

Hrant Kasparyan

Today, at this commemoration event, the speeches are being made at this chapel, to describe an atrocity that took place in Turkey 70 years ago and explain why it is important to remember it.

I would like to share with you how the pogrom that took place on 6 September 1955 was passed down to the third generation, my generation. I would also like to talk about an event related to this pogrom, that I experienced first-hand and that was one of the turning points in my life, as an Armenian journalist and as a Human Rights defender in Turkey.

Like every member of a minority community born and raised in Constantinople, I first learned about this pogrom through the eyewitness account of the oldest member of our home. My grandmother spoke Greek as fluently as she spoke Armenian, and she told me that they had many Greek neighbours at the time and lived side by side. My grandmother did not merely convey to me the dramatic, tragic dimensions of the atrocities witnessed through her aged eyes. She also recounted to me the solidarity of the Greek neighbours at that time, their courageous stance, and their honorable resistance against the racist oppression carried out by the Turkish state.

According to my grandmother, even after the mob, that carried out the pogrom, had withdrawn the next day, many Armenians whose homes had been looted, were still hiding in basements or in any other safe places, all terrified and fearful. But in the Greek neighborhoods, women and men joined hands and gone to the streets. Even though their wardrobes had been looted, they somehow managed to quickly repair their torn clothes and put on their best outfits. The men put on their fedora hats again. Those who still had a sturdy gramophone or Laterna set them up in the streets, and played loud Greek music. They began dancing on the broken glass and rubble in the streets, playing and dancing Hasapiko Politiko. The anger inside them did not prevent their resistance to stay, and to live in the ancestral lands where they were born and raised! They were not afraid, and they raised their fists in the air, saying, 'We will rebuild everything again.'

According to my grandmother, this honorable resistance was reflected in the headlines of Greek newspapers published in Constantinople just after the pogrom. The newspapers ran headlines such as "We're not going anywhere! Den páme puthena! We will stay! Tha Minume." These newspaper headlines became a motto for life, for many of us, including myself, passed down from generation to generation.

Coming from such a family background, by the time I reached my twenties, I was working at *Özgür Gündem*, a newspaper that was a pioneer of opposition and free press in Turkey at the time. During those years, when the Kurdish reality in Turkey was completely ignored, I was publishing news about culture, arts, and minorities in a Turkish published Kurdish newspaper.

Perhaps because of the topics I chose to write about, as a journalist, I have friends in embassies, human rights organizations, and patriarchates. Twenty years ago, in September 2005, one of my friends at the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople called me and told me that an exhibition about the 6 September pogrom was going to be held. He said that Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew had also been invited to the exhibition opening and would be attending. I was invited to this exhibition too. We were excited, because it would be the first exhibition of its kind in Turkey.

The 6 September pogrom would be visible in the public eye for the first time on its 50th anniversary, on the occasion of this exhibition. When I went to the exhibition, there were about 200 police officers around on İstiklal Avenue in Beyoğlu. I went upstairs and looked at the area

where the exhibition was to be held, and at that moment Patriarch Bartholomew arrived. Before the exhibition began to fill up, these police officers suddenly left.

As the opening speeches were being made, shouting and yelling suddenly began. Two groups of 20 to 30 people arrived at the exhibition area. They began chanting fascist slogans such as 'Cyprus is Turkish and will remain Turkish', 'Death to traitors' and 'Love it or leave it'. This aggressive group came up from the lower floor and entered the exhibition area. We were all shocked. Some people in the group were making the Gray Wolf sign with their hands. The security guards at the exhibition took Patriarch Bartholomew under the protection and formed a human wall around him, because we feared that those attacking the exhibition would also attack the patriarch. People were frightened, I saw an old woman begin to cry. The group proceeded to vandalize the exhibition: throwing eggs at the photos, tearing some from the walls, destroying or defacing them, and throwing items out of the windows into the street. The photographs were damaged. Police intervened after the attack had already caused significant damage. Fifty years later, the same racist slogans were chanted on the same street again, and in the same area, broken glass again, shattered frames, and photos were thrown around.

Why did the 200 police officers present in the area before the exhibition leave? Who gave them this order and why? No answer has been found for this question.

Only three people were detained after the attack on the exhibition, but they were released the same day without being charged. The incident sparked public debate, and despite the violence, the organizers chose to keep the exhibition open until its scheduled closing date, extending security measures. No one was ultimately convicted for the attack, which highlighted persistent challenges in confronting and publicly discussing the darker chapters of Turkey's past.

It was revealed that a racist person named Kemal Keriñsiz was among one of those who organized this attack. This dangerous figure would later lead to the public targeting of Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, who was killed in 2007.

The spirit of resistance that my grandmother passed down to me, and the experience of determination which became more powerful by facing fascists 20 years ago, have come with me to Berlin today. I want to thank today's organizers for allowing me to share this with you.