

About Armenian Identity

Saturday 15 July 2006, by [Hrant Dink](#)

Turquie Européenne is publishing in this column the article for which Hrant Dink was on trial and given a suspended sentence for “insulting Turkish identity”. Based on the possible and necessary renewal of the Armenian identity, this text is highly critical of the diaspora’s general attitude, evoking the poison of an identity completely focused on the Turkish factor. But the “Türk” factor is both the poison and the antidote, writes Hrant Dink.

Funny game for our readers : try to identify the insulting terms towards the Turkish nation throughout this article.

The “Turk” of the Armenian

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In our age when global and universal values dominate over local values, let alone living one’s cultural identity in its real sense, even for keeping the identity alive, Diaspora has to reveal special effort. This special effort needs always special reasons and tools. Armenians and Jews are two classical examples of Diaspora who possess these special reasons.

The special reason of both is the same... Having suffered genocide.

Thus the right recognized to them by whole humanity to protect their identities has been a little bit discriminative and positive.

Indeed, Jews have been able to make use of this positive right properly and utilizing the tolerance granted to them to protect their identity very well, they carried the title they took from their religious belief of “privileged people of God” to the level of “privileged people of the earth” they gained from the world. But the same has been not true for Armenian people.

The world has begrudged the sensitivity revealed to the Jewish genocide from the Armenians and this in return led to the greatest damage in Armenian identity. “Armenians of begrudged rights” have then tried to live their identity with a “persistence to demand the truth” and this persistence reached a point to turn to the basic principle of Armenian identity.

While this persistence meant for the first generations of Diaspora to survive and not to exhaust, with the third and fourth generations it turned to a persistence of letting the world acknowledge the truth. And the collective version of this persistence reflects the psychological position of the Armenian Diaspora. Keeping this psychology alive though, is the fundamental means to last the Armenian identity.

Let alone the fact that world has not acknowledged the truth, the main factor causing damage to Armenian identity is the fact that Turks are in a position of not to turn a hair concerning this issue. Indeed when compared, it will be obvious that the main factor leading Jews to their present position is, rather than the result of their own merits, the compassionate role the German people played afterwards.

This people have been able to overcome the trauma and recover psychologically when Germans begged for apology from them by accepting the responsibility of genocide and only then the Jews could be able to make the right ascensions for their cultural identity.

However the traumatic disease of Armenian people is still continuing and the main thing gnawing and exhausting the identity is this unhealthy psychological state.

While analyzing Armenian identity, one should admit the importance of the role of "Islam" and "Turk" factors play on this identity.

In the end, Armenians have a common past of more than a millennium with Islam and Turks.

So much so that the main quality distinguishing Armenians from Western Christians, is the fact that they have been living together with Muslims heretofore. While Western Christians have more lived Christian to Christian, Armenians have had another experience by living side by side and sometimes within the Muslims.

As it is frequently mentioned in recent actual discussions, while European Christians are only newly getting adapted to a multicultural lifestyle where also Muslims take place, Armenians like other Christian nations of the East (Assyrians, Keldanis etc.) have experienced this reality with its good and bad sides for a long time.

Thus this togetherness of centuries had of course have an undeniable role in the formation of Armenian identity but the main factor shaping the present form of Armenian identity and functioning like a cancerous tumour in Armenian identity is the "Turk".

The relation of Armenians and Turks and their interaction is not so ordinary as to pass over with a few words. In their centuries-old relation, they have reciprocally taken so much good and bad pieces of identity that it is sometimes so difficult to separate their ways of behaviour from each other.

Their togetherness is so deep that it has turned to a mutual argument for both sides to define the deterioration of it as treason. Opposite to the Turkish view naming Armenian nation "loyal nation" and then claiming that they have betrayed, Armenians regard the events of 1915 not only as the collective extermination of a nation but they also stress that this act also includes a betrayal to the centuries-old relation.

The point Turkish-Armenian relation has reached today is the following: Armenians and Turks are a clinical case in their view towards each other. Armenians with their trauma and Turks with their paranoia. As long as they are not saved from this unhealthy state they desperately struggle in, -it is maybe not valid for Turks but- Armenians seem to be unable to reshape their identity in a healthy way again.

Especially as long as Turks do not accept an emphatical approach towards 1915, the great suffering of Armenian identity will go on.

Finally it is obvious that "Turk" is both the poison and the antidote of Armenian identity.

The main problem however is whether or not Armenians will be able to free themselves from this "Turk" in their identity.

To be liberated from the Turk

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There are two apparent ways for the Armenian identity to free oneself from the "Turk".

One of them is that Turkey (as a State and society) gets into an emphatical approach towards Armenian nation and as a consequence reveals an understanding of sharing the sorrow of Armenian nation.

Such an approach can lead to the fact that though not immediately but still in the course of time the factor

of “Turk” becomes distant to Armenian identity. However the emergence of this alternative seems to be a difficult possibility at present.

The second way is that the Armenians themselves discard the impact of the “Turk” factor from their identity.

As compared to the first way, the probability of realizing this second alternative seems to be higher as it is bound to one’s own will and initiative.

It is also the way that should be actually preferred.

As to how Armenian world can accomplish it, is bound to look at the present situation with a new understanding.

Looking at 1915 for instance...

Armenian world is well aware of the reality and this reality will not change according to whether the countries of the world or Turkey accept it or not. Even if they do not accept, the name of what has happened is scratched on the conscience of the Armenian nation right from the start. Thus it cannot be the sole aim of the Armenian world to expect the reality to be admitted by the world or by Turkey. Henceforth the time has come to let everyone alone with their own conscience.

In fact whether or not to accept the reality is everybody’s own problem of conscience and this conscience itself is actually based on our common ground of humanity, on our identity of “human being”.

Thus those who accept the truth actually purify their own humanity. It is a mistake of the Armenian world to make the healthy condition of Armenian identity be bound to whether or not the French, German, American and by all means the Turkish people recognize the genocide and this mistake should be left behind by now. Henceforth the time has come to remove oneself from this mistake and to get the “Turk” distanced from this active role within the Armenian identity.

All the pain suffered by the Armenian identity is more than enough and this pain should be left a little bit to the world of humanity from now on.

Unfortunately it is nothing else than a waste of time for the Armenian world to make its peace of identity dependent on the negative and indifferent stance of the ♦Turk♦ and to spend all its collective energy for letting the world countries carry out pressure to Turkey to recognize the genocide. Moreover, this waste of time is also postponing the revival of the Armenian identity.

From now on Armenian world should add such concepts for the future of its identity so that these concepts should be able to push the production capacity of this nation which has been blunted.

For this reason it should be the main orientation to make such an attitude dominate over Armenian identity as “to carry its own pain and when necessary carry it on its shoulders until the end of the world.” Otherwise Armenian world will enchain itself to the sense of fairness of others to accept or not to accept the truth and this is then a real captivity in its own.

Those who believe that Armenian world will experience an emptiness when it frees oneself from the “Turk” and that especially the disunion of the identity of Armenians of Diaspora will be accelerated, are mistaken. There is a much more vital factor that can be fill the gap of the “Turk” and this is the existence of the independent State of Armenia.

This new enthusiasm that didn’t exist 15 years ago, is expected to play a much greater role about Armenian identity than any other impact or factor. The fact that Armanian world relates its future to the prosperity of this little country and to the happiness of those living there, will also be a sign of liberation from all the pain causing uneasiness.

For the Armenian identity the way of being freed from the “Turk” is simple:
Not to fight with the “Turk” anymore.
The new area where Armenian identity will look for its new sentences is also present:
To struggle for Armenia now.

Becoming acquainted with Armenia

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The clean blood that will fill the vacuum of poisonous blood emerging through the lack of the “Turk” is present in the noble vein that will be established by the Armenian with Armenia.
It is only necessary to be aware of this existence.
Those responsible of this awareness are the administrations of Armenia rather than the Armenians spread to Diaspora.
It is of great importance that governments of Armenia are conscious of their responsibility and fulfill it.

However within the 12 year long period of independence, when we look at the relation between Diaspora and Armenia, it can be seen that Armenian governments are still unaware of the importance of this responsibility. Even a functional mechanism of “Diaspora-Armenia meeting” could not be established apart from a few showy “Pan Armenian Meetings”.
The relation of Armenia and Diaspora has been hardly carried out, sometimes through the initiative of Diaspora and other times of Armenia but a permanent, moreover Armenia-based institutionalization has been not achieved.

However Armenia should have already established a special and very powerful Ministry of Diaspora. With this Ministry the problematic of how to reach every single Armenian individual who has been or will be spread to the most remote corners of the world, would turn to a common concern and then projects could be developed accordingly.
The fact that this could still not be done seems to be a great failure. With this lack of interest Armenia seems to be unaware of how a main root it is and Armenia is also thus unable to let this importance be felt by Diaspora.
This again shows that Armenia of course is worthy of the people of Diaspora but the same is not true for administrations of Armenia.

The role that a direct relation of Armenia with the individuals of Diaspora will play in the identity of Armenians of Diaspora and in the formation of new sentences of this identity is very great and indisputable.
Today the main aim of all the Armenian schools, language courses, social and cultural institutions and all other common activities is to carry on Armenian identity further to new generations, to protect it and if possible to improve it. For this aim millions of dollars are spent. What is reached as a consequence is a language that is known but is unable to be spoken and an identity deeming it sufficient to visit the church now and then.
However there is such an other reality and it is inevitable to do what is necessary for it. And this is the fact that the moral dialogue of Armenia with people of Diaspora itself is the most natural school.

For the identity of young people of Diaspora who have not visited these schools and churches, getting acquainted with this natural school called Armenia for a single time means a lot of things. The root of the identity of young people is deeper when achieved through a single visit to Armenia rather than an Armenian identity given to these young people through education and by church for decades. To test the validity of our thesis is not that much expensive. By saving some money it can be easily provided that young people spend 15 days of their annual holiday in the streets of Armenia.

It will be seen how these young people absorb deeply from the root their identity by this period of 15-20 days who before this visit to Armenia have been rather distant to Armenian identity. From that moment on, it is impossible for these young people to forget their identity anymore regardless of where they live. This identity has been injected directly into the vein... Thus organizing special tours to Armenia for the youth is of great importance as an activity to earn an identity. Therefore such activities should be the top of the agenda of every annual program.

The sentences an identity receives directly from Armenia are an unexplainably rich gain. This situation resembles to give a sensitive plant which has grown in a flowerpot back to its soil, water and sun. Trying is gratis and recommended to all.

[Turkish language version](#)