

# The Armenian Weekly

APRIL 2012

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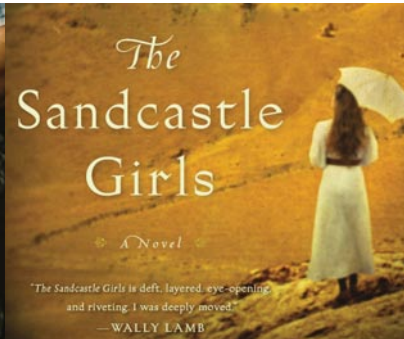
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# The Armenian Weekly

APRIL 2012



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## Editor's Desk

## The Power of Words

BY KHATCHIG MOURADIAN

Mark Twain once said, “The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug.” Over the years, the April magazine issue of the Armenian Weekly has provided extensive space to the topic of choosing the right words and adopting the proper discourse—a challenge that seems to pervade much of the writing on minorities, gender, human rights violations, and genocide.

The magazine you hold in your hands (or are reading on your computer/smartphone screen) tackles this challenge head on. For example, Theriault examines “the commitment to denial,” non-denial, and the space in between, and points out how denialism conceals truth in a “multiplicitous ambiguity,” where “all discussions of mass violence in the present [become] mutual military

conflict, and in the past mutual rhetorical conflict.” Mamigonian looks at how “[i]nstead of confronting the genocide head-on, deniers play upon widespread ignorance of the subject and seek to create doubt,” which is then propagated by lazy journalism. Gursel, in turn, explores problematic discourses by looking at representations of the Armenian Diaspora in Turkish newspapers, tearing apart disease, psychological illness, and rape analogies.

In 2011–12, novels, plays, and films approaching the Armenian Genocide from different vantage points have been or will be released. We have asked a playwright, a novelist, and a filmmaker to tell the story of how their work took shape. The power of their words and the themes they explore echo the issues raised above.

And finally, a third section in the magazine examines perceptions of and discourse on Armenians—as genocide victims, as refugees, and as citizens in an unrepentant perpetrator state—in the early- and mid-20th century, and how those perceptions resonate today.



# Contributors



**Seda Altug** teaches at Bosphorus University. Her dissertation is entitled “Sectarianism in the Syrian Jazira: Community, land, and violence in the memories of World War I and the French mandate (1915–39).” Her research interests are state-society relations, and minority issues in colonial and post-colonial Syria.

**Matthias Bjørnlund** is a Danish archival historian specializing in the Armenian Genocide. He currently teaches at the Danish Institute for Study Abroad (DIS) in Copenhagen.



**Chris Bohjalian** is the author of 15 books, including the New York Times bestsellers *The Night Strangers*, *Secrets of Eden*, *Skeletons at the Feast*, *The Double Bind*, *Before You Know Kindness*, *The Law of Similars*, and *Midwives*. His work has been translated into over 25 languages and 3 times have become movies. Bohjalian’s novel of the Armenian Genocide, *The Sandcastle Girls*, arrives on July 17.



**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 and received her degrees from the University of Chicago and the University of Pennsylvania (comparative literature). In 2011 she held a postdoctoral fellowship at Forum Transregionale Studien, Berlin.



**Suzanne Khardalian** is a documentary filmmaker based in Stockholm, Sweden. Her films include “Back to Ararat,” “I Hate Dogs,” and “Grandma’s Tattoos.” She contributes regularly to Armenian-language newspapers.

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



**Harut Sassounian** is the publisher of the *California Courier*, a weekly newspaper based in Glendale, Calif. He has a master’s degree in international affairs from Columbia University and an MBA from Pepperdine.

**Talin Suciyan** is an Armenian from Istanbul, currently based in Munich pursuing her Ph.D. She works as a teaching fellow at Ludwig Maximilian University, in the Institute of Near and Middle Eastern Studies.



**Henry C. Theriault** earned his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Massachusetts. He is currently professor in the philosophy department at Worcester State University. Since 2007, he has served as co-editor-in-chief of the peer-reviewed journal “Genocide Studies and Prevention.”

**Uğur Ümit Üngör** is assistant professor at the department of history of Utrecht University and at the Institute for War and Genocide Studies in Amsterdam. His recent publications include *Confiscation and Destruction: The Young Turk Seizure of Armenian Property* (Continuum, 2011) and *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913–1950* (Oxford University Press, 2011).



**Joyce Van Dyke** is a playwright and descendant of Armenian Genocide survivors. She is the author of “Deported / a dream play” and “A Girl’s War,” a story of love and war set in Karabagh which has received multiple productions and awards and was published in *Contemporary Armenian American Drama* (2004). Her play, “The Oil Thief,” won Boston’s Elliot Norton Award for best new play in 2009.

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TABOOS, TATTOOS, & TRAUMA

## Making 'Grandma's Tattoos'

By Suzanne Khardalian



I have a tree, my own tree in Stockholm. A dead oak tree. Majestic from a distance. Yet it holds as its secret the big hole inside its trunk. You will not see it unless you climb down and examine it closely. This magnificent oak has still kept its form. The beautiful woody branches still rise to the sky. But the tree is dead; it has been dead for more than a decade. It is a monument to things gone. And it is mute; you will not hear its leaves murmur. I am surprised no one has decided to cut it down.

The tree has lost its roots, just like me. It is standing with no roots. Living yet dead. Just like my culture, my mother tongue.

I am full of dying or dead words. A lifeless existence. On my way to being extinct.

Why am I writing about my tree? The oak evokes in me a world that is disappearing. But what fascinates me is this unique state, of being half dead, half alive. What does a dead tree have to offer? Not life!

Herein are the origins of my interest in memory and its reflections in my work.

Why do we remember things? What is memory? What is it that we choose to remember, and what do we decide to forget? Do we even decide? How much can we influence the process of memory-making?

And why do we remember genocide? Why do we want to remember the pain? Why do we want to pass it on? Is there anything at all to learn from genocide?

And what about selective amnesia? Why do we decide to remember certain stories about the Armenian Genocide, but have difficulty even mentioning some others?

I've been grappling with these questions for more than two decades now. They are at the core of my films.

In documentary film and photography, one is inclined to associate pictures or film sequences and frames with a specific depiction of history. We call it a "slice of time," or sometimes "frozen moments." From this perspective, frozen moments are nothing but flat constructions that we pick randomly from a constant flow of events. And shooting a film means stopping time in artificial ways. But reality is something else: Time is a machine that is moving us, the film viewers, hopping randomly from one event to another, while still sailing the stream.

This is how Heraclitus looked at history and time: "Just as the river where I step is not the same, and is, so I am as I am not." He was attempting to understand history through channeling world events into one big coherent unit, harmonious and consequential. But the camera gives us the opposite picture. It makes time look fragmented. There is no one big river, flowing. It makes us believe that there is no one big narrative, and therefore no place for the art of narration, storytelling.

Yet, Democritus understood time as a big ocean and waves, as big and small explosions, a sea of eruptions. Each event is unique, and independent. There are only free atoms flying around us. In contrast to the first concept, instead of a flowing river, the privilege here goes to unique moments.

So what happens when we look at film as a series of eruptions? This has been the model I've worked with in my films. I see it as an exciting thought that could open the door for new interpretation. According to conventional storytelling, the camera fragments time and consequently the world. But we can never say what came before or after a certain fragment. Time as a sea of eruptions gives us the possibility to see each picture as an entity, freely moving in space and time.

Heraclitus' and Democritus' concepts of time do not contradict each other. Photos are not frozen moments but instead are a "state of things." And film becomes a machine that translates this "state of things" into a series of scenes.

I made this short parentheses about time in order to reflect on my work that has long had the Armenian Genocide as its subject. When making "Back to Ararat," "I Hate Dogs," and "Grandma's Tattoos," I consciously tried not to limit myself to the traditional art of storytelling, and to instead show that the depiction of the genocide does not come in sequences, but as explosive outbursts.

Film not only makes it possible to capture these violent eruptions, but also encapsulates the power that lies within these outbursts. Only then can we understand the power that the survivors' stories carry.

Documentary filmmaking has never been about packaging and storing time, but for me it *has* been about giving the viewer access to an experience that is pressing and distinct in its nature. And my intention has been to capture fragments of traumatic time. Every frame, each picture, each scene, is a standpoint that reminds the audience that in reality there is no room for ready-made solutions.



The filmmaker in Der Zor

There is a connection between the camera and the structure and functioning of traumatic memory. Trauma is disorder in time and memory. Trauma is not the product of the event itself, but is the creation of the experience that, although registered by the individual, never evolves into meaningful memory. Trauma blocks the routine mental processes that usually translate an experience into a memory. Documentary film can give access to an experience that cannot be recalled, but that, at the same time, cannot be forgotten. Film has the potential to

urge the viewer to confront a past moment—one that has been lived, but never internalized, and thus never understood.

The genocide has turned into a collective trauma for us Armenians. In an historical reality such as genocide, there are no simple ways to access the truth. I have tried to capture those persistent uncertainties, the fears and doubts that are still not dealt with, the unresolved issues. I have worked extensively with survivors. Their recollections, their fragmented stories tell about the unique experience, yet with no cohesion and context. They give us a series of eruptions. Through film and storytelling, the sum of the parts become one, integrated. And their eruptions acquire a context. The genocide experience becomes real, lived; it gets a meaning and can finally be turned into a memory.

The viewer cannot identify with an experience if that experience does not have a holder. Genocide survivors and their stories have stopped being private. Testimonies are so general that they've lost their human dimension. They've become numbers. For a human being, it is easy to understand a single tragedy, and to internalize it. But a human being is never able to internalize the death of a million people. Our mind cannot make sense of it.

I want to stress that I am not questioning the veracity of the survivors' recollections. Undoubtedly what they went through was atrocious. But precisely because of that, these stories need to be placed in their right context. This is why I keep on returning to the private, to the individual, to the specific. Only through the personal pain and suffering can the horror be approached.

"Back to Ararat," which was released in 1988, was my effort to describe how we were dealing with the acceleration of history. As Armenians, we were rapidly distancing ourselves from the past.



We no longer inhabited that past; we only communed with it through relics, ruins, and vestiges that had become—and still are—mysterious to us, and that we would do well to question, since they hold the key to our “identity,” to who we are. We were cut from the land, from the language, from the nature, sounds, and places that once were our keys to our identities.

The “acceleration of history” had two effects on our memory. First, we started stockpiling. Caught up in this feeling of loss, we began establishing institutions and instruments that relate to memory: museums, archives, libraries, and digitized collections. Yet, we also found ourselves caught between a past shrouded in darkness or mist and an unforeseeable future. The present emerged as the only category for understanding our lives, but ours was a present that was already historical. “Back to Ararat” dealt with how our past no longer guaranteed our future. It is essentially on this ground that memory came to play such an active role in our communities. Investing in memory was a warranty, a promise of continuity.

“I Hate Dogs—The Last Survivor,” from 2005, was about establishing individual memory, and about the demand for truth—more “truthful” than that of history, *the truth of personal experience and individual memory*. Unlike history, which has always been in the hands of powerful states, public authorities, scholars, and specialized peer groups, we gave memory all the new privileges and prestige of a popular protest movement. It has come to resemble the revenge of the underdog or injured party, the out-cast. My film reflected the mood, and told the story of those who were denied their right to history.

“Grandma’s Tattoos,” which was released in November 2011, again deals with memory. This time my intention was to reflect the mood that memory, too, can be collective, and both liberating and sacred. Before, only individuals had memories, and collectivities had histories. The idea that collectivities have a memory, too, represents an important transformation in the status of individuals within society and of their relationship to the community at large. In this documentary, Grandma becomes us, we become Grandma—a reasoning that mirrors the shift in our understanding of identity.

The concept of identity has undergone a reversal in meaning at the same time as that of memory. It has gone from being an individual and subjective notion to a collective, quasi-formal, and objective one. The expression identity now is a group category, a way of defining us from without. Identity, like memory, is now a form of duty. As Simone de Beauvoir remarked, “One becomes a woman,” and “One is not born a woman.” I am asked to become what I am: a Swede, an Armenian, a film director, an American, or even a Muslim Armenian. It is at this level of obligation that the tie is shaped between memory and social identity. The two terms have become synonymous, and the fact that they have merged reflects a change in the way that history and society interact. No one has a monopoly on history today.

May be that is why “Grandma’s Tattoos” created so much controversy.

As mentioned earlier, the survivors’ traumatic memories were disorders in time and memory. Certain memories were amplified, others were suppressed; certain memories became taboos, never to

A scene from ‘Grandma’s Tattoos’



be touched. It disturbed the essence of our identity. “Grandma’s Tattoos” was about unlocking the attic door and bringing down the walls of oblivion.

“Grandma’s Tattoos” was, for me, the most difficult film to make. We have rarely dealt with the issue of gender, even less when it comes to gender and genocide. It is remarkable that so little is written about the fate of women in wartime. Only now have we started to confront ourselves and ask the questions that were never meant to be asked.

Usually, a film on genocide is viewed as a bad idea, as commercially non-viable. Yet I fought, and persistence yielded results. That is how “Back to Ararat” and “I Hate Dogs” were made. But this time the resistance was incomprehensible, irrational. Already from the beginning, while researching, I was told, “Fate of the women? That is a *strange* way to approach the genocide.”

A commissioner could allow himself to say, “But what is the big deal with rape?”

And sexual violence is almost taken for granted. But that is not surprising. After all, history is written by men; so it is with genocide. Women as casualties is only now becoming an international security issue.

There was another challenge with “Grandma’s Tattoos”: How could you tell the story of thousands of victims while making it interesting, touching, and comprehensible at the same time? The victims, these women, had long passed away.

Perhaps the biggest challenge, however, was fighting my own blindness, my belief that I knew it all, that I had seen all the photos and read all the books. I was shocked when I found out that my own grandma had been a victim. And I was shocked by my family’s choice in dealing with the problem—selective amnesia.

It took me three years of research and of fighting opposition to the project, but the reception to “Grandma’s Tattoos” was overwhelming. We were all discovering ourselves. Women were mostly touched by it. Men were angry. But in the end, the anger was only a sign of desperation.

“Grandma’s Tattoos” was aired on Al Jazeera English, and reached a large audience. It was launched at the prestigious International Documentary Film Festival in Amsterdam. But reaction from the Turkish side came only when the film was to be aired on Swedish television, SVT; Turkish organizations and Turks living in Sweden bombarded SVT with letters, demanding the film not be shown. Instead, they demanded the showing of “Sari Gelin.”

For several weeks the campaign went on. However, “Grandma’s Tattoos” was broadcast as scheduled.

The film was also selected by FILMMOR, in Istanbul. This time, the Azeris took the lead and contacted the festival with threatening words, asking for the film to be removed from the program. The festival committee, however, decided not to politicize the issue, and insisted on screening the film. “Grandma’s Tattoos” was screened in Istanbul three times. □

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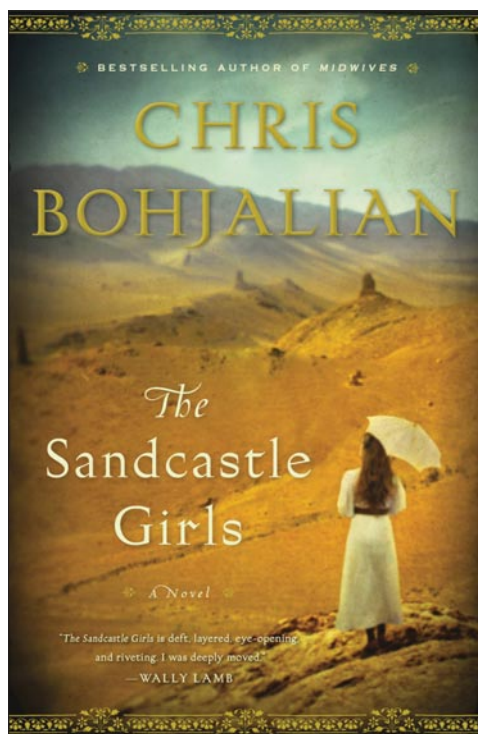
# The kernel that led to 'The Sandcastle Girls'

By Chris Bohjalian

Sometimes my novels have positively elephantine gestation periods—and even that, in some cases, is an underestimate. A mother elephant carries her young for not quite two years; I have spent, in some cases, not quite two decades contemplating the tiniest seed of a story and wondering how it might grow into a novel.

Moreover, in the quarter-century I've been writing books, I've realized two things about a lengthy gestation period. First, the longer I spend allowing an idea to take root inside me, the better the finished book; second, the more time I spend thinking about a book, the less time I spend actually writing it. Here's a confession: The first draft of the novel for which I may always be known best, *Midwives*, took a mere (and eerily appropriate) nine months to write. *Skeletons at the Feast*, another book I will always be proud of, took only 10. But I spent a long time pondering both of these novels before ever setting a single word down on paper.

Perhaps in no case has the relationship between reflection and construction—between the ethereal wisps of imagination and the concrete words of creation—been more evident than in the novel I have arriving this summer, *The Sandcastle Girls*. The novel has been gestating at the very least since 1992, when I first tried to make sense of the Armenian Genocide: a slaughter that most of the world knows next to nothing about.



My first attempt to write about the genocide, penned 20 years ago now, exists only as a rough draft in the underground archives of my alma mater. It will never be published, neither in my lifetime nor after I'm dead. I spent over two years struggling mightily to complete a draft, and I never shared it with my editor. My wife, who has always been an objective reader of my work, and I agreed: The manuscript should either be buried or burned. I couldn't bring myself to do either, but neither did I ever want the pages to see the light of the day. Hence, the exile to the underground archives.

Moreover, just about this time, Carol Edgarian published her poignant drama of the Armenian Genocide and the diaspora, *Rise the Euphrates*. It's a deeply moving novel and, it seemed to me, a further indication that the world didn't need my book.

And so instead I embarked upon a novel that had been in the back of my mind for some time: A tale of a New England midwife and a home birth that has gone tragically wrong.

Over the next 15 years, all but one of my novels would be set largely in New England. Sometimes they would be about women and men at the social margins: homeopaths, transsexuals, and dowsers. Other times they would plumb social issues that matter to me: homelessness, domestic violence, and animal rights.

The one exception, the one book not set in New England? *Skeletons at the Feast*, a story set in Poland and Germany in the last

six months of the Second World War. That novel is, in part, about a fictional family's complicity in the Holocaust. Often as I toured on behalf of the book in 2008 and 2009, readers would ask me the following: When was I going to write about the Armenian Genocide? After all, from my last name it's clear that I am at least part Armenian. (I am, in fact, half-Armenian; my mother was Swedish.)

I had contemplated the subject often, even after failing in my first attempt to build a novel around the *Meds Yeghern*. The Great Calamity. Three of my four Armenian great-grandparents died in the poisonous miasma of the genocide and the First World War. Moreover, some of my best—and from a novelist's perspective most interesting—childhood memories occurred while I was visiting my Armenian grandparents at their massive brick monolith of a home in a suburb of New York City. Occasionally, my Mid-Western, Swedish mother would refer to their house as the “Ottoman annex of the Metropolitan,” because it was—at least by the standards of Westchester County in the middle third of the twentieth century—so exotic.

In 2010, my father's health began to deteriorate badly. He lived in Florida at the time, while I lived in Vermont. I remember how on one of my visits, when he was newly home after yet another long stay in the hospital, together we looked at old family photographs. I was trying to take his mind off his pain, but I also found the exercise incredibly interesting. In some cases, these were images I had seen on the walls of my grandparents' or my parents' house since I was a child, but they had become little more than white noise: I knew them so well that I barely noticed them and they had grown as invisible to me as old wallpaper.

Now, however, they took on a new life. I recall one in particular that fascinated me: a formal portrait of my father when he was five years old, his parents behind him. All of them are impeccably coiffed. My grandfather is seated in an elegant wooden chair in the sort of suit and tie and vest that he seemed always to be wearing when I was a boy, and my grandmother is standing beside him in a beautiful black dress with a white collar and a corsage. I can see bits of my daughter—their great-granddaughter—in my grandmother's beautiful, almond-shaped eyes. My father, a kindergartener at the time, is wearing shorts, a white shirt, and a

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rather badly knotted necktie with a cross on it.

I knew almost nothing about my grandparents' story. But that picture reminded me of those moments when, as a child myself, I would sit on my grandfather's lap or listen to him, enrapt, as he played his beloved *oud*. I recalled the wondrous aroma of lamb and mint that always wafted from their front door when I would arrive, and my grandmother's magnificent cheese *boregs*. I thought of their library filled with books in a language—an alphabet—I could not begin to decipher, even as I was learning to read English.

And at some point, the seeds of my family's own personal diaspora began to take root. I had no interest in revisiting the disastrous manuscript that was gathering dust in my college archives. But I knew that I wanted to try once again to write about the Armenian Genocide. A good friend of mine, a journalist and genocide scholar, urged me on.

Ironically, I was about 90 pages into my new book when Mark Mustian published his beautifully written and deeply thought-provoking novel, *The Gendarme*. I felt a bit as I had in 1994 when I read Carol

Edgarian's *Rise the Euphrates*. Did the world really need my book when it had Mark's—or, for that matter, the stories and memoirs that Peter Balakian, Nancy Kricorian, Micheline Aharonian Marcom, and Franz Werfel had given us? It might have been my father's failing health, or it might have been the fact that I was older now; it might have been the reality that already I cared deeply for the fictional women and men in my new novel. But this time I soldiered on.

I think *The Sandcastle Girls* may be the most important book I've written. It is certainly the most personal. It's a big, broad, sweeping historical love story. The novel moves back and forth in time between the present and 1915; between the narrative of an Armenian-American novelist at mid-life and her grandparents' nightmarish stories of survival in Aleppo, Van, and Gallipoli in 1915. Those fictional grandparents are not by any stretch my grandparents, but the novel would not exist without their courage and charisma.

Is the novel among my best work? The book opens with memories from my childhood in my grandparents' home, what my mother referred to as the Ottoman Annex. In other words, it has been gestating almost my entire life. □

THE MAKING OF

# 'Deported a dream play'



Bobbie Steinbach as Victoria and Jeanine Kane as Varter, in 'Deported / a dream play'

By Joyce Van Dyke

Joyce Van Dyke's "Deported / a dream play" tells the story of two women deported together from Mezireh in 1915: the playwright's grandmother, and her best friend, Varter, the mother of Dr. H. Martin Deranian. "Deported" just received its first professional production, playing to sold-out houses at the Modern Theatre in Boston from March 8 to April 1, 2012. The play was directed by Judy Braha and produced by Boston Playwrights' Theatre in association with Suffolk University.



**H**ow can you make a play about the genocide and its aftermath? How do you tell a story that is unspeakable, unimaginable even? And if you do, will anybody come see it? Those were questions I started struggling with five years ago.

At the same time, director Judy Braha and a company of actors began collaborating with me to explore and shape the material that would eventually become “Deported/a dream play.” The story of two women friends, Victoria and Varter, “Deported” fuses the everyday and the surreal. It opens in Providence in 1938, then jumps forward 40 years to LA in 1978, and finally moves into a dream world of the future.

Early on I decided to tell the story of these two women genocide survivors as a “dream play.” The play would be composed out of dreams. When the lights first come up, we see the main character, Victoria, lying asleep on a table, dreaming about her friend, Varter. Dreams are woven throughout the action, and the entire final Act of the play, set in the future beyond 2015, interweaves Victoria’s dreams with those of other characters.

Dreams allowed me to crystallize a complicated history in visual images onstage. Dreams could accordion a great expanse of time into a moment. People and objects could magically appear and disappear. Real doors on stage could open into the past or the future. In the twinkling of an eye, we could slide from one world to another.

Making the play out of dreams was exciting and artistically challenging for me. It was also an attempt to wrest something beautiful out of this dreadful subject matter. That was an imperative I felt from the very beginning, for myself and for the audience: that if I was to write this play it *had* to embody a kind of beauty and vitality, that it had to represent humor and hope, that it couldn’t just reflect the genocide but had to reflect life beyond it too. The resurgence of life and dreams of the future—these needed to be a part of the play.

But at a deep level, it felt like a necessity rather than an artistic choice to make this a dream play. The form of the play was dictated by the need to tell the truth. What these characters had actually experienced in their lifetimes was surreal, nightmarish—the swift destruction and transformation



**Varter and her first husband, Mr. Nazarian, Mezireh. Both are characters in the play.**

of a whole world. How could I be true to the strangeness of their experience, to the way the genocide shattered not only family and culture, but space and time? How could I show their dislocation and disorientation? These were people for whom, as the main character Victoria says, “too much has happened,” like an earthquake whose repercussions went on and on, down through the years. I could never recreate that story in a realistic play. But I could evoke it in dreams.

So, a dream play, but also a documentary play. Half of the play’s characters are invented, but the others are historical. Much that the historical characters say and do in the play was taken from life. I used their real names, with just one exception. That, too, was a decision made early on. I wanted to save things. I wanted to use the literal facts where I could. These remnants felt precious, and whenever I could use real details in the play it

gave me a special satisfaction: for example, Varter’s artistry in making Armenian needle lace; her husband taken away in the middle of the night in his pajamas; the house Harry built at 74 Sargent Avenue in Providence; Victoria rehearsing a play in the attic of that house for the Armenian Euphrates Evangelical Church theatre group; the Turkish sergeant who followed Varter from Ourfa to Aleppo after she escaped. All of these and many more real-life details became motifs and events in the play. In larger matters, too,

the play’s stories are true, including the story of how these two women lost their children on the deportation.

As I began to work on the play, my original dread of confronting the subject matter gave way to a sense of happiness and release that took me by surprise. Although the writing process was often painful, it greatly deepened my knowledge and love for my grandparents, and for my grandmother’s best friend, Varter, Martin Deranian’s mother, whom I never met but came to love. The more I worked on the play, the more I felt the living miracle of their strength and heroism.

I was sustained throughout the creation of the play by the many people and Armenian organizations that gave me support: our Deported Advisory Board, Armenian International Women’s Association (AIWA), Armenian Library and Museum of America (ALMA), Knights and Daughters of Vartan, National Association



**Bobbie Steinbach as Victoria and Ken Baltin as Harry**



**The playwright's grandparents and mother—Elmas Boyajian (called Victoria in the play) with her husband Harry and daughter Rose, Providence. All three are characters in the play.**

for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR), Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives, Sayat Nova Dance Company, and the many individuals who generously contributed to our special fundraising campaign to help support the production. We were thrilled when Boston Playwrights' Theatre agreed to produce the play in association with Suffolk University at the newly renovated Modern Theatre.

I would like to mention two particularly wonderful features of this production. One was the beautiful photo exhibit in the lobby of the Modern Theatre, curated by Ruth Thomasian of Project SAVE. The exhibit was specially keyed to the "Deported" story and included photos of characters in the play, providing a moving complement to the production and drawing the attention of audiences before and after the show, many of whom were given a guided tour of the exhibit by Thomasian herself. I also cherished the Armenian dancing in the play choreographed by Apo Ashjian of Sayat Nova, who taught our whole company how to dance. Ashjian's beautiful weaving of those dances into the play made them a highlight of the production, communicating the joy and vitality that I so hoped the show would convey.

There are certain people without whom this play would never have come to be. I call Martin Deranian the godfather of this play. He inspired me to write it and was the source of everything I know about Varter, as well as, remarkably, much that I learned from him about my own grandmother.<sup>1</sup>

My artistic collaborator, director Judy Braha, was my partner in the creation of this play from the very start. Braha not only directed the beautifully realized Boston Playwrights' Theatre production at the Modern, but had worked with me over a five-year period to develop the play. Starting before we had any script or even a story, she held improvisational workshops with our company of actors, which became the laboratory for developing the play. Most of these actors

appeared in the production at the Modern. Their creative work, as well as public readings and an earlier workshop production at Boston University that Braha directed, all contributed to the evolution of the script.

"Deported" is a challenging play to stage. In Braha's words: "The play leaps from the intimate to the epic, and it leaps quickly. Dreams tumble out of Victoria's imagination in multiple layers and leave as fast as they arrived... One of our greatest challenges was arriving at a scenic design that could easily, almost magically, shift from an attic in 1938 to a garden in LA in 1978 to a dream space in the future."<sup>2</sup>

An especially evocative and affecting element of the production was not my invention at all, but Braha's idea: that the Suffolk University students, who were cast as Armenian dancers in the show, should double as "Dreamers"—beings who swirled in and out and made the magic happen in the play, making lace and chairs appear and disappear, and repeatedly transforming the world before our eyes.

To my enormous gratification, large audiences came to see the show, and we even sold out most performances. People wept, and they laughed. I was thrilled to see that the audience members were of all ages and backgrounds. One night a busload of 40 college students from North Carolina came; they'd just seen "Les Misérables" at the Opera House next door, and were now taking in "Deported." Parents brought their children. Adults brought their elderly parents. A group of half a dozen women in headscarves came one night. A teacher brought his entire high school class. A lot of Armenians came to see the show, yet they made up less than half of the total audience, in my estimation.

A friend said to me, "Every Armenian's story is different, and they're all the same." Many came up to me after the play and said, "That was *my* story," "You told my mother's story," "my grandparents' story" "my uncle's," although not all of those people were Armenian. As we heard from many audience members—and as we had hoped in creating the play—it resonated with those whose families were changed by the Holocaust, by more recent genocides, by fighting in World War II, and by American slavery.

As for what comes next: My goal is for "Deported/a dream play" to go on to productions in other cities, between now and 2015, and beyond. I believe the theatre is uniquely able to convey the visceral and emotional reality of this story. But I would also like to say that the play ends with hope. In the last scene, set some years beyond 2015, Turks and Armenians from the past and from the future gather together onstage, searching for the words that will allow them to speak. I hope this play can contribute to that conversation. □

1. See [www.bu.edu/bpt/pdfs/press/deportedpreview.pdf](http://www.bu.edu/bpt/pdfs/press/deportedpreview.pdf) for the story told in a March 3 Boston Globe article.
2. See <http://artsfuse.org/53505/fuse-theater-interview-deported-a-dream-play-a-tale-of-new-england-with-global-implications/for> the interview with Van Dyke and Braha.

# TURKEY

## Has *Acknowledged* the Armenian Genocide

By Uğur Ümit Üngör

Turkey denies the Armenian Genocide” goes a jingle. Yes, the Turkish state’s official policy towards the Armenian Genocide was and is indeed characterized by the “three M’s”: misrepresentation, mystification, and manipulation. But when one gauges what place the genocide occupies in the social memory of Turkish society, even after nearly a century, a different picture emerges. Even though most direct eyewitnesses to the crime have passed away, oral history interviews yield important insights. Elderly Turks and Kurds in eastern Turkey often hold vivid memories from family members or fellow villagers who witnessed or participated in the genocide. This essay is based on countless interviews conducted with the (grand-)children of eye witnesses to the Armenian Genocide. The research results suggest there is a clash between official state memory and popular social memory: The Turkish government is denying a genocide that its own population remembers.

### ORAL HISTORY IN TURKEY

Oral history is an indispensable tool for scholars interested in mass violence. A considerable collection of Armenian and Syriac oral history material has been studied by colleagues.<sup>1</sup> The existing body of oral history research in Turkey, though gradually developing, has hardly addressed the genocide. A potential research field was politicized by successive governments and the Turkish Historical Society. Several documentaries about the victimization of Ottoman Muslims in the eastern border regions have included shots of elderly Muslims speaking about their victimization at the hand of Armenians (and presumably Cossacks) in 1918. It seems unmistakable that the Turkish-nationalist camp fears that the

local population of Anatolian towns and villages might “confess” the genocide’s veracity and disclose relevant details about it. For example, the 2006 PBS documentary “The Armenian Genocide” by Andrew Goldberg includes remarkable footage of elderly Turks speaking candidly about the genocide. One of the men remembers how his father told him that the *génocidaires* had mobilized religious leaders to convince the population that killing Armenians would secure them a place in heaven. Another middle-aged man recounts a recollection of his grandfather’s that neighboring Armenian villagers were locked in a barn and burnt alive.<sup>2</sup>

In the past decade, I have searched (and found) respondents willing to relate their personal experiences or their family narratives related to the war and the genocide. In the summers of 2002 and 2004–07, I conducted up to 200 interviews with (grand-)children of contemporaries in eastern Turkey, all semi-structured and taped. Needless to say, oral history has its methodological pitfalls, especially in a society where the memory of modern history is overlaid with myth and ideologies. Many are unwilling to reflect about their family histories because they have grown accustomed to ignoring inquisitive and critical questions, not least on their own moral choices in the face of their neighbors’ destruction. Others are reluctant to admit to acts considered shameful.<sup>3</sup>

But while some were outright unwilling to speak once I broached the taboo subject, others agreed to speak but wished to remain anonymous, and again many others were happy to speak openly, with some even providing me access to their private documents. Even though direct eyewitnesses to the crime have most probably passed away, these interviews proved fruitful. Elderly Turks and Kurds often remember vivid anecdotes from family members or villagers who witnessed or participated in the massacres. My subject position as a “local outsider” (being born in the region but raised abroad) facilitated the research as it gave me the communicative channels to at



once delve deeply and recede at the appropriate moments. It also provided me with a sense of immunity from the dense moral and political field in which most of this research is embedded.

## TURKISH AND KURDISH EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS

A.D., a Kurdish writer from Varto (Mu ), recalled a childhood memory from 1966 when an earthquake laid bare a mass grave near his village. The villagers knew the victims were Armenians from a neighboring village. According to A.D., when the village elder requested advice from the local authorities on what to do, within a day military commanders had assigned a group of soldiers to re-bury the corpses. The villagers were warned to never speak about it again.<sup>4</sup>

Interviews with elderly locals also yielded considerable useful data about the genocide itself. For example, a Kurdish man (born 1942) from Diyarbakir's northern Piran district, had heard from his father how fellow villagers would raid Armenian villages and dispatch their victims by slashing their throats wide open. As they operated with daggers and axes, this often led to decapitations. After the killing was done, the perpetrators could see how the insides of the victims' windpipes were black because of tobacco use.<sup>5</sup> Morbid details such as these are also recorded by the following account from a Kurdish man from the Kharzan region, east of Diyarbakir:

My grandfather was the village elderş (*muhtar*) during the war. He told us when we were children about the Armenian massacre. There was a man in our village; he used to hunt pheasants. Now the honorless man (*bêşerefo*) hunted Armenians. Grandpa saw how he hurled a throwing axe right through a child a mother was carrying on her back. Grandpa yelled at him: "Hey, do you have no honor? God will punish you for this." But the man threatened my grandfather that if he did not shut up, he would be next. The man was later expelled from the village.<sup>6</sup>

Here is another account from a Turkish woman (born 1928) from Erzincan:

**Q:** You said there were Armenians in your village, too. What happened to them?

**A:** They were all killed in the first year of the war, you didn't know? My mother was standing on the hill in front of our village. She saw how at Kemah they threw (*döktüler*) all the Armenians into the river. Into the Euphrates. Alas, screams and cries (*bağırır çağırır*). Everyone, children and all (*çoluk çocuk*), brides, old people, everyone, everyone. They robbed them of their golden bracelets, their shawls, and silk belts, and threw them into the river.

**Q:** Who threw them into the river?

**A:** The government of course.

**Q:** What do you mean by 'the government'?

**A:** Gendarmes.<sup>7</sup>

These examples suggest that there still might be something meaningful gained from interviews with elderly Turks and Kurds. Needless to say, had a systematic oral history project been carried out in Turkey much earlier, e.g. in the 1960's or 1970's, undoubtedly a wealth of crucial information could have been salvaged. Besides the excellent research conducted in Turkey by colleagues such as Leyla Neyzi, Ayşe Gül Altınay, and others, interviews by individual researchers are at best a drop in the ocean. A measured research project with a solid book as output would be a memorable achievement for the centenary of the genocide.

## DISCUSSION

When I was traveling from Ankara to Adana in the summer of 2004, I stopped by the friendly town of Ereğli, north of the Taurus mountain range. My friend, an academic visiting his family, had invited me along. Strolling through the breezy town, we came across one of my friend's acquaintances, an "Uncle Fikri". The old man looked sad, so we asked him what was wrong. He said, "My father has been on his deathbed for a few days now." When we tried to console him, he answered: "I'm not sad because he will die, he has been sick for a while now. I just cannot accept that he refuses to recite the *Kelime-i Shehadet* before he passes on." (*Shahadah*, the Muslim declaration of belief: "There is no God but Allah and Muhammed is his Prophet.") The man looked deep into our eyes, there was an awkward silence for four seconds, we understood each other, and we parted.

In this example, only two generations separated us from the eyewitness generation. Therefore, I believe there might still be avenues for oral history research on the genocide. Father Patrick Desbois is a French Catholic priest who travels to Ukraine in a concerted effort to document the *Shoah* through the use of oral history. His team locates mass graves and interviews contemporary witnesses about the mass shootings of Jews, which often took place just outside the Ukrainian villages they visit. The elderly respondents usually remember the slaughter in vivid detail.<sup>8</sup> Desbois' work on Ukraine has proven helpful in completing the already comprehensive picture historians have of Nazi mass murder in that region. During a private conversation, Desbois intimated that he would be interested in launching a similar project in Turkey, if a viable initiative was proposed.<sup>9</sup> It might be worthwhile to gauge what place the Armenian Genocide occupies in the social memory of Turks and Kurds, even after nearly a century. The conclusion would undoubtedly warrant my introductory comment: The Turkish government is denying a genocide that its own population remembers. □

## ENDNOTES

For endnotes, go to [www.armenianweekly.com/2012/04/27/magazine/](http://www.armenianweekly.com/2012/04/27/magazine/)

## ENDNOTES

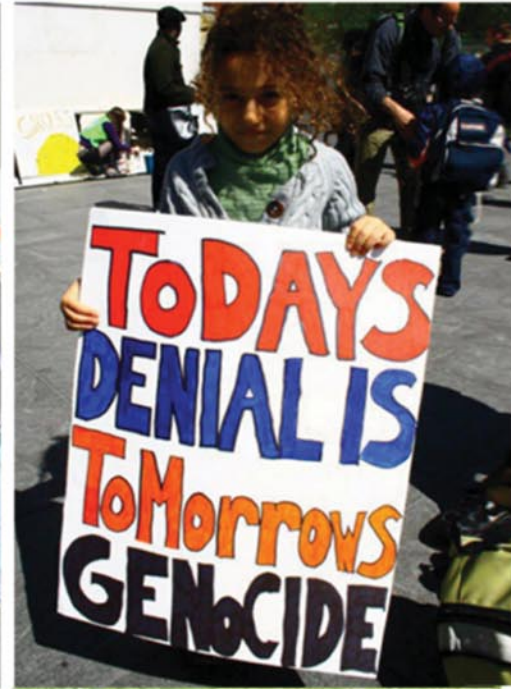
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2. Andrew Goldberg, “The Armenian Genocide,” Two Cats Productions, 2006.
3. For parallel problems in Russian history, see Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin’s Russia*, London: Penguin, 2007, p. XXXV.
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5. Interview conducted with M. . (from Piran district) in Diyarbakır, July 15, 2004.
6. Interview conducted with Erdal Rênas (from the Kharzan area) in Istanbul, Aug. 18, 2002.
7. Interview conducted with K. T. (from Erzincan) in Bursa on June 28, 2002 and Aug. 20 2007, partially screened in the documentary “Land of our Grandparents” (Amsterdam: Zelović Productions, 2008).
8. Patrick Desbois, *Porteur de Mémoires: sur les Traces de la Shoah par Balles*, Paris: Michel Lafon, 2007. Also, see [www.shoahpar-balles.com](http://www.shoahpar-balles.com).
9. Personal communication with Patrick Desbois at the conference “The Holocaust by Bullets,” organized by the Amsterdam Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at the Nationaal Museum Vught (Netherlands), Sept. 11, 2009.





# Armenian Youth Federation

Հայ Երիտասարդաց Դաշնակցութիւն  
Eastern USA



The Armenian Youth Federation - Youth Organization of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Eastern USA stands in solidarity with the Armenian Community to commemorate the 97th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

We will continue to fight for justice through recognition, reparations, and retribution for the Armenian Genocide, in order to ensure justice for our people and prevent future injustices around the world.

Join the movement



For more information or to find a local AYF chapter near you visit [www.ayf.org](http://www.ayf.org)





# Post-Denial Denial

By Henry Theriault

In 2012, we might wonder what the point of engaging denial yet again could be. The best thinking on the Armenian Genocide has moved far beyond it, to the question of reparations; the genocide's gendered dimensions, including the sexual violence and slavery of Armenian women and girls; attention to the micro and meso levels of perpetration, particularly the complex and varied role of regional<sup>1</sup>; and the expansion of theorization of the genocidal process to include Assyrians and Greeks.<sup>2</sup>

**W**hy does denial persist at all? Is it just the atavistic stubbornness of some segment of Turkey's political and military institutions? Is it an embedded prejudice widespread in the Turkish population, especially its growing external component in North America and Europe, a prejudice that continues even in progressive circles and despite much rhetoric to the contrary? Is it a reassertion of genocidal hatred, a mocking of the victims, a refusal to give up the thrill of power and domination that comes from knowing your group has the absolute power of life and death over not just some set of individuals, but entire and ancient peoples? Have denial's proponents, especially academics in the United States, so boxed themselves into an untenable corner, so deeply compromised themselves in their public advocacy for an

odious and duplicitous attack on basic human rights and decency, that their only hope for psychological, material, and status self-preservation is in preserving the lie? Is it the all-too-common genocidal state version of corporate greed and self-interest that subjects all human relations and social commitments to the drive for pure profit, that is, the refusal to give up one iota of the immense material gains from the genocide in land and wealth that endure today as the foundation of the growing Turkish economy? Has denial simply become a habit that those promoting it are just too rigid and lazy to break, a pseudo-religious faith making sense of a complex and changing world without meaningful thought and challenge, even an addiction with its own self-destructive pleasures? Or have its purveyors, its perpetrators, learned from Armenians themselves, who could easily have given up at any point during the past 89 years, stopped fighting tooth

and nail to preserve a damned identity that gave no hope or solace to those marked by it, that the refusal to accept the inevitable undercuts and fractures the inevitable?

Regardless, engaging denial in 2012 is an intellect- and soul-deadening chore, a distraction from the real intellectual and political work that lies ahead for those Armenians and Turks looking forward to a new shared universe in which the Ottoman-Turkish genocidal process has been addressed through a reparative process that reestablishes, in however muted a manner, the long-term viability of its victim groups, and establishes this genocide's lessons learned, for instance, for the struggle against the contemporary trafficking of women and children for sexual and other slavery and the epidemic of violence against women globally. We're still dealing with denial in 2012. But I guess there are those who still argue adamantly that the earth is flat, cigarettes



don't cause cancer, the earth's climate is not getting warmer due to human pollution, and dinosaurs are a myth or lived only after the earth was created 6,000 years ago.

While the tremendous material resources—a benefit of the massive wealth expropriation of the genocide itself—that Turkey and its allies in the political and corporate realms are able to pour into denial mean that the effort can be extended indefinitely on multiple fronts, including public relations/lobbying and academic, given the growing fracture over denial in Turkey itself coupled with the increasing boldness of states such as France in their refusal to give in to political and economic blackmail, legal cases have become the rearguard venue of choice for deniers. The irony, of course, is not lost on those who notice that the Turkish government and its allies continue to parrot the nonsensical insistence that the Armenian Genocide should not be a political or moral issue but should be left entirely to historians at precisely the same historical moment as some proponents of denialist positions take the issue right out of academia and place it squarely in the legal system with lawsuits meant to promote the teaching of discredited denialist material on websites and to prevent denialist editorializing and “scholarship” from being accurately labeled as such. It is not the effectiveness of this new dimension of the campaign against truth and healing that should give us pause, as its only success came as the result of the legal and political ineptitude and moral cowardice of the Southern Poverty Law Center, which instead of taking the heat and consequences itself of its amateurish public statements about Guenter Lewy, simply heaped on the victim group of genocide yet more calumny by retreating completely from its challenge to denial and even promoting and praising Lewy in order to save itself from a lawsuit. When push comes to shove, the line of least resistance is always to sacrifice or harm the victims again. What should draw our attention is the attempt to enforce relativism on the issue, to require that the “second side of the story” be legalistically stapled to the true one side of the story so that the latter can never be uttered without its parasitic other clinging to and sucking the life out of it.

This new legalism has a crucial parallel, which has as yet not been commented upon

by even the most sophisticated discussants of the Armenian Genocide. Ten years ago those very few of us present in the public discourse on the Armenian Genocide who insisted that reparations, and not denial, is the central issue, were met with public dismissal and academic rejection, where our work was taken up at all and not simply ignored. We have continued to make our arguments, and one by one academics, religious leaders, and Armenians, as well as many outside the Armenian community, including U.S. legislators, have shifted their views or come to appreciate the importance of reparations where they had not considered it before. But, if one thing should be learned from Etienne Balibar,<sup>3</sup> it is that steps forward, particularly in regard to oppression, quite often lead to new veiled forms of the same basic oppressive forces rather than a meaningful supersession of oppression. And so it is with the new attention on reparations, which has replicated among those—even in the Armenian community—who recognize the Armenian Genocide (including some who do not use the term but recognize an unlabeled “that which inflicted great harm on the Armenians”) an emerging structural dichotomy that mirrors the tension between truth and denial itself. The problem is not a function of falsification versus truth, *as denial has never been about truth and falsity*, but about power and the prevention of rectification of the impacts of and ethical accounting for the genocide. Those who believe that establishment of the truth is the telos of human rights advocacy for Armenian Genocide victims misunderstand entirely what is at stake in any case of genocide, perhaps because they confuse the putative goal of academic research (production of “truth”) with the complex political and ethical terrain in which this research is rightly situated. Denial can be abandoned at precisely the point at which some new means of resistance to rectification can be engaged more effectively, relative to the current successes or failings of denial. Even if it were true that denial as a state-driven political campaign would cease with the end to the possibility of any material or symbolic reparations (and as the opening paragraph suggests, it might not be), that does not mean that the end of

denial can only come in this way. The tension at the core of denial can morph into another debate or struggle, which will be all the more effective because so much focus has been placed on ending denial as the key to resolving the Armenian Genocide.

The commitment to denial described in the introductory paragraph suggests deep psycho-social roots that go beyond expediency. The triumph of the Turkish state has been to structure Turkish national identity itself in two key ways. First, it has forced that group identity to be central to individual personal identity—explaining the former’s more bizarre and dramatically ironic manifestations, such as the voting of Kemal Ataturk as the greatest in just about every category of a turn-of-the-century Time Magazine poll—and, second, it has made that identity frail and rigid. This is interesting in itself: The Turkish elites have driven the development of a national identity that is (intentionally?) insecure while making individual wellbeing dependent on national self-esteem, in order to bind individuals to the state seen as the only capable defense of that national identity. Denial is one method used to preserve that psycho-social complex in the face of political advocacy toward rectification of the damage (in its more primitive stage, a simple quest by the victim group to gain widespread acceptance of the truth), but it is merely a method, not the foundational problem, in the way that biological race theories are one form of racism but not essential to racism, with a generic racism existing at a deeper level and fueling a variation of forms. New forms of racism emerge, though we can modify Balibar to hold that the old forms do not simply disappear, but that over time more and more kinds of racism aggregate and become options that impose a comprehensive and even hermetically sealed context in which no matter what resistance and facts are met, there is always another way for racism to function that is not susceptible to that resistance—or the particular ethical commitments of this or that individual. While we can see a temporal progression of forms, this is not a linear but an additive history, a packrat historical trajectory in which no oppressive method that has had success in the past is ever really abandoned.



Is there a new tension, a new form, in addition to denial? We are actually seeing the third such emergence. The first was manifested in the tension over whether the term “genocide” should be used to characterize the “events of 1915.” For those Turks and others for whom denial of the facts on the ground of widespread government-sponsored killing of Armenians grossly disproportionate to any putative cause became intellectually or morally impossible—for this they deserve some credit—but who could not face the full reality of history, a compromise position became recognition of the violence against Armenians—if not its fully systematic nature—coupled with a claim that “genocide” should not be applied to that violence. The reasons included the mistaken notion that the concept of genocide did not emerge until after the Armenian Genocide, so it would be historically essentialist to apply it “retroactively” (conveniently ignoring what is now widely known, that in coining the term in 1943 as well as creating the concept at least a decade earlier, Raphael Lemkin had the genocide of Christians in the Ottoman Empire fully in mind as a major example); the vulgar postmodernist claim that a unifying term such as “genocide” suppressed the complex and polyvalent details of the “events [note the fracturing plural] of 1915”; and that, regardless of whether the term is technically correct, its use would alienate the general Turkish population by offending their sensibilities by characterizing some of their national predecessors as *genocidaires*. Others and I have exposed the logical fallacies and imperial mentality underlying such approaches, and there is no space here to revisit them. The relevant focus here is, rather, the shift that this turn from outright denial to mischaracterization represented. As denial became untenable for individuals and to an extent for Turkey in general, a rearguard action ensued that saved the refusal to admit genocide by admitting lower-level violence.

Among some Turks, a second shift paralleled or followed the terminological refusal. The fault line here was between one or more of (1) recognition, conflict-resolving dialogue, or apology and (2) a genuine process of repair. Denial could be set aside and even genocide admitted so long as the immediate next step was the resolution of tensions

between Turks and Armenians and a supersession of the genocide issue. My forthcoming article in the Armenian Review’s special issue on reparations covers aspects of this issue in detail; here, what is important to notice is the way this shift at once leaves denial or misrepresentation behind at the same time as it resists meaningful and respectful resolution of the Armenian Genocide issue.

But even this dichotomy has not been stable, and some of its proponents have retreated further, accepting that repairs must be made. The latest fault line cuts through the notion of “repair” itself, as what has long been proposed as *group* repair is facilely misrepresented as *individual* repair. This dichotomy is present among Armenians, who engage the suffering and material losses of direct family members—sometimes even possessing title deeds—at the same time as they are by communal losses of land, institutions, cultural viability, identity, etc. Both forms of repair address some of the present harms of the genocide, but it is *group* repair that is the tremendously more significant and necessary for the long-term viability of Armenian identity and statehood. Once more, the issue of *why* has been covered elsewhere, for instance in the draft report of the Armenian Genocide Reparations Study Group.<sup>4</sup> The key point here is that individual reparations do not even address the genocide as genocide. They remedy specific thefts of businesses, lands, etc., in exactly the same way that they would if the thefts had been the result of individual thievery, fraud, or other criminality. Individual reparations are not reparations for genocide, but for some particular loss. While in reality each such loss was part of the overall impact of the genocide, treating the losses as individual dissolves the fact of the genocide itself.<sup>5</sup>

In this way, the conflating of individual and group reparations entails a conceptual confusion that is the hallmark of denial in its more advanced forms. If explicit denial began as a confrontational disavowal of the facts of history and their proper characterization, it later became not only a demonstration of power over the victim group(s)<sup>6</sup> and the perpetrator group’s general population (see above), but also a method of befuddling those outside the victim and perpetrator groups. The function of denial,

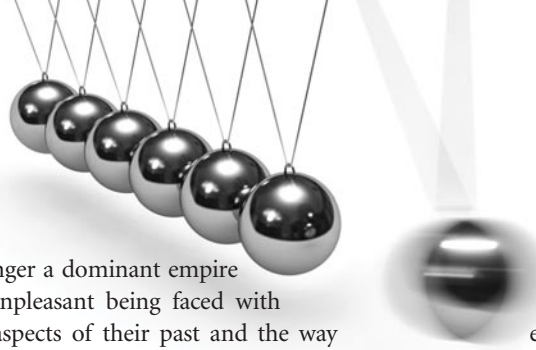
beyond the dominational (sadistic or imperial) thrills it provides its purveyors within and outside the Turkish people, is the conditioning of the global population to experience intellectual confusion at the mere mention of the Armenian Genocide.

The triumph of deniers has been to present the production of this confusion as the activity of the scientific critical thinking that is meant to overcome such confusion.<sup>7</sup> The most obvious is Descartes’ method of critical doubting, by which he subjected classes of beliefs, up to and including mathematical facts such as  $2 + 3 = 5$ , to various philosophical doubts about their certainty. Descartes’ method, of course, was the beginning point of a powerful philosophical progression in which Descartes built up extensive and comprehensive layers of certainty. Deniers, however, stop at the end of Meditation 1, and mistake “critical thinking” for the mere introduction of logical doubt regarding all assertions of fact. They fail to understand that Descartes’ process of destructive doubting, of tearing down belief systems, was the prelude to and had value only as the occasion for a much richer constructive project of knowledge production. By disconnecting the negative or destructive phase of Descartes’ project from the constructive, deniers can situate themselves within the legacy of Cartesian critical thought without following it out to its logical extension. In other words, they simply raise logical doubts, typically not reasonable, against any and all factual claims, no matter how well supported, and remain at that point.

This false Cartesianism has a certain half-life. While it can and presumably will be used indefinitely, over time it becomes less and less effective as information about the Armenian Genocide becomes more widely disseminated and available. As the factual basis becomes more established and assumed, the general population becomes less and less vulnerable to the attempts to confuse them through manipulative misuse of critical thinking principles. Doubt about empirical facts depends to a significant degree on ignorance of the comprehensiveness and internal consistency of the relevant empirical facts.

But since the 1990’s and the work of Norman Itzkowitz,<sup>8</sup> a new approach to





confusion has also been evident. Itzkowitz pioneered a vulgar postmodern relativist denial that melted all material historical facts into purely linguistic narratives all of equal status because all are equally constructs. Armenians had their narrative and Turks theirs. “Truth” disappeared into multiplicitous ambiguity, and all discussions of mass violence in the present became mutual military conflict, and in the past mutual rhetorical conflict. While this is resonant with some lesser strains of postmodernism, it grossly oversimplifies the complex views of the relationship between text/language and materiality characteristic of such figures as Foucault and Deleuze. What is more, in its relativizing use of the concept of the “other”—another term characteristic of postmodern discourse but actually with its origins in the earlier and politically unambiguous existentialism of de Beauvoir and Fanon—to mean any asserted difference between groups, it loses the core of the notion as a question of power relations: The “other” is properly that population whom the dominant exclude, demean, etc. Yet, in current discourse on Armenian-Turkish relations, the term is applied in both directions, as if Armenians are in the position to exclude or demean the Turkish state and society in a manner that has any demonstrable effects or approaches even partially the devastating impact of Turkish otherization of Armenians.

Similarly for “trauma,” which has become a vague and empty term as it spills out of the pens of many discussants of Turkish-Armenian relations. Following Itzkowitz and his co-author Vamik Volkan, “trauma” has been stripped of its proper clinical meaning as a specific, deep psychological reaction to destructive events, with serious psychological symptoms that can compromise the sufferer’s basic functioning, including such things as physical and mental hypervigilance, flashbacks, panic attacks, and so on. In discourse on genocide and particularly perpetrator-victim relations, the term is misused to designate lingering dislike or discomfort about some aspect of reality or intergroup relations one finds unpleasant or against one’s interests. The dissolution of the meaning of trauma undermines its clinical importance and reservation for those who have genuinely suffered, as opposed to those who might feel aggrieved because they

are no longer a dominant empire or find unpleasant being faced with negative aspects of their past and the way that past affects conditions today.<sup>9</sup>

Postmodern philosophy tends not to be system-building, but rather aims at undercutting claims of unity, essence, and the like. In this sense, it might appear to be an advanced version of the same destructive first movement of Descartes, and it is often treated that way, for instance by Halil Berktaş.<sup>10</sup> But political postmodernism, as opposed to the lightweight popularized derivative versions that permeate academia and popular culture today, contains within its very destabilization of key facets of modernity attempts to grapple with the results of that destructive process and, if not to build replacement systems, then to fashion some means of living a meaningful existence. The conceptual confusion introduced by decontextualized applications of postmodernism is more difficult to counter than the perversion of Cartesian doubt, as inherent in postmodern work is the uncertain struggle to overcome the loss of the possibility of unity, essence, certainty, etc. As its reductive conceptual framework becomes entrenched in academic study of conflict, violence, and oppression, it becomes a powerful tool because it undercuts the possibility of truth (there is no “truth,” only narratives, each as valid as the next), so that defeat of this kind of denial automatically leads nowhere, means nothing. This misapplication is a kind of metadenial that prevents even the possibility of establishing the veracity of a genocide. It is an end to direct or explicit denial precisely because it renders it unnecessary. By seizing control of the mental framework through which its victims think, it wins the battle no matter what path of analysis they take.

And this threatens to be the case, as well, regarding reparations. As the term is stretched to designate any kind of provision by some element of a perpetrator group of any material satisfaction to the victim group, the connection between what is given and the true damage done by genocide is obscured and confused. The issue is looked at from the perspective of the current status quo and its projection forward, in which no reparations would be made. From this perspective any provision is a positive step.

When the issue is considered within full view the extensive harms still impacting the victim group, including its very possibility of long-term viability as a cohesive entity, however, the connection between profound harm and extensive necessary remedy is clear. If in decades past the very framework through which the events of the genocide were engaged undermined proper understanding of those events, today the very framework through which the ultimate resolution of the “Armenian Question” is considered threatens a similar undermining.

The foregoing suggests that the standard dichotomy between denial and non-denial is misleading. Since denial itself has been designated as such, this discrete binary dualistic<sup>11</sup> split has been assumed without critical evaluation. This has resulted in an either/or exclusive categorization of individuals treating the Armenian Genocide—and similarly other genocides—as either deniers or not. But denial and truth are poles of a continuum, and the positions discussed above represent different points on that continuum. The enforced either/or has meant that some responsible scholars genuinely trying to understand the issues at stake have been reduced into the denialist category, while some scholars presenting problematic views that stray from the range of accurate possible characterizations of genocide have been put into the truth category and the problems thus shielded from critique. Lest this approach be seen to exonerate any of the resistant positions discussed in this article, it must be emphasized that avoidance of the term genocide remains far from the positive pole. What is more, the denial-truth continuum itself has given way to a cognitive correlate continuum between full impunity for genocide and full repair. If truth is the most that can be attained in terms of knowledge of the genocide, full repair is the most that can be achieved regarding the genocide itself. Both the recognition/dialogue/apology models and the individual reparations models, while not at the extreme of impunity for the genocide, are still far from the full repair pole. □

## ENDNOTES

For endnotes, go to [www.armenianweekly.com/2012/04/27/magazine/](http://www.armenianweekly.com/2012/04/27/magazine/)

## ENDNOTES

1. See especially Uğur Ümit Üngör, “Confiscation & Colonization: The Young Turk Seizure of Armenian Property,” in the *Armenian Weekly* magazine, April 2011: 6–13.
2. Hannibal Travis, “On the Original Understanding of Genocide,” *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 7, 1 (April 2012): 30–55 at 31.
3. In “Is There a ‘Neo-Racism?’” in Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, eds., *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1991), 17–28, Balibar argues that the defeat of biologically based racist ideologies did not mean an end to racism, but racism itself morphed into a new form or forms that were not susceptible to the criticisms leveled rightly against biological racism. Indeed, even the term “race” seems to have dropped out, as codes such as “immigrants” make acceptable treatment that if it were explicitly racially based would not be tolerated. The net result is still extremely harmful to the victims of racism, but the form their oppression takes is different from earlier forms.
4. The members of the group are Alfred de Zayas, Jermaine McCalpin, Ara Papian, and myself.
5. As I argued in “Reparational Efforts for Lost Armenian Properties,” presented at “The Armenian Genocide: From Recognition to Compensation,” Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, Antelias, Lebanon, Feb. 23–25, 2012, on Feb. 25.
6. See Israel W. Charny, “A Contribution to the Psychology of Denial of Genocide,” in *Genocide & Human Rights: Lessons from the Armenian Experience*, special issue of *Journal of Armenian Studies* 4, 1–2 (1992): 28–306.
7. See Theriault, “Against the Grain: Critical Reflections on the State and Future of Genocide Scholarship,” *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 7, 1 (April 2012): 123–144 at 133.
8. For the analysis of Itzkowitz’s denial methods as discussed here, see Theriault, “Universal Social Theory and the Denial of Genocide: Norman Itzkowitz Revisited,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 3, 2 (2001): 241–56.
9. The analysis in this and the preceding paragraph is based on Theriault, “Against the Grain”: 129–132.
10. See Theriault, “Post-Genocide Imperial Domination,” in *Controversy and Debate*, special Armenian Genocide insert of the *Armenian Weekly*, April 24, 2007: 6–8.
11. See Anne Waters, “Language Matters: Nondiscrete Nonbinary Dualism,” in *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004): 97–115.

# Tlön, Turkey, and the Armenian Genocide<sup>1</sup>

“*It has allowed them to question and even to modify the past, which nowadays is no less malleable or obedient than the future.*

—JORGE LUIS BORGES, ‘TLÖN, UQBAR, ORBIS TERTIUS’

By Marc Mamigonian

It has long been clear—at least since 1950 and the publication of Esat Uras’ *Tarihte Ermeniler ve Ermeni Meselesi*,<sup>2</sup> though, in fact, probably since 1915 itself<sup>3</sup>—that the Turkish state, with its allies and hirelings,<sup>4</sup> has sought to construct an alternative history in which, at various times, the Armenians have either not existed, or existed only as a tool of Western imperialist powers threatening the integrity of Turkey or the Ottoman Empire; a history in which the Armenian Genocide cannot be named independent of the words “alleged” or “so-called.” In this sense, the writing of history has served as a continuation of the genocidal process.

In the past decade, even as a few scholars from Turkey and Turkish citizens have begun to talk and write more openly about their history, including the Armenian Genocide, Ankara, perhaps concerned that it is losing the battle to erase and rewrite history, or, on the contrary, perhaps because it believes that victory is achievable, has raised its efforts to a new level. This article examines some of the ways Turkey creates and disseminates its perversion of history and how its narrative is (unknowingly or knowingly) passed along to mostly uninformed readers, with the end result of skewing the discussion towards a narrative acceptable to Turkey. A comprehensive history and analysis is well beyond the scope of this article and, in fact, calls for a book-length study.

Outside Turkey (and perhaps even *inside* the country) it is not too well known that there has existed since 2001 an entity called, in Turkish, Asılsız Soykırım İddiaları ile Mücadele Koordinasyon Kurulu (ASİMKK) or, in English, the Committee to Coordinate the Struggle with the Baseless Genocide Claims.

According to Jennifer Dixon, a scholar who has researched the development of the official Turkish historical narrative on the “Armenian Question,” the committee is “[c]o-headed by the Foreign Minister and the general who heads the National Security Council” and “also includes high-level representatives from a number of key government ministries and organizations, including the Ministry of the Interior, the Turkish Historical Society and the archives.” Dixon further explains that “it appears that its main goals have been to coordinate and execute a centralised strategy for responding to international pressures on this issue, and to shape public opinion in Turkey and abroad on this issue.”<sup>5</sup>

Turkey is thus perhaps the only state with an official or semi-official entity devoted exclusively to events that it maintains did not occur. The committee has not been idle, and the number of publications devoted to refuting the “Baseless Genocide Claims” has increased substantially since 2001.<sup>6</sup>

On June 10, 2010, Turkey’s state news outlet Anadolu Agency reported that in 2011, the Turkish Historical Society (Türk Tarih Kurumu) would publish a 20-volume encyclopedia that “aims to create the most comprehensive resource on Armenian problem [*sic*].” Project director Prof. Enis Sahin stated, “When we first started this project, we thought it would be comprised of 5,000-6,000 pages... Now it seems to be a set of books of nearly 20 volumes each



with 600 or 700 pages. It will become an encyclopedia.”<sup>7</sup> Although the encyclopedia has yet to appear, this author is informed that it is still in the works.

The creation of the 20-volume *Un-cyclopedia* of the Armenian Non-Genocide would likely represent a milestone of sorts in the state’s untiring efforts to negate history. Sahin wrote in 2003:

If Turkey wishes to become a global state or an influential power in its region, it should overcome the difficulties it faces in the Armenian Question just like in each issue and should formulate highly realizable policies in line with its geopolitics and put them in place. These policies should be adopted as imperatives for the country; never should there be any concessions from them... It is evident that Armenian allegations of genocide are a complete deception... There should be an abundant number of works translated into foreign languages supporting the Turkish thesis in libraries and research institutions in these countries.<sup>8</sup>

Sahin’s statements suggest that his agenda is to support and advance the state’s interests (as represented by its official thesis on the “Armenian Question”) by any means necessary. Such remarks might seem unusual coming from a professor of history, but they are less so when one remembers that the Turkish Historical Society was created in 1931 by Atatürk for the development and dissemination of Turkey’s official, state-generated history.<sup>9</sup>

## A DIGRESSION BY WAY OF BORGES

The Turkish Historical Society’s uncyclopedic undertaking—as a part-for-whole representation of the entire monstrous apparatus dedicated to creating a fake history—strongly calls to mind Jorge Luis Borges’ uncanny, nightmarish *fiction* “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius.” Not a short story in the usual sense, it is, as the author points out in the foreword to the collection *The Garden of Forking Paths* (1941) in which it first appeared, an example of what he calls “notes upon imaginary books.”<sup>10</sup>

It is difficult to summarize a commentary on an imaginary book. The Borgesian narrator describes his dawning awareness of the land called “Uqbar” (which, as coincidence would have it, is supposed to be located near Armenia), which is mentioned in some copies of a certain encyclopaedia. Doubting the very existence of such a place, he reads that “the literature of Uqbar was fantastic in character, and that its epics and legends never referred to reality, but to the two imaginary realms of Mlejnas and Tlön...” (19).

Later, much to his surprise, the narrator encounters one volume of *A First Encyclopaedia of Tlön*: “clearly stated, coherent, without any apparent dogmatic intention of parodic undertone” (22).

It emerges, finally, that this is all part of a vast intellectual conspiracy born in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: “A benevolent secret society... came together to invent a country... [and] in 1914, the society forwarded to its collaborators, three hundred in number, the final volume of the *First Encyclopaedia of Tlön*. The edition was secret; the forty volumes which comprised it (the work was vaster than any previously undertaken by men) were to be the basis for

another work, more detailed, and this time written, not in English, but in some one of the languages of Tlön. That review of an illusory world was called, provisionally, *Orbis Tertius*...” (31–32).

This might be the end of the story. Except that in a postscript written seven years later (that is, seven fictional years later), the narrator reveals, with quiet horror, that the “unreality” of Tlön begins to intrude into the “reality” of this world:

Contact with Tlön and the ways of Tlön have disintegrated this world [...] Now, the conjectural ‘primitive language’ of Tlön has found its way into the schools. Now, the teaching of its harmonious history, full of stirring episodes, has obliterated the history that dominated my childhood. Now, in all memories, a fictitious past occupies the place of any other. We know nothing about it with any certainty, not even that it is false. Numismatics, pharmacology and archaeology have been revised. I gather that biology and mathematics are also awaiting their avatar.... A scattered dynasty of recluses has changed the face of the earth—and their work continues. If our foresight is not mistaken, a hundred years from now someone will discover the hundred volumes of The Second Encyclopaedia of Tlön. Then, English, French, and mere Spanish will disappear from this planet. The world will be Tlön (34–35).

For those who follow closely the historiography of the Armenian Genocide and the simultaneous anti-historiography of the Armenian Non-Genocide, much of this should sound less like fantasy than like grim realism. Because when it comes to the history of the Armenian Genocide, to an alarming extent, *we are already living in Tlön*.

But how does this process work? How does the unreality of genocide denial enter into and permeate our world? It is not by means of a secret society as in Borges’ fiction. Mainstream journalism and scholarship undertake the work—sometimes knowingly, sometimes unknowingly—of constructing Turkey’s Tlön.

For the purposes of this article, one example must suffice: a work of journalism that swallows whole the idea that the discussion of the Armenian Genocide is a “debate” and the virtual unknowability of what is actually a rather well-documented historic event or series of events. The article by Jack Grove, which appeared last year in the (London) Times Higher Education, “Can We Ever Know the Truth About the Armenian ‘Genocide?’”<sup>12</sup> serves as a good case study, as it is almost the apotheosis of a “neutral journalistic”<sup>13</sup> approach to the Armenian Genocide that probably unwittingly serves to advance the cause of genocide denial and the dissemination of unreality.

The strategy of denying the Armenian Genocide outright has mostly become the exception rather than the rule. This is not to suggest that what one might call classic, old-school denial<sup>14</sup>—“There was no Armenian Genocide and besides they deserved it” does not live on. Unfortunately, virulent and blatant denial and victim-blaming—unlike analogous Holocaust denial, for instance—is readily available and often is authored by figures associated with one or more of the several Turkish-American groups one of the tasks of which is to import Turkey’s war on historical truth.

More than 20 years ago, the pioneering genocide scholar Roger Smith wrote that “[t]he Turkish argument is elaborate and

systematic and, though some of its surface details have changed over time, its basic structure has remained one of denial and justification.”<sup>15</sup> This is still largely the case today, though one must qualify the phrase “Turkish argument” because not only, of course, is this not an argument made by all Turks, but also because denial and justification of the Armenian Genocide are not limited to Turks.<sup>16</sup>

Overall, since Smith wrote his important essay, the language and the content of Turkey’s denial have evolved,<sup>17</sup> and this evolution has had its impact on the kind of genocide denial that the average person might encounter. The blunt instrument of old-school denial has been honed into a more precise dagger. In the U.S. and Europe, in particular, in order to advance its agenda of spreading mistruth, denial exploits cherished ideals such as freedom of speech and the belief that there must always be two sides to each story.

Instead of confronting the genocide head-on, deniers play upon widespread ignorance of the subject and seek to create doubt. By reframing well-documented history as a “controversy” with at least two legitimate “sides,” they engage in spurious, circular debates with the goal of indefinitely deferring genocide recognition and its consequences. Prof. Taner Akçam has formulated it well: “we can observe that on the subject of the Armenian Genocide, the Turkish government and entities that support its positions follow a very systematic and aggressive policy in the U.S. The essence of this policy is to make the idea that ‘1915 was not genocide’ be accepted as normal and as equivalent to the idea that ‘1915 was genocide.’”<sup>18</sup> Consequently, if both “it was genocide” and “it was not genocide” are equally acceptable positions, then of course there can be no such thing as “genocide denial.”

This policy is being pursued in at least two related ways. The first is a campaign of legal intimidation. Examples include the failed effort in Massachusetts to sue the Commonwealth’s Board of Education for not including denial-supporting materials in its curriculum on genocide<sup>19</sup> and the thus far dead-on-arrival defamation suit against the University of Minnesota and its Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies for identifying the Turkish Coalition of America’s website as one of many “unreliable” sources.<sup>20</sup> This tactic seems intended to produce “a chilling effect on the ability of scholars and academic institutions to carry out their work freely.”<sup>21</sup>

Even when such lawsuits fail, they not only serve to intimidate scholars but also to advance the idea that the subject of the Armenian Genocide is *inherently* controversial and disputed, thus helping to re-frame the discussion in terms congenial to the agenda of new-style genocide denial. In competitive sports this is known as “working the refs.” If a coach complains constantly about penalties on his team, the beleaguered referee may unconsciously start balancing things out, if only to stop the complaints. But, of course, *the complaints never stop*. Another form of this tactic is on display nearly every time a journalist writes anything about the Armenian Genocide and letters, emails, and phone calls follow from Turkish officials or domestic pressure groups, to say nothing of government and business entities seeking to assist a valued ally regarding a “sensitive” matter.<sup>22</sup> It is understandable, though not excusable, that press outlets alter their coverage in a more “balanced” way that they think will make these complaints stop or will safeguard them against legal attacks.

Denial of the Armenian Genocide is only to be expected from advocates of Turkish state interests. More pernicious, arguably, is the conscious or unconscious adoption of denialist themes and rhetorical framing by academics and mainstream journalists. These issues of language and framing are familiar to anyone who follows media coverage of the Armenian Genocide. One is accustomed, when reading the arguments of advocates for the official Turkish position, to encounter leading questions, euphemisms, distortions, and false equivalences, all geared towards a certain “spin.” Denialist phrasing includes such old chestnuts as “so-called Armenian genocide,” “alleged massacres,” “Armenian relocation,” “civil war,” and “necessary wartime security measure.” It should be noted that this maximalist form of denial has been, if not replaced, then augmented by an ostensibly humane approach that takes note of Armenian suffering, even acknowledging massacres, but invariably stresses that the First World War was a time of great general suffering and that in no way was there a deliberate effort to eliminate the Armenians.

Sometimes the maximalist approach and the quasi-humane approach rest cheek by jowl within the same article. For example, Turkish Coalition of America “resident scholar” Bruce Fein’s “Lies, Damn Lies, and Armenian Deaths” allows that “Armenians have a genuine tale of woe” but states that they have concocted an exaggerated number of deaths during the non-genocide to make a more convincing case as they seek “a ‘pound of flesh’ from the Republic of Turkey,” an eyebrow-raising comparison of Armenians to Shakespeare’s Shylock.<sup>23</sup>

One is accustomed, too, to the “he said/she said” treatment of the Armenian Genocide that has become the most frequent fall-back position for many mainstream news media, particularly when (and this is almost always the case), the writer has no background in the subject matter. NYU journalism professor Jay Rosen provides a helpful guide to the hallmarks of he said/she said reporting:

- There’s a public dispute.
- The dispute makes news.
- No real attempt is made to assess clashing truth claims in the story, even though they are in some sense the reason for the story. (Under the “conflict makes news” test.)
- The means for assessment do exist, so it’s possible to exert a factual check on some of the claims, but for whatever reason the report declines to make use of them.
- The symmetry of two sides making opposite claims puts the reporter in the middle between polarized extremes.<sup>24</sup>

The effort to get influential mainstream newspapers such as the Boston Globe and New York Times to stop mandating such inane formulations as, “Armenians claim that as many as 1.5 million...” whereas “Turkey states that Armenians and a larger number of Turks and Muslims died as a result of wartime conditions...” met with success despite the deeply entrenched tendency to engage in false equivalences in the belief that this demonstrates a lack of bias and shows journalistic objectivity.<sup>25</sup> As Rosen writes, “Journalists associate the middle with truth, when there may be no reason to... Writing the news so that it lands somewhere near the ‘halfway point between the best and the worst that might be said about someone’ is not a

truth-telling impulse at all, but a refuge-seeking one, and it's possible that this ritual will distort a given story."<sup>26</sup>

The problems that Rosen identifies as endemic to he said/she said journalism are on display in Grove's article "Can We Ever Know the Truth About the Armenian 'Genocide?'" The problems start with the title.

The title is a good example of what is known as a loaded question—a question that is deployed for rhetorical purposes in order to frame the discussion that follows. To choose another example that has more current-day resonance than a journalist might ask innocently: "Which side do you take in the global warming controversy?" Such a question presupposes the existence of a "controversy," and a controversy presupposes the existence of two or more opinions or sides with a more or less equal claim on truth. To ask the question "Can We Ever Know the Truth About the Armenian 'Genocide?'" is to adopt the language of the party that asserts the existence of a controversy in the face of overwhelming evidence—a party that desperately seeks to be recognized as half of a "heated dispute" rather than as a trafficker in fake history.

The quotation marks around "genocide" signal to readers that the word thus enclosed is somehow questionable. We cannot know the writer's or editor's motivation for using those scare quotes. If the "controversy" is the news, according to Rosen's model, perhaps the scare quotes are meant to telegraph journalistic objectivity by positing the existence of a "debate": i.e., was it a genocide or a "genocide"? They may be read as: "We are not saying it was a genocide, we are not saying it was not a genocide. We are just reporting on a controversy from a neutral position." Nevertheless, the scare quotes within a loaded rhetorical question support the reading that is most congenial to genocide deniers. Far from staking out an already specious middle position, the scare quotes place Grove and Times Higher Education in apparent alignment with those who, "when not able to silence the question of genocide altogether, [attempt] to sow confusion and doubt among journalists, policy makers, and the general public."<sup>27</sup>

The first sentence of the article proper states what appears to be a simple fact: "Few academic subjects are as politically explosive as the dispute over the mass killings in Armenia." The writer has correctly stated that this is an academic subject with political repercussions. However, instead of proceeding to present an accurate assessment of the academic consensus<sup>28</sup> and the reasons for the *political* controversy, which would clearly require a substantial exploration of the subject, the author follows the path of least resistance and presents "both sides" of the "dispute," which, misleadingly, becomes located in the academic realm rather than in the political.

The second sentence virtually constitutes a statement of the *locus classicus* of genocide denial: "Almost 100 years after the alleged atrocities of 1915–16, arguments still rage over whether the deaths of between 600,000 and 1.5 million Armenian civilians constitute genocide." "Alleged atrocities": that is to say, even the fact of atrocities, whether as part of the execution of a genocide or not, is called into question. A wide range of estimated deaths reinforces the idea that even after "almost 100 years" we are no nearer to the truth.

The already tenuous grip on logic is altogether lost in the sentences that follow. "Most historians agree that Ottoman Turks deported hundreds of thousands of Armenians from eastern Anatolia to the Syrian desert during the First World War, where they were killed or died of starvation and disease." Actually *all* historians agree that hundreds of thousands of Armenians were deported from Anatolia to the Syrian desert and that large numbers of them died. Even the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs acknowledges the death of as many as 300,000 Armenians.<sup>29</sup> Yet Grove cannot deign to present even this as a firmly established fact.

"But was this a systematic attempt to destroy the Christian Armenian people?" Grove asks, "[o]r was it merely part of the widespread bloodshed—including the deaths of innocent Turkish Muslims—in the collapsing Ottoman empire?"

A false choice is presented here, because the extermination of the Armenians was *both* a systematic attempt to destroy them—a genocide—as well as part of the overall bloody collapse of the Ottoman Empire during a world war in which many Turks and Muslims also died. Likewise: Was the Holocaust a systematic attempt to destroy the Jewish people? Or was it part of the widespread bloodshed—including the deaths of innocent German civilians—in the war-torn Nazi empire? Clearly it was both. Such false opposition, which masquerades as objectivity in its pretense of emphasizing the tragedy of all loss of life, is a staple of genocide denial—any genocide denial.<sup>30</sup>

Our suggestion is not that Grove knowingly drew on the rhetorical tools of genocide denial or deliberately trivialized the extermination of the Ottoman Armenians. However, he made no attempt to answer the questions he posed or to provide any factual information that a reader could use to formulate a response. In short, he failed to do his job.

The fog of doubt hovering over the author's references to the "alleged atrocities" and quote-genocide-unquote obscures other facts as well. Having noted that "Hrant Dink was assassinated by a 17-year-old nationalist in 2007 after criticising the country's denialist stance," he then retreats and states that "[b]efore Dink's death, such claims had resulted in his being prosecuted for 'denigrating Turkishness.' The Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk was also prosecuted for making similar claims." Claims? Did they make claims or did they make factual statements that brought them into conflict with Turkey's "denialist stance"? And what, for that matter, *is* Turkey's denialist stance? Who formulates it and how is it disseminated? Surely these are questions whose answers a reader of this article would find relevant, but Grove either doesn't know or doesn't think this is important enough to share with readers.

The bulk of the story consists of a collection of quotes from "both sides" of the spurious "debate." Jeremy Salt of Bilkent University takes up the classic "Yes, Armenians died, but..." position, emphasizing "the scale of the catastrophe that overwhelmed the Ottoman Empire." All peoples of the dying empire suffered and died from "massacre, malnutrition, disease, and exposure. Armenians were the perpetrators as well as the victims of large-scale violence... These are the facts that any historian worth his salt will come across," declares Salt.



Salt's statements call to mind part of Roger Smith's enumeration of the rhetorical tropes of Turkish denial in 1989: "Armenians suffered and died, but this was due to wartime conditions and to elements beyond the control of the government—Kurds, criminals, officials who disobeyed orders" but "the number of Turks who died was far greater."<sup>31</sup> Since Grove makes no effort to explore the reliability of Salt's account, the questions need to be asked: What is the purpose of the article and what is Grove's responsibility towards his readers?

The comments of Hakan Yavuz of the University of Utah department of political science<sup>32</sup> shift the discussion away from history itself and towards a "debate." He identifies "the Armenian diaspora" as "the key obstacle to advancing the debate over the causes and consequences of the events of 1915." The diaspora promotes what he calls "the genocide thesis" and works towards "silencing those who question their version" of history.

That is, these are simply two "narratives" of history and neither can be privileged over the other. Such an approach again calls to mind Akçam's assessment: "The essence of this policy is to make the idea that '1915 was not genocide' be accepted as normal and as equivalent to the idea that '1915 was genocide.'"

Yavuz presents another common talking point: "One may conclude that the Armenian diaspora seeks to use the genocide issue as the 'societal glue' to keep the community together." Such a statement deftly avoids addressing what actually occurred historically, and shifts the discussion away from a discussion of facts and toward the realm of identity politics.<sup>33</sup>

While Salt along with Yavuz handle the role of "he said," Akçam is forced into "she said." His presence in the article appears to result not from his authorship of numerous significant books and articles on the Armenian Genocide but because he "told a conference at Glendale Public Library, Arizona [*sic*, the event took place in Glendale, Calif.], in June that he had been informed by a source in Istanbul, who wished to remain anonymous, that hefty sums have been given to academics willing to counter Armenian genocide claims."

"Beyond the legal writs, however, the episode has raised questions of whether free historical investigation of the genocide claims can ever take place amid the frenzied Turkish-Armenian political climate," writes Grove, making use of the doubt-raising term "claims." Akçam is quoted making no such statement.

Grove writes that Akçam "believes pressure from Ankara has made it impossible for Turks to look into the subject at home." That assertion is certainly supportable. But the fact that researchers in Turkey feel real pressure not to address the Armenian Genocide does not mean that there is no "free historical investigation of the genocide," since Akçam is himself engaged in such work—but not inside Turkey.

Giving the impression that such work is impossible suits the purposes of those promoting denial, however, inasmuch as it questions the validity of the large body of scholarship on the Armenian Genocide. Grove's readers are given no real opportunity to understand the actual state of "historical investigation" or who actually creates obstacles and how. A great many readers will come away from it knowing only of the existence of a somewhat nebulous

"debate" that might be historical, might be political, or might be legal, but the true facts of which are either unknowable or not important. Or, in Jay Rosen's formulation: "No real attempt is made to assess clashing truth claims in the story, even though they are in some sense the reason for the story."

Words written more than 25 years ago by Richard Hovannisian are perhaps even more applicable today:

As the number of persons who lived through World War I and who have direct knowledge of the events diminishes, the rationalizers and debasers of history become all the more audacious... At the time of the deportations and massacres, no reputable publication would have described the genocide as 'alleged.' The clouding of the past, however, and the years of Turkish denials, diplomatic and political pressures, and programs of image improvement have had their impact on some publishers, correspondents, scholars, and public officials. In an increasingly skeptical world, the survivors and descendants of the victims have been thrust into a defensive position from which they are required to prove time and again that they have indeed been wronged, individually and collectively.<sup>34</sup>

The Times Higher Education coverage shows how genocide denial has evolved a more effective model that seeks to establish itself as the legitimate "other side of the story." A journalist who can write without irony of "the alleged atrocities of 1915–16" clearly has fallen for this tactic. The "competing narratives" approach to the Armenian (scare-quotes please) "genocide" is the wolf of denial in the sheep's clothing of "objective reporting." Journalists who fail to see beyond the trap of "reporting the controversy" have effectively ceased to engage in journalism and are merely serving as conduits for genocide denial. Which brings us back to Borges. Each time an "objective, neutral" outlet uncritically passes along the Turkish state's historical fictions, the world is that much closer to becoming Tlön. □

## ENDNOTES

For endnotes, go to [www.armenianweekly.com/2012/04/27/magazine/](http://www.armenianweekly.com/2012/04/27/magazine/)

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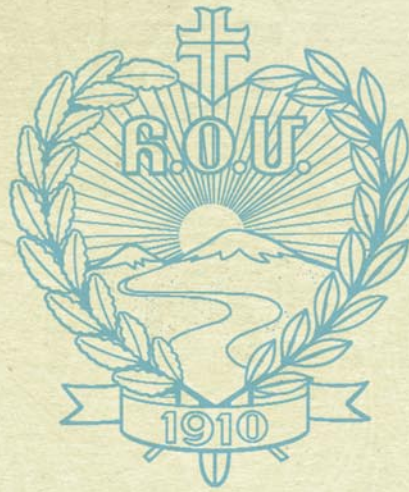
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## ENDNOTES

1. The author would like to thank Dr. Lou Ann Matossian for many helpful suggestions and comments during the writing of this article.
2. The English translation, *The Armenians in History and the Armenian Question*, appeared in 1988 with substantial additions and was widely distributed to libraries. Uras, aka Ahmed Esat, was a former Young Turk official and a participant in the organization of the Armenian Genocide. See Hilmar Kaiser, "From Empire to Republic: The Continuities of Turkish Denial," in *Armenian Review* 48.3-4 (Fall-Winter 2003), pp. 1-24.
3. Official Ottoman publications were issued concurrently with the genocide in order to offer justification of the process then unfolding. See, for example, *The Armenian Aspirations and Revolutionary Movements* (Istanbul, 1916; in English, French, and German) with its copious photographs of menacing-looking Dashnaks and Hnchaks and heaps of "confiscated weapons." Taner Akçam has observed that Talaat Pasha himself "laid the groundwork for the 'official Turkish version' of the deportation and killings" at the Union and Progress Party's final congress in November 1918 (*A Shameful Act* [New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006] p. 184). For a succinct account of the importance of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in "the consolidation of Turkish denial within official Turkish history" see Fatma Ulgen, "Reading Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on the Armenian Genocide of 1915," in *Patterns of Prejudice* 44.4 (2010).
4. As early as 1924, Edward Hale Bierdstadt would assert, "So far as I have been able to ascertain, the direct propaganda in which Turkey indulges is comparatively small...because Turkey has evolved an even better method of concealing truth and spreading untruth. She makes her friends work for her" (*The Great Betrayal: A Survey of the Near East Problem* [New York: R. M. McBride & Company, 1924], p. 84).
5. Jennifer Dixon, "Defending the Nation? Maintaining Turkey's Narrative of the Armenian Genocide," in *South European Society and Politics*, 15:3, p. 478. Dixon's 2011 UC Berkeley dissertation, "Changing the State's Story: Continuity and Change in Official Narratives of Dark Pasts," is by far the most informative source to date on the production, dissemination, and evolution of Turkey's official narrative of genocide denial.
6. *ibid.*, pp. 478-479.
7. Original link (no longer operative): [www.armenialive.com/armenian-news/ANKARA-Turkish-Historical-Society-launches-project-on-Armenian-issue](http://www.armenialive.com/armenian-news/ANKARA-Turkish-Historical-Society-launches-project-on-Armenian-issue). See [www.armeniandiaspora.com/showthread.php?244763-ANKARA-Turkish-Historical-Society-launches-project-on-Armenian-issu#.T2yH89m1Vw4](http://www.armeniandiaspora.com/showthread.php?244763-ANKARA-Turkish-Historical-Society-launches-project-on-Armenian-issu#.T2yH89m1Vw4).
8. "Armenian Question and Turkey: What Hasn't Been Done and What Should Be Done?" See [http://www.stradigma.com/english/april2003/articles\\_02.html](http://www.stradigma.com/english/april2003/articles_02.html).
9. Jennifer Dixon describes the Turkish Historical Society as "quasi-official" and a "nominally an independent foundation" whose "publications frequently reproduce and advance official ideologies on a range of topics, including the Armenian question" ("Changing the State's Story," p. 77 and p. 56, note 140). See also Fatma Müge Göçek's observation that "[i]n an attempt to place the blame for the past as well as present violence squarely on the Armenians, the Turkish state then drew upon its retired diplomats and 'official scholars' to reconstruct a mythic version of 1915. Through the selective use of archival documentation, the official Turkish Historical Society in particular started to build a large body of literature around the imagined narrative of past events" (*The Transformation of Turkey: Redefining State and Society from the Ottoman Empire to the Modern Era* [London: I.B. Tauris, 2010], p. 152).
10. Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones*, edited and with an introduction by Anthony Kerrigan (New York: Grove Press, 1962), pp. 15-16. The translation of "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" is by Alastair Reid. Further citations given in the text parenthetically.
11. Borges' "Orbis Tertius" (Latin: Third World) is undoubtedly intended to suggest the Nazi Third Reich. Connections between *Orbis Tertius* and Karl Popper's World 3 are worth exploring.
12. The article appeared on Sept. 22, 2011. See [www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=417484](http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=417484).
13. That is to say, one cannot and should not assume that Grove has any nefarious agenda. On the contrary, it is the very assumption that he is coming to the topic from an "unbiased" perspective that makes the article significant.
14. A very partial list of earlier analyses of the evolution of denial of the Armenian Genocide includes: Rouben Adalian, "The Armenian Genocide: Revisionism and Denial," in Michael N. Dobkowski and Isidor Wallimann, eds., *Genocide in Our Time: An Annotated Bibliography with Analytical Introductions* (Ann Arbor: Michigan: Pierian Press, 1992); Roger Smith, "Genocide and Denial: The Armenian Case and Its Implications" (*Armenian Review*, 42.1 1989) and Richard Hovannisian, "The Critic's View: Beyond Revisionism" (*International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 9.3, Oct., 1978); "The Armenian Genocide and Patterns of Denial," in *The Armenian Genocide in Perspective*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New Brunswick and Oxford: Transaction Books, 1986); "Denial of the Armenian Genocide in Comparison with Holocaust Denial," in *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999).
15. Smith, p. 6.
16. Nonetheless, because deniers frame the issue as an argument about (judgment of, accusation of, attack on) Turks, Turkey, or Turkishness—and, hence, increasingly play the "anti-Turkish" or "anti-Muslim" card—as opposed to a matter of historical truth, the "defenders of Turkey" respond by attacking the ethnic/national identity of their opponents. Hence the *tu quoque* counterassaults on Armenians, Armenia, or Armenianness; Western "colonialists," "genocidaires," "religious bigots," or "racists," etc.
17. See Dixon, "Changing the State's Story," esp. chapters 3-5.
18. As stated in lecture at the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR), May 2011.
19. See Memorandum and Order, C. A. No. 05-12147-MLW, U.S. District Court, District of Massachusetts, June 10, 2009. <http://pacer.mad.uscourts.gov/dc/opinions/wolf/pdf/griswold%20opinion%20june%2010%202009.pdf>.
20. See <http://www.mndaily.com/sites/default/files/Cingilli%20v%20U%20of%20MN.pdf> for Judge Donovan W. Frank's 3/30/11 dismissal of the case. The dismissal has been appealed.
21. The quote is from a Jan. 18, 2011 letter from the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) Committee on Academic Freedom to Turkish Coalition of America President G. Lincoln McCurdy. See <http://mesa.arizona.edu/committees/academic-freedom/intervention/letters-north-america.html#US20110118>.
22. This is not to say, of course, that individual Armenians and Armenian groups do not also attempt to achieve influence; but the fact is that the Republic of Armenia cannot be compared as a global player to Turkey, nor are Armenians able to draw on the considerable influence of international corporations, ex-government officials, and lobbyists that support Turkey. See, for example, Luke Rosiak, "Defense contractors join Turkish lobbying effort in pursuit of arms deals," <http://reporting.sunlightfoundation.com/2009/defense-contractors-join-turkish-lobbying-effort-in-pursuit-of-/>. In 2008, Turkey was ranked fifth among foreign governments in total money spent on lobbying activity and first in the number of contacts with members of Congress. See <http://reporting.sunlightfoundation.com/2009/adding-it-top-players-foreign-agent-lobbying/>.
23. See [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bruce-fein/lies-damn-lies-and-armeni\\_b\\_211408.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bruce-fein/lies-damn-lies-and-armeni_b_211408.html). Fein is also one of the two attorneys at Turkish American Legal Defense Fund, a project of the Turkish Coalition of America.
24. See [http://archive.pressthink.org/2009/04/12/hesaid\\_shesaid.html](http://archive.pressthink.org/2009/04/12/hesaid_shesaid.html).
25. See, for example, Christine Chinlund, "Should We Call It a Massacre or a Genocide?" *Boston Globe*, May 5, 2003. The *Globe* would announce its change in policy in July 2003.
26. Rosen, "He Said, She Said Journalism."
27. Smith, p. 18.
28. The repeated statements of unanimous affirmation by the International Association of Genocide Scholars, for instance, go unmentioned.

29. See “Armenian Claims and Historical Facts,” <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/data/DISPOLITIKA/ErmeniIddialari/ArmenianClaimsandHistoricalFacts.pdf>. This document is part of the Ministry’s treatment of the “Controversy between Turkey and Armenia about the Events of 1915.”
30. See, for example, Richard J. Evans, *Lying About Hitler* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), for a discussion of David Irving’s willingness to acknowledge large numbers of Jewish deaths but not a systematic policy of genocide.
31. Smith, p. 19.
32. Yavuz is also the director of the Turkish Coalition of America-funded program “The Origins of Modern Ethnic Cleansing: Collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the Emergence of Nation States in the Balkans and Caucasus” at the University of Utah. For Utah’s announcement of the program, see <http://unews.utah.edu/old/p/031009-1.html>. The university’s Middle East Center announced in its June 2009 Newsletter (29.2, p. 11) that “TCA has provided a gift of over \$900,000.00 to be used towards research and scholarship.” Online at [http://www.humis.utah.edu/humis/docs/organization\\_302\\_1249062720.pdf](http://www.humis.utah.edu/humis/docs/organization_302_1249062720.pdf).
33. This does not necessarily mean that the quest for justice for the victims of the genocide and their descendants is not an important force in Armenian Diasporan identity, of course. Obviously one can—and many do—examine the prominence of the genocide in diasporan identity without fostering doubts about the historical facts themselves. See, for example, Anny Bakalian, *Armenian-Americans: From Being to Feeling Armenian* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1993).
34. “Patterns of Denial,” p. 131.





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PERSPECTIVES

KINGS OF SPADES (1)

# Fantasies of Sovereignty in a Pathology Plot

## 'HEY, I GOT A SOCIAL DISEASE!': THE DISEASE ANALOGY

**I**n the title of the column by Alper Görmüş, a seasoned journalist who received the Hrant Dink prize in 2009, the quotation marks around the word 'stuck' (*takılıp kaldı...*) foreground the citable, repeatable quality of the word while mirroring the responsibility-shirking attitude of the column. Unlike other, affirmative or critical, uses of scare quotes in a title, the quotation marks here serve as a safety net around a phrase left hanging (a sense reinforced by the ellipses placed *within* the quotation marks in the original) as someone else's qualifier about Armenians. The entire title is a question that the writer himself simultaneously poses and withdraws by replacing the question mark with ellipses: "Why are Armenians 'stuck' in 1915..." Other than a disclaimer of the kind *it's not me who said it*, the title registers no distance, no analytical or critical distinctions.

The same attitude is visible in the more earnest overarching descriptions of crime denial, and the denial of the "1915 massacres" in particular: "The perpetrator's denial of his crime can, in some cases, be even more damaging than the crime itself," reads the very first sentence, which would clearly have the reader empathize with the

By **Burcu Gürsel**

A woman raped, disenchanted, and sickened by the burden of proof. Dogmatic, hypocritical, cowardly students. The first represents the Armenian Diaspora, and the second, politicized Kurds, in two telling fantasies that have adorned the pages of Taraf, the sometimes-contrarian Turkish newspaper, which recently boasted the Wikileaks first-publication rights in Turkey, and which is best known for its profound ambivalence with respect to just about everything but the military establishment. The fantasies in question were featured in columns by Alper Görmüş, in "Why are Armenians 'stuck' in 1915..." and by Halil Berktaş, in "Not that I was asked, but no, I do not want to teach at the BDP," which appeared at the tail-end of 2011.<sup>1</sup> These pieces exemplify a kind of quick psychologizing discernible in many writings that, while purporting to lend some kind of sociopolitical support to Armenians and Kurds, in fact objectify them as highly irrational, unstable, susceptible subordinates trapped or reveling in victimhood. The writers slip into the shoes of authority they criticize, and identify themselves with its gaze—the venerable older brother, the master professor—in formulaic, instrumentalizing readings of the other as though in a laboratory experiment. Gutted by the very fantasies they conjure up in order to illustrate their anti-authoritarian claims, their analogical and interrogative tautologies delineate the very bounds and fabric of the imagination.

hypothetical victim. But the *tentative* nature of the qualifier "in some cases" is quickly lost in the "fated" (*mukadder*) damage

which comes to possess the victim in the most absolute terms:

"Every victim who encounters such a denial will expend *all* their energy on turning the 'denial' into 'acknowledgement,' unless they have exhausted *all* of their life energy and *retreated* or *ended* their lives... The *primary* feeling of such a person will *inevitably* be 'rage.' On the other hand, a huge ethical problem presents itself when deniers, forgetting that they are the very cause of this 'rage,' further attempt to accuse a person almost sickened [*neredeyse hastalanmış*] with rage for being in that state. **Forgiving does more good to the forger than to the forgiven...**" (italics mine, quotations in bold in the original).

What Görmüş objects to here and later is not the *characterization* ("almost sickened with rage") of the victim who, he further adds, will need to "pour out the venom inside her," but the deniers' attempt to lay the blame for some such "almost sickness" on the victim herself. The vagueness of the phrase "almost sickened" itself captures the status of "sick" between a metaphor and a medical diagnosis, thus echoing the responsibility-shedding quality of the quotation marks in the title. The moment unfolds as yet another instance of misplaced analogies to human physiology, pathology, and contagion in reference to social problems, as well as imputations of social psychological illness, that pervade the Turkish media and the columns of many

self-proclaimed democrats. Before analyzing imputations of psychological illness, it is interesting to note how anti-discrimination writings analogically slip into biological determinism, and how the language of “disease” (*hastalık*),<sup>3</sup> marshaled to metaphorically displace sociopolitical problems, taps into a repository of fear and mystification surrounding the number one historic cause for death *en masse*: epidemics. As a political analogy, the language of “disease” is an alarmist and mystifying concoction that pushes many buttons at once: It evokes images of personal stigma (through additional metaphors stigmatizing diseases),<sup>4</sup> doom, and global apocalypse; it blurs agency through connotations of natural determination and preordainment, and recalls epidemic-related states of emergency that have historically licensed witch-hunts, minority pogroms, and even anti-(bio-) terror laws. The disease analogy rather successfully intensifies angst, mystifies all, and explains nothing.

One is tempted to joke that the use of disease as a metaphor is so pervasive as to be called, well, a disease. Nor are all of its uses metaphorical. Lamentably, in 2010 the same Taraf hosted in the guest column “Every Side [Her Taraf]”<sup>5</sup> edited by Markar Esayan what amounted to a relentless “debate” amongst conservatives as to whether homosexuality is a sin or, quite literally, a disease.<sup>6</sup> But the analogical use of the word disease proves the most fruitful and, as I will try to show, relevant. Markar Esayan himself privileges “disease” as one of the many introductory metaphors in his book *The Tight Room of the Present* (*Şimdinin Dar Odası*).<sup>7</sup> Quoting the opening paragraph of his own award-winning book in his Taraf column, “The Past,” he writes: “To be a person without a past... This hang-up is not new... This disease is not one acquired on purpose or knowingly. [We Armenians],<sup>8</sup> [w]e Easterners [and] we Anatolians live mostly in the Narrow Room of the Present, and fear the past just as much as the mouse fears the cat and the cat fears the dog.” Elsewhere, ruminating on “the Kurdish issue,” Esayan declares: “We are all sick; we have all gotten sick and we maintain a very good relationship with our sickness. Writing our immoralities backward, we read them as virtue.”<sup>9</sup>

The analogy of “disease” is also a favorite of Ali Bayramoğlu’s. A columnist in *Yeni*

Şafak and one of the leaders of the “Great Catastrophe” apology campaign,<sup>10</sup> Bayramoğlu has no fewer than 12 columns with the word “disease” in the title, in immediate or latent reference to “symbolism defect disease,” staunch *laïcité*, militarization, misconceptions of society, anti-government prejudice, the deep state, nationalism, power, and “The Kurdish and Military Problem: Two Intertwined Diseases.” Concerning nationalistic objections to the protest slogan ‘We are all Armenian’ in the aftermath of the murder of Hrant Dink, Bayramoğlu observes: “we are faced with a structure that does not understand metaphor, that has nothing whatsoever to do with simile, that is literalist, that attempts to explain everything by way of straight signs, that tries to graft even Islamism and nationalism on this symbolic defect.” Perhaps in defiance of such pedantry, that last column is titled “Political Symbol Disease.”<sup>11</sup>

Of all the devotees of the “disease” analogy, Etyen Mahçupyan, writing earlier for Taraf and now back in Zaman, is the most committed to making it work. In a column titled, quite simply, “Disease,” Mahçupyan asserts that “human perception” (*insani bir algılama*) accounts for the corollary between medicine and politics, and defends its salience despite acknowledging its flawed positivist thrust (never mind that defining as natural the metaphorical corollary between the body and society is tautological). The quotient of social “health” according to “sociopsychology,” in this view, is the ability for co-existence and functional communication, as opposed to assimilation, the use of force, and blame-game (itemized as the Turkish state and society’s “sick” attitudes toward the Kurds).<sup>12</sup> In another column titled “Acute and Chronic,” the writer explores the etiology of infectious and autoimmune diseases, only to analogically find that European racism, even as it takes the immigrant to be a “germ,” *itself* constitutes the “chronic” and “self-generated” (*bünyenin kendisinde*) disease issuing from European modernity and liberalism. By contrast, racism—and, according to the writer, its root-cause nationalism—“entered” the otherwise robust Ottoman Empire as an “infection,” but then became “chronic.”<sup>13</sup> European racism was thus a self-generated *disease of seeing immigrants as germs*, as

opposed to the Ottoman Metabolism’s ordinary good health. One begins to wonder whether European racism should more concisely be diagnosed Regional Congenital Hypochondria.

Where does this analogical thinking come from and where does it lead? Languages have disease-related *dead metaphors* such as “plagued by, poisoned by, infested with, congested, contagion, immunity, virus, toxic, antidote,” and, of course “social ills.” Words that once literally spelled horrors in human existence or exuded a sense of new scientific explanatory power can in their next or parallel lives adopt secondary or idiomatic meanings that are, nevertheless, unsuitable for rhetorical heavy-lifting. Disease-related dead metaphors gain discursive power when used pervasively and superficially to stigmatize an opponent group or theory. But they crumble under the weight of one bold-faced, capitalized title after another. And as a *social theory*, extended metaphors of disease not only hark back all the way to Antiquity but are rather antiquated themselves.

This last point is no small matter. The notion of a “body politic,” grafted upon an analogy between society and the individual organism, dates back to a determinable point in history not because there is a similarity grounded in “human perception,” but because political discourse, historically that of ruling elites, co-opted the body as a resource for metaphor as well—a resource that is readily experienced as a *unit of coherence* by the individual subject and that can never be *avoided* by her. As metaphors, the body politic and its pathologies evolved along with societies and with increasingly elaborate scientific understandings of the body. And yet, “the body that featured in comparisons of body and society did not have a historical dimension.”<sup>14</sup> Colorful physiological analogies for social problems and ideals pervaded pre-modern Europe, and fueled the French Revolution (the body as a metaphor for sovereignty, as a narrative device concretizing political abstractions, and as an element of ceremonial spectacle), followed by another peak in social functionalist organicism in 19<sup>th</sup>-century sociology and anthropology. Social theories scripted on the body-society analogy assume and idealize social integration and cohesion, using the analogy as a narrative



tool to create the illusion of and excuse for “scientific” claims.<sup>15</sup> The history of the categories of the normal versus the pathological in “hard” sciences itself has long been a subject for study, as have the analogies to physiological pathology favored by totalitarian regimes—such as Nazism with its “body politic” and the racially designated “toxins, parasites, tumors, bacteria,” etc., of which it should be “purged.”<sup>16</sup> If knowing that extended metaphors comparing society to the body are, and have always been, thoroughly ideological is not enough to dissuade a social theory enthusiast from searching for the “right” physiological analogies for society in lieu of the “wrong” ones, then perhaps a step-by-step invitation to consider both the individual psychoanalytic dimension of otherness and the historical, fluid stereotypes of racial, sexual, and psychological “pathology” would prove liberating.<sup>17</sup> It may be difficult for us all to recognize the stereotypes going into our assumptions; it should not, however, be difficult to realize that the problem is not *this* or *that* particular stereotype attributed to a group, but the ever-present endeavor of stereotyping itself.

In short, the comparison of nationalism and racism to “disease” is no more *natural* than the nationalist and racist comparison of minorities, immigrants, or foreigners to disease. In the world as we (should) know it, the comparison of the society to an “organism” with its taxonomy of “pathologies” is studied as a historic artifact, not a living legacy—unless the better half of the previous century and this one have entirely passed one by. The metaphors of pathology, if ever used, are best humored as dead metaphors, not mobilized for stigmatizing discourse or resurrected as sociological zombies. The urge inherent in the society-body comparison here and elsewhere<sup>18</sup> might be one of rhetorical subversion, but the logic is amiss. Just as one cannot subvert a bad racial stereotype with a good racial stereotype, one cannot subvert a bad analogy by taking its square, as in “racism is the disease of calling a group of people a disease.” Furthermore, stereotyping one group is not counterbalanced by “even-handedly” stereotyping another; rather, this piles one set of stereotypes upon another. But the most egregious thoughtlessness takes place when

a writer calls nationalism or racism a disease, and then frames a particular geographic or ethnic entity as (inherently!) racist or nationalist, effectively designating that entity as a *carrier of disease*. How is that not nationalistic or racist? Moreover, conveniently, the metaphor is used to reinstate a prelapsarian cohesion, thus externalizing a “racism *via* nationalism” as “not self-generated.” But most importantly, this tautological metaphor of “the disease of racism in the social organism” tells us absolutely nothing about racism. Identifying sociopolitical segments, actors, agents, groups, attitudes, facts, and events all at once as “sick” and demanding their responsible “treatment” is a contradiction in terms—in *metaphor*—that blurs and in fact eliminates agency and causality altogether. Disease actively spreads and yet cannot itself be *addressed* with a question. Agency falls squarely in the middle of nowhere between germ, cell, symptom, sickness, sick organism, medication, doctor, and hospital in this analogical universe. Which one of these is the state? Which one is the society? Which are journalists? Writers?

### ‘LIKE WE’RE PSYCHOLOGICALLY DISTURBED!’<sup>19</sup>: AN ALL-PURPOSE FORMULA OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DISEASE

Insinuations of “psychological illness” straddle the metaphorical and the medical—not because psychological illness doesn’t exit, but because discourses “of” psychological illness, especially as attributed to groups, are always *other* than cases in psychiatry, itself a self-critical field with an institutional history. Surely, when it comes to writings on “the diaspora” (declared “not monolithic” and then characterized as a two-part or single entity all over again), “disease” is asserted as *both* a metaphor and a literal psychological diagnosis of collective trauma. Typical elements of the psychological disease formula may include some or all of the assertions to the effect:

1. that (all of) “the diaspora” and (ultra-nationalists in) Turkey are both (equally) “sick”;
2. but that one must focus on the diaspora’s “psychological illness” in order to “empathize” with them;

3. that one first sees the immediate content of their “illness”: rage and vengefulness;
4. but that deep down, damaged victims are needy, in fact dependent on the “homeland,” for a final merciful recognition of some kind, most urgently of their pain (“Like inside, the worst of us is good!”<sup>20</sup>).

The formula can be evinced in starry-eyed, cheeky personal anecdotes along the lines of, “I saw the diaspora with my own eyes!” In this new subgenre of travel writing, each “Travels to the Diaspora” lays claims to honest unbiased observation while reproducing the same stereotypes as the next. The formula can also take the shape of intelligence reports by informants who then lament the diaspora’s “trust issues.” It can take the shape of a lab technician’s report recording the strange habits of a curious species.<sup>21</sup> It can, on occasion, come with fictional fantasies.

This feat makes its most intriguing appearances in pieces written as if to counteract damning or demonizing language about the Armenian Diaspora. The column by Alper Görmüş is one of them. In his column, Görmüş quotes Hosrof Dink, the brother of Hrant Dink, and the weekly newspaper *Agos* on the topic of what became known in Turkey specifically as “the French law criminalizing Armenian Genocide denial.” In an interesting synthesis, Görmüş agrees with Hosrof Dink’s contention that Armenians in Turkey must have the better fortune in being “treated” (*tedavi*) but criticizes him for seeing geographic location as the reason why the diaspora is “so angry” and “stuck.” For Görmüş, it is not their living abroad but the “internal” denial (in Turkey) that accounts for “why they are like that.” *Like what*, is where Görmüş’s protest against Hosrof Dink becomes no protest at all. Görmüş’s last section is strewn with these words in bold and quotation marks—borrowed words, as it were, that tirelessly recount the same master-narrative of trauma which he would criticize, and for which he will yet assume no responsibility: Some are in fact the words of Hosrof Dink quoted on the page, but others are not. “Treatment” is chief among many: “The process of the

Armenians' **'treatment'** can only begin with **'the denial of denial,'** Görmüş writes; the diaspora "was given no chance to have any feeling but **'rage'**"; even the opportunity for healing [*iyileşme*] by forgiving was taken away from them. I believe that when making references to Armenians' rage and their **'sickened'** state, something must be said about what made them like this." Görmüş then traces the diagnosis of sickness backwards to a cause, one that is conveniently both *interned* and *externalized* for damage control: "Had the State of the Turkish Republic put a distance between itself and the gangs that plotted and executed the massacres of 1915 and accepted all that happened in all its clarity, the Armenians living abroad would have long begun the process of **'treatment'** by now." Just as the apparent wish to absolve the diaspora of blame for their "sickness" serves to confirm its *status as sick*, the desiderata for truth with "all its clarity" confirm a simple, self-contained, appropriately distanced criminal band as the locus of evil. A sickness so certain, so general as to encompass an entire diaspora; an etiology so contained and extrinsic as to escape diagnosis. All of these implications fall under the rubric of **"treatment,"** the bold scare quotes borrowed from medicine as if for a fleeting taste of authority from on high.

As the person to whom Görmüş defers in his sequels to the first column, Etyen Mahçupyan well deserves another stop in the whirlpool of disease language concerning the diaspora in the Turkish media. Ever the proponent of quaint discourses of "Eastern mentality" and "Western mentality" in his books as well as articles,<sup>22</sup> Mahçupyan further clings to essential differences between the Armenians of Turkey versus those in the diaspora (understood as non-Anatolian). The first are privileged with deeper insight into "free will" and "the wide expanse between recognition and denial." But at the end of the day, "even the harshest names of the diaspora" could fathom these notions, if it were not for the fact that "their emotional need is far greater... They have been longing too long for an outstretched hand."<sup>23</sup> Finally, in his column "The 'Sick' Children of Anatolia," he is at great pains to apply the analogy of disease: "in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, everyone got sick one by one. Interestingly, the last ones to get sick were the Armenians and the

Turks who 'discovered' their identity. [...] And not surprisingly, the disease [of nationalism] ate its own children." Mahçupyan here emphasizes a vast difference in power between Ottoman and Armenian nationalisms, but concludes by way of intoning a sad past that "whispers in our ears how nationalism sickened these lands, and why we still fail to listen to or understand each other. It tells us why Armenians abroad support the Dashnaks and why they are so dependent on [*muhtaç olduklarını*] Turkey's voice of the heart [*gönül sesine*]. Anatolia is searching for the conscience and the heart that it has lost..."<sup>24</sup> Notice that the politico-historical descriptions lend themselves to a metaphor entirely lacking in agents, the *extrinsic* "disease" of nationalism, which morphs into yet another metaphor (the past with its seductive whisper), and into yet another (the voice of the heart). In a few nonchalant strides, we depart from the "positive" pathology of the social organism and arrive at the sing-song neighborhood of conscience. (It is not surprising that Ece Temelkuran, the exemplary focus of my previous article, "Queens of Hearts," has recently become the object of Mahçupyan's ire, but not on account of "the book" she wrote—therein they have so much common ground.<sup>25</sup>) Committed as he is, Mahçupyan is only taking his turn in a chorus refrain teeming with the innate disease of racism, the extrinsic disease of nationalism, the venom of racism in the blood, the venom of nationalism in the milk, the desperate Armenian, the Armenian stuck in the past, the sick Diaspora Armenian, the cured Armenians of Turkey. The pervasiveness is tragic; the pervasiveness is overwhelming; the pervasive is, sometimes, even surprising.<sup>26</sup>

As anxious as democrats/journalists in the Turkish media might be to "talk trauma," someone is always talking faster. "Psychological war" and "victimization psychology" are some of the oft-used phrases in denialist sources—websites, conference proceeding, books—idealizing and extolling a (racially defined) Turkish history, blaming Western imperialism and Armenian separatism, and attributing to the diaspora such characterizations as copy-cat behavior based on "the success of the Jewish Holocaust propaganda"; "trauma psychology" explained as the "psychology of victimization

and exemption"; "Diaspora psychology" itemized as self-alienation, purely imaginary reconstruction of the past, and an identity developed around hatred; "the Armenian Psychological War" concocted internationally to constrain Turkey and dismiss Ottoman war psychology, among others.<sup>27</sup>

The co-option of the terminology of psychology as nationalist discourse is not only a denialist project; it can be a non-negligible, and sometimes defining, aspect of the state orchestration of post-genocidal "reconciliation" processes as well. As Thomas Brudholm eloquently argues in *Resentment's Virtue: Jean-Améry and the Refusal to Forgive*,<sup>28</sup> reconciliation processes such as those in Germany and South Africa can dictate forgiveness rather than inspire or even elicit it—not least by insinuations about mental health. Therapeutic language, itself under increasing criticism in relation to mass-atrocity, can be co-opted by the authorities and the perceived leaders of the public sphere to frame victims as traumatized, self-preoccupied, deficient citizens stuck in the past. Dissent and resistance are suppressed and the victims' responses instrumentalized toward the higher end of a complete "social harmony." Emotions can be divested of their moral dimension and cast as the purely sentimental and spiritual. In contrast to such framing, and because of it, rage and resentment can be part of a legitimate demand for justice and reparations. They can constitute ethical, rather than vengeful and violent, resistance. As in the work of Améry, resentment can substantiate an "impossible" demand that the society wish what "should never have happened" never happened, that its view of the past and social identity be fully informed at all times and not selective, and that its future be marked, not by a damning collective guilt, but by fully-formed social responsibility.

## THE SPADE IN ITS LIKENESS: THE RAPE SICKNESS ANALOGY

A truly perplexing aspect of the column by Görmüş is that he devotes about a fifth of it to recount the plot for a story or novel he has never written, a plot that functions much like a parable reflecting the longer narrative of the column, "Why are



Armenians ‘stuck’ in 1915.” This is not only a story-within-a-story, but a *mise en abîme* that analogically reproduces the greater narrative. The sub-plot sets up a (secondary) metaphorical relationship: The larger narrative is “like” the parable inside it. An example to this narrative strategy can be found in the Bible, in the story of King David and Bathsheba, which has “the parable of the rich man” embedded in it. David sees himself in the narrative mirror of the rich man, and through this metaphorical detour comes to develop a moral feeling about his own action. The story-within-the-story implicitly invites the reader to do the same, that is, to identify herself with David in his moral self-discovery. But of course, there is no way of guaranteeing with whom the reader will in fact identify herself. And there is no guarantee that even after such self-identification takes place, the same emotional response to the character in a story will arise in response to oneself.<sup>29</sup>

Analogies can get the better of a writer, and illuminate other things than their analogous moral. Görmüş embeds his parable in his column thusly:

“Years ago, I had formulated in my mind a plot for a story (perhaps a novel) around this theme... My heroine was a woman who was raped by a man she very much trusted and called ‘*ağabey*’ [older brother]. When trying to deal with the trauma caused by the shattering of her trust, the woman faced one that was even worse: The man was saying that he had never done such a thing, and to top it off, the woman’s friends and acquaintances were speaking his language. My heroine decides to leave Istanbul, where she was born and raised, to move to a remote Anatolian city where her older sister and brother-in-law live, in the hopes of forgetting both the rape and the pain that the denial of the crime caused, and of curing [*tədavi*] herself. There, she would wield her rage on the one hand and keep track of the lawsuit she had filed on the other. Nonetheless, a few years would suffice for her to realize that this choice of hers would not serve the purpose she had intended. The woman would come to realize in that timeframe that what really made her “*sick*” was, more than the rape, the denial of the injustice she had been objected to by the man she had called “*older*

*brother*” and by everyone who knew the truth. In the plot in my mind the woman was driven by this perception to return to the lands where she was born and raised, and to face her friends and acquaintances. Even if the beginning would be disappointing, a friend whose conscience was bleeding would finally acknowledge the truth and apologize, and the process of her treatment would thus begin.”

A preliminary reading of this storyline, which of course tells us so much about fantasy and nothing about the “analogous” history Görmüş has in mind, will be about the elements of the story/analogy in itself. Here we have a rape narrative following a certain set of premises that indicate an urban cultural context which recognizes the woman as possessing a valid and independent, if violated and obstructed, personal identity, agency, physical integrity, sexual dignity, and privacy. In this regard, this is a fairly standard rape-and-denial narrative most familiar from Hollywood movies (one in eight of which features the rape of a woman, as well as male revenge on her behalf) and sensational books such as *Cry Rape: The True Story of One Woman’s Harrowing Quest for Justice*, which may or may not thoroughly explore how a seemingly gender-egalitarian system continues to uphold male dominance through socio-cultural and legal mechanisms. (In Europe and the United States alone, of all the rapes reported, a small percentage is charged, and roughly about 10 percent get convictions. This ratio is but a fraction of that in many parts of the world.)<sup>30</sup>

But even this premise is simultaneously and severely compromised: The storyline explicitly endorses male domination as assumed by the female outlook into the world and warranted by her inherent frailties. It may be a factual given that a large number of rapes of women are by men of their acquaintance, but it is not a given that these men are originally *revered* by those women. Yet the story repeatedly asserts that the woman deeply trusted the man as an “older brother,” and the denial by someone she so profoundly trusted hurt her more than the rape itself.

This is an incredibly problematic premise that implicitly attributes boundless naïveté, dependence, and internalized sub-

mission to the woman, a premise that in fact twice holds the victim herself as the greater cause of her own suffering on account of her original, *misplaced trust*—the wrong place being not the social structure but that particular bad egg. “Trust” (*güven*), unless phrased so as to indicate mutuality, pertains to the one who trusts, and not to the one to whom trust is directed. Her trust was so absolute as to be of the kind placed in an “older brother” (an uncontested criterion), but placed in the *wrong man*. What is problematized is not the replication of a hierarchical family paradigm, but the woman’s inability to detect aberration.

This causality immediately and consistently anchors our attention on the series of frailties in the *woman*—her original misjudgment, her total devastation, her negative, self-destructive, fruitless emotional response of holding a grudge and seeking legal recourse. The storyline defines this early on as “trauma” and then as “*sickness*” and reports from on high that the woman “realizes” [i.e., the *fact* that] this is not the way to go, because the actual cause of her suffering is not so much the rape, not even so much denial, but that she needs to trust again.

The perpetrator is never the problem as an agent, but remains an absent “denier” to the woman of everything he could have given her: complete trust in the system as a family structure where she would remain the happy subordinate. With the law crossed out as an incomplete, and therefore irrelevant, basis for relationships of trust, we are to read this storyline as a *personal* problem, between an aberrant, individual perpetrator (and her cohorts who inexplicably back him up) and a subordinate individual victim. The problem is essentially interpersonal and only tangentially communal. The crime temporarily upset the prelapsarian ideal of family cohesion: The solution can only be a post-lapsarian reinstatement of the same.

Meanwhile, the victim does all the work—travels years and distances—all of which comes to nil, with the final reward magically bestowed by a random denier in a split second: a personal apology which finally begins the victim’s “healing process.” This is suggestive, but in more layers than the obvious. The “trauma” victim again had mistakenly deserted Istanbul (twice reiterated: “where she was born and raised”) for





a remote town in “Anatolia”—the privileged locus of self-reflection. She returns—as it is *she* who must travel yet again to face her deniers—and it takes just one denier’s momentary change of heart, or shift in “conscience,” to begin her healing. Just because the victim happened to materialize *in situ*.

In this analogy, the Diaspora Armenian = rape victim is “stuck” indeed first and foremost because she is cast as a generic, objectified victim in the raw through historic time: the victim herself, and beside herself. A victim with neither her wits about her, nor her descendants, nor her defenders. The absent perpetrator, however, is both interned and externalized—a singular pervert buried in history. And yet, the perpetrator is indomitably represented through historic time by proxy, through the denialist cohorts. The Diaspora Armenian = rape victim has self-generated flaws (trust in the *wrong* superior, fleeing roots), and the constitutive weakness of being destructible = rapeable. Her fate is one of long and hard work in realizations about *herself*, of her own trauma-sickness, and her inevitable return to the location of crime which she herself had deserted (a caveat overwriting forced displacement and generational turnover in the diaspora). The perpetrator makes a comeback by proxy, in the form of a fellow denier, now becoming the Savior of the victim returned to sender as damsel-in-distress.

In the Turkish media of all stripes sexism comes in spades. Ahmet Altan, the editor-in-chief of Taraf, routinely compliments the Prime Minister on his *delikanlı* ways—connoting good-willed macho, man of his word, patron of the ‘hood, “green” yet virile lad. In a recent drama of political turnover in Turkey, Altan wrote that Turkish governments used to be to the state as the “submissive woman” is to “the brutish man” (sprinkled with domestic abuse details). But now, the state is to the government as the “wanton woman” is to the seducible man. That makes for some anti-climactic content for a column titled “The Roles Have Changed.”<sup>31</sup> In all of one paragraph, Markar Esayan, too, likened “the past” first to a “shameless... black widow,” then a “virgin” who becomes a “wanton, coquettish... temple whore” sleeping with “many a brute,” but still remaining “girl-boy-girl” [*kızoğlankız*, i.e., maiden]; the iconographic virgin-

where who “worships power...flirts with the powerful...and offers herself first to this one, then to that.”<sup>32</sup> Indeed!

On the other hand, the column by Görmüş does less, which is more. It parades a reactionary storyline as an emancipatory one, and leaves the ugly object hidden in plain sight. For rape is not *like* genocide; it is *part* of genocide.

If we want to “talk trauma,” and rape immediately springs to mind, but not the kind partaking in the history being represented, there is a problem. If we are instead seeking a generic analogy in rape *cum* trauma, then it is vital to remember that a woman’s rape is a pervasive representational trope for exploiting entirely irrelevant political agendas. We must also remember that men, too, get raped, in significant percentages especially in prison but also elsewhere, as is coming into clearer contemporary focus despite gender codes dictating silence. Although statistically men are more often the victim of all violence, women live in much greater *fear* of assault. If we want to talk rape-in-hierarchy, we can recall that women officers of the United States Army who get raped are, instead of *legally* heard as they wish, often discharged by their own superiors on spurious diagnoses of “personality disorder” (as opposed to post-traumatic stress)—a verdict rewriting the victim’s past, the crime, as well as their future. If we want to talk rape and denial, we can remember that, steering clear of Hollywood movies, rape goes by and large unreported in the greater world where there is no structure that recognizes a woman as the owner of her own body in the first place. Historically and in many parts of the world, what is considered violated is not her own body or integrity but male ownership and honor “embodied” in her alienable chastity, and purged through her exile or murder when violated. In perhaps the world over, rape, violence, and murder charges for a man can be mitigated by allegations on the woman victim’s sexual conduct, but charges for a woman can only be mitigated by the violence she herself endured at the hands of her victim. The law has only recently begun recognizing domestic rape (and that, only in certain countries), and rape remains that odd crime hinging on “consent.”<sup>33</sup>

A writer can devise whichever rape story he pleases. But a serious problem arises where mass atrocity is *compared* to a singular urban scenario of “sick” legal recourse for rape, followed by a randomly “curing” apology from a fellow denialist (no charges pressed). That problem might be: *Is there in fact a similarity between mass atrocity and rape, and could that similarity be the fact that there are kinds of rape and mass atrocity that cannot be legally actionable, that are in fact absent from the entire grammar of the law?* Representation where there is no representability pretends to grant the woman a kind of agency she never had, and strips away all the agency and resistance that she did assert.

The growing literature and documentation on rape during mass atrocity reveals many genocidal attitudes and practices in history: the prohibition on sexual intercourse with “non-Aryans” and simultaneous sexual abuse in Germany; the use of rape as a genocidal terror and assimilation mechanism to induce pregnancy in Bosnia; genocidal rape, forced conversion, and assimilation of women as domestic servants, sexual slaves, or coerced wives in the Ottoman Empire, among a host of others.<sup>34</sup> Genocidal rape as warfare comprehends the above pervasive effect of rape in the world at large on a massive scale of destruction, violence, and stigma.

And yet, instead of looking into rape as a *reality* in genocide, Görmüş prefers to take it as an *analogy* for the diaspora’s “sickness.” The diaspora becomes an inherently subordinate, naive, raw, sick victim of urban rape, misguided seeking recourse in cold legal indictment and enraged structural intervention—a recourse itself cast as *irrelevant* to the ineffable and total destruction of the woman’s soul. The writer drives the fantasy home, to the family reunion in the indivisible empire of the imagination, where the sickened damsel-in-distress will be brought back to life by the perpetrator-prince’s “brotherly” kiss of apology, personalized by proxy. □

## ENDNOTES

For endnotes, go to [www.armenianweekly.com/2012/04/27/magazine/](http://www.armenianweekly.com/2012/04/27/magazine/)

## ENDNOTES

1. See [www.taraf.com.tr/alper-us/makale-ermeni-ner-neden-1915-e-taklip-kaldi.htm](http://www.taraf.com.tr/alper-us/makale-ermeni-ner-neden-1915-e-taklip-kaldi.htm). This column became the first of a three-part series, although there was a significant time gap before the second installment, which followed, according to the author, significant responses from the paper's readership. The second column in question, by Halil Berkay, will be the subject of my sequel to this article, which will appear in the Armenian Weekly next month.
2. From the song "Gee, Officer Krupke" in "The West Side Story," parodying the various stereotypes that the establishment uses to frame social problems—in this case juvenile delinquency. Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, 1956.
3. The word "*hastalık*" could be rendered variously: "disease, illness, sickness, malady, ailment," among others. I suggest that "disease" comes closest to "*hastalık*" in its nominal form, which connotes pervasiveness without definitively implying "contagion" or "infectious" disease ("*bulaşıcı hastalık*").
4. Susan Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor* compares psychological associations of diseases themselves—tuberculosis in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and cancer in the 20<sup>th</sup>—as either an expression of the patient's character or an expression of the repression of the patient's 'true' character. The work was followed by a sequel, *AIDS and Its Metaphors*.
5. "*Taraf*" can mean aspect, way, (taking) side(s), (on) behalf (of), party (to a negotiation, conflict, etc.).
6. The "debate" itself was sparked by a comment by Aliye Kavaf, minister of "women and the family," to the effect that homosexuality is a disease and must be cured. Some of the contributions were then deemed prime examples of hate speech. Responses have included those by Ayşe Günaysu (see [www.sesonline.net/php/genel\\_sayfa\\_yazar.php?KartNo=55223&Yazar=Ay%C5%9Fe+G%C3%BCnaysu](http://www.sesonline.net/php/genel_sayfa_yazar.php?KartNo=55223&Yazar=Ay%C5%9Fe+G%C3%BCnaysu)) and the organization Nefretsoylemi.org (tracking hate speech) (see [www.nefretsoylemi.org/rapor\\_aciklamalar.asp#](http://www.nefretsoylemi.org/rapor_aciklamalar.asp#)). The newspaper Taraf itself otherwise reports on and has regular columnists writing on LGBTT issues.
7. Further metaphors will be discussed below.
8. The book won the *Inkılâp Kitabevi* book prize in Turkey in 2005. For variations, compare the author's quotation from his own book in his own column at [www.taraf.com.tr/markar-esayan/makale-gecmis.htm](http://www.taraf.com.tr/markar-esayan/makale-gecmis.htm) (reprinted in the author's website) with the commercial blurb at [www.kitapyurdu.com/kitap/default.asp?id=88409](http://www.kitapyurdu.com/kitap/default.asp?id=88409), also in the author's own website [www.markaresayan.com/?page\\_id=359](http://www.markaresayan.com/?page_id=359).
9. See <http://taraf.com.tr/markar-esayan/makale-kurt-sorunu-nasil-hallolunur.htm>.
10. The text of this extremely controversial campaign can be found in a number of languages at <http://ozurdiliyoruz.com/>.
11. See <http://yenisafak.com.tr/yazarlar/?i=3621&y=Ali%20Bayramo%C7%9Flu>.
12. See <http://www.zaman.com.tr/yazar.do?yazino=1162747>.
13. See <http://www.zaman.com.tr/yazar.do?yazino=1166319>.
14. A. D. Harvey, *Political Metaphor and Political Violence* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 2–3.
15. See Jonathan Gil Harris, *Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic: Discourses of Social Pathology in Early Modern England* (Cambridge UP, 1998) and Antoine de Baecque, *The Body Politic: Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770–1800*, transl. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford UP, 1993).
16. See, for example, Georges Canguilhem's *The Normal and the Pathological* (1943; 1966; published in English with an introduction by Michel Foucault in 1978). Examples on Nazi scientific practices, ideas, and physiological metaphors include Robert J. Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (Basic Books, 1986) and Robert Proctor, *The Nazi War on Cancer* (Princeton UP, 1999).
17. See, for instance, Sander Gilman's *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Gender* (Cornell UP, 1985) and Mieke Bal's scathing review demonstrating how critics themselves are prone to the very same stereotypical gaze that they would criticize ("The Politics of Citation," *Diacritics*, 21.1 [1991]: 24–45). Sander Gilman has since pursued further research into racial, gendered, and "psychological" stereotypes of pathology in medicine and biology.
18. The extensions and applications are discussed in the next section.
19. See note 2.
20. *ibid.*
21. Examples follow in an endnote below detailing the pervasiveness of the "sickness" discourse—although I am just as interested in its rhetorical role as extended metaphor and analogical displacement.
22. For some such article in English, see [www.eurozine.com/articles/2006-01-18-mahcupyan-en.html](http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2006-01-18-mahcupyan-en.html).
23. Even "The Demonized Children of Anatolia," a column against the denialist demonization of the diaspora, proceeds to characterize the diaspora as largely depoliticized, but forced by the politicized few into a singular identity based on ever-present pain ([www.zaman.com.tr/yazar.do?yazino=1224394&keyfield=](http://www.zaman.com.tr/yazar.do?yazino=1224394&keyfield=)). For the writer, the Westernized, sophisticated versions of Armenian nationalism "uninfluenced by Armenia" and the more heavy-handed and brutish Turkish version can always be interchangeable: "We should not forget that this is how former Unionists (*İttihatçılar*) viewed the Armenians, and it was due to this kind of view that genocide occurred. It is disgraceful that Armenians are sticking to the mentality that led to their own destruction" (see [www.zaman.com.tr/yazar.do?yazino=1221333&keyfield=](http://www.zaman.com.tr/yazar.do?yazino=1221333&keyfield=) and—in English—[www.todayszaman.com/columnists-204751-the-armenian-genocide-and-disgrace.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/columnists-204751-the-armenian-genocide-and-disgrace.html)). The writer states that Armenians need to appeal to Turkish people with their pain and approach their humanistic side, not aggravate matters by political insistence on recognition.
24. See [www.zaman.com.tr/yazar.do?yazino=1223842](http://www.zaman.com.tr/yazar.do?yazino=1223842).
25. Mahcupyan deplores Temelkuran for an anti-government piece she had written for the international media, accusing her of supporting the deep-state and of using the memory of Hrant Dink in that article as well as in "the book" (he implies *Deep Mountain*). Temelkuran herself had concluded her article thus: "As Dink said five ago in his last article, we journalists are 'like frightened doves'. One killed, two imprisoned, myself unemployed." The English-language articles are at [www.todayszaman.com/columnist-270333-hrants-parasites.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist-270333-hrants-parasites.html) and [www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/jan/27/turkish-journalists-fight-intimidation](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/jan/27/turkish-journalists-fight-intimidation).
26. Before the murder of Hrant Dink, his prosecution and conviction over a series of articles in *Agos* were in part based on a reading of the words "poisonous blood" as racist (whereas the analogy was between poisonous blood and racism itself), thus making him a target. Other analogies to physiological pathologies are marshaled in these articles to describe racism itself, but also the generalized "unhealed trauma" and "sickness" Dink attributes to the diaspora, as well as the twin "clinical condition" of trauma and paranoia to Armenians and Turks, respectively. In view of the essentialist or generalizing categories (Oriental, Anatolian, Armenians of the diaspora/Armenia) it is important to note that discourses, and precisely physiological metaphors such as those I analyze in this article, are either explicitly or implicitly validated as the legacy of Dink. Baskın Oran, who later presided much of the discourse on the apology campaign, has been resorting to numerous such analogies, for instance of "poison in the milk" (in reference to Turkish-Kurdish nationalisms) and persistent equalization of nationalisms through the language of disease and psychological sickness. One such example is the article "The Wheel Torture and Honor" in which Oran provides his bullet-point presentation of the "Armenian Psychology" by way of "reporting" according to his purposes on a scholarly group: [www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalEklerDetayV3&ArticleID=920692&CategoryID=42](http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalEklerDetayV3&ArticleID=920692&CategoryID=42). Exactly the same psychological formula appears in Markar Esayan's recent article after the French Legislation debates, "Thoughts on a Trip to

- France" ([www.taraf.com.tr/markar-esayan/makale-bir-fransa-seyahatinin-dusundurduklari.htm](http://www.taraf.com.tr/markar-esayan/makale-bir-fransa-seyahatinin-dusundurduklari.htm)). Orhan Kemal Cengiz advanced the same stereotypes in "My Encounter with the Armenian Diaspora" ([www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalYazar&ArticleID=1083345&Yazar=ORHAN-KEMAL-CENGIZ&CategoryID=98](http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalYazar&ArticleID=1083345&Yazar=ORHAN-KEMAL-CENGIZ&CategoryID=98)), which "counteracts" the characterization of Turkey as a "sick individual" in "An Armenian with a Mexican Hat." Ece Temelkuran's pervasive stereotypes in her book *Deep Mountain* were discussed in my review and Michael Goshgarian's. Rober Koptaş, presently editor-in-chief of *Agos*, also elaborates on nationalism as a disease, argues against demonizing the diaspora, and yet calls for "Pedagogy for the Turk, Psychology for the Armenian" as well as categorizes "Armenian the Victim [*mağdur*], Armenian the Tyrannical [*gaddar*]." These are reproduced, respectively, on his website: [http://hayatoldugugibi.blogspot.com/2010\\_05\\_01\\_archive.html](http://hayatoldugugibi.blogspot.com/2010_05_01_archive.html), <http://hayatoldugugibi.blogspot.com/2009/05/turkepedagoji-erمنيye-psikoloji.html>, <http://hayatoldugugibi.blogspot.com/2009/04/magdur-erمني-gaddar-erمني.html>. In "Guardians of the Temple," Murat Belge succumbed to the same stereotype of "rage" as psychological frailty alongside his "cocoon" metaphor designating the diaspora, along with numerous other direct stereotypes for "good" and "bad" essential qualities he attributes to Armenians, regionally classified in his travels: [www.taraf.com.tr/murat-belge/makale-diaspora-ve-tapinak-bekcileri.htm](http://www.taraf.com.tr/murat-belge/makale-diaspora-ve-tapinak-bekcileri.htm). In 2004, Yıldırım Türker had portrayed "Armenian belligerence" abroad as resulting in the "roughing up" of Armenians in Turkey, and chimed, "[we must bear in mind that] Diaspora Armenians and Turkish nationalists suffer from the same disease," referencing Hrant Dink: [www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalYazar&ArticleID=732271](http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalYazar&ArticleID=732271). Even Ragıp Zarakolu briefly concurred that "both societies need therapy" in a piece on the constraints on the public statements of Armenians in Turkey: [www.evrensel.net/news.php?id=8770](http://www.evrensel.net/news.php?id=8770).
27. Examples include this article on the website "The Armenian Problem" ([www.ermenisorumu.gen.tr/turkce/makaleler/makale25.html](http://www.ermenisorumu.gen.tr/turkce/makaleler/makale25.html)); the book *Ermeni Psikolojik Savaşı: Talat Paşa'dan Alihan Kapısı'nın Açılmasına*, Özkan Yeniçeri and Ümit Özdağ (Kripto 2009); the abstracts for the conference "The Armenian Symposium of the Political Psychology Association" (<http://www.avim.org.tr/degerlendirmetekli.php?makaleid=287>); and online articles (accessible in cache at time of writing) [www.donusumkonagi.net/MerakEttikleriniz/9/psiko-siyaset/2733/turkiyeermenistan-iliskilerinin-psikolojik-savas-acisindan-degerlendirilmesi.html](http://www.donusumkonagi.net/MerakEttikleriniz/9/psiko-siyaset/2733/turkiyeermenistan-iliskilerinin-psikolojik-savas-acisindan-degerlendirilmesi.html) and [www.donusumkonagi.net/MerakEttikleriniz/9/psiko-siyaset/2206/turk-erمني-mesalesinde-magduriyet-psikolojisinin-etkisi.html](http://www.donusumkonagi.net/MerakEttikleriniz/9/psiko-siyaset/2206/turk-erمني-mesalesinde-magduriyet-psikolojisinin-etkisi.html).
  28. Temple UP, 2008
  29. See Ted Cohen, "Metaphor, Feeling, and Narrative" in "Philosophy and Literature," 21.2 (1997): 223–244; 236. Ted Cohen's example of this parable is particularly interesting—although he does not call it *mise en abîme*—also because of the topic: In the passage, King David, who has a harem, takes the virtuous soldier Uriah's only wife and has him killed in battle. Nathan tells him a parable about a rich man, an owner of herds who slaughters a poor man's only and beloved lamb for a banquet. This story makes David recognize his own act as reprehensible. What is mysterious is how a feeling about the self that was not there before arises in response to a displaced metaphorical analogy. That response would require two steps: the (morally motivated) story-teller and the reader/listener responding to a character in the same way, and then the reader/listener responding to themselves as they responded to their counterpart in the story.
  30. For key research on rape, representations of rape, rape narratives, and criticism by/of feminist theory on rape, see: Sorcha Gunne and Zoë Brigley Thompson, eds., *Feminism, Literature, and Rape Narratives* (Routledge, 2010), especially the editors' "Introduction: Feminism Without Borders: The Potentials and Pitfalls of Rethorizing Rape" (1–20) and Sorcha Gunne's "Questioning Truth and Reconciliation: Writing Rape in Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* and Kagiso Legeso Molepe's *Dancing in the Dust*" (164–180); also see: Carine M. Mardorossian, "Toward a New Feminist Theory of Rape" (*Signs*, 27.3 [2002] 743–775); Jane Monkton Smith, *Relating Rape and Murder: Narratives of Sex, Death, and Gender* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Amy Greenstadt, *Rape and the Rise of the Author: Gendering Intention in Early Modern England* (Ashgate 2009); Sabine Sielke, *Reading Rape: The Rhetoric of Sexual Violence in American Literature and Culture, 1790–1990* (Princeton UP, 2002); Corrine Sanders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (D.S. Brewer, 2002); Jocelyn Catty, *Writing Rape, Writing Women in Early Modern England: Unbridled Speech* (Palgrave Macmillan 2011, c1999); and Sandra Gunning, *Race, Rape and Lynching: The Red Record of American Literature, 1890–1912* (Oxford UP, 1996). An earlier reference was made to Bill Lueders' *Cry Rape: The True Story of One Woman's Harrowing Quest for Justice* (Terrace Books, 2006).
  31. See <http://www.taraf.com.tr/ahmet-altan/makale-roller-degisti.htm>.
  32. See the first column quoted, note 8.
  33. In addition to the key sources in note 30, see <http://goodmenproject.com/good-feed-blog/as-victims-men-struggle-for-rape-awareness/>, [www.nytimes.com/2009/08/05/world/africa/05congo.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/05/world/africa/05congo.html), and <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/04/14/health/military-sexual-assaults-personality-disorder/index.html>.
  34. In addition to the attention on this subject in the arts and film, for specific literature see: Lisa Sharlach, "Rape as Genocide: Bangladesh, the Former Yugoslavia, and Rwanda," *New Political Science* 22.1 (2000): 89–102; for an excellent review of the literature in the topic as relating to the Armenian Genocide: Matthias Bjørnlund, "A Fate Worse Than Dying: Sexual Violence during the Armenian Genocide," in Dagmar Herzog, ed., *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe's Twentieth Century* (Palgrave Macmillan 2009), 16–58. Also see: Beverly Allen, *Rape Warfare: The Hidden Genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia* (U Minnesota P, 1996); Patricia A. Weitsman, "The Politics of Identity and Sexual Violence: A Review of Bosnia and Rwanda," *Human Rights Quarterly* 30 (2008): 561–578; Vahé Tahjian, "Gender, Nationalism, Exclusion: The Reintegration Process of Female Survivors of the Armenian Genocide," *Nations and Nationalism* 15.1 (2009): 60–80; Keith David Watenpaugh, "The League of Nations' Rescue of Armenian Genocide Survivors and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism, 1920–1927" *The American Historical Review*, 115.5 (2010): 1315–1339.



# A Tale of Two Monuments

## An Extremely Belated Anatomy of Two Radically Understudied Makings and One Unmaking

### PREAMBLE

**T**he annals of Turkish-Armenian “rapprochement,” “reconciliation,” “initiative,” and “dialogue” marked Jan. 8, 2011 as the day when Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called the Monument of “Humanity” by Mehmet Aksoy in Kars a freak (*ucube*), overshadowing a nearby Islamic shrine, and ordered its demolition. This position would later be supported by Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu on aesthetic grounds: “Kars has an architectural tradition inherited from the Ottomans and the Seljuks. This monument does not reflect that architecture. It does not befit these architectural aesthetics. Works in compliance with the architectural heritage of the region should be constructed,” he said.<sup>1</sup>

Sculptor Mehmet Aksoy, hailed by Today’s Zaman columnist Yavuz Baydar as “a very well-known and deeply respected artist in EU circles,”<sup>2</sup> said his work “carries anti-war and friendship messages” and added, “I depicted the situation of a person that is divided in two. This person will be ‘himself’ again when these two pieces are reunited. I want to express this. ... You cannot immediately label this a ‘monstrosity.’ It is shameful and unjust. One should understand what it says first.” He was right in that one should have understood what the monument itself meant, or even how the his-

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tory and construction of the monument evolved, in the context of domestic Turkish politics or the larger Turkish-Armenian relationship, before taking a pro/con position. Alas, this was hardly the case for either the Turkish or, for that matter, Armenian press.

According to Kars Mayor Nevzat Bozkuş, “a commission of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism had earlier decided to demolish the monument after it emerged that the statue was illegally constructed in a protected area.”<sup>3</sup> Strangely enough, the monument was commissioned by no other than the former mayor of Kars, Naif Alibeyoğlu, himself then elected on an AKP (the ruling Justice and Development Party) ticket during the 2004 municipal elections.

In the following week, Erdoğan reacted strongly against accusations that he was not qualified to appreciate the arts, or that he was an enemy of the arts, like the Taliban who in 2001 dynamited the ancient Buddhas of Bamiyan in Afghanistan. Erdoğan claimed he had “warned the mayor when the construction of the monument began,” that the “Natural and Cultural Heritage Preservation Agency also decided to destroy the monument,” and that “it was mayor’s responsibility to implement the decision.”<sup>4</sup> He also said, “It is not necessary to graduate from Fine Arts. We know what a monument is. I worked as a mayor for 4.5 years and as a prime minister for 7.5 years. I have never destroyed a single statue or a work of art.”<sup>5</sup>

Echoing Davutoğlu's seemingly aesthetic concerns, Erdoğan also argued that "[t]he dome of the [Seyyit Hassan el Harkani] mosque and the hilltop that hosts the statue are at an equal height. Then you have a 48-meter-high statue on the hilltop. You can't allow construction to overshadow such a historic building."<sup>6</sup>

As is typical with debates involving the Turkish political spectrum—which now also unfortunately misinforms the Armenian public sphere with its *reductio ad absurdum* binary nature devoid of any real substance—the country immediately got divided among “conservative” “nationalist hawks” (to whom Erdoğan was supposedly catering to secure AKP seats in Kars in the upcoming elections<sup>7</sup>) and “non-nationalist” “progressive” “doves” (who wholeheartedly embraced both the statue's concept and implementation).

The debates also problematically legitimized a whole array of politically national-socialist conservative artists, including the sculptor himself and Bedri Baykam (the former, an avid defender of the national-socialist Doğu Perinçek line; the latter, an avid Kemalist who fell out with Perinçek and later penned an open letter in which he dismissed Perinçek of “leftism” and “Kemalism”).<sup>8</sup> Five months into the “freak/monstrosity” debates and during the electoral season, the “peace-loving” sculptor baptized the Talat Pasha March organized by Perinçek—an Ergenekon suspect and genocide denier—in Switzerland as a saga of heroism in a TV program aired by Ulusal Kanal, the channel associated with Perinçek's national-socialist Labor Party. In an interview with Funda Tosun of Agos, Aksoy claimed the Labor Party's *Aydınlık* newspaper had twisted his words from the program, even though Tosun confronted him, saying she had watched the original TV excerpt.<sup>9</sup> Aksoy would also come to say that his monument was wanted by Armenians in Armenia, implying it was legitimate. Pressed further, he'd twist his own words into a typical “I'm for all freedoms” line that can qualify for the most famous not-properly-challenged empty-signifier in Turkey. As if the issue discussed on the TV program was one of cherishing freedoms and *not* of glorifying mass murderers, Aksoy said, “I fight for freedoms, I participate in Dink marches, and I fight for Doğu Perinçek.” Unfortunately what Armenians in Armenia and the diaspora knew or didn't know about the sculptor's politics or how the former mayor and the artist defended their project was less important than scoring hackneyed political points against Turkey (and, in the case of Turkish “progressives,” against the AKP).

In *Responsibility and Judgment*, Hannah Arendt recounts how the debates about *Eichmann in Jerusalem* ended up being “a controversy about a book that was never written”; then she refers to the words of an Austrian wit: “There is nothing so entertaining as the discussion of a book nobody read.” The non-substantial quarrel and campaigns surrounding the Monument of “Humanity” were precisely that. As the proverbial bookmark of the book-nobody-read-but-everybody-discussed, the cherry on the cake, the co-chair of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee Hélène Flautre, visited the sculptor and joked, “Kars should be chosen as the European Capital of Culture in order to save the sculptures.”<sup>10</sup> We should all be thankful that her proposition—a much funnier joke than Flautre then likely realized—indeed did remain a joke. If it were not for Erdoğan, who pushed forth the execution of a former decision by the Erzurum Regional Directorate of Pious Foundations, for a

seemingly nationalist political agenda, Armenians and others, with the ideological guidance of their Turkish “progressive” friends, would have baptized the sculptor who applauded the Talat Pasha demonstrations in Switzerland, as the poster child for peace and Turkish-Armenian “re”conciliation.

Barring the pro-AKP director Sinan Çetin, who agreed with Erdoğan on his aesthetic choice<sup>11</sup>, and a few scholars<sup>12</sup> hinting on the margins about the aesthetic value or political meaning of the statue, a well-rehearsed but one-dimensional “Art can't be destroyed” drumbeat started against the destruction of the “statue” of “humanity,” and even led to a comparison of Erdoğan's move to “Entartete Kunst” exhibition of the Third Reich,<sup>13</sup> a periodical analogy that some Turkish journalists throw in once in a while, nonchalantly, to spice up their exaggerated arguments against the authoritarian policies of the AKP.<sup>14,15</sup>

Before I move forward, I would like to end this preamble with an observation of what I think became a circular regularity of things Turkish-Armenian in the last decade. Ever since the 2005 Bilgi University conference “Ottoman Armenians During the Decline of the Empire,” whose date was modified several times, finally matching the then-upcoming Turkey-EU round of talks,<sup>16</sup> Turkish-Armenian civil societal politics has operated on a dim-witted and dumbing—but notwithstanding working—formula that was also at the basis of the Monument of “Humanity” drama: Turkish “progressives” preempt/dictate an action, a campaign, a commemoration, or erect a monument, all without true deliberation.<sup>17</sup> In doing so, let alone their complete disinterest for deliberating with a *broad base* of *representative* Armenians<sup>18</sup> they fail to deliberate even among themselves or with the people they think they are “educating” top-down. Then, very much expectedly, the ultra-nationalists attack them either directly or via the AKP (as in the case of *Ucube*). And Armenians both in the diaspora and Armenia issue either call to action or some political statement exhilarated by whatever scandal-du-jour where the Turkish side looks bad. From a distance, it looks like a win-win situation, where Turkish “progressives” win the unchallengeability of their position because now they are not only the victims of the Turkish state but also of the Turkish right, and where the Armenian side wins showing for the n'th time that the Turkish elite are notorious for throwing the ball out of the game. This is how a complex web of problematic policies, arguments denialist at core, ideological lines, and personal/political/national interests are reduced to a meaningless and empty set of binaries where it's impossible to criticize any kind of form, text, content, action, workshop, persona, or larger than life character because there's always a crisis, some half-baked “progress” to be defended against the ultra-nationalists. Neither in the intellectual sphere—as in the debates over the Monument of “Humanity”—nor in the political sphere are the parameters of the discussion set or shared by Armenians with representative power themselves; instead they are altogether instrumentalized in a political quarrel between the right and the left of a country not yet committed to a post-genocidal normative institutional order. Imagine an institutionally non-committed post-World War II Germany whose left will be framed and defined by a relentless German right who has a track record of having used violence in intra-ethnic conflict.

In this normatively non-committed state of affairs, the Armenian Genocide is seen both in the domestic and foreign policy discourse as an *obstacle* to be dealt away by sweetening hearts and minds with the bait and switch policy-du-jour (anywhere from “we hear/share your pain” to “we eat the same dolma” to “don’t talk about recognition, let’s talk about our common ‘humanity’”), rather than by delving into a genuine intellectual quest in understanding what the genocide means for the Turkish state’s institutional framework *and* the grammar of ethnic relations in Turkey. The circular win-win character of the game distracts from the substance of the game, whose limits are determined, depending on the day, either by the boundaries of the Turkish right or by the “realities” of the situation on the ground.

We have been told several times that the political discourse regarding the Armenian Genocide needs to be formulated first and foremost by catering to the sensitivities of the Turkish people in order to score progress. Incidentally the coup d’étatist generals and their international supporters branded this as the “country’s specific conditions”<sup>19</sup> in the past in order to legitimize a top-down institutional restructuring by the military, implying the country is not yet “ready” for democracy. It’s interesting, to say the least, how the discourse of the country’s so-called liberals mimic that of the generals on two counts of Turkish “exceptionalism,” crystalized in their willingness to speak in a language of “specific conditions” on the one hand, and to shelter themselves in a Jacobinist top-down non-readiness argument on the other—claiming the masses are not ready to confront genocide as is, but instead are fed either symmetrical responsibility tales or third-way non-solutions as in the case of the Monument of “Humanity.”

As the attentive eye will remember, both the former mayor Naif Alibeyoğlu and the sculptor Mehmet Aksoy defended the Monument of “Humanity” as “an alternative to both Armenia’s Dzidzernagapert Genocide monument and the monument in İğdır—the monument that “monuments can’t be destroyed” camp pretended did not exist during the debates of non-destroyability of monuments, both of which “promote a bad relationship and are designed to divide the two people.”<sup>20</sup> In an interview that was not translated by the Armenian press, Alibeyoğlu further claimed that they wanted “to have a monument that showed that Turkish people did not commit genocide. There would have been a 35-meter tear of conscience. Water was going to flow as opposed to the fire [of Dzidzernagapert]. We were going to show that we were for peace and humanity, that we did not commit genocide.”<sup>21</sup>

It is without the knowledge of this background that Armenian parties, including the Armenian Foreign Ministry and several diaspora organizations, reacted to what became the Monument of “Humanity.” We will continue with several key turning points in the five-year history of the monument while problematizing the monument itself and the entire political process from an analytical perspective, taking into account aesthetic, spatial, and political problems that marred not only its destruction but also its conception and inception. □

*Editor’s note: The second part of this article will appear in the Armenian Weekly in May 2012.*

## ENDNOTES

1. See [www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail\\_getNewsById.action?load=detay&newsId=232071&link=232071](http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?load=detay&newsId=232071&link=232071).
2. See [www.todayszaman.com/columnistDetail\\_getNewsById.action?newsId=232204](http://www.todayszaman.com/columnistDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=232204).
3. See link in Note 1.
4. See [www.armenianweekly.com/2011/01/27/not-even-a-handshake/](http://www.armenianweekly.com/2011/01/27/not-even-a-handshake/).
5. See [www.todayszaman.com/news-232333-turkey-press-scan-on-january-13.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/news-232333-turkey-press-scan-on-january-13.html).
6. See [www.todayszaman.com/news-232393-the-people-will-write-new-constitution-says-prime-minister.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/news-232393-the-people-will-write-new-constitution-says-prime-minister.html).
7. Baskın Oran in see link in Note 4
8. See [www.turksolu.org/89/baykam89.htm](http://www.turksolu.org/89/baykam89.htm).
9. See [http://arsiv.agos.com.tr/index.php?module=news&news\\_id=16331&cat\\_id=1](http://arsiv.agos.com.tr/index.php?module=news&news_id=16331&cat_id=1).
10. See [http://www.todayszaman.com/mobile\\_detailn.action?newsId=233449](http://www.todayszaman.com/mobile_detailn.action?newsId=233449).
11. See [www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetayV3&ArticleID=1036353&CategoryID=77](http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetayV3&ArticleID=1036353&CategoryID=77).
12. See [www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalEklerDetayV3&ArticleID=1035819&CategoryID=41](http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalEklerDetayV3&ArticleID=1035819&CategoryID=41).
13. See [www.hurriyetdailynews.com/a-tale-of-two-cities--freaks-of-kars-and-berlin.aspx?pageID=438&n=a-tale-of-two-cities--freaks-of-kars-and-berlin-2011-02-16](http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/a-tale-of-two-cities--freaks-of-kars-and-berlin.aspx?pageID=438&n=a-tale-of-two-cities--freaks-of-kars-and-berlin-2011-02-16).
14. The analogy itself is a prime example that they know very little about the Third Reich except perhaps having listened to a popular Naomi Klein speech comparing the Third Reich to current American domestic politics.
15. See [www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetayV3&ArticleID=1040964&CategoryID=82](http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetayV3&ArticleID=1040964&CategoryID=82).
16. See [www.armeniapedia.org/index.php?title=Conference:\\_Ottoman\\_Armenians\\_During\\_the\\_Decline\\_of\\_the\\_Empire](http://www.armeniapedia.org/index.php?title=Conference:_Ottoman_Armenians_During_the_Decline_of_the_Empire).
17. Hence highly problematic from conception to inception.
18. We can’t be more insistent on this aspect of lack of representation and how it usually revolves around either a cherry picking, or tribal formula of representation. In this context, cherry-picking means choosing from non-representative Turkish-Armenians whom the “progressives” think should represent Turkish-Armenian political opinion. It would be unthinkable to pick the Taraf or Radikal newspapers as *the* representative of all Turks, whereas since this is a mostly reductionist orientalist setting when it comes to the little brothers, there are no limits to instrumentalizing a party around our own scheme of political convenience. It’s not what Armenians think of their institutions that matters here; it’s more what their Turkish “brothers” like to see/hear. There’s a similar but still slightly different method of choosing from their friends (so to speak, the tribal method) and baptizing them as *the* rational Armenians that the world should listen to. Mind you, all these people should be self-declared socialists; if by accident they are pro-AKP figures such as Etyen Mahçupyan, they should be beaten even more than an average Sunni pro-AKP columnist. Yet the same protagonists think they are not being racist in their apparent squared disgust towards Mahçupyan.
19. See a Harold Pinter anecdote regarding the specific conditions discourse at [www.haroldpinter.org/politics/politics\\_torture.shtml](http://www.haroldpinter.org/politics/politics_torture.shtml).
20. See link in Note 4
21. See link in Note 11



# Does the French Law Penalizing GENOCIDE DENIAL Restrict **FREE SPEECH?**

By Harut Sassounian

In recent months, this controversial topic has made worldwide headlines.

Beyond just a legal, ethical, and philosophical controversy, this issue has brought NATO allies France and Turkey to a major confrontation, disrupting their mutual political, economic, cultural, and military ties.

Let us briefly review the historical background and the lobbying efforts of the French-Armenian community, the Turkish government's counter-lobbying (perhaps more appropriately described as bullying), and the awkward, vacillating position of French officials caught in the middle of the two battling sides.

The French Parliament first recognized the Armenian Genocide on May 28, 1998. The French Senate recognized it on Nov. 7, 2000. But because of the intervening elections between the two votes, the Parliament had to vote on it for a second time on Jan. 18, 2001.

Then-Prime Minister Lionel Jospin and President Jacques Chirac on Jan. 29, 2001 signed the following single-sentence law: "France publicly recognizes the Armenian Genocide of 1915."

As the reader may have noticed, there is no mention of Turks or Turkey in this law. They were not accused of committing a genocide; yet, with a guilty conscience, Turkish officials immediately identified themselves as the perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide, and, in protest, withdrew their ambassador from Paris.

However, even after the adoption of this law, French-Armenians continued to endure Turkish state-sponsored lies and ridicule, which repeatedly insulted the

sacred memory of their ancestors who were victims of the genocide.

Such denial also violated the French law on the Armenian Genocide but with impunity. In 1990, France had adopted another law that penalized the denial of the Jewish Holocaust. French-Armenians soon-after began demanding the same legal protection.

If one is punished for denying the Jewish Holocaust, then there should be a similar punishment for denying the Armenian Genocide. There should be no discrimination among genocide victims and no double standards.

In the United States, we highly value our freedom of speech and expression. However, even in this country, freedom of expression has certain limitations. For example, one can't yell "Fire!" in a crowded theater and cause a tragic stampede. And one can't libel or slander others.

In France, there are even more limitations on free speech. Those who think it unacceptable to punish someone for denying a genocide should remember that we are talking about legal limitations in the context of the value system of another country, not those of the U.S.

Since there are already many laws in France that restrict free speech, including the denial of the Holocaust, the Armenian Genocide law of 2001 had to be brought to



**Sarkozy also made powerful pro-Armenian remarks while in Yerevan. He warned Turkey that he would take additional steps, meaning that he would support the bill criminalizing genocide denial, if Ankara did not recognize the Armenian Genocide in a couple of months.**

its logical conclusion by setting a penalty for all those who break that law.

After several years of lobbying, the French-Armenian community finally succeeded in getting the French Parliament to adopt a bill, in 2006, that set a penalty of one-year imprisonment and a 45,000 euro (\$60,000) fine for denying the Armenian Genocide.

To become law, this bill had to also be approved by the French Senate. President Nicolas Sarkozy, however, just like someone in the White House, did not keep his promise to his Armenian constituents and blocked its adoption by the French Senate. A second attempt failed in the Senate in May 2011.

New developments in late 2011, however, came to breathe new life into this bill.

In October 2011, Sarkozy visited the three Caucasus republics. It was obvious that something had changed in the French president's outlook on the Armenian Genocide bill. He spent only a couple of hours in Azerbaijan and Georgia, while staying overnight in Armenia.

Sarkozy also made powerful pro-Armenian remarks while in Yerevan. He warned Turkey that he would take additional steps, meaning that he would support the bill criminalizing genocide denial, if Ankara did not recognize the Armenian Genocide in a couple of months.

No one really knows what prompted Sarkozy to change his position on this issue. World-famous French-Armenian singer Charles Aznavour had recently blasted Sarkozy for not keeping his promise to Armenians, warning him that no Armenian would vote for him in the April 2012 presidential elections. However, those who think that Sarkozy supported the genocide bill to win the votes of 500,000 French-Armenians in the elections are sadly mistaken. To begin with, the 500,000 figure is grossly exaggerated; there are only around 400,000 Armenians in France. And many of them cannot vote, either because they are recent immigrants from Armenia or are under the legal voting age. That leaves at most 100,000 eligible French-Armenian voters. Since the Armenian National Committee

(ANC) of France has already endorsed Francois Hollande, the leader of the Socialist Party and Sarkozy's rival in the presidential election, Sarkozy would likely not get more than 50,000 Armenian votes.

Can anyone honestly believe that the president of a major country like France, just before the presidential elections, would:

- 1) carelessly risk billions of dollars of trade with Turkey during such tough economic times?
- 2) create a major confrontation with Turkey, a fellow NATO member?
- 3) antagonize French exporters, the military establishment, members of the media, and influential intellectuals who oppose restrictions of any kind on their ability to express controversial opinions?

This is all highly unlikely for a mere 50,000 Armenian votes, out of the millions of French votes to be cast, especially when there are at least as many Turkish voters as Armenian ones among the 500,000 recent Turkish immigrants to France.

There may be other reasons why Sarkozy supported the Armenian bill, such as his long-standing opposition to Turkey joining the European Union (EU), and his intent to win the votes of millions of French citizens who are antagonistic to Turks, Muslims, and foreigners in general.

Just to be a little charitable to Sarkozy, let's also assume that he wanted to keep his campaign promise, at long last.

In my opinion, there are three main reasons why, in late 2011, the Armenian bill got a new boost: The first is Sarkozy's unexpected support for the bill. The second is the support of Francois Hollande, the Socialist presidential candidate. Significantly, the Socialist Party won the majority of seats in the Senate in last September's elections. Thus, for the first time, the two largest political parties in the French legislature, and the two leading presidential candidates, supported the genocide bill. The third reason is the decision of the European Union in 2008 to have all 26-member countries adopt laws that punish racism, xenophobia, denial of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes.

Based on this new EU initiative, Valerie Boyer, a French Parliamentary member, proposed a new law that would ban denial of all genocides recognized by France, without specifically mentioning the Armenian Genocide. But, since France only officially recognizes two genocides—the Jewish Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide—and Holocaust denial is already banned, the new law would effectively ban denial of the Armenian Genocide.

Notice how, once again, the text of this proposed law does not mention Turks or Turkey, nor even the Armenian Genocide. Nevertheless, Turkish officials went into overdrive with their usual threats, pressures, and insults, identifying themselves as perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide.

The Turks' bullying tactics, however, did not scare off the legislators. On Dec. 22, 2011, the French Parliament voted to approve the genocide bill.

Turkey once again withdrew its ambassador from Paris, only to return him after a couple of weeks. A month later, despite more

Unfortunately, the eight members of the Constitutional Council on Feb. 28 decided that the genocide bill was unconstitutional because it violated freedom of speech. The council members, however, failed to explain why punishing denial of the Holocaust is not a restriction on free speech while punishing denial of the Armenian Genocide is.



Turkish threats to cut off economic, political, military, and cultural ties with France, the Senate, after a heated seven-and-a-half hour debate, approved the genocide bill on Jan. 23, 2012, with a vote of 127 to 86.

Significantly, not a single member of the French Parliament or Senate, not even those who voted against the bill, questioned the reality of the Armenian Genocide.

After the bill was approved by the Senate, Sarkozy had 15 days to sign it into law. He did not rush to sign it (perhaps because he did not want to be accused of depriving the bill's opponents of the opportunity to challenge its constitutionality). Unfortunately, Sarkozy did not anticipate that the bill's opponents would be able to collect the 60 signatures needed to appeal the bill to the Constitutional Council. Even if he had signed before its appeal, the new law would have been contested as soon as someone was arrested for denying the Armenian Genocide.

Imagine how much more disappointed the supporters of the new law would have been if it were to be thrown out after it was signed into law by the president!

The Turkish government and its surrogates not only used threats and even personal inducements, but hired a French lobbying firm (contradicting their announced boycott of French companies) to collect the necessary signatures and appeal to the Constitutional Council on Jan. 31.

The council is comprised of 11 prominent individuals, including 2 former presidents and several former legislators. Some of the council members had serious conflicts of interest involving their families who had business ties to Turkey, or had taken a position against this bill when they were in the legislature. Most amazingly, one of them was a member of the Bospho-

rus Institute, a Turkish think-tank that lobbied against this bill.

After a French newspaper exposed their sinister affiliations, two members of the council removed themselves from sitting in judgment on the bill, and former President Chirac did not participate in the vote due to illness.

That left eight members. At least two others should have withdrawn their names due to conflict of interest, in which case only six members would have remained—one short of a quorum.

Unfortunately, the eight members of the Constitutional Council on Feb. 28 decided that the genocide bill was unconstitutional because it violated freedom of speech. The council members, however, failed to explain why punishing denial of the Holocaust is not a restriction on free speech while punishing denial of the Armenian Genocide is.

French-Armenians are now planning to appeal the council's ruling to the European Court of Human Rights.

After the council's negative decision, Sarkozy repeated his earlier pledge to re-submit to the legislature a revised bill taking into account the council's objections. Hollande, his Socialist rival, who is ahead of Sarkozy in the polls, also pledged to bring up the bill again.

Unfortunately, the French legislature is now in recess due to the upcoming presidential elections, making it impossible to submit a revised bill to the Parliament and Senate at this time.

Sarkozy now promises to, if re-elected, bring up this bill in June. Hollande has made the same pledge. That's the good news.

The bad news is that Armenians have learned from previous disappointing experiences not to trust politicians who make campaign promises.

It is important to pass this law in France and other countries to stop Turkey from exporting its denialist policies. Switzerland and Slovakia have already adopted laws penalizing denial of the Armenian Genocide.

And for those who naively say that Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code—the so-called “insulting Turkishness” law—which makes it a crime to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide, is the same thing as the French bill (thinking that both restrict free speech), that is not the case, at all! When this bill is adopted, it would be against the law in France to lie about genocide, whereas in Turkey, telling the truth is against the law.

Even though Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu declared victory after the French bill was ruled unconstitutional, this is just a temporary setback and not a final defeat for the Armenian side.

French-Armenians will very likely continue to support this bill until it is signed into law. Even if it does not pass, Armenians will seek other avenues to pursue justice for the victims of the Armenian Genocide.

Punishing genocide deniers is not as critical as the pursuit of more important demands, such as restitution and return of Armenian properties, churches, and the occupied territories of Western Armenia.

Pursuing the just cause of a people is a marathon race, not a sprint.

Armenians are an ancient nation. Throughout their long history, they have overcome and survived many calamities, invasions, wars, and even genocide.

Armenians will certainly continue their struggle until they realize their long sought-after dream. □



# Virtuous Victims?

## Imagining Armenians in the West

By Matthias Bjørnlund

During the winter of 1902–03, small groups of Armenian refugees began arriving in Sweden, survivors of the 1890's Abdülhamid massacres,<sup>1</sup> and according to newspaper reports some even made it all the way to Norway.<sup>2</sup> But it was claimed by an alleged authoritative source that such groups were not, or not necessarily, actual Armenians at all. In the summer of 1903, a party of “fake Armenians” arrived in Copenhagen, ostensibly collecting funds for victims of the massacres. As a Danish popular periodical wrote in a rather sarcastic tone that speaks volumes of widespread perceptions of the Oriental Other:

A few days ago, Copenhagen had the honor of receiving a strange visit. It was said that a group of unfortunate Armenians had arrived from Riga to collect money for the victims of the cruelties perpetrated by the wild Kurds, and the noble feelings already began to stir in the soft Danish hearts. Later the feelings took another direction. It so happens that the Asiatic party, consisting of six men, one woman, and four children, had not counted on the fact that at the moment there lives a man in Copenhagen who could check them thoroughly: The former Turkish consul general, Ali Nouri, whose name will be familiar to the readers of this journal as a regular contributor.... Police Inspector Petersen then summoned the Swedish Turk, and he quickly informed the police about the true nature of these ‘Armenians.’ It has become a large and profitable industry among industrious inhabitants of Asia Minor to journey around Europe begging, falsely claiming to be refugee Armenians.... It is no wonder that such swindlers quickly inspire others. They come home, buy a house, and live off their money—and they are not unwilling to share this business secret with family and friends for a fee. At the moment Europe is being flooded with hundreds of these charlatans, and they have even extended their business to America.<sup>3</sup>

How Ali Nouri Bey (a.k.a. Swedish convert, Ottoman dissident, and Young Turk sympathizer Gustaf Noring) managed to determine that the members of the “Asiatic party” were not Armenians but, as he claimed, Chaldeans, is unclear. In any event, as a result of instant taxonomy, they were shipped off to Lübeck, Germany. Whatever their claim to “true” Armenianness and victimhood, the apparent fact that this and many similar groups made a living travel-

ing through Europe, reaching as far as Scandinavia on a wave of sympathy in the wake of the 1890's massacres, shows that the “Armenian Question” was a matter of serious concern way beyond the Ottoman borders.

Who, then, were the Armenians suddenly mentioned so often in newspapers, petitions, public speeches, academic publications, even police reports? How should they be classified, what was their “essence”? This became a hot topic, a battleground



A German handcolored depiction of Armenians from J. A. C. Löhr, *Die Länder und Völker der Erde; oder vollständige Beschreibung aller fünf Erdtheile und deren Bewohner* (The Countries and Peoples of the World; or a complete description of all five continents and their inhabitants), Vol. II, Leipzig 1818, p. 55. The accompanying text acknowledges that there are conflicting views on Armenians—some say they are devious, some that they are honest—but the emphasis is on Armenians as basically cowardly merchants.

between *realpolitik* and humanitarianism, between more or less scientific world views, political ideologies, religious affiliations, and economic interests. As seen in the example above, human taxonomy is rarely an innocent occupation: How Ottoman Armenians were classified in the West—in Europe and North America—could have direct and far-reaching consequences when linked to discussions of the Armenian Question, in general, and to issues of intervention, proselytizing, and relief work, in particular. Did Armenians deserve aid? Were they worthy of the money and time spent by good Western citizens? The question of how to define the “true nature” of various Ottoman groups even became a topic when discussions of whether any given group deserved, or were capable of managing, a national home when the empire was carved up in the wake of World War I.<sup>4</sup> In this article a small but representative sample of mainly Scandinavian sources is used to analyze and categorize—classify, as it were—Western attitudes towards Armenians in the wake of the 1890’s Abdülhamid massacres in the Ottoman Empire in an attempt to address these issues.

## INTELLECTUAL ARMENOPHOBIA

In general, knowledge about Armenians (and all other Ottoman groups) before the Abdülhamid massacres was marked by racism, religious prejudice, or superficial research. It has been said that “in its narratives of cross-cultural contact, the Western form of the travel book continually sees otherness as inferiority.”<sup>5</sup> While this is not necessarily true, the information about Armenians that reached Western countries was in fact mainly provided by popular travelogues or ethnographic accounts that often portrayed Armenians as greedy, deviant, and cowardly—in short, like Jews were supposed to be.<sup>6</sup> One early example will suffice to illustrate this point: In a detailed and otherwise rather nuanced account of encounters with Armenians, Greeks, Turks, and Jews in Constantinople in 1831, Danish theologian J. F. Fenger could only compare Armenians to Jews, “God’s chosen people



Bagrad Miroshwil, an Armenian from Tbilisi in the Russian army. The photo is taken from a book by O. Stiehl, *Unsere Feinde: Charakterköpfe aus deutschen Kriegsgefangenenlagern* (*Our Enemies: Portraits from German Prisoner of War Camps*), Stuttgart 1917, p. 81. Here, the enemy is divided into racial categories illustrated by ‘typical’ facial features.

wandering the earth, worshipping material goods and a dead religion.”<sup>7</sup>

But it took a human catastrophe, the Abdülhamid massacres, to truly put a distant, “exotic” people like the Ottoman Armenians on the map in the Western world. These events happened to more or less coincide with the rise of certain vital aspects of the modern age: scientific classification; nationalism; racial thinking; public opinion; improved means of transportation and communication increasing the speed, quality, and quantity of travel and news reports; professionalized grassroots movements; debates on human rights and humanitarian intervention, etc. Thus, the nature and timing of the massacres made the Armenian Question an issue among populations, not just elites. Nor was it an issue only for major countries like Great Britain, France, or Germany with significant political and economical interests in the Near East. Scandinavian and other “peripheral” sources suggest that Armenophobia and Armenophilia in fact became truly widespread transnational cultural phenomena during and after the 1890’s massacres. Indeed, this quote by famed Norwegian author Knut Hamsun (later to become a Nobel laureate in literature and a staunch supporter of the Nazi regime in Germany) is quite representative of a cer-

tain type of Western reaction to the resurfacing Armenian Question:

Armenians are the trade Jews of the East. They penetrate everywhere, from the Balkans to China, in every city you go to the Armenians are up to their old tricks. While the papers of the West are overflowing with tears over the misfortune of this people it is not rare to hear in the East that they deserve their fate, they are remarkably unanimously represented as a people of scoundrels. In Turkey proper they push the country’s own children out of one position after the other and take their places themselves. Trade falls into their hands, pawnbroking and money. And the extortion.<sup>8</sup>

With apparent ease intellectuals such as Hamsun extended their “classic” (ethno-religious) and/or “modern” (racialized) anti-Semitism to include Armenians and other “similar peoples,” like Greeks. Especially those with no nation state—Jews and Armenians—were viewed with contempt. In an age of nationalism, persons without a national home were cosmopolitan, city people, rootless; they were “modern,” removed from the soil in body and soul and thus unclean, suspicious, and possibly or even inherently subversive. Often, Jews were the prism, their alleged traits were the traits of the negative other par excellence. Any person or people, Semitic or not, deemed to possess some or all of these traits were considered unreliable at best. At worst they were considered deserving of persecution or destruction. Edward Said wrote that Islamophobia is a “secret sharer” of anti-Semitism.<sup>9</sup> Armenophobia was certainly also a “sharer” of anti-Semitism, and it was hardly a secret: Anti-Semitism and Armenophobia went hand in hand in the media and popular culture around the turn of the century and for decades to come, often contrasted with other, “nobler” peoples.<sup>10</sup> For every villain there is a hero in the classification game.

Examples of Western intellectual Armenophobia are legion and can be found in major newspapers, periodicals, authoritative encyclopedias, and publications from large, respected publishing houses. In 1900, a major, authoritative Danish ethnographical volume briefly defined Armenians as “an



A postcard from the archives of the Danish Women Missionary Workers, c. 1910, one of a series sold to raise money for missionary work among Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. The caption reads: 'Young Armenian women in national costumes' These Armenian women, probably from the Kharpert region where the Danish organization was based, would have looked exotic in the West at the time, but they do not look weak or passive as 'Oriental' women often do in Western imagery. It is rather an image of strong, assertive women, an image which women missionaries would not have picked at random to put on a postcard. Virtuous victims, perhaps, living proof that missionary work mattered?

intelligent race," but—paraphrasing the classic proverb, "One Greek cons two Jews, one Armenian cons two Greeks"<sup>11</sup>—more greedy, cunning, and ruthless than Greeks and Jews, "races" that, it is implied, were already plenty greedy, cunning, and ruthless.<sup>12</sup> Danish reporter Frantz von Jessen wrote during the 1903 uprising in Ottoman Macedonia that "all connoisseurs praise the Turks at the expense of Greeks, Armenians, and Jews."<sup>13</sup> Yet another variation of the stereotype can be found in a book by Swedish officer and war correspondent Spada (Johan Christian Janzon), *Incursions into the Orient*. Here, Spada also contrasts in a typical fashion what is described as the

loud and cunning behavior of Greek, Jewish, and Armenian merchants at a Constantinople bazaar with the dignified, calm, and stoic composure of the Turkish merchants.<sup>14</sup>

Such views spread into educational materials, including a geography textbook endorsed by the Danish Ministry of Culture,<sup>15</sup> and they were indeed quite common in the press as well from early on. In 1895, in a leading Danish journal, it was stated that though there was no excuse for the ongoing Abdülhamid massacres, and though the Western Powers and Russia could reasonably demand that the empire avoided such incidents in the future, it was equally reasonable and understandable that "strict measures" were applied to suppress the Armenians:

A rebellious Armenian in the Ottoman Empire is quite the same as a rebellious Hindu in British India; the Sultan cannot tolerate that the orders of his officials are being challenged by such an ignorant and restive people as the Armenians who are subjects in his Empire, and when the Mohammedans are defending themselves in their own country they are only exercising their right.<sup>16</sup>

This was a defense of empire and imperialism, wherever and with few restrictions; a defense of Turks/Muslims as perhaps brutal masters, but rightful masters nonetheless, pitted against Armenians/Christians. They, in turn, were lowly, rebellious, cunning, intelligent and/or primitive subjects (logical consistency is rarely a hallmark of racist beliefs), a miserable people who brought their misery upon themselves through protests or provocations; they were alien usurpers with no rightful claim to influence or equality, let alone power or land.

Armenophobia could also be an expression of a "scientific" racist negative stereotype influenced by a certain branch of Marxist thinking—the widespread variant of the *comprador* or "middleman" thesis that brands groups like Jews, Greeks, and Armenians as parasitic, bourgeois agents of international capitalism and imperialism, preventing a certain "progressive" economic development in, for example, the

Ottoman Empire.<sup>17</sup> For sure, very many merchants, etc., in the Ottoman Empire were Armenians, Jews, and Greeks, but this fact alone hardly explains the outright hatred directed at these groups. On April 30, 1909, on the front page of the official organ for the Danish Social Democratic Party, Social-Demokraten, a background article on *Turkey, the Motley Empire*, was printed following the Adana massacres. The reality of the massacres was readily acknowledged, but rather than seeing Armenians and other Ottoman Christians as "virtuous victims," they were once again designated as cold, calculating, dishonest business-minded people that belonged to an economic class exploiting the "honest" and "easygoing" Turks.

There were variations of Armenophobia based on the primacy of the environment, not biology, in determining human behavior. According to such explanatory models, Armenians were not born, say, bloodsuckers or "vagabond, ransacking, plundering invaders" as Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) characterized them in 1920.<sup>18</sup> (They were in fact usually not associated with such martial traits in the West until during and after World War I, when actual or invented armed resistance and "cultural machismo" became assets in the competition between would-be nation states.) Armenians had rather developed their alleged negative traits after centuries of oppression by the Turkish invaders, but were now exploiting their proud but indolent masters.<sup>19</sup> As a former Serbian ambassador to the Ottoman Empire put it, "It is said that in cunning and astuteness the Jews are innocent babes when compared with the Armenians. Personally, I do not believe that that has anything to do with the race, and probably it is the result of the peculiar circumstances in which they live. Give them liberty, give them the responsibility of a self-governing nation, give them possibilities of higher culture, and the Armenians, in a couple of generations, would prove to be a noble and generous, as well as a highly intelligent race."<sup>20</sup> Finally, some claimed that while the Armenians encountered in the ports and bazaars of Constantinople and Smyrna



(Izmir) were notorious cheats and liars, Armenian peasants were honest and laborious, uncorrupted by city life.<sup>21</sup>

U.S. historian and publisher William M. Sloane neatly summed up some important basic assumptions shared by all the above Orientalist persuasions in 1914:

It is no exaggeration to say that the passing generation had in its youth little conception but that the homogeneity of nationality with which they were familiar at home was to be found within the territories represented by each of these dividing lines. If it was England for the English and France for the French and so on, why not Turkey for the Turks? Starting from this deep-seated conviction, a few of the better educated and more intelligent read such delightful books of travel in Turkey and the Orient as Byron and Kinglake had rendered attractive and fashionable. Even from the perusal of them, there survived a general impression that within the Ottoman Empire there were ruling Turks who were Mohammedans and gentlemen; that the aristocracy was fairly refined and likewise Mohammedan; and that there was otherwise a huge plebeian mob separated in refinement and culture from the rest by an impassable chasm.<sup>22</sup>

## THE BEGINNINGS OF ARMENOPHILIA

While Armenophobia was arguably widespread among intellectuals, it was hardly the “natural” unchallenged position in the West. Pro-Armenian sentiments appear, in fact, to have been more common, perhaps because support for the persecuted Armenians was not “negative” or speculative like Armenophobia. It was a tangible “good cause” with larger potential for mobilization, as many found it easy to sympathize or even identify with the victim group, and it had broad appeal, as it commonly transgressed otherwise rigid boundaries of religion, politics, class, and gender. Whether based on notions of Christian solidarity, human rights, or plain outrage, condemnation of the massacres was an issue for feminists,

conservatives, liberals, and school children, Christians, Jews, pacifists, atheists, and military men, evolving into a virtual counter-discourse to Armenophobia. Detailed information on the massacres quickly became available and helped create this situation, as in 1895 when a popular Norwegian journal with readers and contributors from Denmark as well as Norway published a serialized treatment of the massacres, their background, the Armenian Question in general, and Europe’s responsibility to protect the Ottoman Armenians.<sup>23</sup>

“Europe” felt otherwise, but despite political inaction, the Ottoman Armenians were not quickly forgotten. Papers and public figures raised awareness of the atrocities, thereby laying part of the foundation for the substantial missionary and relief work that lasted through the Armenian Genocide and beyond. Missionaries and relief workers were sent to the Ottoman Empire, thousands of “ordinary citizens” in Scandinavia alone donated money for the cause or sponsored Armenian orphans, while articles, pamphlets, and books on the subject kept being published, including in Scandinavia: Swiss theologian Georges Godet’s *Les souffrances de l’Arménie* was translated for a Danish and Norwegian audience in 1897, with the proceeds of the sale going to “the miserable Armenians,” and Edouard (Edward) Bernstein’s speech on the sufferings of the Armenians was published in several countries.<sup>24</sup> In 1904, Johannes V. Jensen, a Danish author who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1944, had an encounter with an Armenian massacre survivor as one of the central scenes in his popular novel *Madame D’Ora*, which was published simultaneously in Denmark and Norway.<sup>25</sup> The Suffering Armenian had become a literary figure.

Partly as a reaction to Armenophobe stereotypes, pro-Armenians began at the turn of the century to introduce what became a recurring theme of depicting Armenians as a persecuted people that not only deserved sympathy, but respect for their virtues and accomplishments, whether acquired or “natural.” In missionary circles there was much Armenophobia, especially

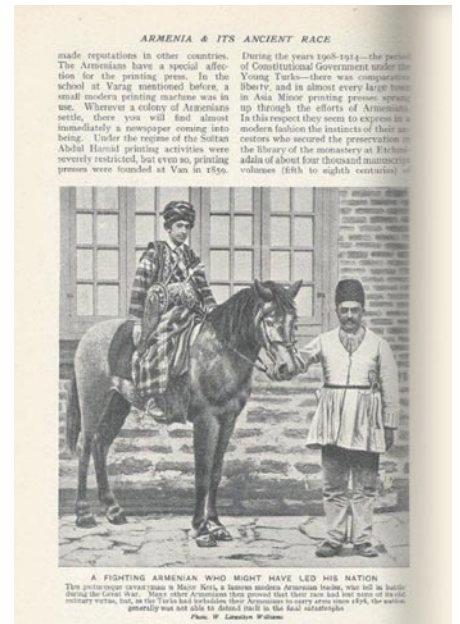


Photo by Llewellyn Williams from Noel Buxton, “Armenia: Tattered Remnants of An Ancient Race,” in John Alexander Hammerton, ed., *Peoples of All Nations: Their life to-day and the story of their past*, Vol. II, Fleetway House [1922], p. 238. The caption reads: “A fighting Armenian who might have led his nation. This picturesque cavalryman is Major Keri, a famous modern Armenian leader, who fell in battle during the Great War. Many other Armenians then proved that their race had lost none of its old military virtue, but, as the Turks had forbidden their Armenians to carry arms since 1878, the nation generally was not able to defend itself in the final catastrophe.” Now, a virtuous victim was a fighting victim.

early on, but it was often stated outright that, by sticking to their faith through centuries of oppression and persecution, culminating with the genocide, Armenians had become virtuous by redeeming themselves and their “petrified” Apostolic Christianity. They had become the “martyred people,” a people to be admired and respected as “keepers of the faith,” even if they remained alien, “Oriental,” in the eyes of the Western beholder. Danish relief worker Karen Jeppe, on the other hand, believed Armenians were “naturally virtuous,” and she consistently underlined in public what she believed to be either Western or generally positive qualities of Armenians—Christianity, work ethic, honesty, moral conduct, willingness to sacrifice.<sup>26</sup>

In 1903, a Danish periodical published Armenian poems introduced and translated by writer and feminist activist Inga Collin (from 1904 Inga Nalbandian, after her marriage to an Armenian scholar), who later became an important figure in the international Armenophile movement as well as the International Woman Suffrage Alliance well into the 1920's. In her introduction, she stated that "awareness of the limitless sufferings of the Armenian people has eventually been thoroughly raised, it has in a manner of speaking become part of today's culture; but awareness of the great *spiritual value* of this mistreated people is completely lacking in this country."<sup>27</sup> There was an implicit, sometimes explicit, message from Collin, Jeppe, and others to domestic and international audiences where many were exposed to anti-Armenian articles, etc., and where many (but far from all) believed that freedom from foreign rule or oppression was a Western or white prerogative anyway. The message was that Armenians as virtuous victims had the same rights to peace, prosperity, security, self-rule, or independence as other "civilized peoples."

In the end, the Ottoman Armenians were destroyed by the Young Turk dictatorship, partly to avoid giving Armenians exactly such rights, while the survivors were persecuted by the Kemalists and abandoned by Western governments. And in that sense Armenophobia, *realpolitik*, or just plain indifference prevailed over pro-Armenian sentiments. Furthermore, as the Armenian Question ceased being a media issue in the 1920's, most intellectuals and ordinary citizens found new worthy causes to fight for or donate money to. But while other *causes célèbres* came and went, the most dedicated of the Western missionaries, relief workers, and activists carried on their work among the remnants of the Ottoman Armenians in exile—some, like Danish missionary nurse Maria Jacobsen, almost until the Armenian Question resurfaced once more in the 1960's. □

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# Armenian Representation in Turkey

By Talin Suciyan

This year, again, the Armenians of Istanbul were confronted with the heavy duty of responding to the dominant atmosphere of political and social hatred against them in the country where they live. The reason was the bill intending to criminalize genocide denial in France. In Turkey, a political campaign to generate public consensus against the bill was successfully initiated and reached its peak with a demonstration on Feb. 26, organized jointly by Turkey and Azerbaijan, in the center of Istanbul—and what was nothing other than a rehearsal of the Sept. 6–7, 1955 events. Beginning in December 2011, anti-Armenian campaigns were run in the Turkish media with the participation of politicians, academics, and public opinion makers, both on the local and national level.

In crisis situations, Armenians in Turkey have been called to represent their community. In the absolute absence of political representation—prohibited from having a political organization as an ethnic group—Armenians have always been requested to react politically and be representatives of their community. The media, politicians, and public intellectuals pose this request incessantly, *all of a sudden feeling the need* to “give a voice to the voiceless.” However, the response should also meet the needs correctly: You are not expected to be a conscious pariah in Arendt’s terms—that is, “accepting the challenge and *responsibility* of being an outsider even among one’s own people”<sup>2</sup>; rather, you are expected to assimilate into anti-Armenian campaigns, which also entails hatred against and dehumanization of the Armenian Diaspora. As an Armenian still living in Turkey, then, you are offered to take part in and reproduce hatred against your sisters, brothers, uncles, or aunts living in other parts of the world. In this way, you are expected to become an enemy of your own past, of your own biography, and decline your own present.

“Forcing Armenians to react” in situations of crisis has a historicity. For instance, from 1941 onwards in Turkish newspapers, news items and articles started to appear regarding Armenians being a “fifth column”<sup>3</sup>; accused of supporting the Germans, Armenians in Istanbul were asked to give a necessary reaction to these accusations. Without having any politically representative

*No assimilation  
could be achieved merely  
by surrendering one’s past  
but ignoring the alien past.  
In a society on the whole hostile  
to the Jews...it is possible to  
assimilate only by  
assimilating to anti-  
Semitism also.<sup>1</sup>*

body, the community was required to respond to such war politics, and during a time when Turkey was still selling chrome to the Nazi government. On Jan. 5, 1946, the famous article by Zaven Biberyan, “Enough Is Enough,”<sup>4</sup> was published in the Nor Lur Armenian newspaper, and was in direct defiance to these allegations as well as the Turkish public opinion makers. Biberyan argued that these public opinion makers (specifically Asım Us in this case) were implicitly trying to put the blame on Armenians, whereas actually a broad segment of Turkish society—but not Armenians—had been pro-German. We can read this of course as an attempt to shape public opinion in a way that would rescue the image of Turkey and the consequences of Turkish-German alliance in the international arena during the post-WWII period. Time and again, it is impossible *not* to remember Biberyan, since the Armenian community in Istanbul is in such a fragile situation, and yet is expected to be a political actor, in order to rescue Turkey from the probable consequences of the criminalization of genocide denial in France. The text entitled “Turkey wants to have the right to denial,”<sup>5</sup> with all its shortcomings, was still an important reaction given by the handful of Armenians remaining in Turkey to the politicians and public opinion makers. Nevertheless, neither the mentioned text, nor the open letter of businessman Ishak Alaton calling on Turkish intellectuals to stop denial, seem to have influenced the public intellectuals in Turkey. It was only after the Hodjali hate rally that the public intellectuals comprehended the degree of rising racism, and saw how denial fuels this racism, how it could all be organized on the state level, and how easily “human resources” could be generated for its implementation.

## PROCESS OF STRUCTURAL ERADICATION

Beginning in 1840, the Armenian community had de facto administrative institutions. In 1847, an election system was introduced for these institutions.<sup>6</sup> The Armenian constitution (*Nizamname*) of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a legal guarantor of these processes. During the first decade of the republic, however,



these electoral systems were abolished as a result of systematic state politics. First, the Patriarchate could not withstand the pressures and paved the way for the abrogation of the Civil Assembly, which was in charge of civil affairs. Later, in 1938, a second electoral process on the district level was abolished. The practice of electing administrative bodies with the participation of a district's inhabitants to administer the properties of the given foundations was replaced with a "single trustee" appointed by the government. The period 1938-49 was marked by difficulties created by the "single trustee" (*tek mütevellî dönemi*) system within the minority communities. Elçin Macar's article on the issue has some very valuable information about the period.<sup>7</sup> State policy regarding the appointment of these representatives was extremely arbitrary; people who had nothing to do with the communities were appointed as trustee.<sup>8</sup> Not being able to collect regular revenue from the properties meant not being able to finance community organizations, such as schools, churches, cemeteries, hospitals, and orphanages, as well as people in need.

During the Single Party years between 1924 and 1946, state-orchestrated intimidation policies, legal pressures of various kinds,<sup>9</sup> and normalized daily racism in society<sup>10</sup> were all part of the systemic policies that encouraged the remaining Armenians to leave. The loss of elected Civil Assembly in the case of the Armenians, and the introduction of the single trustee system, endangered and discouraged public participation in the administration during those years. Although the practice of electing representatives to administer the properties of foundations had to be

re-established in 1949, the right to have an elected council to deal with civil issues has never been restored. As a result, a practice that was established over one hundred years was extinguished within the first decade of the republic. Had the Civil Assembly not been abolished, would it be enough today to meet the needs of the community when confronted with situations loaded with heavy politics, such as the recent French law criminalizing genocide denial? Perhaps not, but it would have given us an organizational model with over nearly two centuries of experience, with its pros and cons—a good reference point to begin with.

Arendt's remark on the price of being a Jew in Europe in the 19th century is still relevant for Armenians in Turkey today. For, they are not only asked to surrender their past but are expected to ignore their past, which encompasses everything from their social, legal, cultural, and political rights to their very existence, as well as the annihilation of their ancestors. This is the only way offered to survive in a state of denial. Armenian representation under these conditions is and can only be a political one, because the hostile attitude against Armenians in Turkey has been one of the longest lasting political attitudes in the country. □

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# Syrian-Armenian Memory and the Refugee Issue in Syria under the French Mandate (1921–46)

By Seda Altuğ

**A**n overwhelming majority of today's Syrian-Armenians are the descendants of Ottoman-Armenians who survived the 1915 Armenian Genocide. The 120,000–150,000 deportees in Ottoman Syria, who had hoped to return to their homeland as soon as World War I was over, returned to Cilicia, which, by the time of the Mudros Armistice (Oct. 30, 1918), had come under French occupation. All hope of rebuilding their communities, however, vanished with the Turkish National Liberation War (1919–21) and the ceding of Cilicia to the Turkish Republic following the formalization of the Turco-Syrian border in the Ankara agreement on Oct. 21, 1921.

During these years, the killing, intimidation, abduction, and stigmatisation of Armenians in Cilician cities—such as Adana, Mersin, Tarsus, as well as in cities like Urfa, Kharpert, Malatya, Diyarbakir, and Arabkir—continued, culminating in a second Armenian exodus towards French Syria and Lebanon. Between 1921–23, 80,000 new refugees arrived in Syria and Lebanon by land or by sea. Richard Hovannisian estimates that by the end of 1925, approximately 100,000 refugees were living in Syria; 50,000 in Lebanon; 10,000 in Palestine and Jordan; 40,000 in Egypt; 25,000 in Iraq; and 50,000 in Iran.<sup>1</sup>

The third wave of expulsion towards French Syria, in particular north-eastern Syria, in Jazira, took place following Turkey's military suppression of the Kurdish Sheikh Saïd Revolt in 1925. According to figures compiled by the League of Nations, between 8,000 and 10,000 Kurdo-Armenians, as named by the French sources, from the rural parts of Diyarbakir, Mardin, Shirkak, Siirt, Bitlis, and Cizre, joined the Armenian deportees who had

arrived in Syria earlier, in 1915–16 and 1921–23.<sup>2</sup>

The history of the post-genocide world in Syria has not yet been critically assessed. Very few scholarly works have incorporated the social and political history of the Armenian refugees into the general history of Syria. It seems that the politics of fear—which is embodied in space, in people's minds and bodies—is also quite pervasive among researchers. Accordingly, the scholarly field inevitably silences and marginalizes contro-

versial historical phenomena from scholarly scrutiny, such as the issue of sectarianism or the refugee issue. This piece will shed some light on the Armenian refugee experiences upon their arrival to their new residence in French Syria.

In the Syrian-Armenian memory, 1915 is seen as a decisive event, a violent ending, but also as a new beginning, and a new period of struggle in a hostile and foreign setting. The violence of the genocide—while it took different forms in social, class, cultural, and geographic terms—constitutes the foundation of *all* the historical narratives of that time. And they all begin with the violence the survivors were exposed to in their home towns or on the deportation routes to Syria, namely an entire life was left behind and would never be returned; Its fields, trees, rivers, and climate are remembered with extreme grief, and the new refuge is never really accepted as a substitute.

The French mandate (1921–46) rule in Syria and the colonial agency are obscured, or rather assimilated, into a survival narra-

tive where the main provider is depicted as the “Syrians” if not the “community” itself. The new life in French Syria indicates a positive change from bad to good, namely from insecurity, fear, instability, and oppression to security, stability, and tolerance. Generosity and respect on the part of the Syrian Arabs are presented as the underlying factors in this safety and security. No mention is made of the distress felt by the local Syrians due to the refugee flow to French Syria; nor of the dominant French colonial perspective on the Christian refugees and the fragile bargaining between the two; nor of the tacit agreement between the Arab nationalists and later the Armenian leadership of the early 1930’s.

Obscuring the colonial period as well as the current state of things in Syria while underscoring the 1915 memories is not a mere coincidence. Neglect of the post-genocide Armenian experience in Syria is apparently related to the repressive conditions that have existed there since independence (1946). Equally important, the genocide is actually the main event underlying the uprooting and deportations of the majority of Armenians to Ottoman/French Syria between 1915 and the late 1930’s. Being the “unacknowledged” victims of the Turkish nationalist venture, and given the lack of space for the Syrian-Armenians’ narratives to be recognized in Turkey, the Syrian-Armenian memory can be considered, as de Certeau reminds us, as “unrecognized reminders of a historical and still ongoing repression.”<sup>73</sup> In other words, the omnipresence of the memory of 1915 is also a response to the current denialism on the part of the Turkish state and a segment of Turkish society. Moreover, the genocide is the main event underlying the deracination, uprooting, and deportations of the majority of Armenians to Ottoman/French Syria between 1915 and the late 1930’s.

## THE REFUGEE ISSUE IN FRENCH SYRIA

There is almost no integrated history of the controversial encounters between the newcomer refugees and the local population during the early days of French colonial rule in Syria.<sup>4</sup> Nora Arissian’s piece *The Echoes of the Armenian Genocide in the Syrian Press* may be considered the first attempt to write the history of the Armenian Genocide as seen through the eyes of the Syrian Arab nationalists.<sup>5</sup> Together with her study of the memoirs of Syrian intellectuals on the genocide (both have been banned in Syria), her work paved the way for further research on the topic.<sup>6</sup> Despite being under-researched, the refugee issue was one of the most controversial issues in post-World War I Levant, posing serious concerns not only for the governing colonial powers and the home state, but also for the displaced and host populations.<sup>7</sup>

Concerned with the economic, social, and political costs of settling refugees in inner Syria or the Turco-Syrian frontier zone, the French authorities had to deal with the refugee issue without causing a deep crisis of legitimacy, both in the eyes of the Muslim majority and the local as well as refugee Christians in Syria. Justifying their presence in Syria and Lebanon as “the protectors of Christians,” the mandate authorities aimed to avoid increasing anx-

iety among the Syrian Arab nationalists. The French archives are full of reports drafted in the 1920’s about the refugee populations—especially Armenians and Kurds from Turkey, and Assyrians from British Iraq—and various settlement projects concerning these groups. These documents demonstrate that the French mandatory state did not adopt a comprehensive refugee policy, but embraced a pragmatic approach that took into account particular political, economic, diplomatic, and social concerns.

In the meantime, the Turkish state was fearful of an “enclave of undesirables”—in particular, Armenians and Kurdish political refugees—forming outside of its control, just south of its border in Jazira.<sup>8</sup> The correspondence between Ankara and the French High Commissariat showcase Turkey’s complaints over “malicious elements” in the form of Armenians in the frontier zone and of rebellious Kurdish tribes residing in Jazira.<sup>9</sup> The settlement of the Armenians along the Turkish-Syrian border, their recruitment into the French administration and army, and the trans-border incursions by the Kurds into Turkey form the *sine qua non* topic of the intelligence reports, telegrams, and correspondences from 1925–27. The French are criticized for providing protection to the Kurdish rebels and allowing the settlement of Armenians in areas near the border.

The French central authorities were well aware of the need to regulate the refugee flow. The High Commissariat in Beirut had, after 1925, become more responsive to the demands from the Turkish Foreign Ministry. In a report drafted after the Sheikh Saïd Revolt, entitled “*Du passage en Syrie des populations Kurdes ou Chrétiens ou de déserteurs Turcs*,” High Commissar Maurice Sarrail openly proposed to Paris to “organize the regulations pertaining to accepting refugees in Syria.”<sup>10</sup> Despite the pragmatic approach adopted by the French central authorities, certain local officers still held their ground and took initiative in the settlement of the refugees, in particular Kurdish refugees from Turkey. In a letter dated Jan. 27, 1925, a local French officer described the Turkish allegations of Armenian colonization on the border as mistaken and exaggerated:

‘Since the beginning of the armistice, the biggest problem that the mandatory power is trying to resolve is the refugee problem. We have received 96,450 refugees since then and they are all impoverished people. France has made great economic sacrifices for them. Just for the sake of relieving pressure on the north of Syria, we have settled two-thirds of these poor people in inner Syria. The rest reside in Aleppo and in the Sanjak of Alexandretta, and their settlements were realized calmly and in deference to the Muslim population.’<sup>11</sup>

Among the Syrian Arab nationalists, too, the “refugee problem” was a hotly debated issue. Until the mid-1920’s, it was as much a political issue as it was a social and economic problem, especially as the settlement of refugee groups—in particular the Armenians, in inner Syrian cities—began to be felt more acutely.<sup>12</sup> Relief, food programs, and settlement arrangements were offered to Armenian refugees by several missionary organizations, as well as by the French mandatory authorities. The refugee issue, along with the French surrender of some Syrian land to Turkey, formed the major



criticism expressed by the Syrian-Arab nationalist elites towards the Ankara Agreement formalizing the Turco-Syrian border.

The arrival and settlement of the refugees either in inner Syrian towns or in the remote corners of French Syria were directly linked to colonial “divide and rule” politics. The flow of refugees into the Syrian space, which continued through the 1920’s without any expression of consent by the local Syrians, evoked a “lack of agency” because of a “sovereignty deficit” in the Syrian national self. Arguing that Syria had turned into a “whore,” as refugees could freely enter the country, several articles in the nationalist press demanded the regulation of the border without regard to the ethnicity and religion of the refugee group.

The French strategy of reinforcing and expanding the political space reserved for the Armenians in the new confessional system in French Syria worsened the situation. In Aleppo, which had the biggest immigrant population, the social and economic discomfort was translated into clashes between the communities.<sup>13</sup> Christians made up 35 percent of Aleppo’s population, and the French embarked on manipulative efforts to “counter” Arab nationalist political activity by playing the “Christian card”: The Armenian refugees were granted Syrian citizenship and acknowledged as one of the official sects among 14 in September 1924, after the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne on July 24, 1923.<sup>14</sup>

Anti-Armenian sentiments became especially apparent following the 1926 elections, when the High Commissioner reshuffled the

existing representative council in order to counter the nationalist vote.<sup>15</sup> As a result of this French manipulation of the population figures, Armenians were accorded two representatives in the 1926 elections, despite the fact that their population was not sufficient even for one. In 1928—when the French authorities were trying to assure as large a Christian vote as possible to counter the political power of the National Bloc<sup>16</sup>—French High Commissioner Henri Ponsot affirmed that Armenian refugees residing in Syria had the right to vote in the Constitutional Assembly election.

The refugee issue manifested itself violently in the immediate aftermath of the first mass anti-French uprising—the Great Revolt in 1925—where a battalion of Armenian-French soldiers fought Syrian anti-French rebels. The subsequent angry attack on the Armenian Quarter in Damascus and the killing of 30 Armenians was justified by referring to the latter’s “proven unfaithfulness” and the claim that Armenians “have been fighting against those in whose land they are camping.”<sup>17</sup> The French were blamed for the Armenian colonization in Syria and the mobilization of Armenians against Syrians.

The last and biggest wave of refugees—mostly Armenians, Kurds, and Syrians from the Kurdish provinces of Turkey in the late 1920’s, and of Assyrians from Iraq to Syrian Jazira in 1933—caused extreme alarm and anxiety among the Arab nationalists. Their unease was expressed in a new framework: “harmful strangers vs. outraged Syrians.” A joint declaration by the main Armenian political parties

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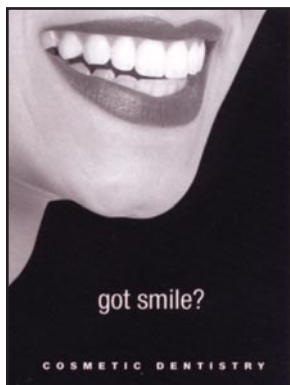
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(Hnchak and Dashnak) published in an Arabic-language article in the journal *Le Liban* on May 15, 1930 reassured the Arab nationalists that there would be no attempt in founding an Armenian state in Syria.<sup>18</sup> “We only have one homeland; that is Armenia,” the statement read. “In this hospitable country, our unique effort is to provide the needs of our families and assure the education of our children. We would like to see that the cordial relations between the Arabs and the Armenians are maintained and the misunderstandings that give rise to suspicions are stemmed.”<sup>19</sup>

## GOOD REFUGEE VS. BAD REFUGEE

The refugee issue reappeared in a different context following the Franco-Syrian Treaty in 1936, which promised independence to Syria within the next five years, and foresaw the incorporation of the autonomously administered regions into a united Syria. These regions included the Sanjak of Alexandretta, the Sanjak of Alawites, and the Sanjak of Druze and Jazira (north-eastern Syria). The treaty was never ratified, but the fierce controversy over two fundamental articles in the treaty—that of the protection of minorities and the unity of Syria—has had long-lasting implications concerning Syrian Christians, in general, and Armenians, in particular. These controversies involved two opposing political movements in French Syria, the Unionists and the Autonomists. The reference point for the Unionists was the Arab nationalists, who were aspiring for full independence in a united Syria, while that of the Autonomists was the Francophile Syrians, who asked for an additional article in the constitution on the protection of minorities, as well as the continuation of the status of the autonomously administered regions under the French mandate.

The notion of minority was contested by the rival Autonomists and Unionists to advance their political claims. While the Autonomists promoted an ethno-religious-based definition of minority-ness and asked for special protection against the majority, namely the Sunni Arabs, the latter avoided confronting the minority question. Rather, they opted for the strategy of incorporating ethno-religious belonging into Syrian Arab national identity. The Unionist majority expected the non-Muslim and non-Arab Syrians to obscure and de-politicize their ethno-religious differences. The nationalist slogan “Religion is for God and the nation is for all” evoked such an idea.

The most explicit sign of the Syrian Christians’ pragmatic consent to an apolitical and inclusivist definition of Syrian national belonging came after two bloody incidents in mid- 1936 and 1937: the Sunday market incident in Aleppo and the Amouda incidents in Jazira. After each incident, the nationalist Christian leaders intervened to calm the Christian community and reassure the Muslim majority. The Armenian Orthodox patriarch, Ardavazd Surmeyan, may be considered one of the first-comers to the rapprochement scene following the Sunday market incident on Oct. 12, 1936. In his visit to the Armenian refugee camp in the north of Aleppo, he said:

“I came here with the nationalist leaders to invite you to be calm and to return to your work. We have every interest in having cor-

dial relations with the Muslims. The incidents of last Sunday’s market had their origin in the ‘White Badge’ who are bought and paid for by certain traitors; they create discord between the elements of the country in order to obtain their goal. I ask therefore all Armenians to have no relations with the ‘White Badge’ and to even prevent these people from circulating around [the tent-city].”<sup>20</sup>

While the Armenian political parties (Dashnak, Ramgavar, and Hnchak) were aiming to maintain amicable relationships with both the French and Arab nationalists, they began to take a more pragmatic approach in the mid-1930’s towards greater cooperation with the Arab nationalists in Syria, particularly after 1936.<sup>21</sup> The Armenian communists in the Syrian Communist Party had always sided with the Arab nationalists’ struggle for full independence.

The interaction between the notions of political dissidence and minority-refugee status in the Syrian Arab nationalist imagery is related particularly to the Autonomy Movement in Syrian Jazira. The Autonomist faction in Jazira asked for a special minority status for the Jaziran population, which was made up of mostly Christian and Kurdish refugees from Turkey, and aspired for the continuation of autonomous rule in the region under the French mandate. While the Autonomists depicted the Jazirans under the rubric of minority on the basis of being non-Arab and non-Muslim refugees from Turkey, a significant portion of the Arab nationalists attempted to counter the Autonomists’ formulation between the status of refugee and minority. Prime Minister Sadallah Jabiri said in a speech that the “ex-refugees of the 1920’s have integrated and become like us, thus they should not be asking for special treatment.” The Arab nationalists labeled the leaders of the Autonomy Movement in Jazira as “refugees who deny favor” in upbraiding rhetoric.<sup>22</sup> Eventually the notion of refugee came to stand only for the “minority” and represented the “interest-seeker dissident rebel.” As minority-ness conjured up the image of political dissidents, the majority among the ex-refugees soon conjured up the image of “simple people who are *only* interested in their daily bread, but nothing else.”<sup>23</sup> In a way, the Syrian-Armenians entered the post-colonial era after they were stripped of transformative political agency.

Until the 1940’s, French Syria was still a refuge for thousands of “undesirables” for whom Turkish nationalism had left no place.<sup>24</sup> The bargain between the colonial power and the Armenian refugees contributed to some extent to the social and economic betterment of the Armenians, while the bargain with the local Arab nationalists helped to calm the ever-lost feeling of security and stability—but only through a patrimonial relationship and at the expense of free political agency. Nevertheless, memories of the horrors of 1915 were evoked during several instances: during the Muslim Brotherhood uprising in Hama in 1981, the Kurdish resistance in Qamishli in 2003, and likely during current days of anti-regime uprising in Syria. Memories of 1915 and the oppressive regime generate a politically conformist discourse among the Syrian-Armenian establishment and the community at large. The spell of the past *will* start to crumble, however, when the 1915 violence is acknowledged and, as Walter Benjamin said, when “the causes of what happened then have been eliminated.”<sup>25</sup> □

## ENDNOTES

1. Richard Hovannisian, "The Ebb and Flow of the Armenian Minority in the Arab Middle East," *Middle East Journal*, xxvii, winter 1974. For different estimates, see Thomas H. Greenshields, *The Settlement of Armenian Refugees in Syria and Lebanon, 1915–1939*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Durham, 1978.
2. For an elaborate discussion of the last wave of deportations, see Vahé Tachjian, *La France en Cilicie et en Haute Mésopotamie* (Paris: Karthala, 2004), pp. 301–317.
3. Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 4.
4. Several works on Syria mention the bad conditions and treatment the refugees endured prior to their arrival, but only in passing. Among the few critical works on the refugees are: Keith Watenpaugh "Towards a New Category of Colonial Theory: Colonial Cooperation and the Survivors' Bargain—The Case of the Post-Genocide Armenian Community of Syria under French Mandate," in Peter Sluglett and Nadine Méouchy (eds.) *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 597–622; Keith Watenpaugh, "A pious wish devoid of all practicability: Interwar Humanitarianism, The League of Nations and the Rescue of Trafficked Women and Children in the Eastern Mediterranean, 1920–1927," *American Historical Review*, 115:4 (October 2010); for Jazira, see Seda Altuğ, "Sectarianism in the Syrian Jazira: Community, land and violence in the memories of World War I and the French mandate (1915–1939)," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, June 2011, Utrecht; Seda Altuğ, "Armenian Genocide, Sheikh Said Revolt, and Armenians in Syrian Jazira," [www.armenianweekly.com/wp-content/files/Armenian\\_Weekly\\_April\\_2010.pdf](http://www.armenianweekly.com/wp-content/files/Armenian_Weekly_April_2010.pdf); Ellen Marie Lust-Okar, "Failure of Collaboration: Armenian Refugees in Syria," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 32, 1(1996), pp. 53–68.
5. Nora Arissian, *Asda' al-ibada al-armaniyya fi al-Sahafa al-Suriyya 1877–1930* (Beirut: Zakira Press, 2004).
6. Nora Arissian, *Ghawa'il al-arman fi al-fikr al-suri* (Beirut, Dar al-furat, 2002).
7. John Hope Simpson, *Refugees: Preliminary Report of a Survey* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1938).
8. See Seda Altuğ and Benjamin White, "Frontières et pouvoir d'État: la frontière turco-syrienne dans les années 1920 et 1930," *Vingtième Siècle*, September 2009.
9. Altuğ, "Türkiye Suriye ile Sınırını Temizlerken, 1, 2, 3," *Agos*, 9, 14, 27. March 2007.
10. CADN, *Fonds Beyrouth, Cabinet Politique*, Box 572, *Service des Renseignements, Service Central*, no. 868/K.S., March 5, 1925, Beirut.
11. MAE, *Série Syrie-Liban*, vol. 177, *Relation Turquie-Française*.
12. Thomas Greenshields, "The Settlement of Armenian Refugees in Syria and Lebanon, 1915–1939," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Durham, 1978, p. 60.
13. Pierre La Mazière, *Partant pour la Syrie* (Paris: Librairie Baudinière, 1926), pp. 200–203.
14. Until the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne, the peoples residing in the territories controlled by the French, including the Armenians, had maintained the legal status of Ottoman citizens. Nicola Migliorino, *(Re)constructing Armenia in Lebanon and Syria: Ethno-cultural Diversity and the State in the Aftermath of a Refugee Crisis* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), pp. 52–55. Uri Davis, "Citizenship Legislation in the Syrian Arab Republic," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 1, 1996, pp. 1–15.
15. Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under the French Mandate* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 171–172.
16. Stephen Longrigg, *Syria*, p. 181.
17. *al-Cha'b*, "al-arman wa qadiyyat askanuhum fi suriyya," Dec. 21, 1926.
18. Taken from CADN, *Cabinet Politique*, Box 576, *Service Politiques, Bureau d'études*, "L'Arménie et les Arméniens," *rédacteur*: cdt. Terrrier.
19. *ibid*.
20. CADN-MAE, *Fonds Beyrouth, Cabinet Politique*, 392, *Sûreté Générale* (Aleppo), no. 3829, Oct. 16, 1936; taken from Keith Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East*, p. 271.
21. Migliorino, *(Re)constructing Armenia in Lebanon and Syria*, pp. 58–62.
22. *al-qabs*, Feb. 5, 1938, "wataniyya al-fiqr wa masharia' al-sahra."
23. Several newspaper articles from the Arab nationalist press construct the "nationalist majority" in Jazira as such.
24. Watenpaugh, pp. 597–622.
25. Theodor Adorno, "The Meaning of Working Through the Past," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 103.