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ARTICLE

Unraveling Perceptions of the Armenian Genocide in Turkish Society: An Examination through Cohen's Denial Typologies

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Abstract

The international recognition of the Armenian genocide is the most prominent issue shaping Turkish-Armenian relations today. Nevertheless, the academic literature lacks empirical analyses of people's perceptions of the genocide in Turkey. To address the gap, the article provides an exploratory investigation into people's online comments regarding the genocide on the most popular Turkish forum website, *Eksisozluk*. Guided by Cohen's (2001) theoretical approach, the study explores online entries on the topic spanning from 2002 to 2018 (N = 2127). The findings reveal eleven attitudes that individuals adopt in the debate. The article examines the diversity in responses by utilizing Cohen's typology, which helps to define and categorize individuals' rationales for denial. Further, it shows that Cohen's approach could contribute to explaining non-denying responses to the recollection of past suffering. The study concludes that people do not uniformly follow the official line concerning the Armenian genocide in Turkey.

Keywords: Stanley Cohen; *Eksisozluk*; the Armenian genocide; Turkish nationalism; types of denial

Introduction

The primary source of tension in Turkish-Armenian relations lies in the international recognition of the Armenian genocide. Moreover, this recognition holds broader implications for Turkish foreign policy, as it ranks among Turkey's most critical issues for its global reputation (Çevik 2024). For example, in April 2021, Turkish President Erdogan condemned US President Joe Biden's formal recognition of the Armenian genocide, marking the first time a sitting US president used the term genocide for the 1915 events. This acknowledgment further strained Turkish-American diplomatic relations, leading to rebukes from Turkey and contributing to ongoing tensions in areas such as defense cooperation and regional geopolitics (Aljazeera 2021). Although the Turkish state's official denialist stance on the matter is well-documented (for example, Dixon 2010a, 2010b), one important aspect of this deadlock, the perception in Turkey, remains insufficiently explored through empirical research. There is a prevailing assumption that the general public aligns with the official line in Turkey. While the state undoubtedly plays a central role in promoting denialism, merely conflating the positions of the state and society fails to fully grasp the significance of the issue (Bayraktar 2015). Aybak (2016) proposes that the discourse regarding the Armenian genocide in Turkey became integral to an open debate in a progressively diverse and emerging multicultural society. Nevertheless, academic literature has not yet offered a comprehensive empirical analysis of

how people in Turkey perceive the Armenian genocide today, which could inform the stances of political leaders and policymakers and prompt a shift in the official perspective.

This article helps to fill this scholarly gap by examining online users' comments about the Armenian genocide on a Turkish forum website, *Eksisozluk*. It tackles two interrelated research questions: (1) How do people in Turkey view the international political debate about the Armenian genocide? (2) What are their basic rationales for rejection and acceptance of the legal designation of the term genocide? To that end, the article explores all online user comments in *Eksisozluk*, the most popular forum website in Turkish, between 2002 and 2018 (N = 2127) under the thread, the Armenian genocide (*Ermeni soykırımı*). In particular, it scrutinizes the ways in which people in Turkey expounded their perceptions. The article demonstrates eleven types of attitudes that individuals employ to either reject, recognize, or refrain from taking a stance on the issue of genocide. It examines the distinctions and parallels in how individuals respond. In so doing, the study theoretically builds on Stanley Cohen's (2001) typology of denial, which helps to highlight people's rationales in responding to the topic.

Given that remembering is a way of affirming one's sense of belonging (Assman 2011), this article's examination of individuals' perceptions of the Armenian genocide reveals the interplay between memory and identity in digital spaces. In doing so, it touches upon discussions in the field of memory studies, particularly the distinctions between cultural, communicative, and connective memory. Communicative memory refers to the everyday, oral recollections shared in a community. Rooted in lived experience and social interaction, it is informal and lacks institutional backing, not perpetuated by educational systems, specialists, or formal rituals. As a result, it has a limited time span, typically extending no more than eighty years, covering three interacting generations. However, it is shaped by communicative genres, traditions of expression, and, most importantly, emotional bonds that connect families, groups, and generations (Assmann 2011). Cultural memory, on the other hand, is embedded in a society's cultural symbols, rituals, texts, and practices. It is not connected to individual experiences but rather to the cultural heritage that shapes a group's sense of unity and identity (Assmann 1995; Connerton 1989). Unlike communicative memory, cultural memory exists in a disembodied form and depends on institutions for its preservation and reembodiment to be passed down through generations. Accordingly, participation in cultural memory tends to be elitist, with some individuals almost compelled to engage and prove their inclusion through formal qualifications (Assmann 2011).

The rise of digital platforms has transformed how individuals engage with memory, often blurring the lines between personal recollections (communicative memory) and established cultural narratives (cultural memory). Hoskins (2011) posits the concept of connective memory, which emphasizes the increasingly networked and hybrid nature of memory in the digital age. Connective memory is a process of ongoing connections between people, objects, institutions, and digital technologies. It unfolds through ongoing interactions, as individuals or groups connect and disconnect from networks. Connectivity — whether real, imagined, or potential — shapes how memory is experienced (Hoskins 2011). That is to say, memory culture is no longer shaped mainly by traditional memory actors, such as official historians. Instead, individuals and groups are now active participants in the dynamic interactions that shape memory (Hoskins 2017). This article's focus on online commentary concerning the genocide occupies the intersection of communicative, connective, and cultural memory in Turkey.

The research contributes to the scholarship on the perception of the Armenian genocide in Turkey, which successfully analyzed important aspects and proponents of the official stance in Turkish politics (Adak 2015; Adar 2018; Bayraktar 2015; Çevik 2024; Dixon 2010a; Gürpınar 2016; Seckinelgin 2023; Suciyan 2016). This article adds to the academic literature by providing the first investigation into the perceptions of people in Turkey regarding the Armenian genocide as expressed online. Moreover, it marks the first application of Cohen's (2001) typology in the empirical analysis of these perceptions. It should be noted that the objective of the article does not lie in the construction or advocacy of any historical or legal thesis concerning the genocide, as it

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focuses on its contemporary perception in Turkey. Therefore, the deployment of terminology pertaining to this subject is not indicative of any particular political or legal stance.

As a Turkish person who grew up in Istanbul, my approach to studying perceptions of the Armenian genocide is inevitably shaped by my background. During my upbringing in Turkey, I was initially exposed to the Turkish official narratives concerning the events of 1915, which influenced my early understanding of the issue. However, working in international academic environments has afforded me a broader perspective, allowing me to critically engage with diverse viewpoints on this politically charged topic. In undertaking this research, I do not aim to serve any political agendas. Accordingly, I focus on illustrating how individuals in Turkey perceive these events, rather than advocating for a specific political stance. I recognize the sensitivity of the topic, given the complex relationship between national identity and memory in Turkish society. My goal is to contribute to the academic literature by offering a nuanced exploration of the diversity of opinions without allowing my own identity to predetermine the outcomes. My primary commitment is to the integrity of the research process and the pursuit of knowledge that captures the perceptions on this issue.

The study bears limitations. In particular, the *Eksisozluk* corpus presents possible selection biases due to the data collection process. Online users posting comments about the genocide are likely to be a minority on the platform and are not representative of the Turkish nation. Nevertheless, *Eksisozluk* serves as a valuable source of data for exploring perceptions and social attitudes for three key reasons. First, as one of the most popular forum websites in Turkey, the platform hosts millions of entries spanning a vast array of topics. Second, users participate under pseudonyms, fostering anonymity and potentially more candid responses —an especially valuable aspect given the sensitive nature of the Armenian genocide debate. Finally, the platform's archival feature, which retains user entries over time, offers the possibility for a more comprehensive analysis. Below, the article commences with a historical overview of the discourse on the Armenian genocide in Turkey and an examination of the relevant academic literature. Subsequently, it delineates its methodology and presents its findings. Finally, the article concludes with a succinct discussion.

A Brief Historical Background of the Debate about the Armenian Genocide

Between the 15th and the 20th centuries, Armenians were part of the Ottoman Empire's millet system, which categorized non-Muslim communities into two groups: polytheists and the "People of the Book," adherents of Abrahamic religions. Armenians, Jews, and Orthodox Greeks held a designated protected (*dhimmi*) status in this system, affording them religious, educational, and juridical autonomy (Barkey 2008). However, they were treated as secondary citizens and were ineligible for official positions. This system waned with the decline of the Ottoman Empire. During the period of the empire's collapse, intercommunal violence escalated between Turks and Armenians. One of the most notorious outcomes was the Ottoman government's deportations from 1915 to 1917, orchestrated by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). The events are commonly referred to as the Armenian genocide by scholars, by many in the international community, and have been legally recognized as such by various national governments and international bodies, including rulings by the European Court of Human Rights. Determining the exact number of Armenians who perished during the genocide remains difficult and widely debated, with estimates ranging from as high as 1.5 million to as low as 200,000. However, most scholars agree that at least 800,000 lives were lost (Dixon 2010b). Levene (1998) estimates that between 600,000 and over a million Armenians were killed out of a total population of two million, aligning with the CUP's goal to establish a modern, ethnically Turkified nation-state in Anatolia. Indeed, most Armenian properties were seized and redistributed by state agents, leading to the destruction of the Armenian community that had resided in Anatolia for centuries (Dixon 2010b). Üngör (2011) argues that between 1913 and 1950, nationalist population policies in Turkey's Eastern region were designed to

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achieve ethnic homogeneity, through methods such as genocide, deportation, spatial planning, and forced assimilation.

The Republic of Turkey, established in 1923, officially abolished the millet system and promised equal modern citizenship for its non-Muslim minorities. The principle of equality was not fully realized in modern Turkey, and the definition of the Turkish nation excluded the non-Muslim minorities. Indeed, Turkish nationalism developed a cautious perspective towards non-Muslim minorities, attributing the collapse of the Empire to an inability and impossibility to integrate these communities into the nation. This view is particularly evident in the work of Ziya Gokalp, one of the founding fathers of Turkish nationalism (Nefes 2013, 2018). Accordingly, the Turkish nationalist ideology tends to approach the non-Muslim minorities as non-local communities from the Ottoman past or "native foreigners" (Tansuğ 2021). This was manifested in the 1931 edition of the Citizenship Education textbook, an integral component of the official educational curriculum formulated by the Turkish Ministry of Education, which labeled non-Muslims as bad people (Ekmekçioğlu 2014). In parallel, the Turkish state closely monitored and censored Armenian publications during the early Republican period, and this apprehensive stance towards Armenians was further fueled by the Armenian territorial claims against Turkey presented at the San Francisco Conference in 1945 (Suciyan 2016). Moreover, Armenians were among the victims of exclusionary state policies and xenophobia against non-Muslims, such as the Wealth Tax of 1942 and the September 6–7 Pogrom in 1955. Since the 1960s, international pressure to recognize the Armenian genocide, along with terrorist attacks by the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA), which primarily targeted Turkish diplomats in the 1970s and 1980s, has further damaged the perception of Armenians in Turkey (Gunter 2007). Further, the Nagorno-Karabakh military conflict since 1994 positioned Turkey against Armenia (Dixon 2010), which added to the negative and exclusionary attitudes toward Armenians in the country.

A shift in how Armenians are perceived in Turkey could be attributed to the aftermath of the tragic assassination of Hrant Dink, a Turkish-Armenian journalist and human rights activist, on January 19, 2007 (Okten 2022). This event garnered widespread condemnation both in Turkey and on the international stage, with many regarding it as an assault on freedom of expression and minority rights (Türkmen-Dervişoğlu 2013). Following the assassination, sympathy towards Armenians grew among the general population in Turkey. In parallel, in 2009, a year-long diplomatic normalization process between Turkey and Armenia ensued (Türkmen-Dervişoğlu 2013). However, this did not have a lasting impact on Turkish-Armenian relations or the official Turkish stance on the genocide debate. In January 2017, Mr Garo Paylan, an Armenian-Turkish politician and a member of the Turkish Parliament (MP), referred to the Ottoman-era killings of Armenians as genocide in a speech, sparking outrage among members of parliament who accused him of insulting Turkish identity. Consequently, he faced a temporary suspension from parliament lasting three days (Hurriyet Daily News 2017). This event not only exemplifies the exclusionary treatment of Armenians but also demonstrates the direct connection between the denialist perspective and Turkish nationalist ideology. The exclusionary stance of modern Turkish nationalism toward non-Muslim minorities since the beginning of the republican period, combined with national reactions to ASALA terror attacks and diplomatic pressure on Turkey to recognize the genocide, has solidified the official view that acknowledging the genocide is an affront to Turkish identity.

According to Gocek (2015), the denial of violence against Armenians can be categorized into four phases: Imperial denial (1789–1907), Young Turk denial (1908–1918), early republican denial (1919–1973), and late republican denial (1974–Present). It was not until the 1970s that Turkey shifted from maintaining an official silence regarding the genocide. This transformation was spurred by two key international challenges: (a) The international recognition of the Armenian genocide in countries like Uruguay, which began in 1965; and (b) the terror attacks carried out by ASALA during the 1970s and 1980s (Dixon 2010a). Following the 1980 coup d'état in Turkey, the military junta that assumed control played a significant role in shaping the government's official

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stance of denial from 1980 to 1983. Turkish military and bureaucratic elites devised and executed new strategies to systematically address challenges related to the Armenian genocide. These encompassed centralizing control over the official narrative, publishing defenses of this narrative, gathering supporting evidence, incorporating it into the education system, and seeking international support (Dixon 2010a). In the early 2000s, the Armenian genocide started to be discussed more openly, as the acknowledgment of the genocide became an informal criterion for Turkey's EU accession between 1999 and 2005, indirectly pressuring Turkey (Açar and Rüma 2007). Turkey responded by making concessions, such as proposing a joint history commission (TBMM 2005).

The Turkish state's position on the Armenian genocide is not merely a refusal to acknowledge historical crimes, it is deeply rooted in concerns over territorial integrity, potential legal consequences, and the preservation of a national identity perceived to be under constant threat (Dixon 2018). The Turkish state has upheld a consistent narrative that recasts the events of 1915 as necessary wartime measures against a rebellious population. This narrative is legally reinforced through laws that criminalize any questioning of the official stance, effectively silencing domestic dissent and preventing public discourse that challenges the state's account. Dixon (2018) notes that Turkish officials have historically been driven by fears of potential material demands, such as compensation or territorial claims, which are seen as highly probable and extensive. This is deeply intertwined with the foundational narrative of the Turkish Republic, which emerged from the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire amid perceived foreign threats and internal uprisings — often referred to as the Sevres Syndrome. This syndrome portrays Turkey as a nation besieged by both internal and external enemies intent on dismembering the country, much like the Ottoman Empire's collapse (Nefes 2015, 2023, 2024). It fosters a belief that acknowledging the genocide would not only undermine the state's legitimacy but also threaten its very identity, making the denial of the genocide a critical element in maintaining national unity and sovereignty.

Since the early 1990s, civil society has played a significant role in shaping perceptions in Turkey by promoting alternative narratives that challenge the official state history. This movement has involved a wide range of individuals — journalists, writers, academics, filmmakers, and descendants of victims — who have produced cultural works presenting counter-narratives that contest the official version (Salomoni 2024). Moreover, some Turkish intellectuals issued an apology in late 2008 for the mass killings of Armenians in 1915, an action that provoked widespread discontent (Bakiner 2013). The emergence of commemorations of the Armenian genocide in Istanbul, beginning around 2005, also reflects the efforts of civil society. These events, organized by groups such as the Say "Stop" to Racism and Nationalism (*Irkçılığa ve Milliyetçiliğe Dur De*!) initiative and the Human Rights Association (*İnsan Hakları Derneği*, IHD) directly challenged the official narrative (Salomoni 2024). The involvement of cultural actors, such as the Hrant Dink Foundation — which organizes conferences, exhibitions, and other cultural events to foster dialogue between Turks and Armenians — further underscores the influence of civil society as a driving force in pressuring the state and shaping public opinion on matters of historical significance (Bakiner 2016).

Perceptions of the Armenian Genocide through Cohen's Typology: Intersecting denialism and nationalism

Stanley Cohen's (2001) book, *States of Denial*, provides a useful elaboration of the ways in which people and states deny past atrocities. His analysis is a broader exploration of state-sponsored violence and its aftermath. The work delves into the psychological and sociological mechanisms that enable collective denial, highlighting how societies often employ various strategies to suppress or distort historical truths. In that regard, a key component in Cohen's examination of denialism is nationalism. The book initiates with an epigraph from George Orwell, implying that nationalists tend to selectively perceive information, overlooking atrocities committed by their own group: "…The nationalist not only does not disapprove of atrocities committed by his own side, but he has a remarkable capacity for not even hearing about them" (Cohen 2001, 5). In parallel,

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Cohen (2001, 98) asserts that this perspective on nationalism highlights the resemblance between personal and ideological denial: "The rhetoric of nationalism functions as a 'moral vocabulary of self-exoneration,' as if derived from a handbook of motivational accounts." Simply put, nationalists may manipulate facts and historical records, as nationalistic loyalties or animosities can make certain facts intolerable. Indeed, this is evident in the staunch defense of the denialist perspective on the Armenian genocide by Turkish nationalists (Açar and Rüma 2007; Nefes, Gürpınar, and Kaymak 2023).

Cohen (2001) describes three basic forms of denial: (1) literal, (2) interpretive, and (3) implicatory. To start with, literal denial refers to a blatant rejection of past suffering, as something never happened. Second, interpretive denial is a form of perception in which individuals acknowledge that human suffering occurred but reinterpret or rationalize it in a way that lessens its significance. It involves accepting the facts on some level but distorting their meaning to avoid the moral or ethical implications. Third, implicatory denial refers to the form where people acknowledge that a wrongdoing or atrocity occurred but refuse to accept their own complicity, responsibility, or moral connection. It is recognizing the facts while disavowing personal or collective involvement, and in so doing avoiding the psychological and moral demands of the suffering. Its manifestations could include idioms of detachment such as "It has got nothing to do with me…"; "What can an ordinary person do?"; "What is the big fuss about?" (Cohen 2001, 8). Cohen's (2001) typology offers a comprehensive perspective on denial, covering cognitive aspects (the refusal to acknowledge the facts), emotional components (not feeling disturbed), moral dimensions (the inability to recognize wrongness or responsibility), and behavioral facets (not taking any action in response to knowing about the suffering).

Cohen's forms of denial could afford a comprehensive perspective on how people in Turkey perceive the international recognition of the Armenian genocide. To start with, people could engage in literal denial by arguing that nothing happened that could be classified as genocide. In addition, they could use interpretive denial and believe that while the mass deportation of Armenians caused a lot of undesired suffering, it could not be classified as genocide. They might minimize the scale of the tragedy by framing it as collateral damage not an intentional killing of Armenians. By doing so, they can dispute the genocide definition and restrain the significance of the event. Further, as an example of implicatory denial, people might acknowledge that atrocities occurred during the period, but could deny that the modern Turkish state or its predecessors bear any responsibility. They might describe the suffering during the period as a result of wartime chaos perpetrated by a few individuals, and not reflective of the Turkish government or society. This form of denial allows them to justify what happened and absolve the nation from any moral or legal culpability.

The academic literature concerning the perception of genocide in Turkey presents examples of denialism that could be categorized in Cohen's classifications. Nefes, Gürpınar, and Kaymak (2023) investigate the responses in Turkish parliamentary politics to the international acknowledgment of the genocide, asserting that ideological distinctions among political parties, the historical context, and the backgrounds of parliamentarians influence how political parties engage in denial. The study reveals that political parties predominantly employ literal denial of the Armenian genocide, and their response tones become increasingly harsh as one moves from the center-left to right-wing Turkish nationalism. Açar and Rüma (2007) discuss how intellectuals' ideological orientations influence their approaches to the international recognition of the genocide. Their presentation of the ideas of the Turkish nationalist intellectuals coincides with literal denialism, while liberal, Islamist, and left-wing intellectuals do not clearly deny or accept the genocide, but take a neutral and interpretive stance that is open to discussing the past atrocities. In his analysis of two films, *120* (2008) and *The Ottoman Lieutenant* (2017), which both perpetuate institutional denialism, Seckinelgin (2023) contends that Cohen's (2011) typology, distinguishing between literal and interpretive denial, can aid in understanding the distinctions in the denialism portrayed in these movies. He asserts that the former film, *120*, exemplifies literal denial by simply presenting the events as an act of self-defense by the Turkish population. He views *The Ottoman Lieutenant* as an example of

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interpretive denial, as it acknowledges victimization among both Turks and Armenians but portrays the Armenian suffering as an unintended consequence.

The scholarship also highlights the role of existential threats in shaping Turkey's prevailing denial. Adar (2018) connects the ongoing Armenian genocide debate in Turkey to anxiety experienced by both Armenians and Turks in the country. She argues that the genocide recognition generates anxiety among Armenians due to their historical displacement in the nation and among Turks who perceive it as a potential threat of displacement. Aybak (2018) posits that Turkey's "Armenian problem" is deeply rooted in its profound geopolitical unease concerning the acknowledgment of the Armenian genocide. While the academic literature presents ample evidence as such, regarding how Turkish state officials, politicians, films, and intellectuals perceive the genocide and their underlying motivations, there is a scarcity of analyses addressing people's perspectives in Turkey. This study employs Cohen's typology to better understand and distinguish nuances in people's perceptions. In fact, Üngör's (2014) oral history interviews with elderly Turks and Kurds in Eastern Turkey demonstrate that people's views often diverge from the official perspective. By using Cohen's theory in a novel context, this article also contributes to the sociological theory of how societies remember past atrocities by assessing the current applicability of the perspective.

Method

The article conducts an in-depth analysis of perceptions regarding the recognition of the Armenian genocide using content analysis, described as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context" (Krippendorff 1989, 403). It specifically employs qualitative content analysis, an inductive approach allowing for a comprehensive exploration of online comments (Lindgren, Lundman and Graneheim 2020; White and Marsh, 2006). The primary unit of analysis comprises individual entries concerning the genocide on *Eksisozluk*, enabling a thorough evaluation of online users' attitudes towards this sensitive topic in Turkish politics and society. Qualitative content analysis proves instrumental in providing a contextual understanding by delving into the surrounding context and conveyed meanings in the text. Moreover, it enables the scrutiny of subjective perspectives due to its suitability for the analysis of delicate phenomena, as highlighted by Elo and Kyngäs (2008), and its capacity to delve into both overt and concealed content, revealing the underlying connotations, interpretations, and concealed themes in the text, as emphasized by Graneheim and Lundman (2004). This capability makes it a valuable tool for examining people's perceptions of the genocide in Turkey.

The research examines online entries in the Armenian genocide thread in *Eksisozluk*, a popular online forum in Turkey, where users, known as "*Sözlükçü*" (contributors), create entries about any topic. Established in 1999, it is one of the most influential digital platforms in Turkey, with millions of entries on various subjects. The platform is primarily utilized by younger, well-educated individuals in Turkey. They offer diverse viewpoints under their chosen pseudonyms, which provides them with a safety buffer against potential repercussions for their entries. These characteristics make *Eksisozluk* a rich source of data for understanding perceptions and social attitudes, particularly on contentious topics such as the Armenian genocide. As such, the research captured a wide range of attitudes and arguments that may not be easily accessible through traditional survey methods or other online platforms.

Employing a total population sampling approach, this study strategically adopts the method to comprehensively illuminate the multifaceted expressions concerning the topic. The total population sampling strategy has proven to be highly effective, enabling a thorough exploration of qualitative categories. Data collection was conducted by research assistants. They collected all 2603 entries on the *Eksisozluk* thread titled The Armenian Genocide (https://eksisozluk1923.com/ermeni-soykirimi–93023?nr=true&rf=ermeni%20soykirimi). After gathering the data, the entries were first cleaned and filtered to remove posts that were either incomprehensible or irrelevant. This process resulted in a final dataset of 2127 entries. Qualitative content analysis was then used to

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explore how users framed the Armenian genocide and the arguments they presented. Last, it should be noted that although users on *Eksisozluk* do not disclose their real names, all usernames have been double anonymized to ensure privacy, particularly in the event that any user opts to remove their posts in the future.

Findings

This section examines online user responses found in *Eksisozluk*, a popular online platform, regarding the topic of the Armenian genocide. By conducting an open-ended analysis, this study identifies three types of responses: rejection, neutrality, and acceptance. The term "rejection" refers to those entries that deny the occurrence of the Armenian genocide, while "acceptance" represents the opposite perspective that acknowledges its existence; neutral comments neither take a definitive stance nor dismiss the debate entirely. Out of the 2127 entries analyzed, 774 (36%) were categorized as acceptance, 1103 (52%) as rejection, and 250 (12%) as neutral. As Table 1 below presents, online users tend to justify their stances in a variety of ways. This article delves into a comprehensive investigation of these reactions to the genocide, shedding light on the diverse range of attitudes and the underlying rationales behind them. It should also be noted that while considerable effort was invested in creating categories that are mutually exclusive (Krippendorff 2013), it is essential to regard this taxonomy as ideal-typical, as these categories represent abstract concepts meant to highlight variations in people's attitudes.

Rejection

As shown in Table 1 above, the denialism encompasses four distinct attitudes: (1) inclination, (2) passing the blame, (3) confidence, and (4) conditionality. This section offers insights into the denial attitudes, highlighting the nuanced ways in which individuals engage with this historical event. First, online users incline towards denial of the genocide, arguing its improbability (1a), calling for verification (1b), or acknowledging it as a tragedy but not a genocide (1c). The second category of denial shifts responsibility away from the Turkish role, blaming other groups such as the Kurds and Germans (2a), or drawing comparisons to past instances of victimhood of Turkish minorities (2b). The third category confidently rejects the classification of genocide. Some simply dismiss the argument without elaboration (3a), while others label it as a political conspiracy against Turkey (3b), or contend that the events fail to meet the legal definition of genocide (3c). Fourth, some users respond insensitively to the Armenian genocide debate, branding Armenians as traitors deserving state violence (4a), or expressing that the genocide was deserved although did not happen (4b). For illustrative examples of each denial, please refer to Table 2 below.

Neutral comments

As demonstrated in Table 1 above, neutral comments were expressed in four tones: undecided, discontented, distanced, and weary. To begin with, certain online users remained undecided regarding the opposing perspectives on the genocide and, as a result, refrained from taking a stance (category 5). Others refrained from clearly aligning with any side due to their dissatisfaction with the quality of the genocide debate (category 6). Additionally, some users asserted that the debate was pointless, as there was no merit in discussing past violence (category 7). Finally, a portion of online users felt disconnected from the debate due to its overtly partisan nature in contemporary politics (category 8). Examples of each of these attitudes in *Eksisozluk* are provided in Table 3 below.

Acceptance

Online users recognized the Armenian genocide in three ways: (1) through inclination, (2) by shifting blame, and (3) with confidence. First, various users were inclined to acknowledge the

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Table 1. Perception of the Armenian Genocide in *Eksisozluk*

Position	Category	Rationale
Rejection	1. Inclined	a. Improbable that it happened
		b. Improbable, but should be checked
		c. Horrible tragedy, but not a genocide
	2. Passing the blame	a. Others were responsible
		b. History is replete with genocides
	3. Confident	a. Definitely did not happen
		b. The debate is a political weapon
		c. Definition does not fit
	4. Conditional	a. Traitors deserved the violence
		b. A genocide was deserved
Neutrality	5. Undecided	a. Not convinced by any sides
	6. Discontented	b. Dissatisfied about the debate
	7. Distanced	c. Irrelevant debate today
	8. Weary	d. Appalled by the partisan nature of the debate
Acceptance	9. Inclined	a. Turkey mistreats minorities
		b. Everybody says so
		c. Cannot be denied, as there is suffering
	10. Reduced liability	a. Pointing at specific groups as responsible
		b. Irrelevant debate today
		c. Happened, but not planned
	11. Confident	a. Definitely happened
		b. Refusing the rejection arguments
		c. Refusing the ideology of denial
		d. Turkey needs to apologize

genocide by drawing inferences from three distinct aspects. Some contended that the consistent mistreatment of ethnic and religious minorities in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey supported the possibility that it happened (9a), while others deduced that the genocide's existence was likely due to the widespread recognition it had received worldwide (9b). Additionally, some argued that the existence of widespread human suffering made it impossible to deny the genocide (9c). The second category of acceptance sought to diminish Turkey's responsibility. In doing so, they emphasized the roles of specific groups, such as Young Turks (10a). They also tended to assert that the insistence on recognizing the genocide was politically futile (10b) and argued that the genocide was an unintended consequence of misguided policies (10c). Similar categories emerged among online users who unreservedly acknowledged the genocide. Most of them regarded it as an undeniable historical fact (11a) and strongly criticized arguments used to deny it (11b), as well as the Turkish state's

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Table 2. Types of denialism

Category	Sample excerpt
1a	I am not saying there is no genocide, because I do not know… However, even the Armenians who claim that there was a genocide, their allegations seem somewhat unsupported… (A1, 23.12.2011)
1b	…it is a so-called genocide that needs to be investigated… In the Ottoman Empire's census of 1914, there were not even 2.5 million Armenians, so how could we have killed 2.5 million Armenians?' (A2, 02.06.2016)
1c	…it is certain that grave events took place. However, it may not be entirely accurate to label it as a genocide, as it would not be correct to consider it as meticulously planned and systematically executed… (A3, 15.01.2017)
2a	Upon the advice of Germany, the ally of the Ottoman Empire at the time, the Ottoman government issued the deportation law… (A4, 22.11.2016)
2b	…one needs to place it into its historical era …the millions of Muslims who suffered genocide and ethnic cleansing in the Balkans and Caucasus also needs to be placed into the picture… (A5, 19.04.2006)
3a	…there were certainly people who suffered greatly both from the Turks and the Armenians, but there is absolutely no genocide. (A6, 06.06.2011)
3b	The genocide is a propaganda by Armenians to incite the world against Turkey and their desire to reclaim the former settlement areas. (A7, 27.04.2005)
3c	Genocide means systematically exterminating a race. Armenians were subjected to forced migration, and some people died during the migration due to the conditions of the time. This is not a genocide. (A8, 16.04.2011)
4a	Yes, Armenians were killed. However, everything began with Armenians killing the local Turkish population. (A9, 25.04.2011)
4b	It is not a case of genocide… However, even if it were, there were enough reasons to justify a genocide. (A10, 02.06.2016)

Table 3. Types of neutrality

Category	Sample excerpt
5	As an ordinary citizen who loves to read, I find myself unable to decide whether it has happened or not… In short, the sources I can access and my own reasoning capacity are not sufficient to draw a conclusion. (B1, 25.04.2017)
6	A conclusive evaluation cannot be made about such a debate with a 100-year history without opening all the archives. (B2, 25.04.2017)
7	Whatever has happened in the past, both good and bad, should now be forgotten, and new bridges should be built in the name of love, respect, and brotherhood. We should approach everyone with love (B3, 22.08.2017)
8	The issue has evolved from the genocide debate into a political superiority conflict. Therefore, all moves made out of prestige concerns in both countries are quite unnecessary (B4, 25.04.2017)

ideological stance of denial (11c). Others asserted that Turkey should apologize for the historical crime (11d). Table 4 below presents examples of each category.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings provide insights into the range of attitudes held by users of the online platform, *Eksisozluk*, regarding the Armenian genocide. The overarching categories of responses — rejection, neutrality, and acceptance — shed light on the complex nature of people's perceptions surrounding

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Table 4. Types of acceptance

Category	Sample excerpt
9a	Genocide is inherent in the Ottoman nature. Did you know that the expression "defterini dürmek" (to erase one's record) entered our language through the fatwa issued during the Alevi massacre in the time of Yavuz? (C1, 15.04.2015)
9b	It is a genocide. It can be understood whether it happened or not when we put Turkey on one side denying it and 30 other countries on the other side recognizing it. (C2, 22.12.2011)
9c	Saying "no, it is not that bad, not a genocide" in response to someone's suffering is not right; behaving like this is also unethical… (C3, 23.12.2011)
10a	A hundred years ago, the despicable Ittihat Terakki plan exterminated hundreds of thousands of innocent Armenians in just a few months. (C4, 13.04.2015)
10b	Like other unrecognized genocides throughout history, the Armenian Genocide is also a fact, but it cannot be judged or prosecuted (C5, 05.01.2012)
10c	The thesis that genocide was premeditated (and inevitable) has not been convincingly established to date. (C6, 16.11.2008)
11a	In many places in the Eastern Black Sea, you can hear stories from the elderly about how Greeks and Armenians were gathered in churches, set on fire, how they desperately tried to escape, and how those who escaped were forcibly thrown back into the flames… (C7, 22.12.2011)
11b	Those who deny the genocide argue that walking hundreds of kilometers in the desert (especially during the summer) is not a hardship for people… [Then], why have so few Armenians been able to settle in Syria? Why have the majority of surviving Armenians sought refuge in Europe? (C8, 12.11.2012)
11c	The most nauseating aspect of this issue is that those who claim it was not a genocide, while defending their stance, threaten others with death. (C9, 15.04.2015)
11d	Unfortunately, it happened. It is the responsibility of the Turkish government to apologize, period. (C10, 25.07.2018)

this historical event in the contemporary Turkish context. To start with, the denial position manifests in various attitudes. Some online users express scepticism about the occurrence of the genocide, citing the need for further investigation. Others, however, firmly reject the genocide classification and often attribute political motives to those who acknowledge it. Some go even further, suggesting that Armenians deserved the violence they experienced. Second, the neutral category encompasses individuals who adopt an undecided stance, express discontent with the quality of the debate, distance themselves from the historical discourse, or feel weary due to the politically polarized nature of the discussion. Third, online users in the acceptance category exhibit recognition of the genocide in various ways. Some lean toward acceptance based on historical context, citing the mistreatment of ethnic and religious minorities in the Ottoman Empire as evidence supporting the likelihood of the genocide. Others emphasize Turkey's diminished responsibility and contend that the genocide was an unintended consequence of historical developments. Some users unequivocally accept the genocide as an undeniable historical fact and criticize denialism and the Turkish state's official stance. Few of them call for Turkey to officially apologize for this tragedy. In short, the findings show that people do not uniformly follow the official denial approach. At the same time, the denial perspective resonates with the prevalent perspective of Turkish nationalism toward non-Muslim minorities, perceiving them as indigenous foreigners who could pose a threat to national security.

Cohen's typology of denial classifies the refutations made by online users concerning the Armenian genocide in a comprehensive manner. It elucidates the reasons through which online users deny the genocide definition and distance themselves from any negative consequences associated with acknowledgment. First, we observe a clear expression of literal denial in the

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confident rejection categories (3a, 3b, 3c) that dismiss the genocide label as inappropriate for describing the events, as well as in the conditional rejection (4b), which contends that while there was no genocide, the Armenian population somehow deserved one. A milder form of literal denial can be discerned in the inclined rejection (categories 1a, 1b), which expresses scepticism about the genocide having taken place. Second, interpretive denial is manifest in the inclined rejection category (1c), where acknowledgment of the suffering endured by Armenians coexists with the conclusion that the events cannot be labeled as genocide. Third, implicatory denial is apparent in the users' inclination to pass blame (categories 2a, 2b), attributing responsibility to others for the violence or justifying ethno-religious cleansing as a normal occurrence during that era. Online users also employed implicatory denial through a conditional rejection approach (category 4a), stating that Armenians deserved the inflicted violence during that period.

Cohen's typology not only elucidates the ways in which people deny genocide but also offers a valuable framework for understanding neutral and accepting perspectives. In essence, literal, interpretive, and implicatory denial can be extended to categorize neutral and accepting attitudes towards the legal designation of the term genocide. To begin with neutral attitudes, individuals who exhibit indecision (category 5), discontent (category 6), detachment (category 7), or weariness (category 8) in the face of the genocide debate demonstrate what could be termed as "implicatory neutrality," which refers to the attitude that people distance themselves from making any moral connections or obligations to past suffering, often citing reasons for their alienation from the ongoing debates. In other words, they excuse themselves from engaging in these discussions, characterizing them as frustrating. Second, one can categorize people's acceptance of the genocide into three distinct forms: literal acceptance, interpretive acceptance, and implicatory acceptance. Those online users who confidently affirm the occurrence of the genocide, finding the evidence overwhelmingly convincing (11a, 11d) and considering the denial arguments exceedingly weak (11b, 11c), exemplify a case of literal acceptance. Additionally, interpretive acceptance becomes apparent in the category of inclined acceptance, where individuals infer that the genocide should have transpired based on their observations of the historically persistent mistreatment of minorities in Turkey (9a), the widespread recognition of the genocide worldwide (9b), and the significant suffering endured by Armenians during the period (9c). Moreover, the category of "reduced liability" can be identified as implicatory acceptance. This category involves a diminished attribution of responsibility to Turkey while still acknowledging the occurrence of the genocide by pointing to the role of specific groups (category 10a), suggesting that the insistence on recognizing the genocide is politically futile (category 10b), and arguing that the genocide was an unintended consequence of misguided policies (category 10c).

The study underscores that communicative, cultural, and connective memories influence online users' attitudes. While the data does not quantify the impact of each type, it does provide illustrative examples of their roles. Communicative memory, marked by informal recollections, surfaces in online users' reflections on familial narratives and experiences. Some users accept the genocide label by drawing on family stories that highlight the profound suffering endured by Armenians, as seen in the example above from category 11a (see Table 4 above). Conversely, the rejection of using the term genocide often hinges on memories of Armenian violence against Turks, particularly evident in categories 4a and 4b. Cultural memory is reflected in how individuals interpret the genocide through historical narratives and collective identity. Some of the online users who acknowledge the genocide, frame it in the broader context of Turkish cultural heritage, as illustrated by the comment in category 9a (see Table 4 above). These interpretations should be approached with caution, as the data does not provide sufficient evidence to explain why individuals adopt such positions. Indeed, in *Eksisozluk*, the distinction between communicative and cultural memory is blurred. Personal recollections are not only shared but also intertwined with the official narratives and cultural symbols. This is a form of connective memory that is hybrid and relational. That is to say, online environments enable individuals to engage with and reinterpret both personal and cultural narratives, leading to a fluid and relational form of memory. This helps to explain the diversity

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of perceptions regarding the Armenian genocide, where official narratives and personal experiences coalesce in novel and unpredictable ways.

Employing Cohen's typology also contributes to the academic literature on the remembrance of human suffering and genocides in three significant ways. First, this study stands as the first endeavor to utilize Cohen's categorization for understanding people's responses to the Armenian genocide in Turkey. In doing so, the article not only offers a broader perspective on the subject but also establishes a taxonomy that can be compared to other contexts involving the remembrance of past suffering. Second, this research represents the first, to the best of our knowledge, to systematically apply Cohen's typology in the analysis of responses from people regarding past atrocities. In this manner, it tests the validity and feasibility of this theoretical approach on a highly significant case. Third, the article demonstrates that Cohen's categories extend beyond explaining types of denial. It illustrates the applicability of the theory to acceptance and neutrality, and it suggests new categories, such as "implicatory neutrality." In this manner, the article broadens the spectrum of contexts in which Cohen's approach can be effectively applied.

All in all, the variety of attitudes in the responses highlights the inadequacy of the broad category known as "Turkish denialism." People in Turkey exhibit a greater diversity of opinions on this matter compared to the official discourse that has consistently denied the genocide for over a century. This suggests that the denialist approach ingrained in Turkish nationalism represents just one perspective among many on the topic, and does not accurately reflect the overall opinion in Turkey. This conclusion aligns with studies emphasizing the diversity of rationales behind Armenian genocide recognition (Gürkan 2021; Fittante 2024). For instance, Fittante (2024) demonstrates how far-right political actors in Europe pragmatically acknowledge the Armenian Genocide to foster discord between Turkey and the European Union (EU), and to vilify Muslim immigrants. Finally, it is crucial to consider the implications of memory politics on the genocide in Turkey for contemporary Turkish-Armenian relations. By illustrating the variations in perceptions of the genocide, this article could provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and civil society organizations.

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