CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

Many stories in this dissertation show how categorical constructions and
discrimination serve to conceal other dynamics and lead to a distorted remembrance and
representation, as has become clear in the narratives of the Non-Gypsies and Gypsies in
the town of Bayramic. The categories of Gypsyness and Turkishness became rigid and
powerful during the attacks as they were mobilized to exclude the Gypsies and to
legitimate collective violence against them. However, the attacks were not caused by the
existing categories. It was just the opposite. The categories became powerful and
functional for the attacks, not the other way around. Moreover, the attacks also sealed
this rigidity. The people who were called Gypsies became “more Gypsy” during (and
after) the attacks. The content of Gypsyness was enlarged and demonized in this process.
It became more rooted in concepts of evilness and led to alienation between Gypsies and
non-Gypsies, although the same people were also referred to as “our Gypsies” with
whom one could stress commonalities in other contexts.

Moreover, the relation of people with the attacks was not only forged through
particular subjective positions, but also through a constructed universe of reason. The
attacks urged to define the universe of the self and its relationship with the other. The
reason was based on power and legitimacy that enabled a violent act towards the
powerless. To avoid misunderstandings, the Gypsies in person who experienced the
attacks were not all powerless, in physical, socioeconomic or political respects. In
contrast, their power in society was increasing. At that point, Turkishness was used as a
source of power and legitimacy that could be employed through the category of
Gypsyness against people who were described as powerless, degraded, humiliated,
dehumanized and thus undeserving the same power and status.

The journey through the representations and remembering of townspeople of the attacks and the ensuing forced dislocation revealed how flexible social categories could be constructed. In the prevailing socio-political environment in which there was space for changes in the power relationships, the historical stigma and nationalist feelings were activated to control the social order. The marginalized profession of driving became profitable and full of potential thanks to the developments in highway transportation, forestry business, and the intensifying relationships between rural and urban areas. While it used to be an unattractive profession, with limited status in society, it gathered an unexpected popularity in the course of the 1960s, when the sector became much more profitable and experienced an upgrade in the working conditions. This historical context is crucial to understand the fight between Muhacir and Turkish drivers over a truck. It was at that moment that the historical Gypsy stigma was activated in the town.

The violence was used to redefine the contents of Turkishness and Gypsiness as well as the relationship between the two. Until the attacks these categories were ambiguous and multi-layered. Some particular characteristics, such as physical attributes, moral values and different manners, were used to differentiate the Gypsies. However, in the town, many Gypsies did not fit into the stereotype. Non-Gypsy townspeople who referred to their local roots and ancestry had often trouble to make clear to what extent they concretely differed from (some) Gypsies and often the boundaries between ethnic categories were blurred. Only when the Turkish majority felt that their privileged position was in danger, the boundaries became significant and the urge to fix them became critical.

Still, before the attack in Bayramic, Gypsiness did influence the cognitive universe and ways of relating to one another. As we have seen in Chapter Four, there was always a relative social distance towards Gypsiness, although transcending that
distance was not necessarily difficult for every Gypsy individual. I argued that the boundaries were crossed and to some extent became blurred through daily interactions. Personal contacts between Gypsies and non-Gypsies led to daily conversations, friendships, work relations, and the sharing of daily experiences in the neighborhoods they inhabited. Such contacts forged relations that went beyond categories of Gypsyness and Turkishness. As a result, Gypsyness was not entirely juxtaposed to Turkishness and overlap was possible. However, there were still some taboos, especially regarding intermarriages. Therefore, although Gypsy stigma was not active all the time in their daily interactions, the taboos served to preserve a certain extent of social distance, and thus boundary maintenance.

Furthermore, the parallels with other cases of ‘othering’ were crucial to understand people’s behavior versus minority groups. It gives us clues about the salience of nationalism, the construction of citizenship and minority positions in the country and how this was reflected in the town of Bayramic. The parallels with Kurdish people appear most significant. Considering recent discontent with some Kurdish people in the town and the recent riots against them, the parallels force themselves upon us. Moreover, Kurdishness generally has been a reference point for minority positions in Turkey especially since the 1990s. Particularly, for many Gypsies in the country, being compared with Kurds puts them in the same category of disloyal members of the Turkish state and nation.

It is remarkable, however, how different the attacks are remembered and represented. The stories were not only loaded with emotions and self-rationalizations, but they also conveyed different perspectives and interests. The story around the “Gypsy threat” was full of fear, not necessarily of the Gypsies but of being an outcast within the nation. Many people who stick to the ‘Gypsy threat’ narrative talked about the violent, improper and immoral acts of the Gypsies, but most did not fear the Gypsies as such.
Instead, they were clearly afraid of the perpetrators and the danger of being labeled as a traitor in case they would defend the Gypsies. This narrative bears many similarities with other cases in which the discourse of fighting against the national enemy to protect national unity was stressed. The role of the state in this conceptualization through political discourses and practices as well as not taking preventive actions and punitive measures is far from negligible.

During the attacks, the terrorization of townspeople was very effective and the employers and protectors of the Gypsies could easily find themselves in vulnerable positions. They also experienced psychological and physical violence. The silence of some townspeople pertaining the attacks displayed their fear. The fact that many people in the town primarily chose not to talk about the perpetrators added the story on misbehaving Gypsies to dominate the collective memory of the non-Gypsies.

Some people did not want to learn or recall the socioeconomic background of the attacks, but reproduced the story about the Gypsy threat and their immorality. The former story was subdued and at most narrated backstage and thus became a marginalized discourse compatible with the Gypsy positions. This study urges to disclose the dynamics between these two main stories as well. It questions the space for alternative historiographies and aims to provide a space for the different voices of not only the Gypsies but also the ordinary townspeople, even the perpetrators.

Doing oral history urges the historian to question the ways of understanding the world, how and why we perceive things, events and people in her particular research and reflects on them. It is a process during which one has to construct and deconstruct mainstream understandings. In this way, one can understand how people remember and represent the past. An important aspect of doing oral history is the realization of multiple ways and perspectives of telling a story. It is an understanding that acknowledges the existence of multiple subjectivities. It takes different perspectives, standpoints and
subjects into account that shape a particular past and explains what it means to different subjects in a society.

Thus, one should be very alert to how a narrator tells the story and how it may be influenced by the fear of exclusion, the influence of nationalism, and the fear to be perceived as an outcast, marginal or as immoral. Moreover, conversations in different times or different ways of relations can lead to different narratives. For instance, when a relationship of full trust with someone is established after several conversations, people may tell other sides of the stories and even may shift to a less dominant or mainstream narrative. In my experience, the level of trust was increased by my background, knowledge of and relation to other people as well as my way of treating my narrators. They would tell different stories if they had not known my links to the town and my knowledge about the events or relationship to someone that they knew. In a similar way, when they realized that I showed respect to them and their stories, they also became more at ease and told me more. Thus, the results of oral history are not only determined by displaying one’s local knowledge and relations preceding to the interview, but also how one conducts the conversation. The key word here is trust, which makes it much more easy for people to share more personal stories and question, implicitly or explicitly, the homogenized mainstream representations.

The shifts between narratives and ways of talking, on the other hand, can happen even during a particular conversation. While they talk about a certain issue, interviewees often made a comment that contradicted the one that they made only a few minutes later when talking about another issue. Most of the time, narrators would not even realize such contradiction. The shifts in these narratives are determined by a number of factors: their relation to particular individuals; whether they base themselves on personal experiences or whether they just follow dominant discourses; the emotional or rational involvement in a certain context. Thus, contradictions should not be perceived as
insincerity or confusion, but they invite the researcher to analyze the dynamics that produce these contradictions. After all, we all unconsciously internalize and reproduce practices, ideas and feelings.

In the dominant remembrance of the attacks, the violation of socioeconomic privileges was concealed behind the violation of masculine power. In this construction, the women symbolized the national territory. The naturalization of the violence against immorality was thus accompanied with nationalistic feelings. Immorality here appeared as an insult to the male sovereignty and power. In the scope of this study, the construction and transformation of the categories of Turkishness and Gypsyness were primary subjects of analysis that structured the ways of remembering and representation. The relations between socioeconomic status, class and ethnicity, therefore, occupied an important place. For further research, the interplay between different aspects of power relations, hierarchies and inequalities such as the articulation of gendered territory along with nationalized socioeconomic power should be given ample attention.

This study analyzes not only the hierarchies between Gypsyness and Turkishness, but also those between the urban and the rural, the modern and the traditional, men and women. They all intermingle in such a way that we cannot easily differentiate which one is functional, and when and how. We should be continuously questioning the power inequalities and hierarchies as well as attempting to deconstruct our perceptions and feelings accordingly. It is only then that we can start understand and transcend those power constructions and relations.

The forced dislocation shows not only the flexibility of categories, but also how, when and why they could be employed in different ways. The focus is not the categories itself but how they were transformed in relation to one another and in accordance with the people’s socioeconomic relations and historical contexts. Thus, Gypsyness and Turkishness are not approached as separate entities but in relationship to one another.
How people make sense of these categories and inscribe their relationships accordingly is significant. Not only the relationship between the two, but also the relationship and dynamics between different Gypsy communities are visible. It is fascinating to find out how different muhacirs and local Gypsies relate to Turkishness. This study gives us clues about the complexity in the identification processes of people as well as the relationship between Gypsyness and Turkishness. Hopefully, further research in Romani studies in Turkey will further explore these dimensions.

The relationships between Gypsies and non-Gypsies in Bayramic, on the other hand, displayed how multifaceted Gypsyness can be. It differs within the town from one group of Gypsies to the other. In addition to heterogeneous and multi-layered relations and group formation, Gypsyness in Bayramic deconstructs the dominant Gypsy stereotype and reveals different class and identification positions. Further research on Gypsyness, marginal positions, power hierarchies and inequalities in Turkey and other societies will hopefully deepen our understanding of the dynamics of these relations.

Furthermore, other dynamics such as being modern, local, educated, good mannered, and villager appeared to be relevant as well. They influenced the status of people as well as their self-representations. They display how complicated these categories indeed can become. Various sorts of commonalities are constructed and these often contradicted categorical differences between Gypsies and non-Gypsies. Although, these differentiations were neglected in the attacks, their influence became visible in the differences in treatment of muhacir and local Gypsies.

This dissertation is not just a story of bad people attacking good people. Instead, it analyzed the relationships, contexts and agency positions within which some people resorted to collective violence towards minorities. After so many years, the leading perpetrator does not make the impression of a ruthless villain and it is hard to imagine him being involved in the attacks. If you had seen 96-year-old Fitnat, who was like a
fairytale grandmother to me, you could have never imagined the words of hatred that poured out of her mouth. But these things happened and urge us to lay bare the conditions that make people think, feel, practice in discriminative ways and seeing these as legitimate.

The study displayed how people employ historical categories and stigmas in nationalistic and exclusive discourses in order to attack certain other people that they perceive as threatening their self-interests, in particular in socioeconomic contexts. We should question all power relations and discriminative discourses even if they have not turned into practices. We should not only question discourses, but also our feelings as we usually internalize those discourses without even realizing how discriminative they are. We should try to eliminate conditions for inequalities that are linked to these discourses and harsh competition on resources. We should try to deconstruct hierarchies and look for the common denominator of people, notwithstanding personal and group differences. After all, ethnic categories easily blind us and make us accept the ethnic boundaries between certain categories. Instead of functioning as something that has an explanatory power (the explanans), ethnicity is something that needs to be explained (the explanandum). Only then can we understand how the boundaries are drawn, how they become blurred and redressed again. The relevance of analyzing the attacks in 1970 Bayramic therefore transcends the local and even national history, and should be seen as a contribution to the study of collective violence and historical racism in general, along with the construction of power inequalities, hierarchies and discrimination.