

# ENEMIES TO THE DEATH OR FRIENDS FOR LIFE? LOOKING INTO PREJUDICE AGAINST TURKS AMONGST ARMENIANS IN ARMENIA\*

(YAŞAM BOYUNCA DOST, VEYA ÖLÜME KADAR DÜŞMAN MI?  
ERMENİSTAN ERMENİLERİ'NİN TÜRLERE KARŞI OLAN  
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**Abstract:** *Armenia is a fairly new nation-state in which the process of creating a new identity is also a newly started process. Within this process of creating a new identity, there are various tools to be used. One of these tools is the process of 'otherization', in other words, the process by which 'the other' is created. When creating an image of yourself, as being the righteous one, you also depict one or more peoples as "the other". In some cases, this even cultivates into the creation of "the other" as the archenemy or anti-Christ himself. In the case of Armenia, this is exemplary in how Armenia views itself and its people in respect to Turkey and Turks. This case study focuses on how the Turk are viewed upon in Armenia and what this means for the sentiments towards Turks amongst Armenians in Armenia. This article also sheds light on how these sentiments came into existence, the historical context it is derived from, and how it is to be seen in the perspective of various theories of nationalism, nation-building, and the process of creating a national identity. Lastly, this article will also deal with what this means for an eventual Turkish-Armenian reconciliation in specific, and the Turkish-Armenian relations in general.*

**Keywords:** *Armenia, Turks, Armenian sentiments towards Turks, Armenian-Turkish reconciliation, Turkish-Armenian Relations, creating the other.*

\* This is an extended, updated, and edited version of the original article 'Foes and Friends: a survey of sentiments and emotions towards the Turks in Armenia' that was presented at Atatürk University in Erzurum, Turkey during the 'Second International Symposium concerning the Great Powers and Turkish-Armenian Relations', which took place from May 6th, 2015 until May 8th, 2015 at the before mentioned Atatürk University in Erzurum, Turkey. The article was presented in the form of a fifteen-page PowerPoint-slide presentation during the nineteenth panel of the before mentioned symposium on May 7th, 2015. My presentation revolved around my field research in Armenia, which is comprised of two different visits to Armenia during 2014. During this research, I looked at the various sentiments that were present in Armenia when describing Turks and the way people in Armenia were looking at Turks in general. Both visits were financed by the European Union and were part of a project that was made possible by the European Union.

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**Öz:** Ermenistan, oldukça yeni bir ulus devletidir ve bu süreçte yeni bir kimlik oluşturma çabası da yeni başlamıştır. Bu yeni kimlik oluşturma sürecinde, kullanılacak bir sürü araç vardır. Bu araçlardan biriyse, 'öteki' yaratma veya 'ötekileştirmek' sürecidir. En doğru millet görüntüsü oluştururken, aynı zamanda diğer milletleri ötekileştiriliyor. Bazı durumlarda, ötekileştirmek bir 'öteki' milletin baş düşmanı ve kötülüğün özü olarak gösteriliyor. Ermenistan'a bakacak olursak, bu durumda Ermenistan'ın Türkiye ve Türkler bakarak kendisini nasıl gördüğünü anlamak için çok uygun bir örnek. Bu alan çalışmasında, Ermenistan'da 'Türk'e nasıl bakıldığına, bu bakış, Ermenistan'da yaşayan Ermenilerin Türklere karşı var olan duyguları nasıl etkilediğine odaklanmaktayız. Bu yazı, ayrıca bu duygular ve önyarguların nasıl oluştuğuna, geçmişte hangi çerçevede içerisinde geliştiğini, ve milliyetçilik, ulus-inşası ve ulusal kimlik oluşturma süreci gibi çeşitli savlar açısından nasıl bakılması gerektiğini açıklamaktadır. Son olarak da, bu yazı, bu üç unsurun olabilecek başta Ermeni-Türk uzlaşması olmak üzere, Türk-Ermeni ilişkileri için ne anlama geldiğini ele almaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ermenistan, Türkler, Türklere karşı Ermeni duyguları, Ermeni Türk Barışı, Türk Ermeni İlişkileri, ötekileştirmek.

## INTRODUCTION

When the First World War ended, the entire region of the Middle East, the Balkans, and the Caucasus was left in utter chaos. One of the biggest outcomes was the collapse of the Ottoman Empire (1299-1922). Most of this huge empire was then occupied by the victorious Allied forces of the First World War.<sup>1</sup> Although the Ottoman Empire was a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic state, it now spiraled in a downwards circle of civil war and chaos in which Turks, French, British, Italian, Greek, Russian, Armenians, and Kurdish armies fought their own wars in former Ottoman lands. However, the most important struggle lay in the difficult process of the various peoples of the former Ottoman Empire to unite into one nation-state outside of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>2</sup> Armenians are a unique case in this process.

The process of creating a national unity amongst Armenians (one of the successor peoples of the Ottoman Empire) resulted in the establishment, in 1918 until 1920, of the Republic of Armenia, in which the dominating identity and culture was called “Armenian.” In this process, some tried to fall back on their religious identity as a Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox Christian, while others allied themselves with others out of “fear” for other nationalities. Yet others -for instance, refugees from Anatolia, the Caucasus, and the Middle East- focused on their violent backgrounds, since the era of 1885-1915 was dominated by the Armenian committees such as Armenakan/Ramgavar, Dashnaksutyun, Hunchakyan, amongst others which behaved mostly as guerrilla-terror squads. Together, these units were responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths, mostly Muslims -Zazas, Kurds, Turks- but also fellow Armenians<sup>3</sup> Amid the chaos of the breakup of an empire and the formation of an Armenian state, a search was mounted for key elements to forge a new unity in which there was room for all these groups, united under one umbrella.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Şerafettin Turan, *Türk Devrim Tarihi: İmparatorluğun Çöküşünden Ulusal Direnişe*, 3. Basım, Ankara 1991/2008.

2 Şerafettin Turan, *Türk Devrim Tarihi*: “(Birinci Bölüm) Yeni Türkiye’nin Oluşumu (1923-1938)”, 2. Basım, Ankara 1995/2005 ; Durmuş Yalçın, Yaşar Akbıyık, Yücel Özkaya, Gülnihal Bozkurt, Dursun Ali Akbulut, Erdinç Tokgöz, Refik Turan, Nuri Köstüklü, Mustafa Balcıoğlu, Mehmet Akif Tural, Cezmi Eraslan & Cemal Avcı, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Tarihi II*, Ankara 2010 ; Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, *History of the Ottoman State, Society & Civilisation II*, İstanbul 2002.

3 Durmuş Yalçın, Yaşar Akbıyık, Dursun Ali Akbulut, Mustafa Balcıoğlu, Nuri Köstüklü, Süslü, N., Refik Turan, Cezmi Eraslan & Mehmet Akif Tural, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Tarihi I*, Ankara 2011 ; Şerafettin Turan, *Türk Devrim Tarihi: Ulusal Direnişten Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’ne*, 3. Basım, Ankara 1992/2009 ; Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, *History of the Ottoman State, Society & Civilisation I*, İstanbul 2001.

4 Soner Çağaptay, *İslam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who is a Turk?*, London/New York 2006/2009.

Uniting people of a certain land into one nation is not considered peculiar.<sup>5</sup> Every state in the world at one point struggled with this problem. In the nineteenth century, the smaller German states formed one nation, or *Kulturnation*, to speak in the terms of Friedrich Meinecke,<sup>6</sup> without actually becoming one unified state.<sup>7</sup> It was then widely believed that the concept of “nation” was interchangeable with that of “race,” because it was accepted that a nation was carved out by descent.<sup>8</sup> In order to forge new nations, it became important to invent myths, traditions, a suitable history, cultural trademarks, and linguistic commonality.<sup>9</sup> This process of “inventing” a nation made oral history an important tool of the newly established nation-state.<sup>10</sup> Most states focused on earlier times in order to depict an ancient “golden age.” In this defining process, oral history was the main tool for selecting or neglecting parts of the national history in order to create a nation in which people felt united and part of the same community.<sup>11</sup>

When creating a community in which people feel that they are part of the same unit, there is the need for a national identity to identify with.<sup>12</sup> One shares this sense of belonging to one state, or to one nation, with a group of people, regardless of one’s citizenship status.<sup>13</sup> National identity comes from elements (either present or not) that include national symbols, language, national colors, history, national consciousness, blood ties, culture, music, cuisine, radio, and television, among many others.<sup>14</sup> The national identity of most citizens of one state or one nation tends to originate in the promoted concept of “national identity” within that state or nation.<sup>15</sup> The sense of belonging to the nation, as

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5 Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*, London 1991.

6 Friedrich Meinecke, *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat: Studien zur Genesis des deutschen Nationalstaates*, München, 1922.

7 Constantin Iordachi, “The Ottoman Empire: Syncretic Nationalism and Citizenship in the Balkans”, *What Is a Nation?: Europe 1789-1914*, Oxford, 2006, p. 120-151.

8 Adrian Collins & Arthur de Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*, Charleston 1855/2010 ; Mark Hewitson, “Conclusion: Nationalism and the Nineteenth Century”, *What Is a Nation?: Europe 1789-1914*, Oxford 2006, p. 312-355.

9 Anthony D. Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach*, New York 2009 ; Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge 1983 ; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd Edition, London 1991/1983 ; Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, Cambridge 1990.

10 Nicholas J. Higham, *King Arthur, Myth-Making and History*, London 2002.

11 Ernst Cassirer, *The myth of the state*, USA (Connecticut) 2009.

12 Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. Boston 1969.

13 Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*, USA (Connecticut) 1993.

14 Joseph-Arthur Comte De Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, Paris 1853-1855 ; Louis Leo Snyder, *The Meaning of Nationalism*, New Brunswick 1954.

15 Carlton Hayes, *The Historical Evolution of Modern Nationalism*, New York, 1931.

experienced by the inhabitants themselves, becomes essential to (especially) newly formed states.<sup>16</sup> In the process of molding a national identity, a certain construction of the past becomes eminent.<sup>17</sup>

The range of instruments includes oral history such as songs, poems, art, novels, and, in modern times, even movies, among others. In these works, the national identity of a state can be emphasized through playful legends and myths that reinforce the image of the nation.

## **NATIONALISM IN ARMENIA**

In the case of Armenia, it was especially the oral history that created sentiments towards their neighbors in general, and the Turks in specific. Although these sentiments were mostly ‘friendly’ during the approximately thousand years that Armenians and Turks lived together in various empires in and around Anatolia, the new Armenian leaders of the Armenian Republic (1918-1920) felt like this should be changed into sentiments that saw the Turks as “foes” instead of “friends”.<sup>18</sup>

The Ottoman Empire (much like its predecessor, the Seljuk Empire) was portrayed as an undivided state with one common culture but much ethnic diversity, encompassing Turks, Armenians, Zazas, Arabs, Greeks, Jews, Laz, Kırmanci (and other Kurdish tribes), and many more ethnic groups.<sup>19</sup> All were supposed to originate from one geographical culture. Many of these groups (including the Armenians, but not the Turks) had already formed their own concept of a national identity some two centuries ago in the eighteenth century, and many were reluctant to agree that “their” culture was part of a “common” culture in the twentieth century (just before the collapse of the Ottoman Empire).<sup>20</sup> Because these ethnic minorities had come in direct contact with nationalism, they had their own views on nationalism. Some felt more connected to their own group than to the Ottoman Empire. For example, an ethnic Greek living in the Ottoman province of Anatolia during the 1910s, might have felt more connected to the Greek nation and subsequently dismissed

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16 Ziya Gökalp, *Türkçülüğün Esasları*, İstanbul, 1923/2001 ; Mahir Ünlü & Yusuf Çotuksöken, *Türkçülüğün Esasları (Günümüz Türkçesiyle)*, İstanbul 2001.

17 Umut Özkırımlı, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction (second edition: extended and updated)*, Hampshire 2010 ; Smith, *National Identity* ; Gabriel Almond & Lucian Pye, *Comparative Political Culture*, Princeton 1965.

18 Yalçın vd., *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Tarihi II*.

19 İhsanoğlu, *History of the Ottoman State I*.

20 Turan, *Türk Devrim Tarihi: Ulusal...*

the Ottoman views on identity.<sup>21</sup> This was also the case with the Armenians, who tried to carve out their own independent nation-state in the heart of the Ottoman Empire but failed miserably.<sup>22</sup> These Armenian revolts lasted from 1885 until well into 1915, and in this context, the sentiments of Armenians towards Turks changed, which was something that was further instigated by the leaders of the Armenian Republic of 1918-1920.<sup>23</sup>

The new fierce Armenian nationalism was built upon the violence of Armenian guerrilla-terror squads on one side, and the notion that ‘all non-Armenians, in particular Turks, were all enemies’ on the other. In this context, the new Armenian Republic declared war on their neighbors Georgia (1918), Azerbaijan (1918-1920), Kars Republic (1918-1919), and even waged war against the newly forming Turkey (1920). The subsequent Soviet invasion of Armenia, in late 1920, quelled the Armenian war effort for some seventy years until Armenia become independent once again in 1991 after being part of the Soviet Union from 1920 to 1991. As Soviet Armenia, anti-Turkish sentiments were still fuelled and the Turkish recognition of Armenia as an independent state in 1991 (as one of the first states to recognize the Armenian Republic) was a friendly gesture of goodwill that became a direct contradiction with the way the Armenian government wanted Armenians to see Turkey; namely not as a “friendly nation”, but as the “archenemy”.<sup>24</sup>

## CREATING ‘THE OTHER’

Vamık Volkan has called this process, instigated by the Armenian government, of changing the view on Turks from friendly to archenemy, as the process of ‘ötekileştirmek’; or “otherization”.<sup>25</sup> He explains this thesis by pointing to the acclaimed author George Orwell and his book “1984”:

*By “nationalism” Orwell meant, “first of all the habit of assuming that human beings can be classified like insects and that whole blocks of millions or tens of millions of people can be confidently labeled ‘good’*

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21 Constantin Iordachi, “The Making of Citizenship in the post-Ottoman Balkans: State Building, Foreign Models, and Legal-Political Transfers”, *Ottomans into Europeans: State and Institution-Building in South Eastern Europe*, London 2010, 179-220.

22 Turan, *Türk Devrim Tarihi* “Birinci Bölüm”.

23 Turan, *Türk Devrim Tarihi: İmparatorluğun...*

24 Yalçın vd., *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Tarihi I*.

25 Vamık Volkan, “The Need to Have Enemies and Allies: A Developmental Approach”, *Political Psychology*, 2, 1985, p. 219-247.

*or 'bad'” (p.362). Political psychologists would modify this only by substituting “allies” or “enemies.”<sup>26</sup>*

By doing so, creating these categories is one of the tools a regime can use to uphold and expand their grip on peoples of a certain nation. According to Volkan, the regime (or the seat of power) can perpetuate itself by creating very black-and-white-categories of “we/us” and “them/the others/our archenemy”. In this process, the before mentioned “we” is portrayed as having all the attributes, qualities, and other cultural trademarks that one considers to be very positive. Amongst these are: honesty, integrity, cleanliness, and loyalty. The category of the “others” is subsequently portrayed as the exact opposite. By doing so, a member of the “us/we” category is prone to believe that the very core existence of his culture and nation-state is tied to his protection of his own way of life. This slowly becomes a culturally-instilled belief for the entire nation.

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This psychological behavior within political science further constructs the link between political science and psychology where the latter is used for the first. Political science clearly makes the link between the political need for enemies, and the creation of “the other” in order for it to make it fit in, in the general picture of ‘us against them’ in order to create unity against possible outside enemies. Volkan explains the process of creating the other by comparing it to the making of a protective armor; “primitive man sought a measure of protection for his vulnerable nakedness by adopting the armor of the lower animals, wearing their skins, leathers, and claws.” Both are aimed at protecting one against the other, in the literal sense of the word. Volkan argues, one “can go further and say that each small group needs to see another as the enemy. Those ethnic antagonisms that run, not along economic or social lines, but along racial and cultural ones,

26 Vamik Volkan, “The Need to Have Enemies and Allies: A Developmental Approach”, Vamikvolkan.com, London 1985/2016 (last visit 23/05/2016). Available online: <http://www.vamikvolkan.com/The-Need-to-Have-Enemies-and-Allies%3A-A-Developmental-Approach.php>.



would seem to bear this out. In turn, however, the larger group (the nation) may unite to oppose another nation seen as a common enemy. Animal bonding is strengthened by exhibitions of this approved behavior; a mate who bares his teeth at an intruder strengthens his bond to his mate.”<sup>27</sup>

In the process of “creating the other”, this bond is based on (the notion of, or the allegation of, or even the belief of) being oppressed by “the others”.<sup>28</sup> Societal traumas at the hand of “the others” can, obviously, also be inflicted during armed conflicts. The effects of these situations are different because these traumas also induce shared shame, humiliation, helplessness, and dehumanization, but make mourning complicated, or even impossible since the “blame factor” cannot be established within armed conflicts. In almost all armed conflicts, both sides conduct war crimes and this makes it very difficult (or even impossible) to position only one of the two parties as the innocent victims.<sup>29</sup> However, this does not take away the trauma of either side. Both sides will feel victimized and both victimized groups will share, within their own group, a shared sense of shame, humiliation, and even dehumanization. These shared unfinished psychological tasks are passed from generation to generation; often in correlation with the seat of power (for example as is the case in Armenia, which has formed the image of ‘the Turk’ in Armenia as we know it today).<sup>30</sup>

## IMAGE OF ‘THE TURK’

Against this background, the current sentiments and emotions that are present in Armenia towards the Turks are examined in this study.<sup>31</sup> These sentiments

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27 Volkan, “Enemies and Allies”.

28 Vamik Volkan, “Massive Traumas at the Hand of “Others”: Large-group Identity Issues, Transgenerational Transmissions, “Chosen Traumas” and Their Consequences”, Vamikvolkan.com, London 2007/2012 (last visit 23/05/2016). Available online: <http://www.vamikvolkan.com/Societal-Well-Being-After-Experiencing-Trauma-at-the-Hand-of-%22Others%22%3A-The-Intertwining-of-Political%2C-Economic-and-Other-Visible-Factors-with-Hidden-Psychological-Processes-Affecting-Victimized-Populations.php>.

29 Vamik Volkan, “Traumas Masivos Causados Por los “Otros”: Problemas de Identidad en Grandes Grupos, Transmision Generacional, “Traumas Elegidos” y sus Consecuencias (Massive Traumas at the Hand of “Others”: Large-group Identity Issues, Transgenerational Transmissions, “Chosen Traumas” and Their Consequences)”, Los Laberintos de la Violencia, Buenos Aires 2008, p. 153-172.

30 Vamik Volkan, “Societal Well-Being after Experiencing Trauma at the Hand of’ Others”: The Intertwining of Political, Economic and Other Visible Factors with Hidden Psychological Processes”, *Measuring and Foster in the Process of Societies: The Second OECD World Forum on Statistics, Knowledge and Policy*, Paris, 2007.

31 This study comprised of two field researches in Armenia. The first visit was between May 13th, 2014 and May 22nd, 2014 to Yerevan, Tatev, and back to Yerevan, while the second was between August 6th, 2014 and August 16th, 2014 to Yerevan, Tsaghkadzor, and back to Yerevan. Both research visits were part of projects of the European Union, and financed by the European Commission.



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and emotions were researched using oral history; asking random people in Armenia of their thoughts concerning Turks. People from all layers of the society (students, villagers, government officials, university professors, locals, etc.) were included in this research. The raw data eventually led to the presentation at Atatürk University, which in turn led to the article: ‘Foes and Friends: a survey of sentiments and emotions towards the Turks in Armenia’. That article was the base for the article you are reading now.

This research took place in two stages and consciously went both to the south and north of Armenia to see if there were different sentiments and emotions in various places in Armenia. The first field research concentrated to the south of Armenia, in specific, the region around Goris (especially Tatev), from May 13th, 2014 and May 22nd, 2014. Subsequently, the second field research focused on the region surrounding Sevan (especially Tsaghkadzor), situated north of the Armenian capital Yerevan. This field research was conducted during August 6th, 2014 and August 16th, 2014. Both visits were realized by the European Union and financed by the European Commission.

*Map 1: Armenia in the region*<sup>32</sup>



*Source: Turkey-Visit.com, ‘Where is Nagorno Karabakh & Map of Nagorno Karabakh’, edited by the author A. Sag (17.05.2016).*<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Turkey-Visit.com, <http://www.turkey-visit.com/nagorno-karabakh.asp> (last visit: 03/03/2016).

<sup>33</sup> Turkey-Visit.com, ‘Where is Nagorno Karabakh & Map of Nagorno Karabakh’, <http://www.turkey-visit.com/images/nagorno-karabakh/map-of-nagorno-karabakh.jpg> (last visit 03/03/2016).

During this research, it became apparent fairly early on that the image of ‘the Turk’ as it exists in Armenia, actually comprises of three categories. Each of these categories will be explained further on in this article by the use of examples of the respondees. The categories, in order of most frequently encountered responses that correspond with the various categories, are the following (in order of high to low): the image of the cruel barbaric Turk (1), the image of the ‘neighbor’ that needs to be approached with friendly words (2), and the image that the Turkish yin is part of the Armenian yang (3).

Firstly, the most-heard sentiments concerning the Turks, are (not surprisingly) that of ‘the cruel barbaric Turk’ in which the Turks are depicted as the archenemy of Armenians. This image of the cruel barbaric Turk was actually the official point of view for a long time in Armenia as spread by the Armenian government. The depiction of the Turks as “cruel barbarians out to get the Armenians” is the core of the Armenian nation-building process and as such the sole reason that the Armenians were able to create unity after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, despite differences in religion (Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, etc.), language (West-Armenian, East-Armenian, etc.), history, and culture. The reason for creating an image of the Turk was to ensure

the unity of Armenians against “this external enemy out to annihilate and destroy everything Armenian, and every Armenian”. Subsequently, many Armenians think that “Turks have no other purpose in life than to try and annihilate all Armenians from the earth”. This idea was fueled by the Armenian guerrilla-terror squads Dashnaksutyun (or the Dashnaks) which dominated the feared 1885-1915 period and used the anti-Turkish rhetoric to ensure their existence for decades to come. This actually worked, since Dashnaksutyun still exists to this day and even holds multiple seats in the Armenian parliament.

Along with Dashnaksutyun, which openly advocates for a fierce anti-Turkish stance, there is one other Armenian terror group that openly advocated for an anti-Turkish stance: ASALA<sup>34</sup>. ASALA was a violent terrorist organization that operated from 1975 until the late 1990s, although their last terrorist attack was

34 Louise Nalbandyan, *Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century*, USA (California) 1963.

a failed assassination in 1991. ASALA targeted Turks for assassination for the sole reason that they were Turkish. Most of their victims were Turkish diplomatic personnel and also innocent bystanders. ASALA, and the wide support its bloody attacks gained throughout Armenian circles, showed the consequences of the dangerous anti-Turkish sentiments amongst Armenians. The wide support for ASALA, and the joy after which every death of a Turkish citizen was celebrated by Armenians, also illustrated how many Armenians were actually anti-Turkish. A third situation in which the hate and anti-Turkish sentiments were fueled and even encouraged by the Armenian government was the war in Karabakh. The Karabakh War (1992) was in fact a continuation of the Armenian-Azerbaijani War of 1918-1920. Armenia invaded Azerbaijan to occupy the Azerbaijani province of Karabakh and in this process implemented a policy of ethnic cleansing in which Armenia viewed Azerbaijanis simply as “Turks” due to the anti-Turkish sentiments prevalent in Armenia. The Karabakh War, which is still technically continuing and is in a state of cease-fire since 1994, on one side shows where hatred and anti-Turkish sentiments can lead to, and on the other side also increased anti-Turkish sentiments as dictated by the Armenian government to ensure the support of the Armenian population for the war against “Turks” (be it Azerbaijani Turks or Turkey Turks).<sup>35</sup> These three factors not only fueled the anti-Turkish sentiments in Armenia, but also influenced generations to come as the Armenian government still spreads this image of “the cruel barbarian Turk”. When talking to Armenian people, this image certainly came back in various answers. Some answers, which were frequently used by the older (but not elderly) Armenians, were the following:

*“You can’t be Turkish?! You look normal?!”* (Respondee A)<sup>36</sup>

This specific situation was when our own guide (and photographer) heard I was Turkish myself. When I explained that I was indeed Turkish, and had no tail and was just an ordinary human being (just like him), he started to explain that a lot of Armenians in Turkey hide their true identity for many decades now because otherwise the Turks will kill them all immediately when they discover it. Seeing that I am not “a weird monster with a tail, but look normal like a human”, he concluded I surely needed to be one of the Armenians he mentioned before:

*“You must be Armenian, then?”* (Respondee A)

He was probably referring to the Hemshin Armenians, of which one theory states that they were Armenian by origin, but eventually converted to Islam

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35 İhsanoğlu, *History of the Ottoman State II*.

36 Respondee A, Male, Age 35-45, tourist guide and photographer, Yerevan/Tatev.

during the reign of the Ottomans. His next question illustrated how he thought Turks were thinking about Armenians. He actually thought that the process in Armenia, where hate against Turks is promoted, was a reaction to the hate that was supposed to be promoted in Turkey by the Turkish government:

*“Do you hate Armenians?”* (Respondee A)

When I responded with a “no”, he was actually surprised and asked what the Turkish government was teaching about Armenians. A similar story also comes from another respondee, when asked if she would ever want to visit Erzurum in Turkey, since she told about her ancestors being from Erzurum:

*“I can’t go to Turkey, Turks would kill me!”* (Respondee B)<sup>37</sup>

Although she was in no way related to Respondee A, she did follow the same line in her perspective of Turkey and Turks. Even after she told about a vacation in Antalya (south of Turkey), she was still afraid that she would be killed if she went to Erzurum, arguing that she was in a five-star hotel in Antalya with a lot of Russian tourists. My remark that she made it to and from Antalya alive, did not struck a chord.

While both responses from the first category were given in Tatev (the south of Armenia, close to the Turkish and Azerbaijani borders), the two respondees were actually from Yerevan and also resided in Yerevan, but were just in Tatev for a short while. One was just on a road trip with friends for the weekend, while the other was there to guide tourists for about a week. The locals from Tatev were mostly friendlier towards Turks, which brings us to the second category: the image of the Turk as the “neighbor”. The profile of people in this category was that they were people who visited Turkey many times by passing to Turkey by Georgia, and they were mostly from Tatev. A third characteristic was that the people that saw Turks more as neighbors and not enemies, was that they wanted to benefit from trade and wealth with their much richer neighbor. The frustration of being so close to the border but not being able to cross it and trade, was clearly present. This category saw Turkey as a neighbor and people in this category rather would rather have a good neighbor than a bad neighbor. Some examples from people in this category, where I could not see any age-restricted sentiments, were the following:

- Middle-aged peoples of this category told about Turkish trade through Georgia, and even illegal trading in Turkey. One middle-aged woman told

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37 Respondee B, Female, Age 25-35, university student and state official, Yerevan/Tatev.

about her trip to the Turkish market through Georgia where she sold her vegetables and fruits in about one or two days, where after she was able to live of the profit in Armenia for approximately one or two months.

- Youngsters and students from this category told me about their frequent visits to Turkey with (international and national) projects in recent years where they had no bad encounters but only friendly experiences of being an Armenian visitor in Turkey.

- All age-categories also underlined that they see the similarities in cultures (cuisine etc.), and this makes them feel more close to Turks.

- Again, all age-categories acknowledged that Armenia needs neighbors, even the elderly Armenians who were subjugated to many years of excessive propaganda and indoctrination from the Armenian government were still able to balance the situation. However, one needs to state that outside of Yerevan, the presence of government officials is seriously lacking which may be a reason why the official governmental views are not as present outside the region of Yerevan as they are in Yerevan itself.

This category seems relatively large but surely is not the majority, which is still the first category, but is numerous enough to slowly start a shift in the way Armenians perceive Turks. It also paves the way for the third category, which must be seen as a sort of mid-way view between the first and the second category. While the first category strongly believes that the Turks are essential “bad creatures”, the second category sees the Turks as neighbors with which Armenians need to have good relations. However, the third category of Yin and Yang merely states that apart from having good or bad relations with Turks, the core is that Armenians need Turks; either to point at them and see them as the bad guys (and by doing so, furthering Armenian unity and the process of nation-building in Armenia and even within the Armenian diaspora), or by having good relations with the Turks and being able to trade with them (making Armenia a wealthier country than it is now). In both cases, this category strongly believes that they (more than anything else) need Turkey because without the Turks, the Armenians will have no aim as the image of the Turks as an external factor is what keeps the Armenians together. One quote that is illustrative for this position was a conversation between two Armenians which was told to me as follows:

“\* *We should move to Australia.*

- *What about the historical buildings?*

\* *We can build them again there.*

- *What about Ararat?*

\* *We can bring the dirt and rocks with us, and make a new mountain.*

- *What about the Armenians?*

\* *We can just persuade them to come, and when they see the wealth and riches they will for sure come.*

- *And what about the Turks?"* (Respondee C)<sup>38</sup>

This story, which has multiple versions, is being told numerous times within Armenia and illustrates that the bond between Armenians and Turks is one which is to be compared with "can't live with them, can't live without them".

*This story, which has multiple versions, is being told numerous times within Armenia and illustrates that the bond between Armenians and Turks is one which is to be compared with "can't live with them, can't live without them".*

## THE PORTRAYAL OF 'THE TURK

'The portrayal of 'the Turk' is firstly promoted by the Armenian government with a strong emphasis on 'the terrible Turk'. This is, in fact, the only official portrayal from the government. This is also seen in the brand names which are meant to keep the distorted memory of 'cruel Turks' alive. Popular brand

names are the cigarettes of 'Akhdamar', the beer of 'Kilikia', the cognac of 'Ararat', and many more. Akhdamar, Kilikia and Ararat are all geographical names for regions that Armenia claims from Turkey and argues are "occupied" by Turks. Using the name for every day products keeps the name, and the allegations, still very much alive in Armenia.

However, the official indoctrination by the Armenian government is a grim contrast between reality and the portrayed image of Armenia. For people that are not able to verify the reality, the propaganda of Armenia becomes their one and only truth. For people that are able to see the reality, it becomes a big contrast. For example, the girl that went to Antalya is still afraid of Turks. In her mind, she tries to find reasons to implement both the unrealistic image of the Armenian government, and the reality she saw in Turkey, into one 'reality'.

<sup>38</sup> Respondee C, Male, Age 30-40, journalist, Yerevan.



In her case, she created a reality in which she found multiple arguments why the ‘cruel Turk’-image was inconsistent. According to her, the tourist places in Turkey were different from the other cities; she was there as a tourist from Russia; she did not leave the hotel very often; the Turks did not know she was Armenian; and Turks were only aggressive in “former Armenian lands”. In her mind, she found a possible outcome in which she could combine both the Armenian propaganda, and the reality she herself witnessed. This effort was not in itself incomprehensible; amongst Armenians there was almost no gray area, but it was mostly black and white. Turks were either evil or not. Turks in regions where Armenians used to live, called ‘Western Armenia’ in Armenia, were exceptionally cruel, but Turks in tourist places could in some situations behave properly as long as they did not know you were Armenian and thought you were Russian or at least from Russia. This black-and-white-thinking was not unusual, as far as I could see during my field research.

Other findings that were interesting were the following:

There were no region-based sentiments in Armenia, although closer to the border with Turkey and further away from the Armenian capital Yerevan, the more people spoke a bit more about the neighbor Turk’ and not the ‘evil Turk’. This was especially the case in Tatev. There were also no age-groups with distinct sentiments about Turks. What struck me during my study visit in Armenia was the presence of the Turkish language, as a lot of young Armenians spoke the language in order to communicate with tourists. In addition, a lot of elderly Armenians still spoke Turkish because they remembered their youth in Turkey, while middle-aged Armenians did not speak Turkish because their parents (the elderly Armenians we spoke of earlier) taught them Armenian. This was very interesting indeed. Another aspect was that many Armenian youngsters spoke of having Turkish friends, which were either Turkish tourists, Turkish students and/or interns. All of them were relatively young: both the Armenians claiming to have Turkish friends, as the ones they claimed were their friends. This brought me to the question; “Is Turkish-Armenian reconciliation near?”. And with such a broad positive sentiment between, especially, the youngsters of both nations, it seems to be (at least) the beginning of the end of the era of wrath between the and two nations, and one could even argue that it is the beginning of a new era of reconciliation between the two nations for at least the upcoming generation.

It needs to be said that this research comprised only of Armenians from Armenia, and not the Armenians from the Diaspora. This needs to be underlined, just as much as the fact that this research was preliminary. Lastly, although this research was funded by the European Union, its careless approach



of the matter (especially the possible reconciliation between Turks and Armenians) seemed the opposite of constructive to me. The way how Armenians were approached (“Don’t ask too much about Turkey, they hate Turkey.”) and the way of questioning (“But you probably hate Turks, right?”) by some of the researchers that were handpicked by the European Commission

seemed to have the opposite effect of reconciliation and seemed like the European Union was not effective in trying to bury the hatchet between Armenians and Turks.

*Of the three most dominant images that exist in Armenia, namely that of the “barbaric Turk”, that of the Turk as a ‘the neighbor’; and the Turk as a yin and yang symbol with the Armenians, two of the three images are actually (relatively) positive. This is something to be underlined and seen as something very interesting. It is a radical change in the views of Armenians towards Turks. It also means that Armenian society is ready for more. This could mean that reconciliation is a real possibility.*

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion of my short but intensive research is as following; Of the three most dominant images that exist in Armenia, namely that of the “barbaric Turk”, that of the Turk as a ‘the neighbor’; and the Turk as a yin and yang symbol with the Armenians, two of the three images are actually (relatively) positive. This is something

to be underlined and seen as something very interesting. It is a radical change in the views of Armenians towards Turks. It also means that Armenian society is ready for more. This could mean that reconciliation is a real possibility. Although state to state level interactions between Turkey and Armenia are definitely stalled at the moment, it is simply a matter of time before reconciliation will be successful so long as people to people efforts are not halted, since the population (and especially the younger generations) are willing for a reconciliation.

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## **ILLUSTRATIONS**

### **Map 1: Armenia in the region, source:**

<http://www.turkey-visit.com/nagorno-karabakh.asp> (last visit 03.03.2016)

<http://www.turkey-visit.com/images/nagorno-karabakh/map-of-nagorno-karabakh.jpg> (last visit 03.03.2016).

**RESPONDEES**

Respondee A, Male, Age 35-45, tourist guide and photographer, Yerevan/Tatev.

Respondee B, Female, Age 25-35, university student and state official, Yerevan/Tatev.

Respondee C, Male, Age 30-40, journalist, Yerevan.