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# The Armenian Weekly



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## Editor's Desk

### Justice as Cure

BY KHATCHIG MOURADIAN

When on Dec. 11, 1946, after months of lobbying by Raphael Lemkin, the UN General Assembly unanimously passed a resolution condemning genocide, an editorial in the Hairenik Weekly noted: "The Armenians were robbed of their historic provinces, they sacrificed a cool million and a half human lives, and another million were made expatriates. In compensation of this colossal wrong the United Nations offers them a 'Genocide.' The Genocide is hardly the cure for Armenian wounds."

The 50th anniversary of the Armenian genocide was a watershed event. Armenians moved from mourning to demanding recognition and justice (see Bobelian). As we approach the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, there seems to be growing

consensus among academic and political circles—Armenian and other—that the battle for recognition of the Armenian Genocide has been, to a large part, won (see Sassounian). Yet as Turkish official denial continues, the battle for discourse wages on (see Mamigonian and Erbal).

In parallel, genocide scholarship is increasingly paying closer attention to the human and material losses Armenians suffered during the Genocide (see Aghjayan and Üngör), and emphasis on justice for the Armenian genocide as the only way for conciliation is also increasing (See Theriault).

The single thread that weaves together most of the articles featured in this magazine is a commitment to truth and justice. A commitment we renew in April of every year through the voices of scholars, journalists, and activists from both sides of the Atlantic, and with the continued support of our readers.

# Contributors

**George Aghjayan** is a fellow of the Society of Actuaries. His primary area of focus is the demographics of western Armenia and is a frequent contributor to the Armenian Weekly. He is chairman of the Armenian National Committee (ANC) of Central Massachusetts and resides in Worcester with his wife and three children.



A graduate of the University of Michigan Law School and Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, **Michael Bobelian** is a lawyer and author whose work has covered issues ranging from corporate wrongdoing to foreign affairs to higher education. His reportage has appeared on Forbes.com, in the American Lawyer Magazine, Legal Affairs Magazine, and the Washington Monthly. Bobelian is the author of *Children of Armenia: A Forgotten Genocide and the Century-Long Struggle for Justice*, the critically acclaimed book published by Simon & Schuster in 2009.

**Ayda Erbal** is writing her dissertation in the department of politics at New York University. Her work focuses on the politics of changing historiographies in Turkey and Israel. She is interested in democratic theory, democratic deliberation, the politics of “post-nationalist” historiographies in transitional settings, and the politics of apology. She is a published



short-story writer and worked as a columnist for the Turkish-Armenian newspaper Agos from 2000–03.

**Burcu Gürsel** grew up in Istanbul, received her degrees from the University of Chicago and the University of Pennsylvania (Comparative Literature), and currently



holds a postdoctoral fellowship at Forum Transregionale Studien, Berlin. Who knows where she will be next year. Burcu considers herself a beginner in things Armenian.



**Marc A. Mamigonian** is the Director of Academic Affairs of the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR). He is the editor of the publications *Rethinking Armenian Studies* (2003) and *The Armenians of New England* (2004) and is the author or co-author of several scholarly articles on the writings of James Joyce.

**Knarik O. Meneshian** was born in Austria. She received her degree in literature and secondary education in Chicago, Ill. Her works have been published in “Teachers As Writers,” “American Poetry Anthology,” and other American publications. She has authored a book of poems titled *Reflections*, and translated from Armenian to English Rev. D. Antreassian’s book *The Banishment of Zeitoun and Suedia’s Revolt*.



**Michael Mensoian, J.D./Ph.D.**, is professor emeritus in Middle East and political geography at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, and a retired major in the U.S. army. He writes regularly for the Armenian Weekly.

**Khatchig Mouradian** is a journalist, writer and translator. He was an editor of the Lebanese-Armenian Aztag Daily from 2000 to 2007, when he moved to Boston and became the editor of the Armenian Weekly. He is a PhD student in Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Clark University. His



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*Editor:* Khatchig Mouradian  
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*Art Director:* Gina Poirier

### ARMENIAN SECTION

*Editor:* Zaven Torikian  
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*Sales Manager:* Karine Galstian

TEL: 617-926-3974  
FAX: 617-926-1750

E-MAIL:  
armenianweekly@hairenik.com  
WEB: www.armenianweekly.com

articles, interviews and poems have appeared in publications worldwide. Mouradian has lectured extensively and participated in conferences in Armenia, Turkey, Cyprus, Lebanon, Syria, Austria, Switzerland, Norway and the U.S.



Originally from a family farm in North Dakota, **Kristi Rendahl** lived and worked in Armenia from 1997–2002 and visits the country whenever possible. She works with non-profit organizations in her consulting practice ([www.rendahlconsulting.com](http://www.rendahlconsulting.com)) and is pursuing a doctorate in public administration. Through her travels, she has met Armenians in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Ethiopia, and across the U.S. Currently, Kristi resides in St. Paul, Minn. She is a columnist for the Armenian Weekly.

**Harut Sassounian** is the publisher of The California Courier, a weekly newspaper based in Glendale, Calif. He is the president of the United Armenian Fund, a coalition of the seven largest Armenian-American organizations. He has a master's degree in international affairs from Columbia University and an MBA from Pepperdine. He has been decorated by the president and prime minister of the Republic of Armenia, and the heads of the Armenian Apostolic and Catholic churches. He is also the recipient of the Ellis Island Medal of Honor.



**Talin Suciyan** is an Istanbul Armenian journalist who lived in Armenia from 2007–08. She is currently based in Munich, where she is pursuing her graduate studies and serves as a teaching fellow at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität. She has contributed regularly to Agos (from 2007–10) and other Turkish newspapers.



**Henry C. Theriault** earned his Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Massachusetts, with a specialization in social and political philosophy. He is currently Professor in and Chair of the Philosophy Department at Worcester State University, where he has taught since 1998. Since 2007, he has served as Co-Editor-in-Chief of the peer-reviewed journal *Genocide Studies and Prevention* and has been on the Advisory Council of the International Association of Genocide Scholars. His research focuses on philosophical approaches to genocide issues, especially genocide denial, long-term justice, and the role of violence against women in genocide. He has lectured widely in the United States and internationally.



**Uğur Ümit Üngör** is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Centre for War Studies, University College Dublin. He was born in 1980 and studied sociology and history at the Universities of Groningen, Utrecht, Toronto, and Amsterdam. His main area of interest is the historical sociology of mass violence and nationalism in the modern world. He has published on genocide, in general, and on the Rwandan and Armenian genocides, in particular. He finished his Ph.D., titled “Young Turk Social Engineering: Genocide, Nationalism, and Memory in Eastern Turkey, 1913–1950” at the department of history of the University of Amsterdam.

**Tom Vartabedian** is a retired journalist with the Haverhill Gazette, where he spent 40 years as an award-winning writer and photographer. He has volunteered his services for the past 47 years as a columnist and correspondent with the Armenian Weekly. He resides with his wife Nancy, a retired schoolteacher. They are parents of three AYF children: Sonya, Ara, and Raffi.



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## Confiscation & Colonization

# THE YOUNG TURK

## Seizure of Armenian Property

By Uğur Ümit Üngör

“Leave all your belongings—your furniture, your beddings, your artifacts. Close your shops and businesses with everything inside. Your doors will be sealed with special stamps. On your return, you will get everything you left behind. Do not sell property or any expensive item. Buyers and sellers alike will be liable for legal action. Put your money in a bank in the name of a relative who is out of the country. Make a list of everything you own, including livestock, and give it to the specified official so that all your things can be returned to you later. You have ten days to comply with this ultimatum.”<sup>1</sup>

—GOVERNMENT PROMULGATION HANGED IN PUBLIC PLACES IN KAYSERI, JUNE 15, 1915.





A 1918 photo of the Armenian church in Trabzon, which was used as a depot and distribution center for confiscated property. (Copyright Raymond Kévorkian and Paul Paboudjian, *Les Arméniens à la veille du génocide.*)

## INTRODUCTION

**T**his article is based on a forthcoming monograph on the expropriation of Ottoman Armenians during the 1915 genocide.<sup>2</sup> It will paraphrase some of the main arguments of the book, which details the emergence of Turkish economic nationalism, offers insight into the economic ramifications of the genocidal process, and describes how the plunder was organized on the ground. The book discusses the interrelated nature of property confiscation initiated by the Young Turk regime and its cooperating local elites, and offers new insights into the functions and beneficiaries of state-sanctioned robbery. Drawing on secret files and unexamined records from eight languages, the book presents new evidence to demonstrate how Armenians suffered systematic plunder and destruction, and how ordinary Turks were assigned a range of property for their progress.

This two-way policy is captured in the two concepts of *confiscation* and *colonization*. The book uses the concept of *confisca-*

*tion* to capture the involvement of an extensive bureaucratic apparatus and illustrate the legal facade during the dispossession of Armenians. Furthermore, it will deploy the concept of *colonization* to denote the redistribution of their property as a form of internal colonization. Together, these concepts best encapsulate the twin processes of seizing property from Armenians, and reassigning it to Turks.<sup>3</sup>

The book is situated in the field of genocide studies, and starts off by asking questions that have been answered fairly satisfactorily for other genocides such as the Holocaust and the Rwandan Genocide: Was confiscation of the victim group's properties economically motivated as a mere instrument for material gain? Did the Young Turk regime distribute Armenian property to local elites in exchange for support for the genocide? In other words, did they simply buy their loyalty by appealing to their sense of economic self-interest? Or did the local elite support the destruction and expropriation out of ideological convictions? Finally, what was the scope of the dispossession process? In other words, how wide was the

circle of profiteers? Did just the Young Turk elite, from the imperial capital down to the provincial towns, profit from it, or did much wider classes in Turkish society benefit?

The book consists of seven chapters that can be divided into three sections. Chapters two and three constitute the first section and will discuss main issues such as ideology and law. Chapter two, entitled "Ideological foundations: constructing the Turkish 'national economy,'" will trace the evolution of the Turkish-nationalist ideology of building a purely Turkish "national economy" within the multi-ethnic Ottoman economic landscape. It will discuss how the Young Turk Party envisioned such a Turkish economy to come into being by analyzing the writings of leading Young Turk ideologues. Rather than macro-economic analyses of Ottoman financial policy in the early 20th century, the chapter will investigate how the party imagined the role of the state and the economic progress of the ethnic Turkish population.

Immediately following it is chapter three, entitled "Legal foundations: using the justice system for injustice." This chapter will closely analyze the many laws and

decrees that the Young Turk regime passed to provide a veneer of legality to their crimes. It will seek to answer the question: Why did the Young Turk regime feel the need to pass elaborate laws on the status of wartime Armenian property? It will discuss not only the laws that were adopted by the regime, but also the legal status of Armenian property. The chapter will distinguish the legal provenance of land and immovable property versus movables.

Chapter four, “The dispossession of Armenians during the genocide, 1915–1918,” constitutes a section in itself. It will examine the development of the genocide and trace Young Turk economic policies towards the Armenian population from the Young Turk coup d’état in 1913 to the fall of the regime in 1918. It will chart how this policy moved from boycott to discrimination, into confiscation and outright plunder, resulting in the mass pauperization of the victims. It identifies main currents and developments of this ruthless policy and how it affected Ottoman Armenian communities. The chapter is meant to be a general introduction to the next three important chapters.

The third and last section of the book comprises chapters five and six. They are each in-depth case studies of several important provinces in the Ottoman Empire. Chapter five, “Adana: the cotton belt,” will be the first of two case studies that describe the organized plunder of Armenians and the subsequent deployment and allocation of Armenian property to Turks. It will focus on the southern city of Adana, where Armenians were employed in cotton fields, and describe how the local Young Turks dispossessed Armenians and assigned the property to Turkish refugees from the Balkans.

Chapter six, “Diyarbakir: the land of copper and silk,” is the second and last case study, concentrating on the southeastern region of Diyarbakir, famous for its copper and silk products. Here, economic life in the bazaar was dominated by Armenian artisans. The chapter will describe how the local perpetrators participated in the destruction of their Armenian neighbors and were rewarded by the central authorities. It will also focus on large-scale corruption and embezzlement.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, chapter seven, the conclusion, will re-center the main questions posed in this introduction and draw the general con-

clusions of each chapter together. It will report in a direct style how and why the Armenians were dispossessed during the genocide, how this affected local economies, and how ordinary Turks profited from the expropriation campaign.

## CONFISCATION

**T**he Armenian Genocide consisted of an overlapping set of processes: elite homicides, deportations, massacres, forced assimilation, destruction of material culture, and our current theme, expropriation. Although these dimensions of the genocide differed and were carried out by different agencies, they converged in their objective: destruction. By the end of the war, the approximately 2,900 Anatolian Armenian settlements (villages, towns, neighborhoods) were depopulated and the majority of its inhabitants dead. What made the massacres genocidal is that the genocide targeted the abstract category of group identity, in that *all* Armenians, loyal or disloyal, were destroyed.

The qualitative leap in the elimination of the Armenians from the Ottoman economy reached an important acceleration with the proclamation of war and the abolishment of the capitulations. The abrogation of the capitulations was a unilateral breach of international law and a catalyst that channeled high levels of power into the Young Turks’ hands. “Turkification” could now be systematized into a comprehensive empire-wide policy of harassment, organized boycotts, violent attacks, exclusions from professional associations and guilds, and mass dismissals of Armenian employees from the public service and plunder of their businesses in the private sector.

The confiscation process began right after the deportation of the Armenian owners. As a rule of thumb, no prior arrangements were made regarding the properties. The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) launched both the deportation and the dispossession of Armenians well before the promulgation of any laws or official decrees. The deportation decrees of May 23, 1915 and the deportation law of May 27, 1915 were issued after the deportations had already begun. Decrees and laws

merely served to unite the hitherto diverse practices and render the overall policy more consistent. So too was the CUP’s approach to confiscation. Telegrams to various provinces ordering the liquidation of immovable property were followed by the streamlined program of June 10, 1915 that established the zkey agency overseeing the liquidation process—the Abandoned Properties Commission (*Emvâl-ı Metruke Komisyonu*). These were not yet christened “Liquidation Commissions,” but nevertheless mostly fulfilled that function.

Officially, there were 33 commissions across the country, and in towns without any, the local CUP chapter often took charge of the tasks. These consisted of inventorizing, liquidating, appropriating, and allocating Armenian property. The most detailed and reliable information we have about the commissions is from Germans stationed in the Ottoman Empire. For example, Deutsche Bank staff members recognized that the Ottoman Bank collaborated in the endeavour.<sup>5</sup> From its correspondence with the provinces, the German ambassador concluded that the confiscation process went through two phases: the direct liquidation of all unplundered Armenian property by the Abandoned Properties Commission, and the transfer of the revenues to the Ottoman Bank that held responsibility for the money.<sup>6</sup> According to André Mandelstam, in 1916 a sum of 5,000,000 Turkish lira (the equivalent of 30,000 kilograms of gold) was deposited by the Ottoman government at the Reichsbank in Berlin. This astronomic amount of money was most probably the aggregate of all Armenian bank accounts, as well as the total sum gained from the liquidations in the provinces.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, German diplomats argued that the commissions worked in tandem with the Grand Vezirate, the Finance Ministry, and the Justice Ministry.<sup>8</sup> The entire operation was supervised by the Interior Ministry, which was tasked with an enormous amount of coordination and recordkeeping. These records have survived and I will draw on them extensively to outline the process of dispossession.

At the outset, the problem of property was a concomitant effect of the deportations and there was probably no blueprint for it written by Talaat Pasha and his henchmen. Throughout 1915 and 1916, the



Interior Ministry issued hundreds of directives, orders, decrees, and injunctions to provincial, district, and city authorities. When deportation came, it recorded the names, professions, and properties of Armenians, before expropriating them and liquidating their immovables. Several empire-wide decrees sketched the contours of the confiscation policy. Liquidation entailed auctioning and selling the property to the lowest, not highest, bidder. To this end, on Aug. 29, 1915 the Interior Ministry wired a circular telegram summoning authorities to auction abandoned Armenian

transformed from a religious definition based on the *millet* system, to a national definition. Thus, the ministry arbitrated that the targets were not only Apostolic Armenians but all “Armenians.”<sup>12</sup> The German consul of Trabzon remarked that under this law, technically, “an Armenian converted to Islam would then be deported as a Mohammedan Armenian.”<sup>13</sup>

Other provinces wondered what to do with the property of undeported Armenians, often military families. The ministry ordered that for now, they would be allowed to keep their property.<sup>14</sup> In another case, three gover-

strategies to avoid seizure of their property. These included transferring property to non-Ottoman Armenians, sending it abroad to family members, giving valuables to American missionaries and consuls, mailing it directly to their new residences at their final destinations. It is these kinds of prohibitions that shed light on the rationale behind the expropriations. They strongly suggest that there was no intention of either compensating Armenians fairly for their dispossession, or offering them any prospect of a future return to their homes. Hilmar Kaiser has rightly concluded that these

It is these kinds of prohibitions that shed light on the rationale behind the expropriations. They strongly suggest that there was no intention of either compensating Armenians fairly for their dispossession, or offering them any prospect of a future return to their homes.

property for the benefit of the local Turkish population.<sup>9</sup> As this order sufficed for the ongoing deportations, preparations were made for future ones. On Nov. 1, 1915, the ministry ordered the drawing up of lists of “Armenian merchants from provinces who have not yet been transported to other regions,” including details on their trading firms, real estate, factories, the estimated worth of all their belongings, information on their relatives living abroad, and whether they were working with foreign business partners.<sup>10</sup> To preclude jurisdictional disputes from arising, the ministry admonished that the only agency authorized to organize the expropriation was the Abandoned Properties Commission.<sup>11</sup>

Talaat and the Interior Ministry he presided over were soon facing two acute problems: ambiguity regarding the forms and provenance of property, and delimiting the scope of the expropriations. An example of the former trend was a question asked by the provincial authorities of Aleppo, namely whether only Apostolic Armenians were to be expropriated or also Protestant and Catholic ones. By then, the definition of the victim group had already

nors asked for advice on how to handle the sowed fields of Armenian farmers. The ministry admitted that the abstract decrees did not always correspond to the existing conditions on the ground and ordered: “These need to be reaped and threshed under the supervision of the Abandoned Properties Commissions and provided for by the funds for the expenses of the settlers. Report within two days how many soldiers or labourers from the population, and which kinds of machines and tools and utensils are needed to harvest the crops.”<sup>15</sup>

These prescriptive provisions were supplemented by prohibitive rules. Those Armenians who anticipated that the deportations were a temporary measure counted on renting out their houses, stables, barns, or shops to neighbors and acquaintances. But the ministry prohibited this practice.<sup>16</sup> Those Armenians who attempted to sell their property to foreigners and other Christians (such as Greeks or Christian Arabs) were also counteracted. It issued a circular telegram prohibiting “decidedly” (*suret-i katiyyede*) the sale of any land or other property to foreigners.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the government prohibited Armenians from a whole host of

restrictions were “a plain admission of official criminal intent.”<sup>18</sup>

A more precise explanation perhaps lays in a revealing telegram sent by the government to Balıkesir District. It read that the expropriation needed to be carried out to “ensure that the transported population will no longer have any connection to possessions and ownership” (*nakledilen ahalinin alâka-ı mülkiyet ve tasarrufu kalmamasını temin*).<sup>19</sup> In other words, the relationship between Armenians and their property needed to be definitively severed to bring about a lasting “de-Armenization” of the land. Three years later, the German consul at Trabzon, Heinrich Bergfeld, correctly noted that the most important decision had been depriving the landowners of the right to dispose of their immovable property. At the end of the war, he reflected on the fate of the Armenian deportees: “If one believes they cannot be allowed to definitively return to their old homes, one should at least give them the general permission to make use of their real estate through sale or rent, and temporarily allow them to go to their homelands for this purpose.”<sup>20</sup> This would turn out to be a naive proposition.

## COLONIZATION

The appropriation of Armenian property by the Young Turk regime, or to be more precise, the Young Turk regime's mass theft of Armenian property, is closely related to the morphology of the organization, coordination, and implementation of the genocide. Recent studies have challenged the convention that the genocide had a uni-polar pyramid structure. On the contrary, the genocide was a multi-polar process: radicalization came from within and without, and emanated from different perpetrating power centers, such as civil and military organizations, the party, the nexus Talaat-Enver, and local elites.<sup>21</sup> Competition and conflict between these sectors shaped the genocide. As a result, the confiscation of Armenian property and its allocation to Turks became a bone of contention between the Ottoman army and the Interior Ministry. The army attempted to acquire movable and immovable Armenian property for its military ends, but the ministry followed its ideological prescript of forging a "national economy" and adamantly assigned the property to the upstart Turkish middle class.

The confiscation of Armenian property was followed and supplemented by the colonization by Ottoman Muslims of the empty spaces they left behind. As Armenians trudged along the deportation routes southwards, their property was being redistributed by the Interior Ministry. Analytically we can distinguish two dimensions to this process: property that ended up in private hands, and property that stayed in possession of the state.

In 1916, the CUP expanded its existing "Turkification" campaign to practically all sectors of Ottoman society. Starting with geography, the CUP began Turkifying place names. On Jan. 5, 1916 Enver Pasha ordered the Turkification of all Armenian, Greek, and Bulgarian place names, including cities, towns, provinces, districts, villages, mountains, and rivers. This was an attempt to wipe out the geographical imprints of non-Turkish cultures. Although the decree was suspended for reasons of military practicality, the practice was picked up after the war and continued well into the 1980s and changed tens of thousands of Armenian

place names.<sup>22</sup> The 2,900 Armenian settlements were now not only emptied of their population, but also stripped of their names. It was as if Armenians had never lived there.

A day after Enver's decree, on Jan. 6, 1916, Talaat ordered an empire-wide decree about the businesses confiscated in the genocide. The order read:

The movable property left by the Armenians should be conserved for long-term preservation, and for the sake of an increase of Muslim businesses in our country, companies need to be established strictly made up of Muslims. Movable property should be given to them under suitable conditions that will guarantee the business's steady consolidation. The founder, the management, and the representatives should be chosen from honorable leaders and the elite, and to allow tradesmen and agriculturists to participate in its dividends, the vouchers need to be half a lira or one lira and registered to their names to preclude that the capital falls in foreign hands. The growth of entrepreneurship in the minds of Muslim people needs to be monitored, and this endeavor and the results of its implementation need to be reported to the ministry step by step.<sup>23</sup>

This order constitutes perhaps the most unequivocal document attesting to the intentions and policies of the CUP. It encapsulates the ideology of "Turkification" and "national economy" in a single, explicit, incontrovertible formulation.

The order was followed up by several other prescriptive ones ordering the redistribution of Armenian lands to Muslim merchants. The CUP sanctioned "the complete transfer of business and industrial enterprises" to the upcoming Turkish middle class in each and every locality. Special care was to be taken that the workbenches, implements, and furniture in the many stores and workshops were not dispersed but stayed in their places.<sup>24</sup> Other decrees were concerned with norms and rules for correct usage. For example, auctioning needed to be properly carried out for the long-term development of the businesses, according to the Jan. 6 decree. During an

auction in Kayseri, a Turk bought a formerly Armenian workshop for 200 Turkish lira, only to sell it for 2,000 lira two days later and pocket the difference. The ministry strongly condemned this act and instructed the Abandoned Properties Commission to rectify the situation.<sup>25</sup>

After this event, a circular was wired to all provinces prohibiting similar practices and underlining again the importance of "Muslims' familiarization with commercial life" and the "build-up of Muslim-owned business enterprises in our country."<sup>26</sup> Long-term goals had absolute priority above short-term benefits. Dilapidation, waste, and negligence were unacceptable too. The ministry admonished the Abandoned Properties Commissions to take proper care and assist the new Muslim owners as much as possible. If any help was needed, the commissions should turn to the ministry.<sup>27</sup> As a result of this policy, a whole generation of Turkish-owned firms—"established in 1916"—mushroomed across the empire.<sup>28</sup>

Before the Young Turks seized power in the 1913 coup d'état, hatred of Armenians (and Greeks) was particularly widespread in the commercial middle class. Curtailing the economic livelihood of Armenians was in their interests. "Turkification," therefore, had particularly favorable economic consequences for these (lower) middle-class Turks, as the liquidation of Armenian middle-class enterprises relieved the pressure of economic competition. It foresaw the promotion of a new generation of Turkish businessmen who enriched themselves from the vulnerability of the persecuted Armenians. The newspaper *kdam* published an article openly exhorting Turks to "get rich" in the "economic revolution":

Pharmaceutics, grocery shops, dentistry, transportation, contracting is rapidly spreading among Turks. Our friends have begun competing with many nations in employment branches that are as yet new fields of activity in our country, like electricians' work, engineering, and similar... It is the revolution in this nation's society and economy, rather than the political changes, that will save this nation (*bu millet* *kurtaracak*) and will provide him with an eternal life.<sup>29</sup>

The government offered ordinary Turks incredible prospects of upward social mobility. With a giant leap forward, a nation of peasants, pastoralists, soldiers, and bureaucrats would now jumpstart to the level of the bourgeoisie, the “respectable” and “modern” middle classes. The groups who benefited most from this policy were the landowners and the urban merchants.<sup>30</sup> When shortages arose in 1916, the party leadership allowed that group of merchants close to the party to monopolize import, supply, and distribution. Defraudation and malpractice occurred in this alliance by individual party members and merchants who enriched themselves at the expense of the Istanbulites.

As the genocide was raging in full force, Turkish settlers were on their way. Local preparations were needed in order to lodge the settlers successfully. The ministry iterated its request for economic and geographic data on the emptied Armenian villages. In order to send settlers to the provinces, the local capacities to “absorb” them had to be determined. The Interior Ministry requested information on the number of Armenian households deported, whether the emptied villages were conducive to colonization by settlers, and if so, how many.<sup>31</sup> It also demanded data on the size of the land, number of farms, and potential number of settler households.<sup>32</sup> The books were kept precisely. According to Talaat’s own notebook, in 1915 the amount of property allocated to settlers was: 20,545 buildings, 267,536 acres of land, 76,942 acres of vineyards, 7,812 acres of gardens, 703,491 acres of olive groves, 4,573 acres of mulberry gardens, 97 acres of orange fields, 5 carts,

4,390 animals, 2,912 agricultural implements, and 524,788 planting seeds.<sup>33</sup>

Last but not least, the CUP elite took the cream of the crop of Armenian property for itself. Ahmed Refik observed the colonization process:

Silence reigns in Eskişehir... The elegant Armenian houses around the train station are bare as bone. This community, with its wealth, its trade, its superior values, became subject to the government’s order, emptied its houses... now all emptied houses, valuable rugs, stylish rooms, its closed doors, are basically at the grace of the refugees. Eskişehir’s most modernized and pretty houses lay around the train station... A large Armenian mansion for the princes, two canary-yellow adjacent houses near the Sarısu bridge to Talaat Bey and his friend Canbolat Bey, a wonderful Armenian mansion in the Armenian neighborhood to Topal İsmail Hakkı. All the houses convenient for residing near the train station have all been allocated to the elite of the İttihadists.<sup>34</sup>

Even Sultan Mehmed Reşad V received his share. This process of assigning the very best property to Young Turks was intensified after 1919 by the Kemalists. Indeed, possibly the most important recipient of the redistribution of Armenian properties was the state itself.

The various Ministries (Education, Health, Justice) greatly benefited from the colonization process. The Interior Ministry

granted them permission to choose from Armenian property buildings it wanted to use as their offices. The state, led by the CUP, was lavished with property up to the highest levels. A famous example of confiscated Armenian property is the story of the Kasabian vineyard house in Ankara. In December 1921, amidst the Greco-Turkish War, Mustafa Kemal was touring the area when he noticed the splendid house of the wealthy Ankara jeweler and merchant Kasabian. The house had been occupied by the noted Bulgurluzâde family after the Kasabians had been dispossessed and deported. Mustafa Kemal liked the house and bought it from Bulgurluzâde Tevfik Efendi for 4,500 Turkish lira. From then on, the compound has been known as the Çankaya Palace (*Çankaya Köşkü*), the official residence of the president of Turkey up to today.<sup>35</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The expropriation of Ottoman Armenians was necessary for the destruction process in general. Dispossessed and uprooted, the Ottoman Armenians’ chances of survival and maintenance gradually shrunk to a minimum. Every step in the persecution process contributed to the weakening and emasculating of Armenians. It robbed them not only of their possessions, but also of possibilities for escape, refuge, or resistance. The more they were dispossessed, the more defenseless they became against Young Turk measures.

The structure of this process can be analyzed at three levels: the macro, meso, and



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micro-levels, bearing in mind the relevant connections between the three levels. The macro-level concerns the context and structure of the political elite that led the empire to war and genocide. They launched the policies out of ideological conviction: the war offered an indispensable opportunity to establish the “national economy” through “Turkification.” They created a universe of impunity in which every institution and individual below them could think of Armenians as outlawed and their property as fair game, up for grabs. If it is the opportunity that creates the crime, then Talaat created an opportunity structure in which ordinary Turks came to plunder on a mass scale.

Now the second level enters into force. Within the structure of national policy were nestled developments such as complex decision-making processes, the necessity and logic of a division of labor, the emergence of specialized confiscation units, and the segregation and destruction of the victim group. This level was characterized by competition, contestation, and clashes over coveted property. Local elites and state institutions such as the army, several ministries, the fiscal authorities, the provincial government, and the party, collaborated for their own reasons. The main agencies were the police, militia, and civil administration. Several ministries were involved in the expropriation process and benefited greatly from it, most notably the Ministries of Education, Justice, Finance, Health, and Interior. The Ottoman Bank and the Agricultural Bank exploited the process unscrupulously for their own ends. The effects of the economic war against the Armenians raise questions about the implication of these institutions.

At the micro-level, the process facilitated hundreds of thousands of individual thefts of deported victims, carried out by ordinary Turks. The mechanisms that propelled plunder were horizontal pull-factors and incentives (zero-sum competition with other plunderers), and vertical pressure (the beginning of the process did not contain precise decrees but was open for liberal interpretation). Thus, ordinary Turks profited in different ways: Considerable sections of Ottoman-Turkish society were complicit in the spoliation. Whereas in the countryside a Hobbesian world of unchecked power was unleashed, in the cities, the CUP launched a more careful, restrained path due to firmly established and complex social and bureaucratic structures. This level is in particular important to study the material benefits that accrued to figures within the Young Turk Party. In an in-depth study of the phenomenon of class in Turkey, Çağlar Keyder concluded that “there was usually one-to-one correspondence between the roster of the Committee of Union and Progress local organization and the shareholders of new companies.”<sup>36</sup> Yusuf Akçura too, reflected after the war on the CUP’s economic policies in the past decade and concluded that in Anatolia, “the Muslim real estate owners and business elite have completely embraced the Committee of Union and Progress.”<sup>37</sup> These arbitrary, corrupt, and nepotistic activities took place behind the juridical facade of government decree.


But history is full of unforeseen and unintended consequences of policies and ideologies. The great unintended consequence of the Young Turk government’s

dispossession of Armenians was the opportunity it offered local Turks for self-enrichment. To the Interior Ministry, this was not acceptable nor accepted: Individual embezzlers were punished by having their rights to Armenian property revoked. Those with ties to local Young Turk Party bosses or enough social status and potential to mobilize people got away with their “crime within a crime.” One can perhaps even conclude that the Young Turk government bought the domestic loyalty of the Turkish people through these practices—initially irresponsible, then outright criminal. The Armenian Genocide was a form of state formation that married certain classes and sectors of Ottoman society to the state. It offered those Turks a fast-track to upward social mobility. So the knife had cut both ways, for the Young Turk movement represented the drive to couple social equality with national homogeneity and political purity.

As Armenians went from riches to ruins, Turks went from rags to riches. But Armenian losses cannot simply be expressed in sums, hectares, and assets. The ideology of “national economy” did not only assault the target group economically, but also in their collective prestige, esteem, and dignity. Apart from the objective consequences of material loss, the subjective experiences of immaterial loss were inestimable. Proud craftsmen, who had often followed in their ancestors’ footsteps as carpenters, cobblers, tailors, or blacksmiths, now lost their livelihoods. The genocide robbed them not only of their assets but also of their professional identities. Zildjian, the world’s largest cymbal producer, was headed by two brothers who



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escaped persecution because during the war they happened to be in the United States.<sup>38</sup> The Zildjians are world famous and renowned. But entire generations of other famous artisan families disappeared with their businesses, extinguishing the name and quality of certain brands. Gone were the Dadians, Balian, Duzians, Demirjibashians, Bezjians, Vemians, Tirpanjians, Shalvarjians, Cholakians, and many other gifted professionals.

The assets of these and other Armenians were re-used for various purposes: settling refugees and settlers, constructing state buildings, supplying the army, and indeed, the deportation program itself. This leads me to the grim conclusion that the Ottoman Armenians financed their own destruction. □

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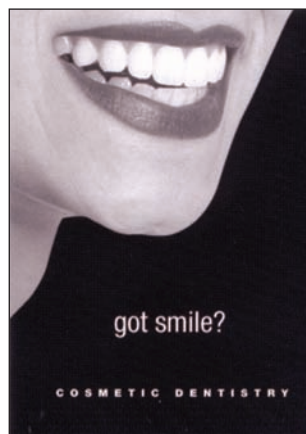
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Hamazkayin Eastern USA cordially invites the Armenian-American community of Eastern United States to its first Pan-assembly after a long hiatus. We hope that this event will be the first of many more to present our cultural heritage to the community at large.

## **4:30 PM** Free screening of Eric Nazarian's **The Blue Hour (Drama, 94 min, 2007)**

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Reception and dinner followed by welcoming remarks

Keynote address - Dr. Levon Avdoyan, *"Armenia at the Library of Congress"*

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FOR THE RECORD

# SHATTERING 50 YEARS OF SILENCE

By Michael Bobelian

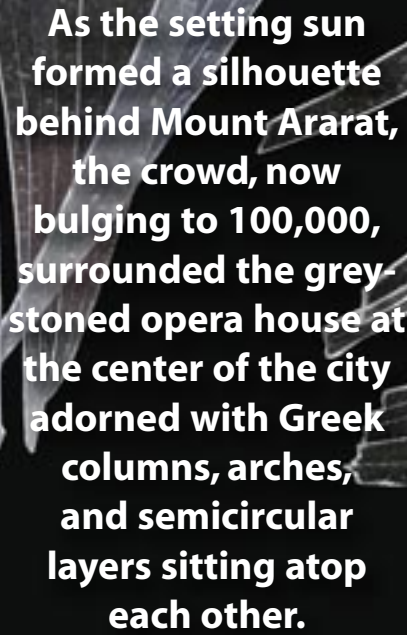
**O**n the morning of April 24, 1965, students from Yerevan's universities skipped class. At a time and place when poets were nearly as popular and influential as celebrities are today, one of Soviet Armenia's greatest poets recited his defiant poem written for the 50th anniversary of the genocide in a small theatre: "We are few, but we are called Armenians." Baruyr Sevag's poem exclaimed that no matter how few or weak Armenians may be in the world, no matter how "death had fallen in love" with this ancient tribe, they shall "feel proud" for being Armenians. The final line of his poem cried out defiantly that the Armenians would grow and thrive, now and forever: "We are, we shall be, and become many." Dead silence followed. Few had heard such exclamatory speeches within the rigid confines of Soviet life before. Doing so usually meant chastisement or worse, imprisonment. The students in the audience, infused with stridency after listening to the poem, then left the theatre to join other students across Yerevan to make their way to the city center for an unprecedented undertaking. They were about to make history by partaking in the first major public commemoration of the Armenian Genocide.

Earlier in the day, the Catholicos, whose long graying beard and gentle eyes gave him a grandfatherly appearance that added to his palpable spirituality, had overseen a memorial prayer commemorating the genocide overflowing with attendees at the Church's headquarters.

The youth descending on the center of Soviet Armenia's capital wanted more than prayers to mark this occasion. They wanted political action. Carrying signs that read "A just solution to the Armenian Question" and "Our lands" along with enlarged photos of genocide victims, the students, joined by their professors and Soviet Armenia's leading intellectuals, artists, and writers, popped in to businesses and homes to recruit others on this sunny day during which a wispy spring breeze kept the shade cool. With no previous experience in organizing demonstrations—one participant described the students' tactics as "primitive"—the procession fumbled along to Lenin Square driven as much, if not more, by curiosity as militancy. Various government buildings and the city's best hotel ringed the oval-shaped public space used to hold communist rallies. Gathering in front of a granite Lenin statue erected during World War II—the largest of the ubiquitous iconic shrines dotting the U.S.S.R.—the students saturated the square and soon spilled into the adjacent streets. The demonstrators muddled their way through the city as some sang nationalistic songs, while others screamed a cacophony of anti-Turkish declarations.

Though free of Joseph Stalin's terror, this was still the Soviet Union, a place where propaganda monopolized every facet of public life. Newspapers like Pravda published the government's credos. Kindergarteners through university graduates studied and regurgitated the canonic teachings of Marx and Lenin. Government officials authorized public events staged to conform to this strict dogma. This demonstration had received no such permission from the state. The protestors understood that this one act might permanently derail their careers, placing them in shabby homes and dreary jobs instead of leading government ministries. They knew that many could be arrested, or worse, jailed or banished to Siberia to suffer in isolation and exile. The sight of KGB officers in plain sight further fueled their fears. Though nervous and worried, they pressed on. The groundswell of emotion on this day was simply too strong.

Holding the largest concentration of Armenians in the world, Soviet Armenia would have been best suited to press the Armenian case against Turkey. If the first Armenian Republic had thrived, it could have pursued reparations and human rights trials against the Young Turks, and maintained territorial claims against Turkey. But the republic gave way to a rigid Soviet policy that reduced political activity by the population of Soviet Armenia to a standstill—even when it came to the genocide. The U.S.S.R. had prohibited Armenian scholars from studying the tragedy. It extinguished any chance of erecting a public memorial. It censored those who brought up the topic. And it refused to sponsor Armenian claims against Turkey.



**As the setting sun formed a silhouette behind Mount Ararat, the crowd, now bulging to 100,000, surrounded the grey-stoned opera house at the center of the city adorned with Greek columns, arches, and semicircular layers sitting atop each other.**

Geo-political interests in corralling Turkey away from its NATO alliance did not completely explain Soviet policy. When Lenin and his ideological brethren brought communist revolution to Russia, they envisioned a world in which Soviet citizens would, in due time, cast off their allegiances to ethnicity and religion. This vision of the Soviet citizen had no room for nationalistic aims. As a uniquely Armenian saga, the genocide did not accord to this ecumenical communist ideology. Soviet authorities took every means to smother any talk of the genocide, even among those who lived through the tragedy.

Yet, on this day, Armenians refused to stand silent any longer.

As the setting sun formed a silhouette behind Mount Ararat, the crowd, now

bulging to 100,000, surrounded the grey-stoned opera house at the center of the city adorned with Greek columns, arches, and semicircular layers sitting atop each other. By now, survivors of the genocide had joined the crowd, injecting the younger protestors with added adrenaline. To appease the growing demand for a public commemoration, authorities had decided to hold a modest ceremony for about 250 people in the opera house. Though the KGB vetted the guest list to prevent any unexpected incidents, it took immense lobbying by Soviet Armenia's leadership to their superiors in Moscow to proceed with the event.

Inside the performance hall, leading representatives of the Soviet Armenian government convened along with the Catholicos. A senior government official spoke first, followed by a world-class astrophysicist. Compared to the reserved performance inside the opera house, the demonstrators listening on loudspeakers outside had grown rowdy, choking off transportation in Yerevan and shutting down universities and businesses. Though tame compared to the riots of America and Europe during the 1960's—with no looting, widespread vandalism, or violence—the demonstration heated up as organizers delivered speeches insisting on Soviet sponsorship of Armenian demands. The protestors wanted to submit a petition to those inside the opera house. When the guards refused to grant them entry, the students pushed against the barricades placed in front of the opera house and threw stones at its windows. After some deliberation, the authorities declined to call in the army, instead employing the municipal security force to entangle with the protestors to avoid bloodshed. The sight of their sons and daughters in the crowd made some officers reluctant to move against the protestors with alacrity. Embarrassment turned others away from facing their children. Instead, firemen blasted high-powered hoses from the building's windows to keep the demonstrators at bay. These proved feeble in the face of the energized crowd. Pumping their fists into the air, the demonstrators repeatedly shouted "Our lands, our lands" in a chorus.

When the astrophysicist finished, the crowd outside grew increasingly antagonistic. The opera's windows shattered amidst the

continuous volley of missiles. Soaked in water, the demonstrators finally overwhelmed the barriers, barging into the main hall and flooding it with screams. Shocked by the population's strong resolve for action, most everyone in attendance fled from a rear exit of the building. The Catholicos remained behind. Respect for his position temporarily silenced the boisterous crowd. "My dear children," he started to tell the restless listeners in his grandfatherly way. Before he got more than a few words out, shouts and jeers continued.

The leaders of Soviet Armenia elected not to order mass arrests. Within a year, however, the fallout from the unexpected demonstration led to their downfall as the chieftains in Moscow installed more stringent satraps to quash such nationalistic outbursts. The Soviet government's only concession to the Armenian fervor was to erect a memorial honoring the victims of the genocide. But it refused to do anymore. It would neither alter its foreign policy nor sponsor Armenian claims against Turkey. As such, Soviet Armenia never again served as a staging point for the Armenian quest for justice. Instead, the demonstration's biggest impact came not in changing the policy of the U.S.S.R., but serving as an inspiration for Armenians throughout the diaspora. And it was the diaspora—and not Soviet Armenia—that struggled for justice for decades to come.

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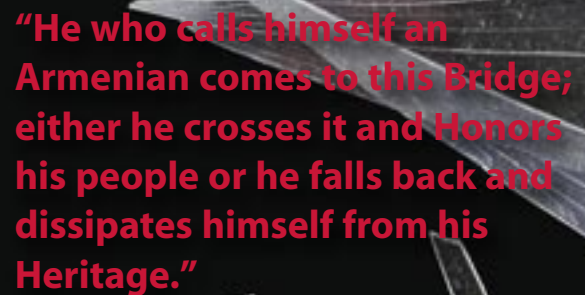
President Herbert Hoover wrote in his memoir: "Probably Armenia was known to the American school child in 1919 only a little less than England." That was no longer true in 1965. A human rights disaster that had inspired the first major international humanitarian movement had largely disappeared from the world's consciousness by its 50th anniversary. One could not find a single museum, monument of noteworthiness, research center, or even a comprehensive publication about the genocide.

On the 50th anniversary of the genocide, the Armenians of the diaspora were finally prepared to take that extraordinary step needed to remind the world of the forgotten genocide. In Beirut, all of the Armenian political parties came together to speak in front of 85,000 people packed inside a stadium. Thousands marched in central Athens. In Paris, Armenians marched down the Champs Elysees; 3,000 attended a memorial mass in Notre Dame. More than 12,000 participated in Buenos Aires. Armenians in Milan, Montreal, Syria, Egypt, and Australia also staged events, as did Armenian Americans. Boston's Armenians held a ceremony in a Catholic cathedral as well as a rally in John Hancock Hall. In San Francisco, 300 mourners marched in silence to a cathedral; others held a vigil in front of City Hall. Armenians held events in Illinois, California, Connecticut, Michigan, New Jersey, Wisconsin, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Washington, D.C., Ohio, Virginia, and smaller communities throughout the country.

Few people encapsulated the meaning of the genocide to a new generation more than Charles Metjian, who organized a demonstration in New York. The 30-something fire department employee was not much of a 1960's radical. Despite caring for a growing family and working two jobs, however, he took it upon

himself to organize a march to the United Nations. Metjian had never met his grandfather, yet the sight of his childhood friends interacting with their own made him long for the mythical patriarch. The childhood stories Metjian had heard of how Ottoman soldiers had hacked his grandfather's body to pieces outside his home, cutting off his arm and finally killing him with a blow to the head, remained etched in Metjian's mind. The bond between grandfather and grandson—between a victim and his descendant—remained strong despite the passage of 50 years. "Time has neither changed nor lessened this crime...committed against you," Metjian wrote in an open letter to the grandfather he had never known. "I vow I will make every effort to make fruitful the justice that is long overdue to you."

Metjian urged others to join him. "The choice is yours," he wrote to all Armenians before the April 24th march. "He who calls himself an Armenian comes to this Bridge; either he crosses it and



**"He who calls himself an Armenian comes to this Bridge; either he crosses it and Honors his people or he falls back and dissipates himself from his Heritage."**

Honors his people or he falls back and dissipates himself from his Heritage." Metjian's message was clear: All Armenians, no matter how far removed in time and space from the dark days of 1915, owed it to their ancestors to fight for justice.

Numerous pamphlets rehashing old arguments of resurrecting the Treaty of Sèvres went out to governments across the world. But something was different. The genocide began to take on a life of its own, detaching itself from the broader historical narrative that had defined the contours of Armenian claims against Turkey in the past. Historically, Armenians had linked the genocide to their desires for their ancestral lands and to a specific place, a homeland, where they would be entitled to self-rule and self-determination. That link remained, but starting in 1965, it began to come apart. A decade or two later, Armenians hardly mentioned the pledges of the post-World War I era in their pursuit of justice; instead, they focused almost exclusively on the genocide as a distinct event. No longer confined to Armenian families and community gatherings, the catastrophe became the focal point of Armenian political aspirations, a never-ending source of mobilization replenished by Turkish denial. As other cultural markers faded or lost their appeal to a younger, assimilating population, the genocide and the pursuit of justice associated with it gradually displaced the longing for a homeland as a central element of Armenian identity.

This new focal point for political action combined with heightened political awareness not seen since the post-World War I era



translated into action. The Illinois, California, and Massachusetts legislatures passed resolutions marking the genocide, as did a myriad of cities and towns. Forty-two Congressmen, including Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), honored the 50th anniversary in America's most hallowed legislative chamber.

\* \* \*

**T**he Turkish response to this unexpected uprising verged on the hysterical. After many years in which news of Armenians barely registered in Turkey, the flurry of activity in 1965 sent shockwaves through Turkey's ruling elite. Turkish newspapers issued bitter denunciations. Diplomats countered Armenian claims in the press. The Turkish Embassy urged the State Department to squash declarations made on behalf of the Armenians by American politicians. Its ambassador asked for the removal of a tiny genocide monument erected at an Armenian senior citizen center in New Jersey because, he insisted, despite being on private property, it was "easily visible to all passersby on a busy street corner and, therefore, legally public property." Some Turkish officials, unable to appreciate that the American government could not simply ban protestors, blamed the U.S. government for the demonstrations.

A member of the Turkish Embassy in Washington urged readers of the *New York Times* that in dealing with the "dark days...the best thing to do now would be to forget them...." That was just the problem. Turkey wanted to forget a past that Armenians could not forget. Too many survivors lived on with traumatic memories that refused to fade away. Too many of their children and grandchildren heard stories of lost relatives, tormented deaths, and a never-ending despair that 50 years had failed to heal. By obliterating their shared past, Turkey was erasing the defining event of the Armenian experience. One group could not get its way without forcing the other to overturn decades of memories. The irreconcilable positions could only result in one victor and one loser.

\* \* \*

**J**ust as the resurrection of the genocide began, the Cold War divisions that had divided the Armenian Diaspora began to fade. Though Armenian factions remained deeply suspicious of each other, the détente between the United States and the Soviet Union filtered down to the Armenians. There was even talk of Church unity.

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), the most politically engaged segment of the community, shifted its policy. While it remained steadfastly anti-Soviet, its Cold War agenda began to recede as the genocide took prominence, making the quest for justice against Turkey, and not the Soviet Union, the party's primary aim. The death of its leadership held over from the Armenian Republic—like Simon Vratsian and Reuben Darbinian—during the 1960's contributed to this shift as the ARF turned its significant political connections and mobilization efforts to the genocide.

Likewise, the aspirations of the survivor generation of returning to the lost homeland offered little appeal for their descendants who had never lived on Armenian soil. The generation that came

of age after the genocide had set roots in new nations. The sentimental attachment to a mythical homeland did not remain. William Saroyan reflected the psyche of this generation. Born in California, in 1964 he travelled to the home of his ancestors in Bitlis, Turkey, after numerous attempts over a span of many years. Despite finding the very spot of his family's house, Saroyan realized that his family's roots had been completely torn out. No foundation remained to make his return possible. "I didn't want to leave," Saroyan said of his visit. "But it's not ours."

Swayed by the civil rights, student rights, and anti-war movements, the Armenian youth in America viewed the genocide as another injustice to fight for, an injustice for which they maintained a personal investment. They refused to cower meekly like the survivors. Instead, having inherited a sound economic and communal foundation from the survivors who had spent their lives rebuilding, they possessed the luxury to mount a political campaign. The experience of the genocide manifested itself differently in these younger generations. The psychological defenses used to contend with and evade the persistent strain of the genocide had contributed to the silence of the survivors. Their offspring had not witnessed its horrors first-hand, and as such, had the necessary detachment to reawaken the forgotten episode of history. At the same time, with only a generation or two between survivors and the children of the 1960's, the psychological scars of the genocide endured. The ongoing failure to establish truth prohibited the natural healing process from taking effect.

In an era when many Americans began to search for their roots, Armenian Americans inevitably confronted the genocide at every turn. They came to realize that so much of who they were was begotten in the apocalyptic days of 1915. The rise of identity politics, a movement that came to prominence in the 1960's, in which groups began to come together and identify themselves by shared historical grievances, encouraged the younger Armenians' campaign for justice. An overpowering sense of obligation to their ancestral legacy along with its unresolved trauma gave them the sustained emotional energy needed to carry on a decades-long struggle with Turkey. Instead of the genocide's horrors ceasing with the death of the survivors, these horrors transplanted into their descendants and overshadowed Armenian identity for generations to come.

\* \* \*

**L**eading up to 50th anniversary of the genocide, several Armenian American newspapers published a long essay authored by the gifted writer, Leon Surmelian. "The time has come for Armenians to stand up and be counted," Surmelian noted. "For too long now we have been the forgotten people of the western world. And we deserve to be forgotten if we take no action, now." Surmelian was correct: The world had forgotten the Armenians.

Starting in 1965, Armenians across the world, whether in Soviet Armenia or the diaspora, whether partisan or apolitical, resurrected the genocide from its dormancy and refused to remain forgotten any longer. □

# A Demographic Narrative of DIYARBEKIR PROVINCE

## Based on Ottoman Records

By George Aghjayan



**My central argument is that there is no major**

**contradiction not only between different Ottoman materials, but also between Ottoman and foreign archival materials. So, it is erroneous to assume that the Ottoman documents (referring here mostly to the documents from the Prime Ministry Archive) were created solely in order to obscure the actions of the Ottoman government ... Ottoman archival materials support and corroborate the narrative of Armenian Genocide as shown in the western Archival sources.”** (Emphasis mine)

—TANER AKCAM IN “THE OTTOMAN DOCUMENTS AND THE GENOCIDAL POLICIES OF THE COMMITTEE FOR UNION AND PROGRESS (ITTIHAT VE TERAKKI) TOWARD THE ARMENIANS IN 1915,” GENOCIDE STUDIES AND PREVENTION, 1:2, (SEPTEMBER 2006): 127–148.

### BACKGROUND

After reading the above by Historian Taner Akcam, it occurred to me that similar assumptions are reflected in the study of pre-World War I populations within the Ottoman Empire. This is particularly true of the various estimates of the Armenian population prior to the Armenian Genocide.

To date, those studying the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire have either accepted Ottoman registration records as the sole source for analysis while dismissing the records of the Armenian Patriarchate, or vice versa. Occasionally, the “suspect” records are critiqued prior to dismissal, but more often than not they are dismissed superficially or ignored altogether.

Using the Diyarbekir province as an example, I plan to analyze under what scenarios Ottoman government and Armenian Patriarchate records are consistent and thus complimentary.

### SOURCES

There existed within the Ottoman Empire a long tradition of tax registers. Throughout the 19th century, a more ambitious registration system developed. At first, adult males were the primary objective for tax and military objectives. Later efforts can be viewed as the foundation for demographic analysis and governmental policy decisions. However, even with gradual improvements in enumeration, the Ottoman registration system never approached full coverage of the population.

While not exhaustive, the following are some of the weaknesses in the data gleaned from Ottoman records:

- Women and children were undercounted;
- Registers containing non-Muslims have never been analyzed (only summary data have come to light thus far);
- Registration systems are inherently inferior to a census;
- The sparseness of data complicates evaluation;
- There is some evidence of manipulation;
- Borders between districts and provinces frequently changed and thus complicate comparisons;
- While detailed records do not exist, summary information has appeared in a number of sources, primarily in Ottoman provincial yearbooks and government documents.

During this same period and for many of the same reasons, the Armenian Patriarchate began an effort at enumerating the Armenian population. Similarly, there are inherent weaknesses in the patriarchate data that include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Population estimates for Muslims were often included even though the patriarchate had no way of gathering such data;
- The patriarchate censuses were often timed with political objectives;
- The sparseness of data makes it difficult or impossible to develop a population timeline;
- Detailed records are lacking and there is little hope further data will come to light;
- There is evidence of undercounting children and other gaps in data.

The primary source for patriarchate data for 1913–14 can be found in two sources: Raymond H. Kevorkian and Paul B. Paboudjian's *Les Arméniens dans l'Empire Ottoman à la veille du génocide* (Paris: Les Editions d'Art et d'Histoire ARHIS, 1992) and Teotik, *"Goghgota Hai Hogeavorakanutian"* ed. Ara Kalaydjian (New York: St. Vartan's Press, 1985).

## ANALYSIS

While most scholars have used the Ottoman statistics unadjusted or made simple aggregate level adjustments, historian Justin McCarthy utilized stable population theory in an attempt to compensate for the known deficiencies. McCarthy's work is often cited with frequent praise and occasional criticisms, but rarely from a mathematical perspective.

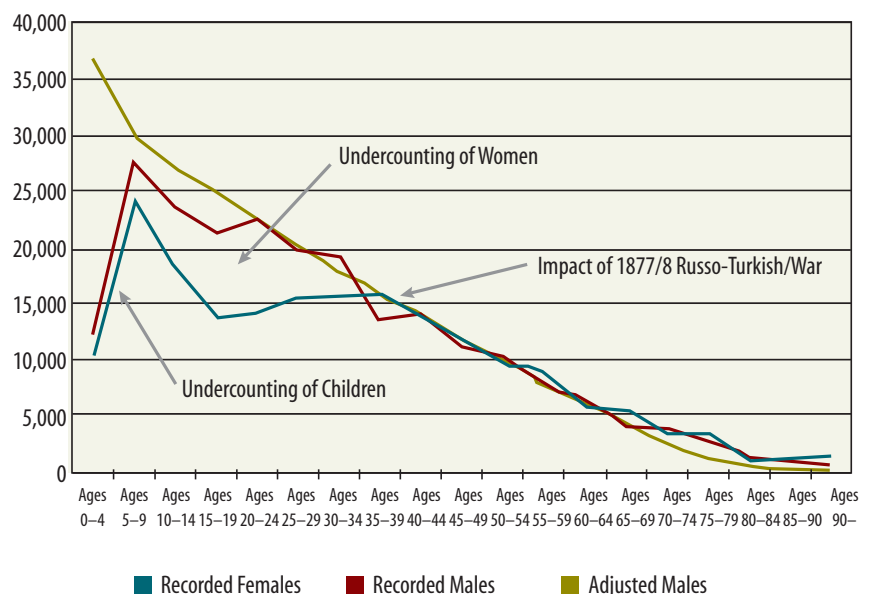
McCarthy utilizes age-specific data from the early 1890's to calculate an adjustment factor that corrects the aggregate population for the undercounting of women and children. He does so by fitting the known data for males over the age of 15 to standard life tables he deems representative of the population at the time and then doubles the corrected male population to arrive at the total population. Once the adjustment factor is calculated, McCarthy applies this to data from 1914 and then utilizes population growth rates to extrapolate back and forth in time. The graph displays his adjustments for the Diyarbekir province.

There are many issues with such a methodology. First and foremost, applying corrections based on the recorded population 20 years prior is highly questionable and McCarthy fails to fully appreciate the implications. The methodology is further hampered by the existence of only one source for the reporting of population by age groups.

In the specific example of the Diyarbekir province, McCarthy notes that the growth in recorded population from 1892 to 1914 is unrealistically high. He speculates that the reason is due to improved enumeration of the population. Yet, he still applies the same correction factor calculated from earlier data without consideration that some of the improved counting could have originated in the groups that the factor is meant to correct (i.e., women and children).

In addition, as can be seen from the graph, McCarthy smoothed a dip in the recorded male population aged 35–39. However, this is the age group that would have been affected by the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78. Stable population theory must be utilized cau-

## Diyarbekir Province 1892/3 data





tiously so as not to remove the very real demographic impact of historical events. The issue becomes more acute when it is understood that the factor thus derived is applied unadjusted to the 1914 population. In essence, the recorded males aged 35–39 in 1914 are being adjusted by a factor derived from the population of males who fought in the 1877–78 war when quite reasonably they should not have been adjusted at all.

While population by age is only available in the 1892–93 data, the breakdown by gender is available for other time periods and the ratio of males to females varies by ethnicity and year of enumeration. The adjustment, which McCarthy applied to all ethnicities equally, should be viewed with caution. In fact, while the data limits the ability to reflect ethnic differences, it is a mistake to assume no such differences exist.

While the ratio of recorded males to females for Muslims in the Diyarbekir province was traditionally around 1.20, by 1911 the ratio had dropped to 1.04. Conversely, the ratio for Armenians was traditionally around 1.05 but had jumped to over 1.17. What can we make of this dramatic change and what are the implications when estimating the Armenian population? The interpretation is complicated by the expectation that the ratio of Armenian men to women should have dropped dramatically following the Hamidian Massacres of 1894–96, which targeted almost exclusively men. However, this could have partially been offset by the forced conversion of Armenian women to Islam. In addition, there is the emigration of Armenian males to consider.

Another way to state the problem is to refine McCarthy's methodology for the differences in male to female ratios. Based on the life table McCarthy employed, he arrived at a factor of 1.1313 to adjust the male population for the undercounting of young boys. The overall factor, then, for any time period and ethnicity would equal  $(2 * 1.1313) / (1 + \text{females} / \text{males})$ . McCarthy's resulting adjustment factor based on 1893 data and that ignores ethnicity is 1.2142 (through an error in McCarthy's calculations, he uses 1.2172). If instead one were to use the 1911 data, the adjustment for Muslims would be 1.1525, while 1.2146 for Armenians.

There is the additional issue of the extraordinary growth in the recorded Muslim population while not quite to the same

## Population by district

	Total Population	Armenians	Armenians / Total	Patriarchate / Ottoman
<b>Diyarbekir Province</b>				
Armenian Patriarchate (1913–14)		105,528		146.3%
1330 Nufus (1914)	602,170	72,124	12.0%	
1329 Ottoman document	522,171	64,535	12.4%	
1312 Salname (1890–91)	397,884	56,196	14.1%	
Census 1 (pre-1890)	369,030	50,804	13.8%	
<b>Chermik, Palu, Siverek</b>				
Armenian Patriarchate (1913–14)		37,446		310.4%
1330 Nufus (1914)	120,224	12,064	10.0%	
1329 Ottoman document	115,346	11,912	10.3%	
1312 Salname (1890–91)	122,814	20,115	16.4%	
Census 1 (pre-1890)	112,494	20,663	18.4%	
<b>Other areas</b>				
Armenian Patriarchate (1913–14)		68,082		113.4%
1330 Nufus (1914)	481,946	60,060	12.5%	
1329 Ottoman document	406,826	52,623	12.9%	
1312 Salname (1890–91)	275,070	36,081	13.1%	
Census 1 (pre-1890)	256,536	30,141	11.7%	

extent in the Armenian population. McCarthy attributes this to improved enumeration and assumes the improvement is equivalent for all ethnicities. That was not the case and in particular the areas with the greatest concentration of Armenians exhibited the least amount of growth. Not surprisingly, these are also the areas with the greatest differences between the Armenian population indicated by the patriarchate with that of the Ottoman records.

As can be seen from the table above, prior to the Hamidian Massacres Armenians accounted for almost 20 percent of the population in the regions of Chermik, Palu, and Siverek. On the eve of World War I, according to Ottoman records this proportion had dwindled to 10 percent. When compared to the Armenian Patriarchate figures, these three areas account for ~25K of the ~33K difference, even though only one-third of the Armenian population resided in those districts.

### SUMMARY

Even prior to the Hamidian Massacres, Ottoman records indicated a decline in the number of Armenians within the Diyarbekir province. It was not until 1900 that the Armenian male population recovered, either due to improved enumeration or as part of the post-massacre demographic rebirth.

The central question is under what assumptions do we account for the difference between an Armenian population of 72,124 as stated within Ottoman records to the 105,528 stated by the Armenian Patriarchate?

If we begin with the 1911 Ottoman document, which seems to represent the population as of 1905–06, the Armenian male population is stated as 34,645. The first adjustment is to account for the undercounting of male children. As we have already seen, McCarthy assumed 1.1313 based on data from 1892. If we do not adjust the male population aged 35–39, which assumes the dip is due to higher deaths from the 1877–78 war, then the adjustment is 1.1215. The fundamental problem is that the recorded population is 80 percent Muslim and there is no way to discern whether Armenian children were undercounted to a greater or lesser extent.

In addition, the total population grew by ~26 percent between 1892 and 1906. A more reasonable growth rate would have been 10–11 percent. The additional growth has been assumed to come from better enumeration. So, one could assume that no adjustment need be made for the undercounting of children since improvements in enumeration entirely came from those under the age of 15. While that is probably not a reasonable assumption, it is a possibility that children were counted to a greater or lesser extent in 1906 than in 1892.

In addition, there is the matter of the reasonableness of the life table that McCarthy has chosen. It is beyond the scope of this article to address this issue, but for these reasons I prefer a range of assumptions. Here I will assume three different adjustments for the undercounting of male children: 10 percent (low), 12.5 percent (mid), and 15 percent (high).

	Low	Mid	High
1906 Recorded Armenian Males	34,645	34,645	34,645
1906 Adjusted Armenian Males	38,110	38,976	39,842

The Muslim population grew by ~14 percent between 1329 Ottoman document and the 1330 Nufus (which is thought to represent the population as of 1914), while the Armenian population grew by ~12 percent. Again, this represents better enumeration plus normal population growth. Either the Armenian population grew at a slower pace or there were greater improvements in registering Muslims than Armenians. For this purpose, let's assume 10 percent, 12 percent, and 14 percent, respectively.

	Low	Mid	High
1914 Adjusted Armenian Males	41,920	43,653	45,420

Interestingly, this is about 6,000 less than what might be expected based on the growth in the Muslim population. Based on other estimates of the time, this would be an estimate for the

number of Armenian deaths during the Hamidian Massacres combined with emigration in the intervening years.

As pointed out earlier, you cannot simply double the male population to arrive at the total population, as Armenian males exhibited deaths and emigration beyond those of females. In addition, conversion to Islam needs to be accounted for. I am going to assume a range of between 0 and 4,000 Armenian women converted to Islam in the years between 1890 and 1914.

	Low	Mid	High
1914 Adjusted Armenian Total Population	85,841	91,305	96,839

This represents a difference from the patriarchate figures of 9–23 percent. From 1890 to 1914, the population of Diyarbekir displayed growth rates that indicate improved registration. Over that period, there was no indication that the trend had leveled or even slowed. Thus, omissions of men over the age of 15 may still have existed.

In addition, there is ample evidence that even in developed countries the undercounting of minorities is greater than the rest of society. For instance, even in the 1990 United States census, African Americans are undercounted almost five times that of whites. Hispanics are undercounted to an even greater extent. Further, the omission rates for African Americans have been estimated to be greater for males aged 15–40 than for ages 5–15.

This is not to say that Armenians within the Ottoman Empire and African Americans within the United States would exhibit the same rates of omission in census enumerations, but it does indicate that differences between ethnicities is a reasonable assumption.

One area that should be looked to for evidence of undercounting of Armenians, whether purposeful or not, is the town of Chungush. Armenian sources indicate a very large Armenian population, yet Ottoman records as late as 1900 indicate only one village containing non-Muslims in the Chermik District where Chungush was located (as well as the towns of Adish and Chermik which also contained Armenians). The Ottoman records indicate the Armenian population dropped from almost 6,000 in this district to less than 800. The population was well above 10,000 and closer to 15,000. This alone could explain much of the difference.

The analysis above, to a large extent, assumed that the undercounting in the Ottoman registration system was equivalent for Armenians and Muslims. That was most likely not the case. But even with that assumption, the Ottoman records indicate the impact on the Armenian population of policies initiated by the Ottoman government.

Imperfect data is the norm in historical demography. However, even with the flaws in available information, much can be learned from such analysis as that above. The goal is not to arrive at a definitive number of Armenians, but more to understand the issues that must be overcome to fully understand the magnitude of the crime that was committed. □

In the quietness of dawn, Narek sat on the jagged hillside in the spot where he always sat when he wanted to think. Resting his elbows on his knees and chin in his hands, he contemplated the rugged landscape interspersed with Armenian and Tatar villages. Down below, treading toward the church and the one-room schoolhouse was Sahakadoukht carrying a large bundle of brushwood on her back. Everyone knew of her, yet no one knew anything about the woman other than that she was a childless widow who spoke little, worked hard, and lived a good distance away. She came to the village twice a week. On Wednesdays, she delivered brushwood to some of the ladies on the hillside and helped them with their chores. For her services, she received a hot meal and cheese and bread to take home, along with an occasional article of used clothing. A few, in addition to her meal, gave her a *kopek* (Russian coin) or two for her day's labor. On Sundays, she attended church services. She always stood against the wall near the entrance, and then remained behind to clean the sanctuary. For this service, the priest gave her two *kopeks*, one of which she never failed to put into the offering plate. The priest's wife, *Yeretsgin* Varsenik, made certain she never left without something to eat and a little food to take home. Crossing Sahakadoukht's path lumbered Haikaz with his donkey piled high with wares to sell in the nearby villages. Returning from the *chaheriz*, the centuries-old man-made underground canal, were Tzovinar and Arevik, his neighbor Hairabed's little girls, each carrying a bucketful of water in each hand up the steep and rocky hillside to their house. Walking down the far end of the road were his other neighbors Arsham, still recovering from the *griep* (grippe or influenza), and Galoust, a new father like himself—one heading for the fields, the other for the orchards. Narek peered into the distance, towards the *geereezmodee dooz* (cemetery) filled with so many, many graves since he had left to study abroad in America. Narek sighed. He reached into his pocket and pulled out his *sring*, the shepherd's flute, which one of his students, Soorik, had made for him from apricot wood days before a throat infection claimed his young life. He began to play a soulful, mournful tune. Never before did he feel such heaviness in his heart for his world—Siunik.

# Narek's Prayer

By Knarik O. Meneshian

Suinik  
Landscape



Although Narek had been home for a little over a year, he still could not grow accustomed to what he saw all around him—the scars of war. The battle with the Tatars had ended in 1907, not long before his return. In his letters to him, his father, Vahram, had never mentioned what he and the others in the village and surrounding areas were living through—the hunger and thirst, the cold, the sweltering heat, the illnesses, the destruction and death that was part of every villager's life during those two infernal years. No, his father had never mentioned such things. Only once, though, in one of his letters did he write:

*You may have heard, Narek jan, that life for everyone in these parts has grown extremely difficult, but do not worry, we will be fine. This, after all, is Davit Bek country, and we are Siunetsis!*

*Light of my eyes, work hard, do well, and be happy.*

*Your happiness is my joy.*

*Your loving father, Vahram.*

Narek lowered his hands and placed them on his knees. He slowly raised his head toward the sky and closed his eyes. “*Der Asdvats* (Lord God), I beseech You, please help me. I do not know what to do about this feeling that keeps coming over me. Ever since I have returned home, the feeling comes more and more often. I cannot really describe it other than something is missing in me. But then, during such heavy moments, when I turn my thoughts to Gayaneh, our twins, Artashes and Vartan, so tiny and sweet, my father, my students, that feeling fades and I am once again filled with completeness and feel like the richest, most fortunate of men.” Suddenly, Narek heard footsteps and turned around to see who it was.

“*Voghjyoon kez* (Greetings to you), Narek jan! I see you too are up early this morning,” said *Der Datev*, the humble and kind village priest, as he approached him and asked, “Why do you play such a somber tune on this beautiful spring morning?”

“*Ortnetsek, Der Hayr* (God Bless, Father),” Narek said as he quickly rose to bow before the elderly priest and kiss his hand. “I have been praying to God about something that has been troubling me for a very long time.”

“Perhaps I can be of help, my son. Would you like to tell me what it is that troubles you so?” *Der Datev* said with concern in his fatherly tone.

“I feel as if something is missing, *Der Hayr*,” Narek replied as he held his *sring* in one hand and pressed the other hand to his chest.

*Der Datev* studied Narek's pained face and then gazed at the ancient, shattered landscape before him. He stared for a moment at a bird flying in the distance, finally disappearing into a tree. He turned to the downcast young man, recalling what a serious student he had been during his school years in the village—always

looking, listening, learning—and gently placed his hand on Narek's shoulder, and said, “My son, be patient. When the time comes, you will find what you are seeking.”

Narek thanked the revered priest for his counsel and bade him a good day.

Just then, Gayaneh called out in her lilting voice, “Narek jan, your breakfast is ready.” As he entered the house, Lilit, one of his three sisters-in-law, who occasionally came in the mornings to help with the twins, was humming a lullaby as she stirred a pot hanging over the flames in the fireplace. Near her lay the babies in a cradle Vahram had made. He, the proud grandfather, had already left for the fields. Gayaneh poured bubbling hot tea into her husband's cup as he sat down at the table to eat his boiled eggs, *lavash*, cheese, and apricot jam. He smiled at her, and she at him. His heart, once more, was content and serene.

\* \* \*



Who was Mesrop Mashdots?” Narek asked and then called on the student who had been the first to raise his hand.

Garoosh, the most pensive and studious of all his students, stood up and answered, “Saint Mesrop Mashdots, who was born in the year 361 in the village of Hatzegatz in the province of Daron, was a clergyman who invented our alphabet in 404 A.D. Soon after, he translated the Holy Bible into Armenian. He also opened the first Armenian school. Because of his invention, Saint Mesrop's fame traveled beyond our land, and soon requests came from Georgia and Albania asking him for assistance in creating alphabets for them. He died in the year 440.”

Narek nodded with approval and asked, “Who was Ananiah of Shirak?”

This time, Samvel, the most curious of all the boys, stood up to answer, “He was a 7th-century astronomer, geographer, and mathematician. Ananiah Shirakatsi was ‘the first to advance the theory that the earth is spherical,’ and in his writings had described the earth ‘like an egg which has a spherical yoke in yellow, surrounded by a layer of white and covered with a hard shell. It resembles, therefore, the yoke of an egg, surrounded by air and bounded by the sky on all sides.’ He was the founder of scientific Armenian literature and author of the book titled *Book on Arithmetic*, which contained a comprehensive table of four operations—the first of its kind in history.”

Narek nodded. He looked at Hovhannes, who was staring out the window, no doubt remembering his best friend, Soorik, and asked, “Who can tell us what those operations were?”

The lanky, curly-haired boy looked toward his teacher. He raised his hand, stood up, and answered, “Addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division.”

Narek nodded, and concluded the day's lesson by discussing the life of Catholicos Khrimian Hayrik, who had died the previous year. He then said, “Do not forget, students, tomorrow we have examinations in math, literature, and geography,” and dismissed the class.



Prayer Book of St. Gregory of Narek

On his way home, Narek's thoughts turned to the day Gayaneh, who just a couple of months after their wedding had asked him and Vahram if she could start a school in their home. She had said that since she was fortunate enough to have been sent by her parents to receive her education in Yerevan at the Gayanian School for Girls, she wanted to share some of that good fortune with the village girls by starting a school for them. The nearest girls' school was too far away. Vahram, who had welcomed his son's bride into their home with the love of a father and did not treat his *hars* (daughter-in-law or bride) as most *harses* were treated by their in-laws, had quickly given his approval of the idea, and so did Narek. By the following morning, Vahram had begun enlarging the *toneer* (where flat-bread is baked) room for her. Within a few weeks, Gayaneh's school was ready. For two, sometimes three, hours every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon, village girls came to their home to learn to read and write. When time permitted, they also studied math, geography, literature, and history. Narek now recalled how after the wedding, Vahram had kissed and blessed them both and said to his new *hars*, "My daughter, in this, your home, you will never be obliged to lower your head and speak in a whispered tone."

With a bashful bow of her head, Gayaneh, said, "Thank you, Father. I am most fortunate and honored to be your daughter."

Home at last, Narek greeted his mother-in-law, Hripsik, who came on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons to watch the twins while Gayaneh taught. He could hear Gayaneh in the next room. Today, she was discussing notable Armenian women and their contributions to their nation. She spoke of Queen Khosrovanush, who encouraged education, the arts, and helped the poor, and of Queen Shahandukht, who also promoted education and in 998 was engaged in the repairs of three monasteries, among them Datev. She spoke of Queen Katramideh, wife of Bagratuni Smbat II Shahanshah, who, upon her husband's death, continued and completed the work he had begun—the construction of the Cathedral of Ani. Gayaneh then talked about some of the Armenian girls' schools in Armenia, Georgia, and Gharabagh, as well as nunneries where girls, some of them orphans, also received an education, with some remaining to become church scribes.

"Before today's lesson comes to an end, my students, let me tell you of yet some other women, the Armenian Deaconesses, who, through the ages, have served our nation."

"Women *sargavakner*?" the girls asked in astonishment.

"Yes," responded Gayaneh, "and that particular 'order of the clergy, ordained by bishops,' still exists. I even saw and spoke to a couple of them during my stay in Tiflis one summer to help my great uncle and aunt. We were attending services at Saint Stepanos Church, and during the Eucharist we saw 'a woman deacon fully vested bring forward the chalice for the communion of the people.'"

As Narek listened to one question after another resounding from Gayaneh's classroom, he remembered the day he, like the girls now, was astonished by what he had heard and witnessed in Chicago during a trip there with the Nersesians, the family from Turkey who had befriended him during his stay in America. One day, during one of his visits to the Nersesians' house, *Baron* Hmayag had announced during dinner to him, "We are going to Chicago to the wedding of my niece, and you, our dear Narek, are coming with us as our guest!"

Narek remembered the Sunday when *Baron* Hmayag and *Deegeen* Antaram took him, along with Garabed and Hayganoosh, their children, to listen to the renowned Armenian minister, orator, and writer, Mangasar Mangasarian of Mashgerd, Turkey, talk to a crowd of 2,000 people at Chicago's Orchestra Hall. "My brother, who regularly attends the minister's sermons, says that every Sunday, the Armenian minister speaks before such a large crowd at Orchestra Hall, sometimes also at the Grand Opera House and other places," explained *Baron* Hmayag. The moment Narek saw the distinguished Armenian clergyman with the dark, piercing eyes, and listened to his profound words, something in him stirred, and he remembered his home, his childhood, and the 10th-century flat-roofed church, built partly underground and of small stones, near the ancient village of Agarak, which had existed since the Middle Ages. It was there he liked to play whenever he and his parents visited friends. It was there, near that secluded church, almost



hidden in the rocky terrain dotted with lizards and scorpions that he liked to explore, to dream of the things he wanted to be when he grew up.

\* \* \*

**“I** will return in two days’ time,” Narek said one early summer morning to Gayaneh and his father as he reached for his knapsack on the chair.

“*Baree janabar, Asdvats kez hed, dghas* (Have a good trip, may God be with you, my son),” Vahram said with a hint of trepidation in his voice, and then thought, Who knows what mishap might befall a lone man traveling on these desolate roads.

Gayaneh added, “*Barov gnas, barov gas, Narek jan* (May you go safely, may you return safely, dear.” The apprehension on her face, and the tightness with which she embraced her husband, betrayed her cheerful voice.

Narek stepped over to the cradle and kissed the heads of his sleeping sons. He smiled at them, then at his wife and father, and bid them farewell. At Der Datev’s urgent request, he was going to Agarak to deliver vital documents to the Balasbekyans, prominent members of that community.

As Narek leisurely walked west, along the Arax River, towards the Zangezur mountain range, with his knapsack hanging over his shoulder, he stopped from time to time to rest and gaze at the countryside, in places barren, harsh, inhospitable; in places lush, beautiful, inviting. Weary and hot from his walk, he stopped to rest under the shade of a tree. After eating some of the food Gayaneh had packed for him, before long, his eyelids grew heavy and he was asleep. Within a matter of minutes, though, he was roused from a deep slumber by the sound of something moving in the distance. “*Der Asdvats* (Lord God), I hope it is not a leopard or a bear!” he said as he leaped to his feet. To his great relief, he realized it was not an animal but a person. Narek blinked and rubbed the sleepiness from his eyes to see who it was, perhaps someone he knew. There, farther down the path, wearily walked Sahakadoukht. It was obvious that she had not seen him. A few minutes later she stopped by the river, placed her bag on the ground, and got on her knees. She remained in that position for the longest time as she stared at the river and then at the mountains. All of a sudden, she began to sing a hymn, and then another, and another. Her angelic voice, which resonated everywhere, took his breath away. Narek was



From top: 10th century church near Agarak (referred to by locals simply as “the church;” entrance to the church; interior window of the church.

stunned, for he had never heard her sing, let alone heard her say more than a few words uttered barely above a whisper. As he listened to her chant the *sharagans* (hymns), Narek recalled how he had been amazed once before on reading in a book, loaned to him by Baron Nersesian, about the 8th-century poetess and composer Sahakadoukht, who had written some of the *sharagans*—those beautiful, ancient hymns this meek and humble peasant woman was now singing.

Upon delivering the documents to the Balasbekyans, the patriarch of the house, Khachatour Tirayri, insisted that Narek spend the night in their home, and he quickly called to his wife and daughters to prepare food and a place to sleep for their honored guest. Although Narek had planned to stay the night with his father’s friends, he accepted the patriarch’s invitation, for to decline his kind hospitality would have been considered a great insult. Early the next morning, with his knapsack filled by the women of the house with cheese, *lavash*, and an assortment of pastries, Narek was on his way home.

Sauntering down the dusty road, he began thinking of his family, his students, and the life he had lived in America. “Those certainly were good days, easy days compared to the ones here,” he whispered to a couple of lizards scurrying by in the hot, thirsty soil and disappearing near some rocks and wildflowers. Narek glanced at a cluster of sparse trees not far off the main path. He knew that out-of-the-way place well and quickened his pace

toward it. There, before him, was the tree—the wishing tree, as he called it, covered still, with strips and pieces of cloth in various colors and lengths hanging from the lowest to the highest branches a tall person could reach. It stood next to the flat-roofed church, near the entrance. This remote place was where he had played, explored, and dreamed as a child whenever he came to the area with his parents. It had not changed. He set his knapsack on a rock just outside the church, opened the low, wooden door, lowered his head, in order not to bump it, and stepped down into the cool, dim, ancient house of worship. There was incense in the air. Resting against the wall on one side of the church were a few plain and simple stone carvings, as well as several small and medium-sized *khatchkars*. Even from where he stood, he could see the intricate details of the *khatchkars*, which had always fascinated him. The cross-stones looked like lacework. Candles flickered on the ground near the foot of the



rundown altar and below the narrow windows on both sides of the sanctuary. Narek stared at the dirt floor of the church made hard and smooth by countless faithful who, through the ages, with bowed heads had stood and knelt here in prayer. He studied the arches high above him, above the windows—all made of small stones like the rest of the church. He gazed at the dome in the center of the church open to the sky, and asked, “How many souls have looked up toward heaven and murmured, ‘In my distress I cried unto the Lord?’” As he looked now at the windows to his right, then at the windows to his left, and then at the door, he remembered *Der* Datev’s explanations, years ago when he was a schoolboy, as to why the churches and monasteries were built with high and narrow windows and low doors. “For defense, my students, and to keep out the evils of the world,” their teacher, the priest, had said. Most certainly, this church was built with defense in mind, and to keep out the evils of the world, for externally it appeared as nothing more than an ordinary, flat-roofed, single-level structure with narrow windows, while internally it was anything but that; it was the heart and soul of a nation and culture.

Narek walked over to the *khatchkars*; he wanted to touch them, but not in passing as he did when he was a boy, but rather to study them—to trace with his fingers the intricate details of these works of art and homage. Leaning forward to touch the tallest and most intricate of them, he gasped and jumped back. A scorpion was stealthily making its way up the ancient stone. To Narek’s astonishment, the instant he leaped away from the *khatchkar*, with the venomous arachnid now creeping boldly over it, that agonizing void in the depths of his heart suddenly began to fill, like water into an empty vessel, with what he could only describe as a “bouquet of prayers.”

Narek slowly walked over and stood in front of the candles now nearly spent but still burning, flickering at the foot of the altar. He closed his eyes, bowed his head for a moment, and then looked up at the altar as he recited the fiery words of Ghevont Yeretz he had read and memorized long ago: “No one can shake us, neither angels, nor men; neither sword, nor fire, nor water, nor any, nor all other horrid tortures.” Narek then whispered the *Aghotk Deroonagan*. As he uttered the Lord’s Prayer in the peacefulness of the church, he could almost see and hear the priests of



Top and bottom photos: Simple cross stones inside the 10th century church.

times-past who, in their sacred vestments had served at this altar, and their people. Narek stood silent for a moment and then began to recite a passage from the *Prayer Book of Saint Gregory of Narek*, a book *Der* Datev had given to him. “The voice of a sighing heart, its sobs and mournful cries, I offer to you... Compassionate Lord... Amen.” Narek bowed his head, and then raising it made the sign of the cross. He slowly looked about the ancient church, memorizing every detail of it, and with sure-footedness walked out into the sunlight. *Der* Datev’s words had come true; he had at last found what he was seeking. Inhaling slowly and deeply the sweet air of Siunik, Narek returned home.

\* \* \*

It was Sunday, and Narek’s first day as the newly ordained village priest—*Der* Goriun. As he stood before his congregation, his family, the students he would resume teaching,

and the retired *Der* Datev, the young priest concluded the day’s service with the *Orhnootoyon yev Artsagoomun*. Following the Blessing and Dismissal, one by one the faithful approached their new priest, kissed the Gospel, and then quietly left the church. *Der* Goriun noticed that near the entrance, standing against the wall, as she always did, was Sahakadoukht. Today, she was wiping tears from her eyes as she waited to begin her work. Seeing the poor woman standing there like that, Narek’s heart began to ache for her. Certainly, he would continue the practice begun by *Der* Datev to pay her for her work every Sunday after services with *kopeks* and food. Even though she speaks little, one day I must sit down and talk to her at length, he thought.

The days, weeks, months, and years passed. Gayaneh’s students increased, and so did her family. Artashes and Vartan had another brother, Gurgen, and twin sisters, Aregnaz and Vartouhi. Soon the five siblings would have yet another brother or sister. As busy and full as their home was, Narek and Gayaneh, as well as the children, felt the absence of Vahram, the beloved patriarch of the house and grandfather, who had collapsed in the fields one day. His absence was felt in countless ways, from his morning greetings to his evening goodnights, every single day. With grieving hearts, Gayaneh and Narek had said again, after the funeral, “If the baby is a boy-child, his name will be Vahram.”

Each time Narek went to the cemetery, he noticed a small bouquet of mountain flowers tied together with a string at the head of his father's grave and that of his mother's. "Who could it be that so diligently comes and places flowers on the graves of my parents?" Narek wondered aloud one day. He stared at the bouquet resting on his mother's grave, and then picked up the one on his father's. He looked at it for a while, and thought, as he touched the string, I remember now. This is just like the ones I have seen, over the years, on Mother's grave. Father always wondered who it was that brought her flowers. Now, it is I who wonders who brings flowers to them both.

\* \* \*

**N**arek *jan*, it is with profound sadness that I deliver this letter to you so soon after your father's death," *Der Datev* announced as he placed a consoling hand on Narek's shoulder, and he added, "I will wait outside with Gayaneh and the children, in case you should need me."

Narek stared at the words "To Narek" written in a handwriting he knew so well. It was *Der Datev's*. He sat down at the table and curiously opened the letter and began to read:

*My dearest Narek,*

*You only know me as the woman with brushwood on her back, who comes from afar to your village twice a week. I know you must have been wondering who it is that has been placing flowers on the grave of your mother, and now on the graves of both your parents. It was I who has been doing this—as a symbol of my gratitude and immense respect for them. They were the finest of the finest people—kind, generous, and humble. I regret, from the depths of my heart, that I will no longer be able to adorn their graves, for you see, I have not much time. I am ailing. For that reason, I requested that Der Datev, who wrote this letter for me since I am illiterate, deliver it to you only upon my death.*

*Now that you are a grown man with a family of your own, I feel that I can tell you that it was I who brought you into this world and first whispered the name Narek—the name of your father—into your sweet ear, and prayed to God that you would always know that name. You see, my son, I was forced to give you away because of widowhood and poverty. Being without a family, as was your father, upon his death I had no means of feeding and clothing you. The moment I learned that Aregnaz and Vahram had accepted you as their child and christened you Narek, I fell to my knees in profound thankfulness to God, for He, The Lord, had heard my prayer and whispered the name I had given you into their ears. Knowing that you were loved and cared for, I did not want to disturb or disrupt your good and happy life with them.*

*Please forgive me for giving you away; I had no choice. But, do know that I have always loved you. And, do know that it was not merely to earn my daily bread that I walked so far every Wednesday and Sunday, but to also see and love you from afar—to watch you grow up. The day you wed; the day you became a father; the day you became a teacher; and the day you became the village priest, I thought my heart would burst with joy for you. And, each time I returned home to my hut, I fell to my knees and thanked God for giving me you, if only for a brief while, and then all those years after enabling me to be with you from afar.*

*May God bless you with a long, happy, and prosperous life with your family,  
Sahakadoukht,  
Daughter of Hambartsoum Vahagni and Maryam Mheri Rostomyan,  
Wife of Narek Aramazti Patkanyan*

Shocked, and with his heart overflowing with emotion, Narek carefully folded and put the letter back into the envelope as he whispered, "*Der Asdvats*, if only I had known . . . I could have taken care of her."

Narek sighed as he slowly walked over to the window, and blinking away tears, stared out, far beyond the trees. He could almost see and hear Sahakadoukht kneeling by the river Arax and singing the ancient, hauntingly beautiful hymn, *Soorp, Soorp*:

*Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Hosts.  
Heaven and Earth are full of Thy glory.  
Blessing in the highest.  
Blessed art Thou that didst come  
And art to come  
In the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna, in the highest.*

The following Sunday, Narek, Gayaneh, and the children went to the cemetery to pray and place flowers on the graves of Vahram, Aregnaz, and Sahakadoukht, all three next to each other. Every Sunday thereafter, a small bouquet of mountain flowers, tied with string, was placed on each of the graves.

One day, as Narek was walking home from school, he heard someone call out, "*Der Goriun, Der Goriun!*"

It was Shavarsh, one of his older students. "Yes, my son, what is it?" Narek asked.

*Der Goriun*, how do you know if you want to be a priest?"

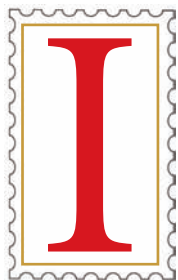
Narek looked long and hard towards the Zangezur mountain range and then turned to the boy, almost a man, and said, "When the time comes, you will know, my son, you will know." □

*NOTE: Narek's Prayer is the third segment of the Narek stories. Segment one, The Gift, appeared in The Armenian Weekly December 2007 magazine issue, and segment two, Christmas Wish, appeared in the January 2010 magazine issue.*



# Wilmington Students Lobby for Armenian Genocide Stamp

By Tom Vartabedian



If the United State postal authorities ever get to mint a postage stamp commemorating the Armenian Genocide centennial in 2015, much of the credit could very well go to a small class of world history students at Wilmington High.

Two dozen of them are lobbying feverishly to get such a commemorative issued by designing their own illustrations and forwarding them with essays to Postmaster

General John E. Potter in Washington, D.C.

The students belong to a class called “Facing History and Ourselves,” taught by human rights activists Lisa Joy Desberg and Maura Tucker.

The idea stemmed from presentations made by members of the Merrimack Valley Armenian Genocide Curriculum Committee, and chaired by Dro Kanayan, over the past four years.

“To get this kind of a response from non-Armenian students is overwhelming,” said Kanayan. “The essays were well written and the illustrations serve as an effective complement. If anything, they’ll get their share of notice. The Wilmington curriculum serves as a model for other schools we’ve visited in trying to educate the student population about the Armenian Genocide. These kids truly extended themselves.”

One illustration came with Armenian lettering, translating the words “memory, love, and pride” over a red, blue, and orange motif.

“We need to recognize the struggle of the Armenian American population,” wrote Victoria Beck, who researched the Armenian alphabet to promote her design. “Considering we have Armenians living in our country, the least we can do is have a postage stamp to show that we didn’t forget. It’s a small gesture to remember Armenian history and show this country that we didn’t neglect their past.”

Courtney Cavanaugh superimposed an outline of Historic Armenia (Turkey) over the Armenian tricolor showing victims that fell in the 1915–23 carnage with the words: “Armenia—Land of the Forgotten.” An added inscription noted: “How long will it be before we see them as people?”

“Genocide is defined as a deliberate and systematic destruction of an ethnic group,” writes Cavanaugh. “Clearly, the mass killing of the Armenian people falls under this definition. How long will it be before the United States erases its skepticism and recognizes this genocide?”

A design showing victims marching through the Syrian desert with a remembrance motif and flag was the brainchild of Erika Johnson. For added measure, she included a sketch of the sun peaking through the peaks of Mount Ararat as a symbol of hope, the dawn of a new era.

“After what this poor race experienced, there are people today who refuse to call this tragedy a genocide,” writes Johnson. “A postage stamp would bring some closure to such an atrocity. The Armenian race deserves our respect toward this tragic event in world history.”





Footprints in the sands of Der Zor with the tricolor waving about and the words “Never Forget” was Mary To’s example of how a stamp should be modeled. She told about deportation, hunger, and unspeakable torture that befell the population during its death march.

“Other horrific events such as the Jewish Holocaust have been acknowledged by millions,” writes Kayla Dankese, who illustrated people holding hands across Armenia. “There have been a myriad of monuments erected and other postage stamps commemorating ethnic brutality. Such a genocide stamp would be a memorial trib-

ute to a martyred nation as well as those who survived and immigrated to this country.”

What motivated the students had to be their instruction. As for the ideas, they appeared to be charged by vivid imagination and a kinship toward human rights and unity.

“When we talk of significant numbers being annihilated, it’s wholesale slaughter,” emphasized Stephanie Barczak. “But each separate life must be recognized. Can we really put ourselves in the shoes of the victims and imagine the fear they experienced? It is up to us to give the dead a voice—to speak up, make noise, and get results.”

Some sketches depicted a religious symbol. Others showed families hand-in-hand. One by Jon Stratovy unleashed a skull and crossbones erupting in volcanic lava with this message: “Light will shine through the darkest night and the blackest heart.”

Maye Randell’s illustration showed Yerevan’s Genocide Memorial, Dzidzernagapert, with its eternal flame, surrounded by flowers on April 24th against a blue sky. Another by Christine Connelly depicts a mother with a baby strapped to her back and another child in hand making her way across the desert sands.

“Although the mother is aware death is upon her and her hopeless children, faith lets them live the moment,” writes Connelly. “She sees the spark beyond the mountains and no matter what, her country of Armenia will forever be in her heart.”


In each example, the Armenian tricolor was prominently displayed with the inscription. “Denial is killing twice,” believes Hannah Judkins.

As for Mathew Prochorski, he resorted to a psychological approach in getting his idea adopted. The illustration showed a Turkish bayonet piercing an Armenian cross with the notation: “Remember 1915-1923.” Simple but effective.

Each facsimile would qualify for a postage stamp. Where the project goes from here is up to the government. The Armenian community has made a feverish pitch in the past to no avail. But youth represent a powerful voice and in the case of these Wilmington students, it speaks with conviction.

At a time when much of today’s youth is given a bum rap, here are a couple dozen teenagers bent on making an impact with genocide recognition. Teachers Desberg and Tucker have created

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such a popular curriculum at the school, students are waiting to become enrolled to make a difference in society.

Members of the genocide curriculum have been appearing there annually to address the students since 2008. As an added inducement, a panel discussion on human rights is also offered, featuring representatives from other martyred countries like Israel, Cambodia, and Rwanda, and Bosnia.

Aside from the public schools along the North Shore of Boston, efforts are being made to approach parochial schools and the private sector. More than a dozen schools have complied.

An earlier exercise had the Wilmington students writing their Congressmen and Senators calling for passage of the genocide resolution.

The genocide presentations are also laden with talks on community life, history, stories of President Calvin Coolidge's orphan rug, current events, Armenia today, and ways to prevent genocide locally and globally. A video presentation offers a graphic look at genocide and those who fought the battle. Examples of Armenian artifacts are also shown.

**"Considering we have Armenians living in our country, the least we can do is have a postage stamp to show that we didn't forget. It's a small gesture to remember Armenian history and show this country that we didn't neglect their past."**

In most cases, very little if nothing is known about the Armenian Genocide or written in textbooks. Committee members are acting as emissaries in promoting knowledge, generating good press in local papers, and creating awareness with administrators and teachers. One class in Haverhill was aimed directly at faculty.

"Those who learn of the Armenian Genocide are not only sympathetic to the cause, they want to do something about it," says Desberg, pointing to her students. "They want to be heard, create a better environment, promote justice, and foster recognition. It's a clear voice, sincere and effective, especially when it comes from the next generation."

What are the odds one of these illustrations will become transcended into a commemorative stamp?

"If enough people speak out, affirmative action could result," she added.

"Perhaps it's under consideration now. The occasion certainly warrants it. If anything, we're educating our students on a very important component in world history." □



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# Lost Innocence

By Kristi Rendahl

“But does it really matter if one kind of bird goes extinct?” I asked my friend, Chris, a college classmate, bird enthusiast, and aspiring veterinarian. “No animal should ever go extinct,” he responded with a fiercely passionate tone and an impatient glint in his eyes. I was in my second year of college and had given little thought to the complete loss of a species, whether the result of negligence or intention or both. A smarter person wouldn’t so readily admit the ignorance of their youth, but I’ve lost interest in pretending that I’m anything except what I have been and what I am.

A few years later I found myself in Armenia, where one of the first words I learned was *tseghas-banoutyou*n. To kill off a tribe. What Raphael Lemkin termed genocide. It was referenced on a daily basis. To me, it seemed like something horrible that had happened, but something that had little relevance to

me. Over time, I learned how fresh the wounds were. How the legacy of genocide was woven into every Armenian family’s story. How the political and economic realities of today were influenced by that loss. And how it matters to all of us, no matter when it happened.

For someone like me, it takes time to absorb the possibility that people knowingly and willingly commit true evil. I was raised with an idyllic sense of belonging, support from the community, and promise of great things to come. Farms were separated by a mile and more, but still earned the designation of neighbors. The achievements of children were regularly highlighted in the county newspaper. And I attended music camp each summer in the International Peace Garden that straddles the U.S.-Canadian border.

My childhood wasn’t perfect, but I’m grateful. My frame of reference was decidedly positive. Even with my knowledge of the Viking raids on Ireland, the oppressive religious and political conditions of my ancestors’ early 19th-century Norway, and the treatment of Native Americans in what we now call the Midwestern United States, I was not prepared to comprehend the notions of forced starvation, death marches, and mass drownings that are part of the history of the Armenian Genocide.

A year or two after I returned to the U.S. from Armenia, I called on a donor to the organization where I was working. She’d agreed to meet with me if I would show her children pictures of my time in Armenia. I paged through my collection of visual memories and recounted some of my experiences there. As I came to the end of the book, I saw that I had included a number of photos from a tour of Auschwitz, the notorious concentration camp in Poland. I wanted to quickly shut the book, but at that point her seven-year-old son was completely absorbed.

The boy pointed at the stark image of the gas chamber disguised as a shower room where people were gassed *en masse* and asked what it was. He was so like myself years ago. A child who had advocates for his wellbeing and no knowledge of adversity. I looked nervously between the image, his beautiful wide eyes, and his mother’s face. She nodded solemnly, silently giving me permission to explain. As I haltingly described what had occurred in that room, how people were callously and systematically put to death, his face crumpled in horror. I was overcome with a wave of guilt: I had robbed him of his innocence. He might have lived another five or more blissful years had I not turned that page.

But maybe it’s for the best, I tell myself today. Maybe it will help him see the world more clearly in all its glory and misery. Maybe it will teach him to love more intensely and without reservation. Maybe it will inspire him to work to make hate a thing of the past. □

## the bare-bare bone

a swallowed sound  
of frisky and small intention  
a studded tone  
wound in a minor glee  
the ivory-checked box housed  
a treasure they said, combed by tuned  
teeth.  
pins hug tines, bright  
and metronomic –this musical box  
of ebony, genus *Diospyros* e.

reaching for the musical box  
(vantage point: three foot four)  
his heels take off the floor unfettered  
the message shooting back  
up from boyish shin to ilium.  
his spine outstretched a healthy inch,  
a stealthy breath uncaged from false ribs  
pumping incremental momentum, building  
vertebral paean.  
neck tilted back, his arm the longing story,  
his blindest hand caressed the dust on the  
musical box  
which never sat  
on the shelf  
untremored by anticipation

of her gasping hand:  
an extremity—  
unindexed sandsunken digits  
of faint articulation

—Burcu Gursel





# ‘A Question of Genocide’ ...and More Questions

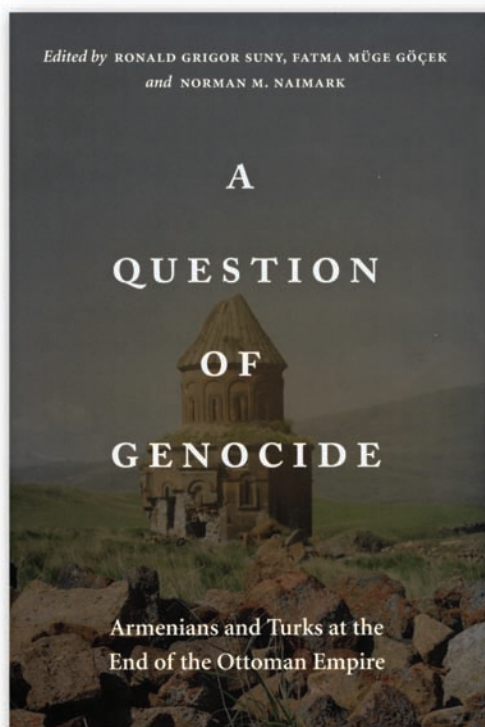
By Marc Mamigonian

The recent publication of the volume *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2011), edited by Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Göçek, and Norman M. Naimark, is an occasion of some significance for reasons of symbolism as well as scholarship. *A Question of Genocide* marks 10 years of WATS (Workshop on Armenian and Turkish Scholarship) gatherings, which began in Chicago in 2000.<sup>1</sup> The volume gathers together 15 papers by many leading scholars of genocide, modern Armenian history, the Ottoman Empire, and related disciplines.

It is not the purpose of this article to assess WATS as a whole or *A Question of Genocide* in its entirety. The volume undoubtedly contains important contributions to the body of knowledge on the Armenian Genocide; the remarks that follow are thus not intended to be a reflection of the book's contents in general. Instead, I look at how the issue of the Armenian Genocide is framed in the book's introductory sections and some of the questions arising from this.

The reader first encounters the book's cover and title, and superimposed over a ruined Armenian church (the Church of St. Gregory at Ani) is the title, “A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire.” The title seems designed to provoke a reaction, and is likely to do so. What does it mean? “A Matter of Genocide”? “An Issue of Genocide”? Or “Was It a Genocide”?

The darker possibilities of this last interpretation come through more clearly in the title of the forthcoming *Armenian History and the Question of Genocide* by Michael M. Gunter, a book which,



according to its publisher, “presents the Turkish position regarding the Armenian claims of genocide during World War I and the continuing debate over this issue.” It is well established that the official Turkish position in its current manifestation no longer denies large numbers of Armenian deaths but seeks to keep the “question of genocide” as just that—a question—by asserting the “unresolved” and “controversial” nature of “the events of 1915” and thus the legitimacy of the so-called counter-genocide narrative.

The book's introduction, bearing the names of Ronald Suny and Fatma Müge Göçek, provides the rationale for the title: “For most of the scholars participating in these discussions the historical record confirmed that a genocide had occurred; for others the term itself led to more problems than it resolved. The title of this

volume—*A Question of Genocide*—reflects both the certainty of some and the ambiguity of others, not so much on the nature of the killings, but how they might most convincingly be described” (p. 10).

This explanation provokes even more questions. We know what happened and the “nature” of what happened, the authors seem to say, but there are “some” who have hang-ups over what to call it. What, then, is “the nature of the killings?” And for whom does describing them need to be convincing? And convincing about what?

It is interesting to compare this with the similar—but subtly different—explanation for the title in Suny's 2009 “Truth in Telling” article: “The working title for the volume (forthcoming from Oxford University Press), *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, reflects both the certainty of some and the ambiguity of others about the nature of the killings.”<sup>2</sup>

Note the differences: In 2009 it is “ambiguity...about the nature of the killings,” whereas in 2011 it is “ambiguity...*not so much on the nature of the killings*, but about how they might most convincingly be *described*” (emphasis mine).

What is of principal interest here is the way the introduction frames the “question of genocide” in contrast to Norman Naimark’s preface. This contrast can be boiled down to two quotes:

Naimark: The chapters that follow contain fresh evidence that undermines any attempt to mitigate the responsibility of the Ottoman government for the mass murder of the Armenians in 1915. After reading these contributions, which represent the ‘state of the art’ in the field, no scholar could contend that there was not genocide in the Armenian case (p. xviii).

Göçek/Suny: What remains open and in dispute for some, albeit a minority among scholars, is whether the murder of a nation in the case of the Armenians and the Assyrians was intentional or an unfortunate consequence of a brutal program of deportations (p. 10, and verbatim in Suny 2009, p. 945).

Unlike the explanation for the book’s title quoted earlier, from which one can infer general agreement on the genocidal “nature of the killings” but not necessarily that genocide is the most “convincing” word for them, to maintain that it “remains open and in dispute...whether the murder of a nation in the case of the Armenians and the Assyrians was intentional or an unfortunate consequence of a brutal program of deportations,” is to question *precisely* the “nature of the killings.” It should be emphasized that the authors do not state that “it remains open and in dispute” for them, but rather for some never-specified others; no scholars from this “minority” are named, nor are their arguments supporting the “unintentional” death of more than a million Armenians and Assyrians presented.

**N**ote, though, the internal contradictions of the sentence: On the one hand, there is “the murder of a nation” (simultaneously borrowing a phrase from U.S. Ambassador Henry Morgenthau and retranslating genocide from its Greek and Latin roots), but on the other hand the possibility—“for some”—that this *murder was not intentional*. Of course, the notion of an unintentional “murder of a nation” beggars belief and, at any rate, is belied by the evidence. The authors, both of whom are well versed in the scholarly literature on genocide, cannot have been unaware of this contradiction. Nor can they be accused of being political *naifs*: Near the conclusion of the introduction, they write: “There may be no escape from the political aspects of setting the record straight on any genocide. The Armenian Genocide has been the exemplary victim of deliberate, sustained falsification. Historians are implicated in these politics no matter how faithfully they attend to the obligations of their craft” (pp. 10–11, and verbatim in Suny 2009, p. 945).

A large part of the “deliberate, sustained falsification” of the Armenian Genocide aims at legitimizing the idea that the Armenian deaths—and even the Turkish state now acknowledges a large number of Armenian deaths—occurred unintentionally. “Setting the record straight” should involve identifying such an unsupported and unsupportable position as what it is: “deliberate, sustained falsification.”

Göçek and Suny write that “[f]or most of the scholars participating in these discussions the historical record confirmed that a genocide had occurred; for others the term itself led to more problems than it resolved,” suggesting that it is the term genocide that is problematic. However, the difference between the intentional and unintentional (and oxymoronic) “murder of a nation” does not center on a term but rather on how the facts are understood.

One is inclined to read a value judgment in Naimark’s choice of words: “no scholar could contend that there was not genocide in the Armenian case.” He seems to say that a scholar who has access to the evidence contained in the book (and elsewhere, of course) and still contends that there was not genocide is, in effect, “no scholar.” A wag might suggest that when Naimark wrote this he had not yet read his co-editors’ introduction.

It should be noted that based on their writings neither Göçek nor Suny themselves question the appropriateness of the term “genocide” for the killing of the Armenians and Assyrians.

Suny in no way avoids using the word in his various writings on the subject and uses it without any qualifications whatsoever in his own chapter in the volume, “Writing Genocide: The Fate of the Ottoman Armenians.”<sup>2</sup> He questions how some aspects of the genocide have been explained, but not the fact of its occurrence nor the aptness of the term.

Suny notes that “[a]mong the baleful effects of the denialist claims about the Armenian Genocide was the sense on the part of many scholars (particularly Armenians) that they needed to present a united consensus on what had happened and why” (p. 35). This may be true, but it is clear from reading Suny that what he means isn’t that there is *not* a clear consensus, based on all available evidence, that there were massive, intentional killings—a genocide; rather, Suny has for some time argued against a preexisting plan for genocide having existed, and for a cumulative radicalization on the part of the Ottoman leadership that culminated in genocide.<sup>4</sup> This is far from arguing that the Armenian deaths were unintentional.

With a striking absence of ambiguity, Suny wrote in an essay published in 2008:

I have never been interested in discussing whether there was a genocide in Ottoman Anatolia during World War I. Once acquainted with the overwhelming evidence of deportations and mass murder of a designated ethno-religious group, planned, initiated, and carried out by the Young Turk authorities, I was convinced that no serious investigator can doubt that, by any conventional definition, genocide had occurred.<sup>5</sup>

There is no reason to think that between the time he wrote those words and the time *A Question of Genocide* was published he became any less convinced.

Göçek has tended to refrain from using “genocide,” preferring “to employ the traditional Ottoman term” massacre (*kıtal*), but has also acknowledged that what occurred is rightly termed “genocide.”<sup>6</sup> It is somewhat bewildering, therefore, to encounter references to “the Armenian ethnic cleansing of 1915” (pp. 43–44) in her chapter “Reading Genocide: Turkish Historiography on 1915.” “Ethnic cleansing” is hardly a traditional Ottoman term, having come into general use in the 1990’s, with particular application to events in the Balkans. (Though, of course, like genocide, it can be, and is, used to describe events that have occurred in earlier times.) Nor is it understood as synonymous with genocide.<sup>7</sup> Yet, only a few pages later, one reads Göçek’s “conjecture that the Armenian deportations and massacres of 1915 would finally be recognized *as the genocide they were*” (p. 50; emphasis mine).

Suny is unhesitant in criticizing those who repeat the Turkish state narrative of denial—and does so in his “Writing Genocide” chapter (as well as in other published writings). Göçek has also been highly critical of the state narrative and its proponents. But are those unnamed scholars (one presumes this to mean WATS participants) who question “whether the murder of a nation in the case of the Armenians and the Assyrians was intentional” beyond criticism?

There appears to be an unstated different standard for those of a so-called (or self-proclaimed) “post-nationalist” mindset who look at the same facts—facts that “no serious investigator” could look at and conclude anything but that “the murder of a nation in the case of the Armenians and the Assyrians was intentional”—and reach conclusions little different than those propounded by the Turkish state and their allies.

It should be noted that none of the chapters in the book present such an argument. It may be that this argument—which, it must be emphasized, goes well beyond the issue of whether to use “the g-word” or not, and gets to the very nature of the killings—was made by some participants in the various WATS conferences over the past decade. One might infer that by not selecting for inclusion in the volume any essays that present such a dubious argument, the editors are drawing a clear line between serious scholarship and unserious attempts to explain away “the murder of a nation.”

It may be that two competing agendas are at work here: One has definite standards (“no serious investigator can doubt that, by any conventional definition, genocide had occurred”), the other allows the issue to dissolve into hazy obscurity (“the question of whether to call the mass killings genocide had yet to be resolved”).

This dichotomy is perhaps unwittingly crystallized by Mark Levene on his book’s back cover:

Nearly a century on from the attempted Ottoman destruction of the Armenians, Turkish politics of denial, on the one hand, and an Armenian mythic representation of a singular Turkish guilt, on the other, have repeatedly sabotaged chances for dialogue. Yet

in this book a group of leading historians from both sides of the divide, and beyond, demonstrate that the reality of genocide can be examined in its multi-causal dimensions not only without partisanship but in recognition of a shared history. *A Question of Genocide* can be read as a breakthrough historical study providing a contextualized, nuanced yet sensitive set of interpretations of an Armenian—but also wider Ottoman—tragedy. Equally, however, it may come to be remembered as a timely intervention on the path to reconciliation between post-Ottoman peoples.

Levene, a leading genocide scholar, has no doubts about the intentional nature of the killings of the Armenians or that the word for this process is genocide.<sup>8</sup> The implied equivalence of “Turkish politics of denial...and an Armenian mythic representation of a singular Turkish guilt” is echoed in the book’s introduction, where it is claimed that “[a]t present, the histories preferred by most Armenians and Turks remain embedded in their respective nationalist narratives” (p. 11). Only within WATS, an atmosphere “free of partisanship and nationalism,” have “[t]he two opposing Turkish and Armenian nationalist narratives [been] replaced by a single shared account” (pp. 4–5).

Let us set aside the blanket statement about “most Armenians and Turks.” As for “nationalist narratives,” the authors would have done well to heed Suny’s warning in his “Writing Genocide” chapter that “nationalism” is “[o]ne of the most unmoored signifiers in historical writing [that] simply has too many meanings to be



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unproblematically invoked” (p. 33). The invocation of “a single shared account” is undercut by the assertion elsewhere that some still question “whether the murder of a nation in the case of the Armenians and the Assyrians was intentional or an unfortunate consequence of a brutal program of deportations.”

Levene explicates what he sees as the dual agenda of the book and the manner in which the “question of genocide” is framed: “historians from both sides of the divide,” “a shared history,” “a timely intervention on the path to reconciliation,” etc. Not merely a collection of scholarly essays, he suggests (whether rightly or wrongly), *A Question of Genocide* is part of a larger reconciliatory effort.

However, the “divide” among historians is not principally between Turks and Armenians, but rather between (to adopt Suny’s phrase) “serious investigators” and unserious investigators. There is no reason the history of the “deportations and mass murder of a designated ethno-religious group, planned, initiated, and carried out by the Young Turk authorities”—the history, in short, of the Armenian Genocide—cannot become a “shared history.” This is the shared history, after all. Not shared in the sense of both parties having equal roles in “the murder of a nation,” but shared in the sense that both parties were (unequal) participants and bear particular (unequal) burdens as a result.

Perhaps by insisting on this point, one is blocking “the path to reconciliation.” But perhaps it may be time for “reconciliation” to take its place next to “nationalism” in the list of “unmoored

signifiers” with “too many meanings to be unproblematically invoked.” If reconciliation means a willingness to set aside one’s scholarly standards—which is normally an abrogation of the responsibility of a scholar—then down that path, which leads far from “truth in telling,” we ought not to wander. □

## ENDNOTES

- 1 A sketch of the history of WATS is provided in the introduction, as well as in Suny’s earlier article “Truth in Telling: Reconciling Realities in the Genocide of the Ottoman Armenians” (*American Historical Review*, October 2009, pp. 930–946). I attended the 2005 New York University workshop as a non-participant and the 2008 Geneva workshop as a panel discussant, and was a participant on the WATS listserv, which was terminated in March 2011.
- 2 See, for example, Suny’s *Armenia in the Twentieth Century* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983) and *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), as well as various articles.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 945. The Introduction cites the 2009 article only as “a prehistory” of WATS.
- 4 The fact that few argue, nowadays, for the existence of a preexisting master plan or “blueprint” is not the same, of course, as arguing that there was no consideration of or disposition towards radical solutions to the “Armenian Question” among the CUP leadership prior to 1915, and Suny acknowledges this in “Writing History.”
- 5 “The Emotions of Genocide: Revisiting Ambassador Morgenthau’s Account of the Armenian Genocide,” in Barlow Der Mugrdchian, ed., *Between Paris and Fresno: Armenian Studies in Honor of Dickran Kouymjian* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2008), p. 511.
- 6 “Turkish Historiography and the Unbearable Weight of 1915,” in R. G. Hovannissian, ed., *The Armenian Genocide: Cultural and Ethical Legacies*, p. 228.
- 7 See, for example, Rony Blum, Gregory H. Stanton, Shira Sagi, and Elihu D. Richter, “‘Ethnic cleansing’ Bleaches the Atrocities of Genocide,” *European Journal of Public Health* (2008) 18 (2): 204–209.
- 8 See Mark Levene’s *Genocide in the Age of the Nation State: Volume I: The Meaning of Genocide* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008).



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GENOCIDE RECOGNITION AND A

# Quest for Justice

By Harut Sassounian



Armenians should be seeking justice, rather than symbolic recognition for the genocide committed against them by Ottoman Turkey.

In the immediate aftermath of the Armenian Genocide, most of the wretched survivors were scattered throughout the Middle East. They had no food, no shelter, and barely the clothes on their back. The first generation of survivors firmly believed that their nightmare would soon be over and that they would be able to return to their ancestral homeland in Western Armenia, from which they were so brutally uprooted.

On Aug. 10, 1920, the Treaty of Sèvres was signed by more than a dozen countries, including the Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan, Turkey, and Armenia. These countries, large and small, committed to restoring justice to the long-suffering Armenian nation.

The Treaty of Sèvres recognized Armenia's independence and asked U.S. President Woodrow Wilson to fix the borders between Armenia and Turkey. Unfortunately, this treaty was never ratified; the European powers abandoned their "Little Ally."

The newly established Republic of Armenia lasted only two years before being swallowed up by the Soviet Union and Turkey. The destitute refugees, abandoned to their tragic fate, were forced to settle down in permanent exile. In those early years, their first priority was survival, fending off starvation and disease.

Gradually, they rebuilt their lives, in new homes, churches, and schools. Engaging in lobbying activities or making political demands was the last thing on their minds. Every April 24, they would commemorate the start of the Armenian Genocide by gathering in church halls and offering prayers for the souls of the 1.5 million innocent victims of what was then known as the "*Meds Yeghern*," or Great Calamity.

President Barack Obama, for reasons of political expediency, revived that old Armenian term in his first two annual April 24 statements, even though, for the past 60 years, ever since Raphael Lemkin coined the term "genocide," Armenians have referred to those mass killings as "*tseghasbanoutyoun*" (genocide).

The succeeding generation, particularly after 1965—the 50th anniversary of the genocide—tried to break the wall of silence surrounding the greatest tragedy that befell their nation. Tens of thousands of Armenians, in communities throughout the world, held protest marches, wrote letters to government officials, and petitioned international organizations. The Turkish government, along with the rest of the world, initially turned a deaf ear to Armenian pleas for recognition of the long-forgotten genocide. But, as media outlets, world leaders, parliaments of various countries, and international organizations began acknowledging the genocide, Turkish leaders, astonished that the crimes perpetrated by their forefathers were still making headlines after so many decades, began pumping major resources into their campaign of denial, funding foreign scholars to distort the historical facts, engaging the services of powerful lobbying firms, and applying political and economic pressure on countries acknowledging the genocide.

Since 1965, the legislatures of more than 20 countries, including Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, Greece, Russia, Poland, Argentina, and Uruguay, have recognized the genocide. Even though it is commonly assumed that the United States has not acknowledged the genocide, the U.S. House of Representatives in 1975 and 1984 adopted resolutions

commemorating the Armenian Genocide. On April 22, 1981, President Ronald Reagan issued a presidential proclamation that specifically mentioned the genocide. The legislatures of 42 out of 50 U.S. states have adopted resolutions acknowledging the genocide. In fact, the U.S. government first acknowledged the genocide back in 1951, in a document submitted to the International Court of Justice, commonly known as the World Court. Furthermore, the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities adopted a report in 1985 acknowledging that the Armenian Genocide met the UN criteria for genocide. The European Parliament also adopted a resolution in 1987, recognizing the Armenian Genocide. Hundreds of Holocaust and genocide scholars have issued joint statements confirming the facts of the genocide.

After so many acknowledgments, the Armenian Genocide has become a universally recognized historical fact. Regrettably, despite such worldwide recognition, there are still a few major countries that have not yet recognized it. Those siding with the Turkish denialist state are not doing so due to lack of evidence or conviction, but, sadly, because of political expediency, with the intent of appeasing Turkey.

Armenians no longer need to convince the world that what took place during the years 1915–23 was in fact “the first genocide of the 20th century.” However, a simple acknowledgment of what took place and a mere apology would not heal the wounds and undo the consequences of the genocide. Armenians are still waiting for justice to be served with a restoration of their historic rights and the return of their confiscated lands and properties.

In recent years, lawsuits have been filed in U.S. federal courts, securing millions of dollars from New York Life and French AXA insurance companies for unpaid claims to policy-holders who perished in the genocide. Several more lawsuits are pending against other insurance companies and banks to recover funds belonging to victims of the genocide.

Restitution can take many forms. As an initial step, the Republic of Turkey could place under the jurisdiction of the Istanbul-based Armenian Patriarchate all Armenian churches and religious monuments that were

expropriated and converted to mosques and warehouses or outright destroyed.

In the absence of any voluntary restitution by Turkey, Armenians could resort to litigation, seeking “restorative justice.” In considering legal recourse, one should be mindful of the fact that the Armenian Genocide did neither start nor end in 1915. Large-scale genocidal acts were committed starting with Sultan Abdul Hamid’s massacre of 300,000 Armenians from 1894–96; the subsequent killing of 30,000 Armenians in Adana in 1909; and the genocide of 1.5 million Armenians from 1915–23.

After the genocide, the Republic of Turkey continued the forced Turkification and deportation of Armenians. Most of the early leaders of the Turkish Republic were high-ranking Ottoman officials who had participated in perpetrating the genocide. This unbroken succession in leadership assured the continuity of the Ottomans’ policies. The Republic of Turkey, as the continuation of the Ottoman Empire, could therefore be held responsible for the genocide.

An important document, recently discovered in the U.S. archives, provides irrefutable evidence that the Republic of Turkey continued to uproot and exile the remnants of Armenians well into the 1930’s, motivated by purely racist reasons. This document is a “Strictly Confidential” cable, dated March 2, 1934, and sent by U.S. Ambassador Robert P. Skinner from Ankara to the U.S. Secretary of State, reporting the deportation of Armenians from “the interior of Anatolia to Istanbul.”

The U.S. ambassador wrote: “It is assumed by most of the deportees that their expulsion from their homes in Anatolia is a part of the Government’s program of making Anatolia a pure Turkish district. They relate that the Turkish police, in towns and villages where Armenians lived, attempted to instigate local Moslem people to drive the Armenians away... The Armenians were told that they had to leave at once for Istanbul. They sold their possessions receiving for them ruinous prices. I have been told that cattle worth several hundred liras a head had been sold for as little as five liras a head. My informant stated that the Armenians were permitted to sell their property in order that not one of them could say that they were forced to abandon

it. However, the sale under these conditions amounted to a practical abandonment.”

In the 1920’s and 1930’s, thousands of Armenian survivors of the genocide were forced out of their homes in Cilicia and Western Armenia and relocated elsewhere in Turkey or neighboring countries. In the 1940’s, these racist policies were followed by the *Varlık Vergisi*, the imposition of an exorbitant wealth tax on Armenians, Greeks, and Jews. And during the 1955 Istanbul pogroms, many Greeks, as well as some Armenians and Jews, were killed and their properties confiscated. This continuation of massacres, genocide, and deportations highlights the existence of a long-term strategy implemented by successive Turkish regimes from the 1890’s to more recent times in order to solve the “Armenian Question” with finality.

Consequently, the Republic of Turkey is legally liable for its own crimes against Armenians, as well as those committed by its Ottoman predecessors. Turkey inherited the assets of the Ottoman Empire and, therefore, must have also inherited its liabilities.

Since Armenians often refer to their three sequential demands from Turkey—recognition of the genocide; reparations for their losses; and the return of their lands—Turks have come to believe that by denying the first demand—recognition—they will be blocking the other two demands that are sure to follow. Yet, commemorative resolutions adopted by the legislative bodies of various countries and statements on the genocide made by world leaders have no force of law, and therefore no legal consequence. Armenians, Turks, and others involved in this historical, and yet contemporary, issue must realize that the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, or the lack thereof, will neither enable nor deter its consideration by international legal institutions.

Once Turks realize that recognition by itself cannot and will not lead to other demands, they may no longer persist in their obsessive denial. Armenians, on the other hand, without waiting for any further recognition, can and should pursue their historic rights through legal channels, such as the International Court of Justice (where only states have jurisdiction), the European Court of Human Rights, and U.S. Federal Courts.

Justice, based on international law, must take its course. □



# APRIL 24<sup>TH</sup> *Remembrance* Devoid of Inspiration and Commitment

If there is one day during the year when all Armenians are united spiritually, it is April 24th, when we remember our martyrs of the genocide. However, it has become remembrance devoid of a compelling message that inspires and encourages us to participate in shaping the future of the Armenian nation.

---

By Michael G. Mensoian

**T**he depravity of the Ottoman Turkish plan and the sadistic manner in which the killings were carried out is known to every Armenian and is an established fact of history. Although April 24th marks the beginning of this horrendous tragedy, with the arrests and executions of our leading intellectuals, its roots lay in the xenophobic mindset of the Ottoman Turkish leaders. Although Armenians may have prospered within the Ottoman Empire, they were a subject people who periodically endured government-sponsored pogroms or the rapaciousness of officials, as well as the Turkish and Kurdish overlords who ruled the rural interior.

The *Meds Yeghern* (Great Catastrophe) had ramifications far beyond the emptying of our historic lands of its Armenian inhabitants. It was a determined effort by the Young Turks to wipe out the Armenian nation. The resulting genocide represented an exceedingly virulent form of xenophobia by these Ittihadists. The impact of this Great Catastrophe shattered the political, economic, social, psychological, and geographic framework of the Armenian nation.

The determination to destroy the Armenian nation crystallized under the Young Turks or Ittihadists during the Great War. This visceral response to Armenians and Armenian culture became embedded in the mindset of every Turkish leader and has fueled the policies of every Turkish government that has succeeded the Ittihadist perpetrators of the genocide, from Mustafa Kemal Ataturk to Prime

Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Having succeeded in emptying the provinces of historic western Armenia, it then became necessary to obliterate every vestige of Armenia's ancient culture from the landscape. The genocide never ended, but morphed into a more subtle and insidious attack on the Armenian nation.

Our message on this Day of Remembrance should not forget the thousands of children and young women who became the "lost" Armenians of the genocide. Whether accepted by compassionate neighbors or people along the infamous death trail to Der Zor, or taken in lust, these young Armenians were lost to their people and denied their birthright to grow up as Armenians. This should be a day when we pray for the progeny of these "lost" Armenians who are still our brothers and sisters living on the lands of their Armenian ancestors. And April 24th should remind us of the never-to-be-born generations of Armenians that the genocide forever took from us.

Not content with having shed the blood of some 1.5 million of our men, women, and children, Turkish forces mounted a final campaign to occupy what little remained of historic Armenia in their determination to complete the annihilation of our people. In the ensuing Battle of Sadarabad (May 1918) the Armenian forces were victorious. Within a few days following this epic victory, the first independent Republic of Armenia was established.

When the Treaty of Sevres was formulated the following year, an independent Armenia (Wilsonian Armenia) was created on our ancestral lands. Unfortunately, it was a country with few of its

rightful Armenian inhabitants. The newly formed Armenian Republic, beset with overwhelming problems—refugees, shortages of food, medicine, clothing, and housing, and the trauma of genocide—was in no position to claim its historic lands.

The rump government of Kemal Ataturk seated in Ankara summarily rejected the Treaty of Sevres, which Sultan Muhammad VI in Constantinople had signed. With little effective opposition to his nationalist message, Ataturk protected his eastern flank by agreement with the Russian Bolsheviks, thus freeing himself to reestablish Turkish control over an Anatolia that had been partitioned by the allied powers. Ataturk's ensuing military successes forced the scrapping of the Treaty of Sevres and its replacement by the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). It was recognition by the European victors of the Great War of the new reality in Anatolia. The present-day country of Turkey, successor to the defeated Ottoman Turkish Empire, was officially recognized as a sovereign state. The genocide of 1.5 million Armenians and the promised independent Wilsonian Armenia were forgotten.

The nascent Armenian Republic had collapsed earlier in 1920 under the combined burden of the socio-economic problems gen-

*We have become  
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that we fail to accept the  
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and Taalat Beys and the  
Ataturks who sought to  
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been defeated.*

erated by the genocide and the political subversion of the Russian Bolsheviks. The boundaries of the newly created Bolshevik Armenian Republic were redrawn to place Javakhk in Georgia, and Nakhitchevan and Artsakh in the newly created Bolshevik Republic of Azerbaijan, and by treaty ceded Kars-Ardahan to Turkey.

In the decades that followed, the determination and resiliency of our people allowed them to overcome what should have been an insurmountable tragedy. Their fortitude and will to survive has brought us to this April 24th, which, symbolically, falls on Easter Sunday. In our desire to honor our martyrs the subtext of our observance continues to be the demand for recognition. We seem willing

to ignore the fact that this is the 20th year of the second independent Republic of Armenia. We seem willing to ignore the fact that in Artsakh, our brothers and sisters were successful in their war for independence from a despotic Turkic-Azeri government. That during the nearly two decades of their freedom, they have developed a sustainable economy and a democratic government.

We are so fixated on the intransigence of Turkish leaders not recognizing the genocide that the miracle wrought by our survivors of the genocide is overlooked. Not only did they rebuild shattered lives, they created vibrant communities wherever good fortune or misfortune took them. Their efforts have made the diaspora a vital part of a resurrected Armenian nation. Through their efforts Armenia can no longer be viewed as a small, isolated, landlocked country, but a global nation whose people have created a web of vigorous and energetic communities in over 40 countries on every continent, linked emotionally and spiritually to the cultural hearth, *mer Hayasdan* (our Armenia).

April 24th should be an opportunity not only to remember our martyrs, but to honor them by dedicating ourselves to building a better and stronger *mayreni yergir* (motherland) and a better and stronger diaspora. Let us not devote this day to a lamentation of their deaths. That should not be the message of April 24th. We have become so obsessed emotionally with seeking recognition that we fail to accept the fact that the Enver Beys and Taalat Beys and the Ataturks who sought to destroy our nation have been defeated.

Today Erdogan looks to the east and sees an independent Armenia, while his Turkic brother in arms President Ilham Aliyev looks to the west and sees historic Armenian Artsakh resurrected. Today our Armenia is on the threshold of an exciting and challenging future. And it is up to each of us, if we care enough, to participate in shaping that future. That should be the message for this April 24th and every April 24th that follows.

Our martyrs would be proud of what their people have accomplished. And each of us, old and young alike, should be inspired as well. Genocide recognition is not the key to Armenia's future. A strong and secure Armenia is the key to the justice we rightfully seek. □

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# One Hundred Years of Abandonment

By Talin Suciyan and Ayda Erbal

**T**he history of the Ottoman Armenians in the 19th century<sup>1</sup> is a history of great promises but also of greater abandonment. More than 200 Ottoman-Armenian intellectuals who were arrested the night of April 24, 1915 and the two weeks that followed possessed the damning knowledge that they were left alone.

Zohrab's Unionist friends, with whom he had dined and played cards, would *choose* not to stop his assassination. But abandonment will not abandon the Armenians. The survivors in the camps of Mesopotamia were alone, as were those hiding in the secluded mountains or villages of Anatolia. And those who survived through conversion or forced concubinage were left alone not only in the summer of 1915, but also in the hundred years that have followed.

The surviving Istanbul-Armenians who staged a book-burning ceremony were on their own too.<sup>2</sup> Compelled to imitate the Nazi party's book-burning campaigns, they would gather in the backyard of Pangalti Armenian Church, build a book-burning altar, put Franz Werfel's *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, along with his picture on the altar, and burn it to the ground. As a last act of symbolic perversion forced upon them, they would not only denounce the author, but also denounce the book's content, hence denouncing themselves and denying their own history.

Hayganus Mark, Hagop Mintzuri, Aram Pehlivanian, Zaven Biberyan, Vartan and Jak Ihmalyan, and the less famous all shared a similar fate, which happened to be that of Hrant Dink too: abandonment.



Armenian community leaders laying a wreath on Republican Statue in 1965.

Likewise, when Armenians around the world gathered to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the genocide, the Istanbul Armenians found themselves in the middle of Taksim Square delivering wreaths to the Republican Statue in protest. The continuous and almost non-changing price of their survival would be their compulsory self-alienation from all other Armenians in the diaspora.<sup>3</sup>

Soon the mythical Anatolia, which is vainly romanticized and widely hailed today in Turkey,<sup>4</sup> would become an open-air prison of leftover Armenians during the Republican years. For, a handful of communities scattered around the country would not be able to perpetuate their identity as Armenians and would leave their birthplaces yet another time.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile in Istanbul, the remnants of a fading intellectual life Armenian journalists and writers, along with schools, churches, and foundations, would all be left to struggle alone against a myriad of verbal, physical, and legal attacks from both the government and Turkish intellectuals of their time. The price levied on the Armenians was extremely high and included not only a clear disengagement from a quest of justice for themselves, but also a clear—albeit forced—disengagement from their relatives in the diaspora. The never-spoken cost for Istanbul Armenians was the complete negation of their political identity and history.

One can argue that this survival strategy was the direct result of Republican nationalist policies regarding Turkey's minorities. Thus the contemporary Turkish practice of demonizing the assertive and politically demanding segments of the Armenian Diaspora falls squarely within the same Republican nationalist



framework that Istanbul Armenians historically embraced as a survival strategy. It's rather puzzling to see why otherwise completely equal non-Armenian Turkish citizens would appropriate this predominantly Turkish-Armenian strategy without questioning it. Additionally, the recent privileging of certain Diasporan Armenians as legitimate interlocutors in the Turkish-Armenian divide is a continuity of the same Republican nationalist mentality, because more often than not these privileged diaspora Armenians happen to be the ones who have chosen *not* to articulate any political demands.<sup>6</sup> A subtle, premeditated silencing of Armenians' legal and political demands, therefore, permeates both relations and the discourse, and leads to a further evasion from the issue that is, in essence, political.<sup>7</sup> Today, 103 years after 1908, the Armenian "Question" revolves around the same problem of legal, political, and social equality before the law, and equality also means that those involved in this quest should not be ostracized or demonized as a fifth column. Unfortunately, even the progressive segments of the Turkish society feel more comfortable when they are able to establish relationships with Armenians from a position of power, that is, when the Armenian interlocutor is speaking from a position of structural weakness.<sup>8</sup> Even though nowhere can diaspora Armenians match the kind of international power intellectuals from Turkey or the Turkish state can muster, politically active Armenians are perceived and represented as powerful. Furthermore, they are demonized as radicals and nationalists, and not represented as a people enjoying equal political rights in the countries they live in. To a great extent, then, solitude, although experienced differently, remains the most prominent characteristic of Armenian society both in Turkey and in the diaspora.

In this light, the contemporary discourse among Turkish intellectuals is far from being able to fully confront the institutional and societal history of hostility and discrimination against both domestic and Diaspora Armenians.<sup>9</sup> Although the scholarship over the past 15 years, stemming from a critical need to face recent history, is a welcome development, it mostly concentrates on crystallized instances of institutional discrimination, such as the 1942 wealth tax, compulsory military service for minorities (20 *kura askerlik*),<sup>10</sup> the events of Sept. 6–7, 1955, or the Dersim Massacres.<sup>11</sup> These discussions have often fallen short of grasping the issue of normalized discourses of essentialist patriotism and racism in their day-to-day representations.<sup>12</sup> To a certain extent, approaching these issues as isolated cases, as opposed to a deeply embedded systemic and ideological problem, contributed to the practices of discourse normalization.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, until the assassination of Hrant Dink, racism was a taboo word in Turkey. If anything, racism was either an American or European problem; certainly not one that intellectuals from Turkey should take seriously. Thus, efforts to keep racism far away from public awareness resulted in the domestication and cherry picking of issues, and the creation of pseudo-rival discourses—their nationalists vs. *our* nationalists (a false parity)—in dealing with the dark history of racism in Turkey.

In a similar vein, the complete avoidance of the Holocaust in public discourse, for example, or in rare instances its use to refute the Armenian case among leftist circles, is indicative of a political culture of either obscurantist or viciously pragmatic nature. For

example, the year 2011 marked the first Holocaust commemoration in Turkey during which the state message oscillated between emphasizing the uniqueness of the Jewish case and highlighting the Ottoman Imperial, and then Turkish Republican, tolerance and acceptance of Iberian, then European, Jews, instead of engaging in serious soul searching on the meaning of the Holocaust or the dark chapters of minority history in Turkey, including several waves of hostility against Turkish-Jews.

## ENTITLEMENT, ETHNICISM, RACISM

The debate over the term racism has come a long way since the Holocaust and the American civil rights movement. Theoretically speaking, American, continental, and Australian approaches to racism are not as much interested in dominative (old-fashioned) racism as they are in modern, normalized, ambivalent, aversive, laissez-faire, differential, and institutional forms of racism operating through *linguistic discursive tools* of othering or subordinating within an asymmetrical relationship of power.<sup>14</sup> Yet, it's hard to claim these academic and/or popular debates with all their contextual and non-contextual theoretical subtleties had any profound effect on intellectual life in Turkey.

Of relevance to this discussion in Turkey is the lack of proper problematization and of consciousness regarding everyday normalized racism<sup>15</sup> as the root cause of attitudes when dealing with Armenians in general, and minority history and personalities in particular. This general problem is exacerbated by the wide-scale ignorance of majority Ottoman Armenians' living conditions during the long 19th century and 1915 itself, and Turkish-Armenians' living conditions and survival strategies during Republican history. There has been neither an institutional nor societal acknowledgement of the racism<sup>16</sup> ingrained in the mainstream mindset, nor any wide-scale institutional measures to combat everyday racism manifesting itself in all its different sub-types. Yet, somehow, the intellectuals from the majority think they are, by definition, devoid of such bias.<sup>17</sup> Even if they admit the existence of racism in Turkey, they conceive it to be a problem of the right and centrist ideologies and not theirs.<sup>18</sup>

Some of these everyday attitudes manifest themselves in four major distinguishable forms of majority entitlement. The first concerns the screening, choosing, and separating of the "good Armenians" (Turkish Armenians plus a small number of Diasporan Armenians who don't prioritize genocide recognition) from the "bad Armenians" (those who push the recognition issue on the international agenda). In other words, interlocutors from Turkey still think that dialogue as such is a matter of finding either the apolitical or non-organized Armenians, or those Armenians who operate only from a position of weakness—either stemming from being a minority in Turkey or from a position of geographic dependency, such as Armenians from Armenia. Besides being an imperial practice akin to choosing to deal with the "house negroes," so to speak—a post-modern loyal *millet*, a reincarnated *millet-i sadika*—its regressive character is not limited to this. Implicit in this approach is the perception of politically assertive Armenians as *the* problem. Also it implies a wishful thinking that if all politically assertive

Armenians were gotten rid of, then the political problem of institutional discrimination and inequality that is still haunting Turkey would evaporate on its own. Yet, even if there were no significant Armenian political activity for recognition, the overall institutional commitment problem in post-1915 Turkey would be the same.<sup>19</sup> It's highly improbable that such mock deliberation geared towards avoiding the legal and political nature of the issue could deliver the sorely needed institutional outcomes in transitional political settings. As a matter of fact, aside from their non-identical religious characteristics, Turkey's Kurdish and Armenian "Question" have had similar trajectories because of Turkey's Turkish "Question," which either does not understand or does not care to solve the institutional problem of equality that has existed for over 200 years now. What Armenians think of other Armenians is completely irrelevant to the issue of Turkish state's much needed institutional commitments. Moreover, this practice is akin to a divide-and-rule colonial/imperial mindset, antithetical to human rights and equality. Trying to build a politics based on the instrumentalization of the inter-Armenian differences to delay justice cannot solve Turkey's problem of 1915. With or without the presence of these inter-Armenian differences, the necessity of implementing institutional changes and complying with human rights standards will remain the same. If anything, Kurdish political trajectory should be a grim reminder for those avoiding the core issues at hand.

The second problematic entitlement concerns the blurring of the difference between the perpetrator and the victim in order to water down the majority state and societal responsibility. This is done with two different, but interconnected, arguments, one concerning the past, the other concerning the present. The first is reminiscent of the late 1980's Historikerstreit discussion in Germany,<sup>20</sup> although the depth of the argument and counter-argument does not compare. A number of intellectuals, including Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, emphasize that Turks also suffered greatly in World War I, in general, and in 1915, in particular, especially in the case of the Gallipoli campaign. No one trained in comparative history denies the fact that the Ottoman Army experienced tremendous losses during World War I; however, this argument establishes a false parity, equating war to a state-sponsored campaign of killing its own citizens, and a false causality as if Ottoman Armenians were responsible either for the war itself or a major episodic campaign. The second argument, again mostly originating in conservative quarters in Turkey, but not limited to them, blurs the distinction between the victim and the perpetrator, and the subsequent generations' responsibilities by resorting to an "our common pain" argument—as in you suffered but we suffered too, because of your suffering. Apart from being a recent invention, this discourse of common pain reduces the perpetrators', bystanders', deniers' and their institutions' responsibility to "feel the pain." A symbolically violent appropriation of pain of an unimaginable magnitude, which even survivor generations are reluctant to own, the "feeling the pain"<sup>21</sup> discourse more often than not becomes a tool to absolve the institutional and societal inheritors from ethical and political consequences. We should recall Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," in which he writes: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are surely caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single

garment of destiny. Whatever affects one, affects all indirectly." Nowhere does King argue that one is entitled to own the other's pain as a substitute for, or as a means of diluting, political responsibility.

Thirdly, in rare cases where the victims' historical suffering is granted, a rather obscene sense of entitlement surfaces. The victims' interlocutor, itself the institutional and social inheritor of a generation of perpetrators, bystanders, or deniers, expects the descendants of the victims to speak in a way that will not make them feel bad. Despite placing an emphasis on empathy (itself a problematic term) and openness, the willingness to listen to Armenians is mostly conditional and carries the implied threat of "If you don't speak *properly* we won't listen to you." The burden of responsibility, thus, rather perversely falls on the shoulders of the historically victimized and structurally powerless; and the interlocutor, whose power and posture is the opposite result of the same history of gross human rights violations, comes to the discussion not as a truly interested party but as if doing a favor to the Armenians.

There is an additional relative silencing effect in the sense that the victim has to temper its discursive tone to *suit* and *prioritize* the emotional needs of its interlocutor *at large*—in this case, the emotional needs of the majority Turkish citizens, as decided upon by these same intellectuals. The entire discussion surrounding the usage of the term genocide, or the avoidance thereof, is a prime example. The mentality behind this "dialogue" is where the unequal and sometimes supremacist thrust of the equation becomes the most visible in the conditionality of the listening and the absolute power to shut down the dialogue if Armenians fail to find a proper language (and tone) to explain their pain.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, as a further frame of entitlement, a discourse of sameness is imposed upon Turkey's minorities.<sup>23</sup> By discourse of sameness, we mean a reductionist tendency whereby a supposed cultural similarity between Turks and Armenians, via food and music, is assumed and presented as an alternative to justice and equality before the law. This particular discourse, which may have a phenotypic (we look alike), cultural (our food and music are similar), and geographic (Anatolia) similarity argument, has a dangerous tint to it. It involves a pseudo-inclusion of Armenians in an imagined community in Anatolia where the dominant trait is a potentially exclusionary narcissism, which is able to love and respect only that which is similar to itself, and glorifies cultural similarity as a political solution. The regressive quality of the argument is more evident when turned upside down, since it's not very clear how it will treat difference, or what it will do if the minority party does not take the offer of similarity, or if it simply wants to insist on its difference. After all, during limited times when conversion was an option between 1895 and 1915, the majority of Armenians did not want to convert, and 1915, and the history leading to 1915, can also be read as one where Ottoman authorities did not want to deal seriously with the issue of difference and inferiority stemming from a dual legal framework of Sharia and Dhimmi Law. Moreover, the sameness argument indirectly hints at the suppression of differences for the sake of social harmony.<sup>24</sup>

All in all, especially the 19th century land romanticism of the sameness argument that takes Anatolia<sup>25</sup> as a common mythic location with ahistorical references to a peaceful, equal co-existence is

totally outdated, and cannot provide a solution to serious political issues. It can only be a conversation starter where it belongs—at the *rakil/arak/dolma* table. Rarely does one encounter such problematic self-orientalization<sup>26</sup> elsewhere. *Hummus*, as far as we know, does not have problem-solving powers nor does it have a place in serious academic or journalistic discussions within the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian divide. If the same cuisine and music has not been able to provide any tangible solution to the much lesser Kurdish-Turkish divide, one wonders how this untenable discourse of sameness will solve anything among Armenians and Turks.<sup>27</sup>

## HISTORY AS CIRCULAR NIGHTMARE

To a certain extent, the history of Ottoman and Ottoman Armenian, and Turkish—Armenian and Turkish—Turkish-Armenian is trapped in the same pre-1908 conundrum of equality before the law and how to deal with difference. On one side of the equation are those who are, still in this day and age, either totally unwilling or reluctant to accept that Armenians have a right to political agency and equality before the law (then domestic Ottoman, now several international polities).<sup>28</sup> On the other side of the equation are those who understand what political action means in order to secure justice and equality. Neither side is made solely of Turks or solely of Armenians. Although the latter is mostly made of Armenians, there are a few scholars and human rights activists from Turkey, both in the U.S., Europe, and Turkey, who do not shy away from the politics of recognition. They know recognition is not just a onetime deal, some sort of a ticket to oblivion, but only the first step in a long struggle of institutional commitments affecting the human rights and history curricula in all countries where there is a substantial political debate on recognitions and denials.

The inability to get out of the circularity of a pre-1908 mentality sets the boundaries of Turkish-Armenian citizens as well, unfortunately. Since there is not any real coming to terms with the past, Turkish-Armenian citizens are still perceived as a fifth column in general, and still have to distance themselves from the diaspora in order to be heard. Instead of dealing with institutional barriers, there is a novel but archaic tendency where the state looks mostly concerned with window-dressing solutions. Efforts are being made to appoint Turkish-Armenian citizens to state positions in order to partially counter the critics of structural inequality. At this point, one has to remember that there were more than two-dozen Armenians who worked as high-level Ottoman officials before 1915; that alone was not indicative of a commitment to equality and human rights. If anything, the same pre-1908 mentality conditioned, and still to a certain extent conditions, the set of political choices for Turkish-Armenians briefly touched upon at the beginning of this article. So coming to terms with history is the only way for Turkish-Armenians to cease to be perceived as fifth columns and to become fully equal citizens.

In light of the discussion above, the fact that Hrant Dink was assassinated for, among other things, calling a spade a spade, and that he continued to be tried in absentia even after his assassination for daring to describe his experience, shows that it's impossi-

ble to be a Turkish-Armenian freely able to describe his/her experience publicly. The victim has been further victimized while trying to qualify the legal and political magnitude of his victimhood. The intellectuals from Turkey cannot pretend that January 19, 2007 does not signify a major rupture. This rupture requires a reevaluation and much deeper understanding of the Republican history of Turkish-Armenian strategies of survival.

If Turkey ever could approach the issue of 1915 from the perspective of justice, a justice frame that also includes calling a spade a spade just as Hrant did, on that day, justice will prevail in the case of assassination of Hrant Dink as well. Further, by doing so, Turkey would be able to approach and perhaps even lighten the heavy burden of the loneliness of the Armenians in their own country *and* in the diaspora. □

## ENDNOTES

- 1 For an elaborate and foretelling socio-political analysis written during the 19th century and recently translated to English, see Raffi (Hagop Melik Hagopian)'s *Tajkahayk: The Armenian Question* (Taderon Press, 2007).
- 2 See Bali, Rifat (2001), *Musa's Children, The Republic's Citizens*, p. 133, for the burning of *The Forty Day of Musa Dagh*. Not surprisingly as an author Franz Werfel was also on the Nazi book-burning list.
- 3 Aharonyan, Kersam (1966), *Khoher Hisnamyagi Avaridin* ("Thoughts on the 50th Commemoration"), p. 149.
- 4 Most writers and journalists from Turkey refer to an imagined idyllic Anatolia when addressing diaspora Armenians to emphasize their "shared" background. This imagined Anatolia is a mostly Republican-leftist ideological construct that's not even similar to contemporary Anatolia that predominantly votes to the right and far-right of the political spectrum. If anything, in domestic discourse not involving Armenians, this same Anatolia is loathed by some proponents of the heavenly Anatolia construct. They romanticize an Anatolia populated by Armenian artists, musicians, and architects, whom they would prefer over what they perceive as the current primitive inhabitants. However historically speaking, neither all Armenian life was artistic and modern (see Matossian and Villa's *Armenian Village Life before 1914*), nor Anatolia has ever been an idyllic place of peaceful "co-existence" in the century and a half preceding 1915.
- 5 Their offspring would become Istanbul Armenians and this would literally be the end of Armenian life in Anatolia.
- 6 Before 2006, the only good Armenians were Turkish-Armenians. Later, a number of mostly European diaspora Armenians were embraced as legitimate interlocutors. This attempt at bait and switch through instrumentalizing ethnic identity is a textbook example of colonial/imperial regressive policy.
- 7 We do not deny nor neglect that the equation has other dimensions as well; however, those dimensions are framed by politics and even in the case of supposedly non-political arguments, a politics of either denial or negation or complete avoidance continues to permeate the discourse.
- 8 Or when the Armenian interlocutor is ready to equally criticize Armenians seeking genocide recognition, or in some cases even treat them as sick and obsessed people. Even if it's politically incorrect, indeed racist, to frame justice-seeking people as psychologically disturbed, somehow it has so far been acceptable for some Turkish intellectuals, especially if the claimant is Armenian. One needs to think seriously what all this means from a politico-philosophical and socio-psychological perspective. What does it mean to validate an otherwise very problematic argument just because an Armenian is making it? How this kind of 'seeing ethnicity before the argument' is different than seeing like a perpetrator state that reduced human beings to their ethnic identity alone.



- 9 Although one may be inclined to think so, the ASALA attacks are not the starting point for open hostility against diaspora Armenians. Also, the earlier indifference towards 1915 is rather strange given the fact that Kemal Tahir was a widely read novelist in the early 1970's; Tahir published not one but two novels dealing with 1915, neither of which has been translated into Armenian or English. So the rather common argument "We did not know" does not hold, at least for anybody who was above 18 and reading novels in the early 1970's.
- 10 20 Kura Askerlik was the compulsory second or third time military conscription of non-Muslim citizens of Turkey during World War II. Non-Muslim citizens between the ages of 25 and 45 were kept away from workforce for over 14 months and the subsequent wealth tax levied on the minorities with outrageous rates (232 percent for Armenians, 179 percent for Jews, 156 percent for Greeks and 10 percent for the Donme (converts)) impoverished them further.
- 11 In February 2011, the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) submitted a petition to the Turkish Parliament to recognize the massacres and deportations that took place between 1937-38 as genocide.
- 12 Seyhan Bayraktar's *Politik und Erinnerung: Der Diskurs über den Armeniermord in der Türkei zwischen Nationalismus und Europäisierung*, published in 2010, is the only exception. She vigilantly examines how discourse frames of the state and intellectuals can sometimes partially overlap or serve to reproduce nationalist discourse frames.
- 13 By discourse normalization we mean all those discursive practices that unproblematically reproduce bias against politically active diaspora Armenians. The leftist/liberal discourse is where demonization of political activity is overtly normalized.
- 14 For an extended debate on the evolution of the term racism/ethnicism and comparative contexts, see Martha Augoustinos and Katherine J. Reynolds (2001), *Understanding Prejudice, Racism, and Social Conflict*; Jennifer Lynn Eberhardt and Susan T. Fiske (1998), *Confronting Racism: the Problem and the Response*; Arthur P. Brief (2008), *Diversity at Work*; John Nagle (2009), *Multiculturalism's Double Bind: Creating Inclusivity, Cosmopolitanism and Difference*; Robert Miles and Malcolm Brown (2003), *Racism (2nd edition)*; Martin Bulmer and John Solomos (2004), *Researching Race and Racism*; Pierre-Andre Taguieff and Hassan Melehy (2001), *Force of Prejudice: On Racism and its Doubles*; Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl (2000), *Discourse & Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*.
- 15 According to Wodak and Reisigl, racist, anti-Semitic, and ethnicist discrimination as a social practice, and as an ideology, manifests itself discursively and is orientated to five simple questions revolving around referential strategies (how are persons named and referred to linguistically?), predication strategies (what traits, characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to them?), argumentation strategies (by means of what arguments and argumentation schemes do specific persons or social groups try to justify and legitimate the exclusion, discrimination, suppression, and exploitation of others?), perspectivation and framing strategies (from what perspective or point of view are these attributions and arguments expressed?), mitigation and intensification strategies (are the respective discriminating utterances articulated overtly, are they even intensified or are they mitigated?), *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*, p. xiii.
- 16 "The concept of 'everyday racism' is intended to integrate, by definition, macro and microsociological dimensions of racism (Essed 1991: 16). After having criticised the dichotomic distinction between 'institutional' and 'individual racism' as erroneously placing the individual outside the institutional (even though 'structures of racism do not exist external to agents—they are made by agents—but specific practices are by definition racist only when they activate existing structural racial inequality in the system' [36]), Essed explains her understanding of the term 'everyday': [...] the 'everyday' can be tentatively defined as socialised meanings making practices immediately definable and uncontested so that, in principle, these practices can be managed according to (sub)cultural norms and expectations. (48–9)." Essed in Wodak and Reisigl, p. 7.
- 17 Minorities are not devoid of such bias against the majority themselves; yet these biases are structurally and causally not identical and need a separate discussion.
- 18 Several websites and reports on discriminatory speech only deal with mainstream right/conservative press while completely neglect the essentialism of those liberal or leftist columnists.
- 19 Institutions do not become post-genocidal on their own, especially when denial persists. The Armenian and the Kurdish issues are deeply related because of the lack of institutional commitment on the part of the Turkish state and the society to a post-genocidal normative order. As anti-Muslim sentiment and persisting anti-semitism in Europe show that institutional commitments are not an end in themselves. The struggle against all forms of open and subtle racism is an everyday matter of vigilance.
- 20 This was a debate central to the late 1980's Germany revolving around left and right-wing interpretations of the Holocaust, particularly about its centrality in modern German history. The right-wingers downplayed the long trajectory of anti-semitism embedded in German society and institutions.
- 21 Not surprisingly, the discourse of "feeling the pain" as an end in itself is reserved for Armenians and in no way is central to the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, because Kurds present Turkey with a real political challenge that most Turkish intellectuals cannot evade anymore.
- 22 This power dynamic is not unique to the intellectuals' relationship to Armenians, as it also applies to their relationship with others, including their historically ambivalent relationship with the Kurdish citizens of Turkey. For years Turkish intellectuals demanded the complete denunciation of the armed struggle first before engaging Kurdish intellectuals. This changed only very recently.
- 23 This has been also echoed from both Turkish-Armenian and a few diaspora Armenian quarters.
- 24 In domestic politics, AKP proponents and secularists are not "all the same," but somehow when it comes to essentialist categories of Turks and Armenians, they "become" the "same."
- 25 19th-century land romanticism is what ties some mainstream leftist Turks to the mainstream Armenian perceptions of land. However, what is perceived as bad for Armenians (as a "nationalist" longing) is good and desirable for Turkish "patriots." At their core, Turkish "patriotic" and Armenian "nationalist" Anatolia/Western Armenia are non-identical but equally nationalistic-romantic mythical constructions. No Anatolianist Turkish leftist lives in Anatolia or has ever spent a considerable amount of time actually living in this mythical Anatolia. As for the Kurds, they have practically lived in dire conditions of armed conflict and internal displacement in this very romanticized Anatolia.
- 26 Orientalism is not just about what the West thought of the East and how it constructed representations of the East. It also has several self-orientalizing dimensions in which the East tends to perfectly reflect the stereotype of being "Eastern"—hence lesser. So, Westerners have institutions and law, and there is always *raki* and *dolma* for Turks and Armenians.
- 27 If one is to take this sameness argument seriously then one has to also explain how sameness was able to kill sameness.
- 28 One major emphasis when talking about 1915 revolves around the "but the Armenians revolted" argument. Historically speaking, this is true, although its magnitude and prevalence is grossly exaggerated. However, framing the history of violence starting from the Armenian revolts misses several important points: The terrible living conditions of Armenians in the 19th century, the episodic violence that Armenians experienced, the fact that they also tried parallel tracks of petitioning but their appeals fell on deaf ears, and finally, the fact that the Ittihadists themselves were trying to get rid of the same absolutist regime. In a way, those Turkish intellectuals who are themselves active in domestic politics but who are not happy with Armenian political activity challenging the status-quo are still arguing in the same utterly discriminatory way: "We can do it, but *you* should not."

# ‘Reparations’ as an Essential Element of any *Just* Resolution of Genocide

By Henry C. Theriault

For decades, the issue of reparations was largely absent from the discourse on the Armenian Genocide. For some, it was implicit in the issue. Once the case was recognized widely as genocide, they expected that reparations could become a central part of the discourse. For others, the notion was an impossible pipedream or a destabilizing fantasy. Mention of it betrayed a “nationalist” agenda and interfered with practical attempts to get international and ultimately Turkish recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

A decade ago, many of those considering the issue of the Armenian Genocide, including some deniers, recognized that some kind of development on the issue was necessary. Desires for a resolution of the issue were loaded into a vague notion of “dialogue” that dominated for a number of years. Dialogue about dialogue, however, did not engage substantively the issue of justice—or, in fact, that of differential power between Turks and Armenians in their national dimensions.<sup>1</sup> Some in the Armenian community, echoed by a few voices in Turkey such as Ragıp Zarakolu and Temel Demirer, raised this challenge. The Armenian Genocide should be addressed not with just any resolution, but with a *just* resolution.

By perhaps three years ago, a critical mass of Armenians followed other victim groups in recognizing the importance of justness in any resolution of genocide, slavery, Apartheid, etc., and reparations as the most obvious and productive means of gaining that justice. As a result, reparations is now recognized as a legitimate concern regarding the Armenian Genocide. While in previous eras, the question was whether or not the concept of reparations would even be allowed a minimal presence in discourse concerning the Armenian Genocide, the issue is now no longer whether reparations for the genocide will be a topic of discussion, but instead whether reparations are a

requirement for a just, long-term resolution of the Armenian Genocide. Some scholars and activists, Turkish and Armenian community members, and others still reject reparations as a component of a just resolution, but even they now recognize that formulation of a legitimate plan for resolution of the Armenian Genocide issue must go through a consideration of reparations.

And so the reparations question is now on the radar screen of those inside and out of the global Armenian community, as well as scholars, political activists, and others who take up the genocide

as a contemporary issue. The increase in community discussion of reparations has, however, been undermined somewhat by a lack of clarity regarding what the term “reparations” means. There are, in fact, two very different concepts operating. The conflation of the concepts can be an innocent simplification of the issue, but it can also serve the cause of those who are against the second, more meaningful form of reparations.

The first concept of reparations is as individual compensation for particular material losses resulting from actions taken by members of the perpetrator group during the Armenian Genocide. While the harms referenced were certainly genocidal, and recognition of the Armenian Genocide would be helpful support for making the case that these individuals experienced unjust losses during the genocide period—of movable or fixed property that would have been available for inheritance by their descendants, and so the property in question should be returned or compensated in the present—such returns or compensation would not be reparation for the Armenian Genocide itself. It is this form of reparation that is the subject of recent lawsuits filed in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

The second concept views reparations as a possible form of justice for the overall Armenian Genocide, taken as a single, cohesive

process of destruction planned and orchestrated by a set of people, executed by a broader set of participants, and targeting Armenians generally.<sup>3</sup> While reparation is not an exclusive form of justice for the genocide, because such things as criminal punishment are no longer possible, it is now a focal point. The key goal of reparations thus conceived is rehabilitation. “Rehabilitation” has two dimensions here: First is rehabilitation of the perpetrator society away from the genocidal elements that were embedded through broad elite and common participation in the genocide, and that have persisted in the military, political, economic, and cultural institutions and practices of the Turkish state and society since, because they have never been exposed for what they are and expunged. Second is rehabilitation of the victim group that continues to suffer and be disadvantaged in significant ways that are a direct result of the Armenian Genocide.

What are the outstanding unjust benefit and harms of the genocide that reparations would address? Turks today enjoy economic power built in part on the massive amount of expropriated wealth taken from Armenians and on land depopulated of Armenians. Not only has the wealth been passed down through the generations, it has been the basis for further economic development. This gain has been matched by the increasing loss of not only the initial wealth and land, but all the economic gains that would have been made with it by Armenians. Similarly, Turkey is a major regional power, with political supremacy and a large territory and population. Had no genocide occurred, or even a genocide occurred but Turkish nationalists left the new Armenian Republic alone after World War I, then Armenia would be much larger territorially and thus much more sustainable and secure than the small landlocked country now is. A large state would have supported much greater population growth. It would have provided a safer and more secure place for the development of Armenian families and communities by survivors. This would have allowed survivors, including refugees who had fled far and Armenians forcibly Turkified during the Genocide, the space in which to reclaim their identity and rebuild their lives and communities. The population of this larger Armenian Republic might have been 20 million today, making Armenia a secure regional power next to a Turkey smaller than its current population.<sup>4</sup>

This in turn would have meant a very different power relation between Armenia/Armenians and Turkey. For instance, with both having large territories and populations, it would be much more difficult if not impossible for Turkey to impose a blockade on Armenia, however much ethnic hatred might exist against Armenians. Turkey would have to treat Armenia and Armenians, including those within its borders, with at least outward shows of respect and care. Instead, today, as a result of the dominance existing under the *millet* system and maximized through the assertion of absolute Turkish power over life and property of Armenians through the genocide, Turkey and Turks exercise significant power over Armenia and Armenians in Turkey and around the world. They can denigrate Armenians, deny the genocide, interfere with the functioning of the Armenian state, and more, without consequences. They can destroy the Armenian cultural and architectural heritage still remaining in Turkey with impunity.<sup>5</sup> Armenians around the world remain subject to an asymmetrical domination relation that shows how much the genocide

consolidated and extended the previous *millet* system.<sup>6</sup> The “independence” of the Armenian Republic means only a constant struggle for survival and against forces of repression by a much more powerful—and unfairly powerful—Turkish state and society. Perhaps the most difficult irony to face is that much of the power of Turkey and Turks now deployed to further oppress Armenians is the direct or indirect product of the genocide.

Individual and culturally and institutionally embedded attitudes against Armenians persist in Turkey as well. According to these attitudes, Armenians are still fit targets of violence and frustration, and if an Armenian acts as an equal of a Turk—even in “progressive” Turkish circles—and demands to be treated as an equal human being with dignity and autonomy and to have his/her rights respected out of abstract ethical principle, not the whims of his/her overlords, s/he is subject to anger, hatred, and reprisals.<sup>7</sup> Many Turks actually perceive Armenians acting as their equals as Armenians asserting dominance over Turks, because the presumption of Turkish superiority over Armenians is so deeply entrenched in Turkish culture,<sup>8</sup> the culture that teaches its basic values to generation after generation of Turks.

To these effects of the genocide today, of course, many more can be added, not the least of which is the loss of 1.5 million Armenians who were killed and all those Armenians who would have been born to them, or their children, grandchildren, etc. There is also the suffering of tens of thousands of women and girls, as well as some boys, forced into sexual and/or domestic slavery. To this can further be added the effects of the trauma of genocide victimization for survivors and later generations.<sup>9</sup> And so on.

As conceived by the Armenian Genocide Reparations Study Group and explained in its draft report,<sup>10</sup> the second form of reparations seeks to address these kinds of losses/gains, imbalances/dominations, and their continuing effects through a complex set of financial, territorial, educational, social, and symbolic initiatives. Reparations are not about a cash payment, for instance, though financial compensation should be part of the comprehensive approach. Instead, reparations are about the Turkish state and society taking responsibility for the ways in which they have benefited from the Genocide territorially, economically, politically, militarily, etc., and how much Armenians continue to be affected in terms of their identity, psychologies, culture, political prospects, economics, and more; reparations are about addressing both the morally wrong benefits and the desperate political and material needs of Armenians and their undermined identity and dignity resulting from the Genocide. These problems must be addressed, if not fully, at least to a reasonable degree, to change the horrific legacy of the Armenian Genocide. Reparations are the most appropriate means to do this.<sup>11</sup> Offering substantive reparations would be a choice by the Turkish state and society to make some kind of meaningful sacrifice to share the burden of genocide in some very partial ways with Armenians, for whom the burden will always be much more than for Turks, even if Turks do as much as possible to address the genocide’s outstanding harms.

It is certainly true that the effects of genocidal violence and individual property theft have deeply affected specific Armenian individuals and families, and have been intertwined with the effects of the overall genocidal process for many Armenian individuals. At the



same time, these two approaches to reparations are profoundly different, and in the coming discussions and debates about reparations must be kept clearly distinct. As more than a century of bitter experience with Turkish denial (starting in relation to the massacres of 1894–96) should have taught Armenians and others concerned with Armenians' basic just existence, in the emerging debate on Armenian Genocide reparations, there will be those supporting Turkish impunity and genocidal gain who will do all they can to confuse the reparations issue. There will also be those in the Armenian community who for their own agendas will subvert and manipulate discussions about reparations and any reparations process that ultimately comes out of them. While pursuit of individual compensation is an individual choice and no individual should be prevented from doing so by any kind of pressure, but should be supported in such endeavors, individual compensation lawsuits and related approaches should never be mistaken for a comprehensive reparations process toward justice for the Armenian Genocide. Successful individual claims should never be misrepresented as justice for the genocide and used to interfere with pursuit of justice. Individual suits could produce justice, but only justice for individual wrongful killings and wrongful thefts, not the whole genocide. Even class-action suits remain aggregations of individual concerns. Individual reparations payments go to individual Armenians. There is no requirement that they benefit any other Armenians or Armenian social, cultural, and political institutions and structures. Even if suit winners donate what they are awarded to Armenian organizations or invest them in the Armenian Republic, this still remains a private choice and activity that cannot address the Armenian Genocide on the broad political, cultural, and psychological levels it affects so deeply. Individual reparations as simply lawsuit processes do not function symbolically as justice. They cannot drive social rehabilitation in Turkey or support repair to the dignity and human worth of Armenians as Armenians. Such individual efforts at most complement rather than replace a broader, justice-focused approach.

The difference between these two concepts of reparations goes to the very core of genocide. There is a long-standing philosophical debate over whether groups are aggregates of individuals or have aspects that are not reducible to properties of the individuals who make them up. In specific terms, is the harming of a group merely the harming of each or many individuals within it, or are there added dimensions such that we can differentiate truly group harm from individual harm? Is justice for a group simply a just resolution for each member of the group, or is there something more that concerns the group that cannot be reduced to individual results? It would seem that this is the fault line between the two forms of reparation discussed in this paper, but this is not the case. Even those who reject the notion of "group harm" as anything more than an aggregate of individual harms recognize that when a group of individuals—with its social, cultural, and political interdependencies, shared interests, etc.—is harmed, the harm to the group as it affects individuals (they each lose aspects of their identity, dignity, social support network, supports for economic livelihoods, possibilities for political impact, etc.) is not simply a set of individual harms as would exist were there no group.<sup>12</sup> The loss of the group is an individual harm, but not like individual harms in the absence of a group. As Raphael Lemkin, who

coined the term "genocide" in 1943, conceived it, "genocide" is the destruction not just of the physical lives of a population but of the "essential foundations of the life of national groups," including "the disintegration of the political and social institutions of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups."<sup>13</sup> Addressing the Armenian Genocide requires addressing these harms, which means supporting reconstitution of the group structure insofar as it supports individual wellbeing. Individual compensation might help an individual balance a genocide's long-term impact on him/her, but it will not support reconstitution of the group itself. Group reparation is required for this. And, if group reparation is required to address the harm of genocide as genocide—that is, as a group harm—then a just resolution of a genocide must include a reparative dimension. □

## NOTES

- 1 For an analysis of the Turkish-Armenian asymmetrical domination relation maximized through the Armenian Genocide and left intact ever since, see Theriault, "Genocide, Denial, and Domination: Armenian-Turkish Relations From Conflict Resolution to Just Transformation," *Journal of African Conflicts and Peace Studies* 1:2 (September 2009), 82–96.
- 2 See, for instance, "Armenian Americans Sue Turkey for Genocide Losses," *The Armenian Weekly*, July 30, 2010, [www.armenianweekly.com/2010/07/30/armenian-americans-sue-turkey-for-genocide-losses](http://www.armenianweekly.com/2010/07/30/armenian-americans-sue-turkey-for-genocide-losses).
- 3 The same Committee of Union and Progress/Young Turk genocidal process directed toward the destruction of Armenians targeted Assyrians and Greeks. While the present paper is focused on reparations for Armenians and the author does not have the expertise or standing to make claims about how Assyrians or Greeks should engage a reparations process, the basis of any reparations claims by Assyrians or Greeks, or made on their behalf, is the same basis of genocide that undergirds Armenian claims.
- 4 Alfred de Zayas, Jermaine McCalpin, Ara Papian, and Henry Theriault, *Resolution With Justice—Reparations for the Armenian Genocide: The Report of the Armenian Genocide Reparations Study Group*, unpublished draft, Oct. 20, 2010.
- 5 Dickran Kouymjian, "Confiscation of Armenian Property and the Destruction of Armenian Historical Monuments as a Manifestation of the Genocidal Process," Armenian Studies Program/California State University, Fresno, <http://armenianstudies.csufresno.edu/faculty/kouymjian/articles/confiscation.htm>.
- 6 Theriault, "Post-Genocide Imperial Domination," in Khatchig Mouradian, editor, *Controversy and Debate: Special Armenian Genocide Insert of the Armenian Weekly*, April 24, 2007, pp. 6–8, 26.
- 7 Hrant Dink's assassination is an example of this.
- 8 Theriault, "Rethinking Dehumanization in Genocide" in Richard G. Hovannissian, editor, *The Armenian Genocide: Cultural and Ethical Legacies* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Press, 2007), pp. 27–40.
- 9 See, for instance, Anie Kalayjian, Siroon P. Shahinian, E.L. Gergerian, and L. Saraydian, "Coping with Ottoman Turkish Genocide: An Exploration of the Experience of Armenian Survivors," *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 9 (1996): 87–97.
- 10 De Zayas et al, *op. cit.*
- 11 See, for instance, Theriault, "Reparations as the Necessary Path to Improved Armenian-Turkish Relations," paper presented as part of the "Issue of Reinstating the Rights of the Armenian People and Armenian-Turkish Relations" panel at the Pan-Armenian Conference for the Discussion of Armenian-Turkish Relations and the Artsakh Conflict, Parliament Building, Stepanakert, Republic of Mountainous Karabakh, July 10, 2009.
- 12 See, as an example, Stephen Winter, "On the Possibilities of Group Injury," in Claudia Card and Armen Marsoobian, editors, *Genocide's Aftermath: Responsibility and Repair* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 111–131.
- 13 Israel Charny, "Classification of Genocide in Multiple Categories," in Charny, editor, *The Encyclopedia of Genocide*, Vol. 1 (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1999), pp. 3–7 at 5.