



PREPARED BY: FERDA BALANCAR

The Sounds Of Silence

Turkey's Armenians Speak

THE HRANT DINK FOUNDATION

The Hrant Dink Foundation was founded in the aftermath of the great grief experienced in 2007, so that this bitter experience may never again be repeated and with a view to continuing to infuse life into Hrant Dink's dreams, words and heartfelt feelings of a more just and free world. The demand for democracy and human rights for everyone, with all their ethnic, religious, cultural and gender differences, is the basic principle of the Foundation.

The Foundation aspires to an order where freedom of expression can be exercised to the full, where differences are encouraged, allowed to live and to prosper. It strives towards a Turkey and a world where the value of people living on a land is upheld more than that of the land itself, where conscience outweighs other concerns in how we look at our past and our present. As the Hrant Dink Foundation, our 'cause worth living for' is a future where the culture of peace and empathy reigns.



HRANT DİNK VAKFI
HRANT DINK FOUNDATION
ՀՐԱՆՏԻ ՏՈՒՔ ՎԱԿՖԻ

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THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE
TURKEY'S ARMENIANS SPEAK

PREPARED BY: FERDA BALANCAR

WITH A FOREWORD BY ALİ BAYRAMOĞLU AND
AN EPILOGUE BY ARUS YUMUL

THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE
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Explanatory notes:

Most Turkish words have been left with their original spelling in the Turkish Latin alphabet;

those in italics are explained in parentheses.

The following is a brief guide to help the reader with the pronunciation of certain letters in the Turkish alphabet:

c: as the J in 'John',

ç: as the ch in 'chip',

ğ: is not pronounced but serves to prolong the vowel it follows,

ı: as in the e in 'after',

ö: as the o in 'word',

ş: as the sh in 'shoe',

u: as the u in 'bull',

ü: as in German ('Ütrecht').

Translators' explanatory notes are written in parentheses after the term they explain e.g. (... – t.n.). Only those that are long are given as a footnote.

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FOREWORD
ALİ BAYRAMOĞLU

From the day it was founded, the Hrant Dink Foundation has been striving to focus on the issues that Hrant Dink took up, found important and drew attention to during his lifetime. There are three amongst them which are undoubtedly of outstanding importance: normalising the perception of the ‘other’, supporting the democratisation process in Turkey and studying history without the shackles of nationalism and racism.

The question of memory, or rather the loss of memory and the harm caused by policies leading to loss of memory, is the ‘Achilles’ heel’ of this society. That is why fear, tension, illness, malevolence and repression, the oppressed, the victims and the oppressors all take their toll on each individual and on each nation, whether dominant or dominated.

Memory is important, because deep down in this society there is blood. Tens of thousands of people, of non-Muslims were thrown out of these lands, and left behind their belongings, their property and their lives; furthermore, tens of thousands of non-Muslims, especially Armenians, were massacred because of their identity. It is this bloody, religion-based standardisation which lies at the roots of this society’s becoming a nation, of the all-encompassing Turkification process, from culture to capital.

The devastating party does not want to know, does not want to remember. New nations burdened with such stories try to build the new nation by forgetting. This is why their policies, their state structures, their education systems, their narratives and tales are 'selective' and 'amnesic'. This is why in our country, social existence is totally amnesic and the main crossroads where conscience and the fight for democracy meet has four directions: remembering, knowing, confrontation and redemption.

What concerns us here, however, is not the story of the dominant nation.

The victims know and remember. Armenians scattered all over the world know what 1915 means, they tell it, they read it and they write it, with pain, with anger, regenerating that pain and that anger...

What concerns us here is not the far-away memory or the memory of those living far from these lands.

What concerns us here is the story of those who were devastated and who stayed on in these lands. The story of a community which has kept silent, which has not told its story, which for years has considered that remembering and recounting was a dangerous act. The Armenians of Turkey are stricken by a voluntary amnesia. They are what concerns us here... For long years what 1915, massacre, deportation, *Yirmi Kura* military service¹ and the Wealth and Revenue Tax² meant to them, was not an echo of their identity, but rather that of being the 'other', and even of protecting themselves. Even if they knew, they did not remember, even if they remembered, they did not want to speak. They strove to protect future generations by hiding their story, by hiding themselves. What they did not speak of was not only the suffering, they did not even speak of their Armenian-ness, of what being Armenian means, they could not.

They are very few. Many of those who had first-hand stories from their

1 During the 1940s non-Muslim citizens were recruited into the army even if they had done their military service before, but they were not given arms or uniforms and used in forced labour for public works.

2 Special tax levied mainly on non-Muslims during World War II, causing the ruin of many of them. Those who couldn't pay were sent to labour camps.

mothers and fathers or from their uncles and aunts are no longer of this world. Those who did their *Yirmi Kura* military service are now over 80. As they leave, they are taking with them the state and the memory of being Armenian during a certain period, in the 1930s, 40s and 50s. And alongside those, we are also losing 1915, their 1915...

This work is based on the desire to capture and hold onto the last bit of that which is being lost forever.

One of the strongest desires of the Hrant Dink Foundation, from the very first day it was founded, was to create a memory repository on the Armenians of Turkey, based on various documents shedding light on oral history records, culture and identity. This work is the first material outcome of that desire.

It aims to recover the traces of the political and cultural memory of Armenians living in Turkey and of the Armenian community, to reveal the continuity in a cultural existence, to find out how individuals with an Armenian identity perceive themselves and the 'others', and in so doing, to reflect the reality of Armenians still living in Turkey in all its political, cultural and historical dimensions. To reflect this reality, it was carried out as an oral history research study.

To this end a working group under the guidance of Ferda Balancar got in touch with Armenians living in Istanbul and in various cities of Anatolia. Interviews were held with 40 people, 21 of whom were women and 19 men. Two focus group meetings were held. Only 4 of the researchers participating in this work were experienced in oral history interviews.

This book contains 15 of those interviews. You will read the stories of people ranging from 19 to 70 years of age as they themselves told them. You will see that the stories tell not only of their remembrance of history but of their lives today.

Because today is important too... And since this is so, then the last word should go to Hrant:

*"Come, let's understand each other first...
Come, let's respect each other's suffering first...
Come, let's let each other live first ..."*