Comparing the Viewpoints of Armenians and Turks on the Current Disagreements between Armenia and Turkey

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INTRODUCTION

The origins of current disagreements between Turkey and Armenia, especially regarding the 1915 events, date back to the last periods of the Ottoman State. The 1915 events resulted in the loss of the lives of many Ottoman Armenians, and Armenians were forcibly displaced. Many studies on the current disagreements between Turkey and Armenia have focused on their historical and political consequences, especially in the disciplines of history, political science and international relations (see, e.g., Akçam, 2004; Görgülü, 2008). However, less scholarly attention has been given to how Armenians and Turks perceive and evaluate the disagreements between their countries from a social psychological perspective.

By using social representations of history (Liu & Hilton, 2005; Hilton & Liu, 2017), the present research, first, aims to explore the social representations of Armenians towards these disagreements. The present study also aims to compare these social representations with the social representations of Turks based on a previous study (Karasu & Göregenli, 2017) to examine the similarities and differences between Turks and Armenians. Specifically, this previous study highlighted three different viewpoints on the current disagreements between Turkey and Armenia: (1) seeing the 1915 events as genocide and Turkish State as the only (political) responsible party; (2) emphasizing mutual suffering, cooperation, and mutual contact between the two communities; and (3) endorsing Turkey's official narrative and denying the genocide. Building on this work, we wish to shed light on the perspectives of Armenian people. To do so, we used Q methodology, which is a convenient method to reveal socially shared viewpoints on a particular issue.

METHOD

Participants

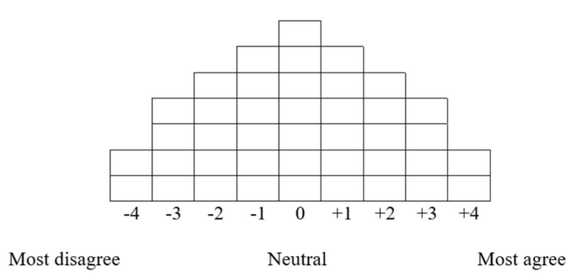
The data was collected in Yerevan in Armenia in 2017 through snowball technique. The sample consisted of 43 participants (29 females, 14 males) from different religious and political backgrounds. The age range was between 19 and 55 (M = 27.09; SD = 8.03). The religiosity of the participants ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much; M* = 2.93; *SD* = 1.92), indicating a less religious sample. The political view also ranged from 1 (*left*) to 7 (*right; M* = 2.67; *SD* = 1.49), indicating a more left-leaning sample.

Procedure, Materials and Analysis

In line with the purposes of the current study, a set of statements were prepared by modifying Entman's (1993) frame analysis to comprise three main domains: a) definitions and causes of the current disagreements between Turkey and Armenia, b) moral judgments related to the current disagreements between Turkey and Armenia, and c) solutions and barriers to solutions of the current disagreements between Turkey and Armenia.

First, participants were asked to complete an informed consent form in the Armenian language. After they agreed to participate in the study, they were asked to sort the 41 statements into three piles according to their opinion: (a) agree, (b) disagree, and (c) neutral or unsure. Next, they were asked to sort the statements into a fixed quasi-normal distribution ranging from +4 (*most agree*) to -4 (*most disagree*; see Figure 1). The data were analyzed with the PQMethod 2.35 program (Schmolck, 2014).

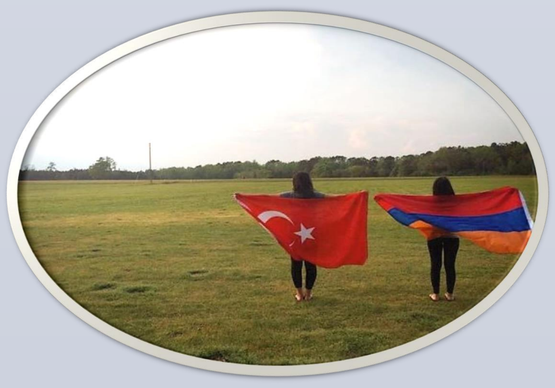
Figure 1. The fixed quasi-normal distribution.



RESULTS

The three-factor solution explained 62% of the variance. Of 43 participants, 30 loaded on one of the three factors. The remaining 13 participants (except participant 28) had either multiple loadings (i.e., their views represent a combination of the perspectives described below) or did not load on any of the factors.

The results of the present study, which was conducted with Armenians participants, highlighted three different viewpoints: (1) demanding solutions from Turkey, (2) cooperation, mutual contact, and empathy, and (3) focusing on the 1915 events, but not on the solutions. In the first viewpoint, demanding solutions from Turkey are emphasized to solve the disagreements between Turkey and Armenia; in the second viewpoint, the cooperation, mutual contact, and empathy are underlined to solve these disagreements; in the third viewpoint, the focus is on the1915 events, but not on the solutions to the disagreements.





Comparing Armenians' and Turks' Viewpoints

The second viewpoints in both studies (Viewpoint-2: cooperation, mutual contact, and empathy viewpoint in the Armenian study; Viewpoint-2: mutual suffering, cooperation, mutual contact viewpoint in the Turkish study) show that there are similarities in terms of their emphasis on contact and cooperation to solve the disagreements between Turkey and Armenia. These two similar viewpoints underline solution strategies such as supporting activities based on cooperation (e.g., conducting scientific studies, establishing bilateral solution commissions, teaching both views in history lessons and restarting the diplomatic relations). However, even though there are similarities between these two viewpoints, we should note that the 1915 events are still not seen as genocide in the Turkish study.

Although there are similarities among the other viewpoints, these viewpoints differ from each other. For example, the third viewpoint in the Turkish study (Viewpoint-3: Turkey's official narrative and denying the genocide viewpoint) is pro-Turkey, which means the tragic events of 1915 are definitely not seen as genocide but inter-communal warfare. The first and third viewpoints in the Armenian study (Viewpoint-1: demanding solutions from Turkey viewpoint and Viewpoint-3: focusing on the 1915 events, but not on solutions viewpoint) are strongly pro-Armenia, which means the tragic events of 1915 must be seen as genocide (see Table 1). However, these two viewpoints are similar to each other in terms of having stable social representations of each other.

Table 1.

Comparison of Turks' and Armenians' Viewpoints and Their Most Agreed Statements

Study	*Viewpoints*	*Most agreed statements*
Turkish Study	Viewpoint-1. Seeing the 1915 events as genocide and Turkish State as the only (political) responsible party	1-To solve the current disagreements between the two countries, Turkey must recognize the Armenian Genocide. 2-Many Turks are prejudiced against the Armenians.
	Viewpoint-2. Mutual suffering, cooperation, mutual contact	1-Both peoples suffered very much in the war conditions of the 1915 period. 2-To solve the current disagreements between Armenia and Turkey, the research institutions and the civil society organizations of both countries should conduct scientific studies and activities.
	Viewpoint-3. Turkey's official narrative and denying the genocide	1-From beginning to today, this problem exists because of the provocations of the global powers such as the US and Russia. 2-To solve the problem, the Armenians must end the genocide allegations.
Armenian Study	Viewpoint-1. Demanding solutions from Turkey	1-The 1915 events are directly described as genocide. 2-To solve the current disagreements between the two countries, Turkey must recognize the Armenian Genocide.
	Viewpoint-2. Cooperation, mutual contact, and empathy	1-Armenians and Turks should play a role together in the solution of the current disagreements between the two countries. 2-To solve the current disagreements between Armenia and Turkey, the diplomatic relations between the two countries should be re-started.
	Viewpoint-3. Focusing on the 1915 events, but not on the solutions	1-To solve the current disagreements between the two countries, Turkey must recognize the Armenian Genocide. 2-The 1915 events took place due to rising nationalist movements in the last period of the Ottoman. *

*the most distinguishing statement for viewpoint-3.

DISCUSSION

The narratives of the 1915 events are a kind of "charter" which describes the origin and historical mission of a group is the core of the social representations of history (see Liu & Hilton, 2005). There are some social-psychological functions of narratives about the 1915 events. For Armenians, these narratives contribute to the formation of the social identity of the newly founded Republic of Armenia (see Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In other words, these narratives are the founding and strengthening functions of the national identity. For Turks, these narratives help protect its glorified Turkish identity as well as identify who Turkey's friends and enemies are. In other words, defending Turkey's official thesis on the 1915 events has become firmly Turkish identity protection tool for Turks (see Liu & Hilton, 2005). These functions serve to reinforce the identity politics for Turks and Armenians. These narratives can also reveal similar effects in the conflict context (e.g., rejecting collective guilt; blaming the outgroup; Hong, Wong & Liu, 2001; Wohl & Branscombe, 2004). Moreover, we think some of these narratives provide a ground for legitimizing the hierarchy, hatred, and discrimination towards Armenians for Turks and vice versa. As charters also function to justify groups' actions (Hilton & Liu, 2008), the narratives of the 1915 events are a kind of "charter" which explains what Armenians and Turks must do regarding the current disagreements between Armenia and Turkey.

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