

HRANT DINK FOUNDATION PUBLICATIONS

The Sounds of Silence II

Diyarbakır's Armenians

Speak

PREPARED BY: FERDA BALANÇAR



HRANT DINK FOUNDATION

Hrant Dink Foundation was established after the assassination of Hrant Dink in front of his newspaper Agos on January 19, 2007, in order to avoid similar pains and to continue Hrant Dink's legacy, his language and heart and his dream of a world that is more free and just. Democracy and human rights for everyone regardless of their ethnic, religious or cultural origin or gender is the Foundation's main principle.

The foundation works for a Turkey and a world, where freedom of expression is limitless and all differences are allowed, livedi appreciated and multiplied and conscience outweighs in the way we look at today and the past. As the Hrant Dink Foundation 'our cause worth living' is a future where a culture of dialogue, peace and empathy prevails.



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HHRANT DINK FOUNDATION
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THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE
DIYARBAKIR'S ARMENIANS SPEAK

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WITH A FOREWORD BY ALİ BAYRAMOĞLU
AND AN EPILOGUE BY ARZU ÖZTÜRKMEN

THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE
DIYARBAKIR'S ARMENIANS SPEAK

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FOREWORD
ALİ BAYRAMOĞLU

The book you are holding in your hands is the second publication in the Hrant Dink Foundation’s series of oral history studies.

The first publication was Turkey-centred: it followed the traces of Armenians in Turkey, and the political and cultural memory of Armenian society. It aimed, within the scope of an oral history study, to understand how people of Armenian identity perceived both themselves, and those who they saw as ‘others.’ Additionally, it aimed to present the political, cultural and historical dimensions of the ‘reality’ in which Armenians who presently live in Turkey find themselves.

The following words were included in the presentation of this first publication:

“For us, memory is an important issue, because there lies blood in the deepest foundations of this society. Tens of thousands of people, non-Muslims, were expelled from these lands, leaving behind their possessions, properties, and lives; furthermore, tens of thousands of non-Muslims, and especially Armenians were slaughtered because of their identity.

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.”

The second study was carried out along these same lines. Within the scope of this study that traced the tracks of Armenians from Diyarbakır in Turkey, Armenia and the Diaspora, a total of 81 people were interviewed: 22 in Istanbul, 17 in Diyarbakır, 9 in Lebanon, 9 in New York, 4 in Los Angeles, 3 in New Jersey, 7 in Montreal, 6 in Toronto and 4 in Yerevan. 41 of them were female and 40 were male. Among them, there are those who live with their Armenian identity, those who have reclaimed or are trying to reclaim their Armenian identity since being Islamicized, and also who define themselves as both Muslim and Armenian...

This book features 16 of these interviews. 8 of the interviewees are female, and 8 are male. 6 of them presently live in Diyarbakır and their families were Islamicized in 1915 or after. They have since reclaimed, or are trying to reclaim their Armenian identity. 5 of them live in Istanbul with their Armenian identity. Of the remaining 5, 1 lives in Lebanon, 1 in Yerevan, 1 in Los Angeles, 1 in New York, and 1 in Toronto. Some of the interviewees from outside Turkey were born and raised in Diyarbakır, and moved abroad at a later stage, whereas some have families from Diyarbakır, but they were born and raised abroad.

There is a common point of the interviews:

The dialect of Armenian they speak, the mores and customs, the cuisine all point towards a phenomenon that can be defined as 'an Armenian identity unique to Diyarbakır.' We also see that Armenians from Diyarbakır who live in the Diaspora try to keep their unique mores and customs alive in the countries where they reside, and that they achieve a degree of success in this.

Asked about their views on Kurds and Kurdish-Armenian relations in history, there is a pronounced difference between the views of people who presently live in Diyarbakır and define themselves as Armenians,

versus the views of people who live in Istanbul or the Diaspora. Those who presently live in Diyarbakır feel closer to the Kurds, whereas those who live in Istanbul or the Diaspora have a more detached attitude regarding the Kurds. They more frequently highlight the role the Kurds played in 1915 and the negative events that took place after.

This study also contains data on the types of problems encountered by people who were Islamicized but want to reclaim their Armenian identity. People who are making an effort to return to their Armenian identity face problems in sending their children to Armenian schools. Adults who want to learn Armenian also encounter difficulties in finding educational institutions that will meet this demand.

Beyond these findings, this study is also an attempt to reimagine, or reconstruct the cultural presence of Armenians in Diyarbakır. For instance, the Surp Giragos Armenian Church in the city had been in use until the 1980s, but later rapidly went to ruin due to the lack of a congregation. Through the collaboration of the Diyarbakır Municipality and Armenian institutions, its recent renovation and reopening for worship bears huge significance in terms of such attempts at reimagination and reconstruction. It is in this sense that this book constitutes another drop in that sea of lost memory.