GOING A LITTLE SLOWER TO BELONG: SENSORY EXPLORATIONS OF TIME- AND PLACE-MAKING AMONG ARMENIANS IN CONTEMPORARY ISTANBUL

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In Istanbul, a city that is undeniably shaped by bodies of water, boats constitute ethnographic sites to observe the multiple processes of community-making. By looking at the time travelled on boats en route to the famous Prince's Islands Archipelago located off the city proper, this article demonstrates how different understandings of time and temporality among the permanent (both winter- and summer-time) and the temporary (summer-time only) residents of the islands both define and inform particular relationships to the islands. For instance, to what extent everyday practices of accommodating time – such as waiting for boats and anticipation of delays – reflect different ways of belonging to the islands? In relation to the very specific demographic compositions and public imaginations about these islands as a non-Turkish/Muslim space populated by Jews, Greeks and Armenians, this article necessarily investigates how accessibility to urban mobility plays out in the (un)making of national unity. In doing so, it follows a specific approach to understanding noise, sound and hearing as ethnographic data, and tackles the ways through which non-Muslim difference and diversity are expressed (and/or similarly silenced) in the city. This is how the article provides an ethnographically thick description of the "stigmatization" of these islands in Turkish national and public imagery by way of focusing on the tangible aspects of (spending) time which is often sensed as discriminatory by the islanders.

Keywords: Istanbul, Armenians, islands, boats, transport, noise, placemaking, belonging

INTRODUCTION

On a hot summer's day in Istanbul in 2012, Nadia, an Armenian friend from Istanbul in her mid-30s and I attempted to travel to the island of Kınalı (henceforth Kınalıada, lit. the

island of Kınalı). The island is located within the Prince's Islands Archipelago, which offers a combination of forests, beaches, car-free streets, and good restaurants – within easy reach from the overly populated mainland. This is why Nadia, like many upper middle class Armenians from Istanbul, was attracted to the island and spent her summers with the rest of her family in a modest mid-century apartment building, where each of the three floors were occupied by close relatives. On that summer's day, our boat was delayed for 15 minutes, as the seemingly overgrowing crowd of passengers required an "additional service" (in Turkish: *ek sefer*) – implying that a second boat was called into the port to finally transport the remaining passengers who wanted to get a taste of the holidays on one of the islands visible on the horizon. As we were almost "pushed" behind the people similarly waiting in line to embark, we found ourselves seeking refuge and finally squeezed into a hot corner of the vessel surrounded by a wall of humans blocking ventilation. The boat was full of commotion, people talking loudly and some others making music for fun and/or money. At that moment, Nadia told me that for all those day-trippers (in Turkish: *günübirlikçiler*) people who lived on the islands were just souvenirs (in Turkish: *turistik eşya*). In her understanding, people living on the mainland came to see their lives on display. For her, these visitors never respected the islands and their specific "culture of living" (in Turkish: *yaşama kültürü*) and they brought litter in addition to noise and disorder. She added that they just never "shut up" (Turkish: *seslerini kesmiyorlar*) on the boats as well as on the streets of the island and continued disturbing residents, who needed to rest before running errands in Istanbul or after work, especially those who had a "real life" (Turkish: *gerçek hayat*) on the archipelago.

In the winter that followed, I was once again on the same pier where I met Nadia, to make it to the 7:40 pm boat from mainland Istanbul to the island. In comparison to the summer, the terminal felt quiet and dead. There were some others running to make it to the same boat after me; however, as I passed through the turnstiles, the officer announced over the PA system that no more passengers were allowed in. Boarding was completed. A woman running behind me started shouting repeatedly: *hayatımdan üç saat çaldınız!* (lit. you stole three hours of my life!). She was protesting that she had to wait – perhaps by sitting at the pier – for the next boat. As soon as I left the woman behind, I came to realize that there was a temporal aspect in claiming a relationship to the island. Especially in the wintertime, when boats are distinctly less frequent, service schedules are perceived as discriminatory by the people who live on the island, in that one could be left stranded for long hours. After all, the generosity shown to day-trippers did not extend to "the real islanders" (in Turkish: *gerçek adalılar*). However, as this article will explore in more detail, who constitutes an "islander" – and to what extent – is very much contested and a multiplicity of everyday formulations of the term clearly reflect this complex situation.

In the article, I argue that time spent on and en route to the island is one of the many components of community-making in contemporary Istanbul. In this context of travelling and dwelling (two inseparable conditions of being for Clifford 1997), time prompted an everyday discussion about the imagined and physical boundaries of the island. On

the one hand, islanders, regardless of gender, class and/or ethnic/religious background, were affected by – and had to learn to accommodate to – the time constraint on their movements between the island and the mainland (in analogy to Reed 2004, whose observations also focused on the materiality of space in relation to the effect of time). On the other hand, the ways in which each group of islanders learned to accommodate time made them different kinds of islanders. Although I do not extensively discuss the input of ethnicity to the organization of everyday life in this paper, I should note that the differences between the rhythms of the city and the island should imply time-specific co-constitutions of public and private spheres. This is not to suggest that the two spheres are necessarily separated, however, my research among Armenians – a very particular minority group in Turkey – shows that experiences of time deeply manifest and reproduce the various intimacies at play in the making of urban communities (à la Zerubavel 1981).

This is how, for instance, we can think about the use of the word *hayat* (in Turkish: life) by the woman at the turnstiles and by Nadia with regard to the island (as opposed to "real life"). When the woman screamed at the turnstiles that three hours of her life were stolen, she was making a statement about the centrality of the island – her permanent home – in her life. Nadia's comment was similar in the sense that she was making a statement about the positionality of the island, although she only spent the summer months there. While on a packed boat from Istanbul, she suggested a difference between how she and the day-trippers perceived the island; she referred to her life on the island as "real life" as opposed to a life on display, or souvenir-like. What was the temporal element that prompted Nadia to emphasize "realness" in relation to life on the island?

It appears that, for Nadia, although she only spends a few months of the year living on the island, Kınalıada is a permanent fixture in her life. Following this observation, in this article, I suggest that there is a primary level of distinction between islanders, which is discerned in the time spent waiting for and travelling on the boats. I take this distinction, which is simply based on a person's capacity to move, as both defining and reproducing the various differences between Armenians and non-Armenian Turks in contemporary Istanbul. I believe that different urban modes and forms of daily commute and travel constitute a dynamic social context in which one of the many aspects of ethnic demarca-tion can be observed. Therefore, I explore temporality in multiple ways, first in relation to the overall enterprise of going to the island, which can be time-consuming, and second in relation to the relative speeds of different types of boats that operate between the island(s) and Istanbul. I argue that boat schedules, waiting, unexpected delays, and time spent aboard create a multiplicity of temporalities through which islanders claim particular relationships to the island(s). In accounting for the ways through which time spent on and en route to the islands identified different kinds of islanders, I specifically make use of sensory ethnographic data to fully describe a physical context in which everyday experi-ences of belonging and "distinction" are located. It is perhaps no coincidence that in the very opening vignette of this article, my travel companion Nadia commented a couple of times on the fact that other passengers, especially those visiting the islands for a day or so,

made so much noise. This is why, in the next section of this article, I discuss the material and the sensory constitutions of space – in order to speculate more on the ways in which everyday morality, which involves both a public and private discussion on what is *in* place and what is not (Douglas 1966; Creswell 1996), is constituted in time-specific contexts of mobility.

A SENSORY APPROACH TO MOVING AND PLACE-MAKING

Turkish story-writer Mehmet Zaman Saçlıoğlu observed that

> [Istanbul] *is such a city that is not quite clear whether it joins or separates two continents, whether it separates or joins two seas.* The answer to these questions does not lie with nature but with humans. That is why Istanbul is different to every eye which looks upon it […] Between the two [continents of Asia and Europe], the waters are enchanted. The enchantment of water stems from the tension between parting and bringing together. The almost touching of these two continents is like the fingers about to touch in Michelangelo's "The Creation of Adam." *It is this touch, or anticipation of touch, that gives Istanbul life.* (2013: 17–18, emphases mine)

In contrast to the orientalist imaginations about Istanbul's warm and steady climate, for most denizens of the city the weather is unpredictable, both in summer and winter. There are days when Istanbulites feel like distances between the shores of the city decrease and others when they feel like these distances increase as the water is less passable. This is because the city is situated between two large bodies of water and landmasses: the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, the Anatolian and the Balkan peninsulas. This implies a unique climatic context, which gives its character to the city. Istanbul is at the centre of constantly changing pressure and temperature zones. Şeref Kayaboğazı, a local geographer/historian of the city, wrote in his 1942 book on Istanbul's geography that Istanbul neighbourhoods and surroundings bore diverse climatic characteristics different from each other. He noted that different neighbourhoods could experience different seasons in the city, as the winds from the colder north and the warmer south were both strong and the differences in temperature between land and sea, as well as between the Black Sea in the north and the smaller Sea of Marmara in the south, were considerable. I argue that it is this particular climatic context that creates a particular context of temporality – that undeniably has many more components than the everyday experiences of anticipation noted by Saçlıoğlu in the above quotation (2013).

In my first and so far only book, *Mobility and Armenian Belonging in Contemporary Turkey* (2023; in press), I explored both urban and transnational mobility in relation to experiences and infrastructures of stasis. By following a thematic framework inspired by Clifford (1997), my aim was to unpack the making of everyday routes of movement and to account for the ways that people moved despite various physical barriers and

practical – not only personal but also legal, political and economic – limitations. This was how my consideration of mobility was transformed from an understanding of movement on "surfaces" (see Ingold 2011 for an excellent discussion) to the wider historical and everyday patterns of circulation. This new perspective required assessing how the movement of particular people and things was made possible at the expense of others who did not and could not move (Glick-Schiller and Salazar 2013). In a move to recognize the multiplicity of everyday urban transportation routes available to passengers, in this article, I would like to emphasize "regimes of mobility" instead of simply referring to networks of mobility. By following the lead of the authors mentioned here, I feel that the former better contextualizes the accumulation of the know-how which makes people move in historically- and politically-informed ways. As I construe the term in the urban transportation context of Istanbul, it points at the everyday tactical relationships between the commuters and the political, economic and physical structures of mobility. In this regard, time spent aboard should not be understood only as restrictive for the passengers, as time can be reappropriated in relation to various personal and collective agendas of placemaking (and belonging).

I attempt to contribute to the current literature by stressing that the personal know-how about how to move – that is how individuals decide to travel on particular modes of transport by following available routes at different times of the day – is reflective of the embodied knowledge of space, and vice versa. In order to move forward with this sentiment, I suggest that the very physical space of a boat can be considered as a *passage* at two levels in Istanbul. At one level, this mode of transportation covers physical distances between the island and the mainland. In this sense, everyday understandings of distance and proximity to the island(s) are very much related to the unique climatic context of Istanbul, where strong winds and currents from the Black Sea and the Mediterranean either unite or separate the shores of the city. This is also a passage at the level of the network, where the passengers are *transported*. At another level, however, the distances covered point at travels to imagined landscapes, where the passengers are *identified* (and perhaps stigmatized?) in certain ways. For instance, Kınalıada (in addition to the other islands within the Prince's Islands Archipelago) is imagined as a "foreign country" within popular Turkish imagery due to the non-Muslim majority (Brink-Danan 2012). This public imagery about non-Muslims-as-foreigners is necessarily related to the construction of a very particular Turkishness as the majority identity of the country (see Çağaptay 2005 for a theoretical discussion on the construct of Turkishness). It is in this context of post-Ottoman nation-building that the islands are believed to be the only place in Turkey where the majority-minority distribution of the population is not in favour of Muslims, although their demographic composition has never been officially verified. This is because the great majority of non-Muslims with summer houses on the island(s) tend to register for the national census in their "permanent homes" – those homes that are located on the mainland, where they spend their winters as well as most of the autumn and spring months. In relation to this second passage, I suggest that the central locus of this article should not

be viewed as a study of Armenians from Turkey who only have a fixed relationship to the island, but rather as a study of the common practice of going to the island that always comes in Turkish with a specific terminology: *adaya çıkmak* (lit. going up to or exiting the island), implying a different type of distancing than simply *adaya gitmek* (lit. going to the island). It should also be noted that I feel a public manifestation of effort in the multiple utterances of the former in Istanbul – an effort which should be further reflective of the specific temporal and physical situatedness of the island I discuss in the following pages.

In terms of public transportation to the islands, there are two primary modes: slow boats, or *vapur* in Turkish (from French *vapeur* for steam) (see the similarity with Venetian *vaporetto*), and fast boats, or *deniz otobüsü,* translated as seabuses.[1] As opposed to what their names literally imply, vapurs have not run on steam for several decades and seabuses are nothing like a bus – besides the fact that the seating organization of the latter is remarkably different than the former (see more in the following pages). The former are landmarks of Istanbul's renowned skyline, with their distinctive funnels and masts – in addition to the city's less mobile domes, minarets, and towers. Operated since 1954 by City Lines (in Turkish: Şehir *Hatları*),[2] a state-owned company and now part of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (or IMM), vapurs run all year round with timetables changing every summer and autumn. Seabuses were only introduced in 1987, again by the IMM, and in 2011 this line was privatized. From Kınalıada, an average journey direct to Istanbul's Kabataş pier takes 50 minutes on the vapur and 25 minutes on the seabus. Faster and more expensive, seabuses only run during the summer. Unlike vapurs, which are monohull boats, the fast boats have catamaran-like double-hulled bottoms and are hence very vulnerable in harsh winter conditions.

By elaborating on the physical conditions of the two distinct types of vessels, I wish to take a specific sensory approach to explore place-making in contemporary Istanbul. For instance, during each sea journey, I observed how vapurs and seabuses were different in terms of their physical settings and audiences with regard to the ways in which passengers talked and kept silent. Here, it is important to stress that I am not trained as a sound engineer or specialist, however, as a cultural and political anthropologist, unpacking everyday experiences of placemaking (hence understanding multiple expressions of belonging and unbelonging) has been at the core of my intellectual project. I have been particularly interested in understanding how feelings of being *in* place (à *la* Creswell 1996) are both stimulated and reproduced in relation to the ways that human beings sense – i.e., how they see, hear, taste, smell and touch – information. I find that the particular definition of Turkishness implies an internalized knowledge about how to express and silence religious difference in contemporary Istanbul – a situation that is clearly evident in Armenian, Greek and Jewish communities of the city (see Brink-Danan 2012). For instance, every time I

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[1] There are more than two modes of sea travel between mainland Istanbul and the islands. There are also *motor*s, smaller boats run by cooperatives, and *deniz taksi* or sea taxis.

[2] The first regular line was started in 1846, and boats were run by various private companies until they were finally and completely nationalized in 1954.

took the vapur to or from the island during the rush hour or on the weekend, I had great difficulty in hearing people: a commotion of people always accompanied a cacophony of languages – diverse languages of people from Turkey and from other countries. I was always amazed by how some people indeed managed to understand each other in such a noisy environment. Most of the time it was possible for my Armenian friends to communicate from a distance if they spoke a language other than Turkish – for example, with a person who took a seat two or three rows in front of us, as if a bridge or a channel of communication in Armenian connected people located in different parts of the boat, cutting through the white noise in the air.

The noise on the boat sometimes sounded deafening, but communication was possible nonetheless. On a beautiful summer's day, I was on my way to the island with Manuk and Lena, a newly married Armenian couple in their mid-30s. As we were talking in Turkish over tea and *tost*, toasted sandwiches with cheese, I asked them how they met. The topic never came up since the first time I met them a couple of months before. They told me that they had *obviously* met on the island, and that they knew each other for about twenty years, since childhood. They met as most of their peers did, through swimming on the same beach on the island, travelling on boats frequently in summertime, attending baptisms or wedding ceremonies, dining in the same restaurants, going to the same discos, or shopping in the same shops. As it seemed, their acquaintanceship before their romantic relationship was limited to the summers they spent on the island. The groom explained that it was for this reason that they took their time in getting to know each other as adults, and they travelled many places together before they got married. They were very fond of travelling together. Manuk started to talk about how he had family in Paris, Brussels, and London, which was why those were among the first places they visited. They also visited their ancestral towns of Muş and Van together, and now, he told me, they planned to go to Armenia as they were curious about seeing Armenians there. Then he started to compare Armenians living in different countries. In a conversation entirely in Turkish, he said that he once attended a football game between France and Armenia in Paris, on the side of the latter. At that moment, Lena started to talk about another topic that was entirely different and disconnected from that of her husband, about the best ways to raise a child. Manuk went on talking about how among Armenian spectators there were people from many different countries, but that he was probably the only one from Istanbul. He started to give examples about how Armenians from Turkey, Europe, and Arabic-speaking Middle Eastern countries were different, which for him was best exemplified by their attitude towards ASALA (the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia, an Armenian terrorist organization that was active between 1975 and 1988, known for attacks on Turkish diplomats). When Manuk started to talk about ASALA, Lena started to speak even more loudly about the best kindergartens in Istanbul. As he kept talking, now jumping from topic to topic and suggesting that in fact all Kurds and Alevis were survivors of the 1915 Armenian Genocide who had survived as converts to Islam, a political subject that was delicate to talk about in public, she was practically screaming about the importance

of primary school teachers in the education of children. When the groom finished his monologue, the bride finished hers, as well. There was silence at the end in our tiny group, but the crowds continued speaking in the same manner as they mostly did. I was puzzled all through this long conversation with this couple, as I did not know whom to follow. For a second, I thought every other person around us must have been looking at us, and I checked other people from the corner of my eye but realized that nobody really heard what Manuk was talking about.

I would not understand what had happened on the vapur on that summer's day until I watched a currently unreleased ethnographic documentary on a slum community at the very heart of Bangkok by Michael Herzfeld, a subject matter which he later published on in the following years (Herzfeld 2016). This slum community, surrounded by a wall that separated it from the rest of the city, was at risk of being demolished for the purposes of a gentrification project led by the local government at the time of the video's shooting. The movie shows how the residents became politically active and resisted the demolition plans. Herzfeld explained that rapid communication was key in the resistance of the then residents/now activists, but in a chaotic and very noisy city like Bangkok screaming and shouting did not have any use when immediate help was needed in times of direct clashes with the police (personal communication on 30 November 2012). The residents/activists learned to talk below the "white noise" of the city instead of attempting to go above it (see also Herzfeld 2016: 156–162). While the police outside could not hear them because of it, they could communicate by finding a way around it. Similarly, the fragment of travelling with Manuk and Lena presented above portrays a moment of speaking above and below. While Manuk talked about increasingly politically sensitive issues on a vapur packed with people, Lena also increased her voice, to the point that no one around us could hear what her husband was saying. I argue that she went above and covered up the speech of her husband by deliberately creating a blanket of "alternative white noise", which I take to be reflective of the wider (embodied) politics of difference operating in Turkey.

Steven Feld (1996) in his work on the Kaluli of New Guinea argues that there is a doubly reciprocal motion between senses and places: "as place is sensed, senses are placed" and "as places make sense, senses make place" (91). I believe this is a more complex argument than it seems, and it is worth exploring in relation to Armenian place-making in Istanbul. It appears that hearing (here as sound, not directly as language) affects the ways we perceive space. In addition to the incomprehensible white noise, the ways voice is produced and heard demonstrate how the self is positioned at a particular place. This could refer to the physical and social positionings of the self, and although both should depend on each other, within the scope of this article I am mostly interested in the latter (i.e., how Armenians are socially positioned as different in relation to the things they hear and do not hear, listen to and do not listen to, and speak and do not speak, and other people who hear and listen to them and their perceptions of what they hear or listen to). Following that, I suggest that hearing is a mediator between the people within its reach, and a component of human sociality. Howes (2003) wrote that "sensual relations are

social relations" (2003: xi), implying that what we see, hear, touch, smell, and taste is constitutive of the social roles between different people.

In order to elaborate more on the centrality of sound and hearing for place-making, Feld suggests a new terminology:

> Acoustemology, acousteme: I'm adding to the vocabulary of sensonic studies to argue the potential of acoustic knowing, of sonic presence and awareness as potent shaping forces in how people make sense of experiences. Acoustemology means an exploration of sonic sensibilities, specifically of ways in which sound is central to making sense, to knowing, to experiential truth. This seems particularly relevant to understanding the interplay of sound and felt balance in the sense and sensuality of emplacement, of making place. (Feld 1996: 97)

Sonic knowledge or acousteme is a vital source of information for researchers, and a domain of knowledge for our informants and the wider crowds we encounter during fieldwork. David Howes (2013) writes that the anthropology of senses was initially inspired by a desire to explore under-investigated non-visual modes of experience. This is why in the past decade there has been a growing interest in the sense of hearing in anthropology, and anthropologists have suggested and pursued "sensorial fieldwork" (Robben and Sluka 2007) or "sensory ethnography" (Pink 2009). Such ethnography of the senses has an agenda to account for the compartmentalization of ethnographic data in terms of the methodological tools and the media used for the registration and communication of cultural facts and theories.[3] In this sense, as anthropologists, our task is to look for more holistic approaches in data collection and close the gaps between the different senses in providing us perspectives on human realities. Consequently, the ethnographic data pre-sented in this article illuminate that sonic experiences are indicative of how people relate to immediate strangers and other crowds through hearing and unhearing noise and voice.

With a focus on hearing, my inquiry here is based on exploring the ways in which Armenians in contemporary Turkey embody the difference vis-à-vis Muslim citizens of the country. This way of hearing and sensing the world, as Feld argues, "is internalized as bodily knowledge" that could be thought of as similar to Bourdieu's (1977) everyday "body hexis", which can be best understood as embodiment turned into permanent disposition and the naturalized regime of knowing on how to use our bodies, which Mauss called "body techniques" (1935) (also discussed in Feld 1996: 100). Following these three authors who similarly point at the correlation between bodily movement and social behaviour, hearing – and detecting the ways my informants do and do not hear, are heard and are not heard – opens up the possibility of understanding embodied practices of difference. For instance, Hirschkind (2009), in his inspirational work on cassette sermons in contem-porary Cairo, argues that aural media contributes to the shaping of moral and political

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[3] Such compartmentalization is perhaps most evident in the ways that "visual ethnography" is clearly distinguished as a different methodology than "oral history" which often focuses on deciphering the tension between the spoken and the unspoken/silenced.

landscapes, not only through its capacity to disseminate ideas or instil ideologies but also in its effects on the human sensorium, on the sensibilities and perceptual habits of its vast audience. As a result, it should be expected that the sensorium is both an ethnographic context in which we can observe the embodiment of other domains of knowledge and a sum of practices that reflect wider body-politics in a nation-state like Turkey, where nation-building imagined and crafted particular landscapes as "foreign".

Brink-Danan (2012) argues that significant experiences of discrimination and surveillance led non-Muslim minorities to develop a particular kind of internalized knowledge about where, when and how much to speak. As also portrayed in the cases of my informants, non-Muslims in Turkey constantly reposition themselves in accordance with the sensory information available to them. This reminds me of Zerubavel's seminal work on the territoriality of time, where the public and private domains are both reproduced and manifested through the temporal boundaries of social accessibility from the outside (1981: 138–166). In referring to the two terms, I should note that I believe in their co-constitution, implying that the boundaries between different levels of collective intimacy should come into formation on a time-specific basis. This is also perhaps why I find the term "public-life" (Navaro-Yashin 2002: 2) more applicable, especially in the context of travelling en route to the island, as it stresses the participation of both the state and the people in the making of "the intimate" (as well as "the political") in everyday life. By following this theoretical discussion on the making of space and time, in the next section, I would like to probe more into the role of sounds and sensorial rhythms in the making of time in the context of the island.

LOOKING FOR ONE'S OWN "PLACE"

Kınalıada, often referred to as "an Armenian island" (Kaymak 2016) by both its Muslim and non-Muslim residents, has a destabilizing effect on the national(ized) topography of contemporary Turkey. In many ways, it is "an out-of-the-way-place" (Tsing 1993: 27), which is defined not only by its political or any other tangible marginalization but also the level of mental and emotive work it requires to reach it. In this section, I am particularly interested in accounting for the ways through which boats – perhaps almost coming closer to Birth's understanding of an object of time (2012) – mediate and possibly reproduce the different cycles and rhythms of everyday life between the city proper and the island. Earlier, I suggested that the time spent on and en route to the island defined people as particular kinds of islanders. However, as we will see more in detail below, this is simultaneously determined by one's relationship to Turkishness, or the very popular and state-imposed definitions of who constitutes a Turk (and a Turkish citizen) in the country.

As the following ethnographic descriptions clearly demonstrate, the two primary levels of distinction between different kinds of islanders reproduce each other: the amount of

time spent on the island *also* points at the religious affiliation and class background of the person. This also explains how and why upper- and middle-class Armenians (who have their second or third homes on the island to spend the summer months) imagine lower-class Muslim residents of the island (who live there permanently both during winter and summer times) as different kinds of islanders.

On a hot summer's morning, I missed the 8:25 am boat from the island and waited for the next one at 9:30 am. This boat was often referred to as the *patron vapuru* (lit. the boss boat) by the commuters who take the earlier boats, as the passenger crowd on this boat is quite different, with an average age of 60 or above. Unlike earlier commuter boats and unlike any other boats on the weekend, this boat is usually less busy. On that day, people and acquaintances were sitting in groups, people ordering tea or coffee and chit-chatting. I heard one man whispering behind me, talking to his friends. He was talking about how his house on Kınalıada had burnt down the previous winter. He believed that someone burnt down the house, that it did not happen accidentally as a result of an electrical fault. He claimed that he knew who burnt down the house; however, it was impossible for him to take them to court. His and his family's *yer* (in Turkish: "place") (see more below) was known by the *adanın yerlileri* (in Turkish: "natives" or "locals" of the island), specifically referring to Muslim residents. At that point, other middle-aged Armenian men and women joined him, nodding and shaking their heads. He added *biz 6-7 Eylül'ü yaşadık,* referring to the fact that he had lived through the violent Pogroms of September 1955, during which Turkish mobs specifically targeted non-Muslim communities (both individuals and properties) and led to their eventual exodus from the city. Everyone in the group responded: *yaşadık* (lit. indeed we did). The vapur still enabled public discussion of sensitive issues but in a remarkably different way than what would have been on a busy and consequently noisy boat. The house owner and the people around him believed that they needed to keep a low profile and this was most evident in the way they kept whispering, although there were not so many people around.

Taking a detour here, I need to reiterate a few points before analysing how and why this group of elderly people whispered on the vapur. *Yer* in Turkish can refer to different but interrelated concepts: it can refer to place, ground, home, or location. It is related to where one physically is, although it similarly refers to a distant place such as where someone is from. I suggest that it is an articulation of a bond between where one lived and lives, a powerful metaphor in Turkish to denote belonging and place-making. Consequently, when this group of elderly boat passengers uttered *yerimizi biliyorlar* (with a triple meaning of "they know our place", "they know where we are", or "they know where our houses are located"), the uttering came once more to stress a self-articulation of Armenian difference. Moreover, the most important aspect of the term echoes in the term *yerli*, with its simultaneous meanings of "local" and "native". As presented at the very beginning of this article, Nadia made a distinction between "real islanders" and the rest, while she was both expressing her frustration about the uncomfortable boat journeys to/from Istanbul and making a statement about the centrality of the island in her life – although she spent only

a couple of months a year on the island. It is important to note here that Nadia was not alone in expressing her relationship to the island by following this very particular terminology. All through my research, I observed that Armenians almost exclusively referred to themselves as "real islanders" in a move to change the official and popular discourses of their foreignness in the country. It is in this context that the term *yerli*, almost counterintuitively, applies only to Muslim Turks who live on the island permanently (i.e., both in winter and in summer). In other words, the added "realness" to Armenian self-identification addresses an acute need to redefine belonging in the specific context of the island.

When it comes to the everyday negotiation of Armenian difference on the boats, there are two underlying differences in relation to how people spoke – and sounded. First, as presented in the two fragments above, there is a difference between the vapurs that operate at rush hours and on the weekends and the vapurs that operate at less busy hours and days of the week. Second, there is a difference between how people speak on vapurs in general and how they do not talk on seabuses. Whether speaking loudly or whispering, people talk and discuss things on the vapurs, whereas the faster seabus has an incomparably more silent atmosphere, to the extent that if someone attempts to speak all other passengers can hear what they are saying. This is because of the organization of seating on the seabus. Passengers are not allowed to stand, as the unique wind and sea current regimes of Istanbul makes this double-hull vessel precarious and difficult to manoeuvre. Moreover, as opposed to the vapur where passengers can sit facing each other, passengers on the seabus sit in coach-like rows of seats and hence are limited in terms of socializing. Furthermore, the use of mobile phones is not allowed, adding another layer of silence to the atmosphere. This is why if someone has something to discuss, the vapur, with its commotion and crowds, is usually a better place to talk about sensitive issues or private matters than the seabus.

There is a paradox here, at least at first sight. While people do not talk on the seabus, they might prefer to travel on vapurs to avoid contact with passengers from the island. As opposed to the seabus, vapurs have often two or three decks with more room to accommodate more people. As presented below by the novelist Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, there are ways to avoid people on a vapur:

> …Mümtaz met Nuran – the woman who would transfigure his life from alpha to omega – at a time when isolation had overcome her. Rather than be interred in the gloom of the lower deck, he preferred to sit on the upper deck, knowing full well that he'd be somewhat less comfortable. *But what Istanbulite could keep from wondering who else had boarded the same ferry-especially with no risk of being left without a seat?* He couldn't bring himself to go upstairs without first peeping below… (2011: 86–87, emphasis mine)

On the vapurs, the organization of seats enables passengers to walk around and change seats located on different decks and in different rooms in the case of encounters with people they want to avoid. Moreover, the vapur, as a soundscape, provides passengers with a sense of anonymity and privacy within crowds. This was, perhaps, why every time I took the vapur with an Armenian friend to/from Istanbul, one of our favoured discussion topics

was how Armenians identified other Armenians in a mixed and crowded environment like the boat. Every time I took the boat with them, my informants always seemed confident in their identification of who was who. First, they would distinguish who they knew from the island. They would often explain how they came to know the person in question, or how that person was related to another friend or acquaintance from the island. Second, they would distinguish those they knew from boat journeys, i.e., familiar faces from the other islands of the Prince's Islands Archipelago. On the islands, almost everyone, but especially those who commuted from their summer houses to their jobs in Istanbul, always took the boat, whether slow or fast, at the same time every day. This is how many people from the islands came to know people from the other islands. Asked how they knew each other, a common response would be "This is a friend from the 8:25 boat." Third, there were many others that my informants did not know from either the islands or from boat journeys. They would nevertheless start identifying who amongst these strangers was Armenian, Jewish, Greek, and Turkish, seemingly easily. Each time, I asked them how they could possibly know about other people's ethnic background, because everyone looked the same to my untrained eyes. They did not know how they did it, but often explained that it had to be *something* related to the island (in Turkish: *adayla ilgili bir şey*). Could it be because the island consisted of an outside for everyone, including Armenians and Muslims, where no one could escape the gaze – and the sound – of each other?

My Armenian companions on those boat journeys possessed an intimate knowledge on how to read difference – and how to reproduce it. They were equipped with a series of reference points to make sense of in a mixed environment. Whether or not they were correct in their identifications of other people, they had a collective knowledge of difference and meaning that enabled them to read others as coming from distinct communities. I believe that such an "everyday study of difference" for Armenians would not have been possible without the physical component of the boats, especially slower vapurs, which have emerged as a perfect microcosm that displayed the wider politics of difference in contemporary Turkey and provided a site to witness and study these politics.

A primary distinction among the people on and en route to the island can be made between those who can afford the seabus and those who cannot. People with summer houses on the island (i.e., middle- and upper-class Armenians) can usually afford to pay for the faster journey, while tourists, day-trippers, and people who live permanently on the island usually take the slower and cheaper vapur. As a result, the seabus has a less diverse spectrum of passengers in relation to the vapur. During my research, I observed that Armenian and non-Muslim difference is exposed in a different way in the much more sterile atmosphere of the seabus in relation to the vapur. On busy summer days many people find themselves without a seat on the vapur, especially on the weekends, whereas each passenger always has a seat on the seabus, as standing up is not permitted on this fast-moving vessel. For most young professional commuters from Kınalıada, a seat (in Turkish: *yer*) is a component of their daily voyage between the city and the island. The instance I note below sheds further light on this everyday situation on the fast boats.

One morning in July, I was waiting at the Kınalıada seabus terminal to get on the 8:20 seabus. It was delayed, and when it finally arrived, the crew quickly moored and opened the gates of the vessel. Upon seeing this, people who were enjoying cigarettes or some coffee on the outside of the turnstiles rushed to the gates to grab seats. At first, there was nothing extraordinary about this situation as all through my research I observed how people in Istanbul in general, and boat passengers in particular (both vapur and seabus passengers alike), were always anxious to find seats – although practically implying different things. As part of the fast boat regulations, all passengers on the seabus must be seated: one is denied entry unless there are available seats on this faster boat. However, once on the boat on that day, the crew made an announcement that the electronic turnstiles did not work properly. There was a system failure and the turnstiles could not count the number of people as they swiped travel cards or inserted coins in order to enter the boat. The announcement made it clear that those without seats now had to disembark. When the last seat was taken, the crew attempted to remove the people left standing. Already delayed, and having missed the slower vapur by 5 minutes, those without seats began to protest. Passengers and crew were yelling at each other, until one member of the crew shouted *sizin kafanızı kesmek lazım!* (lit. It is necessary to *cut off* your heads!). This pronouncement shocked the passengers, myself included. Suddenly, everything went quiet, the jostling ceased, and people seemed almost paralysed as the words cut through the air. Finally, the crew was able to escort all the standing passengers off the boat, and the fast boat eventually arrived at the same time as the slower vapur, although it was scheduled to arrive some 25 minutes earlier.

In the days that followed, I observed how the news of this event circulated among the Armenians from Kınalıada. In WhatsApp groups people told each other about who had already sent e-mails of complaint, and who still planned to. Facebook was full of the issue, which became a subject of discussion even amongst those who had not come to the island for a long time. There were calls to boycott the seabus in favour of the vapur. Scuffles between boat crews, bus drivers, or airline stewards and passengers normally do not receive such public attention in Turkey, but this time both the content of the fight and the public were different. *Kesmek*, the Turkish verb used by the member of the crew that translates as "to cut" in English, resonates in many ways with the massacres of the Armenian Genocide. As Talin Suciyan (2015) has suggested, Turkey is a "denialist habitus" in which denial of the Armenian Genocide of 1915 defines taboos and a firm line between what is and is not socially and historically acceptable, and constantly reminds citizens how they are expected to read history. This situation has significant consequences for my informants, as they cannot publicly talk about the Genocide otherwise. This is why words such as *kesim* (i.e., the cutting off) made their way with very particular meanings into the daily lexicon of Armenians. Translations of this word into Armenian (and not the other way around) have also come to correspond to the Genocide.

The "cutting heads" incident also denotes the moment when "metaphors of past violence" break free into everyday circulation. For Rapaport (1997), these violent sentiments

and their particular vocalization as such set the tone of relationships between genocide survivors and the wider social universes around them. In the particular case of Armenians from the island, both receiving these sentiments and the widely perceived inability to respond to those sentiments accounted for how they positioned themselves both as survivors and in relation to the other islands within the archipelago – necessarily signalling to my informants that *theirs* was not a community as much as those of *others*.[4] Especially positioning themselves as opposed to local Jews in Istanbul, Armenians widely believed that they could not manage to *birlik olmak* (lit. to be unified or to become unified). In this regard, Jews are usually praised for their ability to help each other, maintain solidarity as a closed community, and keep the welfare of the community members at an optimum level. This stereotype explains why, when faced with personal difficulties or a lack of help from friends and acquaintances, I often heard my Armenian informants say in Turkish *"Yahudiler olsaydı böyle yapmazdı"* ("Jews would not have behaved in this way"). Jews are also believed to be pragmatic, opportunistic, and efficient workers, skilled at solving community-related problems immediately.[5]

One of the most explicit and direct everyday articulations of Armenian difference from the other non-Muslim community is constantly made through comparing Kınalıada to its neighbouring Burgazada, with their imagined Armenian and Jewish majorities, respectively. In order to clarify this observation, let me share a discussion which took place around a dinner table on an early summer's evening at a friend's house on the island: A couple of people at the table had felt unable to go to mainland Istanbul earlier that day, as the island was again packed with day-trippers; the boats – vapurs and seabuses alike – were full. Someone else at the table told us that she called the municipality in order to report her complaints, but, just like in previous summers, it was of no use. Boat schedules were always a favoured topic among my informants, especially for the ones who commuted to Istanbul every weekday. For them, there was a need for more frequent boats. Moreover, boat journeys were not comfortable, as the boats were full of tourists, often making it impossible to get a seat (in Turkish: *yer*). Another friend responded that it was never the case with Burgazada – the neighbouring island with a significant Jewish population, a kosher restaurant, a Jewish social club, and a still operating synagogue. She believed that

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[4] My informants only used the word community (in Turkish: *cemaat*) to refer to the body of historical Armenian organizations (the Church, schools, orphanages, hospitals, etc.), i.e., the word community was not used to refer to Armenians from Turkey. The terms *bizimkiler* (ours or our people) or *bizim haylar* (our Armenians) was used in this sense. In contrast, Armenians frequently refer to Jews and Greeks as a *cemaat*. I argue that this contrasting and selective use of the term "community" enabled my informants to deny or acknowledge their links to other Armenians (from Armenia or the diaspora) when necessary, and also enabled them to articulate their own diversity while positioning Jews or Greeks – or others – as monolithic communities.

[5] Contrary to this, Greeks are admired for other reasons; they are usually praised for their insistence on speaking their own language and preserving their culture, and their openness to the wider world, despite their dramatically diminishing population. They are believed to be less business-oriented than Jews and good at enjoying life no matter what.

on such weekends, the islanders of Burgazada simply did not let tourist boats approach and moor at their piers.

"They do not want tourists strolling along their streets, making noise, and littering". Unlike Kınalıada, "they could do it" (in Turkish: *yapabiliyorlar*). While everybody else at our table was nodding and affirming what she had just said, I asked what set Kınalıada apart from Burgazada. As if there was already a consensus among them, a couple of people responded that it was the Jews. Armenians did not know how to get together, make their voices heard, and protest. They did not know how to defend their interests. They did not know about their interests at all, as there was no unity among them. But Jews were different. They were united. For the people around the dinner table, the neighbouring island was a place of tranquillity (in Turkish: *huzur*). The islanders of Burgazada acted as a single unit (in Turkish: *tek bir insanmışçasına davranıyorlar*), and they loved their island. This was why, I was told, people who had houses on Burgazada lived there all year long, in stark contrast to Kınalıada. They were not there only for the summer. The houses of Burgazada were well maintained, similar to its streets. It was much more beautiful than Kınalıada in every sense; it was green and had far better restaurants. At the end of their praise for the island, I asked them why they did not consider moving there. Everybody laughed in response to this suggestion. One of them responded sarcastically: "We shall spend our summers on Kınalıada and our winters on Burgazada then." Everybody laughed again. My proposition was not even an option. No one was interested in leaving Kınalıada for Burgazada. The case was closed.

I believe that the discourse which circulated around the dinner table that night should be understood as operating in three ways. Initially, it depicts how the two islands are idealized as the embodiments of the two communities. While the success of Burgazada is attributed to the success of its Jewish population, the failure of Kınalıada is attributed to the failure of the Armenians living there. Such failure is understood not in terms of the financial situation of Armenians, but lack of solidarity and cooperation. Moreover, the expression of failure shows how the temporal experiences of the respective residents of each island affected the ways they established bonds with their island, and how each community was believed to have distinct ways of collective action and mobility. The lack of unity among Armenians was partly reflected in the fact that they only lived on Kınalıada during the summer and abandoned it in the winter, thus not giving it the value it might have actually been worth. The lack of unity among Armenians was believed to reflect the lack of unity between people and their places, in this case their land, *yer*.

Armenians on the island do not feel themselves to be insiders in a place that they imagine as a meeting point for Armenians in Turkey and abroad. This is also because, despite being a zone of accessibility, intimacy and connectedness between Armenians, the island has a panopticon-like quality in such a way that my informants cannot hide or leave behind their differences as Armenians from the gaze of the Muslim residents of the island. Why was the case closed at the dinner table then? My informants all seemed to

be very fond of Burgazada, its physical setting, its lack of tourists, and the level of privacy it offered its residents. The neighbouring island was seen as a place that allowed a sense of anonymity impossible on Kınalıada. However, as they made it clear, they rejected any idea of moving to another island. Despite its shortcomings, Kınalıada continued to attract Armenians from Istanbul. I could see that the island provided my informants with a per-formative site of social intimacy to redefine their community borders in addition to holding a physical space for a place- and time-specific Armenian community in a megacity like Istanbul. In many ways the everyday comparison of the island to the other island(s) within the archipelago defines a community specifically by overstating what is lacking on the island rather than what is not. As I also suggested earlier, one of those daily practices of demarcation entails making sense of the physical distances between the island and the mainland. As such, I take everyday urban travel en route to the island as an ethnographic context to observe those articulations of distance and proximity both in relation to the time spent on boats and specifically through the diversity of Armenian, Jewish or Turkish human actors it brings together. Going full circle here, the ways in which diverse actors spend and share time together hints at the ways in which a specific "culture of living" (in Turkish: *yaşama kültürü*), a concept uttered by one of my informants in a way to protest boat conditions in the very beginning of this article, is constantly in-the-making on these islands. As I have not discussed the various possible ways of defining culture in terms of time (and patterns, routines, cycles and so on) in this paper, these points are open for further research.

CONCLUSION

In many ways this is a work in progress, as much as any other anthropological work. In this paper, I have been interested in understanding how discourses of time are also made to otherize (à la Fabian 1983). I argued that ethnic demarcation between Armenians and Turks (and Muslims in general) is also a process of temporalization in the context of the island; everyday conceptualizations of belonging to the island – and to Turkey – are deeply embedded in the making and covering of distances en route to Istanbul proper. In this sense, there was a particular temporal aspect to boat travel, which manifested itself in the time invested en route to the island: distinctions between "natives of the island" (in Turkish: *adanın yerlisi*) and the Armenian category of "real islanders" (in Turkish: *gerçek adalılar*) were widely put in place according to one's capacity to travel to the island by (slower and faster) boats as much as the "actual time" spent on its soil. On this subject, Avner Wishnitzer in his historical account of time in the late Ottoman Empire, *Reading Clocks, Alla Turca* (2015), writes that starting from the second half of the 19th century, as ferry lines in Istanbul increasingly "wove together hitherto loosely connected locali-ties into well-integrated systems, growing parts of the city were gradually subjected to a clock-based temporal order which dramatically rearranged daily and nightly routines"

(2015: 124). Although I conducted my research some one and a half centuries after the first passenger boat to the islands started operating in 1846, boat trips still had a profound effect on the organization of some 21st-century urbanites' daily routines in Istanbul. It is in this context of sea transportation that what initially appeared to me only as a mode of commuting (and a means to break away from the city for others) was a fundamental practice of articulating genealogies vis-à-vis the island.

Over the course of my research, many people told me that the boat schedules for both vapurs and seabuses were intentionally organized contrary to the islanders' needs. A local newspaper from the islands published articles on the issue and argued that the schedules were intended to isolate the islands (in Turkish: *kendi haline bırakmak*) and punish (in Turkish: *cezalandırmak*) the islanders ([s.n.] 2007: 15–31). Many believed that the state did not want Armenians and other non-Muslims to enjoy the island(s). There were reasonable grounds for such thinking: There were few boats in the wintertime and "too many" in the summer, privileging day-trippers instead of the residents. In winter the last vapurs from Istanbul to the island were scheduled for 7:40 pm and 11 pm; hence, if one was just a bit late in arriving at the pier after a day at work in the city, they needed to wait at the terminal for almost three and a half hours. This lack of evening boats was felt acutely as the seabus did not operate in winter due to the unpredictability of the winds and the limited number of passengers at that time of year. In the summertime, boats (both vapurs and seabuses) were scheduled frequently, with extra boats on the weekends in order to accommodate the large number of Istanbulites and foreign tourists. On summer weekends, it was unlikely for islanders to find seats on the vapur, given the numerous competition. Because of an excess of passengers, many Armenians living on the island chose not to leave the island on the weekends, and if they had to, they would take the seabus rather than the vapur. The seabus, at significantly higher prices than the vapur, not only provided a seat for everyone, but also – thanks to its air-conditioning – provided a more comfortable mode of transport on hot summer days. This is why I provided an ethnography of soundscapes within the boats so as to better describe the contexts in which faster or slower boats attracted my informants. In the diverse context of Istanbul where people need to navigate between talking about sensitive issues and hiding away from unwanted audiences, practices of everyday urban mobility cannot be solely informed by the speed of travel.

In attempting to show how travelling on slow or fast boats informed my informants of their own relationships to Kınalıada, the title of this article intends to highlight the irony behind what speed actually implies with regard to boat journeys in Istanbul. On a beautiful summer's day, Garo, an Armenian man from the island who was in his mid-60s, expressed his perfect confidence that he would make it to Istanbul before I did. He simply "admired" the vapur and the sociality it promised. He belonged to a time period when an *Istanbullu*, as Orhan Pamuk put it in his memoir *Istanbul* (2006), could identify various boats while they were still on the horizon. He was a proud denizen of the city, with a family history going back generations in the city, as opposed to millions of others who had lived in the same city for a generation or so, Istanbulites. As he was looking at the horizon, he told me

that the *Fahri Korutürk* – the largest and fastest vapur on the Istanbul seas, named after the sixth Turkish President – was on its way to Kınalıada. He firmly believed that the boat could make it directly to Istanbul in less than 40 minutes, and as he anticipated that the seabus would be delayed again, he therefore believed he would arrive in Istanbul before me. However, the seabus arrived on time and I reached Istanbul some 15 minutes before him. On that day Garo could afford to take it slow, whereas I was hurrying to arrive at a meeting on time – and, more importantly, prioritized getting ready by going over my notes in full concentration within the silence of the seabus. He was eager to wait in any case, take his time, and enjoy the lively social and sensory atmosphere of the vapur. For me, there was no time to socialize. For him, the time he could afford to spend on the journey made him claim very specific relationships to the island and to the city.

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MALO SPORIJE PUTOVANJE KAO KLJUČ PRIPADNOSTI: SENZORNO ISTRAŽIVANJE STVARANJA VREMENA I MJESTA MEĐU ARMENCIMA U SUVREMENOM ISTANBULU

U Istanbulu, gradu koji je neporecivo određen vodenim površinama, brodovi su etnografski teren u okviru kojega se mogu promatrati različiti procesi stvaranja zajednica. Istražujući vrijeme provedeno na brodu na putu prema znamenitim Prinčevim otocima, koji se nalaze nedaleko Istanbula, u članku se istražuje kako različita shvaćanja vremena i temporalnosti među stalnim i povremenim stanovnicima otoka (tj. onima koji tamo

žive i zimi i ljeti, odnosno samo ljeti) definiraju njihov odnos prema otocima i utječu na njega. Na primjer, do koje mjere svakodnevne prakse prilagodbe vremena – kao što su čekanje broda ili predviđanje njegova kašnjenja – odražavaju različite načine pripadnosti otocima? Uzevši u obzir specifičan demografski sastav Prinčevih otoka te predodžbu o njima kao o neturskom/nemuslimanskom prostoru koji nastanjuju Židovi, Grci i Armenci, u ovom se članku istražuje kako pristup urbanoj mobilnosti dovodi do (ra)stvaranja nacionalnog jedinstva. Točnije, u članku se buka, zvuk i slušanje shvaćaju kao specifični etnografski podaci te se istražuje kako oni dovode do izražavanja (i/ili ušutkavanja) različitosti i raznolikosti nemuslimana u Istanbulu. Tako se – istražujući opipljive aspekte (provođenja) vremena na putu, što stanovnici otoka često shvaćaju kao diskriminatorno – daje etnografski gust opis "stigmatizacije" Prinčevih otoka u turskom nacionalnom i javnom imaginariju.

Ključne riječi: Istanbul, Armenci, otoci, brodovi, transport, buka, stvaranje prostora, pripadnost