In reality half of the country is Armenia, the other half is Greece...' said an ageing Migrant woman once. In a similar vein, Tiran, the vice-president of the HD school, would stubbornly use the term 'Western Armenia' when speaking about eastern Turkey. I have even seen Karen, the employee at the local-Armenian jewelry workshop, half-jokingly telling his Turkish co-worker that 'one day we'll take our lands back from you... Kars, Ardahan, Erzurum, all of it...'

#### *The 'Other' reproduced and nourished in Istanbul*

The Turkish 'Other' not only survives among the Migrants after their encounter with Turkey, but is also reproduced and somehow further nourished there.

First, it should be recalled that the Hrant Dink School closely follows the academic

curriculum used in Armenia. This curriculum is one of the main tools transmitting the memory of the genocide and of the Turkish-Armenian historical antagonism to the young generations. Not only is the Genocide covered in detail, but also Western Armenian (corresponding to eastern Turkey) geography, national heroic figures resisting Turkish rule and pre-genocide massacres of Armenians by the Ottoman Turks are taught at schools in Armenia (Firat et al. 2017: 12). The Hrant Dink school, preparing its pupils to complete their education in Armenia, naturally follows the same educational and, indeed, ideological direction.

On 12 May 2016, I went to the Armenian Protestant church of Gedikpaşa to watch a theatrical show prepared by the school's teachers, acted by the pupils, and dedicated to two important figures in Armenian history: Father Komitas (1869-1935), the famous ethnomusicologist who experienced a mental breakdown and what would now be recognised as severe post-traumatic stress disorder after being arrested and deported to a prison camp during the genocide, and Hovhannes Tumanyan (1869-1923), the famous Eastern Armenian poet. The politicised and nationalist nature of the theatrical show was more than obvious to me. Not only 'our land,' 'our fatherland,' 'our nation,' were mentioned by the actors and in the voice-over of the projected videos, but the genocide itself and the Turkish-Armenian conflict were heavily engaged with in the show. A slide show of real photos of genocide victims and death marches was played. The term 'Western Armenia' was used and Tumanyan was quoted blaming those Armenians who were siding with or not resisting the Turks. All this was not only unexpected and surprising to me, especially given the fact of being in Turkey and compared to the extremely cautious stances of local Istanbulite Armenians, their schools and institutions (see Chapter 2), but also revealing. Whether intentionally or not, the production of the Turk as the Armenians' main 'Other' and the transmission of the memory of Turkish-Armenian hostility were clearly a persisting

phenomenon in the Migrant community in Istanbul.

Second, the ongoing otherisation and antagonism is also fueled by the ‘Others’ themselves. Although encountering Turkey and the Turks has, as shown above, a certain positive effect of normalisation and of partially breaking down the stereotypes and unrealistic fears, it often has a negative impact as well. My research attests to instances of discriminatory and hostile treatment of the Migrants by ordinary Turks, the Turkish media, and the Turkish state at its highest levels.

Although some interlocutors, as shown above, confessed to never having experienced any bad treatment by ordinary Turks, others have told me about negative experiences. Heriknaz, the founder and principle of the HD School, linked the increase in anti-Armenian popular feelings in Turkey to the broader political context. She recalled how in the days preceding and following the vote to criminalise the Armenian Genocide’s denial in France, a move which was harshly criticised in Turkey, the Migrants had numerous unpleasant experiences: ‘Our pastor was giving an interview in the church’s yard and people threw plastic water bottles at him. Later, while walking in the street, strangers told me to “go back to my country”’. But such discriminatory treatment is not always tied to the political context. The Migrant couple running the small bakery in Kumkapı told me, for instance, that occasionally people leave the bakery after learning that they’re Armenians, sometimes even bluntly declaring that they ‘won’t eat Armenians’ bread.’ Similar examples are abundant and are also observed by other researchers (Körükmez 2012: 166; Ozinian 2009: 27; Ozinian 2011). Last but not least, in May 2019 in the neighbourhood of Samatya two masked people attacked a Migrant woman with knives at her door, and, as it was reported, shouted ‘this is just the beginning’ while running away. The attack was widely interpreted as a hate crime, after the Migrant family later published a photo of a message recently left on their door, reading ‘f\*ck off infidels,’ accompanied by the sign of a cross

(*Agos* 2019). The Migrant family was later reported to have fled to Armenia (*Bianet* 2019b).

Coupled to such acts by ordinary Turks are discriminatory approaches towards the Migrants by the Turkish state. At first sight, the state seems very lenient towards the mostly undocumented Migrants. It is widely accepted that the police usually do not deport the undocumented Armenians although there are all the necessary legal grounds for doing so. Some interpret this leniency as politically motivated. Muradyan, for instance, writes: ‘The empiric experience shows that Armenians are not as easy to deport as, say, the Uzbeks, because it means dealing with the whole context of Armenian-Turkish relations, which implies a social pressure on policemen that they are racist, as there are issues like the Armenian Genocide, collective memories and so on’ (2015: 82). Istanbulite Armenian journalist and previous editor-in-chief of *Agos* newspaper Rober Koptaş, on the other hand, perceives a political strategy in that leniency: ‘The aim was, probably, to keep the undocumented Migrants as a potential political leverage to be applied in the problematic relations with Armenia’ (Koptaş 2011, my translation).

Repeated political statements by different high ranked Turkish state representatives have indeed proved that the Migrants are used as a leverage in Turkish-Armenian relations. Not only is the problem of Migrants’ legal status noted to draw Turkish statesmen’s and the media’s attention only when political tensions flare between the two countries (Ozinian 2009: 28), but their statements about the Migrants leave no room for suspicion about political motivations. Turkish Parliament member Şükrü Elekdağ’s comments in 2006 regarding the French National Assembly’s draft bill to criminalise the denial of the Armenian Genocide were perhaps the most striking in this regard: ‘In my opinion, the most effective precaution to take against this draft bill is putting leverage on Armenia. One of the first precautions to take is sending 70,000 Armenian citizens, who work in Turkey, back’ (cited and translated by Ozinian 2009: 97). Former Prime Minister and current President

Erdogan's comments are equally telling in this regard: '[Armenian Migrants' presence in Turkey is a] display of our peaceful approach, but we have to get something in return' (Vilhelbeitia 2010); 'if need be I will send those hundred thousand [Armenian Migrants] back to their country... Armenia should take a very important decision' (Öztürk 2010). Ozinian argues that the constant rise of the alleged number of Migrants from 30,000 to 100,000 in those political speeches is also politically motivated (2011).

Such political statements put considerable pressure on the Migrants who feel directly targeted and threatened by the Turkish state. Although they don't see it as an existential threat, the Migrants nevertheless seem to be conscious of the possibility that they could be deported at any time: 'I'm always ready for that, I expect it at any time. Because they are that same nation, and their president is such a guy who could be ruthless and cleanse these neighbourhoods of Armenians just like they have previously done...' said a Migrant woman, interestingly drawing a connection with the historical deportations of Armenians by Turkish authorities.

#### *Anti-Turkishness defining Armenianness*

Even more significant, especially for the main task of this chapter and dissertation, is that anti-Turkishness seems to *define and condition*, at least to an extent, Armenianness itself for the Migrants. Two vignettes shall help to illustrate this. In the first, Anahit, a woman in her early forties living in Turkey as a result of marriage migration (a rare case as such), surprised by her unexpected leniency towards Turkish national symbols worriedly questions her own 'national consciousness':

I come from a radical nationalist family in Armenia. As a child, I invented games with my sisters in which Turks and Armenians would fight for Mount Ararat. Whoever would 'knock-out' the Turks would climb on the sofa chanting 'Ararat is ours!' Now I'm surprised how tolerant I am towards the fact of coming and living in Turkey. A musician colleague of mine visited Istanbul for an international musical festival. When I visited him in his hotel room, all the curtains were drawn shut. I tried to open them because the room was dark, but my friend did not let me, saying that he couldn't bear the sight of the numerous Turkish national flags covering the city, that they would turn him hysterical... Seeing him in that

state and comparing it to mine caused me to feel quite troubled... “How have I become so tolerant?” I thought and still think to myself. Could it be that my national consciousness has decreased to the extent of dying out?

Anahit’s story not only reveals, once again, the extent of anti-Turkish sensitivity among some Armenian nationals such as her colleague, but sheds a clear light on the identificational potential that anti-Turkishness holds for Armenianness. In other words, Turks and Turkey as the Others seem to be so deeply rooted in many Armenians’ symbolic-cognitive conception of Armenian identity, that any disturbance or relocation of the Turkish-Armenian highly tense and sensitive boundary would put Armenianness itself in an existential crisis. A decrease of antagonism towards the Turk, in fact, is perceived as a decline of ‘Armenian national consciousness’ by Anahit.

Furthermore, a second vignette shows that too much intimacy and closeness with Turks might even result in one’s Armenianness being completely denied on the part of some Migrants. During a conversation with a group of Migrant women, all domestic workers of different ages, the issue of Migrant Armenian sex workers came up. The women became engaged in a heated conversation in which they judged and evaluated not only the morals of their compatriots, but also their very Armenianness. ‘Ok, we’re thankful that they’re letting us stay and work here, but who are the Turks after all? How could one go to bed with Turks who are beheading our soldiers?’, a woman pointed out, conflating Turkey’s Turks with the Azerbaijanis (as is commonly done by Armenians) who had beheaded an Armenian soldier during the then-recent four-day war in April 2016. But her most important thought was yet to follow: ‘Whoever does that is not an Armenian. Period! If you’d go and kiss the Turk – forgetting your past! – then you’re not an Armenian.’ There were, in the group, other women who agreed with her exclusionary categorisation. Thus, Migrant sex workers were deemed ‘non-Armenian’ not only for lacking ‘Armenian morality,’ but also for letting Turkish men too close, and allowing the latter to exploit and dominate them.

The Turks, to conclude, are and have historically been the national ‘Others’ of the Armenians, in relation to which the latter identify themselves. Encountering them in Istanbul breaks down their abstract and stereotypical figure and alleviates the exaggerated fears, but only to an extent and among certain, not all, Migrants. Others, depending on the frequency of their encounters with Turks and on their particular experiences with them, still firmly hold to the traditional conception and categorisation of the ‘Turk.’ Furthermore, that antagonism seems to be in constant production even in Istanbul, and fuelled by a reciprocally discriminatory and hostile treatment by some Turks and the Turkish state. In short, the Turkish ‘Other’ still holds its oppositional—and identificational—value for Armenianness amongst the Migrants. Differing from the Turks, keeping them at a distance and being demanding – even hostile – toward them, are, for the Migrants, still valid boundary markers of Armenianness.

## **Conclusion**

Tiran had stressed that one’s conduct, one’s way of living should also be ‘Armenian-like’ in order for one to be loyal to the Armenian identity resulting from one’s genes. In this chapter I aimed to discover, analyse and explain the main properties of living and acting ‘according to the Armenian way’ as imagined by most Migrants. The bearers of ‘Armenian blood’ are thus expected to meet several behavioural and ideological conditions as well: connectedness to, reverence and defense of the homeland, the Republic of Armenia; abiding by the traditions and customs of the Moral Nation, especially those that concern gender and kinship roles and relations; and maintaining the necessary distance, national politico-historical demands and hostility towards the main Others, i.e. Turks, thus sustaining the Turkish-Armenian identificational dichotomy and boundary. Only by accomplishing all of the latter could one be categorised as an ‘ideal Armenian’ in the point of view of the majority of

Migrant Armenians I met in Istanbul.

Last but not least, I should note that these different fields (genetics, morality, patriotism and hostility toward the national Other) are often conceived in causal relation with each other. Compliance with one of the expectations of Armenianness could be attributed to the existence of one of the others. Failing to abide by one of them could pave way, on the other hand, to an Armenian's perceived degeneration in one or more of the other fields. Hovo, the drama teacher at the HD school, for instance, explained his 'everlasting subconscious enmity' against the Turks by the 'call of the blood.' Tiran, on the other hand, argued that the 'unchanging Armenian genetic code' was responsible for contemporary Armenians' moral successes and failures. Finally, an interlocutor of Dudwick has had an even richer, tridimensional equation of Armenianess, where morality, genetics and the Turkish Other are in direct causal relationship. He had hypothesised that the original Armenians' moral character had deteriorated over the centuries because Turkish blood had intruded into the Armenian 'race' (Dudwick 1994:64).

## CHAPTER 6

### **Intra-Armenian Boundary Making and Struggles over Armenianness (1): Local Christian Armenians and Muslim/Alevi Armenians**

In August 2014, during a short period of fieldwork for my Mphil dissertation, Father Tateos hosted me for a few nights in his small abode situated in the courtyard of the Armenian Church on Kınalıada. My Mphil research dealt only with the Christian Armenian community of Istanbul, but I was aware of the existence of the Muslim, Alevi and Migrant Armenians as well. When I asked his opinion about the phenomenon of the Muslim/Alevi Armenians, Father Tateos had a strict reaction: ‘We are going to gather them all and send them to Beirut!’ His half-joking response betrayed sincere feelings of antipathy and discomfort towards this group of people. What he meant was that he and other Istanbulite Christian Armenians did not share the interest and excitement that Armenians outside Turkey, including Beirut Armenians such as myself, had toward the newly emerging Muslim/Alevi Armenians.

That was perhaps one of the first instances that drew my attention to the relations between members of the different factions of Armenians coexisting in contemporary Turkey and their stances toward each other, a topic to which I turned in this doctoral dissertation.

This chapter, in particular, looks at the relations between the Muslim/Alevi Armenians and the Christian Armenian citizens of Turkey. First, it reveals how the majority of the latter exclude the former from their community and imagined nation, both symbolically and socially. Then it looks at the ways in which the Muslim/Alevi Armenians react to that exclusion and counter it. Finally, it also studies the alternative inclusive

approach toward the Muslims and Alevis by the progressive secularist minority within the Christian Armenian community.

Beyond description, I seek to explain those particular mechanisms of boundary making. What are the underlying reasons for the emergence of rigid boundaries that exclude the Muslim and Alevi Armenians? Which factors, on the other hand, allow or encourage the secularist minority to expand the boundaries of Armenianness and incorporate the ‘new Armenians’ into the old nation?

### **‘Muslim or Armenian? Let Them Make a Choice!’: Christian Armenians rejecting Muslim/Alevi Armenians**

#### *Erecting symbolic and social boundaries*

My observations among the Christian Armenian citizens of Turkey clearly attest to the fact that they have erected both symbolic and social boundaries between themselves and the Muslim and Alevi Armenians. According to the distinction made by Lamont and Molnar (2002), symbolic boundaries are ‘conceptual distinctions’ made by individuals, serving to categorise things, including people. On the other hand, it is possible to speak of social boundaries only when those symbolic distinctions translate into actual practices and patterns of social exclusion and segregation. The Christian Armenians both cognitively exclude the Muslim Armenians from their imagined community and nation, and socially keep them at a distance.

The rigidity of the symbolic boundary clearly manifests itself on the linguistic level. The way in which my Christian Armenian interviewees talk about the Muslim/Alevi Armenians and the wording they use when referring to them betray how deep-rooted is the boundary they cognitively draw between themselves and those unorthodox Armenians. I often asked a Christian Armenian whether a third person was Muslim and heard the ‘no, he is Armenian’ response, suggesting that the ‘Muslim’ and ‘Armenian’ categories are

perceived to be antithetical and mutually exclusive. When talking about a conversation between a Christian Armenian man and his Muslim Armenian relative, an Armenian Protestant pastor was referring to the former as ‘our guy’ and to the latter as ‘the other.’ ‘The Armenians and the *dönmes* [converts]’ is yet another expression that symbolically separates the Christian Armenians from the Muslim/Alevi Armenians in the formers’ ‘mental maps’ (Lamont 2002).

Muslim/Alevi Armenians’ Armenianness is often bluntly rejected by Christian Armenians. Here is an excerpt from my conversation with an Armenian Apostolic priest living in southeastern Turkey:

Father B.: How can one belong to two opposing sides at the same time?

I: Do you mean that being a Muslim and being an Armenian are contradictory states?

Father B.: Yes. That’s my approach. A man in Diyarbakır once told me that he is a Muslim *and* an Armenian. ‘How can you be both?’ I asked. ‘What can I do?’ he said. But that’s unacceptable! Some of my father’s relatives have also Islamised...

I: And you don’t consider them as Armenians I suppose...

Father B.: I don’t... I tell them right to their face: ‘You are not Armenian.’

I: But do they perceive themselves as Armenians?

Father B.: Yes. But I tell them they’re not.

I: And how are your relations with that Muslim part of your family?

Father: Not warm, not close... quite limited and rather formal...

Father B.’s boundary making goes beyond the symbolic level and affects interpersonal relations, thus already producing social boundaries. Similar religion-based social boundaries drawn against Muslim kin exist in other families as well. The family of Sarkis, a Christian Armenian born in Batman but currently living in Istanbul, has cut all ties with his aunt who married the son of an Islamised family. An old Christian Armenian man from Bitlis told me that he does not greet his niece anymore because she married a Muslim Kurd and became a Muslim. Interestingly, he thinks that, through Islamisation, the niece has ‘Kurdified’ and ceased to be an Armenian. The immediate relationship between the symbolic Muslim vs. Armenian boundary in the man’s perception and his drawing of a social boundary through his particular behaviour is more than obvious here.

I have noticed a similar approach toward the Alevi Armenians as well. Ceren, a thirty-year-old Alevi woman originally from Dersim and self-identifying as an Armenian, told me that she and her Christian Armenian ex-boyfriend had to end their relationship because his parents wanted him to ‘marry an Armenian,’ clearly suggesting that she was not counted as an Armenian since she was not Christian.

The social boundary against Muslim/Alevi Armenians goes beyond interpersonal and familial relations and has a more collective nature as well, in the sense that Christian Armenians are usually reluctant, to say the least, to give the Muslim and Alevi Armenians access to their ‘community system’ (see Chapter 2). The matter of admission to Istanbulite Armenian schools is an example. Although the condition of being a ‘minority member,’ that is a Christian Armenian, in order to be eligible to attend these schools is prescribed by Turkish Law, the Armenian community leaders are also mostly in favour of not allowing Muslim/Alevi Armenians’ admission. In 2015 the state eased its control over this admission process by transferring the Ministry of Education’s responsibility of checking applicants’ eligibility to the Armenian schools’ principals (Palakoğlu 2015; Tchilingirian 2016: 150). Consequently, the community leaders, under the auspices of the Patriarchate, set the condition of presenting baptism certificates in order to become eligible for admission to the schools. Thus, they further strengthened the boundary and made sure that no single principal admits Muslim/Alevi Armenian children to the community schools, whether by mistake or intentionally.

A similar kind of gatekeeping is also practised by some of the hometown associations that assemble Armenians originating from particular regions in Anatolia. For instance, knowing that there are Muslim Armenians from *Sasun* (contemporary Batman) in Istanbul, I asked the president of the Compatriotic Union of Armenians of Sasun in Istanbul whether they had such members as well. ‘No. We accept only Armenians,’ he said, denying the

Muslim Armenians' Armenianness. He added that they had even written the association's charter accordingly. In a similar vein, the administrators of the Association of Sivas Armenians and Friends in Istanbul were quite reluctant to accept my proposal of welcoming Muslim and Alevi Armenians to the Armenian language classes that I used to teach at their centre. When I insisted, they finally agreed to admit only those few whom I personally knew and trusted.

The Muslim and Alevi Armenians thus find themselves facing quite a rigid boundary on the part of many, if not most, Christian Armenian citizens of Turkey, both on the symbolic/cognitive and social/practical levels. They are thus not only excluded from the Turkish-Muslim nation as 'Armenian bastards,' but also from the Christian Armenian community. Their situation is in this sense similar to that of other peoples who remain outside the established ethnic/religious categories of Turkey, namely the descendants of the Islamised Jews known as *Dönmes* who are discriminated against and rejected by both Turks and orthodox Jews (Danon 1997: 25; Nefes 2012: 426).

How can we explain the emergence and maintenance of this intra-Armenian boundary? Why do the Christian Armenians exclude the Muslim/Alevi Armenians and even deny their very Armenianness rather than welcoming them to the community? My analysis of this boundary making reveals both instrumental and non-instrumental, i.e. cognitive, ideological, cultural and emotional explanations for it.

*Disinterested boundary making: issues of cognitive dissonance and perceived historical injustice*

Sibel, a Christian Armenian woman in her late twenties, has recently had the chance to meet Muslim Armenians thanks to working as a translator on a film project dealing with that population. She told me the story of her first encounter:

We went to film a family living in Fatih. The woman who opened the door was veiled in the most conservative style. A man and a few other veiled women welcomed us in the sitting room. Only the man spoke. He told us the story of his grandfather. By the way, they were all of a 100 percent Armenian ancestry. He knew everything about their past, even the location of the cave where his grandfather hid and survived the massacres. He knew more than I know about my own family history, and he was explicitly saying that he and his family were Armenian... But their Armenianness and the [Islamic] way the women looked were *totally* incompatible. My brain could simply not fit the two together! It was a real shock to me. It was midnight when we came out of the house, but I was so lost and perplexed that I needed a drink and people to talk to about this. Thank god my friends were at a pub in Taksim, so I joined them, and before telling them the story, I asked them: ‘What does being Armenian mean? Who is an Armenian?’

According to social psychologist Leon Festinger (1957), cognitive dissonance is a mental discomfort experienced when an individual’s belief clashes with new and opposing evidence. As revealed in Chapter 2, the Christian Armenians mostly believe that being Christian is a precondition and a byproduct of being Armenian. The recent advent of the ‘Muslim/Alevi Armenian’ category strongly challenges this notion, contradicts it, and thus triggers a cognitive dissonance among many of the orthodox Armenians, such as my friend Sibel.

For many of the Christian Armenians, the idea of a non-Christian, especially a Muslim Armenian is, to start with, very new. One of the most respected intellectuals in the community, the editor of the *Nor Marmara* newspaper Rober Haddeciyan spoke to me about this novelty in the following words: ‘Five or six years ago, the “Muslim-Armenian” notion was not a matter of discussion for us. There was no such concept at all.’ During a public event about the Dersim Alevi Armenians in 2017, the president of the Association of Dersim Armenians said that, for the Armenian community of Istanbul, the Alevi Armenians of Dersim were ‘non-existent for years, until very recently.’ To my surprise, some Christian Armenians were still totally unaware of the phenomenon during my research years (2015-2017). ‘What does “Muslim Armenian” mean?’ asked a woman with sincere perplexity when I told her and others about my research topic. ‘Have any of you heard about that? Here I am, 62 years old, and I have never heard about such people till now. Both Muslim *and*

Armenian? That cannot happen!’, said a Christian Armenian woman in Malatya in a very similar manner.

This does not mean, however, that they are unaware of the Islamisation of Armenians during or after the genocide. On the contrary, many know and tell stories about the conversion of parts of their families (see also Suciyan 2016: 62-65). Nevertheless, observing from within their cognitive frames of classification, they consider the Islamised and their descendants as no-longer-Armenians, no matter how the latter identify themselves. Apart from ‘Islamised,’ in fact, they use expressions such as ‘*türkleşmiş*’ or ‘*dajgats’adz*,’ meaning Turkified in Turkish and Armenian respectively, and ‘*kürtleşmiş*’ or ‘*krdats’adz*,’ meaning Kurdified, which completely strip the converts of Armenianness. ‘Once Islamised, they cease to be Armenian, right?’ a woman asked her husband in order to double-check her knowledge, after I asked her about the Muslim/Alevi Armenians.

Thus, according to most Christian Armenians’ ‘mental maps,’ that is ‘the grammar of evaluation they use’ (Lamont 2000: 4), one can be *either* Muslim/Alevi *or* Armenian. Being simultaneously both is a cognitively untenable phenomenon, it entails being ‘hors de catégorie’ and having a ‘neither/nor status’ (Wallman 1978: 214). According to the Christian Armenians’ worldview, religious (Christian/Muslim) and ethnic (Armenian/Turkish) boundaries should be congruent. Muslim Armenianness, on the other hand, suggests incongruence and thus implies, in Wallman’s terms, a ‘boundary dissonance’ (1978: 212). Haro, a middle-aged man, was insisting that the ‘so-called Muslim Armenians’ should pick between the Armenian-Christian and Turkish-Muslim identities. When I pointed out that those people are making a third choice, that of being Muslim Armenian, Haro lost his patience: ‘There is no third choice! This is like saying that one is neither a male nor a female, but something in between! Is that possible?!’

Furthermore, the cognitive dissonance provoked by the idea of the Muslim-Armenian is even more intensely experienced when being faced with its actual embodiment, like in the example that Sibel provided at the beginning of this sub-section. After a dinner with my Christian and Muslim Armenian students of Armenian, one of the Christians, Siran, said that she was shocked by the fact that Erhan, the founder of the Muslim Armenians Facebook page, had muttered the Islamic *bismillah* ('in the name of God') before he started to eat. 'What? You're Armenian! What was that?!', she had instantly thought, as she recalled. Clear signs of that cognitive dissonance were also visible among the Christian Armenian audience of a non-academic talk about Muslim Armenians. In particular, when the speaker showed a video in which the Armenian national flag was accompanied by the tune of an Islamic prayer, some people reacted with laughter, while others were explicitly embarrassed and one elderly man even asked to stop the video. To the eyes of those Christian Armenians, Islamic symbols clearly make 'visible "others"' (Zolberg and Woon 1999: 7), and their overlapping with Armenian ones had thus triggered cognitive and emotional discomfort among them.

All this is surely understandable in light of the Christian Armenians' ethno-religious understanding of Armenianness, which posits Christianity and belonging to the Armenian Churches as the most important definitional pillars of Armenian identity. Being institutionalised and legally inscribed, as we have seen, the *religious* boundary of Armenianness is 'bright,' 'path-dependent' (Alba 2005), and thus not really prone to change for most Christian Armenians. 'Our nationality is our religion, our religion is our nationality,' Haro reminded me while arguing that Muslim Armenianness is impossible.

Thus, because of their incompatibility with the Christian-Armenian ideological and cognitive pairings, the Muslim Armenians are excluded from the Armenian nation by the Christian Armenian citizens of Turkey. They share, in this sense, the fate of the Christian

Turks (Özyürek 2009a; 2009b), and the Muslim Jews (Danon 1997; Nefes 2012), two other populations having neither/nor status in contemporary Turkey, and that of a range of other peoples remaining in between and thus on the margins of established official categories elsewhere.<sup>69</sup>

A second non-instrumental factor contributing to the Christian Armenians' drawing of boundaries against the Muslim/Alevi ones consists of their moral judgment about the conversion of the latter. I was in my hometown Beirut during the Easter holidays of 2016. By coincidence, Ergün, one of my Muslim Armenian students, was also there with two of his Christian cousins. Thanks to intensive daily contacts with his Christian Armenian relatives, he was becoming acquainted with Christianity and had started to develop some interest towards it. In this context, he was attending Sunday mass in one of the Armenian churches of Beirut, together with his cousins, committed Christians, and myself, a committed researcher. At a certain point during his sermon, the priest drew a parallel between the sacrifice of Christ and that of the 'one-and-a-half million Armenians who did not betray God, remained Christian and sacrificed themselves' during the genocide of 1915. Ergün's Armenian was very poor at the time and he did not understand these words, which were indirectly accusing the Islamised Armenians – such as his immediate ancestors – of being traitors.

That same thinking, in an even more straightforward manner, is broadly present among the Christian Armenians of Istanbul, for whom the issue of the Muslim/Alevi Armenians is much more tangible. Similar to the priest in Beirut, many of them consider

<sup>69</sup> Such populations include, but are not limited to, the English-born Blacks and the high-achieving Black students in the UK (Wallman 1978: 213-214), the Indian Muslims (Viswanathan 1998; Pandey 1999), the Muslim Germans (Özyürek 2009b), the Muslim Europeans (Zolberg and Woon 1999), and the Muslim Georgians of Ajaria who, for being non-Christian, are sometimes not considered to be 'real' Georgians by their Christian compatriots (Pelkmans 2006: 129 -131)

their ancestors' suffering and death during the genocide to be a direct result of their religious identity. However, they go further than the Catholicos, as they not only consider the victims martyrs sacrificed for Christian Armenianness, but explicitly accuse the convert-survivors of betraying the religion and the nation it is coterminous with (see also Özgül 2013: 206).

In a way, the problem for the Christian Armenians lies not only in the fact that Muslim Armenians are not Christians, but in the fact that they are Muslims in particular. The Muslim state and majority, for the Christian Armenians, have long been parties oppressing them on religious grounds. Even the genocide in the late Ottoman period is mostly interpreted by them through a religious prism and a matter of Muslim-Christian confrontation (Chapter 2). The 'Muslim Armenian,' in their view, impossibly embodies both the perpetrator and the victim, both the self and the enemy other. That is exactly why the Christian Armenians are more lenient with Alevi Armenians than they are with the Sunni Muslim ones. That is also why some have told me that they would probably be able to accommodate the idea of Buddhist, or Hindu Armenians, but never Muslim. 'Isn't Islam our enemy at the end of the day? It stole our sons and daughters from us, and converted them by force. Satan took them from us. And now they come to tell us: "Yes, we are your children, but we are Muslims." How can this be easy for us?', explained an Armenian Protestant pastor to me. Another woman expressed herself as follows:

Excuse me but I simply cannot accept someone leaving this pure religion of ours and choosing one that encourages killing. It is the Muslims who came and uprooted us from our land, it is they who massacred us... How could I accept an Armenian's conversion to that religion? What kind of Armenian is that?

Moreover, Christian Armenians find it to be unjust that their ancestors have endured more massacres, deportations and losses than those of the Muslim and Alevi Armenians who took, in their opinion, the easy, but dishonourable way out. They find even more unacceptable the fact that converts and their descendants have remained Muslim/Alevi for

decades after the end of the massacres, when their lives were not at risk anymore. Here is how a community leader expressed his resentment:

It's been a hundred years since the genocide, and only during the last ten or fifteen years these people are claiming to be Armenian or to have Armenian origins. They knew about that all the time, right? And why were they not daring to speak out then? Because it was not as easy as today, right? On the other hand, we, the Christian Armenians, have always been openly Armenian. And for decades we went through difficulties, persecutions, discrimination, and all that for *officially* being Armenians and Christians, for having those identities declared on our identity cards. We have paid the price for our Armenianness. They have not. If they are really Armenian, why aren't they changing their religion back to Christianity and declaring it on their identity cards? I'll tell you why. Because they might need to deny their Armenianness once again when things get worse in the future.

Thus, unaware of the Muslim/Alevi Armenians' own suffering and difficulties described in Chapter 4, many Christian Armenians find the 'Muslim Armenian' identity to be insincere and its bearers to be two-faced, i.e. willing to be treated as Armenians by the Christian Armenians, but as Muslims by the state and the majority of the population. They think it would be unjust if they treat the Muslim/Alevi Armenians as equals and as full-fledged members of their nation, since the latter have been and still are able to deny their Armenianness and evade the treatment they themselves endured for decades. That last assumption is evidently incorrect, since Muslim/Alevi Armenians are, as we have seen, discriminated against despite their religious affiliations. An Alevi Armenian woman in her fifties finds this approach of the Christian Armenians to be insulting and argues that their conditions in Anatolian provinces have sometimes been even harsher than those of the Christian Armenians living in Istanbul. Nevertheless, the Muslim/Alevi Armenians' stories remain mostly unknown to the Christian Armenians who look down on them as traitors with privileged positions thanks to conversion and 'denying their identity.'

These moral-ideological stances of Christian Armenians vis-à-vis the Muslim and Alevi Armenians are, like to the cognitive-symbolic stance described above, non-instrumental factors contributing to the emergence and maintenance of symbolic and social boundaries against the latter. The exclusion of Muslim/Alevi Armenians on the part of the

Christian ones, to conclude, is first of all cognitive, symbolic, ideological and emotional, long before any contact, conflict, competition, or instrumental calculations occur.

*Instrumental boundary making: resource competition, issues of security and 'authenticity'*  
Nevertheless, Christian Armenians' making of the symbolic and social boundary vis-à-vis the Muslim/Alevi Armenians is not purely disinterested. In addition to the aforementioned cognitive, ideological and emotional factors, there are interest-related practical issues that further solidify the boundary: resource competition, the community's security, and the nation's 'authenticity.'

A recurring theme in my conversations with the Christian Armenians over the Muslim/Alevi Armenians' attempts to approach them and join the community was the probable financial burden the latter could bring with them. 'They see us as grant funders,' a deacon told me, alluding to the rumours that Muslim/Alevi Armenians approaching the community expect financial support. A layman community leader also believed that many Muslim/Alevi Armenians's motivation in approaching them is either the expectation of getting help in finding a job, or the hope of getting access to the community's institutions, such as one of the many schools. These opinions, as discussed in Chapter 4, are exaggerated, to say the least, and ignore what Muslim/Alevi Armenians *lose* by coming out as Armenians.

As I have already mentioned, most of the community leaders are against admitting Muslim/Alevi Armenian children to the schools. In addition to their experience of a cognitive dissonance in view of Muslims or Alevis attending their schools, there are more practical reasons behind that opposition. Since the state does not fund minority schools, it is the community itself that undertakes that financial burden. As community members explained, many of the schools are already in financial difficulties and can barely secure the education of 'the community children,' i.e. the Christian Armenians. 'What are we supposed to do with those newcomers? How can we take care of them? We surely cannot allow them

in at the expense of *our* children in *our* school!’ said a high-ranking priest, clearly revealing the fact that the maintenance of the boundary would be in the financial interest of the community.

Another interest-related factor contributing to the emergence and maintenance of the boundary is the Christian Armenians’ concern with their own security. I have noticed that fears and conspiracies surrounding the Muslim/Alevi Armenians exist among the Christians. There is a general mistrust towards ‘these people who were silent for years and suddenly decided to become Armenian.’

In a short documentary filmed by *France24* (2015), Archimandrite Tatul Anushyan appears, saying: ‘To protect our Church and the Armenian community we need to investigate, monitor and identify the roots of a person who wants to take a step like this. When a person says they want to abandon their former cultural identity after four generations and take on the identity of their ancestors, one wonders what the purpose is. That is why we are cautious.’ Anushyan’s caution was directed mainly toward Muslim/Alevi Armenians willing to convert to Christianity and officially join the community. The carefulness towards Muslim/Alevi Armenians who wish to stay Muslim or Alevi is naturally even more accentuated. It appears not only among community leaders, but also many members of the community. The porter at the Association of Sivas Armenians and Friends told me, for instance, that he does not trust my Muslim and Alevi Armenian students there: ‘I am still observing them, examining them.’

A first reason for this prudence is the possibility, according to the Christian Armenians, of some Muslim/Alevi Armenians’ being agents of the Turkish state. ‘The MIT [Turkish secret services] would surely have infiltrated the Muslim and Alevi Armenians,’ believed a young Christian Armenian journalist. ‘Why do they want to learn Armenian?’ conspiratorially asked me an Armenian pastor in Istanbul. ‘They tell me they are Armenians

and thus they want to learn their ancestors' language. What is wrong with that?' I retorted. He insisted: 'Well, Satan is always attentive and ready to seize opportunities... and we know that this state teaches some of its secret service personnel Armenian so they can spy on us.'

Second, many Christian Armenians sincerely distrust the Muslim Armenians on religious grounds. 'Just as we are treated as *gavurs* [infidels] by Muslims in general, we will be treated the same way by the Muslim Armenians, if they are truly Muslims,' reasoned a 70-year-old Christian Armenian man. 'Wine that turns into vinegar is more acidic than original vinegar' was a metaphor I heard a few times, suggesting that converted Armenians and their descendants are sometimes more radical Muslims than Kurds or Turks. Aram said that he fears the Armenian converts even more than the Turks or Kurds because 'they will be the first ones to follow an order of *jihad* against us, in order to prove to their religious brothers that they are true Muslims and not Armenians anymore.'

Such arguments are sometimes based on actual experience. Beril, the Christian Armenian woman who appeared in the Introduction, told the story of an Islamised Armenian man in one of the villages in Batman, some of whose sons had remained Christians as they were able to move to Istanbul. When the father died, the Muslim members of the family forbade the Christian sons to touch their father's body fearing that the *gavur* sons might desecrate the dead that had been washed according to the Islamic customs. 'How do you expect us to have confidence in these people? They clearly have the potential to harm us,' concluded Beril after bringing up this example.

Thus, mistrust toward Alevi and especially Muslim Armenians is a factor that further encourages the Christian Armenians to keep the former away from the community. Especially in light of a century-long experience of violence and discrimination on the part of the state and the Muslim majority, the Christian Armenians, in particular the community leaders, find the emergence and maintenance of the boundary to be in the interest of the

community. ‘If this community has survived for this many years in this country, it is thanks to fear and cautiousness,’<sup>70</sup> the very same Archimandrite Anushyan told me during one of our several conversations.

Finally, Christian Armenians believe that the boundary in question would defend Armenian identity from degeneration. Conservatism and self-seclusion is, according to Archimandrite Anushyan, ‘the guarantor of our identity.’ There is a fear that contacts with Muslim Armenians might encourage community members’ conversion to Islam. ‘If we let them join our associations, our girls and boys might marry them and also become Muslim,’ argued the president of the Compatriotic Union of Armenians of Sasun in Istanbul. In a similar vein, Archimandrite Anushyan argues that admitting the Muslim/Alevi Armenians to the Armenian schools poses a serious risk because if their number exceeds that of the Christian Armenian students they might impose their own religion and culture on the latter: ‘If we let those foreign elements infiltrate our schools and community, we might turn into a minority within our own institutions. They could assimilate us, we Armenians could go through a metamorphosis and become estranged to ourselves!’ The Muslim/Alevi Armenians are thus, like the Christian Turks studied by Özyürek, a ‘site of anxiety’ for the Christian Armenian majority because they are believed to have the potential to convert the latter ‘and thus threaten the[ir] assumed religious and cultural purity’ (2009b: 95).

Moreover, in addition to that concern about their acculturation, Christian Armenians feel that Armenianness itself, as a concept, is threatened by the rise of Muslim/Alevi Armenian identities. Accepting the latter into the community would mean legitimising them, thinks Anushyan. And when Muslim/Alevi Armenianness is legitimised, ‘even the idea of the “Armenian” would change!’ he exclaims.<sup>71</sup> A Catholic Armenian from Mardin once

<sup>70</sup> Original in Western Armenian.

<sup>71</sup> Original in Western Armenian.

asked me to ‘unlike’ the *Muslim Armenians* Facebook page, arguing that otherwise I would be supporting them in their endeavour of ‘drawing Armenian identity towards Islam.’ Months later, reacting to the publication of an interview about my research (Papazian 2016b), he wrote again and threatened to kill me if I ‘continued supporting those so-called Muslim Armenians.’

This is similar, again, to the way Turkish nationalists perceive the Christian Turks as a threat to the Turkish nation and its integrity (Özyürek 2009a)—which is also understandable given the fact that, as already mentioned, non-Muslims have traditionally been the ‘Others’ of Turkish identity—and to other cases, such as the Indian Muslims whose practice of customary laws other than the one accepted as the ‘national,’ i.e. Hindu, is declared as separatist and antinational by the majority (Viswanathan 1998: xi). The Muslim/Alevi Armenians are thus somehow ‘absolute enemies’ to the Christian Armenians as they threaten their collective existence mainly ‘in an ontological sense,’ by ‘challeng[ing] the very notion by which the identity of the[ir] collective has been formed’ (Buck-Morss 2000: 34). Accordingly, erecting symbolic and social boundaries and denying their access to the community and the nation as an idea is instrumental in, perhaps even necessary for, defending ‘Armenianness’ as the Christian Armenians understand it.

#### *Multilateral boundary making*

Here I introduce the notion of multilateral boundary making, which I hope to contribute to the existing literature on boundary work. So far I attempted to understand and explain Christian Armenians’ erection of symbolic and social boundaries against the Muslim/Alevi ones through a linear analysis limited to observing the symbolic and practical relations between the two groups. However, a wider observation that situates this particular case of boundary making in its broader context reveals that it is also conditioned, influenced and motivated by the Christian Armenians’ relations with and boundary on another front, that

with the Turkish state and majority. Furthermore, this multilaterality appears when it comes to both instrumental calculations and disinterested symbolic relations.

On the instrumental level, the Christian Armenians not only take into consideration potential risks coming directly from the Muslim/Alevi Armenians, but also fear that the latter can jeopardise their fragile relations with the Turkish state and majority, thus bringing them indirect harm. As a high-ranking cleric in the Apostolic Church described, the political stances of some of the Muslim/Alevi Armenians contrast with theirs, and that is another factor prompting them to have reservations toward the latter. Especially those who come from Kurdish-populated areas, he said, have leftist, anti-statist or anti-government stances, in addition to the memory of the genocide for which they sometimes publicly accuse the Turkish state. ‘This is one of the other issues we have with those people. We are in a very fragile status quo and we cannot risk our good relations with the state. We don’t have the luxury to speak about the genocide, to condemn the government for its anti-Kurdish, even anti-Armenian acts, and then expect the state to treat us well,’ said the cleric. Thus, by erecting boundaries and distancing themselves from Muslim/Alevi Armenians, the Christian Armenians avoid the risk of being conflated with ‘self-proclaimed Armenians’ whose politics might contradict theirs, this way protecting their relations with the Turkish state and majority. Hence the multilaterality of boundary making on the instrumental level.

Moreover, though less obvious at first sight because of not being articulated by the Christian Armenians, I argue that their boundary making is multilateral on the cognitive-symbolic level as well. The Christian Armenians experience a cognitive dissonance when encountering the category of the ‘Muslim-Armenian’ and often reject it so stridently not only because it does not fit their understanding of Armenianness, but also because it indirectly jeopardises their most important symbolic boundary, that with Turks. Since in their worldviews Christianity is the most important feature separating them from

Turkishness, which is seen as coterminous with Sunni Islam, eroding the difference between the ‘Armenian’ and the ‘Muslim’ somehow erodes that between the ‘Armenian’ and the ‘Turk’ as well. In other words, if an Armenian can be a Muslim, then what is it that makes one an Armenian in contrast to the Turk? The Muslim Armenian identity thus shatters the Christian Armenians’ cognitive categories and puts them in an ‘existential crisis.’ Naturally, then, Christian Armenians’ rejection of Muslim Armenians’ Armenianness serves to prevent the erosion of their definitional difference from the main ‘Others’ in reference to which they identify. Calling the Muslim Armenians *dajgats’adz*, that is ‘Turkified,’ somehow restores the Muslim-Turkish and Christian-Armenian categories.

On the other hand, the fact that Christian Armenians’ boundary making toward the Alevi Armenians is not as intense and as uncompromising as it is against the Sunni Muslims, has also partly to do with these multilateral workings, since in Christian Armenians’ ‘mental maps,’ and indeed in Turkish ideology and identity politics since the founding years of the Republic (Ekmeçioğlu 2014: 668-670; 2016: 105-106), Turkishness is congruent particularly with Sunni Hanafi Islam, from which Alevism greatly diverges.

Thus, by making a rigid boundary against the Muslim Armenians, the Christian Armenians at the same time maintain their boundary in another direction. Hence the multilaterality of boundary making on the symbolic-cognitive level as well.

#### *Conversion as a pre-condition*

Thus, an array of instrumental, that is interest-motivated, and non-instrumental, that is cognitive, subjective and ideological, factors, on both the linear and multilateral levels, instigate the erection and maintenance of symbolic and social boundaries on the part of most of the Christian Armenians against the Muslim/Alevi Armenians. They not only cognitively and discursively situate the latter outside the boundaries of ‘Armenianness’ as they

understand it, but also limit social interactions with them and impede their access to the community.

For most of the Christian Armenians having this approach, the only way through which a ‘so-called Muslim Armenian’ can cross these symbolic and social boundaries and ‘become an Armenian’ is by being baptised in an Armenian Church. Ceren, the Alevi Armenian woman whose story of being rejected by her potential in-laws for not being Christian I told above, had a second relationship with a Christian Armenian man. A few months before their marriage, she was baptised in the Surp Pirgiç Armenian church in Yedikule. I attended the ceremony with my then-partner, a Christian Armenian herself, who was explicitly happy with the fact of Ceren’s conversion. ‘We gained one more!’ she said afterwards. ‘Did you use the “we” as a Christian or an Armenian?’ I asked. ‘As a Christian-Armenian,’ she firmly said. She definitely knew that Ceren self-identified as an Armenian before her baptism, but she nevertheless cognitively fully included her in the *we* of her nation and community only after the latter’s conversion.

The Christian Armenian institutions, last but not least, and especially the Patriarchate, are also ready to grant the Muslim/Alevi Armenians access to the nation/community and its institutions if, and only if, they convert to Christianity. They even organise six-month-long courses of religious education for people willing to ‘become Armenian,’ as they say. Father Shnork, the teacher of one of those courses which I attended and observed for a certain period, told me that he always prays for ‘all those lost souls who were once Armenian but are not anymore’ with the hope that they return to their ‘essence.’ That way, he thinks, not only will those individuals reach salvation, but the Church and – importantly – the nation will grow stronger, suggesting that there exist instrumental factors behind the removal of the boundary as well.

The fears and conspiracies regarding the intentions of Muslims/Alevi claiming Armenianness and willing to convert to Christianity surely act as inhibiting factors in this case as well. That prompts the Church to take additional measures, such as seeking proof of one's Armenian family background, testing applicants' interest in the religion over a certain trial period, making the six-month-long religious course mandatory, etc.<sup>72</sup> The issue of resource competition also does not fade away, but the number of converts to Christianity still remains very low thanks to those very same strict conditions set by the community leadership.

### **The Muslim and Alevi Armenians' Response**

As discussed in Chapter 4, the Muslim and Alevi Armenians actively engage in a process of 'Armenisation' and try to engage with Armenian culture, language, history, as well as with Armenia and Armenians. That process, as we have seen, is often emotionally difficult and even against subjects' material interests. Naturally, then, the Muslim/Alevi Armenians get disappointed and feel insulted when they come across the rigid boundary drawn by the leadership and majority of the Armenian community of Istanbul.

Ceren, who, before her baptism was once rejected as a bride because of 'not being an Armenian,' describes her experience in the following words: 'Just as I got the courage to claim Armenianness and approach [Christian] Armenians, the latter pushed me back. It felt like I belonged to nothing at all. I was acknowledged neither as an Alevi, nor as an Armenian.' This feeling of being doubly outcast is very common among Muslim/Alevi Armenians. Muzi, a Muslim Armenian in his sixties referred to it as well: 'When I say I'm Armenian to my Muslim brothers, "What kind of a Muslim are you?" they say. When I say I'm Muslim to my Armenian kin, "What kind of an Armenian are you?" they say, and I

<sup>72</sup> See Özgül (2013) for a detailed study of cases of conversion to Armenian Christianity in Istanbul.

become a minority within a minority!’ Alper, a Hemshin Armenian artist, compared the Christian Armenians’ exclusionist approach to that of the Turkish state and ‘its policy of the melting pot where everyone should eventually become the same.’

What are the main counterstrategies of Muslim/Alevi Armenians facing this politics of exclusion?

### *Dismantling the Christian-Armenian pairing*

The Muslim and Alevi Armenians’ first response to their symbolic (and consequently social) exclusion from the Armenian nation consists of an attempt to dismantle the Christian-Armenian ideological pairing that mostly conditions that exclusion.

A common argument consists in referring to *irk* and its unalterability, thus opposing their racial understanding of Armenianness to the religious one of most Christian Armenians. ‘They tell us that once Muslims, we are no more Armenians. But we tell them that if we cut our veins, the blood that pours out will still be Armenian!’ a Muslim man born in a village near Muş symbolically presented his argument.

A second recurrent strategy is to raise examples that invalidate the argument of the Christian-Armenian pairing. In particular, Muslim/Alevi Armenians might point out contemporary Armenian individuals who are officially Christian, but are nevertheless atheists and not involved in Church affairs. If an atheist Armenian’s Armenianness is not questioned, the argument goes, why should that of the Muslim/Alevi Armenians be? Similarly, the historical example of pre-Christian Armenianness is often brought up. ‘Armenians have been Christian for only 1,700 years. Were they not Armenians before?’ asks Erhan, the founder of the *Muslim Armenians* Facebook page. His page shares material that alludes to that pre-Christian Armenian past (see Figure 32). Metin, a Hemshin Armenian writer, argues that ‘our Armenianness transcends Christianity,’ basing his statement on the example of an orally-transmitted pagan prayer in Armenian, which his mother taught him.

He thinks of himself as a carrier of Armenian culture, part of which, such as that prayer, precedes Christianity.

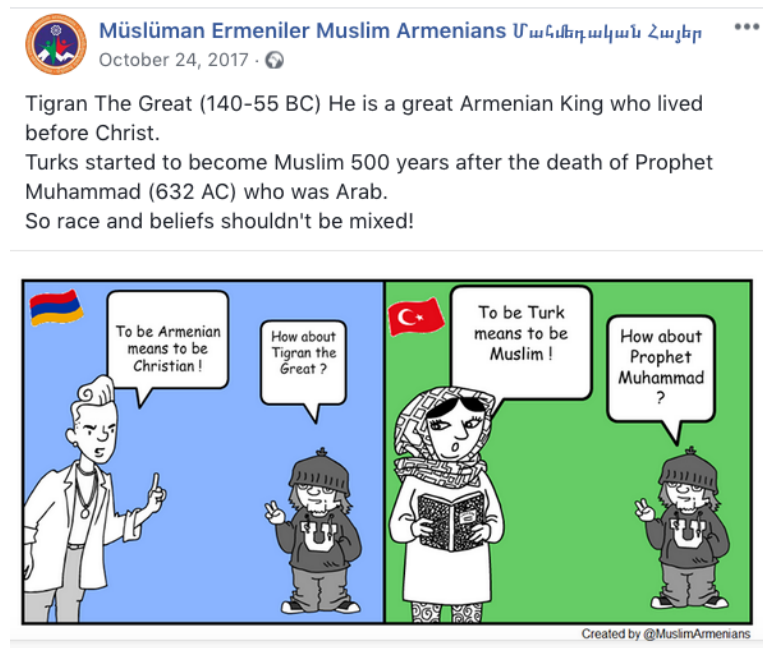


Figure 32. Screenshot of a post by the 'Muslim Armenians' Facebook page. Note the usage of the word 'race.'

### *Revisiting the history of relations between Muslims and Armenians*

The *Muslim Armenians* Facebook page also spreads an alternative historiography of Armenians' relations with Islam, which challenges the widespread argument that the two identities cannot be compatible because of historical enmity and counters it with a history of good relations between the two. For example, in May 2017 the page shared an excerpt from an academic talk about 'a historical agreement between prophet Muhammad and Armenians' (Müslüman Ermeniler 2017). A year earlier, the page had shared an informative video about the same agreement, stressing that it was signed against the Byzantine Empire and thus hinting at the possibility of Armenians preferring Muslim rulers over Christian ones (Müslüman Ermeniler 2016b) Similarly, in an interview given to *Diriliş Postası* in June 2016, Erhan, the founder of the page, has noted that Armenians sided with Muslims against the Roman Empire as well (*Diriliş Postası* 2016). In July 2017, the Facebook page shared a

picture telling the story of an Armenian standard-bearer who not only served in the Arab Islamic army during the siege of Alexandria against the Byzantines in 641, but also saved the life of the army's commander, and, as a result, a market in Cairo was named after him (see Figure 33).



Figure 33. Screenshot of a post by the 'Muslim Armenians' Facebook page.

Erhan countered in particular the argument about Islam's responsibility in the Armenian Genocide of 1915, conceding that religion was exploited by the then rulers of the Ottoman Empire who were nevertheless motivated by racial/national, rather than religious beliefs. 'They were not even true Muslims. They were secular Turkists who later persecuted Islamic leaders as well,' he said of the organisers of the Genocide, and added: 'That's why I don't agree when Christian Armenians accuse me of following "the religion that killed your ancestors."' It's not Islam that killed them, but racism. It was done in the name of Islam, but genuine Islam opposes those killings.'

*'Our diversity is our strength': expanding the boundaries of Armenianness*

During a trip to the eastern Anatolian city of Malatya in June 2016, I visited its Armenian cemetery, one of the last ones remaining in Eastern Turkey thanks to the city's very small Christian Armenian population. There, to my surprise, I found three rather recent tombs belonging to apparent Muslims, since the names inscribed on them were Islamic ones: Mustafa, Mehmet, and Osman (see Figure 34). I asked my local guides and was told that they were an Armenian father and his two sons who had Islamised and acquired those official names.



*Figure 34. Tombs in the Armenian cemetery of Malatya. Photos by the author, taken in June 2016.*

This incorporation of at least officially Muslim Armenians into an officially Armenian space, that is the cemetery, is exceptional. It could probably not happen in Istanbul, but had happened in Malatya because 'it's a small community anyway and we know about each other and each other's past,' according to my local guide, who meant that they, the Christian Armenians, knew that the family had Islamised only in the official records. 'In reality they lived like Armenians,' he said, meaning that they continued practicing Christianity. Thus, the Tabas were not truly Muslims and were welcomed only thanks to the Christian Armenians' acknowledgement of their 'true identity.' Nevertheless, on a symbolic level their tombs represent what the Muslim and Alevi Armenians strive for: the expansion of the boundaries of Armenianness, which would allow their own incorporation into the space of the nation as an idea and the community as a social sphere.

Reading one of my interviews given to *Agos* (Papazian 2016b), Metin, the Hemshin Armenian writer, was dissatisfied with the fact that I had spoken about different kinds of Armenians in Turkey without mentioning the Hemshins. He posted my interview on his social media accounts noting that ‘brother Hrag has forgotten the Hemshins!’ (see Figure 35) Although I had not mentioned the Hemshin Armenians in particular, I had mentioned the Muslim Armenians, of which they constitute a sub-group. Metin knew that I considered Hemshins like him to be Armenians as long as they did. His comment, then, intended to fight for acknowledgment by the general public, especially Armenians, rather than by myself.

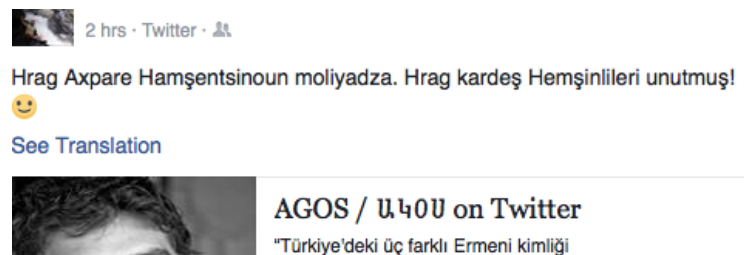


Figure 35. Screenshot of a Facebook post by Metin, where he had written: ‘brother Hrag has forgotten the Hemshins!’ in both Hemshin Armenian and Turkish.

Muslim/Alevi Armenians like Metin argue that the Christian Armenians should put their exclusionist approach aside first of all for the sake of the Armenian nation, its strength and beauty. ‘We are rich in our diversity,’ wrote the *Muslim Armenians* page on Armenian Christmas Day of 2017, after celebrating the feast of ‘our Apostolic Armenian relatives, friends and followers’ (see Figure 36). A few interlocutors argued that the Christian Armenians are ‘dividing the nation’ and weakening it by drawing such strict boundaries and excluding its Muslim and Alevi sub-groups.



Müslüman Ermeniler Muslim Armenians Մահմեդական Հայեր ...

January 7, 2017 · 🌐

Apostolik Ermeni Kilisesi mensubu akrabalarımız, arkadaşlarımız ve takipçilerimizin "Surp Dzinunt" yortusunun esenliğe vesile olmasını dileriz. Farklılıklarımız zenginliğimizdir.

*Figure 36. Screenshot of a post by the Muslim Armenians Fb page. It reads as follows: 'We hope that the Christmas holiday of our Armenian Apostolic relatives, friends and followers contributes to their well-being. We are rich in our diversity.'*

In return, the Muslim Armenians call for the expansion of the boundaries of Armenianness, which could allow the 'fusion' of Muslim/Alevi Armenians and Christian Armenians and the 'incorporation' of the former into the Armenian nation (Wimmer 2008b: 1031-1036; 2013: 50-55). This, in other words, consists of an attempt to redefine Armenianness. Metin straightforwardly advocated reworking Armenian identity:

Armenianness should be debated and reinvented. It has been restricted to a communitarian identity, which is a quite archaic model. It should be modernised and democratised. It should accept religious multiplicity – A Muslim, an Alevi, a Catholic, a Protestant, an Atheist, they can all be Armenian. Neither of those denominations *make* someone Armenian, but all of them can be compatible with Armenianness. Religion should cease to be seen as the crucial common ground on which to base Armenian identity. Linguistic and historical commonality should replace it as definitional factors.

Alper, another Hemshin Armenian, even made practical suggestions. Himself an artist, he told me about his idea of creating a global network of young Armenians with artistic and intellectual curiosities: 'Armenians of Lebanon, like yourself, Armenians of Armenia, of France, of America, of Istanbul, and Armenians of Hemshin should all be included in it.' What is his suggestion, if not one of a nation building mechanism which incorporates, among others, the Muslim Armenians of Hemshin?

Thus, the Muslim/Alevi Armenians try to counter the exclusionary arguments of the Christian Armenian establishment and majority, seek to normalise their own existence, and attempt to expand the boundaries of Armenianness in order to be included in it. They thus constitute, as in other cases of unorthodox sociocultural groups, a 'symbolically significant group' challenging the established order (Özyürek 2009a: 112).

## **An Alternative Stance: The progressive current welcoming the Muslim/Alevi Armenians**

As explained in Chapter 3, a small but growing faction of the Christian Armenian community has started to formulate and advocate for an alternative, secular Armenian identity in Turkey, which is based on ethnic self-identification rather than narrow religious-communitarian belonging. This group's approach to the Muslim and Alevi Armenians is quite different and even opposed to that of the majority and the community establishment. In fact, members of this secularist faction are not only usually open to Muslim and Alevi Armenians on the cognitive level, bluntly affirming that 'they might be different Armenians, but they are Armenians anyway,' but even often actively engaged in communicating with them and supporting their integration into the broader Armenian community and nation.

For instance, since 2012, *Agos*, the weekly newspaper at the forefront of this intra-communitarian movement, has published more than 30 articles concerning the Muslim/Alevi Armenians, including opinion pieces, news articles, or even interviews with some of them.<sup>73</sup> Sarkis Seropyan, then-editor of the newspaper's Armenian section, encouraged Metin, the Hemshin Armenian writer, to write fables in the Hemshin dialect and publish them in the newspaper, as Metin himself told me. The Hrant Dink foundation, another main actor in the secularist faction of the community, together with the Association of Malatya Armenians organised a conference about the 'Islamised Armenians,' which was 'intended as a gateway to amplify the academic research on the issue,' as stated on the foundation's website, and hosted a panel where Muslim and Alevi Armenians spoke about themselves and their experiences.<sup>74</sup> As part of the conference, a workshop hosted seventeen

<sup>73</sup> The list is available at:

<http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/ara?query=m%c3%bcsl%c3%bcman%20ermeni&page=3>, last accessed on 3 May 2019.

<sup>74</sup> Web page and excerpts from the conference are available at:

<https://hrantdink.org/en/activities/projects/history-program/230-islamized-armenians>, last accessed on 3 May 2019.

‘children and grandchildren of Islamised Armenians’ who were given the opportunity to share their traumatic experiences and open up about their fears to a psychologist. The workshop was found to be successful and two years later the foundation decided to organise other sessions as well (Balancar 2015b).

Unlike most other hometown associations in Istanbul, that of the Malatya Armenians is open to Muslim Armenians from Malatya and had three such members at the time of my research: ‘They are Armenians after all,’ justified the then president. Another Christian Armenian who has close relations with Muslim Armenian covillagers told me that he has asked Istanbulite Armenian institutions and wealthy Christian Armenian individuals to provide financial support for the establishment of an association for the Muslim Armenians. His requests were either ignored or rejected. Last but not least, members of this secularist faction have often spoken in favour of admitting children of Muslim/Alevi Armenians to the community schools.

Besides the aforementioned collective and institutional efforts, such Christian Armenians also engage in interpersonal relations and communication with Muslim/Alevi Armenians. Kevork, a Christian Armenian man from *Sasun* (Batman), is keen to keep in touch with Muslim Armenian families from his village of origin. He introduced me to the children of such a family, Ahmet and Ibo mentioned in Chapter 4, and asked me to befriend them ‘so that they have an Armenian friend and not depart from Armenian identity.’ Zaven and Artin, two Christian Armenian friends acknowledging the Muslim/Alevi Armenians’ Armenianness, are quite actively engaged with the Hemshins. They support those who claim to be Armenian and even try to convince those who do not that ‘they are in reality Armenian, even if they deny it.’

These Christian Armenians, thus, in contrast to the majority and the leadership of the community, do not draw symbolic and/or social boundaries between themselves and the Muslim/Alevi Armenians. The boundary making strategy chosen by them is that of expansion. They make the boundary of Armenianness more inclusive particularly through ‘shifting the emphasis’ from the level of religion to that of ethnicity and thus incorporating the Muslim/Alevi Armenians into their Armenian nation (Wimmer 2008b: 1031). It remains, then, to understand the reasons that encourage these Christian Armenians, or make it possible for them, to take this approach.

### *Cognitive compatibility*

The first simple reason why these Christian Armenians do not reject the Muslim/Alevi Armenians’ Armenianness as most of the others do lies in their own understanding of Armenianness. Their non-religious, secular, ethnicity-based approach makes non-Christian and Armenian identities compatible for them, unlike in the case of the majority Christian Armenians who experience a cognitive dissonance when encountering Muslim/Alevi Armenianness.

Part of these Christian Armenians accepting the Muslim/Alevi’s Armenianness do so based on a liberal approach to identity which emphasises choice and self-identification. These people are generally well-read, educated, or at least exposed to such ideas through their contacts with progressive Turkish political circles. Here is how historian and sociologist Ohannes Kılıçdağı, PhD from Boğaziçi University, treats this issue:

An Armenian can surely be a Muslim, a Buddhist, or an Atheist... identities, in my opinion, do not have clear definitions and rigid boundaries. Armenianness can be plural and diverse, no one can impose a monopoly over it. There is no single type of Armenian. That’s an illusion. Are all Christian Armenians similar? How similar are the Armenians of Los Angeles and the Armenians of Paris?

Unlike most other Christian Armenian religious leaders, the Armenian Catholic Archeparch of Istanbul, Archbishop Levon Zekiyán, does not deny Muslim/Alevi Armenians’

Armenianness and does not see Armenian identity as conditional on membership in the Church. That is mainly because, as an academic and highly-educated man, he defines Armenian identity as ‘a voluntary belonging to an ethnic collectivity.’ If the Muslim and Alevi Armenians declare themselves to be and truly feel Armenian, then they are Armenians, he thinks. Although he would not be satisfied by mere claims and would like to see enactment and active participation in the nation’s social and cultural life, as ‘otherwise one could stand at the top of Everest and scream that he’s an Armenian... then what?’, he nevertheless does not show any signs of cognitive dissonance when it comes to Muslim or Alevi Armenianness.

In addition to these people who have a liberal approach to identity, a few Christian Armenians I met were open toward Muslim/Alevi Armenians and Armenianness based on a primordial, ethnic, at times racial understanding of belonging. Unlike most other Christian Armenians, they think that Armenianness transcends religious affiliation because it is primarily a racial, hereditary identity. ‘One can change one’s religion, but never one’s blood,’ ‘They are born Armenian, how could one deny that? It’s in their genes,’ ‘Blood is transmitted from generation to generation and cannot be modified,’ are expressions I heard from such people arguing about the undeniable Armenianness of the Muslim/Alevi Armenians. Artin, a Christian Armenian man with an overtly nationalist worldview and labeling the community leadership’s rejection of Muslim/Alevi Armenians as ‘religious fascism,’ metaphorically argued that ‘although it’s been cut and deformed, a table made from oak remains an oak.’

Furthermore, this categorisation sometimes even supersedes the self-identification of the categorised, in the sense that these Christian Armenians might consider all people with Armenian descent as Armenians, even if the latter do not perceive themselves to be so. These people’s openness towards Muslim/Alevi Armenians goes beyond that of the liberal

ones, as it shows a readiness to impose Armenianness, and not just acknowledge it. ‘They do not know but their blood is Armenian. So, they’re Armenians even if they deny it,’ said, perhaps unexpectedly, a deacon. My Muslim Armenian friend Ahmet told me that he did not use to perceive himself as an Armenian until a Christian Armenian man had explained to him that ‘Armenianness is an *ırk*, not a religion. You can perfectly well be a Muslim and an Armenian at the same time.’

Thus, the first reason why a relatively small number of Christian Armenians does not exclude the Muslim/Alevi Armenians from the nation and community is their non-religious understanding of Armenianness. Their boundary work is, like that of the ethnoreligious majority, first of all non-instrumental, in the sense that it is mainly conditioned by their cognitive and ideological constructs. As long as Armenianness is not equated to or seriously conditioned by Christianity, Muslim or Alevi identities can be compatible with it.

A last point to make here would be that about the effect of long-term encounters on people’s stances. I have noticed that several of those Christian Armenians who are open toward the idea of Muslim/Alevi Armenianness have been in contact, for a certain period of time, with people claiming it. They either have such relatives with whom, unlike others, they have not cut ties, or have got the chance to be in long-term contact with some of them through professional, political or other social networks. The cousins of Ergün, for instance, have no difficulty in accepting the Armenianness of him and the rest of his Islamised family because ‘we know that they truly feel Armenian despite the fact that their conditions have forced them to become and remain Muslim.’ Acknowledging this fact, in turn, contributes to the development of a non-religious understanding of Armenianness among them.

Similarly, Sibel who was extremely shocked during her first encounter with veiled Muslim Armenian women (as described above), told me that through further encounters

with such Armenians she gradually changed her attitude not only toward Muslim/Alevi Armenians, but also Armenianness itself: ‘For me Armenianness was previously coterminous with our religion and religious culture: Easter, attending the Church mass, baptism, church choir, etc. But after my encounters with Muslim Armenians, I realised that Armenianness has no single definition.’

*Instrumental compatibility: perceived political interests*

Kevork is a Christian Armenian man in his seventies who had caught my attention by his very positive, friendly and supportive approach toward Muslim and Alevi Armenians on social media. When I asked him the reason behind his stance, he said:

I’m interested in all Armenians in this country. Why? Because very few of us Armenians are left here, and we are getting weaker. So, when I see people claiming to be Armenian, I definitely want to support and win them back, no matter their religion. Let them remain Muslim for another hundred years, I don’t care as long as they identify and act as Armenians. They’re part of my nation at the end of the day, they carry the same blood.

The president of the Association of Malatya Armenians similarly thinks that the Muslim and Alevi Armenians should be welcomed, since otherwise ‘we would lose those people for good.’ Artin, one of those few Christian Armenian nationalists who try to ‘convince’ Hemshins that they are Armenian, thinks that ‘by gaining those people back we Armenians would get political leverage and start to have a say in this country. We’re speaking of millions of descendants of Islamised Armenians, that’s a huge potential!’ (Note the multilaterality of his instrumental thinking, as the leverage he speaks of is to be applied in negotiations with the Turkish state.) And in order to attain that goal, Artin argues, ‘we should be open, gain their trust, show them interest,’ which speaks of a strategy clearly opposing that of making rigid social boundaries applied by most Christian Armenians.

These people, thus, clearly see the rise of the Muslim and Alevi Armenians to be in the interest of their secular Armenian nation, and that is why they actively support it. One of them, for instance, had praised the release of a Hemshin Armenian song and announced

the coming of ‘Western Armenia,’ corresponding to part of contemporary Eastern Turkey (see Figure 37). Later, when I asked him whether he had met the band members, he said he had not (whereas I had, and I knew that they did not identify as Armenians).

Not surprisingly, these individuals particularly stress the importance of admitting Muslim/Alevi Armenian children to the Armenian community schools. There, they believe, those children would be further ‘Armenised.’ Thus, the lifting of the boundaries which they advocate for has an instrumental purpose. It enlarges and fortifies their nation. It serves a particular project of ‘nation building,’ to use the term that one of them suggested. It contributes to the building of an Armenian nation suited to their secular vision of Armenianness.

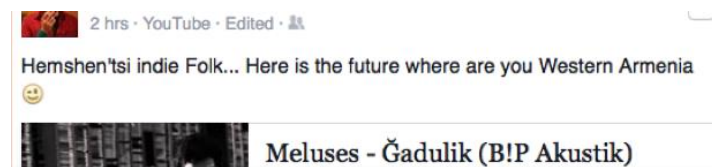


Figure 37. Screenshot of a Christian Armenian friend's Facebook post.

As shown above, security concerns are an important factor encouraging the majority of Christian Armenians to erect and maintain a social boundary between themselves and the Muslim/Alevi Armenians. Paradoxically, some members of the secular current also bring in security-related arguments in defence of their open stance towards the Muslim and Alevi Armenians.

Two arguments come into play here. First, I have heard from a few that pushing the Muslim Armenians back and away from Armenianness might cause anger amongst the latter and turn them into more radical Muslims and anti-Armenians. On the other hand, there is the hope that building friendly relationships with Muslims who have Armenian roots, finding a common ground with and especially ‘re-Armenising’ them would help in ‘neutralising’ potential risks, that is Muslims who think of themselves as Turks or Kurds

and see Armenians as their enemies. A second such instrumental calculation concerns the potentially positive effect the ‘re-Armenisation’ of Muslims/Alevis is believed to have on their non-Armenian co-religionists’ approach to Armenians. This instrumental logic has, again, a multilateral dimension. Here is how Vahan, a man in his 50s, put it:

I think we don’t have time to lose. We should research those Muslims who live in Anatolia and have Armenian roots. Why is that important and how could that benefit us? At least, I assume, anti-Armenian feelings could decline among Muslims living in the east. Many people who feel enmity toward us without even having met a single Armenian might now hear that their dear friend or relative has Armenian ancestry, and that might ameliorate their attitude towards us Armenians in general.

The attitude of the minority advocating secular Armenianness, to conclude, is also conditioned both by ideology and interest, and is situated in a larger context of multilateral relations where the Turkish state and majority are other important actors.

## **Conclusion**

During the last two decades, the Christian Armenian community of Turkey gradually found itself facing the phenomenon of Muslim and Alevi Armenians. The latter not only claimed Armenianness on media and social media, but also actively started to reach the Christian Armenians, get in touch with them and attempt to join their community. Prompted by non-instrumental factors (cognitive, ideological and emotional constructs), and instrumental calculations (resource competition, the security of the community, defending the ‘authenticity’ of Armenianness), the leadership and majority of the Christian Armenians have erected and still maintain quite rigid symbolic and social boundaries between themselves and the unorthodox newcomers. The secularist minority within the community, in contrast, welcomes the Muslim/Alevi Armenians as their ethnic brethren. Their response, again, has its own non-instrumental (cognitive compability) and some instrumental (nationalist political goals) explanations. Both the traditional majority’s and the secular minority’s boundary making are situated, as seen, in a context of multilateral symbolic and

practical relations. The Muslim and Alevi Armenians, in turn, either decide to convert to Christianity and become acknowledged as Armenians, thus reifying the official ethnoreligious definition of Armenianness in Turkey, or if more religious and/or rejecting to succumb to a 'second forced conversion,' as some of them put it, remain Muslim/Alevi and counter the arguments of the Christian majority with the vision of expanding the boundaries of Armenianness and redefining Armenian identity.

## CHAPTER 7

### **Intra-Armenian Boundary Making and Struggles over Armenianness (2): Migrants and Armenians of Turkey**

Haro, the Christian Armenian citizen of Turkey who compared Muslim Armenians to ‘neither males nor females’ and argued for their existential impossibility, is married to Janna, a Migrant woman from Armenia. Their marriage, like a few similar others, symbolises the relative openness of members of the two groups towards each other. Nevertheless, during my conversations with the couple I witnessed debates which revealed existing misunderstandings between the local and immigrant Armenians, mutual stereotypes, and the way each evaluates the other according to their own understanding and expectations of ‘Armenianness.’

Janna, who first met Haro online and migrated to Istanbul only in order to marry him, says that she’s very disappointed by local Armenians, to the extent that she would have preferred not to come if she knew in advance ‘about the way they are.’ Labour Migrants generally share Janna’s negative opinion. ‘We don’t like the local Armenians,’ two Migrant men bluntly told me even before I had asked them about their relations with the Istanbulites. Furthermore, several Migrants, including Janna, seriously question the Armenianness of Istanbulite Armenians.

Haro, on the other hand, refrained from bad-mouthing the compatriots of his wife. He was mainly preoccupied by countering the harsh criticism of Janna, arguing that she is clueless about the local Armenians’ historical experience in Turkey. But Haro’s local friends and family, as Janna complained, look down on her as a *Hayasdants’i*. Meaning ‘from Armenia,’ this label is often used with a negative connotation by local Armenians.

Why do Christian Armenian citizens of Turkey and Migrants from the Republic of Armenia have negative opinions about each other? How rigid are the symbolic and social boundaries between the two sides? Moreover, how do the Migrants relate, if ever, to the Muslim/Alevi Armenian citizens of Turkey? This chapter strives to answer these questions. First, I will look into the local Christian Armenians' approach to the newcomer Migrants; second, I will study the Migrants' take on the Istanbulite Christian Armenians; third, I will deal with the Migrants' stance toward the Muslim/Alevi Armenians of Turkey.

### **Local Christian Armenians Facing the *Hayasdants'i* Migrants: Institutional openness, interpersonal closure**

#### *Bolsahay versus Hayasdants'i: a symbolic boundary*

Unlike their approach toward the Muslim/Alevi Armenians, the Christian Armenian citizens of Turkey do not deny the Migrants' Armenianness. The latter, in fact, do not challenge the former's main definitional condition of Armenianness, that is Armenian Christianity. There is, however, a quite rigid symbolic boundary drawn by the locals between themselves and the newcomers whom they categorise as *Hayasdants'is* and clearly differentiate from themselves the *Bolsahays*, meaning 'Istanbulite Armenians' in Armenian. In other words, in their cognitive systems of classification, the local Armenians provide the Migrants a separate slot, the reasons and motivations of which shall be discussed below.

#### *Institutional openness*

As active members of the Istanbulite Armenian community told me, the Migrants arriving in Istanbul approach community institutions, especially the Churches, in order to seek practical support. Considering the newcomers as *azkagits'ner*, that is coethnics in Armenian, and knowing about their difficult economic situation, the community institutions have

shown considerable support, although they might not have directly helped all individual applicants.

Some earlier researchers have written about the ‘dysfunctionality of the institutions belonging to the Armenians of Istanbul’ when it comes to helping the Migrants and about ‘each request coming from the migrants apparently [...] [being] rejected’ (see Taşçı 2010: 125-126). There probably is some truth to such statements, since Migrants themselves told me that they were previously rather neglected compared to more recent years during which ‘the *Bolsahay* community has become more aware of our existence and problems.’ But it would be incorrect to think that institutions have started to help Migrants only recently.

A slightly more recent sociological research project than that of Taşçı already mentioned instances in which the local Armenian institutions helped the Migrants by, for instance, providing them with used clothing or acting as intermediaries between them and local wealthy Armenian individuals in order to ask the latter’s financial support (Körükmez 2012: 157). Furthermore, even if the institutions’ help has been minimal during the research years of Taşçı, it has not been so in the very first years of Armenian citizens’ migration to Istanbul. Not only have local Armenian interlocutors spoken of a ‘complete openness and support during the first years,’ but also the Armenian Apostolic Patriarch of the time, Mesrob Mutafyan, has noted that until 2004 ‘[Migrants] used to come to us more often for financial support... In case they were left with no other option than returning to Armenia, we used to cover their travel expenses for them to repatriate.’ Mutafyan added that direct financial support had stopped after the community leadership realised that some of the beneficiaries were not using the sums for the initially declared purposes (Kaplan and Ozinian 2006).

In any case, my research suggests that at least during recent years the local Armenian institutions had an increasingly positive and helpful attitude toward the Migrants. The

church of Kumkapı, for example, was supporting the small bakery established by a Migrant family at the time of my research, as attested by the bakers themselves: ‘They help us a lot, they send us customers, they buy their bread and wafers from us.’ If Migrants were left alone to ‘personally practise’ baptism in earlier times (Taşçı 2010: 126), that is no longer the case, as the Armenian Apostolic Church takes care of that religious rite of passage. Here is what Tiran, the vice-principal of the HD school, has to say about the issue: ‘It was previously not easy to be baptised in the local churches, but our [Migrant] children can be baptised nowadays. Recently the Church even asked us to make a list of our students who wish to be baptised, so that they could take care of it.’ Last but not least, the Armenia-Turkey Expert Dialogue Group convened by the Istanbulite Armenian Hrant Dink Foundation has recently ‘decided to focus on possible steps to be taken for addressing the humanitarian issues faced by the Armenian-citizen migrants in Turkey’ (Hrant Dink Foundation 2018: 9-10), and as a first step conducted and published a research on the Migrants (Erdoğan and Semerci 2018).

But perhaps more than anything else, the local institutions’ support is mainly directed to the Migrants’ HD School and its students. Apart from the Armenian Protestant church of Gedikpaşa hosting the school for free, the Armenian Apostolic Church supports it as well. In June 2017, for instance, a charity lunch in support of the HD School was organised by the Armenian Apostolic community in the Surp Asdvadzadzin Patriarchal Church, which is the seat of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople (Agos 2017c). Earlier in 2015, the Armenian Apostolic patriarchal vicar Aram Ateşyan paid a visit to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia, in order to discuss the fate of the school. Moreover, the school gets material support from the Turkish Red Crescent thanks to the mediation of the Armenian Patriarchate, according to its vice-principal. Last but not least, students of the school are eligible for free healthcare at the Yedikule Surp Pırığıç Armenian Hospital belonging to the local Apostolic Armenian community.

In addition to the financial and organisational support, vital but still far from being sufficient in any case, Istanbulite Armenian institutions invite the HD school administration and students to some of their meetings and events, thus incorporating them into their community space. For instance, the principal of the school is usually invited to participate in the periodic meetings of the principals of all local Armenian schools. In April 2016, representatives and students of the school were invited to visit the office of *Jamanak*, one of the local Armenian newspapers (Jamanak 2016). Last but not least, the local Armenian boarding school on Kınalıada Island also welcomes, for free, students of the HD School during the summer months.

Most importantly perhaps, in stark contrast to its approach to the Muslim/Alevi Armenians, the Istanbulite Armenian establishment willingly opens the doors of its schools to the children of Migrants and exempts them from admission fees. In September 2011, the Ministry of National Education of Turkey allowed the admission of Migrant children to local Armenian community schools (Salman 2012). But that, crucially, was the result of efforts by the local Armenian community leadership.

The educational ministry, however, gave Migrant children the status of *misafir öğrenciler*, that is ‘guest students’ in Turkish, which meant that they would not be provided diplomas upon graduation and thus could not continue their education in universities. In response, the Istanbulite Armenian community leadership aims to convince the Turkish state to lift its ban on the diplomas as well, so that Migrant graduates willing to stay in Turkey and attend universities be able to do so: ‘We are working towards that as well,’ said the principals of two schools, one Apostolic Armenian and one Catholic Armenian. Meanwhile, they show readiness to write letters of support for their Migrant graduates willing to apply to universities in Armenia: ‘We attest that those students have followed all the necessary courses and are competent, even if they lack diplomas,’ one school principal told me.

To conclude, that these Istanbulite Armenian institutions include the Migrants in their charitable, social, educational and other activities, sometimes even hosting them in their physical spaces, clearly attests to the fact that they do not draw social boundaries between themselves and the Migrants. On the contrary, they welcome them and seem to apply the boundary making strategy of ‘fusion’ through ‘incorporation’ (Wimmer 2008b).

#### *Understanding the institutions’ stance*

I argue that the Istanbulite Armenian institutions’ general openness towards the Migrants and their willingness to incorporate the latter into the community is motivated both by altruism and interest.

On the one hand, I noticed sincere feelings of empathy toward the Migrants among a number of local community leaders. Seeing the newcomers’ dire economic situation, and especially the unhealthy conditions in which the students of the HD School are educated, some religious or secular leading figures in the community truly want to help their coethnics. The Hrant Dink Foundation, for instance, hopes that the publication of its recent research ‘will raise awareness about the needs of Armenian-citizen migrants in Turkey who continue their lives under fragile circumstances’ and promises to explore ‘possibilities for the establishment of support mechanisms,’ thus undertaking a clearly benevolent and humanitarian mission (Hrant Dink Foundation 2018: 10). The Church, on the other hand, also feels obliged to take care of the Migrants as part of its religious vocation, since many of the latter are in fact followers of the same Armenian Apostolic Church.

There is, on the other hand, the instrumental facet of that welcoming approach. If the assimilation of the Istanbulite Armenian community members and the community’s gradual shrinking because of emigration are quite serious concerns for the community leadership,

the arrival of the Migrants is perceived as a temporary solution to those problems. The Migrants are seen as human capital that could extend the life of the community.

Ara Koçunyan, the editor-in-chief of *Jamanak* newspaper, concedes that ‘today our Patriarchal church of Kumkapı is saved from its previous empty, almost abandoned and tragic state because *Hayasdants* ‘is attend it.’<sup>75</sup> In a similar vein, whether in a premeditated manner or not, the Armenian Evangelical church increases the number of his followers in return for hosting the Migrants’ school in its basement. In fact, the church pastor very often visits the school and even ceremonially prays for the students (see Figure 38 below), and, as I was told, the Migrant students attend religious camps organised by the institution hosting their school. According to the same logic, the admission of Migrant children to the local community schools can somehow compensate for the shrinking of the latter’s student populations. In fact, according to a teacher at the Migrants’ HD school, the Armenian Apostolic Church was initially not supportive of their school ‘because they hoped to draw the current and future students of our [HD] school to their own schools.’

Finally, the Istanbulite Armenian community profits from the presence of the Migrants as carriers of Armenian cultural knowledge, which the community seriously lacks. Janna, whom I introduced in the beginning of this chapter, is often invited to play Armenian melodies during events organised by the locals. Ara, a Migrant man in his fifties, is invited to teach drama courses in a few local Armenian schools. Naira and Nvard have been hired by two different local Armenian newspapers for their good knowledge of Armenian, a very scarce skill in the local Armenian community nowadays.

Like in the case of the boundary work between the Christian Armenians and the Muslim or Alevi ones, the local Armenian institutions’ choice of boundary making mechanism vis-à-vis the Migrants is neither purely instrumental, nor totally disinterested.

<sup>75</sup> Original speech is in Western Armenian.

Thick ethnography, once again, reveals that people's treatment of others might be conditioned by both types of factors. Feelings of empathy and moral obligation towards their co-ethnics and members of their religious flock on the one hand, the aim of strengthening the Armenian community by using the newcomers as fresh human capital on the other, lead the local Armenian community leadership to support the Migrants and incorporate them into the *Bolsahay* community.



Figure 38. The Gedik Paşa Armenian Evangelical Church's pastor prays in the HD School. Photo retrieved from the school's Facebook group with permission.

### *Interpersonal closure*

Unlike the local Armenian community's institutions, individual Istanbulite Armenians are more prone to erect symbolic and social boundaries against the Migrants. Some individuals join the institutions in their empathy toward the Migrants and support them by various means, whether collecting funds for the school, or sending gifts to its students (see Figure 39 below), or covering the baptism expenses of newborn Migrants. However, these are exceptions rather than the norm. Moreover, they mainly consist of benevolent acts from a distance, rather than real relations and attempts of social inclusion.

In fact, during my meetings and conversations with local Christian Armenians I generally noticed an explicit lack of enthusiasm toward the Migrants, some serious mistrust toward them and in some cases a preference to avoid contacts with them altogether. Apart from a very few cases of marriage with female citizens of the Republic of Armenia, which has led to the latter's migration to Istanbul such as in the case of Janna, and even fewer cases of marriage with Migrant women already in Istanbul, the local Armenians generally have no close relations with the Migrants who often live in the very same neighbourhoods as them. Several are in daily contact with their Migrant employees, mostly domestic workers, but that entails more of an employer-employee relationship with its usually negative consequences on mutual perceptions, rather than friendly relations on equal terms. Moreover, some local Armenians have even started to prefer not to employ Migrants in recent years (see section below), thus even eliminating that last sphere of relations with them. The preference to avoid contacts with the Migrants is in some particular cases so extreme that I have heard of, for instance, local Armenians who have threatened to take their children out of the community schools in case the latter admit children of Migrants.

As a result, a broad picture of *Bolsahay-Hayasdants'* relations would be close to the description given by the Gedikpaşa Armenian Protestant Church's pastor: 'So many years have already passed, but we still have two separate entities. The *Hayasdants'* stand on one side, the locals on another. There is little mixing, limited contacts, not much relations between the two sides except on the official level.'

Why?

Պղպաճայ մի ընտանիք (որը չկամեցավ իր անունը հրապարակել) Զատիկի առթիվ իր գեղեցիկ նվերներով մեծ ուրախություն պարգևեց Ստամբուլի Հրանտ Դինքի անվան վարժարանին աշակերտներին ....Թող Աստված առատորեն վարձատրի ձեզ



Figure 39. Screenshot of a Facebook post by the HD School's principal, in which she thanks a local Armenian family for its gifts sent to the students.

*Explaining the erection of boundaries: culture and manners, issues of trust, and multilaterality*

The widespread negative approach to Migrants and the reluctance to establish relations with them on the part of the majority of local Armenians is conditioned by multiple factors, once again both related and unrelated to interest.

Coming into contact with citizens of Armenia often for the first time in their lives, the Armenians of Istanbul have realised that they have quite deep differences with them in terms of culture and manners. These differences and their recognition, in turn, constitute barriers to communication and rapprochement.

The first and most obvious difference separating Migrants from locals is that of dialect. Whereas the Istanbulites speak the Western dialect of Armenian, the Migrants speak in Eastern Armenian. Although the two are not mutually unintelligible for anyone who is proficient in any one of them, matters are more complicated for the Istanbulite Armenians. As they generally either don't know Armenian at all, or have learned it only as a second language, locals mostly find it truly difficult to understand Eastern Armenian. Even the

principal of a local Armenian school said that she was unable to communicate with the mother of one of her Migrant pupils. Clearly, language is an important and natural boundary between the two groups.

Furthermore, there are differences in culture and manners that demotivate the locals from establishing close relations with Migrants. ‘They are different in many ways: their language, their hairstyles, the way they dress and speak...’ a local Armenian friend told me. Sometimes the locals describe the Migrants’ manners and lifestyle in ways that may even be demeaning to the latter. Barkev, a local man in his seventies, like several other Istanbulite Armenians thinks that the Migrants are ‘uncultivated and rude people of the mountains, prone to laziness and cheating.’ All this has also to do, of course, with issues of class and wealth inequality between the two groups. In particular, those local Armenians who have contact with the Migrants are usually well-off and can allow themselves to employ the latter in domestic work.

Moreover, two phenomena related to Migrants displease the local Armenians in particular: prostitution and occasional theft. It is known that, like other migrant women from other post-Soviet countries in Istanbul (see, for example, Gülçür and İlkaracan 2002), some Armenian migrants engage in sex work. Although their number seems to be much less than that of migrant sex workers of other nationalities – there were only three Armenian nationals among a total of 1183 trafficked sex workers that were rescued by the Turkish police between 2004 and 2011 (Kaya and Erez 2017: 2959) – the phenomenon nevertheless exists and leaves a mark on the local Armenians’ judgment about the Migrants. Similarly, the fact that some Migrant domestic workers are believed to have stolen money or goods from their local Armenian employers has also fed the local Armenians’ discourse about the moral deviance of the Migrants. Such judgments often turn into stereotypes and naturally contribute to the erection of at least symbolic boundaries against the Migrants.

Interestingly, many local Armenians attribute the Migrants' difference in manners and 'morality' to the the Soviet/Russian influence. 'The Soviet experience has changed them a lot' is an expression I often heard by locals referring to the newcomers. Artin, a 50-year-old Christian Armenian originally from the province of Batman thinks that 'communism has corrupted the *Hayasdants'is* and made them lazy! Rather than working, they send their sisters here for prostitution!' In her travel diaries, Istanbulite Armenian Bercuhi Berberyan portrays a rude, shabby and uncivilised image of the Armenians she met during her trip to Armenia, also referring to a hypothetical Russian influence on them. She uses the term '*rus bozmasi*,' meaning 'corrupted by Russians' in Turkish, at least twice (Berberyan 2009: 21, 179).

Last but not least, although I did not ask about it during my fieldwork, other researchers have noted that local Armenians criticise the Migrants for their lack of religiosity and distance from the Church (Körükmez 2012: 148), explaining that by, once again, the 'Soviet influence' (Ozinian 2011). I can confirm, based on my observations and interviews with them, that Migrants do not prioritise religion as much as the locals do, and that might well be another cultural-ideological factor contributing to the locals' perception of the Migrants as 'different Armenians.'

Thus, differences in language, culture, and manners on the one hand, and moral judgments and stereotypes on the other, are factors contributing to a disinterested emergence and maintenance of boundaries against the Migrants on the part of the Istanbulite Christian Armenians.

Another factor inhibiting the social embracement of Migrants on the part of the locals is the serious and quite generalised mistrust the latter have vis-à-vis the former.

On 6 February 2016, a shocking piece of news became the talk of the community. Thieves had not only robbed the home of an Istanbulite Armenian elderly couple, but also attacked and hog-tied them, as a result of which Hakob Demirci was killed and his wife, Seta Demirci, was wounded and taken to hospital (see Figure 40 below). Many of my local Armenian friends immediately interpreted the killing as yet another anti-Armenian racist attack by Turkish nationalists. A few days later, to everyone's surprise, it was revealed that the criminals were a group of migrants from Armenia (Diken 2016). The Migrant caretaker of the couple was an accomplice in the robbery as she had opened the door for the other members of the gang.



*Figure 40. Seta Demirci being hospitalised after the attack on 6 February 2016. Retrieved from Asbarez (2016).*

Although the incident was unprecedentedly violent, it was not, importantly, the first case of robbery or misbehaviour by Migrant domestic workers against their local Armenian employers. Murat, a Catholic Armenian, told me even before this incident that he had a decision of 'never employing *Hayasdants' is*' after having caught, through security cameras, his Migrant domestic worker beating his child. The incident with the elderly couple thus greatly fed an already existing mistrust towards Migrant domestic workers and contributed to the hardening of social boundaries against them.

More specifically, I was told by several Migrants that many of their friends working as domestic workers in local Armenian homes were fired after that shocking incident. A journalist friend working for *Agos* told me that, around a week after the incident, a local

Armenian man wanted the newspaper to announce that he was looking for a domestic worker, but specifically a *Bolsahay*. He had asked, moreover, to publish the ad in Turkish so that Migrants would not understand and apply.

Thus, several cases of alleged or proven robbery and misconduct by Migrant domestic workers have contributed to the creation of a negative stereotype of the Migrants in general, presenting them as unreliable and dangerous. As a result, many local Armenians prefer to limit their interactions with the *Hayasdants'is*, in order to evade a perceived danger. The social boundary making they are engaged in is thus also clearly instrumental.

Finally, just like their boundary making towards the Muslim/Alevi Armenians, the local Christian Armenians' boundary making toward the Migrants is also situated in a broader multilateral boundary work and conditioned by it, in the sense that it is influenced by symbolic and practical relations between themselves and, once again, the Turkish state and majority. More simply put, the locals' choice of erecting, strengthening and maintaining social boundaries vis-à-vis the Migrants is also conditioned and affected by considerations about their relations and boundaries with the Turkish state and majority. In fact, they often perceive the Migrants as jeopardising their reputation, their already fragile security from potential anti-Armenian discrimination and violence on the part of the Turks, and even their belonging to Turkey.

First of all, cases of robbery and prostitution on the part of some Migrants clearly embarrass the local Armenians and worry them about a further loss of reputation among the Turks. Here is how an Armenian Evangelical pastor describes the situation, clearly linking local Armenians' boundary making against the Migrants to the impression the latter leave on Turks:

Migrant women are sometimes employed by Turks. When they steal money or goods from their homes, and when this happens more than once, those Turkish employers, and Turks in general reading news about such acts, would start forming a negative opinion about the

Migrants, which would in turn be extrapolated to us, the local Armenians who are the *Hayasdants'is*' coethnics at the end of the day. Turks might not really differentiate between us [locals] and them [Migrants], you know? This naturally becomes an embarrassment for us, as a result of which many of our community members draw a clear boundary between themselves and the Migrants and prefer to stay away from them.

Second, many of the Migrants' explicit and uncensored Armenianness and sometimes Armenian nationalism worry the local Armenians who, on the contrary, often prefer to hide their Armenian identity and refrain from 'excessively Armenian' acts or symbols that could, they fear, trigger anti-Armenian reactions on the part of Turkish nationalists or the Turkish state (see Chapter 2; also Papazian 2015 and 2016a). For instance, the fact that Migrant Armenians speak Armenian with the local Armenians in public places embarrasses the latter because it discloses their Armenian identity, which they usually prefer to hide in unfamiliar environments, based on their history and collective memory of anti-Armenian discrimination and violence (ibid.).

During a concert performed by a choir from Armenia and organised by Istanbulite Armenians, some Migrants in the audience started waving the Armenian national flag. Soon, some of the local Armenian organisers approached and asked them to take the flag down, which they refused to do. Consequently, the organisers called a security guard who took the flag away. The Migrants had thus breached the local Armenian unofficial code of conduct according to which Armenian political and national(ist) references should not be displayed, in order not to be interpreted as signs of treason or revolt against Turkish hegemony. The local Armenian organisers' initiative of taking the Armenian flag away served the purpose of distancing themselves from the Migrants and their act, thus reasserting their allegiance to the Turkish state.

That act of censorship is in purpose very similar to a local Armenian jeweler's response to his Migrant employee's complaints about Turkey in front of, importantly, Turkish coworkers. 'Go back to your homeland then!' he retorted. By that sentence, recounted to me by Narek, the Migrant employee himself, the local Armenian employer was

drawing a boundary between himself and the Migrant by disapproving of his complaints. He was doing so in order not to allow the potential emergence of a boundary between himself and his Turkish coworkers, and was thus clearly engaged in a multilateral boundary work.

Importantly, the employer was also indirectly drawing a boundary between himself and Armenia, by declaring it the homeland of his employee, and thus not his own. In fact, most of the Istanbulite Armenians I've met since 2014 share that approach and declare their homeland to be one of or a combination of the following: Istanbul, Anadolu (Anatolia), Turkey. For instance, Istanbulite Armenian writer Bercuhi Berberyan writes: 'Armenia is not my homeland just because I was born Armenian,' and refers to Armenia as 'the homeland of *other* Armenians' (Berberyan 2009: 11, emphasis mine).

Istanbulite Armenians usually explain this stance of theirs by the argument that their ancestors have always lived in what has historically been the geography of Western Armenia, corresponding to Eastern Anatolia/Eastern Turkey today, and not in Eastern Armenia or the Southern Caucasus where the Republic of Armenia is currently located. These explanations might often be straightforwardly truthful. Nevertheless, there are also political factors peculiar to the Turkish context that have contributed to or even influenced Istanbulite Armenians' stance in this regard.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Turkish state has been instrumental in suppressing national and political manifestations of Armenian identity within its borders. It has accordingly demanded Armenians' abstinence from any links, whether material or ideological, with political units other than itself, especially the Armenian diaspora and (post-)Soviet Armenia (see also Öztürk 2020: 254). For instance, even as late as the 1980s, Istanbulite Armenian community schools were ordered to erase Armenia from their maps (*Bianet* 2015).

Applying a multilateral analysis, I argue that local Armenians' rejection of the Republic of Armenia as a homeland, in other words the making of a boundary between it and themselves, is also motivated by an attempt to secure and reinforce their belonging to Turkey, which is always questioned on the part of the Turkish state and majority. In fact, Berberyan writes not only that she does not consider 'the place thought to be my homeland,' i.e. Armenia, as her homeland, but also that she is 'not acknowledged as a compatriot in the place that I consider to be my homeland,' that is Turkey (2009: 11). She juxtaposes the two statements in a single sentence, betraying a mental link between the two.

Thus, the boundary making of the Armenians of Turkey vis-à-vis the Republic of Armenia is also part of and conditioned by a broader, multilateral boundary making where their boundary with the Turkish state and Turkish homeland is also taken into account. Embracing Armenia as their homeland, they fear, would jeopardise their relations with the Turkish state and their already fragile belonging to the Turkish homeland.

Similarly, the boundary making vis-à-vis the Migrants serves the instrumental purpose of securing the local Armenians in relation to the Turks and the Turkish state. First, it aims at securing them from anti-Armenian discrimination that could potentially be triggered by the Migrants' overt Armenianness. Second, it aims at disidentifying with their coethnic *Hayasdants*'is in matters of homeland and belonging, in order not to be seen as foreigners like them and not to appear on the other side of the Turkish national boundary.

The multilaterality of this intra-Armenian boundary making is surely not unique and has its counterparts in other contexts where established minority members try to distance themselves from new migrants, sometimes their coethnics, whom they call 'FOBs,' that is 'Fresh Off the Boat' (MacPherson 1999; Pyke and Dang 2003; Shankar 2008; McAuliffe 2008; Clayton 2011; Phoenix 2011; Moloney and Hunt 2012; Shin 2012; Qureshi et al. 2012; Huang 2013) or 'freshies' (Charsley and Bolognani 2017). Established Samoans in Fiji, for

instance, distance themselves from ‘FOB’s who give a bad reputation to ‘us good Samoans’ (MacPherson 1999: 56), quite similarly to the Istanbulite Armenians’ stance vis-à-vis the ‘*Hayasdants*’ is blackening our reputation.’ Second generation Asian Americans (Kibria 2002), British Somalis (Pheonix 2011), British Pakistanis (Charsley and Bolognani 2017) and other established community members also publicly disidentify with new migrants in ‘an attempt at gaining relative status in hierarchies of belonging’ (ibid. 50), such as the Istanbulite Armenian jewelry master attempting to maintain his status of *Türkiyeli* (Turkish citizen) in contrast to the *Hayasdants*’i foreigner employee. Finally, a more relevant example would be that of the established Armenian community in California ‘distancing itself from the lower-class domestic workers’ that had newly arrived from the Republic of Armenia, in order to ‘maintain [their] affluent image in American society’ in contrast to the newcomers (Ishkhanian 2002: 406).

To conclude, whereas the Istanbulite Armenian institutions and community leadership are generally open towards Migrants and willing to help and incorporate them into their community, the majority of the community members prefer to limit contacts with the newcomers, thus erecting a social boundary. The erection of that boundary and the maintenance of quite a rigid symbolic one against the highly-stereotyped *Hayasdants*’i are at the same time disinterested, i.e. based on factors such as language, culture, moral judgments, and instrumental, that is for the sake of safety and, on a multilateral level, for the maintenance of good relations with the Turkish state and majority.

## **Discovering the ‘Turkified Armenians’: Migrants’ take on the locals**

### *Symbolic and social boundaries*

Just as the locals do not deny the Armenianness of the Migrants, the Migrants do not deny that of the locals. As the vast majority of the Migrants have a primordial and biological

conception of Armenianness and consider Armenian blood as sufficient for making one Armenian (Chapter 5), they do not leave the Istanbulite Armenians outside the boundaries of their Armenian nation. In other words, whereas the Migrants meet the Istanbulite Christian Armenians' incontestable precondition of Armenianness, that is Armenian Christianity, the latter meet their own, that is racial/ethnic/genetic Armenianness.

There is, however, a clear symbolic-classificatory divide between the Migrants and the locals in the minds of the former as well. The Migrants perceive the locals as different and symbolically distant from themselves. They call them '*teghi Hayer*,' literally meaning 'local Armenians' in Eastern Armenian, but always separating them from themselves, simply '*Hayer*,' i.e. 'Armenians.' They do not conceal the fact that they find the locals quite alien to themselves. Ani, a young Migrant woman who had been in Istanbul for only a few weeks when I met and interviewed her, told me that she had already started to keep a diary about her experience with the local Armenians whom she had unexpectedly found 'strikingly different'. She had entitled her diary, to my surprise, *Urish Hayer*, literally meaning 'Other Armenians.'

'I increasingly noticed that they do not uphold the values and traits that are characteristic to the Armenian as I conceive it... But one way or another, they are also Armenians,' Ani told me when I asked her to expand on her diary's title. Yet other Migrants are more particular in their differentiation, and prefer to categorise the local Armenians as *T'rk'ats'ats Hayer*, that is 'Turkified Armenians,' often not knowing that those 'Turkified Armenians' sometimes, though to a lesser extent, call them 'Russified Armenians' in turn.

On the level of social boundaries, the Migrants' approach is again generally similar to that of the locals towards them. Like the local Armenian institutions' openness toward the Migrants, the latter's sole institution, the Hrant Dink School, seems to do its best to establish connections with the local Armenian community. When I first approached the

principal of the school and proposed to teach chess to the children, she got very excited because ‘the children would be able to participate in chess tournaments organised by local Armenian schools, and that would be great, as we are aiming to strengthen our connections with the *Bolsahay* community.’ That policy of rapprochement appears in many other instances: inviting students of the local Armenian schools to the HD School’s annual theatrical performances, accepting invitations by local Armenian institutions, or praising famous and influential representatives of the local Armenian community.



*Figure 41. HD School's teachers and students visiting the grave of Hrant Dink in September 2016. Picture retrieved from the school's Facebook group with permission.*

For instance, during one of the school’s theatrical performances to which local Armenians were also invited, quotations of local Armenian writer Rober Haddecian were used and he was explicitly cited. On another occasion, in September 2016, the school’s principal published pictures of the students and teachers paying a visit to the grave of famous Istanbulite Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, whose name the school bears (see Figure 41 above). ‘Rest in peace... there are people following your path,’ she wrote below the photos, symbolically linking the Migrant students to Hrant Dink and thus the local Armenian community.

I speculate that this proactive engagement with the local Armenian community and the attempt to strengthen connections with its leadership mainly serves an instrumental

purpose: leaving a good impression on them and further strengthening the emotional and social bonds in order to secure continuous support without which the school could probably not sustain itself. I propose this explanation mainly taking into consideration the fact that Migrants, including many of the teachers of the school, otherwise have no real interest in the local Armenians on the interpersonal level.

In fact, apart from that institutional openness Migrants' connections with local Armenians are very limited. There are those who are employed by local Armenians, and some children attending local Armenian schools—67 of them in 2012-2013 according to *Agos* (2012) and currently fewer than a hundred as estimated by one of the Istanbulite Armenian newspaper editors, which remains smaller compared to the number of Migrant students attending the Hrant Dink school, 132 this year. These instances of social relations mainly serve instrumental purposes. Whereas working for local Armenians provides Migrants the most essential resource for sustainability, i.e. a job, for which they have come to Istanbul in the first place, sending one's children to local Armenian schools is also perceived to be beneficial because they are free of charge, unlike the HD school, and because, as the HD school principal explained, 'some Migrant parents send their children to the local Armenian schools hoping that they would later marry one of their *Bolsahay* classmates and thus acquire Turkish citizenship.'

Otherwise, generally Migrants are not in contact with the locals, do not tend to form friendships with them and prefer to socialise among themselves. 'We don't really like the local Armenians,' 'I cannot really communicate with them, we're different,' 'I don't have any local Armenian acquaintances, not even a single one,' and 'We socialise only among ourselves' are a few quotations attesting to the existence of a social boundary. Although that social boundary is nourished, as described above, by the local Armenians as well, it's important to note that the Migrants also actively and willingly contribute to it from the other

side. In other words, it is definitely not the case of a boundary against their will, like the one erected against the Muslim/Alevi Armenians on the part of the Christians.

How can we explain these social and symbolic boundaries that Migrant individuals draw between themselves and the Istanbulite Armenians whom they often call *T'rk'ats'ats Hayer*, meaning 'Turkified Armenians'?

*Reactive boundary making: Migrants responding to discrimination and exploitation*

As described above, local Armenians often have a discriminatory and demeaning approach toward the Migrants, which is also admitted by some local Armenian intellectuals. Pakrad Estukyan, the editor of the Armenian section of *Agos*, writes about his community's members' 'discrimination' and 'intolerance' toward '*hayasdants'is* who have sought refuge in Istanbul because of tough social conditions' (Estukyan 2017). Istanbul-born journalist Alin Ozinian, who has studied and lived in Armenia and thus established relations with its citizens, criticises the Istanbulite Armenian community's treatment of the Migrants and qualifies it as 'discrimination and marginalisation' (Ozinian 2011).

In particular, Migrants complain about two phenomena: first, the discriminatory, disrespectful or condescending treatment they get from the local Armenians, and second, the exploitation of their labour on the part of their Istanbulite Armenian employers.

'They look down on us, as if we represent a lower caste,' 'They treat us as savages from remote villages, as people who have seen neither cities nor culture and civilization,' "'Here come the starving *Hayasdants'is*", you can read in the locals' eyes' and many other similar expressions I heard from Migrants attest to feelings of resentment against the locals' treatment of them as cultural inferiors. The stereotype of the 'uncivilised *Hayasdants'i*' is in fact so real and widespread that I have even heard of instances, especially during the first years of the migration, of local Armenian employers wanting to teach basic technological

skills to their Migrant domestic workers, thinking that they were encountering technology for the very first time in their lives. ‘Do you know what this is? Here is how you turn the TV on and off,’ explained Donna’s employer, showing, to her great surprise and embarrassment, a remote control.

The condescending approach toward the Migrants is condensed in the label *Hayasdants’i*, often used negatively by Istanbulite Armenians. At least that is how the Migrants interpret the usage of the term. Nvard, a Migrant journalist working for one of the local Armenian newspapers, said that it had often occurred that local Armenians would start speaking to her and then, after a while, praise her by saying that she is ‘not like *Hayasdants’is*’. ‘And what are the *Hayasdants’is* like?! There is a stereotypical image of the *Hayasdants’i* in their imagination, and we are all discriminated according to that image,’ she complained. ‘You are the only *Hayasdants’i* that I like,’ ‘I don’t want a *Hayasdants’i* in my house,’ ‘Those *Hayasdants’is* knew nothing until they came here and learned from us,’ were other expressions personally heard by my Migrant research participants.

Furthermore, Migrants employed by local Armenians often complain about being exploited and ‘forced to work as slaves.’ This was the case mainly for female domestic workers. ‘They don’t treat us as humans, but rather only as employees,’ one of them told me. I have heard stories of local Armenian employers waking up their Migrant domestic worker in the middle of the night to give her a task, of employers yelling at their Migrant maids, and of Migrant domestic workers being forbidden from consuming food from the fridge. Elsewhere Migrants are quoted saying that they were hired as baby-sitters, but were then asked to do the cleaning and cooking as well (Ozinian 2011).

There are no legal contracts that define these Migrants’ obligations and rights because most of them have neither residence, nor working permits. Moreover, many of them have some form of dependency on and moral obligation toward their local Armenian

employers, as without the latter they could not have secured a job in Istanbul in the first place, especially since they did not know Turkish when they first arrived (see Taşçı 2010: 130-132).

I should state, to be fair, that not all Migrant domestic workers complain about exploitation and bad working conditions. I have witnessed myself how helpful and friendly my local Armenian friends were toward the Migrant maid that used to work for them. However, bad experiences are not exceptional, and, as a result, they contribute to the formation of a negative stereotype of the local Armenians among the Migrants.

Naturally, both the discriminatory/condescending approach toward the Migrants and the exploitative conditions in which they often work engender feelings of resentment and, consequently, make way for a reactive boundary making. ‘In the beginning, I was sympathetic toward the local Armenians. I considered each of them to be one of ours. But I was always repelled as a “*Hayasdants‘i*,” and that saddened me a lot. As a result, I lost my initial positive attitude toward the locals,’ said one of the teachers working at the HD School. Because of the aforementioned exploitative conditions, many Migrant domestic workers are willing to cut their one tie with the local Armenians as soon as they find the opportunity. ‘I could not stand the way they treated me, so I left that job for this one, although I knew that I would earn less,’ said another teacher at the HD School.

Thus, this reactive boundary making is both instrumental, in terms of evading possible discrimination and exploitation, and motivated by emotions and feelings of resentment towards those phenomena. Migrants’ boundary making vis-à-vis the local Armenians is nevertheless not purely reactive. There are other factors, mainly ideological ones, that motivate them to draw symbolic and social boundaries against the local Armenians. To put it briefly, the local Armenians do not meet the expectations that Migrants have of Armenians and ‘ideal Armenianness.’

*'They have put being Armenian aside'*

A first critique by the Migrants directed at the local Armenians concerns the latter's hiding, sometimes even denying, their Armenian identity. Tiran, the vice-principal of the HD School, complains that the Istanbulite Armenians 'have put being Armenian aside,' although he understands that there have been historical reasons for it.

Migrants usually think that the locals' extent of cautiousness is not justified, and consequently find their behaviour strange and demeaning to Armenianness. They especially get embarrassed when the locals expect them to act similarly. Donna recalls how she used to get angry at her local Armenian employer when the latter would 'unnecessarily' ask her to remain silent on public transport 'so that people don't realise that we're Armenians.'

The Migrants tell, often spicing their words with pride, that they never fear and feel the need to hide their Armenian identity. 'I am totally aware that being Armenian might bring negative consequences here. Nevertheless, I never hide it. I simply cannot permit myself to do so,' said Maria, a young teacher at the HD School, indirectly blaming the local Armenians for permitting themselves that 'weakness.' Janna has resisted her local Armenian in-laws' advice of giving her children Turkish names for their future security: 'I told Haro that it is painful to think that people could bother my son because of his [Armenian] name, but I nevertheless don't want us to cower. I want us to proudly bear our names and identity.'

*Perceived Linguistic and Cultural 'deficiencies'*

Another reason why Migrants construct mental and social boundaries between themselves and the local Armenians, are the linguistic and cultural 'deficiencies' they think the latter have as Armenians. In other words, the fact that most of the local Armenians speak Turkish rather than Armenian, and that they are, according to the Migrants, distant from Armenian culture, not only leads the latter to perceive and categorise the Istanbulites as 'Turkified,' but also inhibits social connections between the two. Tiran puts it quite simply: 'I cannot

communicate and make friendships with locals [because] their culture, their lifestyles, the way they speak and move, their jokes and everything has become so similar to those of the Turks.’

Janna, who has had the opportunity to engage in contact with the local Armenians because of being married to one of them, thinks that the Istanbulite Armenians have ‘no cultural commonalities with Armenia and generally Armenians.’ In particular, the most serious problem for her and most of the Migrants is local Armenians’ being almost completely Turkish-speaking, which, as Janna thinks, contributes to their general acculturation (Haro masters Armenian, but that is not usual among Istanbulite Armenians). ‘If you’re an Armenian, then you should speak Armenian before everything else!’ is an expression I often heard from Migrants. Gevorg, a teacher at HD school, thinks that the locals’ illiteracy in Armenian is ‘a shame’: ‘They speak, curse, sing in Turkish, they even say “I’m Armenian” in Turkish! Where is your Armenian if you’re an Armenian?!’

The HD School, interestingly, despite its difficulties and reliance on the local Armenians’ help, does not shy away from declaring that enriching the local Armenian community with Armenian culture is one of its goals. At the end of the students’ annual artistic performance, held in September 2016, the school’s principal Heriknaz made an announcement to the audience, comprised also of local Armenian schoolchildren and community leaders. Speaking fully in Eastern Armenian, she recalled a visit to one of the local Armenian schools, during which the Migrant students had performed a verse by the famous Armenian poet Hovhannes Tumanyan. After the performance, she said, she had asked the local Armenian students whether they had previously read that or any other piece by Tumanyan, and getting negative responses she had ‘a very sad day.’ That day, she said, she made a decision: ‘We have to provide the *Bolsahay* community with the Armenian

cultural knowledge it lacks. We have to inject [Armenian culture] into the community. And that is what we had intended to do through this performance today.'

Most of the Migrants, however, do not have the school principal's approach, and simply prefer to Otherise the locals as 'Turkified Armenians' and stay away from them.

*An unacceptable 'denial of the homeland'*

As analysed in Chapter 5, the homeland Republic of Armenia is of high importance for the Migrants and their interpretation of Armenian identity. Being Armenian should entail, they believe, interest in and care for the homeland. One of the most serious 'deficiencies' that they perceive among the Istanbulite Armenians is the latter's general lack of enthusiasm towards Armenia and, moreover, its denial as a homeland in favour of, importantly, Turkey.

As described in Chapter 5, the 2016 four-day war between Armenia and Azerbaijan had immensely worried many of the Migrants. When explaining her dislike of the Istanbulite Armenians, Janna brought the example of their attitude at that time: 'As if they did not care about the war in Armenia. They were discussing only Turkish politics... Is that their Armenianness? They think that going to the Church is enough to make them Armenian, and remain indifferent towards Armenia!'

Gevorg finds it unacceptable when local Armenians occasionally tell Migrants to 'go to your Armenia,' not only because of the exclusionist approach of that expression, but also because of the local Armenians' disidentification with Armenia it entails: 'Why "your Armenia"? Isn't it theirs as well? Aren't they Armenians as well?' The conclusion of Narek, the Migrant man who was told to 'go back to your homeland' by his local Armenian employer, goes further:

I don't consider locals with that approach to be Armenians. There is the word "*Hay*" (Armenian) in "*Bolsahay*" (Istanbulite Armenian), but how has *this* [Turkey] become your homeland and *that* [Armenia] ceased to be yours? If this is your homeland and not Armenia, then how are you different from a Turk?

Lastly, I should mention that, far from being widespread, a change in attitude towards Armenia can nevertheless be noticed among local Armenians during the recent years. Trips to Armenia, for instance, have increased. Whereas Öztürk had met only one Istanbulite Armenian family who had applied for Armenian citizenship during his research years, that is from 2011 to 2013 (2020: 250), I met dozens of such applicants during mine, which started in 2015. Although this is partly motivated by the deterioration of Turkey's political climate since 2015 (see Chapter 1) and applicants' willingness to acquire a foreign citizenship which could come in helpful in case matters get worse, it nevertheless suggests a change in attitude and the establishment of connections with the Republic of Armenia at least on a legal/official level. Moreover, in October 2017, the anniversary of the Republic of Armenia's independence was celebrated in Istanbul for the first time. Although the initiative was that of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Armenia to the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, local community members had an active role in its organisation and the community leadership, including representatives of all three Armenian Churches (Apostolic, Catholic, Protestant) attended it. Needless to say, the celebration had the 'permission' of the state. Not only was it tolerated, but the venue was provided for free by the municipality of the Beşiktaş district of Istanbul (*Jamanak* 2017).

Nonetheless, it is still too early for these recent developments to have an effect on Istanbulite Armenians' sense of belonging and their stance towards Armenia in general, let alone for these to be noticed by the Migrants. Meanwhile, the latter would still be facing this additional factor contributing to their questioning of the local Armenians' 'extent of Armenianness.'

*Migrants against the Turkish-Armenian pairing: Multilateral boundary making*

As I argued in Chapter 5, keeping an appropriate distance from the Turks and retaining a dose of hostility and politico-historical demands addressed to them are important markers of Armenianness for the Migrants.

Consequently, if illiteracy in Armenian is perceived as a ‘shame’ by some Migrants, replacing it with Turkish is even more unacceptable to their eyes. In fact, as Istanbulite Armenian intellectual Sevan Değirmenciyan has written in an article (2017a), Armenians of Turkey visiting Armenia have often faced difficulties and criticism because of speaking in Turkish. It is for this same reason that Gevorg, the Migrant teacher at HD school, experiences a cognitive dissonance and finds it appalling that local Armenians would say ‘I’m Armenian’ in Turkish.

A further intolerable phenomenon for the Migrants is the local Armenians’ general compliance with the Turkish state’s policy with regard to the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923. Migrants cannot accept the fact that most of the local Armenians do not demand justice and recognition of the genocide from Turkey. Marlina, a Migrant teaching eastern Armenian in one of the private universities of Istanbul has done her best to convince her Istanbulite Armenian students to join the annual protest marches for the recognition of the genocide organised by democratic and progressive factions of Turkish civil society in Istanbul, but has always become ‘enraged’ when the students have said that their parents won’t permit them to. The Migrants’ reaction is naturally even harsher when they encounter local Armenians actively reproducing the Turkish state’s narratives of denial of the genocide. Here is an extract from Janna’s criticism directed at her local Armenian husband’s community members:

You have people in your community saying ‘whatever happened [during the genocide] is a matter of the past, now we should forget about it and be brothers with the Turks!’ I’ve heard that expression many times (...) Have some self-respect! That’s what I say. Have some attitude at least among yourselves! I’m not asking you to fight the Turks, but at least don’t stand on *their* side!

Last but not least, overt pro-Turkishness or enactment of Turkish nationalism on the part of some local Armenians is also harshly criticised by Migrants. Janna told the story of how local Armenians stood up and started to sing the Turkish national anthem when a group of nationalist Turks was parading with Turkish flags on the mostly Armenian-populated island Kinaliada Island. She recalled how ‘a young Armenian couple were passing by. They stopped, put their hands on their chests and proudly started singing. Don’t tell me that they were forced to do it, Haro! They were doing it with sincere feelings of veneration!’

Similarly, the fact that Istanbulite Armenian schools and institutions decorate their buildings with the Turkish flag on important Turkish national holidays is also mentioned with criticism by Migrants, whose school and classrooms display only the Armenian national flag (see Figure 42 below). A few Migrant parents told me that they had enrolled their children in local Armenian community schools, but after a few days took them out and enrolled them in the HD School because ‘we did not want them to learn that “oath to Turkishness” standing under the Turkish flag in those *Bolsahay* schools.’<sup>76</sup> This last example, in particular, clearly attests to instances of social boundary making that impede Migrant children’s incorporation into the local Armenian community because of the latter’s being permeated with Turkish national ideology and culture.

When Migrants see local Armenians resembling Turks or identifying with them, whether in terms of language, culture, political stances, belonging to Turkey as a homeland, or referring to the Turks as *merinnerĕ*, meaning ‘ours’ in Western Armenian, they experience a kind of cognitive dissonance in which the Armenian and the Turk, concepts radically different from and contrasting each other in their imagination and ideology, are paired together. They cognitively and ideologically refuse to accept that phenomenon

<sup>76</sup> Abolished only in 2013, the oath used to be mandatory in Turkish and even Istanbulite Armenian schools. It consisted of words such as ‘I am a Turk... May my life be dedicated to the Turkish existence... How happy is the one who says “I am a Turk!”’ (see Ekmekçiođlu 2019: 170).

because it somehow jeopardises their boundary with the Turk, which is fundamental to their identities. Thus, they draw both social and symbolic boundaries between themselves and the Armenians of Turkey by calling them ‘Turkified Armenians’ at best, or in some rare cases even ‘Turks.’ This boundary making, obviously, is also situated in a multilateral boundary work by the Migrants, as erecting a boundary between themselves and the ‘Turkified Armenians’ serves the function of maintaining the boundary between Turks and Armenians, in other words that between Turks and themselves.



Figure 42. The Armenian flag in the Migrants' HD School vs. the Turkish flag and the bust of Atatürk in the Istanbulite Armenian Getronagan school. Picture on the left retrieved from the HD School's Facebook group with permission. Photo on the right by the author

### *Haro's response*

Unsurprisingly, local Armenians often counter the criticism of the Migrants by noting that the latter are unaware of the difficult sociopolitical conditions in which they lived for decades and which have affected their behaviour toward Turkey and the Turks. While listening to Janna's words during my interview with her, a moment came when Haro could not hold himself back any longer and asked, apologising, if he could join the conversation. He started by listing difficulties which the Armenians of Turkey have gone through after the 1980 military coup, then went further back into history and counted the massacres of 1894-

1897, 1909, the genocide of 1915, then arrived to the conscriptions of ‘The Twenty Classes’ in 1941, the Property Tax Law of 1942, and the pogrom of 1955 (see Chapter 2).

Then he presented his counter-argument to Janna: ‘There are reasons why we are very cautious here. Turks are the Sword of Damocles hanging over our heads. You’re wrong if you think that we don’t care about Armenia or we were not concerned during the recent short war. We simply don’t expose what we think!’ Then he tried to explain why many Istanbulite Armenians have no clue about Armenian history, including the genocide: ‘Do not forget that we don’t have the right to teach Armenian history in our schools. And we’re obliged to use state-sponsored history textbooks which deny the genocide.’ Finally, he also referred to historical reasons that have contributed to a lack of interest and enthusiasm towards Armenia among the Istanbulite Armenians: ‘For decades, we had no contact with Armenia at all. It was extremely difficult to travel to Soviet Armenia. My father was one of those very few who dared to organise touristic trips, but was often interrogated at the border, and a member of the secret police used to follow them until Kars.’

However, because of the general lack of contacts between local Armenians and the Migrants, most of the latter, unlike Janna, do not have people like Haro to explain to them that the local Armenians’ extreme cautiousness and the resulting pro-Turkish behaviour have reasons deeper than ‘putting Armenianness aside’ and do not necessarily represent the Istanbulite Armenians’ true feelings or opinions, although in some cases they do. Most of the Migrants, for instance, might think that Arsen, a previous principal of one of the Istanbulite Armenian schools, is a supporter of Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic and one of the leading figures of Turkish nationalism, since he had the latter’s picture hanging on the wall behind his desk at the school. I knew, however, that Arsen ‘had to do that for the safety of the school and its reputation among the ministry’s representatives’

and he actually disliked Atatürk for his anti-Armenian actions. In fact, that was why he had hung Atatürk's portrait *behind* his desk, 'so that I don't see him all the time.'

*Locals lacking 'Armenian morality'*

Lastly, the Migrants' moral expectations of Armenianness, such as hospitality and abiding by gender and kinship-related expectations (discussed in Chapter 5), are usually not met by local Armenians. This fact, once again, motivates the former to draw a boundary against the latter and categorise them as 'Turkified' or, at best, 'Other' Armenians.

Migrants, for instance, complained that the local Armenians are rather self-centered and egotistic, and neglect the 'Armenian traditional hospitality.' They noted, for example, that whereas they do not expect invitations from close friends and can simply call them and *inform* them that they will be dropping in for a coffee, among local Armenians 'you should necessarily call and *ask* whether it is suitable to visit.' Among Istanbulite Armenians, they added, one might get a negative response, his friend might say that they are having lunch and it is not suitable for him or her to visit, 'whereas we would invite him to join us for lunch! But here everyone lives for himself and does not like to get bothered by others.'

Matters get even worse when kinship related customs dictated by 'Armenian traditional law,' such as caring for children and the elderly or respecting one's parents are, according to the Migrants, not followed by local Armenians. The fact that the latter leave their parents to live alone under the care of a Migrant domestic worker is found morally unacceptable and 'not appropriate for Armenians' [*Hayin vayel ch'i*]. One of those domestic workers said:

I take care of my employer because his four children do not. We are six sisters in our family, and according to the [customary] law in Armenia, a son stays with the parents who should never be left to die alone. Since we don't have a brother, we six sisters took care of our father. He came and stayed with whichever of us and for as long as he wanted. My friends were advising me to come and find a job here in Istanbul, but I could not leave my father alone and I came only after he passed away. Parent-child relations are very different, much more humane in Armenia than here among the Turkified Armenians.

Finally, Migrants are most disappointed and critical of the local Armenians when it comes to gender roles and expectations. Female domestic workers argue that local Armenian men are not ‘as manly as an Armenian man should be,’ since, for instance, they refrain from giving orders to their wives, they are not capable of ‘controlling’ them and are, on the contrary, ‘controlled’ by them. One domestic worker told me with enthusiasm that she tells her local Armenian employer that he is an ‘Armenian of Armenia, not a *Bolsahay*’ because he is ‘a real man.’ To support her thesis, she told me with obvious satisfaction the story of her employer strictly ordering her, like ‘real Armenian men’ do, to make sure that cheese and *raki* (Turkish anisette) were always present in the fridge.

On the other hand, local Armenian women are also criticised by Migrants and found to be ‘non-ideal Armenians’ because of neglecting their wifely duties (mainly taking care of the husband and children) and behaving ‘immorally’ (smoking, dressing ‘immodestly’, etc.). Such behaviour, Migrant women argue, diverges from ‘traditional Armenianness’ which demands that ‘women be modest, decent, and obedient to their husbands.’ ‘These are the reasons why we call them Turkified,’ bluntly concluded one Migrant domestic worker.

This usage of moral standards while drawing symbolic group boundaries is of course not unique to the Migrants of Istanbul. Lamont has famously studied such instances of boundary making among working men in France and the United States (2000), and has even provided a quotation by a Muslim Arab whose boundary making motivations are incidentally very similar to those of the Migrants in Istanbul, as they also are strongly linked to family matters and obligations: ‘The familial feeling, you don’t have this. I say “you” in general because I am Arab and you are Catholic or Protestant. For us Muslim Arabs, we keep our parents with us, and you send them to the nursing home. You send them to the nursing home to go to the movie theater or somewhere else. (Tunisian screw cutter, Bobigny)’ (Lamont 2000: 6).

Thus, apart from the Hrant Dink School, which as an institution tries to engage with the local Armenian institutions and strives to 'join the community' at least partly for instrumental purposes of securing the latter's crucial support, the majority of individual Migrants draw symbolic and even social boundaries toward the local Armenians of Istanbul. That boundary making is mainly disinterested. It results from the emotional factor of resentment toward a discriminatory and condescending approach on the part of the local Armenians, and from ideological and cultural phenomena, namely the Migrants' interpretation and expectations of Armenianness which contrasts with the discourse and behaviour of the locals.

However, based on their racial-biological understanding of national identities, Migrants generally don't deny the locals' Armenianness. They find them to be Turkified, but nevertheless 'Turkified *Armenians*.' Despite her harsh critique and even rhetorical questioning of locals' Armenianness, Janna nevertheless ended the interview by stating that 'they are nevertheless ours, they are Armenians and as such I love and defend them no matter their defects.'

Only further research during the coming years or decades could reveal to what extent the mutual openness on the institutional level, especially the admission of Migrant children to local Armenian schools and the HD schoolchildren's occasional contact with their local Armenian counterparts, will find its way to the sphere of interpersonal relations, and whether the mutual symbolic and social boundaries will start to fall apart.

### **Migrants and the Muslim/Alevi Armenians**

Finally, Migrants' relations with the Muslim/Alevi Armenians remain to be described and analysed. The reason why I allocate only a section to these, rather than a full chapter, lies in their strictly limited extent. In fact, there is almost no contact between members of the two

factions in Istanbul,<sup>77</sup> simply because they do not encounter each other. Whereas both the Migrants and Muslim/Alevi Armenians reach out to the local Christian Armenians, the first for material support or employment, the second for recognition and help in their endeavours of ‘becoming full-fledged Armenians again,’ they generally don’t have any reasons or opportunities to establish contacts between each other.

However, the Migrants’ stance towards the *idea* of the ‘Muslim Armenian’ or ‘Alevi Armenian’ might interest the reader, especially in comparison with that of the local Christian Armenians described in the previous chapter.

*Relative symbolic openness: primordialism, a Soviet legacy of secular Armenianness, and nationalist dreams*

At least among those Migrants with whom I conversed, the majority are relatively open toward the idea of a Muslim or Alevi Armenian, in the sense that, unlike the local Christian Armenians, they do not cognitively reject its possibility. Furthermore, many of them do not even demand that Muslim/Alevi Armenians convert to Christianity before they will acknowledge their Armenianness.

A first reason for that absence of a symbolic boundary pushing the Muslim/Alevi Armenians outside the borders of the Migrants’ Armenian nation is the primordial-biological understanding of Armenianness the Migrants hold. When I asked a group of Migrant Armenian women whether they would question the Armenianness of the Muslim/Alevi Armenians, they collectively responded that they would not, arguing that ‘one is Armenian by blood before anything else.’ Furthermore, Migrants’ primordialism leads them to count *all* descendants of Islamised Armenians as Armenians, no matter how they self-identity. Tiran, the vice-principal of the HD School, believes that thousands of people

<sup>77</sup> Öztürk notes having encountered female citizens of Armenia married to or in relationships with Hemshin men in Hopa (2020: 91), which is an interesting phenomenon that I did not encounter and remains outside the scope of my research.

in Turkey ‘do not know that they are Armenian.’ When I asked him whether he would consider them to be Armenians even if they did not identify as such, he did not hesitate at all: ‘If they’re ethnically Armenian, then they’re Armenian. What else could they be?’

A second non-instrumental factor is the relative secularity of many of the Migrants and of their conception of Armenianness, which is at least partly a legacy of their Soviet past. In fact, despite the post-Soviet religious efflorescence (Dudwick 1994:48), religiosity is said to remain at a relatively low intensity in Armenia (Antonyan 2011). Moreover, Migrants and their compatriots have experienced the possibility of non-Christian Armenianness in the Soviet era, during some periods of which ‘the Armenian population in the Soviet Union had largely lost any organic connection to the Church’ (Corley 2010: 190). Based on that past, Lilit, a Migrant woman in her late twenties, argued: ‘Religion cannot determine Armenianness. In Soviet times baptism was banned, people got less religious, some became atheists, but they were always Armenian, right?’ Marineh, a much older Migrant recalls that she used to be an atheist for years, ‘but I was nevertheless Armenian.’

Third, my observations allow me to argue that the idea of Muslim and Alevi Armenians’ presence in eastern Turkey completely fits Migrants’, and generally Armenian citizens’, nationalist dreams about a return or recapture of the lands from which Armenians, including many of their direct ancestors, were eradicated during the genocide. The idea that there might be ‘millions of Armenians in the lost homeland’ gives them hope in that regard. During the Q&A session after the lecture of a Christianised former Alevi Armenian in Armenia, for instance, members of the audience asked about the willingness of the Muslim/Alevi Armenians to join Armenia ‘in case the issue of return of the lands arises one day’ (Modus Vivendi 2014: 56’ 30’’). I argue that it is such political and nationalist dreams about restoring the nation’s ‘glorious past,’ rather than a desire for connections and access to people outside the borders of their ‘shr[u]nk[en] Armenian universe’ (Öztürk 2020: 150-

151), that engenders a mythification of the Muslim/Alevi Armenians among many Migrants who believe – or rather need to believe – that Turkey is home to millions of *irakanum Hayer* ('in-reality-Armenians' in Eastern Armenian). Thus the Migrants' openness vis-a-vis the Muslim and Alevi Armenians is also instrumental and situated in a multilateral context in which the acceptance of the latter is believed to bring a gain in their struggle against Turkey.

#### *Enactment as a condition*

Nonetheless, just as they expect it from the local Christian Armenians, Migrants expect the Muslim/Alevi Armenians to *enact* Armenianness apart from merely bearing it in their genes. Tiran demands from the descendants of Islamised Armenians to 'live and act like Armenians.' He considers their Armenianness to be 'in vain' if they would 'not undertake actions in that direction.' Those actions to which he refers might be learning Armenian, 'acquiring the culture,' visiting Armenia and accepting it as one's homeland. Once those conditions are met, the Muslim/Alevi Armenians would be wholeheartedly welcomed by many of my Migrant research participants. 'I watched a video about those people. Although they have Islamised, they are nevertheless going to Armenia, declaring their Armenianness, considering Armenia as their homeland... of course they're Armenian!' a Migrant remarked about the Muslim/Alevi Armenians.

#### *Differing views and reservations*

However, it would be wrong to generalise the aforementioned welcoming stance. Some Migrants, in fact, do not accept the fact that Armenians become or remain Muslim, and consider such people as 'imperfect Armenians.' I encountered only one Migrant for whom the Muslim Armenian category was cognitively untenable, perhaps because he had never heard of that possibility before. Several others, however, although not ruling out the

possibility of Armenians being Muslim, nevertheless considered them ‘Armenians who have given up on their Armenianness.’

These are usually religious individuals for whom Christianity, if not a condition *preceding* Armenianness, is nevertheless a feature normally accompanying it. ‘When we say “Armenian,” we immediately add the word “Christian” next to it. We say “*Hay-K’ristonya*” [Armenian-Christian], right?’ argued a HD School teacher. The religious revival in Armenia around the time of and especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the consequent fortification of the role of the Armenian Apostolic Church as the carrier of national identity, and the introduction of the obligatory ‘Armenian Church History’ course in the school curriculum (also followed by the HD School), have in fact weakened concepts of secular nationhood in Armenia (Burchardt and Hovhannisyan 2016), and apparently among some of the Migrants.

Furthermore, some Migrants have reservations about Islam in particular, and find it ‘unfortunate’ that some Armenians have adopted it. Like many Christian Armenian citizens of Turkey, these Migrants refer back to the genocide and the role of religion in it. Narek, the Migrant man introduced above, told me that he does not reject Muslim Armenians’ Armenianness, but remains skeptical towards them: ‘Befriend the dog, but never put your stick down.’

Thus, lacking opportunities of encounter, Migrants and Muslim/Alevi Armenians are not in a position either to draw social boundaries towards each other, nor to incorporate or fuse with one another. When asked about their opinion, Migrants mostly don’t reject the Armenianness of the Muslim/Alevi Armenians, basing their judgment on their primordial-genetic and usually secular understanding of Armenian identity. They expect, nevertheless, an ‘enactment of Armenianness.’ Some of them, lastly, have some reservations about Islam

in particular, and thus consider Muslim Armenianness to be a sad phenomenon inflicted on the Armenian nation by the Turks. Nevertheless, they acknowledge its existence.

As for the Muslim/Alevi Armenians, they do not have much to say about Migrants in Istanbul, and most of them are unaware of the latter's presence. They often do have, however, expectations of Armenia. In particular, they resent the fact that they cannot get Armenian citizenship unless they provide baptism certificates. However, their treatment on the part of the Armenian state remains outside the scope of my research on Armenians and Armenianness within the borders of Turkey – but is certainly an interesting topic for further research.

## **Conclusion**

Apart from witnessing the public appearance of Muslim/Alevi Armenians, the local Christian Armenian community increasingly found itself facing yet another novel Armenian category during the last three decades: the Migrants. Although its institutions have been, generally speaking, open to those newcomers and have even attempted to incorporate them into the community, most of its members are not enthusiastic, to say the least, toward the *Hayasdants* 'is, to the extent that they generally erect social boundaries against the latter. Motivating factors behind that boundary making range from the disinterested (linguistic, cultural, moral-judgmental) to the instrumental (mistrust and personal security). Furthermore, that exclusion and disidentification is part of a broader, multilateral boundary making, since the locals fear that Migrants could jeopardise their relations and boundaries with the Turkish state and majority.

The Migrants, in turn, also draw both symbolic and social boundaries against the local Christian Armenians, with the exception of the Hrant Dink school, their sole institution. Their boundary making is similarly conditioned by disinterested (resentment toward discrimination and exploitation, expectations of 'Armenianness') and instrumental

(avoiding potential discrimination and exploitation) factors. It is also, once again, situated in a multilateral boundary work where their boundary with Turkishness is perceived to be jeopardised by the possibility of a Turkish-Armenian pairing in the example of the ‘Turkified Armenians.’

Finally, Migrants do not generally encounter the Muslim/Alevi Armenians, but usually don’t draw as rigid symbolic boundaries toward them as the local Christian Armenians do. Based on their primordial and usually secular understanding of Armenianness, they accept the Muslim/Alevi Armenians’ Armenianness, and are sometimes even overtly enthusiastic toward those ‘millions of secret Armenians’ whom they see as potential partners in their anti-Turkish struggle for the ‘lost homeland’—hence the multilateral nature of this boundary work as well. Nevertheless, they equally expect enactment of Armenianness from the Muslim/Alevi Armenians, and might feel, at least some of them, uncomfortable or sad about the fact that Armenians could truly follow Islam.

# CONCLUSION

## **Armenians and Other Armenians in Contemporary Turkey**

Having studied the interpretations and experience of Armenian identity by the different factions of Armenians residing in contemporary Turkey and the mechanisms of boundary making at play between them, I now end this dissertation with some concluding remarks.

First, I comment on the plural and heterogeneous nature of Armenians in Turkey (and hence beyond), arguing that they do not constitute a single social group or community. In that context, I explore the potentials of nominal identity and of processes of (self-)naming and (self-)categorisation. Second, I put together the different cases of boundary making revealed in the previous chapters and return to the existing literature in order to argue that boundary making is often both disinterested and instrumental at the same time, and that it is also often multilateral. I end by rearticulating my call for a multilateral study of group relations and social boundaries.

### **Armenians in Contemporary Turkey: Community, group or category?**

This ethnography first of all revealed that the ‘Armenian’ in Turkey, often used in a simplistic, unitary and stereotypical manner in Turkish popular discourse, is a much more complicated and contested idea when it comes to its perception among the people who lay claim to it. Moreover, internal plurality and even segregation characterise Armenians in contemporary Turkey.

### *Internal plurality and segregation*

If the Christian Armenian citizens of Turkey had traditionally been the sole representatives of Armenianness in the country, matters have got more complicated since the 1990s, as explored in Chapter 3. Although the Christians continue to represent the officially acknowledged ‘Armenian minority’ of the country alone, two other branches of Armenians have unexpectedly emerged and diversified Turkey’s landscape of Armenianness, thus challenging the very notion of ‘Armenian identity.’ Not only did a considerable number of citizens of neighbouring Armenia start to migrate and establish residence in Turkey, mainly in Istanbul, after the independence of their homeland, but also and almost in parallel officially Muslim—hence ‘non-Armenian’—citizens of the Republic of Turkey started to publicly identify as Armenians in growing numbers, drawing on their Armenian ancestors who had Islamised decades, in some cases centuries earlier.

Obvious and important internal differences attest to the heterogeneous character of the Armenians of contemporary Turkey. In terms of citizenship, Christian Armenians and Muslim/Alevi Armenians are Turkish, whereas the Migrants are citizens of Armenia. In terms of religion there are the Christians, mostly Apostolic but also Catholic and Protestant, Sunni Muslims, and the Alevis, let alone individuals with secular or atheistic visions existing in all three factions. In terms of historical experience, the Christian Armenians have lived as a ‘minoritized’ group in the Republic of Turkey (Ekmekçioğlu 2016: 8) and have been treated as ‘infidels’ and second-class citizens. The Muslim and Alevi Armenians have lived as converts, mostly in eastern parts of Turkey, and have often not been fully accepted by members of their new religious groups and endured lineage-based racist and discriminatory treatment on their part. The Migrants bear the experience of Soviet rule and of a post-Soviet ‘demodernized’ Armenia suffering economic hardship (Platz 2000: 124), but nevertheless national(ist) and independent.

In terms of legal status, the local Christian Armenians are the only ones who are categorised by the state as members of the ‘Armenian minority,’ only they are counted in published censuses, and only they can fully profit from ‘minority rights’ such as operating their own institutions and organisations, attending Armenian schools, etc. (see Ekmekçioğlu and Altuğ 2019: 172). The Muslim/Alevi Armenians, although in practice often labelled and discriminated as Armenians both on the part of ordinary citizens and the state, officially make up part of the ‘Muslim majority’ rather than the ‘Armenian community’ and are thus denied those ‘minority rights.’ The Migrants, finally, are either completely extra-legal, having overstayed their tourist visas or been born to undocumented migrants, or at best have residence permits. In any case, they are not citizens and are thus officially not part of the ‘Armenian community’ and thus, like the Muslims and Alevis, cannot fully participate in its community life.

All of those differences, in addition to the fact that members of the different branches usually rarely, if at all, interact with each other, indicate that the Armenian population of Turkey is highly heterogeneous, plural and fragmented.

Perhaps thematically most similar to my dissertation is Vered Amit Talai’s *Armenians in London*, an anthropological study published in 1989. Through her ethnography, Amit Talai reveals the plural and non-uniform character of the 10,000 Armenians of London, mostly first-generation immigrants, who had a few sub-divisions characterised by diverse origins, linguistic, cultural and political differences. However, a major difference between the Armenians studied by Amit Talai and those appearing in contemporary Turkey is that the latter contest the idea of ‘Armenian identity’ itself and do not hesitate to question or even reject each other’s Armenianness, thus erecting far more rigid symbolic and social boundaries than those observed by Amit Talai in London a few decades ago. Whereas London Armenians’ ‘tension and potential fractionalisation,’ as

argued by Amit Talai (1989: 42), '[were] contained by a shared acceptance of all these different kinds of people as, after all, Armenians,' the different factions of Armenians in contemporary Turkey often symbolically exclude one another from the 'Armenian nation' as they perceive it. That is so because, unlike the London Armenians who had 'a common symbolic framework' for interpreting and defining Armenianness (ibid.: 2), the Christian Armenians, Muslim/Alevi Armenians and Migrant Armenians have diverse understandings of what being Armenian means. They define who they are and who they are not through quite different 'structuring principles' (Lamont 2000: 51).

As we have seen, Armenianness for Christian Armenians, except for a secularist progressive minority of them (Chapter 3), is first and foremost anchored in Christianity and belonging to one of the Armenian Churches. It is understood and reproduced, in other words, as an ethno-religious identity (Chapter 2). For Muslim and Alevi Armenians, religion does not constitute a boundary of Armenianness, which is rather dictated by lineage and ancestry (Chapter 4). The Migrants, finally, also share a notion of 'Armenian by blood,' but conceive of three further 'characteristics of Armenianness' that they expect from all Armenians: (a) belonging, love for and care toward Armenia, (b) 'Armenian traditional morality,' and (c) distinction from and hostile vigilance toward the main national others, i.e. the Turks (Chapter 5). Encountering one another in Turkey and mainly Istanbul, these different Armenians find each other not fitting their understandings and expectations of Armenianness, perceive one another either as 'Other Armenians' or as not Armenians at all, and thus erect intra-Armenian social boundaries (Chapters 6 and 7, and section below).

Thus, unlike the Armenians of London in the 1980s, those of contemporary Turkey do not constitute a *community*, in A. P. Cohen's sense of the term, because their different factions clearly lack an 'attachment or commitment to a *common* body of symbols' (1985: 16, emphasis mine). They rather have at least three different and incompatible 'symbolic

constructions' of Armenianness, and their contradictions do not seem, at least for the time being, to be 'amenable to a resolution' in favour of a greater 'essential likeness' (ibid.: 115 and Amit Talai 1989: 42).

Furthermore, besides not sharing a common interpretation and symbolic framework of Armenianness, the three factions of Armenians in contemporary Turkey do not share a common perception of Armenians' main 'others' and Armenians' boundaries with them, in which, according to Cohen, 'the consciousness of community is [...] encapsulated' (1985: 3). In fact, whereas the main 'other' of 'the Armenian' is the Muslim for Christian Armenians, it is the racially non-Armenian (Turk, Kurd, Arab, etc.) for the Muslim/Alevi Armenians, and the Turkish, as not only a racial, but also national, cultural and political category, for the Migrants. Whereas the boundary of the Armenian is essentially religious in character for the Christian Armenians, it is *irk*-based for the Muslim/Alevi Armenians and primordial but also national (belonging to and care towards Armenia), political (anti-Turkishness), and cultural-moral ('Armenian traditional morality') for the Migrants.

Finally, this difference between the three factions' perception of Armenians' others and the boundaries with them, not only disjoins them and strips them of the characteristics of a community, but also, and importantly, contributes to their segregation and internal boundary making because it situates them in one another's category of the 'other.' For instance, the Muslim Armenians are not only dissimilar to Christian Armenians, but also, *as Muslims*, none other than the latter's 'Others.' The Christian Armenians not only do not completely share a symbolic framework of Armenianness with the Migrants and often do not meet the latter's standards of 'Armenian morality,' but also, being Turkish citizens, Turkish-speaking and often politically siding with Turkey or lenient (at least in discourse) towards its anti-Armenian approaches, merge with and at least partly become the very same 'Other' of the Migrant Armenians.

These internal inconsistencies and contradictions concerning the meaning and definition of Armenianness and its boundaries thus suggest that there cannot be talk of a single Armenian community in contemporary Turkey, nor of a coherent social ‘group’ with an agreed-upon ‘collective internal definition’ and mutual recognition between its members (Jenkins 1994: 198-202; 2014a: 114-119; Mann 1983: 34). Thus, it might be tempting to describe them in terms of the theoretical ‘other’ of the notion of ‘group,’ i.e. as merely a *category*, ‘externally defined’ and ‘delineated by others’ (ibid.). Doing so, however, would also entail oversimplification, since members of all three branches of Armenians in Turkey studied in this dissertation *self-identify*, that is *self-categorise* as ‘Armenians,’ although ascribing different meanings to that very same ethnonym. They are not simply categorised as Armenians ‘from above’ on the part of external observers.

Thus, Armenians of Turkey constitute neither a social group, nor merely an abstract, external, classificatory category devoid of substance. They are, if one insists on objectively defining them all together, residents of Turkey sharing a nominal identity. This, however, is not to say that there are no other commonalities between members of the three different factions. They share, of course, history, but only until around a century ago, that is before any of them was born. Some partly share the Armenian language, though only a minority of them, and not the same dialect. Particular members of a given faction might share this or that cultural element with particular members of another, but that is far from being the norm. The only characteristic that binds them *all* together is the nominal identity ‘Armenian’ that they use to categorise themselves, not even what they understand by that word. This fact, however, is not to be underestimated at all.

#### *On the potentials of nominal identity*

Apart from the distinction between ‘groups’ and ‘categories,’ Jenkins makes a helpful and important distinction between *nominal* and *virtual* identities, the first being the name of an

identity, the second being its experience, that is one's behaviour and treatment by others in relation to that identity (1994: 218; 2014a: 46, 111). He states that people sharing a nominal identity can have dramatically different experiences related to it: 'The nominal may be associated with a plurality of virtualities' (2014a: 102). The case of the Armenians in Turkey clearly reaffirms that statement. But, importantly, it also brings to light the fact that not only its experience, but also the meaning given and boundary drawn for a single nominal identity can also substantially differ from one bearer of it to another.

Nevertheless, the case at hand also shows that a given nominal identity has the potential of connecting, both mentally and experientially, the different people who self-identify through it. More simply put, the mere fact that Turkey's different factions of Armenians all call themselves 'Armenian,' makes them encounter and interact with each other and partly unites them in experience.

In fact, it is only because the Christian Armenians are 'Armenians' nominally, that the Migrants have approached them in the first place. Only later have they realised that these people sharing with them a nominal identity are not 'ideal Armenians,' and have started questioning their Armenianness. Nevertheless, once in contact and in relations of support or employment thanks to the initial expectation of sameness and feeling of closeness based on the same nominal identity, they keep engaging with them and even work towards 'feeding' them 'Armenian culture' as they perceive it (see Chapter 7). Reciprocally, it is only because of the Migrants' being 'Armenian' that the local Christian Armenians have initially welcomed them, helped them, trusted them and employed them in their houses, only to slowly start to distrust, despise and even reject or avoid those 'Sovietised/Russified Armenians,' but still feel obliged to institutionally support them as their 'co-ethnics' (see Chapter 7). Similarly, it is only because those Muslim/Alevi citizens started to identify themselves as 'Armenians,' using the particular ethnonym *Ermeni* in Turkish, that leaders

of the Christian Armenian community and community members in general *had* to encounter them, think about them, judge them, and either reject their Armenianness, thus engaging in a long-distance debate with them (and what is a debate, if not a kind of interaction?), or at times, as in the example of Sibel in Chapter 6, even question their own understandings of Armenianness and expand its boundaries in order to include those people who are significantly different but still *nominally* the same. In short, the mere fact of sharing a nominal identity encourages or forces the different kinds of Armenians in Turkey to interact with each other, be that in practice, in discursive debate, or cognitive processes, despite their otherwise immense differences, clashes of interest, and mutually-excluding symbolic frameworks of Armenianness.

Importantly, the potential of nominal identity also manifests itself when it comes to external discriminatory labelling. In fact, the stereotypical label of the ‘Armenian’ discussed at the beginning of the Introduction to this thesis most of the time does not target any particular faction within the Armenian population of Turkey, but rather the general nominal identity, which concerns *all* Armenians, whether Christian, Migrant, Muslim, Alevi, secular or atheist, thus joining them in an identical experience in which the ‘Armenian’ in its broadest sense is degraded, insulted, and pointed at as a target of potential violence.

Thus, whether it had been a Migrant, a local Christian Armenian, a Muslim or an Alevi Armenian in my place during the two incidents with the taxi drivers described in the Introduction, they would all have felt as victims of anti-Armenian hatred, just like I did as yet another person sharing that very same nominal identity. This is not mere speculation. I have personally witnessed Muslim, Alevi, Christian and Migrant Armenians feeling insulted and reacting on social media in very similar ways to the very same instances of anti-Armenian hate-speech that are extremely common in Turkish media (Ulukaya 2012: 5-6; Ensari et al. 2017), social media and even in public spaces. Figures 43 and 44 below, for

instance, show respectively a Christian Armenian and an Alevi Armenian protesting against an anti-Armenian graffito that appeared on a wall in the south-eastern Kurdish-populated city of Yüksekova in June 2016. The graffito read ‘Kurds and Turks are brothers, but you are Armenians!’ and was suspected to be written by members of the Turkish special forces after their operation against Kurdish PKK militants whom they were thus ‘accusing’ of being Armenians.

Thus, having otherwise different virtual Armeniannesses, and even different interpretations of their nominal identity, all people self-categorising as ‘Armenian’ are at times situated in quite similar virtualities (Jenkins 2014a) and experiences of Armenianness because of their shared ethnonym.

Lastly, their common nominal identity brings them closer not only in terms of experiences of discrimination and violence and related feelings of fear or resentment, but also, occasionally, in real physical terms. In fact, apart from a few Armenian concerts or movie screenings open to the public, the only times I witnessed representatives of all three Armenian factions physically uniting in time and space, were moments when ‘Armenianness,’ which has otherwise different definitions for each, was attacked and had to be defended. During annual protests for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide on April 23-24, at the annual marches commemorating Hrant Dink’s assassination, and during the struggle for the return of Kamp Armen, an Armenian orphanage in Tuzla confiscated by the Turkish state in the 1970s and slated for demolition in 2015 (see Papazian 2016a), Armenians from all three factions were present, though in differing numbers. Some of them were probably unaware that Armenians from the other factions were standing next to them. Many of them, whom I personally knew, definitely had reservations about the ‘other Armenians’ marching in the same street and for the same cause and would seriously question or reject one another’s Armenianness. But all were nevertheless there for the same purpose

of standing up for ‘Armenianness,’ whatever its definitions and the location and properties of its boundaries.



Figure 43. Screenshot of an Instagram post by a Christian Armenian acquaintance protesting against an anti-Armenian graffiti in Yüksekova.



Figure 44. Screenshot of a Facebook post by an Alevi Armenian acquaintance protesting against the same anti-Armenian graffiti. The Alevi Armenian writes: ‘We have been on these lands before the Kurds and the Turks... For 2,500 years, or even more... Even though we’re Armenians, we’re everywhere, get used to it.’ (My translation)

### *An immanent possibility*

To conclude, although Armenians in contemporary Turkey do not currently constitute a cohesive group or community, they nevertheless share the basic but important common feature of self-categorising as ‘Armenian,’ which not only encourages them to consider each other and interact to a certain degree, even if with mistrust, but also puts them in very similar conditions and experiences when it comes to the anti-Armenian sentiments and politics in the country. Although much depends on a number of other factors in the broader context

(the stance and role of the Turkish state, changes in Turkish identity politics, relations between Turkey and Armenia, the increase or decrease of the number of the Migrants, etc.), nevertheless that shared nominal identity creates opportunities of encounter and potential rapprochement, nascent signs of which can already be witnessed (e.g. the openness on the part of the secular-progressive minority within the Christian Armenian community toward the Muslim/Alevi Armenians discussed in Chapter 6; or the mutual institutional openness and cooperation between the local Christian Armenians and the Migrants discussed in Chapter 7). If external categorisation ‘at least creates group identification as an immanent possibility’ (Jenkins 2014a: 111), common *self*-categorisation in the form of sharing a nominal identity may in fact do so to a greater degree.

### **Social Boundary Making: Summary and theoretical considerations**

For now, however, far from representing a social group and community, the Armenians of Turkey are characterised by segregation and internal boundary making.

Most Christian Armenians draw rigid symbolic and social boundaries between themselves and the Muslim and Alevi Armenians, pushing the latter outside the boundaries of Armenianness as they understand it. Only a small faction within the Christian Armenians, progressive, secular and often politically active and resisting the state-imposed definitions and hegemony, are willing to expand the boundaries of their community in order to incorporate the Muslim and Alevi Armenians.

On the other hand, Christian Armenians’ stance toward the Migrants is more nuanced. The latter’s Armenianness is almost never questioned by the former, though it might be deemed ‘corrupted’ by Soviet/Russian influence. There is, however, a quite generalised mistrust and antipathy toward the Migrants, called, often in a pejorative way, ‘*Hayasdants is,*’ and social boundaries drawn against them on the part of local Christian

Armenian individuals who establish almost no contacts with the former except in order to employ them. On an institutional level, however, the local community leadership takes practical steps toward a rapprochement with the Migrants, even opening its schools' doors to their children.

The Migrants, in return, not only have equally negative sentiments toward the local Armenians whom they find stingy, snobby and condescending, but also at times go as far as questioning the latter's Armenianness and labelling them as 'Turkified' (*T'rk'ats'ats Hayer*). In reciprocity to the locals, they also usually refrain from contacts with them except for jobs, and prefer to socialise among themselves. However, the Hrant Dink school, their sole institution, actively attempts to establish relations with the institutions of the local Armenians, especially the schools. As for the Migrants' stance towards the Muslim and Alevi Armenians, except for some who have reservations toward Islam in particular, it is usually positive, but with the expectation of *enactment* of Armenianness by them. However, although not as a result of intentionally drawn social boundaries, there is almost no contact between members of the two factions who might sometimes even be unaware of each other's presence in the very same city.

Finally, the Muslim and Alevi Armenians usually do not draw boundaries between themselves and the local Christian Armenians, neither against the Migrants. On the contrary, they proactively attempt to reach the Christian Armenians and their community, gain access to its institutions, and become part of it either by conversion, thus incorporation, or by demanding the expansion of the boundaries of Armenianness, its surpassing of Christianity and hence their recognition.

*Disinterested and instrumental: for a balanced approach*

Analysing these boundaries and their making between the different factions of Armenianness, chapters 6 and 7 revealed that their emergence, maintenance or dismantling

is both disinterested and instrumental. In other words, Turkey's Armenians' boundary making processes are guided by both interest-based calculations and disinterested cultural, cognitive and affective factors, the latter often preceding the former. Furthermore, as argued in Chapter 4, the Muslim and Alevi Armenians' attempts of boundary crossing and incorporation into the Armenian population of Turkey is usually even anti-instrumental, since it situates those individuals in disadvantageous and even dangerous situations. Armenian identification for them constitutes not so much a tactical move in pursuit of political, economic or social capital, but an emotionally and ideologically loaded subjective endeavour.

These said, I join my voice to authors who have criticised the radically instrumentalist approaches to identification, group formation and boundary making that reduce these important social and political phenomena to mere matters of conscious calculation, strategising and choice, as if taking people out of historical, cultural, symbolic and social contexts and depriving them from the workings of cognition, ideological inclinations, cultural baggage, moral values, emotions and beliefs.

I have no intention to deny the potentials of interest and power on the paths that processes of individual or group identification may take, nor to deny the immensely valuable contribution that works in the instrumentalist tradition, from Cohen (1969) to Wimmer (2008a; 2013a), have brought to our understanding of those processes. In fact, through several examples this thesis indeed validates the claim that considerations of interest can affect people's boundary making.

However, I argue against theoretical generalisations such as 'men stick together... only because of mutual interests' (Cohen 1969: 200) and against over-emphasising interest-based 'choices' of boundary making to the extent of neglecting other, i.e. disinterested factors. That is what, as argued in my Introduction and elsewhere (see Lamont 2014),

Wimmer essentially does (2008a; 2013a), although he is otherwise aware that ‘[it] makes little sense to debate whether ethnicity is mostly about “interests” or “identity,” about “material” benefits or “ideals”... [E]thnic boundary making mixes these various resources into an intertwined struggle over who legitimately should occupy which seat in the theater of society’ (2013a: 5).

It is exactly to that ‘mixing of various resources’ that we need to direct our attention in order to be able to comprehensively account for and explain social boundary making. And that would necessarily entail an analytical approach that refrains from ‘understat[ing] culture’ and ‘ignor[ing] self-consciousness, and the commitment made by individuals and, perhaps, groups to views of themselves which... they do *not* regard as “negotiable”’ (Cohen 2000: 5, emphasis in original). A ‘thick’ analytical approach to boundary making should definitely take individuals’ quest for interest, issues of resource competition and relations of power into consideration, but should also ‘pay proper attention to affective dimensions of identification’ (Jenkins 2014b: 813), should also analyse ‘symbolic boundaries’ and their relationship with social ones (Lamont and Molnar 2002), and ‘com[e] to terms with the discourse [boundaries] enclose’ (Cohen 1996: 75). It should as well study the ‘cultural processes... at the level of meaning making’ (Lamont et al. 2014), the ‘cultural repertoires’ that surround individuals (Lamont 2000: 243; Lamont and Thévenot 2000), the ‘mental maps’ (Lamont 2000) and the cognitive and symbolic ‘frameworks that are constitutive of reality’ and ‘guide human actions’ (Lamont 2014: 816; see also Lamont 2009). Finally, a balanced approach must recognise the entanglement of ‘perceptual judgments’ with ‘instrumental or strategic considerations’ (Horowitz 1975: 121).

Thus, reconciling the two theoretical traditions, my dissertation argues that boundary making is often *both* disinterested and instrumental. Members of the different factions of Armenians, as argued, at times construct, maintain or dismantle boundaries between each

other for instrumental purposes. But often cognitive, symbolic and affective factors' effect on their boundary work precedes their instrumental calculations and, in the particular case of the Muslim Armenians, even contradicts them.

*On the multilaterality of social boundary making*

In order to understand the emergence, maintenance or dismantling of the boundary between any two of the Armenian factions in Turkey, I have first looked into the bilateral symbolic and practical relations between them. However, I have also broadened the focus of analysis and revealed how the making of a boundary between Armenians from any two factions is also guided by their relations, again on both instrumental and disinterested grounds, with *other 'others'*, i.e. with third parties, mostly the Turkish state and majority.

As revealed in Chapter 6, mainstream Christian Armenians instrumentally draw a boundary between themselves and the Muslim/Alevi Armenians not only because they take into consideration potential risks coming directly from the latter (bilateral level), but also because they fear that those unorthodox Armenians could jeopardise their fragile relations with the Turkish state and majority, thus bringing them indirect harm (multilateral level). Perhaps more importantly, they experience a cognitive dissonance when encountering the category of the 'Muslim Armenian' not only because it does not fit their understanding of Armenianness (bilateral level), but also because it indirectly jeopardises their most important symbolic boundary, that with the Turks (multilateral level). On the other hand, since the secular-progressive Christian Armenians' symbolic boundary with the Turks is not a religious one, the acknowledgement of the 'Muslim Armenian' and 'Alevi Armenian' categories is less problematic for them. On the instrumental level, some of these secular Armenians hope that the rise of Muslim/Alevi Armenians would empower them in relation to the Turkish state in their struggle for recognition, minority rights and historical justice.

As analysed in Chapter 7, by dis-identifying with the Migrants especially in matters of homeland and belonging, the local Christian Armenians assert their belonging to Turkey on a symbolic level. Also, they feel their security jeopardised by Migrants' overtly public Armenianness that might, they fear, be perceived as 'provocative' on the part of Turks and the state. Similarly, they fear that some Migrants' criminal acts would have a negative impact on their own image in Turkey. Hence, social and symbolic boundaries against the Migrants serve to diminish such risks on the level of relations with the Turkish state and majority.

On the other hand, seeing local Armenians resembling Turks or identifying with them, be that in terms of language, culture, political stances, or perceiving Turkey as a homeland, the Migrants experience a kind of cognitive dissonance in which the Armenian and the Turk, concepts radically different from and contrasting each other in their imagination and ideology (Chapter 5), are paired together. They cognitively and ideologically refuse to accept that pairing because it somehow jeopardises their boundary with the Turks who are the fundamental 'others' of their identities. As for their general openness vis-a-vis the Muslim/Alevi Armenians, it is multilaterally instrumental, since those 'new Armenians' are believed, by them, to politically empower their struggle against Turkey whom they perceive as the perpetrator of historical injustice against their nation.

Finally, the Muslim and Alevi Armenians' attempts of incorporation into the Armenian population of Turkey by crossing or expanding its boundaries are also somehow situated in a context of multilateral boundary work. In fact, as argued in Chapter 4, these individuals often start identifying as Armenians, thus symbolically crossing the boundary, as a result of being expelled outside the boundaries of Turkishness, Kurdishness, or Islam, which usually includes discrimination and at least moral violence. This boundary work on the part of surrounding non-Armenians leaves them outside established categories and

makes them feel misrecognised and ‘permanently in between’ or in a ‘*boşluk*,’ i.e. emptiness or void. The symbolic boundary work of identifying as an Armenian and seeking recognition within those new boundaries is thus at least partly motivated by an ungrateful boundary making experience coming from another direction. Furthermore, crossing the boundary of Armenianness is often also a challenge, a reaction, or a resentful response to oppressively discriminating Turks, Kurds, other Muslims, or the state. Hence, the boundary work of the Muslim/Alevi Armenians is also situated in and guided by multilateral relations.

All these said, the case of the Armenians of Turkey reveals, I argue, that social boundary making can often be multilateral. Looking back to the existing literature in the field, however, one realises that the multilaterality of boundary work has often been overlooked or, at best, dealt with in passing but never theorised.

For instance, reading the classic work of Geertz (1976) on the internal diversity and segregation of the Javanese of Modjokuto, one cannot but notice the linearity and one-dimensionality of the analysis of tensions and divisions between the Santris, the Abangans and the Prijajis, i.e. the three main Javanese factions, and the complete dismissal of the influence that these groups’ symbolic or practical relations with third parties might have on their mutual relations and internal boundaries. In fact, Geertz mentions at least two other important players in the field who are despised by all three Javanese factions: first, the Dutch, and by extension the Westerners/Europeans, symbolically present in the discourse and collective memory of the locals as previous colonisers, and the Chinese, the largest minority who, importantly, dominate the economy (1976: 2). It looks highly probable that, for instance, those willing to criticise the Prijajis would have exploited the latter’s cultural similarities with the Dutch, the fact that they speak Dutch rather than Javanese, and so on (see *Ibid.*: 236). However, no attention is paid to a probable interdependence between

boundaries and their making on those two separate levels: the Javanese vs non-Javanese (Chinese, Dutch) one, and the intra-Javanese (Santri-Abangan-Prijaji).

Some other works, on the other hand, have accounted for instances of multilateral boundary making, but neither explicitly described and studied the phenomenon, nor theorised it, as this dissertation attempts to do. Horowitz (1975: 127-128) and Wallman (1978: 211), for instance, note that the juxtaposition of two groups, respectively ‘Malay’ and ‘Chinese’ in Malaya and English and ‘Asian’ in Britain, has eventually led to the blurring of the previously existing internal boundaries *within* those groups, in favor of those *between* them. Looking at these cases through the analytical lens of multilateral boundary making, one notices a causal relationship between social boundaries on different fronts: those people seem to have blurred their internal boundaries guided by the need to fortify the relatively new external ones that were perhaps practically more relevant now. Gieryn explains Victorian England’s scientists’ symbolic boundary making against the phrenologists by the fact that the latter’s ‘desire to meld science and Christianity could have inspired a religious backlash against [the] scientists, at a time when religion may have had greater hold on public sympathy than science’ (1983: 789), thus indirectly noting an instance of multilateral instrumentality. More recently Lamont suggested that the strength of the boundaries that African-American workers draw against the poor might be explained by their willingness to dismantle their association with poverty that exists among whites (a second boundary) (2000: 146). Similarly, Moroşanu and Fox (2013) described how Romanian migrants in the UK activate and rigidify their boundaries with the Roma people, thus attempting to transfer the stigma of the ‘Romanian’ to the latter, in order to avoid a sharpening of their boundary with the locals and their own stigmatisation. Finally, instances of multilateral boundary making are recorded in an array of works where old-established immigrants appear drawing boundaries against newly arriving ones in order not to be

conflated with them and not to lose their hardly-acquired status of citizens or ‘locals.’ By drawing those boundaries, they thus aim to avoid the undesired re-activation of other boundaries, those between themselves and the host societies (see, for example, Bauböck 1995:13; Gutierrez 1995; MacPherson 1999: 56; Kibria 2003: 87-92; Pheonix 2011: 322; Moloney and Hunt 2012: 465; Wimmer 2013a, Chapter 5; Charsley and Bolognani 2017: 49).

Those works, however, have applied the multilateral analytical lens only in passing and for merely descriptive and empirical purposes, that is in order to understand and explain *particular* cases of boundary making. They have not dwelled upon the phenomenon, have not attempted to extrapolate it to other cases, have not theorised it, and have not singled it out as an *essential factor guiding or conditioning boundary making*. They have not, based on their particular observations, suggested that all cases of boundary making and unmaking should be subjected to a multilateral analysis. As a result, the theoretical literature on boundary making, including the most recent work by Wimmer (2008a; 2013a) explicitly aiming to formulate a ‘theory of boundary making’ which explains the phenomenon and identifies factors that influence its outcomes, misses the important fact that, at least in many cases such as that of this dissertation and the ones referred to in the previous paragraph, boundary making is multilateral: the making of a group’s boundary in a given direction is causally related to, indirectly influenced by, and in turn influences the making of another boundary of the same group.

This dissertation, I hope, could serve to illuminate the multilateral character of social boundary making, and thus contribute to anthropology’s, and generally the social sciences’, endeavour of explaining the general phenomenon of social boundaries, their rise, maintenance, change, and erosion.

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## APPENDIX A

### List of Interviewees

Name	Group	Age; Gender	Birthplace	Place of Residence	Location & Date
A. K.	Muslim (Sunni)	30-35; Female	Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul	Şişli, Istanbul. October 18, 2015
H. A.	Migrant	46; Female	Yerevan, Armenia	Istanbul	Kumkapı, Istanbul. October 27, 2015
Pastor K.	Christian (Evangelical)	50-60; Male	Arapgir, Turkey	Istanbul	Fatih, Istanbul. October 30, 2015.
D. K.	Migrant	27; Male	Yerevan, Armenia	Istanbul	Kumkapı, Istanbul. November 11, 2015
Father H.	Christian (Catholic)	70; Male	Sivas, Turkey	Istanbul	Şişli, Istanbul. November 12, 2015
H. K.	Christian (Apostolic)	30; Male	Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul	Beyoğlu, Istanbul. November 12, 2015.
R. H.	Christian (Apostolic)	89; Male	Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul	Beyoğlu, Istanbul. November 19, 2015
Archbishop A.	Christian (Apostolic)	61; Male	Diyarbakır, Turkey	Istanbul	Kumkapı, Istanbul. November 23, 2015
Deacon E.	Christian (Apostolic)	50; Male	Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul	Eminönü, Istanbul. November 30, 2015.
A. K.	Muslim (Sunni)	71; Male	Malatya, Turkey	Malatya	Maltepe, Istanbul. December 8, 2015.
Father S.	Christian (Apostolic)	53; Male	Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul	Kumkapı, Istanbul.

					December 8, 2015.
K. F. Ç.	Christian (Apostolic)	69; Male	Batman, Turkey	Istanbul	Şişli, Istanbul. December 9, 2015.
A. G.	Christian (formerly Sunni Muslim)	55; Male	Adıyaman, Turkey	Istanbul and Adıyaman	Fatih, Istanbul. December 14, 2015.
K. H.	Migrant	40; Male	Yerevan, Armenia	Istanbul	Şişli, Istanbul. December 14, 2015.
A. N.	Christian (Apostolic)	44; Male	Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul	Beyoğlu, Istanbul. December 16, 2015.
M. P.	Christian (Formerly Alevi)	51; Male	Tunceli, Turkey	Istanbul and Tunceli	Şişli, Istanbul. December 16, 2015.
E. A.	Hemshin	32; Female	Artvin, Turkey	Istanbul	Kadıköy, Istanbul. December 26, 2015.
Archbishop Z.	Christian (Catholic)	72; Male	Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul	Beyoğlu, Istanbul. December 4 and 15, 2015, and January 15, 2016.
M. Ö.	Hemshin	38; Male	Artvin, Turkey	Istanbul	Beyoğlu, Istanbul. January 19, 2016.
I. C. H.	Christian (Formerly Alevi)	48; Male	Tunceli, Turkey	Istanbul	Kağıthane, Istanbul. January 20, 2016.
Father T.	Christian (Apostolic)	40; Male	Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul	Kumkapı, Istanbul. January 25, 2016.

K. Y.	Christian (Formerly Sunni Muslim)	56; Male	Adıyaman, Turkey	Istanbul	Şişli, Istanbul. January 25, 2016.
V. B.	Migrant	28; Female	Yerevan, Armenia	Istanbul	Şişli, Istanbul. January 26, 2016.
Father M.	Christian (formerly Sunni Muslim)	27; Male	Diyarbakır, Turkey	Istanbul	Beşiktaş, Istanbul. January 29, 2016.
A. M.	Alevi	19; Male	Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul	Beyoğlu, Istanbul. January 29, 2016.
Owners of Lavash Bakery	Migrants	66; Female, 44; Female, 57; Male	Yerevan, Armenia	Istanbul	Kumkapı, Istanbul. January 29, 2016.
S. K.	Muslim (Sunni)	56; Male	Muş, Turkey	Istanbul	Kağıthane, Istanbul. February 2, 2016.
A. D.	Christian (Apostolic)	59; Male	Batman, Turkey	Istanbul	Eminönü, Istanbul. February 2, 2016.
A. G.	Migrant	30; Female	Yerevan, Armenia	Istanbul	Eminönü, Istanbul. February 8, 2016.
Y. K.	Christian (formerly Sunni Muslim)	53; Male	Adıyaman, Turkey	Istanbul	Fatih, Istanbul. February 8, 2016.
A. K.	Christian (Apostolic)	42; Male	Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul	Şişli, Istanbul. February 10, 2016.
A. S.	Muslim (Sunni)	61; Male	Batman, Turkey	Istanbul	Bahçelievler, Istanbul. February 11, 2016.
I. K.	Hemshin	29; Female	Artvin, Turkey	Istanbul	Beyoğlu, Istanbul.

					February 13, 2016.
E. B.	Muslim (Sunni)	42; Female	Adapazarı, Turkey	Istanbul	Fatih, Istanbul. March 2, 2016.
A. H. and four friends	Migrants	25; Female, 25; Male, 27; Male, 35; Male, 65; Female	Yerevan and Ejmiatsin, Armenia	Istanbul	Fatih, Istanbul. March 9, 2016.
I. A.	Hemshin	55; Male	Rize, Turkey	Istanbul	Kadıköy, Istanbul. February 19, 2016.
S. A.	Christian (Apostolic)	41; Male	Batman, Turkey	Istanbul	Beyoğlu, Istanbul. February 30, 2016.
B. S.	Christian (Apostolic)	75; Male	Sivas, Turkey	Istanbul	Şişli, Istanbul. March 7, 2016.
K. T.	Christian (Apostolic)	65; Male	Kayseri, Turkey	Istanbul	Şişli, Istanbul. March 9, 2016.
H. I.	Christian (Formerly Sunni Muslim)	53; Male	Batman, Turkey	Istanbul	Şişli, Istanbul. March 10, 2016.
B. K.	Christian (Apostolic)	49; Female	Batman, Turkey	Istanbul	Fatih, Istanbul. March 18, 2016.
B. A.	Muslim (Sunni)	24; Male	Kayseri, Turkey	Istanbul	Şişli, Istanbul. March 13, 2016.
B. S.	Muslim (Sunni)	25; Female	Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul	Beyoğlu, Istanbul. March 13, 2016.
Ü. F.	Hemshin	48; Male	Rize, Turkey	Rize	Fatih, Istanbul.

					March 13, 2016.
M.S. and I.S.	Muslim (Sunni)	27; Male, 25; Male	Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul	Bahçelievler, Istanbul. April 14, 2016.
A.	Christian (Apostolic)	83; Male	Kastamonu, Turkey	Istanbul	Bahçelievler, Istanbul. April 14, 2016.
A. A.	Christian (Apostolic)	Late 50s; Male	Trabzon, Turkey	Istanbul	Şişli, Istanbul. April 16, 2016.
E. T.	Muslim (Sunni)	36; Male	Muş, Turkey	Istanbul	Zeytinburnu, Istanbul. April 18, 2016.
S. A.	Muslim (Sunni)	27; Male	Batman, Turkey	Istanbul/Isparta	Bahçelievler, Istanbul. April 22, 2016.
A. K.	Migrant	51; Male	Yerevan, Armenia	Istanbul	Şişli, Istanbul. April 23, 2016.
E. V.	Muslim (Sunni)	25; Male	Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul	Şişli, Istanbul. April 27, 2016.
S. S.	Alevi	30; Male	Erzincan, Turkey	Istanbul	Şişli, Istanbul. April 27, 2016.
H. Ş.	Hemshin	50s; Female	Artvin, Turkey	Ankara	Şişli, Istanbul. April 29, 2016.
Ö. A.	Hemshin	41; Male	Artvin, Turkey	Istanbul	Kadıköy, Istanbul. May 7, 2016.
E. E.	Muslim (Sunni)	28; Male	Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul	Fatih, Istanbul. May 7, 2016.
A. H.	Migrant	32; Male	Ararat, Armenia	Istanbul	Bakırköy, Istanbul. May 8, 2016

B. B.	Christian (formerly Alevi)	55; Male	Tunceli, Turkey	Istanbul	Şişli, Istanbul. May 16, 2016.
N. E. G.	Christian (formerly Alevi)	30; Female	Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul	Şişli, Istanbul. May 19, 2016.
M.A.	Christian (Catholic)	49; Male	Mardin, Turkey	Istanbul	Yeşilköy, Istanbul. May 23, 2016.
A. G.	Hemshin	Late 50s; Male	Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul	Şişli, Istanbul. May 24, 2016.
B. G.	Christian (formerly Alevi)	56; Female	Tunceli, Turkey	Istanbul	Şişli, Istanbul. May 25, 2016.
Father Ş.	Christian (Apostolic)	Late 30s; Male	Istanbul, turkey	Istanbul	Üsküdar, Istanbul. May 26, 2016.
A. S.	Christian (Apostolic)	29; Male	Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul	Şişli, Istanbul. May 30, 2016.
Kh.	Christian (Apostolic)	Late 70s; Female	Malatya, Turkey	Malatya	Malatya. June 2, 2016.
L., T. and S.	Christian (Apostolic)	Late 60s; Female, 51; Female, 27; Male	Malatya, Turkey	Malatya	Malatya. June 2, 2016.
O. B.	Christian (Formerly Sunni Muslim)	54; Male	Adıyaman, Turkey	Adıyaman	Adıyaman. June 6, 2016.
M. B.	Christian (Formerly Sunni Muslim)	Late 40s	Adıyaman, Turkey	Adıyaman	Adıyaman. June 6, 2016.
H. B.	Christian (Formerly Sunni Muslim)	mid- 40s	Adıyaman, Turkey	Adıyaman	Adıyaman. June 6, 2016.

H. G.	Migrant	28; Male	Gyumri, Armenia	Istanbul	Fatih, Istanbul. June 17, 2016.
G. M.	Migrant	32; Female	Yerevan, Armenia	Istanbul	Fatih, Istanbul. June 17, 2016.
D. M.	Migrant	61; Female	Ejmiatsin, Armenia	Istanbul	Fatih, Istanbul. June 17, 2016.
S. C. Y.	Muslim (Sunni)	25; Female	Ordu, Turkey	Istanbul	Beyoğlu, Istanbul. July 10, 2016.
D. M.	Alevi	23; Female	Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul	Şişli, Istanbul. July 12, 2016.
A. G.	Migrant	41; Female	Yerevan, Armenia	Istanbul	Kınalıada. July 20, 2016.
H. M.	Christian (Apostolic)	55; Male	Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul	Kınalıada. July 20, 2016.
A. Z.	Muslim (Sunni)	57; Male	Batman, Turkey	Istanbul	Zeytinburnu, Istanbul. July 28, 2016.
K. N. Ü.	Hemshin	62; Male	Artvin, Turkey	Istanbul	Şişli, Istanbul. August 5, 2016.
M. H.	Christian (Apostolic)	65; Male	Vakıflı, Turkey	Vakıflı	Vakıflı, Hatay. August 11, 2016.
C. Ç.	Christian (Apostolic)	41; Male	Vakıflı, Turkey	Vakıflı	Vakıflı, Hatay. August 14, 2016.
Father A.	Christian (Apostolic)	37; Male	Iskenderun, Turkey	Iskenderun	Vakıflı, Hatay. August 14, 2016.
H. Z.	Muslim (Sunni)	26; Male	Muş, Turkey	Istanbul	Beyoğlu, Istanbul.

					August 18, 2016.
A. A.	Christian (Apostolic)	58; Male	Kayseri, Turkey	Istanbul	Bakırköy, Istanbul. August 22, 2016.
S. Ç.	Christian (Apostolic)	30; Female	Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul	Bakırköy, Istanbul. August 29, 2016.
Group of 5 women at Kınalıada	Migrants	50-60; Female	Yerevan, Gyumri, Ejmiatsin (Armenia)	Istanbul	Kınalıada. September 11, 2016.
G. K.	Christian (Apostolic)	68; Male	Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul	Kınalıada. September 15, 2016.
M. A. and S. Kh.	Migrants	Late 40s; Female	Gyumri, Armenia	Istanbul	Kınalıada. September 21, 2016.
I. A.	Christian (Apostolic)	76; Male	Bitlis, Turkey	Bitlis	Fatih, Istanbul. December 18, 2016.
S. S.	Alevi	43; Male	Tunceli, Turkey	Tunceli	Beyoğlu, Istanbul. January 12, 2017.
S. K.	Christian (Apostolic)	58; Female	Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul	Beşiktaş, Istanbul. February 15, 2017.
L. E.	Muslim (Sunni)	38; Female	Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul	Fatih, Istanbul. March 28, 2017.
C. K.	Alevi	70; Female	Erzincan	Istanbul	Kadıköy, Istanbul. April 1, 2017.
O. K.	Christian (Apostolic)	42; Male	Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul	Şişli, Istanbul. April 4, 2017.
T. N.	Christian (Apostolic)	42; Female	Istanbul, Turkey	Istanbul	Kınalıada, Istanbul. May 10, 2017.

L. G.	Migrant	30; Female	Yerevan, Armenia	Istanbul	Yerevan. January 13, 2018.
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## APPENDIX B

### Christian Armenian Institutions and Organisations in Turkey

Today, there are a total of 42 functioning<sup>78</sup> Armenian Apostolic Churches in Turkey, 35 of which are located in Istanbul (eight on the Asian side and 27 on the European side) and seven in the eastern provinces (one in Kayseri, one in Mardin, two in Diyarbakır and three in Hatay). The Armenian Apostolic Church has also 11 working chapels, one of which is in Diyarbakır (Patriarchate of Armenians of Turkey 2017: 172-179). Also, 13 Armenian Catholic and five Armenian protestant Churches operate in contemporary Turkey (Komsuoglu and Örs 2009: 341).

Other Christian Armenian community institutions and organisations in Istanbul include: 16 community schools (13 Armenian Apostolic and 3 Armenian Catholic);<sup>79</sup> around 25 Alumni, hometown, teachers' and sports associations; two daily and one weekly newspapers; six magazines; two hospitals; two orphanages; 10 charity foundations; 17 cemeteries; and one publishing house.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Many others remain in a state of destruction, especially in the eastern provinces.

<sup>79</sup> This number used to make up to 1084 before the genocide in 1915 (*Bianet* 2015).

<sup>80</sup> See the website of the Patriarchate of Armenians of Turkey, available at: <http://www.turkiyeermenileripatrikligi.org/site/>, and (Değirmenciyan 2017b).

## APPENDIX C

### Anthem of the Hrant Dink School



Figure 45. Photo of a poster on which the HD School's logo and anthem appear on a background depicting the Armenian national flag. Retrieved from the school's Facebook group with permission.

#### Original (Eastern Armenian)

Դպրո՛ց, դպրո՛ց, ի՛մ սիրուն  
Դու ծնվեցիր օտար հողում  
Հաւաքեցիր մեզ բոլորիս  
Դարձրիր փոքրիկ մի ընտանիք

Մնա՛ հավերժ, դու ի՛մ դպրոց  
Դու իմ դպրոց, մտքի դարբնոց  
Սաներդ ճախրեն երկրէ երկիր  
Հասնեն իրենց վե՛տ, ձյունոտ բարձունքին

Ջեռու երկրից մեր հայրենի  
Մնանք հողին մեր արժանի

Լինենք բարի գործով հայտնի  
Որ մեր ազգը փառաբանի

Մնա՛ հավերժ, դու ի՛մ դպրոց  
Դու իմ դպրոց, մտքի դարբնոց  
Սաներդ ճախրեն երկրէ երկիր  
Յասնեն իրենց վեհ, ձյունոտ բարձունքին

Այս պատերից թող միշտ լսվի  
Քո ծիծաղը՝ բյուր դարերի,  
Սիրես դու միշտ քո հայրենին  
Խօսես լեզվով քո մայրենի

Մնա՛ հավերժ, դու ի՛մ դպրոց  
Դու իմ դպրոց, մտքի դարբնոց  
Սաներդ ճախրեն երկրէ երկիր  
Յասնեն իրենց վեհ, ձյունոտ բարձունքին

### **Transliteration**

Dprots՛, dprots՛, im sirun  
Du tsnvets՛ir ōtar hoghum  
Havak՛ets՛ir mez boloris  
Dardzrir p՛ok՛rik mi ětanik՛

Mna haverzh, du im dprots՛  
Du im dprots՛, mtk՛i darbnots՛  
Sanerd chakhren yerkrē yerkir  
Hasnen irents՛ veh, dzyunot bardzunk՛in

Heru yerkrits՛ mer hayreni  
Mnank՛ hoghin mer arzhani  
Linenk՛ bari gortsov haytni

Vor mer azgë p'arabani

Mna haverzh, du im dprots'  
Du im dprots', mtk'i darbnots'  
Sanerd chakhren yerkrë yerkir  
Hasnen irents' veh, dzyunot bardzunk'in

Ays paterits' t'ogh misht lsvi  
K'o tsitsaghë byur dareri,  
Sires du misht k'o hayrenin  
Khōses lezvov k'o mayreni

Mna haverzh, du im dprots'  
Du im dprots', mtk'i darbnots'  
Sanerd chakhren yerkrë yerkir  
Hasnen irents' veh, dzyunot bardzunk'in

## **Translation**

My school, my school, my beautiful  
You were born on a foreign land  
You gathered us all  
And made [of us] a small family.

Remain forever my school  
You, my school, forger of the minds  
Let your students migrate from one country to the other  
And reach their noble, snowy height.<sup>81</sup>

Far away from our fatherland  
Let us remain deserving of our land

<sup>81</sup> Alludes to Mount Ararat, situated on the Turkish side of the Turkey-Armenia border and symbolising Armenians' lost lands in Armenian national imagery.

Let us be known for our kind actions  
So that our nation gets glorified.

Remain forever my school  
You, my school, forger of the minds  
Let your students migrate from one country to the other  
And reach their noble, snowy height.

Let from these walls be heard  
Your laughter, centuries-old  
Let you always love your native [land]  
[and] speak in your mother tongue.

Remain forever my school  
You, my school, forger of the minds  
Let your students migrate from one country to the other  
And reach their noble, snowy height.