



## Blurring the lines between history education *100 Voices* and activism: How *100 Voices* remembers the Armenian Genocide

Duygu Gül Kaya

*York University, United Kingdom*

**ABSTRACT:** This article explores how a group of Armenian young adults in Toronto remember the Armenian genocide from afar, 100 years after it happened. The data comes from *100 Voices: Survival, Memory, Justice*, a multimedia project that commemorates the 100 year anniversary of the Armenian genocide. Through a detailed analysis of in-depth interviews with the project team, and a thematic and visual analysis of a sample of video clips posted on YouTube, this article claims that *100 Voices* blurs the lines between history education and activism. The production team's use of audio-visual testimony and ensuing visual and discursive strategies open up a space for project participants to address their non-Armenian Canadian peers, teaching them the history of the Armenian genocide. These choices by the production team, on the other hand, enable project participants to articulate the impact of the genocide and its ongoing denial by Turkey through the discourse of human rights.

**KEYWORDS:** Memory, digital media, history education, youth, diaspora, Armenian genocide

### Introduction

How are collective memories of violence mediated, represented and transmitted through digital media? When survivors of the genocides have passed away, how does the use of new media technologies inform the contents and structures of memories of genocides? To answer these questions, this article explores how young adults in Canada who currently see themselves as Armenian remember the Armenian genocide by using new media technologies, especially in educational settings. Kansteiner, a prominent scholar of memory studies, has argued that “two irreversible trends” will reconfigure our memories of the twentieth century (2014, p. 413). Survivors of the genocides have passed away, while digital media is replacing more traditional forms of media through which memories of such crimes are mediated, represented, and transmitted. In the face of these challenges, Kansteiner has predicted, “the contents and structures of our collective memories of violence will have to change” (2014, p.413). This article asks whether this observation holds true for the memories of the Armenian genocide. It explores how young adults in Canada who currently see themselves as Armenian remember the Armenian genocide by using new media technologies, especially in educational settings.

This article focuses on *100 Voices: Survival, Memory, Justice* (Sara Corning Centre, 2015; Gül Kaya, 2018), a multimedia project that commemorates the centennial of the beginning of

PLEASE CITE AS: Gül-Kaya, D. (2020). Blurring the lines between history education and activism: How *100 Voices* remembers the Armenian Genocide. *Historical Encounters: A journal of historical consciousness, historical cultures, and history education*, 7(2), 50-61.

the Armenian genocide (1915-1918).<sup>1</sup> The Sara Corning Centre for Genocide Education, an Armenian non-governmental organization located in Toronto, produced *100 Voices* in partnership with senior students and teachers at Toronto's A.R.S. (Armenian Relief Society) Armenian School, the largest co-educational and bilingual private day school in Ontario, Canada. Founded in 2012, the Sara Corning Centre aims to educate Canadian youth, and to train teachers in the area of human rights and genocide education.

Project materials include lesson plans, photographs, and excerpts of Canadian press coverage before, during, and after the genocide. In addition, a total of seventy-eight video clips were posted on YouTube<sup>2</sup> between 15 January and 24 April 2015. These video clips include audio-visual testimonies of A.R.S. high school students, teachers and one alumnus, recitations of well-known pieces of Armenian literature by students, and the testimony of a survivor of the Armenian genocide, Kourken Mouradian. The testimonies of students, teachers and one alumnus are excerpts taken from interviews conducted and filmed by the project team, and they are available for public viewing on YouTube<sup>3</sup>.

For this article, I carried out a thematic and visual analysis of thirty-two video clips that featured audio-visual testimonies by 25 high school students, six teachers, and one alumnus of the A.R.S. school. I also conducted in-depth interviews with the members of *100 Voices* production team, a team of two teachers and three students, all of whom had already participated in the project with their own audio-visual testimonies. In analysing these testimonies and interviews, I aim to address one core question of this Special Issue: "How is the past made present in history education with the use of particular forms of memory media?" I address this question by looking at how audio-visual testimony is used in *100 Voices*, and the implications for history education. I argue that *100 Voices* is not simply a project of history education that aims to raise awareness about the Armenian genocide among non-Armenian Canadian high school students. Particularly, because of the production team's use of the genre of audio-visual testimony, as it is used in activist contexts, *100 Voices* blurs the lines between history education and activism. In the face of Turkey's ongoing denial, and the pervasive impacts of genocide denial on the current generation of Armenian youth, *100 Voices* is aimed not only at history education, but also at recruiting public support to Armenians' collective struggle for Turkey's official recognition of the Armenian genocide.

This article is organised in four parts. The first part maps out the intersections of human rights activism and history education reform, with a focus on the use of video testimonies. The second part turns to *100 Voices* and analyses the testimonies in terms of their content and aesthetic features. What follows is my analysis of an interview I conducted with Zabel, a young Armenian adult who was a member of the production team and a participant of *100 Voices*. The final part discusses the implications of *100 Voices* in terms of the blurred lines between history education and human rights activism.

## **Video testimonies at the intersection of human rights activism and history education**

As scholars of memory and media have pointed out, new technologies provide novel ways of collecting, arranging, displaying, replaying, disseminating, and circulating multiple media forms, such as images, texts, and moving images in a non-bounded space (Garde-Hansen, Hoskins & Reading, 2010; Hoskins, 2011; Nieger et al., 2011; Pinchevski, 2011). The proliferation of new media technologies has transformed, among other things, the ways in which the past is remembered and taught in the classrooms, as well as how it is mobilised in activism. For instance, the genre of video testimony, which emerged and was popularised in the context of Holocaust remembrance, has been turned into a transnational cultural form.

Emerging and popularising in the context of Holocaust remembrance, testimony has become the prevailing cultural form in human rights campaigns and struggles for historical justice (Kennedy, 2014; McLagan, 2006). With the advent and widespread use of digital media, various local groups and activists widely use audio-visual testimony to keep record of human rights abuses and injustices, especially in post-conflict and transitional justice processes (for example in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, South Africa, Sierra Leone, Canada, and Northern Ireland).

There have been considerable efforts to reform history education in these transitional contexts. As Cole has aptly defined it, transitional justice refers to “confronting past abuse as a part of major political transformation,” a complex process that includes “trials and tribunals, truth commissions, the reform of the judiciary, army and police, and commemorative gestures and efforts toward reconciliation in fractured societies” (2007, p. 117). In various contexts, ranging from South Africa to Northern Ireland, scholars and practitioners have elaborately discussed the relationship between history education on the one hand, and peace building, democratic citizenship, and upholding human rights, on the other (Cole and Murphy, 2009). For instance, Duthie and Ramírez-Barat have proposed that a reformed history education can “engage society, especially the younger generations, in a dialogue on the importance of dealing with the past,” hence contributing to “preventing future violence from recurring” (2018, p. 20).

To elaborate, a reformed history education in transitional contexts shifts the perspective from victors and winners to victims, survivors, and witnesses, hence revealing what Cole has called a “history from below” (2007, p. 132). Audio-visual testimony is a particularly useful tool to achieve this shift in perspective. As Kennedy has pointed out, audio-visual testimonies “bring the picture into sharp focus by looking at the people, at the faces of husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons; wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters, to feel the human tragedy deeply and to grieve for the loss” (N.D., p. 2). Watching these first-person accounts, students can develop critical skills in their interpretations of the past, question normative or official accounts of history, and make connections between the past and the present. Seeing the human side of history is also crucial for them to foster a sense of empathy for the suffering of others.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, it is crucial to note that these efforts to reform history education in transitional contexts heavily rely on Holocaust and genocide education. For instance, Facing History and Ourselves (FHAO) has played a key role in expanding Holocaust and genocide education to other cases of collective violence (Cole and Murphy, 2009). Founded in Boston in 1976, FHAO initially focused on teaching Holocaust in the USA (Wells and Schaefer, 2010). Since then, FHAO has expanded its work considerably by producing numerous resources on the Armenian genocide, Rwandan genocide, Cambodian genocide, and South African apartheid, just to name a few examples. Opening its office in Toronto in 2008, FHAO has produced numerous materials for the use of Canadian teachers. It has also collaborated with other non-profit educational organizations like the Sara Corning Centre for Education, the producer of *100 Voices* project.

Significantly, the Toronto School District School Board used some of the materials and resources produced by FHAO when it developed *CHG38: Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity*, a grade eleven elective history course that is taught all across Ontario since 2008 (TDSB 2009). There are six units in the course: 1. Introduction to Human Rights and Behaviour; 2. the Armenian Genocide; 3. the Holocaust; 4. Judgment and Responsibility; 5. the Rwandan Genocide; and 6. Reflection and Social Action. Unit 6 is followed by a separate section, with ten sub-sections, entitled *Canadian Connections*. These are: Aboriginal Connections; The Internment of Ukrainians in Canada during the First World War; The Georgetown Boys; The Role of Eugenics in Canada; The Rise of Fascism in Canada and the Riot at Christie Pits; Voyage of the St. Louis; Japanese-Canadian Internment in the Second World War; Dr. James

Orbinski, MSF, and Rwanda; Civil Liberties and Hate Speech; and, The Activist Toolbox-Exploring Tools to Make Positive Changes.

CHG38 can reasonably be seen as the crystallisation of history education reform in Canada. It aims to instil in students a genuine respect for human rights and universal values by teaching them the history of atrocities and genocides. CHG38 course aims to make sure that “students will use critical thinking skills to look at the themes of judgment, memory, and legacy, and will evaluate the ways in which active citizens may empower themselves to stop future genocides” (2009, p. I-1). The underlying assumption here is that once educated about past genocides and crimes against humanity, young students will feel a sense of responsibility towards the future. They will be knowledgeable and responsible citizens who would uphold human rights and work towards a better world.

It is crucial to situate *100 Voices* project within this particular context of history education reform in Canada. Many of the project participants took CHG38 in the A.R.S. high school, while others were familiar with the course content as the latter was publicized in community settings by the Sara Corning Centre. As Raffi Sarkissian, the director and co-founder of the Sara Corning Centre for Genocide Education and the lead of *100 Voices* aptly observes, the course “encourages students to think about ethical questions involved in the history along with choices made by individuals. Students learn that choices and actions matter and that young people can, and should, be agents of change” (2011, p. 24). *100 Voices* project embraces and operates through the same rationale of history education reform, specifically, the idea that knowledge of the past will empower the current generation in making right choices and creating political change.

### **Aesthetics and content of *100 Voices: Survival, Memory, Justice***

In his recent article, Sarkissian (2017) provides a vivid account of the debates around the development and introduction of CHG38. In particular, he focuses on the objections from some Turkish groups in Canada because of CHG38’s coverage of the Armenian genocide. Sarkissian thwarts these objections successfully, and posits that teaching the Armenian genocide to Canadian students is crucial for fostering a culture of mutual respect. Towards the end of his article, he also talks about *100 Voices*, particularly in regards to the transgenerational effects of the Armenian genocide on Canadian-Armenian youth. While Sarkissian (2017) discusses the significance of genocide education, with a special emphasis on the Armenian genocide, he does not provide detailed information about *100 Voices* project materials. In what follows, I present a more comprehensive analysis of *100 Voices* video clips in terms of both their aesthetic features and their content.

For this article, a thematic and visual analysis of thirty-two video clips was conducted. Although each of the 78 video-clips that were posted on YouTube were viewed, 32 testimonies were selected to analyse in more detail for two reasons. First, because all of the testimonies were similar in terms of their aesthetic features and content, in-depth analysis of more testimonies was not necessary. Second, while selecting these testimonies, I aimed to create a sample that is representative of the whole group in terms of participants’ different positions, such as students, teachers, and alumni.

The aesthetic similarities between these audio-visual testimonies are striking. All video clips open with the same melancholic duduk tune by Djivan Gasparian, a world-famous master of the duduk, an ancient woodwind instrument that is often described by Armenians as Armenia’s national instrument. The camera is static and its angle does not allow the audience to make eye contact with the participant as s/he looks towards the interviewer, who is outside the frame of the screen, yet whose presence is implied because s/he is the one who asks the questions. All

the video clips use the same decor of twigs and pomegranates against a black background, and start with the same introductory images. Along with the decor, the black background and their black shirts also help focus attention on the participants' faces and voices. Black and white portraits of the participants are displayed in the form of a photo album on the website of the Sara Corning Centre, again diverting attention away from external factors and toward their faces.

These aesthetic decisions made by the production team situate each participant as the speaking subject of testimony of a painful collective and familial past that continues to influence her/him in the present moment. The video-editing work also contributes to this effect. The original interviews were cropped, cut, and edited in such a way as to leave out what the project team thought irrelevant to the project. What was deemed irrelevant depended on the questions that were asked to each participant. Interviews with members of the production team revealed that participants had been given the questions in advance and asked to do research on their family histories. These same questions were then asked during the interview. However, due to the editing strategy, the viewer cannot hear the questions. While transcribing the video clips, I was able to infer these questions from the answers given by the participants: From where did your family originate? How has the Armenian Genocide affected you and your family? How do you and your family remember the past? What difficulties do you face in remembering the past? How can we keep Armenians living outside Armenia intact and strong? What is your place in the continuing struggle for justice? What is justice for you? How do you persevere or stay strong? Why is it important that your voice be heard?

The video clips are all structured in the same way. Participants begin by telling where their ancestors are from, such as specific villages, cities, or regions in Western Armenia or today's Turkey, or other countries like Iran and Iraq. Then they continue with the stories of their ancestors' survival and later, their family's immigration to Canada. They also speak of how they try to unearth the unknowns of the family past, and, unable to fill in those gaps, they remain frustrated, fully aware of their temporal distance to the Armenian genocide. For instance, in regards to the question "Where did your family originate from?" many participants expressed a sense of frustration in the video clips. They explain that they feel frustrated because of "gaps in our history" (Noubar), "lack of information/resources" (Melanie), or "unanswered questions" (Taline). Another reason for this sense of frustration is Turkey's ongoing denial of the Armenian genocide. In their responses, many participants discuss the reverberating influences of the genocide by using the word trauma. They see themselves and their family members as being traumatised, especially because of Turkey's impassioned insistence that there was no genocide.

The questions "How can we keep Armenians living outside Armenia intact and strong?" and "How do you and your family remember the past?" situate project participants within the diasporic present of the local Armenian community in Toronto. They are asked to address two immediate concerns; the risk of losing Armenian identity in diaspora due to assimilation, and the risk of losing the memories of the genocide in the absence of the survivors. With respect to both issues, they underscore the significance of participating in local diaspora organisations, such as the Armenian Community Centre, the Armenian Youth Federation of Canada, and Hamazkayin, a cultural organisation. These are places that, in Taline's words, "we can refer to as our home, and will keep us Armenian and passionate about our Armenian culture." In order to keep the memories alive, they also participate in community commemorative events such as the annual gathering in Ottawa on the 24 April.

When asked "What is your place in the continuing struggle for justice? What is justice for you?" project participants insist on the pressing immediacy of genocide recognition and reparations, which they often refer to as the "Armenian cause." They identify themselves as the youth of the Armenian nation who are responsible for remembering the past and preserving

Armenian identity, which are often described as one and the same. Accordingly, they see each other as sharing a common past, as working towards the same cause, and as dreaming of the future in similar terms.

While these questions frame the testimonies in the same way, the role of the producers is obscured. As Allen (2009) points out, this is a limitation often encountered in the deployment of testimonies in human rights activism. Similarly, in *100 Voices* the angle of the camera and the framing of the project do not let the audience see who is asking the questions. The audience neither sees the interviewer, nor hears the questions that are being asked. The video clips are often abruptly cropped and compressed, leaving out any silences, hesitant moments, or irrelevant responses by the participants. Consequently, the aesthetic and visual uniformity of the video clips, as well as the centralised character of the production process, raises some questions as to what was left out. What would those edited out silences, pauses, and incomplete sentences tell us about project participants' perceptions of *100 Voices* and their own role in it, especially in reference to the overarching issues of memory and history?

A full answer to this question is outside the scope of the present article, as I did not gain access to unedited versions of the testimonies. Instead, in the next section I will address this question, albeit only partially, through a close analysis of my interview with Zabel<sup>5</sup>, who was both a member of the production team and a participant in *100 Voices*.

### **"Putting a human face" to numbers and facts: History education and human rights activism**

Zabel is an affable and confident young woman who defines herself as "a passionate Armenian." On 23 March 2016, we met for an interview and our conversation lasted close to two hours. Among other things, we talked about her role in *100 Voices*. Her account overlaps with my interviews with the rest of the production team. Yet, what makes Zabel's account distinct and particularly relevant for paper is her discussion of *100 Voices* at the intersection of history education and human rights activism:

1.5 million people died, well, they can turn around and say, World War One, World War Two, a million examples of death and destruction in this world, not genocides, you know? But I guess if you haven't been persecuted, if you're, if you don't have a history of persecution, you know? It's hard, someone wanted to end your race, wow, right? But some people can't, I mean, emotionally can't make that connection, so when you, when you let people, like, express their emotions and their family stories, you make this a human, a very human issue, you're putting a face to a one point five million people issue, you're putting a human face, that's huge. Umm, I think that, that's when you start seeing results, as far as I mean, this is supposed to be an educational tool in classrooms, right? And, and, that, history is very disconnected, I mean we read it on, in a book and if you don't see it, if you don't feel it, if you don't have a personal connection to it, you don't really internalize it, you don't really get what history is. History is more than facts, right? I mean, you can say, I mean, there's something about people putting a face to the issue and then, when you see, maybe in another high school, a public school for example, that a student a few blocks down the road, at the Armenian school actually lives their day, their day to day affected by the Armenian genocide, you say "oh, so it's not just a faraway issue in a faraway time in a faraway land, the issue is very much present," you know, and genocide transcends borders, you know, transcends time transcends space. So I think that's, that made this project especially effective and that was one of the main reasons that I, umm, joined.

Apparent in this excerpt is Zabel's position vis-à-vis the Armenian genocide. Although she did not experience or witness the genocide herself, she is still very much impacted by its reverberations. She does not experience it as a "far away" history, but as an ongoing experience of loss and pain. Moreover, she wants her experiences to be seen and recognized by her non-Armenian peers. As an educational project, *100 Voices* is a tool to achieve this goal. It can potentially render the daily struggles of Armenian youth visible for their non-Armenian peers.

In expressing this desire for visibility and recognition, Zabel embraces the broader efforts for history education reform, a point I have discussed in the preceding section. She sees *100 Voices* as an attempt to reform history education by shifting its focus from numbers and facts to personal stories. She acknowledges that testimony is both a valid source for, and a useful tool of, history education. This is what she hoped her testimony on YouTube would achieve. By moving her intimate and familial experience of suffering to the public sphere, she hoped to raise awareness among the wider Canadian public about the Armenian genocide.

Later in our conversation, Zabel elaborated on her perceptions of the audience *100 Voices* had targeted, highlighting once again the project's aim of changing students' perceptions of genocide in general and of the Armenian genocide in particular:

[...] so I think he (the project lead) wanted it to be an educational tool, and that was a guiding principal for us, how do we make this so that it's actually useful to teachers in the classroom, teaching about the Armenian genocide, how does it make history, history can be very two dimensional if your teacher doesn't really put their own spin on it. I've had great history teachers, poor history teachers, I think the great history teacher is the one that make history come off the page, great, World War One happened but how did that change the world order? How, what have we learned from World War One? I think that's a huge part of learning history, I think that's a distinct challenge, and learning history, and learning about crimes against humanity is especially tough, you know and they're not, we live in Canada they don't happen every day, we're not, I mean some of my history teachers at school said "I wish you were from war torn countries, so you would understand what this means," you know, the implications of genocide for example, of wars for example, so, so we really wanted it to be an educational tool and I think that, that's what we kinda structured it to be, but not facts. Education in the sense that we knew who our, that our target audience is students and teachers, but mostly students, right?

In talking about *100 Voices*, Zabel once again refers to history education. Similar to the descendants of other groups that fled from persecution or violence in their respective countries of origin and migrated to Canada, Zabel is faced with two uneasy questions: How can history education make people "understand" what it means to be exposed to violence when they do not have any personal connection to that particular history of violence? And, how can one render the particular history of a group interesting and relevant for Canadian students?

Her reference to crimes against humanity is telling in this respect. She believes that *100 Voices* renders the Armenian genocide meaningful for non-Armenian Canadians by presenting it as a crime against humanity that deserves utmost attention and urgency. Nonetheless, Zabel's resort to human rights discourse should not be understood simply as an instrumental gesture to advertise *100 Voices*. On the contrary, she explains her participation in *100 Voices* as part of her self-proclaimed identity as a human rights activist or human rights defender, as she variably puts it. This self-identification can be understood as her personal response to the legacies of the past:

I think you'll find that different people deal with it differently but for me, I, I, I'd rather, like I, I won't let myself sink into that pain because my story anymore may not be so detailed but other people's stories are detailed and that, that's just painful, I mean you don't have to be Armenian or Jewish to understand the pain, but for me, I mean, I, like, pain I try to take it, umm, so it doesn't happen again, you know, so never again, does it become again and again like they say, umm, and I try to be an activist, you know, a human rights activist not just genocide umm prevention and awareness, you know, just human rights in general, like, that's how I handled the pain, personally, so I try to be a good political citizen, for example, umm, I try to be aware of what's going on in the world in terms of like, not just the Armenian genocide denial issue, but all, you know, crimes against humanity, umm, that's how I, because I would hate, umm, the world not to have learned a lesson. From what happened, you know, and then the Holocaust, and then it happened in Rwanda and we didn't intervene, right, so this is very interesting to me, how it continually continue not to, you know once you call it the G-word you have to do something, so this is very interesting to me.

Here, Zabel draws connections between the Armenian genocide and other cases of collective violence such as the Holocaust and Rwandan genocide. Her self-identification as a human rights

activist is what enables her to move beyond her Armenian identity and make these broader connections. In her *100 Voices* testimony, Zabel also talks about how she sees herself both as an Armenian youth, and as a human rights activist. Once again, she articulates a particularistic imperative that is derived from her Armenian identity through the universalising discourse of human rights:

If you identify as an Armenian, then you're obligated to be committed to the Armenian cause. You're obligated to support your community and your nation, you're obligated to be the best possible representative for your people and an avid defender of human rights.

The notion of crimes against humanity is a recurring theme in other *100 Voices* video-clips as well. Similar to Zabel, other participants resort to human rights discourse and present their group-specific case of claim making, which they often call the "Armenian cause," in a language that is more appealing to wider publics. For instance, Sarig, one of the teacher participants of the project, intimates that Armenian children are often more sensitive to others' suffering and other genocides. Many other participants, like Raffi and Rupen, also emphasise that their *cause* concerns not only the Armenian genocide, but also all forms of persecution and all other genocides.

In doing so, project participants derive a universal lesson from the past, while at the same time advocating for the recognition of the Armenian genocide. The use of audio-visual testimony plays a substantial role in constructing these meanings. As Torchin (2006, 2012) effectively discusses in her work on human rights and genocide activism, the medium is not a transparent delivery system for truth. On the contrary, the medium in use has a key role in the construction of meaning as it enables certain discursive practices and not others. In the case of audio-visual testimony, the medium is supposed to not only unveil and record human rights abuses, but at the same time, it reinforces the truth claim of the speaker's narrative. Presented in the form of testimony, stories of human rights abuses not only aim to elicit sympathy, but they can also make certain ethical claims on viewers and listeners, turning the audience into what McLagan (2006, p. 191) calls "witnessing publics" or what Assmann (2006, p. 265) calls "secondary witnesses." This refers to the process of hailing the audience, asking them to take responsibility and to act on the issue at stake. In other words, the use of audio-visual testimonies in activism is based upon the idea that, "if people know, they will act accordingly" (Torchin, 2012, p. 1). There is an expectation on the part of narrators or activists that testimonies will lead to recognition, which will, in turn, trigger transformative action on the part of the audience (Kennedy, 2014).

Likewise, the participants in *100 Voices* not only record the Armenian genocide as a case of crimes against humanity, but also make a political and moral claim on viewers. They present Armenians' struggle for genocide recognition not as a parochial or exclusionary identity claim, but rather as a universal moral imperative, that concerns the interests of the whole of humanity. Taken together with the Sara Corning Centre's overarching agenda of human rights and genocide education, *100 Voices* participants emerge here not only as Armenian youth who aim to teach a wider public the history of the Armenian genocide, but also as activists who try to solicit public support for historical justice in the case of the Armenian Genocide.

## Conclusion

The Sara Corning Centre publicized *100 Voices* in multiple events and venues since the inception of the project in 2015. The Centre held an exhibit, "Thank You Canada," in Toronto City Hall on October 22, 2015, where some of the *100 Voices* video clips were screened. On November 7, 2015, the Centre held a panel on the *100 Voices* project during Holocaust Education Week in Toronto and screened two video clips to a predominantly Jewish audience.



On March 8, 2016, it co-organized a Toronto District School Board student conference at the Central Technical School, in cooperation with Alpha Education, Facing History and Ourselves (FHAO), Holodomor Research and Education Consortium, and the Toronto DSB Aboriginal Education Centre. The Centre participated in this conference with two workshops: *Canadian Upstanders During the Armenian Genocide* and *100 Voices: Survival, Memory and Justice*. On April 24, 2017, the Centre held a student conference titled *Armenian Genocide: A Just Resolution*. Over 180 Grade 11 and 12 students and teachers from all across Ontario participated in this conference (Sara Corning Centre, 2017).

What impacts did the *100 Voices* project have on these audiences? More precisely, how did watching *100 Voices* testimonies influence non-Armenian Canadian students, the project's targeted audience? As this article has shown, efforts for history education reform in transitional contexts are based on the presumption that once the current generations are better educated about the past, they will become responsible and active citizens of the future. How can we, as scholars, ascertain whether or not the hopes of theorists and practitioners of history education reform are realised in this specific case?

While it is difficult to measure what impact *100 Voices* has had on its targeted audience, this article has suggested that the project has played a crucial role in the formation of its participants' identities. *100 Voices* has cultivated a particular subjectivity among the project participants. The aesthetic and discursive choices made by the project team have enabled the project participants to identify themselves not only the young people of the Armenian nation, but also as activists for human rights. The production team's use of audio-visual testimony, often used in human rights activism, has played a crucial role in creating this effect. In the face of the declining number of genocide survivors who are still alive, *100 Voices* participants reconstruct the past through the medium of audio-visual testimony, a point that confirms Kansteiner's (2014) prediction about the changing character of memory making through new kinds of media. By talking publicly about their own family histories in these testimonies, project participants educate a wider public about the ongoing impacts of the genocide and its denial on the current generation. At the same time, by representing their struggle against genocide denial through the universal parameters of human rights activism, *100 Voices* participants emerge as human rights activists. Consequently, this article has argued that the *100 Voices* project blurs the lines between history education and activism. Still, assessing the long-term impacts of *100 Voices*, both on the project participants and non-Armenian Canadian youth as its targeted audience, is a task that awaits future research.

## References

- A.R.S. Armenian School. (2015). Our history. Retrieved from [http://www.arsarmenianschool.ca/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=27&Itemid=148](http://www.arsarmenianschool.ca/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=27&Itemid=148)
- Akcam, T. (2012). *The Young Turks' crime against humanity: The Armenian Genocide and ethnic cleansing in the Ottoman Empire*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Allen, L. A. (2009). Martyr bodies in the media: Human rights, aesthetics, and the politics of immediation in the Palestinian Intifada. *American Ethnologist*, 36(1), 161–180.
- Assmann, A. (2006). History, memory, and the genre of testimony. *Poetics Today*, 27(2), 261–273.
- Cole, E. A. (2007). Transitional justice and the reform of history education. *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 1(1), 115–137.

- Cole, E. A., & Murphy, K. (2009). *History education reform, transitional justice, and the transformation of identities*. Research Brief, International Center for Transitional Justice.
- Duthie, R., & Ramírez-Barat, C. (2018). Introduction: Addressing the educational legacies of Human Rights violations. In C. Ramírez-Barat & M. Schulze (Eds.), *Transitional justice and education: Engaging young people in peacebuilding and reconciliation* (pp. 17–44). Göttingen: V&R unipress.
- Garde-Hansen, J., Hoskins, A., & Reading, A. (Eds.). (2009). *Save as... Digital memories*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gocek, F. M. (2014). *Denial of violence: Ottoman past, Turkish present, and collective violence against the Armenians, 1789-2009*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gül Kaya, D. (2018). 100 Voices after 100 years: Remembering the Armenian Genocide in diaspora. *Popular Communication*, 16(2), 1–13.
- Hoskins, A. (2011). Media, memory, metaphor: Remembering and the connective turn. *Parallax*, 17(4), 19–31.
- Kansteiner, W. (2014). Genocide memory, digital cultures, and the aesthetization of violence. *Memory Studies*, 7(4), 403–408.
- Kennedy, E. J. (N.D.). Redefining Genocide Education. Retrieved from <http://www.genocidewatch.org/aboutgenocide/articlesongenocide.html>
- Kennedy, R. (2014). Moving testimony: Human Rights, Palestinian memory, and the transnational public sphere. In C. De Cesari & A. Rigney (Eds.), *Transnational memory: Circulation, articulation, scales* (pp. 51–78). Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter.
- McLagan, M. (2006). Introduction: Making human rights claims public. *American Anthropologist*, 108(1), 191–195.
- Pinchevski, A. (2011). Archive, media, trauma. In M. Neiger, O. Meyers, & E. Zandberg (Eds.), *On media memory: Collective memory in a new media age* (pp. 253–264). NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sara Corning Centre for Genocide Education. (2015). 100 Voices. Retrieved from <https://www.corningcentre.org/about.html>
- Sara Corning Centre for Genocide Education. (2017). News and Events. Retrieved from <https://www.corningcentre.org/news--events/armenian-genocide-a-just-resolution-corning-centre-conference>
- Sarkissian, R. (2017). The Benefits and Challenges of genocide education: A case study of the Armenian Genocide. In S. W. Murray (Ed.), *Understanding atrocities: Remembering, representing, and teaching genocide* (pp. 107–123). Edmonton: University of Calgary Press.
- Torchin, L. (2006). Ravished Armenia: Visual media, humanitarian advocacy, and the formation of witnessing publics. *American Anthropologist*, 108(1), 214–220.
- Torchin, L. (2012). *Creating the witness: Documenting genocide on film, video, and the Internet*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Toronto District School Board. (2009). CHG38 Genocide and Crimes against Humanity Course Profile: A Grade 11 History College/University Preparation Ontario Ministry of Education Approved Locally Developed Course. Toronto.

Waal, T. D. (2015). *Great catastrophe: Armenians and Turks in the shadow of genocide*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Wells, M., & Schaefer, L. (2010). Facing history and ourselves. *Canadian Issues*, 51–54.

### Video-Clips

Corning Centre (2014, December 2). *100 Voices Trailer* [video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYw7WXkD5A4>

Corning Centre. (2015, January 15; 14). *Karnie* [video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=to-LfeBPFwQ> (Part 1), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=es2JXMZs1TQ> (Part 2)

Corning Centre. (2015, February 9). *Lia* [video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=78XYJL-d7qo>

Corning Centre. (2015, April 10). *Melanie* [video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyHgiH3AvHo> (Part 1), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7vPCIHRQn6A> (Part 2)

Corning Centre. (2015, February 10). *Noubar* [video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PxmCetBIVB4&t=15s>

Corning Centre. (2015, April 12; 16). *Raffi* [video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-0Jm-SXJNxg> (Part 1), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QnaFNE06FhA> (Part 2)

Corning Centre. (2015, March 19; April 14). *Rupen* [video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0CE-OpY2wf0> (Part 1), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=quC3TpDe8oE> (Part 2)

Corning Centre. (2015, April 27). *Sarig* [video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AptxyuP1Zs>

Corning Centre. (2015, February 13; March 15 ). *Taline* [video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CjRWMAfe46Q> (Part 1), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0QouGzbBuVs> (Part 2)

### Endnotes

---

<sup>1</sup> The Armenian genocide refers to the mass killings of the local Armenian population of Anatolia by the CUP (Committee for Union and Progress) government in Ottoman Turkey during World War One (1915-1918). An estimated 1.5 million Armenians perished in a series of premeditated and systematic mass deportations and executions. Since 1915, successive Turkish governments have denied that the Armenian genocide took place. However, countless reputable and prominent scholars have pointed out that the mass killing of Armenians in Ottoman Turkey constitutes genocide (Akcem, 2012; Gocek, 2014; Waal 2015).

<sup>2</sup> YouTube enables repeated viewing and replay, along with the functions of pausing, rewinding, and sharing the video clips on other social media platforms. YouTube also presents the video clips in a playlist format and it suggests related video clips on the Armenian genocide on the sidebar.

<sup>3</sup> Thus, the use of these video clips in my research without the participants' consent involves no potential breach of privacy and it is unlikely to adversely affect the welfare of individuals to whom the information relates.

<sup>4</sup> I want to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for drawing my attention to this point.

---

<sup>5</sup> Although her testimony is available on YouTube, I use the pseudonym Zabel here to ensure greater anonymity.

## About the Author

Duygu Gul Kaya is a PhD candidate in Sociology at York University and holds an MA from Bogazici University, Istanbul. Her research interests include memory studies, theories of transnationalism and diaspora, and debates around citizenship and belonging. Duygu co-edited a Special Issue for *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory* (Vol 9, Issue 3, 2013), in which she co-authored the essay article "Violence, memory, and the dynamics of transnational youth formations". Her book reviews have appeared in *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, *Memory Studies*, and on *H-Memory*. She has published articles in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (2015), *Citizenship Studies* (2018), and *Popular Communication* (2018).