



IFAIR
Young Initiative on Foreign Affairs
and International Relations e.V.



***The memories, experiences and identities of Second-Generation
Armenian Genocide and Jewish Holocaust survivors***

Mariam Kurshudyan – Armenia

Yair Rubin – Israel

23-29/8/2017 – Israel

11-15/9/2017 - Armenia

Young Initiative on Foreign Affairs and International Relations (IFAIR) e.V.

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GENERAL INFORMATION: WHO ARE YOU? WHO ARE YOU WORKING FOR?

We are two interested people who are concerned about the lack of comparative research and writing about the issues of Armenian Genocide and Jewish Holocaust. We should say that we are quite brave in taking upon ourselves the task of dealing with this theme and compare two “incomparable” things, which the nations don’t want to compare at all.

Yair Rubin: I am the founder and the manager of "Face to Face", an Israeli NGO that operates youth-exchange projects between Israel, Germany and Poland. For 5 years I was a guide in the Ghetto Fighter's House museum and for 22 years I worked as a high school teacher (literature, political science) in the Israeli educational system.

Mariam Kurshudyan: I am an activist on Human Rights. I am the Project Manager of “Green Camp Educational NGO”, which is a youth organization working with society through youth. The main aim of my organization is to provide non-formal educational opportunities to youth in the rural areas, encouraging youth to be involved in social activities, giving them a chance to volunteer in our/partner organizations, to develop their mental and creative skills. For the past two years I have also been working as the Project Manager of the NGO “Coalition to Stop Violence against Women”. The organization is dealing with women’s rights, advocacy and awareness-raising to Human Rights and especially women’s rights.

PROJECT TEAM: WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO WORK TOGETHER?

We do not have a good answer to that. During the meeting in Yerevan we found that we have common areas of interests and ideas, and when we started thinking about a joint project things just rolled in a natural course. We both were interested in the effects of trans-generational transference on people that are second generation to Jewish Holocaust and Armenian genocide survivors, and we both believe that it is time that Jews and Armenians expend the connections between the so-similar-and-yet-so-different cultures and nations. We think that one of the ways to do that is to think, discuss, research and write about the similarities and differences between the two nations.

PROJECT IDEA: WHAT IS YOUR JOINT PROJECT ABOUT?

We plan to write an article that will be based on interviews with people that are second-generation to the Jewish Holocaust on one side and the Armenian Genocide on the other side. We want to write a comparative study, to see what are the similarities and differences in points of view, feelings, memories and influences on their lives as second-generation.

We have prepared a questionnaire that deals with three major subjects – "personal memory", "collective memory" and "identity and actions". The interview is going to be done in person and straight forward – sitting and talking. We will record the interview and transcribe it afterwards (all of that has already been done in Israel).

We, for the time being, use only our private sources and connections in order to find people to interview, and to learn about the current research. We talked to a few experts like Prof. Yair Auron, an Israeli expert on genocide in general and the Armenian genocide in particular, and Prof. Ara Sarkis Asjian, and we conducted a search for Jewish-Armenian comparative research, in order to know more about what we need to do and what is the current situation in that field. From our research and our talks with experts we learned that nothing like the article we plan to do has ever been done before.

We would probably need some funding in the future for working on the actual writing and publishing of the article. We plan to meet again, after the interviews, in order to work on the analysis and write the article itself.

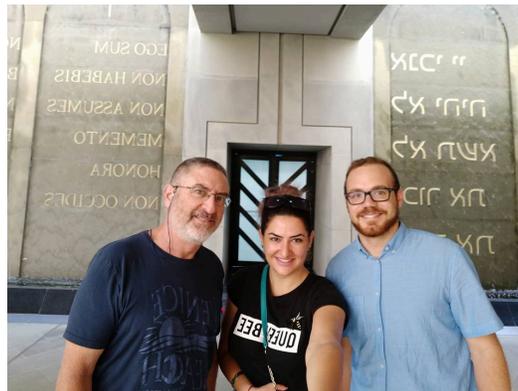
ACTIVITY PLAN: WHAT WAS THE PROGRAM OF THE WORK SHADOWINGS?

The program, both in Israel and in Armenia, is to get generally acquainted with the countries, the societies and traditions of each other, in order to understand the other nation better.

The second stage is to interview in Israel a representative of the second generation of Jewish Holocaust survivors, and in Armenia a representative of the second generation of Armenian Genocide survivors. We planned to transcribe the recorded interviews and integrate them into the identical questionnaire we prepared in advance.

The program of the days in Israel (23 – 29 August 2017):

First day: Visiting Domus Galilaeae, a unique Catholic Priests school, and talking to one of the students there. Then we visited the holy sites in Nazareth, getting to know the Christian aspect of Israeli life.



Our guide in Domus Galilaeae

Second day: touring the Western Galilee and Akko, exploring the complexity of mixed Arab-Israeli life.

Third day: touring the old city of Jerusalem and the holy sites of it. It is extremely complex, very diverse and very important to the understanding of the Israeli culture. In addition to that we visited the Armenian quarter of the old city, met people and heard their thoughts about what we plan to do. We even got some names of people we should meet and places we should see. It showed us the level of care and interest in what we do, which was encouraging and supportive.

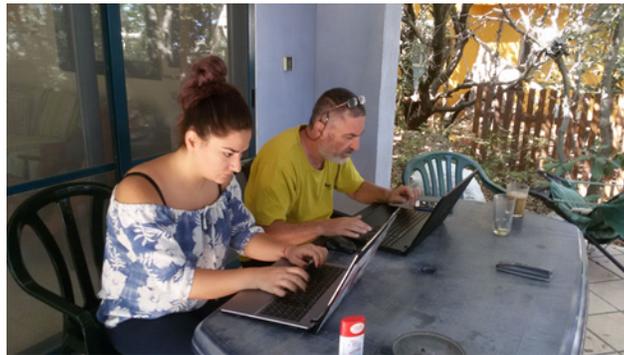
Fourth day: making last preparations before the interview, reviewing the questionnaire and continuing searching for relevant material – academic sources, literary material and research.

Fifth day: We interviewed the Jewish second-generation person we chose, and then we toured the exhibitions of the Ghetto Fighter's House museum, the first Holocaust museum in the world. At that day we also transcribed the interview.



Interviewing Tali Shner

Sixth day: incorporating the transcription of the interview with the questionnaire and writing the first draft of the report.



Working on the report

The program of the days in Armenia (11 – 15 September 2017):

First day: Going to Tatev Tatulyan to see the monastery that is a major part of the Armenian identity and culture.



Second day: A study visit to the Genocide Museum, with the purpose of getting deeper into the subject of collective memory and remembrance culture. We started with a short research in the library and we had a talk with Gohar Khanumyan, the manager of the library. After that Gohar Khanumyan guided us in the museum, and we continued our long conversation about the differences and similarities in the educational work and the different emphasis in the remembrance culture between Israel and Armenia. We concluded that there might be a place for wider co-operation. Gohar Khanumyan was very interested and supportive towards our project and promised to help in any way. She asked that a copy of the article will be given to library when the time comes.

In the evening, we went to see the art galleries in Cascade, absorbing as much as we can from the Armenian taste, architecture and art – all of which is part of the identity, collective memory and attitude towards history.

Third day: The interview with Alvard Mandakunyan. The 72 year-old music teacher had an excellent memory, was very cooperative and open-hearted. We were also greeted very nicely by the kindergarten principal (where the interview took place), and once more we got very warm and encouraging responses to our idea.

Then we visited Sergei Parajanov's museum, getting a glimpse of modern interdisciplinary art in Armenia, created by an artist that has direct references to the Armenian Genocide in his work.

The rest of the day was dedicated to writing the report on our work-shadowing, transcribing the interview and starting to plan the next phases of our joint work.

Fourth day: Part of the day was dedicated to the work of analyzing the interviews, writing some main points that we should pay attention to when we go deeper into the analysis and finally – some rest and getting ready to go home.

Fifth day: Yair went home with a great hope to meet Mariam again during the process of writing the article...



Interviewing Alvard Mandakunyan



After the interview



Working on the report

REFLECTION ON THE WORK SHADOWINGS:

1. The goals were to meet and get to know the respective societies in order to be able to analyze and understand our interviewees and their answers to our questionnaire. That meant to travel a little in the country, meet people and get to know the atmosphere, the culture and the way of life so as to have a well-based article after all.
2. We think that we had a very productive and well-spent time in Israel and then in Armenia. As we wrote in the first report, and we see no reason to repeat it, we feel that we managed to learn a lot about the role of the Holocaust (in Israel) and the Genocide (in Armenia) in the cultural life, we managed to see some of the more important places relevant to our theme and we feel that we have a better understanding of the subject.
3. Our organizations are not relevant to the subject. We met in this project because we come from organizations that are committed to cooperation and openness to other cultures and different ideas, but our current joint work is a different side of our interests as human beings and as part of our national and social identity.
4. Our work was a real team work. We read a lot about each other's nation and tragedies before our meeting, so we were "on the same page". Due to that we think our work was really productive, as we have managed not only to write the questionnaire for our comparative article, to meet the interviewee and transcribe it, but also we began to write the prologue of the main article. And what is even more important – we became really good friends, which makes our work easier.

PERSPECTIVES: WHAT IS THE STATUS OF YOUR PROJECT?

We fulfilled the tasks of the first phase – learning, understanding the current situation in the field, writing the questionnaire and implementing it. Our second and third phases – analyzing, writing and preparing for publishing – are ahead of us. We have not yet decided where to publish and we are looking for different options.

We would like very much to get help in funding a final meeting in order to work face to face on the final stages of preparing the article for publishing.