

STOCKHOLM SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY  
Theological Program  
Theology & the Surrounding World/  
Practical Theology

DEGREE PROJECT  
Bachelors Essay  
Spring 2016

# **In the Junction between History and Future**

A Minor Field Study about Identity and Faith of Armenian Orthodox  
Youth in a Minority Situation in Jerusalem

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## **Key words**

Jerusalem; Armenian; Diaspora; Youth; Identity.

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# 1. Introduction

My first contact with the Armenians of Jerusalem was during a four day Minor Field Study in February 2015.<sup>1</sup> Before that I hardly knew anything about the community that has such a long history in the region. Despite their lengthy presence in what is commonly known as the Holy Land, the fact that they are joint custodians of the Christian Holy places and even have a whole quarter named after them in the Old City, they seem to be somewhat of a mystery to most people that visit. They are a minority that hold on to many of their distinct features regarding religion and culture from their homeland, something that is the trademarks of what is commonly known as a diaspora. The importance of culture and faith for the Armenian people seemed to be stressed time after another during my research. Pride was expressed to have endured as a people through many hardships. The Armenian Genocide stands out as the most significant of the many sufferings. Alongside with the traumatic consequences of the genocide is the ongoing struggle fought on many fronts for global recognition of the atrocities committed against their people.

The largest group of Armenians in Jerusalem are situated in the Armenian Quarter. At the center of both the territorial and the structural composition of this community lies the convent of Saint James. Not only does the brotherhood of Saint James, consisting of about 30 brothers, and other clergy reside inside the convents premises. The majority consists of lay people. The lay community though has been decreasing for a number of years.<sup>2</sup> If the current trend continues it may, according to some predictions, even vanish in the future.<sup>3</sup> A gloomy outcome that would radically change the makeup of the Old City of Jerusalem.

Therefore, after my first Minor Field Study, I went back four times during the coming year to learn more. I was also granted a scholarship through Stockholm School of Theology to conduct a Minor Field Study among Armenian youth. When first voicing my interest to interview youth and learn more about their identity I was told by a local contact that it would be futile. Because of the pressures of everyday life in Jerusalem few youth would have something relevant to share. They are forced to live day by day due to the ongoing conflicts. A strong statement that cannot be taken as true without evidence. This confirms the importance of conducting a more in depth study concerning how Armenian youth reflect on identity and belonging. The very existence of a future Armenian community in Jerusalem depends on their youths desire and ability to remain in the City.

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<sup>1</sup> The Minor Field Study was part of a ten day field trip with the University course "Christians of the Middle East", given by Stockholm School of Theology. Falk 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Tavit 25.02.2015, 24.09.2015.

<sup>3</sup> "The Saabel Survey" 2006:10.

## 1.1 Purpose and research questions

The purpose of the thesis is to do a qualitative research about the identity of Armenian youth in Jerusalem. To explore how Armenian youth in Jerusalem define themselves, their identity and belonging.

Key words for the semi-structured interviews regarding identity are culture, faith and Jerusalem. Armenian faith as well as culture have been important identity markers in the history of the Armenians. Jerusalem is their hometown but the complicated situation with many conflicts might be a threat to their attachment to the city.

Research Questions are;

1. Does Armenian youth in Jerusalem experience a disputed belonging?
2. Are Armenian identity markers, faith and culture as important to Armenian youth in Jerusalem today, as they were to the city's previous generations of Armenians?
3. Has the identification with their Palestinian neighbors grown stronger?<sup>4</sup>
4. Is Armenia, which also might be considered their country of origin, perhaps their "real home"?

## 1.2 Material, method and limitations

The primary material consists of semi-structured interviews with youth from the Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem. Through a qualitative case study<sup>5</sup> the aim is to survey their views on identity and belonging. With many factors regarding their situation and surroundings being radically distinctive this must be considered a unique case.<sup>6</sup>

Because of the time frame the goal was to interview eight people. Preferably four girls and four boys. Four individuals between the age of 15-19 and four between the ages of 20-24.<sup>7</sup> I was early on warned that it might be difficult to find enough youth that want to be interviewed. Therefore I decided to use "the snowball method".<sup>8</sup> It is a network based conduct where you through the first contacts and interviewees find more people to interview. Considering the small community connections between respondents could be expected regardless of method used.

At the local Armenian school I got thirty minutes out of an Armenian Culture class to do a group interview with the students from the upper grades. The boys and girls are between the ages of 15-18 and according to their teacher know each other very well. In order to get all of them as engaged as possible and create an atmosphere where each one can express their views

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<sup>4</sup> Some sources still call them Palestinian Armenians while the older Armenians I talked to call themselves Armenians. Falk 2015, Kaufman 2008:118.

<sup>5</sup> Bryman 2011:73-74.

<sup>6</sup> Bryman 2011:77.

<sup>7</sup> The age span of 15-24 years of age is the definition for youth that is used by the United Nations. 18.08.2016.

<sup>8</sup> Bryman 2011:434.

more freely I conducted the interview as an assessment exercise. Because of the limited time I could not register each answer with a name so they are presented below in categories as boy, girl, majority etcetera. The follow up interviews I intended to do with a couple of youth were not possible to fulfill as they were busy with exams at the end of the semester.

All interviews except one with youth in the older category were done one on one. Erig brought his friend Samvel for our appointment so I decided to interview them both. All interviews except one were recorded and transcribed by me. The exception is the first interview with Alen when I had to settle for taking notes which I filled in once the interview was over. All names are aliases to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Since the Convent and Church of Saint James are at the center of the community I also made interviews with four seminarians as a secondary source. The seminarians are almost exclusively from Armenia and live at the Seminary situated opposite of the Convent within the Armenian Quarter. I excluded the interviews with the seminarians since they did not add anything to my analysis.

Participatory observations were conducted regularly during April and May 2016. I participated in commemorations of the Genocide, religious feasts, and guided tours within the convent. I visited Sts. Tarkmanchatz School on two occasions and almost daily attended Church Services. During events conducted in Armenian without translation to English I focused on interactions of various kinds between the participants. Translations and explanations were usually given afterwards through inquires on my behalf.

Most of the background information about Armenians in Jerusalem comes from adult Jerusalemites like Sara, Tavit, Hayg and his wife Rita, clergy and visiting Armenians. Also, they all hold important positions within the Armenian community. The information is gathered in section 2 and contains facts that are vital for my analysis of the interviews. I have arranged the answers, presented in section 3, after topics related to the research questions. Sections 3.1 to 3.4 are related to the research question about a disputed identity. 3.5 to 3.6 are about Armenian faith and culture. 3.6 also deals with the youths thoughts on Armenia. 3.7 is connected to the question about identification with Palestinians and also discusses Israeli Jews and the conflict. Section 4 gives a summary about the importance of the Armenian identity while conclusions are presented in section 5. I am aware that the findings of the research must be treated modestly because of the small sample.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore the answers of the respondents might be influenced by the interview context and by me as an interviewer.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Alan Bryman remarks that there are scholars that estimates the need of 20-30 (Warren 2002) or even 60-150 interviews (Gerson & Horowitz 2002) for a qualitative study to be published. Bryman 2011:437-438.

<sup>10</sup> Bryman 2011; 222-223, 368.

## 2. Background information

In the following chapter I will give information about Jerusalem and the Armenians there.

### 2.1 Jerusalem

Jerusalem is a city afflicted by numerous tensions such as conflicts due to different political, economic and religious interests among its inhabitants. Israel has proclaimed Jerusalem as its capital and rule the city even though this is not internationally recognized. Many of the inhabitants of the Old City and East Jerusalem, being Palestinians, only have a residency permit while they hold Jordanian passports.<sup>11</sup> In October 2015 there was a spiraling of violence connected to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. According to some this is “the third Intifada”. In this complicated situation many of the Armenians have tried to remain neutral and not take sides. Being in minority in a situation of conflict brings to question belonging and loyalty. Jerusalem has been proclaimed “the indivisible, eternal capital of Israel” by its mayor Nir Barkat.<sup>12</sup> Something which Ann-Catrin Andersson in her Doctoral Dissertation calls the master narrative or vision of the current city politics.<sup>13</sup> Jerusalem is “an empty signifier” that various groups fills with meaning from different perspectives.<sup>14</sup> The politics carried out is striving to maintain a demographical balance, with a 70/30 percent population in favor of the Jewish population. Something which is also an attempt to strengthen the security for the majority.<sup>15</sup> Another part of the city planning is “spatial segregation of the various population groups”. Whereas ethnic segregation often is viewed as problematic in many other countries the Local Outline Scheme (2000) considers it an advantage as every group can live as they please in their own cultural space.<sup>16</sup> According to some of my contacts there are limitations to how free the minorities are. The Patriarch Nourhan Manougian stated in an interview that “Nobody knows anything about Armenia or Armenians ... We don’t belong to the community – they don’t [accept] us as members. We are third-class citizens”.<sup>17</sup> They have been told not to have a cross on top of the entrance into the Armenian Quarter and even had to rebuild the iron gates to the Armenian Cemetery so the big cross could not be seen from the walkway. This was because the authorities cannot assure protection from the threats of Jewish extremists.<sup>18</sup> There have been threats and assaults on the Armenian clergy and seminarians, therefore they occasionally have police escort during religious processions.<sup>19</sup> Tavit says that after the Israeli authorities gets rid of the Palestinians through harassments, building restrictions, house demolitions and obtaining land in East Jerusalem,<sup>20</sup> the Armenians and other Christian minorities are next in turn.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> “East Jerusalem” 17.08.2016.

<sup>12</sup> “Mayor of Jerusalem” 22.04.2016. “Mayor’s Twitter” 18.06.2016.

<sup>13</sup> Andersson 2011:108-110.

<sup>14</sup> Torfing, 1999 quoted by Ann-Catrin Andersson, Andersson 2011:107.

<sup>15</sup> Andersson 2011:239.

<sup>16</sup> Andersson 2011:162, 240.

<sup>17</sup> Gelfond Feldinger 29.06.2013.

<sup>18</sup> Tavit 24.09.2015.

<sup>19</sup> Seminarian Gor says he did not experience any attacks during his first two years in Jerusalem but in couple of years he has experienced maybe ten attacks. There are attacks on other Christians as well that does not seem to diminish. 18.04.2016. Barkat 12.10.2004, Prince-Gibson 21.06.2016, Hasson 28.04.2015, Gelfond Feldinger 29.06.2013.

<sup>20</sup> This is also addressed by Civil Rights associations as ACRI. “Planning & building” 18.08.2016.

<sup>21</sup> Tavit 24.09.2015.

## 2.2 The Armenian Apostolic Church and the Brotherhood of Sts. James

The majority of the Armenians belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church which counts its origin from the early apostles. A source of pride is that Armenia adopted Christianity as early as 301 CE. During the Ottoman Empire the millet system<sup>22</sup> served to consolidate religion to its political form.<sup>23</sup> During the 20th Century the role of Jerusalem and Sts. James as the dominant ethno-religio-cultural center for Armenians increased.<sup>24</sup> Still today in Jerusalem the Patriarchate, with the Patriarch as its highest ranking leader, has a prominent role in the secular community as it administers the whole Armenian Quarter.<sup>25</sup> The long Armenian presence in Jerusalem, with valuable cooperation in rebuilding the Holy Sites after one of the many invasions, have awarded them the prestigious role of Custodian of the Holy Places.<sup>26</sup> That the in numbers inferior Armenian Apostolic Church have this prestigious role alongside the Latin Catholics and Greek Orthodox is a source of great pride.<sup>27</sup>

As in other Orthodox denominations only men hold most offices within the Church. At the Seminary in Jerusalem there are women holding teaching positions as theologians though. Besides priests, all of them brothers of Sts. James, deacons and seminarians serve in church. There are services and prayers every day. During my observations I have admired the beauty and grandeur of the architecture, liturgical clothing including hats shaped as the holy mountain of Ararat and enjoyed the beautiful singing which is always a cappella. The seminarians serve a lot in church as all of the liturgy except the sermons and some of the readings are sung. It is only the preaching that is in Western Armenian language, the language that is spoken by most of the local Armenians. The rest is in Grabar, a classical Armenian that few understand today. Generally lay people do not understand it, but learn at least the most important prayers. As the liturgy can last many hours most people only attend part of the service. The clergy are often in majority. It is during the big feasts, like Easter, that the services are well attended, not only with locals but also many pilgrims. Historically Jerusalem is important to Armenian pilgrims.<sup>28</sup>

There are many practical things that complicates the situation for the Church in Jerusalem. One is to be able to maintain ownership of buildings and land.<sup>29</sup> When the security wall was built the State confiscated land from the Church outside of Bethlehem.<sup>30</sup> Another is obtaining work permits and visas for the clergy and seminarians. Patriarch Nourhan Manougian has voiced his

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<sup>22</sup> The Armenians were a Christian minority within the Muslim Ottoman Empire. The Empire was governed through a juridical-religious system with so called millets. This allowed a certain amount of autonomy for minorities although they did not enjoy the same rights as the Turks. Karlsson 2012:57-58, Der Matossian 2011:25-26.

<sup>23</sup> Nisan 1991:136.

<sup>24</sup> Matossian 2011:24.

<sup>25</sup> Der Matossian 2011:26.

<sup>26</sup> Hintlian 1989:2.

<sup>27</sup> Der Matossian 2011:25.

<sup>28</sup> Hintlian 1989:1-3, Hintlian 2015:27.

<sup>29</sup> Tchilingirian 16.07.2016.

<sup>30</sup> A wall and a fence with barbwire now encircle part of the property. On the land that is partly covered with an olive plantation a memorial for the genocide have been erected. It is important to be able to prove that the land is in use according to Tavit. He also explains that due to building and renovation restrictions an Armenian building outside of Zion Gate has been without a roof for many years while buildings in the Jewish quarter are extended. 21.05.2016, 24.09.2015.

frustration on how the state of Israel handles these issues. It's not only the church that depends on the novice priests who attend the Seminary but also necessary for the survival of the community. Some of the seminarians who decide to become priests and monks stay in Jerusalem to maintain the church and the monastery.<sup>31</sup>

## 2.3 The Armenian Genocide

The impact of the genocide on the Armenians is evident through the memorials held annually in Jerusalem and all over the world. The estimations of Armenians killed vary, often between 800 000 – 1 500 000. The variation depends on the timeframe and which causes of deaths are included. Svante Lundgren remarks that when Klas-Göran Karlsson estimates them to 800 000-1 000 000 only the victims of 1915 are taken into consideration. If the victims of the “mini genocide” are added the numbers are closer to 1.5 million.<sup>32</sup> Göran Gunner writes that the numbers are shockingly high whether 1 million or about 1.5 million.<sup>33</sup> Most scientific researcher agree on the term genocide regarding the killings of Armenians done by the Young Turks and their accomplices during the end of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>34</sup> That many countries still refrain to recognize the events as a genocide<sup>35</sup> is a source of great frustration among Armenians in general.<sup>36</sup> Israel's policy on the Armenian genocide is especially a source of disappointment among the Armenians in Jerusalem.<sup>37</sup> That Palestine has not recognized it either is not mentioned as often in discussions. In 2015 when the centennial of the genocide was commemorated many hoped that a recognition would finally come about. It did not. Hopes that the Knesset would recognize the genocide in 2016, even though the Israeli government would not, also failed<sup>38</sup> although a committee of the Knesset did recognize it.<sup>39</sup> Among reasons presented for Israel's standpoint the relationship with Turkey is crucial. The country is one of its few allies in the Muslim world. Turkey fiercely rejects all claims of a genocide on Armenians.<sup>40</sup> Another reason not to interfere could be to avoid the opportunity for other nations to criticize Israel for its dealing with the Palestinians. There are also suspicions of a fear to belittle the sufferings and significance of the Holocaust by a recognition of other genocides.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Hasson 28.04.2015. Gelfond Feldinger 29.06.2013.

<sup>32</sup> Karlsson 2012:151, Lundgren 2015:64-66.

<sup>33</sup> Gunner 2012:19-20.

<sup>34</sup> Yackley 23.04.2016.

<sup>35</sup> “Genocide recognition” 16.07.2016. Ironically not only the atrocities committed by the Nazis drove the Polish Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin to coin the expression genocide to describe crimes that are premeditated with defined goals. Reading about the Ottoman killings of the Christians was also among what inspired him. “Raphael Lemkin” 17.03.2016, Gunner 2012:17, 35.

<sup>36</sup> Lubbcok 22.05.2015.

<sup>37</sup> Hasson 28.04.2015.

<sup>38</sup> Auron 04.07.2016.

<sup>39</sup> Gravé-Lazi 08.03.2016.

<sup>40</sup> Lundgren 2015:156-158.

<sup>41</sup> Rolef 25.05.2011. President Reuven Rivlin has since taking his office backed away from his former advocacy for naming the mass murder of Armenians as a genocide. Ravid 26.04.2015. Fishman 25.04.2016.

## 2.4 The Armenian community in the Armenian Quarter

One-sixth of the Old City of Jerusalem consists of the Armenian Quarter.<sup>42</sup> The Armenian community is estimated to be the oldest outside the motherland by some, but it was with the adaptation of Christianity that the bond to the Holy City deepened.<sup>43</sup> Some of the first laymen in the Convent were ancestors to Pilgrims who were employed for administrative tasks. They were a part of the Palestinian society within the Ottoman Empire and spoke Arabic. Armenian was the second language. After the genocide the Armenian population grew rapidly and changed due to the great influx of Armenian refugees.<sup>44</sup> The convent hosted many refugees and orphans which over time became permanent residents.<sup>45</sup> Although there were initial tensions with such a population increase the community worked through the challenges. A variety of businesses were started by Armenians. By the 1930s they could reach out to suffering Armenians abroad.<sup>46</sup> The community was at its peak when it was dealt a mortal blow in the war 1948.<sup>47</sup> The means to be a part of society was according to Tavit deliberately destroyed. The message was “you don’t belong”.<sup>48</sup>

As entrepreneurs Armenians started the first printing press and many other businesses in Jerusalem.<sup>49</sup> They are still renowned for their ceramics.<sup>50</sup> The rental agreement within the convent originating from the time after the Genocide states that the houses belong to the Church but the tenants do not have to pay any rent.<sup>51</sup> The exact number of Armenians in the community seems to be something of a secret and estimations given to me are between 700-1 200.<sup>52</sup> Most inhabitants of the Old City carry a Jordanian passport but have a complementary blue id-card which makes them residents of East Jerusalem.<sup>53</sup>

It is a tradition among the Jerusalemite community, as among other Armenians, to favor marriage between Armenians. Furthermore they also tend to stay somewhat closed as a community.<sup>54</sup> Aram, a teacher at Sts. Tarkmanchatz, reflects that the Armenian youth today

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<sup>42</sup> Hintlian 1989:46.

<sup>43</sup> Hintlian 1989:1-3.

<sup>44</sup> Der Matossian 2011:26. Melkon Rose 1993:2-5.

<sup>45</sup> In the beginning of World War I the Armenians in Palestine numbered around 2 000-3 000. In 1925 the population, which was situated mainly in Jerusalem, had increased to 15 000 according to Der Matossian. 2011:26-30. Baileys estimate them to more than 20 000. Bailey & Bailey 2003:72.

<sup>46</sup> Even though they worked through their conflicts and began to flourish the wars of 1948 and 1967 between the Arabs and Jews caused the initial decrease of the community. Der Matossian 2011:28, 31-32, 36, 39-40.

<sup>47</sup> Der Matossian 2011:24.

<sup>48</sup> Tavit 31.05.2016.

<sup>49</sup> Hintlian 1989:46.

<sup>50</sup> Hayg says “when people enter to my shop they come to buy Armenian first, and then ceramics. Not ceramics and Armenian”. 26.02.2015.

<sup>51</sup> According to my sources Alen and Tavit. 08.04.2016, 19.04.2016.

<sup>52</sup> Patriarch Nouhar Manogian expresses a concern for the decrease of Christians in the city and estimates the Armenian community to 400 individuals. Gelfond Feldinger 29.06.2013. Tavit says there are 1 200 Armenians. 31.05.2016.

<sup>53</sup> East Jerusalem 17.08.2016.

<sup>54</sup> Aram, teacher at St Tarkmanchatz Armenian School, contributes this to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. His view that it has had an effect that can be viewed both as an upside and a downside for the Armenians may be somewhat controversial. He explains it has probably caused the

seem to be free to move around and probably mixes more with society than previous generations.<sup>55</sup> The structure is patriarchal with traditional roles for men and women. In some ways similar to the surrounding society at large. In Church not all priests approve of the fact that most local women nowadays only wear a headscarf when receiving the Eucharist. A practice which distinguishes them from most of the pilgrims from Armenia, which do not only cover their head in Church but often wear longer sleeves and skirts. The bond to Armenia is important to the community. When there are Pan-Armenian games and other gatherings in Armenia, the Jerusalem diaspora is well represented.<sup>56</sup>

## **2.5 Sts. Tarkmanchatz Armenian school of Jerusalem**

The Sts. Tarkmanchatz school is situated within the Armenian Convent and was established 1929. A brother of St James is serving as the principal. There is a kindergarten from the age of three and school to the twelfth grade. Next to Armenian large parts of the education is in English as the British General Certificate of Education serves as the curriculum.<sup>57</sup> That the school is multilingual is evident during recess when the students speak in different languages with each other. Arabic and Hebrew are taught in school as well. The Students handbook has a very thorough “Code of Conduct”.<sup>58</sup> Details about rules for behavior and practical information makes sure students and their parents know what is expected of them. It also expresses goals as “instilling in our students a love and appreciation of Armenian culture, language, history, and knowledge of the Armenian Orthodox Church and its religious teachings and traditions”. Even though the importance of good conduct is stressed, the atmosphere at the school, between all the staff and the students, appears to be relaxed and warm. Most of the staff are former students of the school. All students wear school shirts but the dress code about dark trousers is not rigidly followed. Some wear tighter and more fashionably torn denims than the regulations allows. The teacher Aram says that their aim is to help the youth keep their Armenian identity.<sup>59</sup> According to him they have succeeded well as the youth have their distinct identity but are still integrated in society. By integrated he means they know how things work in the society and are aware of their surroundings.

## **2.6 Diaspora and identity**

Diaspora often refers to national or religious groups living outside a homeland. The Jewish diaspora was the paradigmatic case which used to define the term. Armenian and Greek diasporas were also early on viewed as classical examples while a more recent group is the Palestinians. The orientation towards a homeland, victimhood, trade or mobilization defined the early discussions.<sup>60</sup> As the connotations of the term diaspora has proliferated with the increased interest in the concept sociologist Rogers points out that due to the various intellectual, political and cultural agendas it cannot be viewed as an innocent analytical

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community to stay a bit closed and therefore helped them to keep their very own identity. If it hadn't been for the conflict maybe they would have integrated fully into society. 21.04.2016.

<sup>55</sup> The young Armenians do not only move more freely in Jerusalem, but also go to Tel Aviv or Ramallah. Aram and his friends hardly ever went beyond Jaffa Gate. A contributing factor was that he grew up during the two intifadas.

<sup>56</sup> According to Alen and Aram even the most represented compared to the other diasporas. 21.04.2016.

<sup>57</sup> “Sts Tarkmanchatz” 25.04.2016.

<sup>58</sup> “Students handbook” 14.04.2016.

<sup>59</sup> 21.04.2016.

<sup>60</sup> Brubaker 2005:1-2, 12, Faist 2010:12.

concept.<sup>61</sup> Among his arguments for a “category of practice” to avoid an essentialist view is a reference to a study that showed that only a few of the so called Armenian diaspora in the US have a diasporic identity. The large majority of the Armenians in the US rather have a “symbolic ethnicity” and have distanced themselves from the homeland and from Armenians elsewhere. This way diaspora is a way of formulating the identities and loyalties of a population as the political, social and cultural struggles takes place as within all groups.<sup>62</sup> A social constructive perspective holds that it is not possible to find one shared dominant identity in the diaspora community. The shared common ground that still defines it as something distinct from its surrounding is constituted in an interplay between different actors.<sup>63</sup> Three commonly accepted criteria are;<sup>64</sup>

1. *Dispersion* – in its narrow sense understood as forced and traumatic, or in a more wide interpretation regarding a dispersion in space.
2. *Homeland orientation* – as the “authoritative source of value, identity and loyalty”
3. *Boundary-Maintenance* – includes keeping “a distinctive identity visa-á-vis a host society (or societies)”. It can be enforced through endogamy or inflicted by social exclusion.

### 3. Analyses of the Interviews

Age did not indicate any noticeable importance during the interviews. Therefore, all interviews are categorized and presented according to specific topics related to the research questions. These seven topics are related to an Armenian identity in this particular context. Since the group interview with the youngest youth was restricted to thirty minutes, I only categorized their answers according to gender and numbers.

#### 3.1 Introduction of the respondents

All of the youth except for Anna, Alen and Erig have gone to Sts. Tarkmanchatz School. Two of the boys, currently attending Sts. Tarkmanchatz School, recently moved to Jerusalem. One of the boys attended a Jewish school before he moved, while the other boy went to an Arabic school.

*Anna* went to a private school with an Arabic curriculum where the majority of the students were Arab Christians. She speaks five languages, her main languages are Armenian and Arabic. She studies at the University and also works part time in a restaurant. She has lived in the convent all her life. When asked about her nationality she answers “Armenian” with emphasis even though her passport is Jordanian.

*Alen* and his siblings attended a private school tuition free as his whole family have European passports through a grandparent. He studies at a University in Europe. His great grandfather, who was a master pottery maker, moved to Jerusalem during the period of the British mandate.

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<sup>61</sup> Brubaker 2005:1-2, 12, Faist 2010:12.

<sup>62</sup> Brubaker 2005:12-13.

<sup>63</sup> Faist 2010:19-24.

<sup>64</sup> Brubaker 2005:5-7.

There he started a family business which is now a renowned ceramics factory and retail outlet. Alen calls himself an Armenian, but also a Palestinian Armenian. He feels that the Armenian and the Arabic culture have a lot in common.

*Erig* went to an international private school in Jerusalem and now studies at University in the city. His passport is Jordanian but he usually introduces himself as “an Armenian from the Old city”. He says an introduction is a necessity because of the ongoing problems. Armenians are seen as being in the middle which is probably safer considering the conflict between Jews and Palestinians.

*Samvel*, a youth from the younger category, now serves in the IDF (Israel Defense Forces). He was born in Armenia, but after the collapse of the Soviet Union his father decided that the family should move to Jerusalem because of the very hard times. They later switched their Armenian passports for Israeli even though his father has always said that his son will move back one day with his friends to “raise the country from its ashes”. Samvel considers himself one hundred percent Armenian although he is seen as an Israeli according to his passport.

*Maria* studies at University in Jerusalem. She has dual citizenship, Jordanian and the other from a country in another part of the world. When asked what nationality she is, she says she is Armenian. Some of her ancestors came to this region a long time ago to be a part of the Church here while others came after the Armenian genocide. Although one of her grandparents is Arab, she says she’s one hundred percent Armenian and is certain that her siblings would say the same.

*Elen* studies at a University in Jerusalem and works part time in a shop. She has lived all her life in the convent. Her parents are from other Middle Eastern countries but met in Jerusalem and settled there. Later they got Israeli passports for the family. When asked about her nationality she says Armenian. Elen explains that she always introduces herself as “an Armenian from Jerusalem”. She thinks it is ok to have an Israeli passport. “In the end you are living in Israel, whether you like it or not”.

### **3.2 The bond to Jerusalem**

The majority of the interviewed youth want to remain in Jerusalem even though some consider to move abroad for studies. There are some exceptions though.

All but two of the youth attending Sts. Tarkmanchatz School were born and raised in Jerusalem. When asked if they think they will move from Jerusalem at some point the majority seems to take the position that there are many deciding factors where they might end up so they can’t say for sure. Education is the main deciding factor where they will live. Many expect to return even if they would move away. Some add that they might like the new place and do not want to return. Two girls say that they definitely will come back. The reasons are “being rooted here” and “you can’t leave this land, it’s my home”. No one says they definitely will move away but at least some of the youth have the desire to do so. One girl longs to live in a place where there is peace. Armenians always end up in the middle between Palestinians and Israelis even if they try not to take sides. She also points out a difference in opinions and culture with “how we wear what we wear and how we behave” when comparing to Jews and Muslims. Two girls and one boy say they agree on this. Another girl wants to see new things and travel the world. She seems torn between her desire to travel the world, her family and the community in Jerusalem. One of the boys that moved to Jerusalem says that it is hard to move

away from family and friends. Still, compared to the other youth who grew up together he is not as attached to his friends thus he will probably move.

*Anna* wants to stay in Jerusalem since she likes to live there. She cannot really explain why she likes it. Life in Jerusalem can be hard and some of her friends “just hate it”. An example of what complicates life is that every two or three months the Old city is closed off due to Jewish feasts. She believes she will be able to get a job in the future although the particular field of work she is aiming for is harder to get into for someone that is not a Jew. Despite the bad things *Elen* also still likes living in Jerusalem and actually considers it a blessing. “[L]iving anywhere has its pros and cons”. She appreciates the historical aspects of living in the Old city with its ancient walls. A lot of people dream of visiting the city where they get to live. When *Maria* is asked where she would prefer to live in the future she says that in Jerusalem they have a base and know how things work, and if she was forced to choose it depends. “[I]f it just was [between] Jerusalem and Armenia, I would definitely say Armenia. But if we’re saying like Armenians in Jerusalem... I would definitely say in here... we are just a small community and if I could help with anything I would rather do it here, because like in Armenia they are already all Armenians”. She hopes that many would stay and even more would come. As a Christian it is also nice to live in the Holy Land. She still feels uncertain about future plans but would like to study somewhere abroad for a couple of years. The University here requires one to two years of additional Hebrew courses. Therefore, half of her friends are studying abroad at the moment. *Alen*’s future plans include studying and working abroad for a decade to prove that he can make it on his own. Then he wants to move back to Jerusalem and work in the family business. He is frustrated about certain things, still he feels they have a lot to be grateful for being situated in a large compound on Mount Zion. Growing up in the convent, he remembers how a lot of people of different ages used to gather in the evenings. He thinks there are fewer youth there nowadays. He is disappointed with the Patriarch as they say of the lay community has decreased according to him. Neither the Church nor the youth clubs have programs that attract the youth. He adds that maybe there is light at the end of the tunnel because those that are around the age of 16 or 17 are more active today.

Joining the IDF was a deliberate move according to *Samvel* as he plans to spend the next ten to fifteen years in the country and will get more privileges through this. He also sees this as a way of educating more people about Armenian history and what the Armenians are. “[B]efore I went none of them knew“. But it is controversial within the community because of the current political situation. He believes there are only three Armenians that joined previously and now he and his best friend joined. This has caused people to treat him differently. *Erig* is very disappointed in the older generation of the community and calls them corrupt. According to him they choose to blame others to protect themselves and mainly make connections with people that have connections. He says that “a lot of Armenians from the outside don’t really like the Armenians of Jerusalem”. All of this makes him very sad. “[T]hey’re my people and I feel we should be together. Instead of uniting we’re divided”. According to him the youth are affected by all of this. Still, he loves the youth and thinks they are very smart, patriotic and determined. Since he wants to move to Armenia, he would love for all the youth to join him. When asked what will happen to the Jerusalemite community if everybody leaves, *Samvel* rephrases his stance a bit and states “if I decide to move to Armenia and decide to live there, I will definitely miss the community here and I will definitely come and revisit because I don’t think that all of us would leave”.

### 3.3 Family and friends

During adolescence friends as well as family are important for belonging. As the family generally is considered of great importance for Armenians these concepts are analyzed together. The statement “family is more important than friends” gets at least six youth which totally agree in the group interview. One girl adds “family is permanent, friends are only temporary”. A boy says that “friends come and go but family stays”. Some other youth agree on the big importance of family but add that some friends are like family to them. One girl states that “we live in this community that is very small and everyone is very close together”. She views her friends as her sisters and brothers. A boy adds “a lot of close friends are like family”. No one seems to choose friends over family though. Ten out of sixteen agree on that it is important to marry an Armenian. Laughter is followed when one of the girls say “we should do more Armenians”. The reason is that they are few and must continue what previous generations has done fighting to keep their nation for many years. When a girl states that they must marry Armenians as the Jerusalemite community is decreasing because Armenians are marrying Arabs or Jews she receives applause. A third girl also says they should marry Armenians in order to keep their identity through their religion, culture and language. Five of the youth do not find it as important as the others. Many of them would prefer an Armenian but are open for other options. One of the boys that grew up in another city agrees that it is important to continue the culture and would prefer an Armenian spouse. Since he did not grow up with Armenians but with “Christians, Jews and Muslims”, he is not sure what will happen in the future. One girl finds it more important that “he is a good person and treat me right”. The majority says that their friends have mixed backgrounds which are defined in ethnic and/or religious terms. They met these friends through sports or through peace groups. Some of the youth live outside of the convent and have neighbors of different backgrounds. One girl and one boy says that the majority of their friends are Armenian. The girl explains that most of her friends are Armenian because she lives in the convent and goes to school there.

*Alen* was certain he would marry an Armenian girl until a couple of years ago. Now he does not know as he at the moment feels it does not matter whether she is Jewish, Muslim, Armenian or Italian. His mother will accept if he marries a non-Armenian but she warns him it might get complicated and that he could get shunned. So he is not sure how all of this will affect him in the end. He says that some guys go to Armenia when they reach their thirties to get a wife that cooks and cleans for them. The Armenian culture is quite conservative. For example being a homosexual is not really accepted so it is not something you talk very openly about. One person who used to be open about it left the community after a while. Anna says her parents would prefer for her to marry an Armenian. Personally she does not care if he is Armenian, Arab or something else as long as he is a Christian. The older generation wants the young people to only marry Armenians. In this way the community can grow, stay together and keep their religion, language and culture alive. This is sometimes perceived as if the Armenians do not want to be with Arabs or Jews. She admits that there are Armenians that think like that but she does not look at anyone differently based on religion, language or culture.

*Elen* explains that growing up in the convent was very safe, and still is as the door closes at 10 pm and no strangers are let in. Being together all the time, almost like brothers and sisters, gave them close bonds to each other. Also it was easy to form close bonds with the youth you didn't know, since you have similar experiences growing up. The youth club was where they did different activities and they also used to go on trips together. Since they learn four languages it was easy to make other friends when going on school-trips. According to *Elen*, being close as a family with everybody in the convent can be both good and bad. *Samvel* sees the teachers, classmates and all he grew up with as his extended family. His decision to join IDF caused

noticeable tensions. Some time back he greeted a high ranking priest with the Armenian phrase of respect but only got an angry glance in return. He is neither Pro-Israeli nor Pro-Palestinian. He wishes to “go back to the good old days, how we all used to be connected and all loved each other”. Erig believes that the strength the Armenians carry despite their history of hardships derives from living by “you have to marry an Armenian” and “stick to your close group”. This sense of duty to marry within the group has united the Armenians and has given them the strength to endure hardship. Erig feels that the older generation have a negative mindset compared to the younger generation. This is noticeable both in Jerusalem and in Armenia. He still believes a change could come about with the young people since they are more open. As he has a lot of Jewish and Arab friends, and Samvel has a lot of Jewish friends it gives them an opportunity to reach out. They get to be the middle ground through whom their Jewish and Arab friends can meet. For the most part Jews and Arabs do not meet because of the tension. Knowing Arabic and Hebrew give young Armenians the opportunity to be that middle ground. When asked what they consider typically Armenian one answer is that youth of the local community usually knows a minimum of four languages. Among the younger youth the majority have Armenian as their first language. Three or four of the youngest youth are partly Arab and speak Arabic as their first language. Out of these most don't speak Armenian although they understand it. All students speak English very well and for many this is considered the second language

*Alen* was supposed to study at a University in Jerusalem first but that would have taken him one or two years of Hebrew language preparations. There was a time when he was younger that he was mad at his parents for not putting him in the local Armenian school so he could have learned the language and more about the Armenian identity there. Instead he had to attend language classes after school. *Anna* had to take some extra Hebrew courses before she started at the University even though she is good with the language. The field she aspires demands a level of knowledge that sometimes even makes it a bit hard for her Jewish classmates. *Maria* states that the Armenian community in Jerusalem is different from other diasporas as everything is connected, their school, Church, the clubs and youth programs. They could stay Armenian since they did not have to mix with others like the Arabs and the Jews. The bond with other Armenians is very important “to keep the Armenian soul” and she mentions language as a part of this. Whenever she hears a song or a poem in Armenian she connects more to it and feels it has a deeper meaning. Some abroad in other diasporas do not even speak the language. She still thinks it is good to go out from the “Armenian bubble” and get other friends. It can be hard sometimes to be the only Armenian Christian at the University where the others have their groups but as she likes “both sides” everybody are ok with her and they all respect each other which is the main thing. She feels you have to accept people around you to be happy and should not dislike people based on differences in religion, culture or ethnicity. “First of all I'm human and then I am Armenian”.

### **3.4 The Genocide**

In the group interview most agree on that it is important for them that other countries and people recognize the Armenian genocide. Only one girl stands out on this matter. She believes that people from other countries that refuse to recognize the Armenian genocide do so because of their countries domestic politics. One boy and two girls elaborate on how important it is to make sure that it doesn't happen again. The first states that “as they say history will repeat itself and something will happen again and it will be too late for the world to stop it”. A girl says that as they have recognized the Holocaust for the Jews they should do the same for the Armenians. They should also not let political or economic reasons as being friends with Turkey hinder them. The other girl draws parallels between the genocide of the past and what is happening between

Azerbaijan and Armenia. She feels that history is repeating itself while no one does anything about it. If the genocide doesn't get recognized she fears that Azeris will continue killing Armenians.<sup>65</sup>

*Maria* feels obliged to spread knowledge about the genocide. For Armenia, for herself, for her people, but also so people could learn from history. As it is now no one seems to have learned from it. But maybe they as youth can raise the awareness so people would do something to prevent history from repeating itself. This also includes to increase the awareness among the older generation and people that are influential. This overall heightened awareness could eventually cause Turkey to recognize the Armenian genocide. The goal is recognition, reconciliation and to get their historical lands back. The Jews should also know that they have a connection through the Holocaust and that something happened "before them". *Alen* says that they want recognition and justice. What justice could mean is not easy to explain. Even though he does not expect them to receive all land back, the area with Mount Ararat would be important. But what to do with the Kurds, that are currently living there, is not solved easily since it has to be done in a good way. He thinks out loud about how Turkey maybe could follow Spain's example. Spain gave citizenships to the ancestors of those Jews that had lost their citizenships during the pogroms. Economical compensation is also a possibility. Armenia though, who is the probable benefactor of an arrangement like this, is unfortunately corrupt. *Alen* also reflects on how the Armenians instead of staying victims have learned from the genocide. Something which *Erig* later shares as he has been inspired by a Facebook post by his friend. Talking about the local community *Samvel* says that the younger generations greater understanding comes from the older ones investing in them to be what they could not and to finish what they started. He feels that it is the youth that are the activists and are more involved in protests concerning the genocide for example. As they are more open, go out to meet more people it gives them more understanding. The elderly stay in their own bubble. *Samvel* says that when you talk to an older person that have lived their whole life in the convent you realize that "they just don't want to go out and socialize with the outside world which is anywhere outside of the Armenian quarter". His generation has taken the step outside the convent door and through socializing with other people they are also able to share with them what the Armenians have been through and what they are currently doing. Something he thinks is very important as they have been fighting 101 years for the world to recognize the genocide.

### 3.5 Church and religion

Ten of the younger youth in the group interview agrees with the statement "faith is important to me". Only one girl states that "religion is not my priority". A couple of others takes a stance somewhere in between. "[T]here is not always faith", and also because you sometimes need to use your mind as the world is "going forward" while religions can be close minded. One girl finds faith very important, although hard as some people seem to lose their faith easily. But "if we stay on the right track we'll be good". A boy and a girl both bring up that as they were the first nation that converted to Christianity they have a legacy to honor. Another girl says that the church and priests are a part of the community's everyday life that's just there, it's not something that they get to say yes or no to. She also thinks that the environment of faith has

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<sup>65</sup> The conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia spiraled in the early morning 2 April 2016. Suicide drones has been used and the fact that Israel is a big provider of arms to Azerbaijan causes much annoyance among the Armenians. Ravid 10.04.2016. During three days it was the worst fighting with the most casualties since the ceasefire in 1994. Rallies in support of Nagorno-Karabach are arranged in the Armenian community in Jerusalem. Youth are involved in this. Furthermore there are protests against Azerbaijan's and Israel's involvement.

been important to the community in the past. This is said after another girl says that “there are two things that kept the Armenians together during the genocide, it’s our language and it’s our religion. And if we didn’t have our religion we probably would have been spread out”.

*Elen* says that the Churches bring them together as being Armenian is connected to being Christian. When she grew up they even attended Church with school. It was a ritual she did not enjoy, being forced to stand for hours. So she stopped attending Church on a regular basis after she had finished school, but during the big Feasts she does go with family or friends and sometimes she takes communion. Today she can appreciate the service that is conducted in Armenian. St James is the only Church where she senses something spiritual even though she has been to a lot of Churches. She has not yet been able to discover why she senses something spiritual at St James but not anywhere else. When asked about faith she explains it is not something tangible that you can touch, to kiss a cross or the Book, even though she do not wish to demean those that do it. For her it is “believing in a higher power whether it can be Jesus, or God or anything... believing that things actually did happen, and things can really happen if you really believe in it. If you believe in a higher power”.

*Alen* explains that religion is closely linked to the Armenian culture. His family is not religious but while they were children his mother used to pray with them and even his father joined them during those years. His father is critical of religion though. It was his grandmother on his mother’s side that was the only religious member in their family. The other grandmother also did become religious when she got old, “as they often get”. They do go to Church at big events and he even crosses himself and burn candles. For him it is more of a meditation than something spiritual when he is in Church. He is disappointed in the Patriarchate and the Church as he feels they do not do anything for the youth. For Christmas they could have a Christmas fair in the compound which would add the now missing Christmas spirit as well as generate money to the Patriarchate. He has himself talked to some people about a joint event with Palestinians. *Maria* reflects that she believes in what is logical to her when asked about faith, but also feels she does not want to question things too much. They were raised to believe in things and within her there is faith no matter what. “There is something bigger than us”.

Every Monday at school, when *Anna*’s religion teacher would add marks to the students that had attended Church, was a time when she felt that she stood out from the other girls because she was the only one from the Armenian Church. But she actually used to go to the Arabic Church with her friends as well. She still likes to go there and actually prefers it as it is in Arabic so she can understand everything. The service is also shorter, only one hour instead of three in the Armenian Church. When she goes with the family it is only to the Armenian Church. As the service is so long and they do not understand everything they usually only stay half an hour to forty minutes. Nowadays being so busy it is hard to find a time that works for everybody else so it is easier for her to go by herself. When asked about faith she says it is connected to Church but even more so to prayer for her. She prefers to pray at home. This does not happen very often but when having a hard time she prays in Arabic and reads the Bible. It makes her feel relieved.

*Samvel* was brought up by his parents and especially his aunts “to become a good Christian”, since religion is a very strong part of the Armenian identity. Even though he does not want to say he has lost his faith he no longer believes there is a God. He has also realized how corrupt the Church is. It is Erig that first starts to talk about the corruption. He has heard disturbing stories of sexual and economical nature about the Church. Most people do not want to talk about it, or maybe not a lot of people know about it. Despite this Samvel still would like the Church to keep governing the community. He thinks they need that but wishes that everything would

be by law and not corrupt in any way. During the interview he states that not everyone would talk about this corruption but him and Erig will as it is true. Others might be scared to do that but they are already considered rebels. *Erig* says he believes in Jesus but he does not think he is the Son of God. He believes in God, in “the three religious books” and takes “something from everything”. But he cannot tell this openly in the community because while being an agnostic or atheist is fine talking about other religions is controversial. “[A] lot of Armenians ... don’t see you as as Armenian if you’re not a Christian”. It should not be connected to religion as it is an ethnicity. The Church is holding them back and he thinks is applicable to the Armenian community at large as “we put everything in the hands of God and you... have to help yourself sometimes. You can’t just sit down and wait for Jesus to bring down the miracle”. There is a division in the Jerusalemite community according to *Erig* that can be seen in the two social clubs. They were established on political grounds and while one is focusing on Armenia the other is more closely linked to the Patriarchate and the Church. He feels the Church is diverting the community from focusing on Armenia as “it’s not our country here, Jerusalem is not ours”. If the Church should have a function at all it should be to unify them and teach proper religion.

### **3.6 Armenia and the Armenian heritage**

When the group of younger youth are asked if they could consider to live in Armenia everybody agrees. One girl declares that they should get educated to be able to help their homeland to advance in a time when “a lot of Armenians are escaping from Armenia because there is no work and no money”. Another girl says that “we should protect our homeland”.

*Maria* loves everything about her Armenian heritage. “[I]f I could be... anything else I’d still choose to be Armenian”. They do celebrate holidays with the Arab side of the family as well but the priority is always the Armenian side. She emphasizes how rich it is as a tradition and culture with the language, the music, the food, the dances and that there is always more to know about it. She has been to Armenia twice and instantly felt at home. There she is able to speak in what she calls her mother tongue without the need to switch between Arabic, Armenian, English or Hebrew. She also felt an acceptance from everybody there and has this connection that makes her want to go back. She loved the nature, the culture and the architecture. Even though Armenia is the motherland and it is possible to relocate, she still thinks it would be hard to move there.

*Elen* takes pride in being Armenian because her people have suffered for many generations but still stand and have their own country. Sufferings after the genocide and being scattered all over the world did not hinder the minority from rebuilding themselves, Churches and communities. This was made through persistence and determination. Therefore she feels being Armenian also comes with a responsibility to make sure there is a continuation. Love for their country and the language brings them together and there is a connection that makes her feel joy and warmth. She can feel there is something missing when not around Armenians. *Elen* has been to Armenia several times and describes it as “an identity acceptance”. Armenia is her own country. She feels an emotional freedom whenever she is there, she is at home and accepted. Asked if there is a difference to what she feels there compared to Jerusalem she answers “[t]here is no discrimination, there is no racism... you can think whatever you want, you can say whatever you want, no one judges you, no one looks down on you, no one says Jews are better, or Arabs are better”. The opposite of how she sees the situation in Jerusalem and Israel. She would really like to live in Armenia although she thinks it is too soon to know what will happen in the future. She is not sure if her field of studies could provide career opportunities over there. At the same time she likes living in Jerusalem. Some of her friends want to leave as they do not like living there but what happens in the future is hard to predict. They do not talk about that.

What makes *Alen* proud to be Armenian is that they are not using the genocide to victimize themselves and instead learn from it. Later he writes; [o]ur ability to build a country, bring together our nation, preserve our identity and culture without having to rely on the pity of others, without having to use the Genocide as a tool to intimidate and use others”. When asked what makes someone Armenian he answers that it is foremost considering oneself as one and he also feels one should show interest in the language and the traditions. For him political awareness and traditions are important. He is a traditionalist but not a conservative. He says that identity is very linked to tradition. *Alen* considers Armenia as his fatherland. The first time he visited the country was together with his family when he was a child. Since he became a teenager he has visited Armenia regularly not only with his family but also with the community’s youth clubs as well.

An Armenian trait according to *Erig* is claiming to have done everything first. The patriotism makes people claim crazy and funny things such as them being the cradle of civilization or that Jesus was Armenian. *Samvel* thinks the patriotism is something that mark the Armenians. It gives them a heartwarming feeling towards everything that is Armenian. Like if you hear someone’s surname ends with -ian you immediately feel joy as there is a ninety percent chance the person is Armenian. *Samvel* declares that “being an Armenian comes with love. Pride”. The reasons he finds in the nations long history of wars and conflict. This is what he feels makes them unique. Their pride and the fact that they are small in numbers and spread out over the world makes it important to spread the information about them to other people. *Erig* does not agree that their history makes them unique. Instead he refers to a Facebook post by his friend *Alen*. Armenians often say the source of pride comes from living through a genocide and a long history of keeping their culture but his friend pointed at something else which made perfect sense for *Erig*. Firstly, it is that they used their history to strengthen themselves instead of staying victims. Secondly, it is about pushing themselves to become better and although small in numbers still helping others “that have been through the same thing”. *Erig* believes that there are a lot of Armenian youth in Jerusalem that are motivated to move to Armenia to help rebuild the country that is struggling with corruption, a bad political and economic situation. A situation which according to *Samvel* makes many people that live in Armenia desire to emigrate. Both *Erig* and *Samvel* have plans to move when still young and start families over there. They believe there are a lot of youth in their community that feel the same way. *Erig* points out that because of everything going on “we are not really loyal to any government”. Armenians in other diasporas can be very loyal to their host countries and with comfortable lives they might not be as motivated as the Jerusalemites that have the political as well as religious tensions. He thinks that all Armenians that have the possibility are obliged to move back and help.

*Anna* is the only one of the older youth that never have been to Armenia. They have talk about going with the whole family in the near future. One of her older siblings did go with the youth group when younger. She is proud to be Armenian but when asked about why she says that she has not really thought about it. It is not something so special for her. It just did not bother her to be different. When asked what is distinct about the Armenian culture she does not see a very big difference, they have their own language and quarter. Even though she knows it is more personal for others which makes some perceive them as racist and only loving Armenians. She knows many that have this image about Armenians.

### **3.7 Arabs, Jews and the conflict**

There are a number of youth that feel more connected to the Arab culture than to the Jewish. Among the younger youth in the group interview a boy states that it is because he used to live in another Middle Eastern capital with his family before he moved to Jerusalem a few years

back. One girl feeling the most connected to the Arabic side states that it is because she is Arab. The other boy that lived in a coastal city in Israel during his early years is the only one of the whole group that is definitely more connected to the Israeli culture. But he has a lot of friends from different backgrounds. In a group of boys and girls the reasons for not taking sides and staying in the middle are that “Arabs are closer to Armenians but we also live in Israel... Israel protects us”. A boy adds that “Arabs don’t protect us”.

As *Anna* studied at a private school with an Arabic curriculum she has a lot of Arabic friends that she feels close to from the school years. Although she works with Jews she does not have any Jewish friends. There were a couple of girls she used to meet sometimes but they were never close friends. She explains that there is a cultural difference as Jewish girls tend to be free to go out more. The Armenian culture is closer to the Arab. “Arab girls understand me more than any Jewish girl”. Her parents would never allow her to move out to live alone at the age of eighteen, or to live with a boyfriend before marriage. She claims that most of the Jewish girls are allowed to do those things opposed to what is accepted in the Armenian and Arab community. She reflects that maybe she would have more Jewish friends if she had attended a Jewish school when growing up. At school she was the only Armenian Christian among the majority who were Arab Christians. She was always looked upon in the same way as if she would have been a Muslim. Today she and her friends never talk about being Armenian or Arab though. *Anna* says that 90% of the Jews she tells she is Armenian have no clue what that is. People she has worked with for years get surprised but do not treat her differently when they find out. Some Jews seem to think the only difference lies in the language since they do not know anything about the Armenians. The Arabs that are closer to them and also live with them know more.

*Alen* feels Armenians and Arabs have a lot in common with similarities of culture concerning language, food and even broidery. He prefers to go to Betlehem or Ramallah over Tel Aviv when going somewhere with his friends. To sit around a campfire and sing songs in Armenian and in Arabic with them is preferable over clubbing. *Elen* has few Jewish friends but a lot of Arab Christian friends. On a few occasions she has experienced Jews being racist towards her Arab friends. She feels that Jews act as if it's only them that matter, how “they put themselves on you, they tell you what to do and not to do”. During the Holy Fire on Easter she and her friends were not allowed to enter the Holy Sepulchre. She felt it was very unpleasant and demeaning that Jewish officers tells her she cannot enter her own Church. She also states that while some people say they do not want to get into the Palestine Israel conflict she has accepted living in Israel. At the same time the Israeli passport is considered something useful for travel but is in no way connected to whom she is. She is an Armenian from Jerusalem.

*Samvel* explains that Armenians are a very peaceful people and compares how the police in Armenia, unlike the police in Jerusalem, do not need to carry M16 or M4 guns. Elaborating on the source of pride for being Armenian *Erig* says that the Jews have handled their history with a genocide much differently than them. The Jews seem to be victimizing themselves with the Holocaust and “using [it] as an excuse to get away with a lot of things that they do”. He points out that he is not a racist and that all nations has “their wrongs and rights”. As *Erig* has both Arabic and Jewish friends, and *Samvel* have Jewish friends they get to be “the middle ground” through whom all can meet. He thinks that the Armenian youth could bring about a change if they can get others to think the way they think with the result of connecting Jews and Arabs. When hearing that people have accused them to consider themselves superior *Erig* defends the community and explains that being “the middle ground” as a small community can also be dangerous. So staying together has nothing to do with racism, although there are Armenian

racists, rather the motive is protection. An Arab might think you are a Jew and stab you or a Jew might think you are Arab and attack you. The joint custody of the Holy Sepulchre as well as them having their own quarter and not being a part of the Christian quarter is something that brings other conflicts. *Maria* says that it can sometimes be hard to live with the conflict between Arabs and Jews. Although it's been a bit challenging she feels being forced to face this and other obstacles outside her community has made her more confident. For the future in Jerusalem she hopes that people would start respecting each other and stop racism even though she believes there will always be a conflict. The Jews that spat on the cross during Easter should stop making problems and realize that they have been here for many years now "so just get used to it".

## 4. Summary – importance of the Armenian Identity

The credibility of this study is acceptable since it is possible to present complex variations of a diasporic identity among the respondents. At the same time transferability is for obvious reasons questionable because of the few respondents. In the group interview, with the younger youth, a majority represented views I understand to be characteristic for many Armenians. Although, because of the set questions and the fact that group dynamic might affect the result I have focused more on the individual interviews which were conducted with open questions. The descriptions of identity in the interviews are often connected to a larger narrative about what it is to be Armenian. Still, there were variations that prove an influence of the Jerusalem context and of individual positions.

The Armenian identity, among the interviewed youth, proves to play a greater role than both nationality as well as other belongings. All of the interviewed youth identify themselves as Armenians although none of them carries an Armenian passport. Their belonging is best described by the phrase "an Armenian from Jerusalem". Jerusalem is home and the bond to the city is the Armenian diaspora. A community that for many is considered an extended family that is mostly praised even though there are some critique. Staying loyal and closely connected to other Armenians is considered a trait. Through marriage within the group the diasporic identity has been regenerated. Those that would not mind a spouse of another ethnicity or religion still feel the pressure from the older generation to choose an Armenian spouse. Because of these customs Armenians are sometimes perceived as racist.

Pride is very prominent when describing what it is to be Armenian and Armenian culture. Therefore, at times the descriptions can even be perceived as nationalistic. The Armenian culture is significant for their identity. In particular the Armenian language appears to both carry as well as consolidate their identity. Religion and the Church are not as important for Armenian youth as it was for the previous generations. Still it is acknowledged to have an important role and seems to be a resource for many. The greatest importance is attributed to religion as a unifier for the Armenians and as such it exceeds the significance of religion and faith on an individual level. Although many see faith as something that enables Armenians to endure hardship, other youth consider religion as something that holds them back. Critique of the Church is voiced by some.

The most prominent source of pride is to have endured multiple hardships and yet stand firm as a people and even as a nation. Therefore, many explicitly or implicitly express that being

Armenian also comes with responsibilities. The genocide brings a duty to share about the history of the Armenians and an obligation to ensure that the Armenians exist as a people. The recognition of the genocide is a burden they share with the previous generations. In the individual interviews it is only Anna that does not mention the genocide. Armenia is considered the homeland, but while many feel a strong connection and want to support the country it is only Erig and Samvel that have pronounced plans to “move back” in the future. Erig even calls it an obligation to move there and help if possible. These individual variations seems connected to a weakened bond to the Jerusalem diaspora.

The standpoint of being “an Armenian from Jerusalem” is also a way not to get drawn into the conflict between Jews and Arabs. A conflict which causes some stress although most feel they are not directly involved in it. For those that could consider relocating the conflict plays a part. Many of the youth criticize the Jews and the State of Israel for being discriminatory and racist especially towards the Palestinians. Still no one wants to be perceived as taking sides in the conflict. It is only Alen that explicitly identify as an Armenian Palestinian among the older youth. This seems to be a cultural and moral standpoint. Maria on the other hand is partly Arab but solely promotes her Armenian identity. Many do feel a deeper connection with the Arabs than with the Jews. Most have more Arabic friends and there is a resemblance between Armenian and Arab culture. Still it is considered an asset being a friend of both sides. Erig and Samvel considers it as a means to build bridges between the two adversaries. This is enabled by them being multilingual and also seems connected to a new openness among the youth.

The conclusion is that a *diasporic identity* is evident to various degrees among the youth. The *boundary-maintenance* against society at large is still upheld from within through a distinct Armenian identity, even though the youth are more outgoing than previous generations. Furthermore, the fact that the genocide still has not even been recognized by Israel, adds to the social exclusion they experience as a minority. This also cements a *homeland orientation* with Armenia as an authoritative source of loyalty and identity next to the Jerusalem community. For a few youth a disputed belonging is an outcome. Still, the strong Armenian identity is mainly a resource for them as for the rest of the youth. They are ambitious and well-functioning citizens. Furthermore, as long as the bond to the Armenian community is strong enough a disputed belonging are not alone reason to leave Jerusalem for good.

## 5. Conclusion

The transferability of the data received through the interviews can be questioned due to the few numbers of respondents while the credibility can be perceived as acceptable. Therefore it is possible to present some of the complex variations of an Armenian diasporic identity among the interviewed youth. A certain authenticity<sup>66</sup> of the interviews was confirmed afterwards both by respondents, listeners and third party persons approaching me. As articulating points of views and beliefs are ways of gaining a better understanding of ones social situation and environment, the participants standpoints can be assumed to have developed in this area. Also the group interviews gave all involved a better understanding of other perceptions of the context.

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<sup>66</sup> Authenticity criterions for qualitative studies developed by Gubas and Lincoln. Bryman 2011:352-357.

The interviewed youth are best described as Armenians from Jerusalem. They belong there although a disputed belonging is evident to a certain extent in Elen, Erig and Samvel. Still, the strong Armenian identity is mainly a resource for them and the rest of the youth. They have a rich heritage to be proud of. Many of the statements by the youth are similar to what I found through my previous research and observations about the Armenians. Cultural expressions are connected to a larger narrative about what it is to be Armenian. This proves a strong Armenian socialization. Especially the Armenian language carries cultural significance for the Armenian identity. The language appears to both carry as well as consolidate their identity. An identity that first of all is connected to the community in the Armenian Quarter. The Armenian community is of great importance for the youth and is their main bond to Jerusalem. A family like connection grows from the closely knitted relations formed by school, social clubs and a big compound for gatherings within the convent premises. Jerusalem is home for the Armenians, although the loyalty is restricted mainly to the diaspora because of the surrounding conflicts.

To claim a neutral position in the conflict between Palestinians and Israeli Jews is something the youth share with many older Armenians. It can be considered playing it safe to protect oneself. To end up in the middle between the two parties involved in the conflict is considered very negative. Some youth though tend to view the position in between as a means to build bridges between the two adversaries. This way of looking at their role in the conflict seems connected to the new openness of the younger generations. They move about more freely. They also learn Hebrew besides Arabic whereas not all in the older generations would do that. Most of the Armenians of Jerusalem are closer to the Arabs than the Jews. Even though the Armenian youth are well functioning citizens there is a gap between them and the majority of the society. Many of the older youth criticize the ongoing discrimination of minorities in Jerusalem. The political context and the current conflict between Jews and Arabs reinforces their identity as a subgroup in the society at large.

Religion remains a factor that unites the Armenians at some level. Christianity was and is connected to the Armenian identity. This withstands accusations by some that the Church and the clergy have failed to keep the expected moral standards or that the Church and religion hold back the community. The Patriarchate still has an important societal and political role. In a religious city like Jerusalem the societal role of religion as a unifier goes beyond personal convictions. On the way in and out of the convent premises everybody has to pass by Sts. James church. Many youth that pass the church, whether they believe in God or not, still honor the tradition by crossing themselves. During the big feasts most of the young people attend church at some point, but probably less often than older generations did. While a personal faith in a god varies, religious practice is more valued among Armenian youth compared to youth in secular environments. Some youth experience comfort through religious practice like prayer. For others religion is an assurance that the Armenian people will flourish when staying within the Armenian faith. Therefore, religion remains a resource for many of the youth.

Many mention that pride is connected to the Armenian identity. Foremost they take pride in their resilience through a history of suffering. This is something they share with many Armenians elsewhere, still Alen and Erig bring a new perspective. They emphasize that they have not stayed victims or used the genocide as an excuse to mistreat others. A clear influence of the context as it is a critique of the Israeli state. The quest to get the Genocide recognized is also something the respondents share with other Armenians. The fact that the genocide still has not been recognized by the Israeli government is very personal. This reinforces the suspicion that the government mainly supports the Jews. In the individual interviews all except Anna

mention the genocide. They talk about the genocide almost as a metanarrative and not how it affected their families back then. Only Alen mentions how it affected ancestors in a subordinate clause. The Older Armenians I have interviewed before always mentioned how the genocide affected their families. The knowledge the young people have of family stories concerning the genocide seems to be subordinated to the shared recollection of the community.

The collective inheritance of having been through a genocide combined with the threats of living in an environment of conflict is likely to have consolidated their strong identities as Armenians. Furthermore the so called homeland-orientation is made stronger because of the political and societal context. Although the younger Armenians in Jerusalem seem to be more outgoing than the older generation, they still carry a so called diasporic identity. Armenians have a responsibility towards the homeland, and for Armenians in general. While they share this with Armenians globally there is a difference. The youth in Jerusalem with a diasporic identity have a more defined homeland orientation towards Armenia compared to Armenians in the US. A rather idealistic image of Armenia is expressed by many, especially when compared to Israel. Armenia appears as the ideal antitype. At the same time the youth are aware of the problems in Armenia and few imagine their future there. Almost everybody would like to help through short term commitments, whereas it is only Erig and Samvel that have long term plans to move there. A contributing factor for this might be that they are not on good terms with some people in the community.

Samvel could be considered well integrated into the Israeli society. Still, it does not interfere with his identity as an Armenian. He carries a diasporic identity rather than a symbolic one (as the Armenians that have integrated into the American society). His loyalty is questioned by many in the Armenian community though. What he considered as a practical move for himself when he joined the IDF, was actually a political statement as well. Because of the strife caused by this his loyalty to his Armenian heritage is directed from the community in the Armenian Quarter towards Armenia. Erig expresses that Jerusalem is not their land which might be very offensive to many Armenians there. Not only to those that consider it as holy as the soil in Armenia. There are other individual variations as well among the youth as the identity consists of a value system that responds to the needs of the individual in a specific context. The reason why Anna does not seem to carry the same sense of purpose in her identity as “a proud Armenian” seems connected to that she has not been exposed to the same socialization as many of the others.

It is clear that the majority of the interviewed youth feel at home in Jerusalem and want to build their future there. For the majority the threats perceived are not alone reasons to leave Jerusalem for good as long as the bond to the Armenian community is strong enough. Although sympathetic towards the Palestinians few of them seem to take on a Palestinian identity. Alen is not of Arab descent, therefore his strong identification with the Palestinians can be considered a cultural and moral standpoint. Maria’s strong Armenian identity, although partly Arab, indicates that the socio-cultural impact of the Armenian community is very strong. One of the younger girls of Arab descent had a different outlook on certain questions than the majority. There was unfortunately no time to elaborate on how youth with mixed descent identify with their Arab ancestry and a Palestinian identity. As all my observations and interviews were made in an Armenian environment I have unfortunately not been able to observe how they relate to their Armenian heritage in the surrounding contexts. In further research with more respondents it could be of interest to explore how the negotiations between these heritages are made in individuals and within groups.

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