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Young Armenian Diasporans in the Fight for Genocide Recognition

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## **Young Armenian Diasporans in the Fight for Genocide Recognition**

### **Abstract:**

One cannot underestimate the historical and political implications of genocide and its denial have had on the trajectory and formation of the Armenia diaspora. Armenians have used every kit in the toolbox to try and accomplish the recognition of the Armenian genocide and obtain justice such as symbolic, monetary and territorial reparations. Yet after 105 years the responsibility of this calamity continues to be denied and justice withheld. Drawing on the literature developed by genocide scholars, this thesis investigates what genocide denial is, how it manifests in the Armenian case and denialist rhetoric's consequences on the fight for justice and on descendants of the victims. To do this, young Armenian diasporans voices are centralized to conduct a thorough review of their interpretations of denial, the attempts to rectify justice lacking, and the future of this battle. As a result, the research finds that the systematic denial of the Armenian genocide and absence of justice has created a situation in which these painful memories have festered for years. It has concurrently been the glue keeping together the diaspora but while the demands for justice are loud, young diasporans admit the impracticality or even impossibility of justice.

**Key words:** genocide, denial, recognition, reparations, diaspora



## **Młodzi Diaspory Ormiańskie w Walce o Uznanie Ludobójstwa**

### **Abstrakcyjny:**

Nie można nie doceniać historycznych i politycznych implikacji ludobójstwa i jego zaprzeczenia dla trajektorii i formowania się diaspory armeńskiej. Ormianie używali każdego zestawu w skrzynce narzędziowej, aby spróbować rozpoznać ludobójstwo Ormian i uzyskać sprawiedliwość, taką jak odszkodowania symboliczne, pieniężne i terytorialne. Jednak po 105 latach nadal zaprzecza się odpowiedzialności za tę klęskę i odmawia się sprawiedliwości. Opierając się na literaturze opracowanej przez badaczy zajmujących się ludobójstwem, niniejsza teza skupia się na badaniu, czym jest zaprzeczanie ludobójstwa, w jaki sposób przejawia się w sprawie ormiańskiej i jakie konsekwencje ma retoryka negacjonizmu w walce o sprawiedliwość i na potomków ofiar. W tym celu głosy młodych ormiańskich diaspor są scentralizowane, aby przeprowadzić dokładny przegląd ich interpretacji zaprzeczania, prób naprawienia braku sprawiedliwości i przyszłości tej bitwy. W rezultacie badania pokazują, że systematyczne zaprzeczanie ludobójstwa Ormian i brak sprawiedliwości stworzyły sytuację, w której te bolesne wspomnienia jątrzyły się przez lata. Jednocześnie jest spoiwem łączącym diasporę, ale chociaż żądania sprawiedliwości są głośnie, młodzi diaspory przyznają, że sprawiedliwość jest niepraktyczna, a nawet niemożliwa.

**Słowa kluczowe: ludobójstwo, zaprzeczenie, uznanie, zadośćuczynienia, diaspora**



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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The way in which we treat and understand the past has direct implications on how we respond to contemporary catastrophes. The Armenian genocide and its denial represent one such example of how inaction and inadequate condemnation of these crimes and their denial can lead to disaster. Turkey escaped from punishment for its genocidal actions against its minorities in the early 20th century. Years later when Adolf Hitler questioned, “Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?” he was speculating about the possibility of avoiding accountability for the actions he would proceed to take against the European Jewry (Yglesias 2007). The Turks had successfully gotten off scot free for eliminating their undesirables, the Third Reich followed in its footsteps hoping to achieve a similar oblivion of the crime. Ultimately, genocide denial and lack of justice sow the seeds for further repression, setting a dangerous precedent for future would be violators.

This thesis aims to examine what genocide denial is and how it manifests in the Armenian case by investigating the motivations behind this ideological enterprise and the transgenerational trauma inflicted on descendants by continued denialist rhetoric. This is followed by a discussion of the Turkish state’s denialist policies and their impact on justice for the crime. The research question centrally asks how young Armenian diasporans understand the history and future of the fight against negation and injustice. These diasporans are tapped for their views on these complex matters, having effects even decades later. Their sensibilities and suspicions of past methods utilized as well as the future in the fight for justice for the Armenian genocide expands upon the pre-existing literature on genocide denial through a unique focus on the voices of descendants of victims.

The first chapter centers on conceptualizing genocide, genocide denial, justice and its various forms. Each conceptualization is followed by a discussion of its implication in the Armenian case. The next section delves into the absence of justice and its ensuing consequences as the attempts to recover justice started a bloody terrorist movement, eventually morphing into a war of words. Method is described in the following section and the results of these interviews are subsequently discussed, identifying common features and disagreements among young Armenian diasporans. This in-depth reconnaissance of beliefs concerning genocide denial, recognition and justice is followed by a conclusion with parting thoughts on the fight going forward.



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

This chapter introduces the main concepts utilized in examining Armenian genocide denial. The section is divided into three parts: genocide, denial, and justice. The first part engages the definition of genocide and how it applies to the Armenian case. While there is an academic consensus the events of 1915 fall into the United Nation's definition of genocide, it is also a legal concept and this creates controversy in the label's relevance as no legal verdict has been rendered in the matter. The second part focuses on a discussion of genocide denial and the how and why of its continued propagation. Through using a conceptualization of genocide denial originally developed in response to the negation of the Holocaust, I begin to discuss the motives and consequences of Armenian genocide denial. The final part of the chapter centers on justice and its various forms followed by what justice measurements have been enacted in the Armenian case.

### ***2.1 Genocide***

The term genocide was coined by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish-Jewish lawyer whose family perished in the Holocaust. Lemkin's own memoirs detail his discovery of group-targeted violence, including the Ottoman directed massacres of Armenians ([encyclopedia.ushmm.org](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org)). This sparked Lemkin to discuss with his professor in international law the main genocidaire, Talaat Pasha, and his actions which led to the death of over a million Armenians. To Lemkin's dismay, the professor told him under the then current framework of the law, the Pasha had not committed a crime. What happened in Eastern Anatolia was simply an atrocity. While Talaat was guilty of the murder of a million no such crime had ever been codified by international law (Eshet 2007:4).

Following the Nazi terror and Holocaust Raphael Lemkin would create the term genocide, a combination of the Greek word for race, "genos" and the Latin word for killing "cide" (DeWaal 2015:132). The newly created United Nations would take Lemkin's definition and enshrine it in positive law terms in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Savelsberg 2010:27). The definition offered in Article II is as follows:

*In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to*



*destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:*

- a. Killing members of the group;*
- b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;*
- c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;*
- d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;*
- e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.*

(un.org/en/genocideprevention)

### ***2.1.1 The Definition and its Implications in the Armenian Case***

Today the genocide of Armenians committed by the Ottoman empire is not recognized by the modern-day Turkish state. Ankara vehemently denies any responsibility in the mass killing of its Armenian and other minority populations in the start of the 20th century. When Dr. Gregory Stanton, the former president for the International Association of Genocide Scholars, exchanged correspondence with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to discuss the recognition of the Armenian genocide, he was met with a curt response. Erdogan threatened that if the United States were to recognize the Armenian killings as a genocide, his government would label the American killings of Native Americans as genocide (Nahapetyan 2020).

Raphael Lemkin was in part inspired in his creation of the term genocide by the Armenian case (Manukyan 2019). The Convention, which is based off of Lemkin's work, was passed by the United Nations in 1948. Genocide itself now is typically referred to as the crime of crimes and thus refuting the application of this damning label becomes a bit more understandable, especially as the document calls for the prevention and more importantly punishment of such a crime. However, one must bear in mind that genocide is a legal term. Retroactive prosecution in this case would contradict the legal principle of *nullum crimen sine lege* as the crime took place before the adoption of the Genocide Convention and treaties do not apply ex post facto (Ambos 2015).

For philosophers such as Paul Boghossian, this does not cause an issue to applying the label of genocide. The concept itself of genocide applies to what occurred in 1915 and the legal convention applying in this matter is another matter entirely (Boghossian 2010:72). Nonetheless



a legal analysis by the International Center for Transitional Justice found that the events of 1915 “include all of the elements of the crime of genocide as defined in the Convention, and legal scholars as well as historians, politicians, journalists and other people would be justified in continuing to so describe” this as the Armenian genocide (ICTJ 2002).

## **2.2 Denial**

Unfortunately, where there has been genocide, denial of the crimes committed is never far behind. Dr. Gregory Stanton theorizes that there are ten stages to any genocide. Denial “is the final stage that lasts throughout and always follows genocide” (2016). This insidious phenomenon of negation occurs no matter how well the genocide is documented. As genocide scholar Deborah E. Lipstadt would point out, the Holocaust has “has the dubious distinction of being the best-documented genocide in the world” yet it is also so flippantly denied (2017). Despite these noble efforts of many to preserve the factual memory of those crimes committed, the negation of the Holocaust remains ever present in today’s society. Given the Holocaust’s documentation and its ever-prevalent denial, it has attracted considerable academic study. This is also because the scale of the destruction wrought by the Holocaust was much larger, the scores of dead eclipsing the death toll of the Armenian genocide. Lipstadt takes the problem head on and has written extensively on the denial of the Holocaust. In her landmark book, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* she details out many several important observations on Holocaust denial. Her findings on the negation of the Shoah have weight thus they can and should be examined in other cases of genocide denial. For this reason, it is appropriate to first discuss her conclusions on denial and then consider their potential applications in the Armenian context.

Lipstadt characterizes denial as a tool to “reshape history and demonize the victims and rehabilitate the perpetrators” (1994:216). Those who engage in historical revisionism “freely shape or create information to buttress their convictions and reject as implausible any evidence that counters them” (1994:26). The deniers employ a methodology which mixes the truth with lies and selective scholarship which purposefully avoids critical information of the perpetrator (1994:2). Furthermore, those who deny the Holocaust range in impact and stature, they range from internet trolls to shady charlatans posing as scholars trying to legitimate their negationist views. Many years have passed since Lipstadt wrote of deniers and the internet has become the



cornerstone in our society. Genocide deniers can now spread their ahistorical message to any corner of the world. Platforms like 8-chan, an anonymous messaging board platform, attract white supremacists who can freely discuss issues such as Holocaust denial without fear of posts being moderated (Birnbaum 2019).

In her book, Lipstadt describes that there can even exist entire institutions which are dedicated to denial. These are arguably more distressing as their negationists are camouflaged in suits and hide behind the name of free speech and academia. This kind of denier and denial institution use language of reasoned inquiry but their research is “a purely ideological enterprise” (Lipstadt 1994:26). For example, Lipstadt discusses in detail the practices of the Institute for Historical Review (IHR), a California based organization best known for publishing pieces questioning the existence of the Shoah. The entire *raison d’être* behind the IHR is to encourage the creation of and the distribution of Holocaust denial literature. While the Institute argues it encourages historical revisionism of all history, the lion’s share of its published articles are on World War II and the Shoah (1994:143).

Finally, genocide negation does more than aim to alter history, it inflicts pain upon the survivors and their descendants. For Lipstadt “denial of an individual’s or a group’s persecution, degradation, and suffering is the ultimate cruelty - on some level worse than the persecution itself” (Lipstadt 1994:27). This thought that genocide denial is painful has been echoed by prominent writer and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel. For Wiesel, the denial of genocide functions as a “double killing” which strives not only to kill the memory of a genocide but insults the dignity of survivors and their future generations (Holthouse 2018). In short, denial robs victims and their descendants of psychological peace but also justice which is described in the next section.

### ***2.2.1 How Does Lipstadt Apply?***

There are key differences to distinguish between Turkish denial of the Armenian genocide and denial of the Holocaust. Despite these divergences many of Lipstadt’s arguments can be applied to the case of Armenian Genocide denial but these differences should be addressed. Germany has accepted that the Third Reich perpetrated a genocide against the European Jewry while Turkey, the successor state to the Ottoman empire, has always refused to use the controversial ‘g-word’ to describe the horrific massacres beginning in 1915. The German



government has apologized for the devastation it inflicted upon European nations such as Poland and the Nazi plans to destroy the nation (Aderet 2019). German acceptance of its ethical burden was not always the case as until the 1960's, the society was silent on the matter of the Holocaust (Hasselbach 2019). There was not an immediate acceptance of culpability in part due to its division into East and West Germany. The former communist East Germany rejected any blame while West Germany slowly came to terms with its accountability and duty to memorialize. It would not be until the reunification that Germany's policy to remember the Holocaust became consolidated (Johnstone 2016). Today it actively commemorates the genocide and memorials are conspicuous across the nation, occupying important spaces in Berlin and other cities.

On the other hand, the denial of the Armenian genocide is actively promulgated by the Republic of Turkey. The common method of denial employed by Turkey is to place the blame on any factors which do not implicate the Ottoman empire as being culpable. Just as Lipstadt characterized of Holocaust denial, Turkey copies the methodology which mixes the truth with lies and purposefully avoids critical information of the perpetrators (1994:2). American denialist academics like Justin A. McCarthy, who was funded by the Turkish state, refused to use term genocide because they find that Turks were simply exercising their right to self-defense as Armenian ideologues were equally massacring Turks and conspiring with the chief enemy at the time, the Russian Empire, to bring about the destruction of Ottoman control (Holthouse 2018). Not only does this thesis shift the blame to the victim group but labelling the targeted as undesirable fifth column elements and spies is a page taken directly from the book of Holocaust deniers who use anti-Semitic tropes to somehow justify the targeting of Jews and even their slaughter (Lipstadt 1994:52,89).

Importantly, it disputes that there was genuine intent on the part of the Ottoman government to kill its minorities, intent serving as a necessary component to the application of the label of genocide set for in the UN definition. One of the ways in which it attempts to minimize the intent element is that Turkey minimizes the fatalities incurred by Armenians. Ankara claims that the death toll has been greatly exaggerated by Armenia and international scholars who generally put the number of casualties at about 1.5 million (Bloxham 2005:208). Turkey would conservatively estimate that only 300,000 Armenians died during the period of World War I ([bbc.com/news/world-europe](http://bbc.com/news/world-europe)). Ankara also estimates that many Armenians died not at the hands of Turks as a part of an orchestrated killing spree but as a result of famine and



disease brought on by the war. This echoes the strategy of many Holocaust deniers who question how many Jews were killed by the Nazi regime, one of the most popular denialist books is indeed entitled *Did Six Million Really Die? The Truth at Last* (Lipstadt 199:104) It alleges throughout that Jews died because the Allies bombed supply routes which made the concentration camps unable to feed their prisoners.

The range in Armenian genocide deniers closely resembles that of Holocaust deniers described by Lipstadt. They range in scale from violent ultranationalists to government backed deniers. Sometimes, this scale is combined into one: far-right terrorist groups who enjoy the support of the government. The Turkish Revenger Brigade is a unique example of this combination. The Brigade is a terrorist organization which wishes to purge all non-Turkish elements from their society and they find continuous support from Erdogan's nationalist allies (Bozkurt 2019). The Brigade has threatened to bomb *Agos*, an Armenian-Turkish paper which uses the dreaded g-word to describe the 1915 massacres and critiques Ankara's memory policy.

Particularly in this case negationists are not left to their own devices. Denial of the Armenian genocide is state sponsored (Holthouse 2018). The Turkish government funded the creation of institutions such as the Institute for Turkish Studies (ITS) to spread denial outside of its borders to fund academics like Justin A. McCarthy. Although now defunct the Institute aimed to promote and establish Turkish studies programs in the United States (ahvalnews.com). Its purpose was not solely to advocate for Armenian genocide negation like the Institute for Historical review; however, like the Institute the ITS over its years of operation was often implicated in sponsoring denialist scholars. The ITS bought full-page advertisements in a number of prominent American newspapers such as *The New York Times* to question the existence of the Armenian genocide. 69 scholars all receiving money from the Institute signed on to the ad. Another such debacle occurred after the ITS threatened to sue notable Armenian-American columnist Harut Sassounian after he published names of scholars and the amount of money they received from the Institute (Sassounian 2019).

In its own borders genocide denial remains at the core of the Turkish state's policy. At the approach of the 100th anniversary of the beginning of the Armenian genocide, Ankara went into overdrive denial mode. They were fully aware the centenary would renew Armenian calls for recognition of the Ottoman empire's ultimate crime. State bureaucrats, foreign policy experts, scholars and historians were all enlisted to prop up the Turkish side of the genocide debate



(Aybak 2016:132). Turkey commemorated April 24, 2015 by remembering not the Armenian genocide, the anniversary of the Ottoman assassination of members of the Armenian intelligentsia, but the Gallipoli battles. Everyone could see this as a direct attempt to sideline the commemoration of the Armenian genocide in Turkey. Everyone that is but Erdogan of course. In an interview he pressed that his April 24 commemoration “is a date in history and it has nothing to do with the ceremonies in Armenia. Quite on the contrary, they fixed their ceremonies to coincide with our date” (2016:136).

Turkish denialists go many steps farther than their American counterparts. Scholars such as Ali Nazmi Çora goes as far to claim that historians who speak of the “so-called ‘Armenian genocide’” have been hired by the Armenian diaspora and that they had managed to introduce “their falsehood into the educational curricula across the USA with the assistance of the like-minded politicians, and they (have) flooded the media with the support of the duped journalists” (Çora 2015:20)<sup>1</sup>. Again, a method directly in step with Holocaust denial, accusing victim groups of influencing mass media and funding institutes to propagate a falsehood (Lipstadt 1994:56,105). In Çora’s book *ARMENIAN GENOCIDE, A BIG LIE*, published in 2015 coinciding with the centenary, he details out that Armenian insurgents and terrorists were complicit in the slaughter of Turkish Muslim peoples. He calls out that the Ottoman government is not at all blameless in the deaths of so many Armenians but he defends the Young Turks against the label of “genocidaires” (2015:29).

While Çora would apparently regret the death of so many Armenians, from what it writes it would certainly seem he believes some got what they deserved. The Armenians had a “privileged life for more than a thousand years” in the Ottoman empire yet as Çora would see it, the Armenians fell into the machinations of the Western powers and Russia and began to see the Turks with contempt. From there, Armenians would go on to massacre innocent Muslim Turks (2015:31). Books like Çora’s are filled with anti-Armenian sentiment and aim to excuse the deaths of Armenians at the will of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). He engages in what Lipstadt would label as an immoral equivalency, which minimizes the severity of actions the Ottoman government took against Armenians by saying Armenians committed comparable wrongs (1994:41). But why have Turkish victims been ignored? Deniers like these often assert

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<sup>1</sup> To note, the author has not been hired by the Armenian diaspora to write this dissertation.



that the massacres of Armenians gained more prominence because they were not Muslim (Çora 2015:33).

Other deniers like M. Hakan Yavuz allege that Armenians were only pushed to use the term genocide after persistent efforts on behalf of the Soviet Union and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation-Dashnaktsutyun (2014:1). Yavuz equally believes that the term genocide has “a prosecutorial tone of accusation” that stifles dialogue which seeks to ascertain what actually occurred in 1915 (2014:2). The employment of the term genocide for Yavuz is also to blame for issues that continue to plague the region even today and thus used politically. The eternal victimhood of Armenians allows them to continue persecuting those they deem as the “bloody Turks” thus constituting a part of the ideology which permits them to commit ethnic cleansing of Azeri Turks in Nagorno-Karabakh and their refusal to normalize relations with Ankara (2014:2).

The term genocide is so polemical that the Turkish government has even gone as far to criminalize the affirmation of the genocide. In 2005, Turkey enacted Article 301 which made it a crime to “denigrate Turkishness”. This made it effectively illegal to acknowledge the existence of the Armenian genocide (Holthouse 2018). Nobel Laureate Orhan Pamuk was charged for telling a Swiss newspaper that a million Armenians had been killed in “these lands” (Freely 2007:15). The editor-in-chief of *Agos*, Hrant Dink, was prosecuted 3 times over his persistent critiques of the Turkish government’s denial of the genocide. These prosecutions were direct attempts to silence Dink who spoke of the consensus that what occurred was a genocide. These attempts; however, did not dissuade him from pursuing dialogues of peace between Armenians and Turks as well as advocating for human rights in Turkey.

Already a high-profile figure in Istanbul, these prosecutions resulted in Dink receiving threats to his life. Some members of the Turkish press estimate that by 2007, some 26,000 death threats had been launched against Article 301 defendants (Freely 2007:17). In his last article in *Agos* he wrote, “I feel like a pigeon. Like a pigeon I wander uneasily amidst this city, watching my back constantly, so timid and yet, so free” ([pen.org/press-clip/](http://pen.org/press-clip/)). The day he published the article Dink was shot dead by an ultranationalist 17-year-old Turk. The assassin evaded arrest and disturbing footage would later show him posing with policemen in front of a Turkish flag (Holthouse 2018).



Dink's assassination caused an uproar in Turkey. The assassin who was captured 20 hours later still in possession of the murder weapon and wearing a white beret made clear to Turkish audiences the teen thought he could act with impunity. The footage of him posing with police would further confound fears that he had connections with the Turkish deep state (Freely 2007:21). The assassin was sentenced to only 23 years in prison since he was a minor at the time of the attack. Amnesty International criticized the Turkish government for its failure to adequately investigate state officials' alleged involvement in the crime and the failure of the police to relay information that could have stopped the murder (amnesty.org/). Prosecutions under Article 301 were temporarily abandoned until 2017 when it was put into use again, this time against Turkish Armenian lawmaker Garo Paylan (Cengiz 2019).

Finally, just like with Holocaust deniers, labelling becomes a problem. Holocaust deniers claim they cannot speak their "truth" because they will automatically be called anti-Semites (Lipstadt 1994:82,120). Similarly, those who deny the Armenian genocide are slapped with what some would consider "the epithet of 'denier'" (Schabas in Aybak 2016:127). Çora implies that the Armenian lobby uses the label of denier to hide from the fact that their accusations of genocide are not legitimate (2015:27). Yavuz would argue that people who questions whether or not what occurred was a genocide "are silenced or delegitimized as a result of this weighty stigma, rendering the framework of genocide a conversation-stopper" (2011:234). Ironically enough, while Schabas, Çora, and Yavuz argue that the label of denier has adverse effects on reconciliation they remain silent on the Turkish government's prosecution of those who would use the label of genocide, suits intended to function as a censor. There is also not a peep on Ankara's inability to bring to justice co-conspirators to the murder of Turkish citizens for using the term genocide.

### ***2.3 Justice***

Denial of a genocide means that justice is simultaneously denied. But what is justice? Justice has a broad meaning and can include elements of fairness and accountability. For the purpose of this study and given the lack of a perfect single template for justice, I will focus on three elements of justice that have applied to the Armenian case: recognition, reparations, and institutional reform. For this I will be focusing on elements from the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ). They define that there are constant features of justice which include



“the recognition of the dignity of individuals, the redress and acknowledgement of violations, and the aim to prevent them happening again” ([ictj.org/transitional-justice](http://ictj.org/transitional-justice)).

### ***2.3.1 Recognition***

Armenians have inadvertently been pulled into a debate that should not even exist. The genocide happened and it is fact. As discussed previously, denial is a “double killing” for the victim group (Holthouse 2018). If “denial of an individual’s or a group’s persecution, degradation, and suffering is the ultimate cruelty” then to correct this injustice, recognition is the appropriate course of action and reaffirms the dignity of individuals (Lipstadt 1994:27). Recognition is the other side of the coin to denial and recognition of the crime itself must be the first step toward justice. By denying that a crime ever took place the denier effectively erases any need for trials and reparations or any method of transitional justice.

Victims groups have a right to the truth and recognition of the abuses inflicted upon them. Allowing the truth to be spoken makes sure that “Nunca Mas” is more reality than dream. As human rights scholar and lawyer Ellen Lutz would put it aptly “the best kind of justice leads to national acknowledgement of the wrongs that occurred and societal involvement in righting them” (Sikkink 2006:131). Redress for denial and recognition can be accomplished by truth commissions. “Truth commissions provide acknowledgement and recognition of suffering and survival to those most affected” ([ictj.org/truth-commissions](http://ictj.org/truth-commissions)). Statistical analyses show that truth commissions have a positive impact on human rights situations as they provide information of the abuses committed and communicate narratives on societal norms (Sikkink 2006:187). With this, survivors and their descendants are safer in the country and acknowledgement of what happened may prevent future conflict.

Of course, it would not matter if this denier were just a group of fanatics that could be easily brushed aside. In this case we are referring to the Turkish state who holds an enormous power over what amount of justice the Armenians of Anatolia and their descendants will ever see. They are the keeper of the keys of archives which remain closed except to a select few. In the Armenian case, part of recognition would entail first recognizing what happened as genocide and possibly establishing an unbiased historical commission to establish a truthful record of what happened.



Denialists, like Ali Nazmi Çora are quite obsessed with the fact that genocide is a legal concept and that no one has been legally convicted of the crime of genocide in the case of the massacres in 1915. M. Hakan Yavuz is of a similar view and strongly states that genocide is a legal term and it can only be decided by a court that the CUP committed this ultimate crime (2011:233). Quite generally scholars who deny along with the Turkish government are obsessed with the idea that since genocide is a legal concept thus recognition cannot happen without and furthermore it is not correct for national parliaments to employ the term in this case. National resolutions which recognize the genocide as a genocide are “declarations of opinion rather than anything else” (Lütem 2015:100). However, with the total absence of trials to determine the appropriateness of the label of genocide, where else can Armenians turn to ensure that they are recognized? I would argue it then falls to third party countries to condemn such violence and recognize what happened since the perpetrator is incapable.

The Turkish government also insists that this a debate that should stay out of the parliaments of the world and instead should be a task left to historians. However, we must remember that Ankara simultaneously refuses to open its historical archives to the broad public and persecutes historians that would apply the term genocide. Concurrently denialist historians like M. Hakan Yavuz contradict this government assertion that matter is better left to historians by arguing that the label of genocide “is a legal term and not conducive to historical inquiry” (2011:233). This goes to show, deniers often contort into contradictory positions to keep genocide negation sustained and recognition from being achieved. At the end of the day, for genocide deniers it would seem there is no appropriate venue to discuss what happened to the Armenians.

### ***2.3.2 Reparations***

Reparations offer both symbolic and material aid to victims and do not constitute just monetary compensation but also apologies and granting access to land ([ictj.org/reparations](http://ictj.org/reparations)). There is a large body of literature on reparations and I do not make an effort to review all or even a great deal of this literature but to summarize the main elements necessary for the following case study. As of today, international law has made clear that a duty exists to provide reparations. In practice; however, implementation is incredibly tricky and questions of feasibility inevitably arise (Magarrell 2007:11). I will review three types of reparations: symbolic,



monetary, and territorial. Symbolic reparations have become more common while monetary and territorial or housing, land, and property (HLP) reparations are often the least implemented form of justice ([ictj.org/reparations](http://ictj.org/reparations)).

Symbolic reparations like official public apologies and commemorations constitute an important component of justice. An apology further reinforces recognition that wrongs were committed. The ICTJ would define an apology as “a formal, solemn and, in most cases, public acknowledgement that human rights violations were committed in the past... and that the state, group, or individual apologizing is accepting some or all of the responsibility for what happened” (Carranza et al. 2015:4). It has become progressively more commonplace for leaders and heads of state to publicly apologize on behalf of the state to victims and communities of state perpetrated abuses (ibid 2015:4). Symbolic reparations like apologies are not enough on their own for justice. Ideally, they should be followed by material forms of reparations as well as other mechanisms to document the injustices committed such as prosecutions and truth commissions.

Monetary reparations serve two functions, to recognize the loss and pain experienced by the victims of state abuses and let them become right-holders entitled to redress and secondly to provide actual material benefits to victims (Carranza 2009:2). Different victims have different needs and these can change in the passage of time ([ictj.org/reparations](http://ictj.org/reparations)). Some debate exists whether reparations are needed for the descendants of victims of state perpetrated crimes. The answer to such a debate is yes. Effects of such horrible and extensive crimes are still being felt over a hundred years later in the United States for example. There exist calls to pay reparations to the descendants of the victims of the slave trade and the genocide of the Native Americans. In fact, it even became a very serious topic in the political sphere in the 2020 US Democratic Primaries and in the US Congress (Lockhart 2019).

Symbolic and monetary reparations may be the easiest of reparations to administer but neither can fulfill the primary need for land or redress for stolen property (Magarrell 2007:12). Housing, land, or property (HLP) reparations or even granting access to land to dispossessed people are more troublesome to implement and represent a major problem to durable peace if not solved (McCallin 2012:4). Where the rule *nemo dat quod non habet* (“you cannot give what you don’t have”) would usually apply, there are few but notable exceptions to this. The doctrine of market overt is one such which stipulates that a bona fide purchaser can acquire a good or title from a swindler if the sale takes place in an open market. Of course, this legal philosophy may be



easy when it comes to a stolen necklace but becomes significantly more problematic when innocent people are sold houses and may now be inhabiting land stolen from dispossessed peoples as the result of state perpetrated human rights abuses (Alexander 2014:875).

Complications for HLP reparations may grow ever more considerable as time passes, considering the fading memory as witnesses may have died or been further dispersed and records lost (McCallin 2012:7). It can; however, still be accomplished if political will and memory have not waned completely. Even in 2015 local municipality governments in California have transferred back lands that were taken from the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of the Stewarts Point Rancheria over 150 years ago after extensive lobbying and reconciliation efforts (Callahan 2015). It is important to dispel the illusion though that this complex restoration would return matters to status quo ante and most cases may require a second act of expulsion which violates principles of fairness and justice (Alexander 2014:890). Indeed, the Kashia Band was able to successfully reacquire its land because the acres given back were uninhabited forest and coastlines (Callahan 2015).

HLP reparations are called for to achieve two objectives, to correct an ongoing injustice, which presents a present and future focused argument to continue to develop peace, and to correct historical injustices (Alexander 2014:878). Property law scholar Gregory S. Alexander argues that territorial reparations should aim to correct only present and future circumstances of injustice because historically correcting “restitution does not reverse the clock—it does not return all of these people to their original positions, that is, the situations they occupied prior to the time of the land’s confiscation” (2014:879). The unpleasant truth is that there is no way to completely rectify situations such as dispossession. While many in favor of territorial reparations content that land is fundamentally linked to identity, quite in line with the Hegelian notion of property ownership, Alexander would argue; however, that while owning land may be essential to the identity of self, the present self will have acquired a new identity based on what is currently owned and not on the things that were once owned. This again becomes painfully evident in cases where decades have passed since the original expulsion (2014:881).

From the beginning, symbolic, monetary and territorial reparations must bear mind the limitations or opportunities that can emerge in the implementation stage (Magarrell 2007:12). Reparations should respond to the ongoing needs of victims and recognize that these needs change over time ([ictj.org/reparations](http://ictj.org/reparations)). Combinations of justice mechanisms such as recognition



and reparations are complementary and not mutually exclusive. Kathryn Sikkink finds that over time successful recovery stories of post-conflict societies have usually used a combination of justice strategies (2006:227). Finally, while reparations can ameliorate situations of historic marginalization this may not even occur until the past wrong is acknowledged to be fact.

### ***2.3.3 Justice in the Armenian Case***

What justice measures discussed above have been implemented in the Armenian case? Zero and that is due mostly to the state sponsored denial or non-recognition of the genocide. The closest the Turkish state ever came to symbolic reparations or an apology was in 2014 when President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan offered condolences to the grandchildren of victims of the massacres. But this was more an apolo-lie, in that he stated that “millions of people of all religions and ethnicities lost their lives in the First World War” thus conveying the message that Armenians were not specifically targeted by the Ottoman empire when they indeed were. He also used the occasion to say that despite the “inhuman consequences - such as relocation - during the First World War, (it) should not prevent Turks and Armenians from establishing compassion and mutually humane attitudes among towards one another.” These condolences were unprecedented but a long cry away from a real apology (Yildiz 2014).

In Turkish civil society there has been more movement to symbolic accountability on the crimes of the Ottoman empire. In 2008 an online campaign entitled “Özür Diliyorum” or “I Apologize” was created by a group of Turkish Intellectuals. In signing the petition, the signatory affirmed, “My conscience does not accept the insensitivity [shown in] the denial of the Great Catastrophe that the Ottoman Armenians were subjected to in 1915. I reject this injustice and for my share, I empathize with the feelings and pain of my Armenian brothers and sisters. I apologize to them.” Notably they did not use the g-word but the Turkish translation for the Armenian term of the events “Great Catastrophe” (Shahnazarian 2009:1). Even though the term genocide was not used, President Erdoğan had nothing less than a harsh response to the petition stating, “We did not commit a crime, therefore we do not need to apologize” (Tait 2008). This demonstrates that while small and important steps are being made Turkey is still far away from reconciling the past. Remarkably, in Istanbul the men responsible for the extermination of the Armenians and also men who are generally regarded as incompetent leaders by Turks, are worthy enough of having their graves in the Monument of Liberty in Istanbul (De Waal 2013).



While the active killing phase of the genocide may have ended in 1917, horrible discrimination against Armenians occurred well into the first years of the establishment of Turkey. When Mustafa Kemal Atatürk came to power, he expelled the remaining Armenians in the Cilicia region of Turkey alongside other Christian Greek and Assyrian minorities. The plunder of Armenian property and wealth enriched the modern Turkish state (Tolbert 2015). Recognition would undoubtedly weaken Turkey's legal defense against the need to provide compensation (Gladstone 2015). The mere idea of monetary reparations touches a nerve in Turkey. Turkish scholars like Ömer Engin Lütem believe that Armenians wish to achieve recognition in states like America so that enough pressure will be put on Turkey to pay indemnities to the descendants of Ottoman Armenians (2015:102). Estimates of what is owed depending on method of calculation but some studies would put the figure exceeding 100 billion dollars (Gladstone 2015).

Professor Henry Theriault charts that monetary reparations did not always figure as a demand of Armenians in the fight for justice; however, starting from 2005 the idea started to grow that this was a fundamental component of justice. This is marked by a strategy change of the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) from focusing exclusively on recognition of the genocide to adapting a hardline position on the necessity of monetary reparations (Chalikyan 2015). This was echoed even in the homeland in the Pan-Armenian Declaration on the Centennial of the Armenian Genocide which revealed it planned to make legal claims for the rights of the Armenian people, meaning reparations ([mfa.am](http://mfa.am)).

While recognition or symbolic and monetary reparations are problematic enough, territorial reparations or access to the land of Eastern Anatolia, or what Armenians refer to as Western Armenia, represent what are perhaps the most provocative of demands in the eyes of Turkey. The fear of losing land in Turkey goes back to the days of the Ottoman empire when the Young Turk government suffered a humiliating loss of most of its European and Libyan territory and sustained 250,000 military casualties ([nzhistory.govt](http://nzhistory.govt)). The Treaty of Sèvres decided by the victors of World War I essentially carved up the losing Ottoman empire into European zones of influence but it also dedicated a large swath of land in Eastern Anatolia for the creation of the Armenian state (Suny 2015:340). With the disinterest of Western powers to make sure Turkey committed to honoring the treaty this never came to be, but modern-day Turkey suffers from what some label as Sèvres Syndrome, the fear of dismemberment (DeWaal 2015:251).



Henry Thierault would conclude “that the future viability of the Armenian Republic as the secure and permanent home of Armenians as an identity group depends on territorial reparations” (Chalikyan 2015). However, the question of returning any property or territory is complicated considering that while territorial reparations could serve as a measure of justice, what happens when *nemo dat* is applied and necessitates a second wave of dispossession? Any HLP reparations would have to take into consideration that now sizeable populations of Kurds and Turks live in what is considered rightfully as Western Armenia. The Kurds have no state and have largely settled the lands of Eastern Anatolia. Over the past 100 years houses have been inhabited, churches have been converted to mosques, the stones of ancient buildings used for new projects (Mirabile 2019).

In a special report prepared by the Armenian Genocide Reparations Study Group (AGRSG), of which Thierault is its chair, the crucial problem of modern Kurdish inhabitants as a mere afterthought. It acknowledges that any inhabitants are not themselves genocidares, the return of that land and any resulting difficulties current inhabitants would fault would not lie in the claims for Armenian territorial reparation but with the genocide perpetrators. It also poses that righting the wrongs committed would not be “possible without some kind of disruption” (Thierault et al. 2015:90). Disruption is a rather curious word to use in a situation where dispossession is very likely. The report also questions “If the rights of contemporary inhabitants trump Armenian claims to territory, does this not lead to a de facto acceptance of genocidal Turkification of that land, that is, a condoning of genocide?” (Thierault et al. 2015:90). This is a clear embrace of the *nemo dat* rule, while Kurds, also a persecuted minority in Turkey, would bear the brunt of such claims.



## **Chapter 3: Historical Background**

Armenians have used every kit in the toolbox to try and make the world recognize the genocide and to obtain justice such as symbolic, monetary and territorial reparations. In the years directly following the genocide some Armenians chose militancy like Operation Nemesis. Later on terrorist means to achieve this goal again became the medium of choice for the members of the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia, the Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide, and the Orly Organization. From the nineties and on, the battle for recognition and justice shifted to the legislature and civil society. Therefore, this chapter begins by briefly summarizing the incident in question and the absence of justice. This is followed by a historical account on the attempts to rectify justice lacking, the crimes' denial and the wounds of the past.

### ***3.1 A Brief History of the Armenian Genocide***

Armenians in the Ottoman empire were no strangers to persecution. From 1894 to 1896, Sultan Abdul Hamid II would order the slaughter of some 100,000 Armenians with many more being left destitute (Savelsberg 2010:16). According to Hamid II, the Armenians of Eastern Anatolia, who at this point were increasingly looking to Russia and European powers for protection, were in danger of further crippling the empire. In blaming the Armenians for the Ottoman loss of territory, he stated "By taking away Greece and Romania, Europe has cut off the feet of the Turkish state. The loss of Bulgaria, Serbia, and Egypt has deprived us of our hands, and now by means of this Armenian agitation they want to get at our most vital places and tear out our very guts" (DeWaal 2018:54). These years of violence and prejudice would be a grim precursor to what would become one of the bloodiest chapters in Armenian history.

Surges of ethno-nationalism would soon become the norm in the empire. There were concerted Russian efforts to kindle the nationalism of Armenians and stir unrest in order to undermine the Ottoman empire (Hoffman 2006:71). This would be used as evidence of Armenian's treachery. Talaat Pasha, the Ottoman Minister of the Interior, was largely responsible for ordering the deportations, confiscation of property and the massacres of Armenians in the empire (Sarafian 2011:5). Many Western nations, having diplomatic personnel and other such workers in the empire, would end up producing a dossier of damning eyewitness



testimony of the massacres and deportations (Wilkinson 1983:345). For the first time ever, the formulation term “crimes against humanity” would be charged upon the Ottoman empire by Russia, France, and Great Britain.

By the end of 1923 nearly 1.5 million Armenians died but even early after the start of the deportations and massacres Talaat Pasha proclaimed these policies presented “the definitive solution to the Armenian Question” (DeWaal 2015:33). The Ottoman Empire would go on to lose World War I and the Allied powers would impose the Treaty of Sèvres which would carve out large parts of Eastern Anatolia for the creation of a large Armenian state (Suny 2015:340). In the Treaty of Sèvres, international trials akin to Nuremberg would be adjudicated, advocating for the trial punishment of the perpetrators of this violence (Kazarian 1997:74). These trials would never materialize and the creation of this great Armenian state was abandoned as new forces would come into play and annul the Treaty. Sèvres remains a dream for many Armenians, to gain back historical lands but is a nightmare for the Turks who see it as once again tearing out their very guts.

### ***3.2 Operation Nemesis***

After the collapse of the leadership of the Committee of Union and Progress, a new government was founded and a resulting Turkish court martial of 1919-1920 tried Talaat Pasha in absentia. He was found guilty of orchestrating massacres and sentenced to death. Talaat was able to avoid his punishment by fleeing to Germany (Garibian 2018:231). Incensed by the perceived lack of justice, a group of Armenians formed Operation Nemesis, named after the Greek goddess of retribution, with the mission to assassinate those deemed responsible for the genocide (Gunter 2007:114). Young Soghomon Tehlirian, whose family fell victim to the genocide, became a member and under the direction of the leaders of Operation Nemesis he carried out the assassination of Talaat Pasha in Berlin in 1921. He was caught and tried for the murder of Talaat but the German jury sympathized with Tehlirian who claimed his mother’s corpse came to him in a vision chastising him for seeing Pasha but not avenging family. He was acquitted on account of temporary insanity (DeWaal 2015: 101).

Many people testified on behalf of the assassin Tehlirian including Armin T. Wegner, a doctor stationed in Turkey during World War I and direct witness to the destruction of the Armenian people. He described that the defendant was as an “atom in which pain is crystallized”



and that his actions demonstrated “his heroic readiness to sacrifice himself for his people, whereas no courage is needed by a minister, sitting in his office, to deport an entire people to the desert” (Garibian 2018:221). Medical experts were also called by the defense team to explain Tehlirian’s mental reasoning. Expert witness Dr. Robert Stormer said of Tehlirian, “his childhood, his faith in humanity, and his confidence in justice have been totally destroyed” (www.cilicia.com). Professor Dr. Edmund Forster stated, “he does not want to obtain justice by himself” pointing to the very clear fact that justice had failed in the case of Talaat Pasha.

Tehlirian’s actions; however, cannot be interpreted as just because murder is not justice at least not in the modern sense. Nevertheless, the defense lawyer for Tehlirian described the situation as such, “On the one hand, there was the representative of brute force, and, on the other, the representative of the oppressed who sought justice... Indeed, when the representative of justice found himself face to face with the representative of brute force, the former lost control of himself and no longer knew what he was doing. The Court has to render a just verdict. The defendant deserves justice” (www.cilicia.com). No matter that Tehlirian appointed himself judge, jury, and executioner and had carried out vigilante justice. It was not Tehlirian who was deemed to be in the wrong but the Pasha. The acquittal of the assassin and the wholesale condemnation of the victim, the trial served as a symbolic rebuke of the violence authorized by Talaat Pasha instead of as a mechanism to prescribe justice for the act of murder committed Tehlirian.

Ultimately this assassination would have long lasting consequences for the Armenian cause. As discussed in the previous chapter, the case would catch the eye of Raphael Lemkin and helped set him on the path to coin the term genocide. Tehlirian would become a sort of folk hero to Armenians across the world, with numerous statues erected in his honor in Yerevan and elsewhere (asbarez.com). The New York Times wrote in 1921 that Soghomon Tehlirian’s acquittal was “a queer view of moral rightness (that) opens the way to other assassinations less easily excusable than his or not excusable at all” (Kanon 2015). Indeed, it was, as the precedent of the Tehlirian case would serve as a much cited example to those wishing to justify the ethical and moral implications of Armenian terrorist acts in the 70’s and 80’s (Gunter 2007:114).



### ***3.3 Evolving Armenian Terrorism***

Following Raphael Lemkin's creation of the term of genocide and the United Nation's adoption of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, many Armenians saw that their experience fit into the definition. This would be the first ripple in the awakening of the Armenian consciousness. However, it would not be until 1965, 50 years since the beginning of the mass slaughter, that waves would be made. Uruguay recognized the Armenian genocide in 1965, the first country to do so (Lomsadze 2013).

Commemorative events took place across the globe in Tehran, Marseilles, and Beirut on April 24, 1965. More surprisingly, in Yerevan tens of thousands of Armenians protested against the culture of silence imposed by the Soviet Politburo (DeWaal 2015:140). From Deir ez-Zor in Syria, once home to the concentration camp of Armenians driven out of the Ottoman empire, the bones of the dead were brought to the holy city of Etchmiadzin for reburial (Black 2015). These events were allowed to proceed by the leaders of Soviet Armenia and April 24, 1965 would serve as a wakeup call to diasporans throughout the world.

The combination of diasporan events and the nationalistic outburst in Soviet Armenia would send shockwaves through Turkey (Bobelian 2011). The construction of the modern Turkish nation had been founded upon the forgetting and the denial of the existence of non-Turkish elements of Anatolia (Aybak 2016:125). Thus, there had largely existed a culture of amnesia surrounding long ago events of 1915. This collective silence would come crashing down as this Armenian awakening would also give birth to a violent movement, one which retaliated against the lack of justice for the crimes against humanity inflicted upon the Armenians.

Assassinations and terrorism would again be the methods of choice. Understandably so as terrorism is created out "of an imbalance of power and a real frustration at the impotence of political means of change" (Pettiford and Harding 2010:14). The new Armenian terrorist groups were embittered with the perceived injustice that Turkey never truly had to answer for the crimes it committed. For these Armenians, peaceful means had failed and the genocide was in danger of being forgotten. Only spectacular acts could bring this crime back to the forefront of everyone's mind and internationalize the need of justice for Armenians.

This movement would start in the already bloody theatre of the Lebanese civil war with the formation of the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA). ASALA was created in the then Armenian diasporan political capital of Beirut 1975 by Hagop Hagopian



and a number of other radical left-wing Armenians (DeWaal 2015:151). ASALA took inspiration from and cultivated close ties with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) (Wilkinson 1983:346). Monte Melkonian, a prominent ASALA member and later a commander in the Nagorno-Karabakh war, wrote in his posthumously published journal that the PLO were instrumental to the development of ASALA in the late 60's and early 70's and indeed "during this time several Palestinian resistance organizations provided their Armenian comrades with extensive military training" (Gunter 2007:112).

A second group would enter the Armenian terrorist scene, the Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide (JCAG). JCAG was founded by the right-wing Dashnaks of the Armenian Revolutionary Foundation (ARF) to keep party members from joining the Marxist ASALA (Gunter 2007:112). The fact that the Dashnaks felt the need to even create their own terrorist alternative shows that many Armenians were receptive to this method of political change making (Dugan et al. 2008:235). Overall, while JCAG actually assassinated more Turkish diplomats than ASALA, it was the latter which received more media attention because Turkey and its Cold War allies focused more upon the left-wing ASALA which was purportedly being funded by the Soviets (DeWaal 2015:154).

The goals of ASALA and JCAG were similar as they both wished to compel the Turkish Government to acknowledge publicly its responsibility for the Armenian Genocide in 1915 as well as pay reparations and restoration of the homeland by ceding the territory of Eastern Anatolia which they deem Western Armenia (Wilkinson 1983:346). They demanded justice but the methods employed are of course not just. Both Armenian terrorist groups would end up conducting 188 operations worldwide from 1973 to 1985 (Gunter 2007:109). ASALA would ultimately be responsible for killing 66 people and injuring 445 more and JCAG with 40 fatalities and 26 injuries (Dugan et al. 2008:240).

Aside from political leanings, where these two terrorist organizations further differed was in which people were targeted. ASALA targeted not only Turkey but any 3rd party which got in the way, so to speak, of their achievement of their stated demands. In 1980, the Swiss government arrested two individuals suspected of having links to the group and ASALA initiated a wave of reprisals and initiated 32 attacks against targets and that these attacks would not cease until the release of the two Armenian suspects (Wilkinson 1983:347). In 1982, an administrative attaché at the Turkish Embassy of Portugal was shot dead by ASALA agents. The attaché's wife



was caught in the crossfire and she died months later due to complications from her injuries (Ben Aharon 2019:283). This is a tragically common example of how ASALA did not care who would be neutralized in the process of achieving their strategic objectives. The most important aspect of any ASALA attack was that it needed to attract attention, thus putting into focus their cause and creating greater hope to achieve justice for the genocide (Hoffman 2006:72).

JCAG was more disciplined in its behavior and its selection of targets. Its sole targets were individual Turkish diplomats as well as symbolic non-lethal attacks against Turkish institutions such as their diplomatic buildings and Turkish airlines (Hoffman 2006:72). JCAG was also averse to creating ties with other militant groups, unlike ASALA who actively courted the support of Palestinian terrorist organizations (Gunter 2007:115). Though isolated from other groups, as a result of its connections to the Dashnaks and ARF's deep roots in the Armenian diaspora, JCAG did not encounter complications in recruitment or fundraising (Dugan et al. 2008:236).

ASALA and JCAG would proclaim that they had broad public support from the Armenian diaspora. Hagop Hagopian claimed in 1980 that "In five years we managed to win for ourselves the support of the Armenian masses and the democratic and revolutionary forces throughout the world" (Gunter 2007:117). ASALA found popular support in the diaspora. In 1982, after 4 ASALA commandos were arrested for taking hostage the Turkish Counsel of Paris, more than 5,000 French Armenians donned ASALA t-shirts, badges and flew flags and organized hunger strikes in support of the detainees (Dugan et al. 2008:234). Dashnak papers would proclaim that the actions taken by "the Justice Commandos against Turkish officials are supported by a mass of the Armenian people since the Oppressor (Turkey) is being defied" (Gunter 2007:115).

Not everyone; however, would approve of ASALA and JCAG's tactics. Both organizations polarized the Armenian diaspora. ASALA and JCAG were immensely popular in Lebanon but many in the United States decried the terrorist actions of these Armenians (DeWaal 2015:157). In 1983, ASALA's popularity in France would start to decline after Hagop Hagopian tried to twice order the execution of Ara Toranian, a popular figure in the French-Armenian community and co leader of the Conseil de Coordination des organisations Arméniennes de France.



Wanton acts of indiscriminate violence would start to spell the end for ASALA. Hagopian ordered several deadly attacks, one of which was perpetrated at the Orly airport in Paris. In the Orly attack, an Armenian terrorist brought a bomb intended for the cargo hold of the plane; however, it detonated prematurely killing four French, two Turks, one American and one Swede (DeWaal 2015:158). France would arrest 51 Armenians who had suspected connections to the Orly bombing. In retaliation for what they deemed to be repressive actions against these Armenians, ASALA would detonate bombs in the offices of Air France and the French Embassy in Tehran (Wilkinson 1983:347). Armenian diasporans who did wish to achieve universal recognition would continue to become more and more alienated by the horrible attacks being perpetrated in name of genocide remembrance (Hoffman 2006:73). Member Monte Melkonian would be interviewed about the attack and he commented, “Orly claimed innocent lives. It debases our struggle” (Gunter 2007:119).

Internal struggle was well documented in ASALA and this would be the final nail in the coffin of the organization. In the beginning of the early 80’s the group had already started to splinter and their campaign faltered. Hagop Hagopian, who already had shown signs of mental instability, descended further into madness, group morale falling with it. Hagopian started going after his own people. He deprived his commandos of their freedom by subjecting them to censorship and withholding their identity papers, money, and food. He even executed members who tried to desert the organization (Dugan et al. 2008:234). Hagopian would then murder his own wife and then was eventually assassinated by his rivals in Athens (DeWaal 2015:157). ASALA would soon fall into irrelevance thereafter.

Considerably less is known about JCAG and its disintegration. It was a highly effective organization. JCAG’s assassins were disciplined which led to less civilian casualties with no Orly styled attacks and there were also no notable internal squabbles (Dugan et al. 2008:238). Nevertheless, just as JCAG’S birth would be sparked with the creation of ASALA, its decline would follow the same concurrent pattern. Some believe a ceasefire was brokered with JCAG. Without naming any sources, *The Wall Street Journal* alleged that the group “had yielded to CIA pressure exerted through Dashnag intermediaries” thus putting an end to their blood-soaked crusade (DeWaal 2015:158).

The terrorist plots of both ASALA and JCAG would bring the events of 1915 back into the forefront of the minds of Turkish leaders and the world. As one US Department of State



official would put it, “by resorting to terrorism, Armenian extremists were able to accomplish in 5 years what legitimate Armenian organizations have been trying to do for almost 70 years—internationalize the Armenian cause” (Hoffman 2006:73). However, these bloody campaigns would not achieve their strategic goal of justice: the recognition of the genocide, nor the surrender of Eastern Anatolia and payment of reparations. In fact, Turkey’s resolve to deny that any purposeful wrongdoing or specified intent to commit genocide had taken place in 1915 was strengthened (Wilkinson 1983:349). Even Monte Melkonian would admit that the continuous assaults against Turkish people and institutions meant that “the Turkish government was finding it easier to muster anti-Armenian chauvinism” (Dugan et al. 2008:237). To this day the Turkish government commemorates the diplomats and their families who were killed by Armenian terrorists.

The terrorist methods of the past have implications for the current strategy in which Armenians globally pursue this recognition. At the end of the day while acts of violence brought the Armenian genocide back to the forefront of everyone’s mind, it had negative consequences in Turkey as it rekindled anti-Armenian sentiments in Turkey (DeWaal 2015:163). Due to Turkey's invasion of Cyprus, it had bigger fish to fry during the 1970’s. The change in denial strategy did not consolidate itself until after the 1980 military coup (Dixon 2010:470). From this point the wall of denial started to be reinforced as pamphlets and publications using Ottoman sources favorable to the Turkish position challenged Armenian claims of genocide (Aybak 2016:126). From 1983, “the Armenian question” started to appear as subject matter in universities and secondary schools. These materials defended the deportations as appropriate and focused heavily on Armenian violence perpetrated against Turks before and after World War I (Dixon 2010:473). The terror attacks being committed against Turkish diplomats and citizens ultimately fed into the narrative that Armenian people instigated Ottoman empire and due to their violence, their deportations were necessary (Dixon 2010:471).

### ***3.4 The Case for Legal Recognition***

Justice still remains elusive for the Armenians. Today, for the Armenian diaspora, no matter the nationality, socioeconomic status or political opinion, the universal legal recognition of the Armenian Genocide has become a strong rallying cause worldwide (Zarifian 2014:506). After the genocide, Armenians were scattered all across the globe. With the absence of the



Armenian state, the campaign for genocide recognition effectively served as a binding agent in the identity formation of the Armenian diaspora and became the *hai dat* (Koinova 2019).

Today 32 nations recognize the Armenian genocide (Borger 2019). Uruguay, home to South America's largest Armenian communities, became the first state to recognize the genocide on its 50th anniversary in 1965 (Lomsadze 2013). Many Western democracies such as France and Italy have officially acknowledged the genocide despite a barrage of Turkish threats to the French and Italian economies. However, for the United States, home to one of the world's largest Armenian populations, the road to recognition is incomplete. As early as 1990 the US Senate debated over the usage of the term genocide in application to the Armenian case (DeWaal 2015:173). Republicans and Democrats have made several attempts to introduce laws affirming the Armenian genocide since 1990 (Zarifian 2013:80).

The question over the application of the word genocide to the 20th century massacres has been an important issue for hopeful presidential candidates in the United States. In key swing states like Florida, home to a sizable ethnic Armenian community, every vote counts and the vocal support of genocide recognition can have an impact. Florida was a battleground state between Republicans and Democrats in 2000 and Armenian Americans learned Republican reportedly because of the previous Democratic administration's refusal to recognize the genocide (Zarifian 2014:506). Years later, when campaigning for the White House, Barack Obama promised to push for the recognition of the Armenian genocide (Borger 2019). During his time as a senator, Obama defended the former US Ambassador to Armenia John Evans who was sacked from the State Department for deliberately and publicly using the word genocide to describe the events of 1915 (DeWaal 2015:224). However, during Obama's 8 years in the White House, his administration failed to deliver on the campaign promise with top aides, including Samantha Power, coming out years later to express their regret on the situation (Toosi 2018).

It would not be until 2019 that the United States House of Representatives would successfully vote to formally recognize the Armenian genocide. The symbolic vote was overwhelmingly in favor of recognizing the early 20th century systematic murders of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire as genocide in a 405-11 margin (*RFI* 2019). There were notable abstentions such as Democratic Representative Ilhan Omar who voted present. After facing backlash from her present vote, Omar stated on Twitter that genocide recognition "should not be



used as a cudgel in a political fight. It should be done based on academic consensus outside the push and pull of geopolitics" (Arkin 2019).

The US Senate would eventually follow suit in acknowledging the genocide but only after several setbacks. Three Republican senators attempted to individually block the recognition proposal, viewing the measure as another move further jeopardizing an already complex geopolitical situation. Senator Kevin Cramer, like his colleagues, rested on the argument that it would not be wise to further endanger the United States' precarious relationship with Turkey, adding "At the right time, we may pass it" (Zengerle 2019). As it would stand the United States' relationship with Turkey, which has been on a downward spiral for several years, took a turn for the worse in 2019 after Ankara's continuing offensive in northeastern Syria and their purchase of Russian S-400 missile systems (*RFERL* 2019). Nevertheless, the proposal would be again brought to the Senate floor and unanimously passed in the end of 2019 (Borger 2019). Senator Ted Cruz celebrated the recognition stating that the Senate "finally took a stand and spoke the truth -- spoke the truth to darkness, spoke truth to evil, spoke truth to murder, spoke truth to genocide -- and finally honored the 1.5 million innocent lives lost" (*RFERL* 2019).

Undoubtedly, the decision at both levels of the Congress to recognize the Armenian genocide at the time it did was political. The Trump administration's choice not to follow through on recognition would also prove to be a calculated political move. The administration pushed Republican Senator Lindsey Graham's to block bringing the proposal to the Senate floor for a vote (Woodward 2019). While many were hopeful Trump would recognize the genocide, in the end it was unsurprising his decision against it. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatened that if the Trump administration was to recognize the events of 1915 as genocide that he would be forced to consider closing strategic U.S. military bases in Incirlik and Kurecik (McGarry 2019). To some such a drastic move by Turkey seems unlikely; however, in 1998 when the US State Department released from the archives eyewitness accounts describing how thousands of innocent Armenians were butchered and a bill was introduced in the Senate to recognize the genocide, Turkey blocked US Navy ships from strategically important waters and banned military training operations on their territory (Holthouse 2018). Trump is also quite chummy with Erdogan and considers him to be a "friend" and "a hell of a leader" (Finnegan 2019).



Diasporans around the world would voice their disapproval and influential members in the Californian Glendale community like Harut Sassounian would call on their Armenian compatriots to not vote for Trump in the 2020 presidential election (2019). While Trump's blockage of the recognition was a disappointment to many, the Armenian American diaspora has accomplished much in the country in the battle for genocide acknowledgement. While nationally the executive and bodies like the State Department have yet to officially use the term genocide, 49 out of 50 states have recognized the Armenian genocide leaving only Mississippi ([anca.org/armenian-genocide/recognition](http://anca.org/armenian-genocide/recognition)). This is largely due to the tireless activism of Armenian American diasporan groups across the country. The Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) is largely responsible for the successful grassroots organizing of state legislatures and the US Congress.

Since its founding in 1941, ANCA has become a major lobbying power in the US and serves as a role model to foreign Armenian diasporan organizations (Koinova 2019). The goals of ANCA echo those of ASALA and JCAG. They wish to compel the Turkish Government to acknowledge publicly its responsibility for the Armenian Genocide in 1915, as well as pay reparations and help the restoration of the homeland by ceding the territory of Eastern Anatolia which they deem Western Armenia. However, the Turkish lobby is also very powerful in Washington and has millions lobbying against US affirmation of the Armenian genocide (Zarifian 2014:509). The Turkish lobby has had a startling rate of success in lobbying even the top levels of government in the United States (Holthouse 2008). The combination of Turkish lobbying and very real threats against American interests in the Middle East and Black Sea region were reason enough for the Trump administration to block the affirmation of the Armenian genocide.

### ***3.5 Forgoing Justice? Rapprochement with Turkey***

Due in part to Armenia's quest for genocide recognition and Turkish denial of the genocide, diplomatic relations between these two neighbors are not simple, in fact it would be more accurate to say they are non-existent. The border between the two nations has been closed since Armenia regained independence. It remains likely that they will stay closed due to Armenia's continuing occupation of Azerbaijan's territory but also due to Armenia's dedication to achieving universal affirmation of the genocide. Armenia remains dedicated to the recognition



of the genocide; however, historically this has been the “hai dat” of the diaspora (Koinova 2019). The diaspora and the first government of independent Armenia were often directly at odds with each other. Levon Ter-Petrosyan, the first president of the new republic, did not support the precondition of Turkish recognition of the genocide for normalizing relations with Ankara (Gasparyan 2016:269). However, in 2008 Yerevan tried to make steps to normalizing relations with Ankara in what is now known as football diplomacy.

Following Russian invasion of Georgia and a faltering economy in Armenia, Armenia and Turkey tried to push past the century of cold relations. It was greeted domestically with protests by some but the political will was present in the leadership of both countries in 2008 (de Breda and Mkrtchyan 2008). The diaspora was outraged with the prospect of the two countries normalizing relations. Prominent Armenian-American historian Richard Hovannisian stated that “The proper order must be recognition of the crime and only then the formation of commissions to seek the means to gain relief from the suffocating historical burden” (DeWaal 2015:220).

Azerbaijan would soon register its complaints of betrayal to Turkey. Moreover, diasporans worldwide protested the initiative and saw the talks as using the genocide as a bargaining chip just so that Armenia could improve its poor economic situation (DeWaal 2015:230). The fear that efforts to achieve justice were voiced loudly in various diaspora groups. The protests were so successful that a ministry for the diaspora was created to reestablish trust between the diaspora and the homeland (Gasparyan 2016:277). Soon after, the combination of complications with Azerbaijan, the protest of the Armenian diaspora and the general air of distrust the talks were dead in the water yet justice for the diaspora remained ever as elusive as before. With neither side backing down from their respective historical narratives of the events of 1915, the situation remains unlikely to change.



## **Chapter 4: Method**

The data presented in this study has been collected from interviews. The interviewees were selected from the Armenian diaspora. It is important here to distinguish the differences between members of the Armenian diaspora and those born and raised in Hayastan or the Republic of Armenia. As discussed in the previous chapter the two groups may be connected through common heritage but after decades apart a divergence was created. Most notably this divergence is apparent in language but also in socioeconomic status, demography, and social behavior. How the homeland and the diaspora have chosen to deal with genocide denial and recognition also differs. The campaign to recognize the genocide has been more a priority in the diaspora than in Armenia itself (Gasparyan 2016:266). While Armenia was stuck behind the iron curtain various diaspora coalitions, who were banned from operating in the Soviet Union, led this campaign forward (Koinova 2019). It is also worth noting that the diaspora itself is not a monolith. Participants hail from the United States, Lebanon, and Syria.

The research question centrally asks how young Armenian diasporans understand the history and future of the fight against negation and injustice. To answer this and because this project is a case study aiming to understand how genocide denial, recognition and justice are interpreted within the Armenian diaspora, in-depth interviews were a natural choice to dig deeper into the views, values, and beliefs of these young diasporans. Any other method would not appropriately allow a full understanding. The questions utilized in the interview were open ended to allow for highly textured responses. In-depth one-on-one interviews are particularly suited to highly sensitive, taboo, or personal topics and eliminate the concern for the interviewee of what is generally socially appropriate to respond (Guest et al. 2020:5).

The participant diasporans are young, ages 20 to 40. The sample size of the study is 13. Each interview was conducted within an hour, audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Originally it was decided that interviews would be conducted in Yerevan, Armenia. This city was chosen as the setting for various reasons. Yerevan acts as a homing beacon to many diasporans. I went there to interview but as soon as I arrived in the country the first case of COVID-19 was registered. It would be shortly after that a state of emergency would be declared and in person recruitment and interviews would be impossible. Participants were then recruited via Facebook through Armenian diasporan groups. It would have been ideal to collect a larger



number of interviews but given the ensuing chaos a global pandemic, this became difficult to accomplish.

All interviews took place online. Because of the pandemic, participants were scattered across the globe, some at home but others thousands of miles away. Participants were asked a series of questions concerning the topics discussed in the previous chapter. The interviews started with probing their thoughts on Armenian genocide denial and their perception of justice following the genocide. Logically following these questions came inquiries on their opinions of the methods used to obtain justice, like Soghomon Tehlirian, ASALA, JCAG, Orly and their effects on the cause. Next came their thoughts on the US House of Representatives' and Senate's decision to recognize the Armenian genocide and President Donald Trump's decision to block the recognition of the Armenian genocide. Respondents were then asked to discuss the current status of commemoration and recognition of the genocide as well as this as the cause or the hatred of the Armenian diaspora. The interview concluded with the thorny topic of Turkey and Armenia normalizing relations without Turkish recognition of the genocide.

Reflexivity is an essential part of conducting qualitative research. While I have been studying Armenian issues since 2016 and live in the country, I am not ethnically Armenian. I believe this was a strength because as discussed the respondents did not have to worry about the social desirability of their answers due to the fact, I am not a fellow member of their diasporan community who might judge positions not commonly spoken. A constraint based on my group membership is that I do not speak Western Armenian. This limits the amount of people I was able to reach who are Syrian or Lebanese Armenian.

In total 13 interviews were conducted with 7 women and 6 men. All names used are pseudonyms to protect participants' identities. From the Americans we have Lilit, a 26-year-old pharmaceutical student. Mariam is a journalist and 39 years old. Her husband participated in a separate interview, Davo, who is a jeweler and 40 years old. Yana is 30 and working in the field of education. Hasmik is also in the education field and 28 years old. Mane is a history teacher and 29 years old. Gor works in the agricultural field and is 27 years old. Areg is a mechanic and technician and 30 years old and Hayg is a 25-year-old Masters student. Participants from Syria include Vardan, a 36-year-old teacher. Shogher is a 26-year-old dentist. Anoush is 24 and working in journalism and translation services. Finally, Arpi is a 38-year-old psychologist and hails from Lebanon.



## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

This chapter focuses upon the responses collected and aims to identify common features, themes, and thought processes of Armenian diasporans. Although the specific experiences of each participant differed and all hailed from different corners of the world, many of the accounts they gave converged in opinion. Nearly all felt it necessary to clarify they had unique or unpopular positions about the quest for genocide recognition and justice. But indeed, with nearly all declaring their opinions may be anomalies, commonalities arose very quickly. Respondents drew upon similar narrative styles and imagery. Levels of hopefulness fluctuated throughout the interview, shifting more toward cynicism in the prospect of obtaining justice. Respondents would often reason out loud, like Mariam who described, “It’s just that that would never happen so I don’t think... It would never happen, so I don’t think it’s realistic.” Others like Vardan flat out stated “My thoughts about the justice, of course we will not win anything.”

### ***Denial***

Interviewees commonly echoed the thoughts of Elie Wiesel, like Anoush who described denial as “a second genocide.” Lilit voiced her vexation by Armenian genocide denial stating, “It’s both frustrating and confusing at the same time” as well as calling it “a crime against humanity.” Hasmik similarly found it as upsetting because, “your ancestors, your family go through this horrific thing. And then for that on top of it to be denied for so long” is what Wiesel described as a double killing. Again, genocide denial strives not only to kill the memory of a genocide but insults the dignity of survivors and their future generations (Holthouse 2018). It robs victims and their descendants of psychological peace. Yana was in agreeance and thought that denial “gives no peace to the victims” and but for this continued denial Armenians “wouldn’t have to rally and make this such a part of people’s consciousness as a collective if it was accepted... it is something we could move past.”

Negation of a genocide has not only consequences for history and truth but it inflicts pain upon the survivors and their descendants. A common theme evoked by respondents was that genocide denial is psychologically painful and that denial of their group’s “persecution, degradation, and suffering is the ultimate cruelty - on some level worse than the persecution itself” (Lipstadt 1994:27). Vardan described it as “very painful” and Mariam as “very deep.”



Others went further using physical imagery to describe this feeling. Arpi compared it to “a wound that doesn’t heal easily” as well as Yana who described this as “a very open wound.” Mane likened it to being “a deep scar that can't be... can't ever go away, and not recognizing it won't even let that scar or that wound heal or close up.”

Denial is also part in parcel of any genocide and “is the final stage that lasts throughout and always follows” mass slaughter (Stanton 2016). When describing what denial meant to them, some respondents such as Hayg were inclined to agree with Stanton, “Denial is an integral part of genocide, this attempt to cover the tracks is not separated from genocide, but the same process.” Similarly, Areg would say “I'd have to say that it's expected but it's still despicable behavior.” His reasoning would echo the thoughts of Shogher who says “I think it's the case with every sort of trauma out there. It's just people denying it because... for specific reasons that they have, or maybe because it was too gruesome for them to believe it.” Respondents also used analogical bridging to connect between the denial of their genocide to that of the Holocaust. For Hasmik, it was obvious that the Armenian genocide is “far less accepted when it comes to the Holocaust, but still certainly a thing, Holocaust denial.” Yana worried that “any horrific event can happen and the perpetrators can just cover it up or rewrite history.”

Knowing the history behind the word genocide itself and the reasons which are directly linked to the Armenian genocide further stymied 3 respondents to the incredulity of the Turks. Hayg knew that the events of 1915 and Soghomon Tehlirian’s trial “had a profound impact on him” to coin the term genocide. Lilit and Davo respectively thought “Just to think that there was actually a word made up for it, and the fact that we use it for that, it's just kind of like it makes it even harder to deny it. Like it was a word that was made specifically because of these events” and “Look, guys, you don't want to call it a genocide but here is the person that invented the word. And here he is telling you why he invented the word.”

### ***Justice***

For many respondents, recognition was thought as the bare minimum in obtaining justice. Lilit felt that “a simple declaration of these events and acceptance of them happening is kind of already like enough.” For Hayg, an easy “Okay, it happened before very sorry. Let's just try and move together forwards and not antagonize each other” would suffice. For Yana, recognition would be a relief she wouldn’t “have to try to explain it or have to try to prove that it is



something that happened in history and give you articles and give you my family stories and give you all this stuff” just to convince others the genocide is fact.

For respondents like Areg, Mane, Mariam and Davo it was important to note that the recognition of the genocide should be coming from Turkey and should be based on intrinsic desire to right the wrongs of the past. Areg thought it was important they do this not “because some larger country pressured them into it, like generally acknowledging on behalf of the State and convincing the population of the country that it is the right step.” Mane too believes “justice would be recognition, specifically from the Turkish government, but they themselves in their country, among their people accept that this happened, that it was something they did in the past and it was wrong.” Mariam suggested a way of accomplishing this would be “to get into the minds of Turkish, the normal Turkish citizen.” Davo similarly thought that the messaging on genocide recognition was too aggressive for Turkey to accept. He instead proposed “So I shouldn't be like attacking (Turkey). I should be saying, hey, join me in finding the closure on what happened in that history.”

In a way, certain respondents even understood why the Turkish state is so adamant in its denial and its unwillingness to recognize the Armenian genocide. For Areg, he compared the non-recognition of the genocide to the denial of any crime, “Like you would expect the murderer would go to court and be like, no, I plead not guilty.” And like in a criminal case where damages would be awarded to a victim, Shogher understood very well why recognition had not yet been accomplished supposing “Why would the person admit that they are wrong if they have nothing to lose? But if they have something to lose?” Similarly, Davo attributed the continued denial to a “lack of education and misinformation and propaganda” and because Turkish people think “If we recognize it, we're going to have to give money. If we recognize it, we're going to lose our lands.” In step with this Mariam reasoned, “Turks are extremely scared about that and I think that is why it is the argument. When Turks ask me well it's been 100 years, why does our government care? Well you realize the Turkish state was founded on dead Armenian money. Right?”

Hasmik, Gor and Vardan; however, believed that recognition was not so consequential or not enough to constitute justice. Hasmik was frustrated with this question for recognition stating “I don't expect Turkey to recognize the genocide. I don't want Turkey to recognize the genocide. Turkey would say that the country that exists (today) is different from the empire that existed



then including the population and all of those things.” Similarly, for Gor, he said “I don’t care if the international community knows that the genocide happened. In my opinion it changes nothing.” He continued, “So to me it's a matter of semantics, I don’t think denial is really a big deal.” For Vardan, he says recognition “only is not justice for me. It will not add any value, okay, maybe it's nice.”

The three above were the only to find recognition as rather insignificant. The other respondents thought recognition to be a necessary measure of justice and framed this as the first step in obtaining other forms of justice such as reparations. Only after recognition was achieved could higher levels of justice occur. As Yana aptly put, “Until we get there I cannot even fathom having the conversations taken seriously about any more than that.” In these interviews the most sought after reparation was housing, land and property (HLP) reparations which is often the least implemented kind of transitional justice ([ictj.org/reparations](http://ictj.org/reparations)). Perhaps knowing this fact subconsciously, most respondents wanted territorial reparations but viewed it as an impossibility. For Arpi she wanted the lands back but she admitted “So I’m dreaming but this is right. My right.” Hayg took a similar position in terms of the land being their heritage, “the people like me, deserve to have that once again.” Again, cynicism featured itself prominently. Lilit wondered, “I don't know about the whole territorial thing. I'm not really sure what Turkey can do about that.”

Despite Ararat not being located today in Armenia it is one of the most identifiable symbols of the nation. The mountain was a specific point for Mariam as she thought “giving back Ararat would be nice. I don’t know if they would ever do that. But it doesn’t mean anything to them. Like it doesn’t mean anything to Turkey other than we took it from the Armenians. Whereas for Armenians it means so much.” For Vardan, without land reparations he stated, “I’ll not be happy because til now I can see Sis and Ararat occupied.” Many Armenian churches and cultural heritage sites are also located in Turkey. Both Arpi and Hayg noted their destruction or occupation as a major problem. This speaks to the idea that the implementation of HLP reparations presents a stumbling block to durable desire for regional harmony if not solved (McCallin 2012:4).

However, the granting of HLP reparations was for some an unrealistic idea or could even cause more problems than it solved. For Hasmik, “I’m not looking for land necessarily or not at all.” Davo believes, “I don't think like the lands should be part of it... the Turks are able to hold on to and be like, see, they want our lands!” For Mane a fundamental problem arose with



territorial reparations, “They took away generations of Armenians, they took away... there's no way you could give that back. Like you could give us the land of physical land back, but the people who would have occupied that land you took away from us.” Indeed, restitution will not “reverse the clock”, the people who would have lived in Western Armenia were wiped out and the traces of memory are fading (Alexander 2014:879).

Land reparations are best suited to correct ongoing injustices rather than historical ones. As Shogher rightly points out “Okay, let's say we get the lands back, who's gonna move there?” Over 100 years have passed since the original expulsion that even if the land was returned to its rightful owners, the situation has evolved greatly over time as the land has been possessed by other people for years and bearing in mind that the legal doctrine *nemo dat quod non habet* faces immense difficulties in its application to HLP reparations (Alexander 2014:875). For Areg this is quite evident, “But I mean, so much time has passed that differently. The Kurdish population lives in Western Armenia now.” This also troubles Anoush, “If we say if it is our right to go back there and live in our lands, what happens to the Kurds? We’re killing them! Or they are being exiled from where they live and it's not their fault that they live there.”

Nevertheless, for Gor, this does not pose an issue. In his view, HLP reparations don’t cut it, the Turks will never willingly give Western Armenia so justice is militarily taking back the land. “I don’t think it’s fair to say that like people in Turkey who have no idea what the genocide was just give up their lands, like they know they’re living on our lands, even if they don’t know full well. Like me in America, if the Native Americans decided to take back the US, their own native lands by any means necessary? More power to them. It's my fault for not knowing where I’m living.” Vardan similarly advocated, “If you want to win the fight, you have to use your hands. You have to use your guns, you have to kill.” While the Armenian Genocide Reparations Study Group (AGRSG) does not advocate for military intervention, both Gor and Vardan’s points are in line with some of the key ideas of the AGRSG. Contemporary Turkish people are responsible for reparations because their state still benefits today from the genocide and justice will never be “possible without some kind of disruption” (Therault et al. 2015:90). Both Gor and Vardan concede that “military as forcing Turkey, it's not an option right now.” The crux of this issue remains, for these diasporans the land is non-negotiable.

Eastern Anatolia or Western Armenia holds such an importance in the topic of justice for the Armenian genocide. Ararat, the ancient cities, churches, monasteries and cultural heritage



sites form a significant part of the ancestral homeland of Armenians. For this reason, in these interviews HLP reparations were discussed to a far greater extent as a means of justice than monetary and symbolic reparations. Achieving monetary reparations for Lilit, Hasmik, and Mariam was met with a level of general skepticism. Yana's point would summarize best their positions, "I mean so much was lost as a result of this genocide. And I'm sure that there are people that would like to see that happen as well but to be completely honest, I don't believe that is an entirely realistic thing to demand." Some respondents referenced Holocaust reparations like Anoush. "Turkey would compensate for what they did financially too, they would compensate financially like Germany did." While this model was cited, other respondents doubted if it was possible in their case. Areg stated, "I think people follow the Jewish Holocaust example too literally." For Gor as well, "I don't expect reparations, I don't think anyone has gotten reparations for anything besides Israel for the Holocaust."

As discussed in the second chapter, symbolic reparations like official public apologies, commemorations, and memorials help bring justice to historical wrongs. These acts reinforce the idea that state perpetrated abuses are criminal and deserving of official condemnation. While this type of reparation is increasingly common worldwide, they were almost absent from these diasporans conversations on justice. Mane was the only respondent to mention a strong need for symbolic reparations, stating "I think that the Turkish Government perhaps needs to pay for some type of like, you know, or fund some type of campaign where it's like this memorial or recognition or something needs to be done." Lilit would appreciate an apology, Davo as well but he isn't holding his breath on that, Armenians "just want Turkey to say, 'Yes, this happened. We're sorry.' Or let's, even if they don't want to say we're sorry like, let's come together and talk about it." Gor on the other hand firmly believed, "An apology isn't going to change anything." The weak demand for symbolic reparations stems from the fact that if Turkey has so vehemently denied the genocide for 105 years, receiving a sorry or memorialization of victims may be pushing it. Why would Turkey apologize to the Armenians after it has so long portrayed the alleged victims as terrorists or traitors?

### ***Operation Nemesis***

While Talaat Pasha had been condemned by a Turkish court martial and sentenced to death, his sentence would be carried out by an act of vigilante justice by the hands of an



Armenian. For these Armenians this was not described as vigilantism, simply as justice, justified or just desserts for the Pasha. Accountability for the crimes committed mattered most in this point of the interview. Areg stressed, “all the Turkish ministers and high generals involved in the genocide pretty much got away with it.” Vardan had similar thoughts on Tehlirian, “he tried to make the justice by killing who was planning” and executing the genocide. Hayg, “I think given the targets we're all somewhere between complicit to orchestrating genocide and that they had gotten away scot free? Or, you know, pretty scot free considering? The actions were very much justified.” For Mariam, she believed without Operation Nemesis would Tehlirian ever “get justice? Was this guy (Pasha) ever going to be held accountable by any other way?”

The series of assassinations committed by Operation Nemesis can be classified as revenge, which differs totally from justice; however, Shogher disagreed with this thought. For him, “That's that's justice. That's not retribution.” For Yana, it was “an empowering story.” And for Mane, “I think like the Armenian in me is feels like that justice was served and like I would lie if I said that a part of me doesn't feel a sense of satisfaction that that was his fate you know?” This theme of empowerment was also expressed through a common time travel trope, “If I could go back in time, I would kill Adolf Hitler.” This trope was touched upon by Hasmik who stated, “I don't think anyone would be faulted for saying I'm not going to say it but I don't think anyone be faulted for saying like I could, I would kill Hitler if I could go back in time. And that's what Soghomon Tehlirian did.” Comparing also to Hitler, Anoush felt, “I wouldn't feel bad for it, just as no one would feel bad for Hitler.”

A handful deemed statues appropriate. For Anoush, “he is a hero and he deserves to have statues commemorating him” and for Areg, “there is no limit to celebrate someone like Soghomon Tehlirian.” Gor believes “a statue is nice because it reminds people of the acts they did.” Mane deemed him as a “hero” and Hayg even had a sticker of Tehlirian on his water bottle. Both Hasmik and Yana felt it was odd based on your perspectives, as Yana summarizes, “For some he is a hero and for some you have a statue of an assassin, that's weird.” This demonstrates that despite expressing that Tehlirian had delivered justice or stating the murder was justified, many such as Mane believed “we're in such a moral gray area.” Some respondents felt the need to clarify they do not condone murder such as Hasmik who believed Talaat's assassination “was still murder in cold blood.” Only two respondents completely rebuked Tehlirian's method. Lilit voiced, “I don't really like the idea of using violence to solve violence. I don't know. I just feel



like there are probably more humane ways of doing it... I guess my overall opinion of him would be that I don't think he maybe had, he had like good intentions, but he just didn't carry them out in the best way." Arpi too stated, "I don't like violence. I like peace. I want peace all over the world, even with Turkish people."

### ***One Man's Terrorist***

Many of these young diasporans learned of groups like ASALA, JCAG, and Orly early on in their lives. For Yana, she discussed "growing up you are taught that, or at least in my case, you were taught that these people are heroes! They really put their lives on the line, no one was listening, no one cared about the Armenian cause or the Armenian genocide and these people took action." Anoush also discussed how she learned of ASALA, she recounted "They tell us that ASALA targeted Turks who were responsible and who were followers of Talaat Pasha. That's what I was taught for example. As you grow older, you'll start to doubt things..." Indeed, the stories surrounding these groups have been embellished, the tales of their heroism would even spark some questionable fashion. In open air markets in Yerevan one can easily find hats, t-shirts and other paraphernalia with ASALA's emblem printed upon them.

However, while these young diasporans were educated about other parts of the Armenian genocide, Soghomon Tehlirian, and the fight for recognition, several respondents were almost completely unfamiliar with these groups. For example, Lilit stated, "I would say as the everyday Armenian American, I have actually never heard of these groups before." Vardan and Mane had heard little of these groups. If the respondents did know about Armenian terrorism then they mostly only mentioned ASALA by name. Only 2 discussed JCAG and Orly by name, Anoush and Hayg. For Hayg it was because he "hadn't heard of them" however he did know of Orly. Only Anoush addressed all three separate organizations.

The reasons for this lack of knowledge of any of these groups could be multiple. It is a darker chapter in the history of the fight for genocide recognition, perhaps glossed over this very reason. Another plausible reason would be already in America these groups were quite controversial exactly because of their methods and after the bombing of Orly many more diasporans lost their taste for these revolutionaries (DeWaal 2015:157). Finally, in the current day and age, methods have switched to a battle more legal in nature. Diasporans now spend considerable money lobbying to achieve genocide recognition, endorsing past groups or even



publicizing their acts would be counterproductive at best to the cause. It would be worthwhile to explore how Turkish young people remember these groups and if they are more present in Turkish collective memory.

Only four respondents framed these actions as terrorism. Davo directly used the term “Armenian terrorists” with no justification for their actions and Hasmik labeled the tactics as “terrorist acts.” Mane too labeled this as “terrorism.” Shogher also labeled members of these groups as terrorists but he had some justifications for this. “I mean, yes, we have had terrorists, Armenian terrorists. They have done some bad stuff. I read an amazing quote one time, it said, in order for you to be a good person, you sometimes have to do bad stuff.” Others like Arpi and Lilit strongly disapproved of the methods but skirted around naming them specifically as terrorists. Lilit stated, “it’s just that word terrorist which kind of rings negatively in my ear.”

Three respondents framed the groups ASALA and JCAG as freedom fighters. Anoush embraced the label stating, “I don’t think of them as terrorists.” and “These people were patriots.” For Vardan, these groups were trying to get “justice for us.” He related it back to “We can’t ask in a nice way, there is no nice way to ask Turkey to return our rights.” Gor too believed in this sort of eye for an eye method of justice. “So, the assassination of Turkish diplomats I’m very for. It’s a very reasonable thing to do, they’re directly tied in with it, or even if they’re the children it I still think they have the right to execute those people for the continuation of the denial of the genocide and all those things.” Of these three Anoush and Gor found the Orly group’s actions to be unacceptable. For Anoush, she hadn’t ever heard about this attack. “I wasn’t told about the airlines who mostly had Americans, Swiss and French people. Obviously, I disagree with that.” Gor wondered, “Like what does France care about what happened to your people? I’m sure they feel bad but don’t bomb their planes to get recognition.” To a lesser extent than these three, Hayg believed that ASALA and JCAG were in a morally gray area “but Orly for example is unacceptable. To me it’s terrorism.” The rest of the respondents were less likely to clarify these groups as in a morally gray zone as they did with Soghomon Tehlirian.

Among these respondents, few explicitly distinguished the difference between Soghomon Tehlirian and ASALA, JCAG, and Orly. This relates back to what Anoush and Yana discussed, they were taught these groups were heroes or that they were assassinating people directly responsible for the genocide. Of course, though, the victims of ASALA and the other groups were not genocidaires as the victims of Operation Nemesis were. They were Turkish diplomats



and random Turkish and non-Turkish civilians not even alive at the time the genocide was perpetrated. For Mariam, this was a problem. “Morally if you’re killing a young diplomat, I mean what do they have to do with it? They love their country, they’ve been taught lies since 30 years, what can you do?” Mane related that “you are a product of your environment” and Hayg admitted that their belief the genocide was not really that is because “they believe in this but they’re not doing it out of hatred or spite.”

Aside from recognizing that Turkish propaganda would play a huge role in forming the denial of the genocide, respondents also recognized that those being assassinated did not play a direct role in the massacres. For Yana, “anyone they would have killed would have been innocent because they are not a direct organizer or implementer of the Armenian genocide so how does that help?” Even Shogher and Anoush who presented defenses for the actions taken were bothered by this. For Shogher, he believed “You can’t put a whole nation under the mentality of a couple of people that committed the crimes in the past. Like, we can’t just go to Turkey right now and say yeah, your ancestors killed my ancestors. So it’s my right to kill you.” Anoush who framed these groups as freedom fighters and patriots questioned “like why would you kill a Turkish ambassador now? He is only doing what the government is asking him to do. For me, people now are mostly brainwashed.”

### ***Strategic Goals***

None of the groups mentioned above were able to achieve their strategic goals of recognition and reparations. When asked about this the respondents generally divided the impact of these group’s actions into three categories, their impact on Armenians, on Turks, and on the world. For Shogher, bad publicity is good publicity. “I mean, ASALA put the Armenian name on the map. Whether or not they did a good or bad thing.” Others were less positive. While they considered it may have publicized the Armenian struggle and galvanized Armenians, they admitted it had a negative effect on their reputation in Turkey and the international community. Anoush felt that “their impact on Armenians was oh wow, we have more patriots out there and like getting the job done but if we’re talking about Europe and America and they’re very western and progressive they’d be like ‘Oh no killing is not the answer.’”

Respondents made descriptive analogies to describe their feelings on how Turks and others may take these attacks in the fight for genocide recognition. They described this as



ammunition and fuel to further denial. Hayg felt that “these attacks had the positive impact to organize for the diaspora to look into picking up the nonviolent channels of recognition, but it certainly had a strong negative impact because it gave the perpetrators or deniers of genocide ammunition to further that denial.” Yana had a similar opinion thinking “maybe it helped rallies, you know, generations, you know future generations of Armenians” but she conceded that these terrorist acts could be “used as fuel” on the Turkish side. Turks could then say, “they kill innocent people and this and that.” And in that sense, I feel like it's, it's not helpful. It does the opposite actually.” Lilit discussed that terrorism wasn't effective because “it's like not going to extinguish the fire, you know, it's just going to make kind of bigger.”

Hasmik believed these groups made more of an impact “on the side of the genocide denier conversation.” As Davo would discuss it adds fuel to the “propaganda and disinformation.” Mariam agreed. “Well, the Turks definitely turned it around and made it like a see those Armenians, their lies” so “at the end of the day it was detrimental.” Mane felt a trap because “the world usually doesn't listen unless you are loud or violent or making an impact somehow” but at the same time using violence “doesn't make you any better, then you are the same.” Gor also thought the impact was menial as “it was pretty much to get people excited that diplomats were being assassinated. In terms of Armenian homeland, I don't want to say it was in vain but their efforts could have been much more better planned and directed to other places.” Areg thought at the end of the day “the Armenian lobby, like ANCA has made pretty much more progress worldwide, then ASALA ever did, but it was a start, right? It started in a certain way and obviously now it's that the method is civilized, right?”

### ***US Congress Recognition***

Only two respondents were genuinely excited by the US Congress recognition with no reservations on the matter. For Arpi the decision to recognize was “very important and every country counts” because “it is a big country and when they recognize, that is something very positive for us, for our ancestors.” Lilit too marked upon the importance of a country like the US recognizing the genocide, “I mean, the US is one of the most powerful countries in the world, and for them to recognize this, publicly like that on the world front, is a very big deal.” Yana summarized this feeling, “I think in our minds, well, once the US recognizes that then it's over. Like everything is gonna change and the whole world will rally behind us.”



Other reactions to the recognition ranged from disappointment with the politics infused with the decision to this recognition does nothing for the Armenian community. The timing and the politicization of the American recognition was a focal point with respondents framing the decision to finally acknowledge the genocide as “political”, “politicized, or “a political tool”. Some respondents were visibly irritated discussing this. Hayg called it “a spineless vote grab because it was popular to hate Turkey at the time.” Shogher explained the situation as “they just wanted to condemn Turkey for doing a bad thing. They just want to poke it like they wanted to poke Turkey.” Vardan was frustrated with diasporans like Lilit and Arpi who he viewed as too naive exclaiming, “Come on! No one cares about us!”

Others were disheartened describing their feelings on the recognition like Anoush who felt “that Armenia is just a pawn” because “if Turkey does something bad they’re (America) like oh we’ll recognize the Armenian genocide, stay put.” For Yana “it just seems so political and it almost like took the the spirit out of it almost have like this didn't seem like a genuine thing because you care about the Armenian Genocide, this is like a political stab at Turkey.” Areg also questioned the intentions of the Congress doubting they genuinely cared because “they decided that their morality was temporarily a little bit higher than the politics they were willing to have with the Republic of Turkey and decided here. We'll just recognize the genocide.” Overall, the mood was that the US recognition of the genocide was a necessary step but the timing and politicization of the matter cheapened the victory. The recognition itself wasn’t empty, it was recognized but not out of the kindness of people’s hearts.

For two respondents the recognition does not accomplish much because there are so many other issues that the Republic of Armenia faces. Hasmik detailed out recognition “wasn’t particularly meaningful to me because I don't... because I know that it's just a political tool. I know it is painful to a lot of people in the community for whom like this is the Armenian cause, but at the same time, like, well, what next?” For Gor it was a similar story, “almost the second strongest lobby in North America and it's pathetic, they’ve done nothing... I don’t think a single dollar should be spent on genocide recognition when Armenia as a state has so many projects that need to be focused on.”



### ***Trump's Rejection***

Trump's decision to deny the recognition of the Armenian genocide came as a surprise to no one in this study. Hasmik put it best, "the things that he says, the way that he acts like, it's entirely predictable in its unpredictability." While respondents weren't happy with this situation, they understood why it was so. Trump is Trump and the potential recognition could have irreparable consequences for the nation but more importantly for a narcissist, personal consequences. For Mariam, the president rejected this "because he is a nut job!" She continued, "Armenians were banking on the fact that he is Putin's friend like Putin is his handler but he is an asshole at the end of the day. And he has Azerbaijani friends." Hayg too thought "I don't think he can spell Armenia never mind, I don't have an awfully high opinion of the man, never mind know anything about what has happened in this country... So, again, it just has to do with his relationship with Turkey, his relationship with Erdogan." Arpi believed there is "too much politics is involved in this case. He has many good relationships with Turkey, he has financial situation with Turkey so it was expected that he is not going to admit or he is not going to continue with the recognition. As I told you before, he is not a wise man."

Respondents also thought that while Trump's decision was a blow, it was political and made sense for the United States. Shogher believed "if he didn't deny it, it would have been almost stupid of him to do that." The reason being as Anoush says, "Being an ally of Turkey has more advantage than them, like supporting justice for Armenia." Gor also thought it would be foolish for the United States, because "as an American, I would not accept the Armenian genocide because I'm looking for the interests of my own country." As Mane would point out, "the US will never accept the genocide unless Turkey falls out of their graces because... there's US military bases in Turkey." Areg also rightly drew attention to the fact that since "Clinton's era, you have all these presidents coming in and promising that they're going to recognize genocide. And Trump never really made that promise." At the end of the day many like Yana believed, "even the fact that it moves through the House and the Senate was a bit unbelievable."

On the possibility for future recognition, many were not optimistic like Anoush. "You can never win in politics and unfortunately we're caught up in that mess and even if the US does recognize it, it's still like they can un-recognize it whenever they want to." Vardan also said the politics of the recognition would play out as "they recognize it today, maybe tomorrow they will say we will not." Arpi and Lilit were again the optimists with Arpi stating it's "political I think,



but it is an undeniable fact. He cannot refuse for long.” Lilit too pronounced, “I’m not happy about it, but I’m hopeful that it’s a temporary situation and that it will change in the future with a different leader.” It could happen according to Shogher, “maybe Joe Biden would accept it and if he accepts it, okay, sure. Thank you, man.”

### ***Status of Commemoration and Recognition***

Many respondents remarked upon the ability to speak freely on the subject matter. My positionality often became a point of conversation before the interviews started. While some assumed outright, I was not Armenian, many still asked if I was ethnically Armenian. When those who questioned and learned I was not Armenian but living in the country and researching the genocide they were surprised an *odar* or non-Armenian and someone outside of this closely knit diaspora would even take interest in the topic. This speaks to an issue that Yana brought up in terms of what more could be done to achieve recognition and justice, “I think that the hardest thing has always been how do I get people who are not Armenian to care about this? That’s always been the biggest struggle.”

This is a struggle. How do you get people on board with recognition especially when it may be unheard of and politically costly? When asked about the status of commemoration and recognition, respondents gave varied answers. Some were proud that Armenians had come this far, like Mane who explained “of course, there’s always more that can be done, but with all the factors of our Armenians considered, I’m really proud of how hard we fight and how much we haven’t given up.” Others commented on how recognition and April 24th made them feel. For Shogher, having the chance to march to Tsitsernakaberd “gives a sense of home.” Areg remarked “I mean, it’s come a long way since it was just a Turkish flag burning.” Respondents were uncomfortable with this which still happens at commemoration events. Instead Hayg thought it paramount while Armenians “commemorate it’s very important to celebrate our life.” Yana too said, “I don’t want our commemoration to be angry and bitter and name calling like I also don’t think that gets us very far.” Hasmik believes would like “more positive aspects of the way the community commemorate the genocide. I would like to see more of that as opposed to the flag burning.”

To get more people to recognize the genocide, Anoush was at a loss. “I mean we’re ripping our assholes trying to get everyone to recognize the genocide! I don’t know what else we



can do! Clearly peace hasn't worked, violence hasn't worked." Mariam and Arpi thought a potential solution to the denial should concentrate on building human connections between Armenians and Turks. For Mariam, "It's when you're actually friends with someone, if these two countries had more connections, it really does work. Denial - you can no longer deny." Arpi also believed "there are a lot of educated people in Turkey, they know about the genocide, we need to depend on those people."

Education was emphasized by many of the diasporans. Hasmik wants genocide education "to be something that's part of our school curricula." Lilit recounted a vivid memory of her history class saying, "our world history textbook had like one paragraph on what they called the 'Armenian massacres'. Yeah, because I mean, that's what they they didn't wanna use the word genocide, of course. I mean, I specifically remember this too, like that image will forever be imprinted in my mind." Mane too recounted that her textbooks "use the words like possible genocide or alleged or no things like this, and that's hurtful is deeply, deeply hurtful." For Yana, genocide education meant "on April 24 we're not spending our time trying to, like, justify that it's something that happened. Instead, we're having those next step conversations of what it takes to recognize this as a genocide." Vardan remarked, we need "university studies like what you are doing now institutions, specialized institutions, these should run all the year." On the opposite end of the spectrum Gor who stated, "It doesn't matter to me if the Armenian genocide is in French textbooks or not, they've killed enough Africans to learn about their own crimes, they don't need to know about the crimes that happened to my people."

### ***Hai Dat***

Genocide recognition for Armenians has been instrumental in "creating common identities among them for generations in the absence of the Armenian state" (Koinova 2019). Arpi is inclined to agree as the diaspora is "all united for one cause." Shogher too would agree that, "It's good because nations need something to, that get them together that unifies them." However he would also say, "that our history is important, but the current people, current inhabitants of Armenia are more important than what was passed." This was the general mood of most participants. For Anoush, "This was 100 years ago but like actual people are dying in Karabakh" today. Yana described "As much as we rally around that Armenian genocide, it's not



to say that it's not an important thing... but that there needs to be room for more causes in the Armenian diaspora.”

Genocide recognition as the *hai dat* bothered Hasmik leaving her to explain, “Genocide recognition is not my Armenian cause.” For her “there's a lot of other things to talk about and think about and I think if we have too much genocide, we are ultimately defined by it.” This was a worry for many that by focusing too much on the genocide, not only were they trapping themselves in the past but that they would be forever defined as the victim. Hayg stated, “I'm not saying that we're not victims, we are, but it's not a nice thing to open with. And it's not a nice thing to have define who you are.” Vardan felt similarly, “when we talk about the genocide when we are the let's say publicizing it to the others, telling the others we are only standing in the victim” role. Yana conceded “it's a horrible thing and it should never be tolerated but at the same time our country needs us to help it in other ways. This cannot be the only, it can't be the defining thing of our people.” Gor too felt “I don't like that it is a part of our diasporan identity because, I'm not saying you're letting it define you but it's one thing if you're actively working to get that land back through whatever means.” While this was an unspeakable atrocity, being defined eternally as a victim makes these diasporans is undesirable and for good reason. Looking to the past cannot always solve present and future problems.

Recognizing the genocide has always been more of a priority in the diaspora than in the Republic of Armenia (Gasparyan 2016:266). Interviewees felt this disconnect. Gor noticed this in the commemorations, “even though there are Armenians here who are descendants of the genocide, just during the USSR there was no culture of revenge or of homeland things like that, it was more mourning.” Yana felt that “the genocide is so much a part of that narrative of your identity. And then when you go to Armenia it's like, it's obviously still there and it is still a part of their identity as well. But it's not this, this *hai dat* that it is in the diaspora.” Davo viewed this as a disadvantage to the two groups, especially concerning the prospect of land reparations because as he pointed out the Armenian government “has said we've made no claims to Turkish lands or your lands anymore... So this, the splintering is actually I think, a big hindrance to actually come up with one Armenian goal, like what they want to do, and I don't think like the lands should be part of it.” Anoush explained it like this, “The diaspora is not fully aware of the current situation in Armenia, I think they're still stuck 100 years behind in what is important for Armenia.” Vardan hopes one day to move past this difference because “when we have the same



past, we have to share the same future.”

### ***Rapprochement with Turkey***

This disconnect was most strongly evident in discussing normalizing relations between Turkey and Armenia. The rapprochement between Turkey and Armenia was code for Armenians accepting the lack of accountability from Turkey for the crimes committed. In other words, it was a nonstarter. For Davo, he explained that this a hard to beat mentality, “I don't think Armenians can come to terms with them not accepting the genocide.” And he was right as many were uncomfortable with this prospect like Arpi who plainly stated, “I cannot accept any relationship with the Turkish without them recognizing it.” Yana was wary of this path for the reason that “if we build relations or even normalize them without that as a precondition, at some point we are giving them the power of them choosing narrative and then them having the power in that relationship of like, oh yeah, so it must not be that at all that important to you guys anyways.” Similarly, for Mariam, “I don't think it would work because Turks would be like we won, we won! And that's not fair. It's not fair to win on a lie.” Normalizing relations with Turkey without Ankara first recognizing the genocide was something in their minds that denied justice. Lilit also considered that “to pretend that the victims will forget about it, it's just very naive.”

Others like Hasmik thought “waiting for genocide recognition to improve relations between Armenia and Turkey is not in the best interests of Armenia.” In both camps of recognition needed to be a non-negotiable and normalization without recognition, each side acknowledged the economic benefits to rapprochement with Turkey. Anoush couldn't fault locals who didn't find genocide recognition as a precondition essential because “there is nothing wrong with wanting a good life as long as other people don't say oh they're a traitor.” Relating back to not wanting to play the victim card, Hayg felt “we can't let the victimhood for the genocide be an excuse... Oh, we suffered so we get a free pass. No, no, like we're not Israel.” Hasmik found it counterproductive to the future of the Armenian Republic to be “maintaining enemies with everyone around us and in some way, victimizing ourselves in a way that doesn't move us forward.” Shogher agreed, questioning “at what point we should put our pride aside, as a nation aside and think realistically about the situation of our country, economically, to better it



and to get our country to a position that it can benefit, not our history, but the current people that are living in the current situation?”

Attitudes toward Turkey also causes a split in the diaspora community. Some wish reconciliation would happen like Mane who explained “we're neighbors and at one time we were... we lived amongst each other and had the genocide not happened our like languages and culture and our people would have been even more, like we would have been totally mixed. It would have been wonderful.” At the opposite end of the spectrum are diasporans like Gor who firmly argue “I don’t want a friendly Turkish-Armenian relationship. All that’s going to do is trying to get Armenians more comfortable with that Turkey occupies the state of Armenian land. So if anything, I’m glad Turks hate Armenians.” To quote Hrant Dink, “It is evident that the ‘Turk’ is both the poison and antidote of the Armenian identity” (DeWaal 2015:251).

The absence of punishment of the Ottoman empire’s rulers or its successor state has given rise to a mindset in the Armenian diaspora which is eternally frightened of the prospect of revictimization. The logic goes: They got away with it once, they’ll try to get away with it again. Indeed in late 2019 when Turkey started its incursion into northeastern Syria to remove Kurdish fighters considered terrorists by Ankara, it touched a nerve in the diaspora. The narrative again was that the Turks are able to victimize minority groups with impunity. Armenians showed their solidarity in pro-Kurdish rallies across the world (Titizian 2019). In my own Facebook feed, many Armenian diasporan friends related the over 100,000 displaced back to their own people’s tragedy, noting the original crime going unpunished.

This fear of revictimization is equally demonstrated by many in the diaspora’s unwavering and even fanatical support for Armenia’s war against Azerbaijan. Many interviewees unprovoked mention Azerbaijan. Even if they did not refer to Azerbaijan by name, many mentioned bad relations of the homeland with their neighbors, referring to not only Turkey but also Azerbaijan. It is almost as if Armenians are still facing the Turks in the war for Nagorno Karabakh and the surrounding territories of Azerbaijan. In Gor’s interview he simply referred to Azeris as Turks. For a lot of Armenians, they do not even warrant the distinction of being their own nation. Many diasporans joke that Coca Cola is older than Azerbaijan, to surmise that Azeri territorial claims are invalid and that Azeris are supposedly not an ancient people. They have thus been relegated to be Turk 2.0. With the Turks then surrounding the motherland in the West and the East, a siege mentality can be seen. This therefore justifies the powerful existential need



for Armenians even outside of Armenia to engage with Azerbaijan in the war over the territory. Armenia's irredentism extends not only into Turkey but also into Azerbaijan.

Respondents that mention directly or indirectly Azerbaijan are aware that even if reconciliation between Turkey and Armenia were highly desirable, Baku would complicate or nix the peace efforts as it did in the soccer diplomacy attempts over a decade ago. Lilit believes justice would produce a "domino effect in the relationship between Turkey and Azerbaijan." Areg related that the soccer diplomacy attempts prove that the Turks are "not ready to do anything without creating some sort of a pretense of whether that's the Artsakh war, which has nothing to do with the Republic of Turkey." Hayg relates Western Armenia to Karabakh, "I've come to accept is that just like Karabakh, it will never be part of Azerbaijan again... it's the same with Western Armenia and Turkey." So while Western Armenia may be lost forever, Armenians are loathe to let any inch of land more be taken again by the 'Turk'.



## Chapter 6: Conclusion

For Gor, the debate over the term isn't meaningful, "to me it's a matter of semantics, I don't think denial is really a big deal." While this arguing over the application of the label of genocide may seem inconsequential for him and distracts from other worthwhile causes, the loudest voices in the room argue that this label does matter. Naming it the crime of crimes would give peace to Armenians who have been robbed of this for if Armenians could have forgotten the wounds of the past, they already would have. It does not serve the future interests of the diaspora to concentrate so heavily on this tragic history. However, attempts to destroy and deny this unfortunate past from the side of the perpetrators has caused a situation in which these painful memories have festered for years.

One cannot underestimate how the historical and political implications of such a calamity as genocide have had its impact on the identity formation of the Armenia diaspora. Genocide itself created the diaspora, thus it had a central role in the formation of diasporan identity and thought. Importantly, these respondents came a generation after the Armenian awakening in 1965, one that demanded not only recognition and reparations but punishment of those deemed responsible. This awakening gave a diaspora spread thin across the globe a cause to fight for which in turn helped further shape the Armenian diaspora identity: address the tragedy that created them in the first place. At the end of the day these respondents, even though most were born 75 years after the massacres, had their thoughts and feelings directly shaped by their creation, the genocide and the following political events. As Mane put it as the descendants of genocide survivors, "it's more than just our path is this pain and it's a burden that we carry, because those people suffered and we survived."

Most respondents spoke of Turkish recognition of the genocide as a scenario so unlikely to happen that it could only ever occur in their wildest dreams. Even while many characterized the American recognition as political maneuvering, they were taken aback that the vote happened in the first place. This shows how conditioned one can become to genocide denial.

Unfortunately, many of these diasporans will continue to have the same feelings of exhaustion, exasperation and overall frustration so long as the genocide is denied and its recognition and justice so heavily politicized. We must recall that "Victims, among the most ardent of the advocates of transitional justice, are ultimately disillusioned with institutions that can neither heal their broken bodies and minds nor return their loved ones" (Sikkink 2011:25). Nevertheless,



while interviewees did speak about considerable pain and frustration many were careful to emphasize a message of hope for Armenians. Their people survived despite the odds.

There are many unpleasant realities that must be faced in order to foster understanding of the struggle for genocide recognition and justice. The demand for recognition has taken a long winding path, evolving from terrorism and violence to parliament buildings around the world. While, as some of the respondents will admit, that these kinds of terrorist acts are undesirable and counterproductive many more would argue they may have inspired Armenians to delve into non-violent means of achieving recognition and justice. This erases the negative impact these attacks created not only on stopping denialism but on Armenians who lived in Turkey at the time. This is not an attempt to place blame but a call upon diasporan Armenian schools, communities and political groups to do a better job of educating their young people exactly how the fight for recognition has progressed and the consequences of past actions. These were the actions of a few past individuals but their consequences matter in the fight going forward.

For those respondents who viewed recognition as crucial it was the first step in obtaining justice, with all other measures of justice such as symbolic, monetary and territorial reparations flowing from that acknowledgement. Yana spoke of Tsitsernakaberd and a special installation in the museum. In the piece, the world was formed into a puzzle, with countries having recognized the genocide illuminated in a bright light and those countries who have yet to recognize cast in a shadow. For her every addition to the map elicited a reaction of “Oh, one more piece like yes, here we go... once you get them all, you're like, look a complete puzzle! Like everyone believes us!” This begs the question, what happens if the puzzle never becomes complete and what then lies ahead for the Armenian diaspora? Genocide recognition has traditionally served as a binding agent for Armenians across the globe but what comes next? As the Republic of Armenia continues to wake from a deep authoritarian sleep and lumbers its way to democracy, efforts should be concentrated to the future.

Looking to the future, therein lies the problem with the idea of territorial reparations. It is the terrible truth that there is no way to completely rectify situations such as dispossession and genocide. Land could never return the status quo as the generations who would have inhabited the land have been stolen away. And most of these diasporans are fully aware of the impracticality or even the impossibility of such justice yet many in political positions in the diaspora advocate for a situation that will not bring future focused justice. Furthermore, pushing



for ideas that disadvantage the homeland further this schism between the diaspora and the Republic. These young diasporans for the most part acknowledge the fundamentally different wishes and needs of Western and Eastern Armenians. For some; however, the need for this kind of justice outweighs these considerations.

This in-depth reconnaissance of beliefs concerning genocide denial, recognition and justice would help to constructing a more large-scale study of the issues presented. The research question centrally asked how young Armenian diasporas understand the history and future of the fight against negation and injustice. These interviews shed a critical light on the situation as mass atrocities desolate communities and have effects even decades later. The continued denial of recognition and justice make conditions of a nation more precarious ([ictj.org/transitional-justice](http://ictj.org/transitional-justice)). Denial aims to rehabilitate murderers and demonize victims (Lipstadt 1994:216). It is also the surest indicator that reoffending is a possibility (Stanton 2016). The road to justice for the Armenian genocide is a long one. Failing to condemn genocide and genocide denial is an affront to victims but may have dire consequences for the future. Arpi said it best, “We need justice for our people, for my ancestors that were killed at that time. It’s not fair, if we let them go, things will happen again. Massacres will happen again. We need to stop this for humanity, not only for Armenians.”

In 2020, the commemoration of April 24th was not physically possible with the COVID-19 pandemic raging across the globe. Usually there would be a march of thousands to Tsitsernakaberd in Yerevan, commemorations in Paris, protests in Ottawa and Los Angeles or even quiet church services in Beirut. In 2020; however, the roads and churches were empty. This did not dissuade people from commemorating while keeping socially distant. It marked the first year of a fully digital commemoration. As evening fell, a minute of silence took place in Yerevan. My Armenian flat mate and I took to the balcony to see apartments across the city light candles and shine their cell phone flashlights from their windows. ‘Ari Im Sokhak’ played on the television coverage of Tsitsernakaberd which was beaming bright into the night sky. Not even a global pandemic would stop Armenians from paying tribute to the dead. Afterall, the consequences of staying silent and allowing denial to win are all too dangerous.



## Annex 1: Ethics Approval



College of Social  
Sciences

Ethics Committee for Non-Clinical Research Involving Human Subjects

### Notification of Ethics Application Outcome – UG and PGT Student Applications

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#### Application Details

Undergraduate Student Research Ethics Application ☐ Postgraduate Student Research Ethics Application ☐

Application Number: PGT/SPS/2020/006/IMCEERES

Applicant's Name: Renee Denise Rippberger

Project Title: Armenian Genocide Denial as Understood by the Diaspora

**Application Status: Fully Approved**

Date of Review: 24/01/2020

Start Date of Approval 14/02/2020 End Date of Approval 31/12/2020

**NB: Only if the applicant has been given approval can they proceed with their data collection with effect from the date of approval.**

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#### Recommendations (where changes are required)

Where changes are required by reviewers all applicants must respond in the relevant boxes to the recommendations of the Committee and provide this as the Resubmission Document to explain the changes you have made to the application as well as amending the documents. **Changes to the application form or supporting documents should be highlighted either in block highlight or in red coloured text to assist the reviewers.**

All resubmitted application documents should then be provided.

**Approval Subject to Amendments** means that the applicant can proceed with data collection with effect from the date of approval, but amendments must be fulfilled.

**Amendments Subject to SEF** should be submitted to ethics administrator.

**If your application is rejected** a new application must be submitted to the ethics administrator. Where recommendations are provided, they should be responded to and this document provided as part of the new application. A new reference number will be generated.



REVIEWER MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS

APPLICANT RESPONSE

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REVIEWER MINOR RECOMMENDATIONS

APPLICANT RESPONSE

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ADDITIONAL REVIEWER COMMENTS

APPLICANT RESPONSE

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## Annex 2: Ethics Approval Amendment



College of Social  
Sciences

### Request for Amendments to an Approved Ethics Application

(please complete this document and forward it with any supporting documentation to your School Ethics Forum administrative see [Ethics Contacts](#))

Undergraduate Student Research Ethics Application ☐

Postgraduate Taught Student Research Ethics Application ☒

Student id. Number: 2470816

Application Number: PGT/SPS/2020/006/IMCEERES

Applicant's Name: Renee Denise Rippberger

Project Title: Armenian Genocide Denial as Understood by the Diaspora

Original **Start** Date of Application Approval: 14/02/2020

Original **End** Date of Application Approval: 31/12/2020

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#### **Amendments Requested**

Extension to Approval Period:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Documents to be amended:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participant Group, change or addition:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Information Sheet/Plain Language Statement:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Methodology:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Consent Form:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Addition/Change to Researcher team:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Recruitment Document:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other:	<input type="checkbox"/>		

**Justification for Amendments proposed:** *e.g. extension to approval end date required; addition of new participant group; change in project focus.*

This amendment follows sustained discussion with Dr Ammon Cheskin, the academic convenor of the ERASMUS MUNDUS International Master programme in Central and East European, Russian and Eurasian Studies. While he has discouraged a number of students from moving to online research methods, we both feel that it is necessary for me to do so. This is in line with recent guidelines that allowed EM students to continue to apply for online research.

Due to the pandemic of COVID 19 it is no longer possible to conduct face to face interviews. Unfortunately, my research is based in Armenia (where I am currently living), and is not possible without data collection from interviews of some description. Without permission to move to online interviews I will not be able to meet the requirements for my dissertation with my two other EM partners.



I therefore wish to change from face-to-face to digital interviews. I have discussed the ethical issues surrounding this carefully with my supervisors. We all feel that, despite the ethical issues outlined by the Ethics Committee's recent correspondence, that this project is still ethically sound when moving to online interviews. The topic of the research is not high risk and I will ensure that I do not put undue pressure on people to respond to request for online interviews.

In terms of data protection, I will use Skype for Business or Microsoft Teams for the interviews. This follows advice from the Helen McKellar (relayed to me by Dr Ammon Cheskin), the Information Compliance & Records Management Specialist at the university that Skype for Business is covered in university insurance policies. It is also covered because of its high standards in terms of GDPR. All interviews will be audio recorded with a Dictaphone that will be placed next to the computer speaker. No other data will be stored on a computer, including video feeds. All participants will be given the usual consent and PLS forms, and will be made known of these updated procedures for data management. The Consent form and PLS will be emailed in advance of interviews and returned via email with digital signatures. In fact, this means that the process will largely be the same as for face-to-face interviews as I will record the interview and store the recording (password protected) on my computer as stated in the original application.

Recruitment of participants will take place on social media, through Facebook groups. This was not included in the original application. I must do this switch due to the pandemic and resulting lockdown in Armenia, as I am unable to locate potential participants the old-fashioned way and must now switch to online methods. It also provides a less intrusive method to access participants: I will post requests for interviews on public groups for diaspora Armenian groups. This means that I will not be applying undue pressure on people to respond to my request for interviews.

**List of Supporting Documents attached:**

**Declaration:**

I certify that to the best of my knowledge the information given above, together with any accompanying information, is complete and correct.

**Signature(s)**

Applicant: Renee Denise Rippberger

Supervisor (if student project): Ammon Cheskin

**Reviewer approval:**

As first reviewer Matthew Waites, and on behalf of second reviewer Sohail Ahmed, we are in agreement that approval is granted in light of the specific ethics guidelines applying to Erasmus Mundus students mentioned in the application, in the COVID-19 context.



Matthew Waites 22.04.20



## Appendix 3: Coding Mechanism

### *Denial*

- *What is denial?*

Respondent describes how denial feels personally to them.

- *Inevitability of denial*

Respondent indicates that denial is inevitable, the last step or a part of any genocide. Respondent understands why Turks may deny the genocide be it for reasons of education, societal and cultural upbringing, propaganda. Respondent understands why Turkey may balk at the label of genocide because of implications concerning their ancestors.

- *Pain, hurt, survivors guilt*

Respondent uses terms such as painful, hurtful, guilt, frustration, etc.

- *It's all political, political tool, politicized*

Respondent feels that denial is being done as a part of a larger political agenda or uses terms political, political tool, politicized to describe denial

- *Denial is criminal, deserving criminal punishment*

Respondent indicates that denial is criminal, deserving of criminal punishment, a crime against humanity.

### *Justice*

#### *Recognition*

- *Opinion on recognition (family, community influence, oral histories)*

Respondent gives opinion on recognition, if

- *Up to the people of Turkey*

Respondent feels that the people of Turkey must be the ones to recognize the genocide, that the effort must come from within the Turkish state.

- *Lemkin*

Respondent mentions or indirectly mentions Raphael Lemkin and the creation of the term genocide in relevance to the Armenian case.

- *It's all political, political tool, politicized*

Respondent feels that recognition is being done as a part of a larger political agenda or uses terms political, political tool, politicized to describe recognition

#### *Reparations*

- *Symbolic reparations yes/no, of yes impossible/possible, why?*

Respondent indicates that symbolic reparations would configure into their definition of justice.

- *Monetary reparations yes/no, of yes impossible/possible, why?*

Respondent indicates that monetary reparations would configure into their definition of justice.

- *Land reparations yes/no, of yes impossible/possible, why?*

Respondent indicates that land reparations would configure into their definition of justice.

- *It's all political, political tool, politicized*

Respondent feels that reparations are being done as a part of a larger political agenda or uses terms political, political tool, politicized to describe reparations

- *Distinguishing between modern day Turkey and the perpetrator*

Respondent distinguishes the difference between the modern day Turkish state and the Ottoman empire.

- *Cynicism*



Respondent shows feelings cynicism or pessimism, does not believe reparations or recognition is possible or highly improbable.

### ***Operation Nemesis and Soghomon Tehlirian***

- *Respondents use the terms justice, justifiable, justified, just desserts*

Respondents feel that Soghomon Tehlirian was justified in his murder of Talaat Pasha. Respondent uses the terms justice, justifiable, justified, or just desserts in relation to the murder. Respondent indicates the Talaat Pasha would have never faced justice for his crimes, that many people express they would kill Hitler or similar criminals.

- *Expressing the situation as morally gray*

Respondent expresses discomfort at the idea of murder being justified, even if the victim is a genocidaire.

- *The word hero*

Respondent would call Tehlirian a hero or describe his actions as heroic.

- *Statues: yes/ambivalence/no*

Respondent expresses the are for statues, they are in a morally grey situation, or they are against them being erected.

### ***“One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter”***

- *Little to no prior knowledge, medium, excellent*

Respondent has either next to none or no knowledge of these terrorist group or know them well.

- *Freedom fighter/terrorist*

Respondent classifies these groups as either terrorist groups or freedom fighters.

- *Eye for an eye*

Respondent views these groups as enacting justice or expressing the view that equal harm should be done to the Turks in response to th

- *Morally gray zone*

Respondent expresses discomfort at the idea of murder being justified.

- *Assassinations and bombings as justice*

Respondent views the acts of ASALA, JCAG, or Orly to be a measure of justice or uses the words justified, reasonable, etc.

- *Assassinations and bombings revenge/retribution*

Respondent views the acts of ASALA, JCAG, or Orly to be vengeful or aiming to exact retribution. Respondent calls actions unacceptable

- *Distinguish between perpetrators and diplomats*

Respondent marks a difference between Operation Nemesis and ASALA, etc. Respondent differentiates between targeting diplomats and targeting actual genocidaires.

### ***Strategic Goals***

- *Positive/negative impact, why?*

Respondent discusses whether they think the actions of ASALA, etc. had a positive or negative impact. Whether this gave the Turks more ammunition to deny or if it advanced the cause.

### ***US Congress recognition***

- *Excitement/empty win*



Respondent discusses whether they were purely excited by the US Congress recognition of the Armenian genocide or if they felt that somehow the political nature of the timing and reasons cheapened this landmark occasion.

- *Knew reasons for timing/It's all political, political tool, politicized*

Respondent expresses that the recognition was the result of political machinations or uses the terms political, political tool, politicized, etc. The respondent knew the reasons for the timing and why the US Congress decided to recognize the genocide in that exact moment.

### ***Trump rejection***

- *Not shocking, unsurprised*

Respondent expresses that they were not shocked or unsurprised that Trump blocked the complete recognition of the genocide.

- *Knew reasons for rejection/It's all political, political tool, politicized*

Respondent expresses that the rejection was the result of political machinations or uses the terms political, political tool, politicized, etc. The respondent knew the reasons for the timing and why the US Congress decided to recognize the genocide in that exact moment.

- *Possibility for future recognition*

Respondent believes or expresses hope that the next American president will recognize the genocide.

### ***Status of commemoration/recognition***

- *What could be done?*

Respondent discusses what they think could be done more to commemorate or recognize the genocide. Respondent discusses the current status and if they find this satisfactory.

- *Education*

Respondent believes better education will lead to more understanding of the past and improve chances for recognition, justice.

- *Danger of oblivion*

Respondent admits that the genocide happened long ago and for that reason there is the fear that it could be forgotten. The respondent uses phrases such as, this can't be swept under the rug, underlining the importance of remembering the genocide.

### ***Hai daht***

- *Is this the true cause?*

Respondent discusses whether they believe genocide recognition and justice is the hai daht of the Armenian diaspora.

- *Not wanting to "play the victim card"*

Respondent emphasizes that while Armenians may be victims, they don't wish to "play the victim card", meaning they do not wish for Armenians to only identify as victims of the genocide, that there is more to the Armenian diaspora than the cause.

- *Felt disconnect between Homeland/diaspora*

Respondent describes a disconnect in the goals of Hayastan and the Armenian diaspora.

### ***Turkey/Armenia Rapprochement***

- *Precondition necessary yes/no, why?*



Respondent agrees/disagrees that in order to normalize relations between Armenia and Turkey, Turkey must first recognize the Armenian genocide.

- *Economic impact on Armenia*

Respondent acknowledges that normalization of relations between the two nations would bring enormous economic development to Armenia.

- *Soccer diplomacy, agree/disagree*

Respondent brings up the soccer diplomacy attempts between Armenia and Turkey. Respondent agrees or disagrees with such normalization attempts.

- *Azerbaijan*

Respondent mentions Azerbaijan during the interview.

- *Karabakh*

Respondent mentions Karabakh/Artsakh in the interview.

- *Fear of revictimization*

Respondent indicates they believe that a normalization of relations would allow Turkey to once again decimate or terrorize Armenians. Respondent indicates that Turkey is employing similar methods even today in relation to the Kurds or its incursions into Syria.

### *Analogical bridging*

- *The Holocaust*

Respondent connects their struggle to that of the Holocaust

- *The Native Americans/First Nations*

Respondent connects their struggle to that of the Native Americans/First Nations people

- *Palestinians*

Respondent connects their struggle to that of the Palestinians

- *Syria*

Respondent connects their struggle to that of Syria



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