

The image shows the interior of an ancient Armenian church, likely the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Ani. The architecture features a large dome and several smaller arched niches. The walls and ceiling are covered in intricate frescoes, many of which are faded and partially obscured by peeling plaster. The lighting is dramatic, with light streaming through small openings in the dome and walls, highlighting the textures and colors of the ancient art. The overall atmosphere is one of historical grandeur and artistic richness.

# The Armenian Weekly

APRIL 2017

# 102 years on...

*We pledge to continue our purpose of fostering a nationalistic pride amongst all Armenian youth through educational, political, cultural, athletic, and social activities.*



*Armenian Youth Federation—Youth Organization of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation*

# The Armenian Weekly



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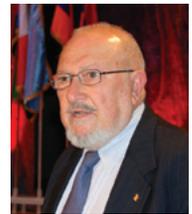
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**Raffi Sarkissian** holds a master of education from York University, as well as a bachelor of education from Trent University. He holds principal's qualifications and teaching certifications and is the vice-principal of the Armenian Relief Society Armenian Private School of Toronto. He has conducted extensive research in the field of genocide and human rights education and is the founder and chair of the Sara Corning Centre for Genocide Education. Sarkissian also serves as a board member of the Armenian Legal Centre for Justice and Human Rights, and is an occasional part-time professor in the Department of General Education and Liberal Studies at Centennial College.

**Henry C. Theriault** earned his Ph.D. in philosophy in 1999 from the University of Massachusetts, with a specialization in social and political philosophy. He is currently a professor in and chair of the Philosophy Department at Worcester State College, where he has taught since 1998. Since 2007, he has served as co-editor-in-chief of the peer-reviewed journal "Genocide Studies and Prevention." His research focuses on philosophical approaches to genocide issues, especially genocide denial, long-term justice, and the role of violence against women in genocide. He has lectured widely in the United States and internationally.



**Hagop Toghramadjian** is a senior at Boston College, where he studies political science and Arabic. Over the summer of 2015, he lived in Bourj Hammoud, Lebanon, where he researched the contents of the article that appears in this issue. He has been awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to study the contributions and integration of Syrian-Armenian refugees in Yerevan, Armenia.

## 102 Years On . . .

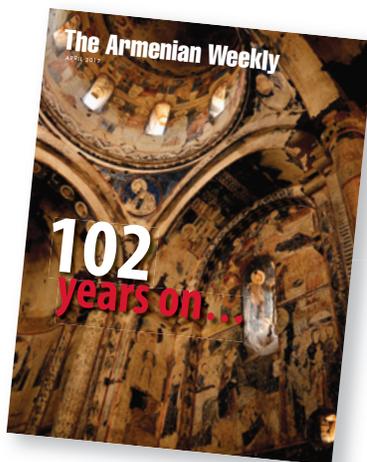
BY RUPEN JANBAZIAN

Each year, as April rolls around and the 24th approaches, rarely do we stop and ask ourselves a simple question: Why do we still commemorate the Armenian Genocide?

Earlier this year, a troubling op-ed in a major American newspaper recommended that viewers of the recent films covering the time period of the genocide “look into the historical record” and “draw their own conclusions” regarding the slaughter of 1.5 million Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. The author held that neither movie was likely to settle “the debate over the events of World War I.”

The fact that one of the most widely read publications in the United States allowed for the genocide to be “debated” on its pages shows why remembering and reminding—and above all demanding justice for the Armenian Genocide—are so important 102 years later.

Ten years ago, the Armenian Weekly made the decision to publish an annual magazine issue dedicated to this Great Crime. Today, this magazine continues to give space to the heroes of the Armenian Genocide (see Karakashian); to the stolen and confiscated sites (see Karanian, Ozpinar); and to the importance of



teaching about genocides to future generations (see Rizopoulos).

Armenians 102 years ago were scattered throughout the world, but were able to build communities and new lives in countries near and far (see Toghramadjian).

And, more than a century after the genocide began, Turkey’s denial of the Crime continues to spark controversy—even in Hollywood (see Babkenian and Diamadis)—and prompts descendants of survivors to demand justice (see Sonentz-Papazian) and to rethink our approach as a nation (see Theriault, Mensoian).

The Armenian Genocide may be a significant part of human history, but it surely is not stuck in the past.

Today, it is more relevant than ever. □

**Rupen Janbazian** is the editor of the Armenian Weekly. His writings focus primarily on politics, human rights, community, literature, and Armenian culture. He has reported from Armenia, Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabagh), Turkey, Canada, the United States, and Western Armenia.



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# ‘The Ottoman Lieutenant’: Another Denialist ‘Water Diviner’

By Vicken Babkenian and Dr. Panayiotis Diamadis

**O**n the eve of the First World War, approximately 170 American missionaries—many of them women—were scattered among the Armenian communities in the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire.<sup>1</sup> By early 1915, the imperial government had imposed strict censorship on correspondence from the eastern provinces. As the deportations and massacres of Armenians began in April 1915, American missionaries were warned by Ottoman authorities against reporting on local conditions.

In order to bypass the censorship, missionaries began to refer to their reading of literature, and especially the story of “Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie” which, many of them wrote, “seems to be so applicable to the circumstances under which we live here.”<sup>2</sup>

Evangeline is an epic poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, first published in 1847. The poem follows an Acadian girl named Evangeline and her search for her lost love Gabriel, set during the time of the expulsion of the Acadians from Acadia by the British during the Great Upheaval.

It was through dispatches of American diplomats, missionaries, journalists, and businessmen stationed throughout the Ottoman Empire that the United States’



Ambassador to Constantinople, Henry Morgenthau, learned of the deportations and mass killings of the empire’s native Christian Armenian, Hellenic, and Assyrian populations.

Based on these dispatches, Morgenthau informed the State Department on July 10, 1915 that reports from “widely scattered districts” indicated a systematic attempt to uproot peaceful Armenian populations and through arbitrary arrests, terrible tortures, wholesale expulsions, and deportations from one end of the empire to the other

accompanied by frequent instances of rape, pillage, and murder, turning into massacre, to bring destruction and destitution on them.<sup>3</sup>

It was not until Americans in the Ottoman Empire began returning home and were able to report freely what actually took place that more detailed facts about the genocide became known. Their testimony can be found scattered in American governmental, institutional, and private archives as well as in many published books. Taken together, these accounts provide detailed evidence that the Ottoman-Turkish government had embarked on a policy of deliberate extermination of its native Christian population. They also provide many instances of American heroism and rescue of the deportees.

This is the geopolitical and geographic setting of “The Ottoman Lieutenant,” a film that attempts to tell a story of an American nurse who falls in love with an Ottoman-Turkish officer. The story it tells stands in stark contrast to documented American testimonies. The film attempts to tell a story that seems to be aligned with an extreme Turkish nationalist narrative, which denies the genocides, portraying Armenians as rebellious, as victims of war, not victims of a wide-scale systematic campaign.

One reviewer, MaryAnn Johanson, rightly condemns “The Ottoman Lieutenant”:

**This is a movie that is trying to change the past by erasing it, tweet by enshrining ‘alternative facts’ into cinematic history, and by distracting you from its denial with a nice white lady falling in love with a handsome and honorable soldier. This is a denial of genocide close to a par of that which denies WWII’s Holocaust of the Jews, and everyone involved in this production should be ashamed of themselves for abetting it.<sup>4</sup>**



In reality, American women such as Mary Graffam at Sivas, Grace Knapp at Bitlis, Ida Stapleton at Erzerum, Ruth Parmalee at Harput, Elvesta Leslie at Urfa, Clara Richmond at Talas, Harriet Fischer at Adana, Elizabeth Ussher at Van, Emma Cushman at Konia, and others expressed their contempt for the Turkish authorities for their actions against the Armenian population. These women risked their lives to save deported Armenians and to document what they witnessed and heard during their time in Anatolia and neighboring regions.

“The Ottoman Lieutenant” follows in the footsteps of Russell Crowe’s 2014 “The Water Diviner,” an example of erasing the past with the sleight of a cinematic hand. Crowe’s film tells the story of Australian farmer Joshua Connor who travels to Turkey to find his three missing sons, all presumed to have died during the 1915 Gallipoli Campaign. The film presents an anachronistic interpretation of Australian sentiment towards Turkey in the immediate post-war period.

In the film, Connor is assisted by Turkish nationalists to enter the interior of Anatolia, where he eventually finds one of his sons alive and happy in an unoccupied Greek Orthodox church. There is no mention of what happened to the indigenous Hellenes, not even the villagers of Levissi, where the climactic scene was filmed.<sup>5</sup> In the midst of this episode, Joshua Connor helps the Turkish nationalists defend themselves from evil Greek bandits. History records that in a series of deportations ending in massacre between 1914 and 1918, Levissi’s more than 6,500 Greeks were exterminated.<sup>6</sup> Levissi and nearby Makri were the inspiration for the town of Eskibahçe in Louis De Berniere’s novel *Birds Without Wings*, a prime illustration of how the genocides may be dealt with in a work of fiction. Yet the genocides do not rate a mention in either “The Water Diviner” nor “The Ottoman Lieutenant.”

The film claims to be “inspired by actual events.”<sup>7</sup> The historical record shows that many of the events in the film are misrepresentations and falsehoods. Australian prisoners-of-war had been mistreated in the Ottoman-Turkish Empire during the war, including being sent on death marches. Many were held in former Armenian homes and churches. The Armenian quarter and the Sourp Asdvadzadzin (Holy Mother of God) Armenian Church in Afionkarahissar became the largest Allied POW wartime internment camp. The city’s Armenians had been deported in August 1915 and Australian prisoners witnessed their expulsion.<sup>8</sup>

There is no record of an Australian farmer traveling to the interior of post-war Turkey looking for his sons, aided by Turkish nationalists. There *are* records, however, of Australians in Anatolia documenting Turkish atrocities against the native Armenians and Hellenes, and providing relief to them as well as investigating Turkish war crimes.

During the First World War and its aftermath, the American and Australian public were well informed of the Armenian, Hellenic, and Assyrian Genocides through continuous harrowing reports published in the major newspapers and journals. Public outrage led to the establishment of a highly-organized international humanitarian relief

movement in both countries to rescue survivors. This is the story that Professor Peter Stanley and Vicken Babkenian tell in *Armenia, Australia and the Great War* (short-listed for two major Australian literary awards in 2016).

A series of unfortunate events in the post-war period, including resurgent extreme Turkish nationalism under Mustafa Kemal, and the rise of Bolshevism, resulted in the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres never being enforced. Sèvres had stipulated punishment for the Turkish offenders and a national home for the Armenians. Closer economic and political ties began to be forged between the United States, Australia, and Turkey, and the Armenian, Assyrian, and Hellenic tragedies faded from public memory, overtaken by the Great Depression and the rise of Nazism.

As demonstrated by the 1978 television mini-series “Holocaust,” film has assumed a central place in shaping public memory. With the active assistance of the Turkish state, some filmmakers are producing works that whitewash the genocides of the native peoples of Anatolia. This assistance includes funding and permission to film.<sup>9</sup>

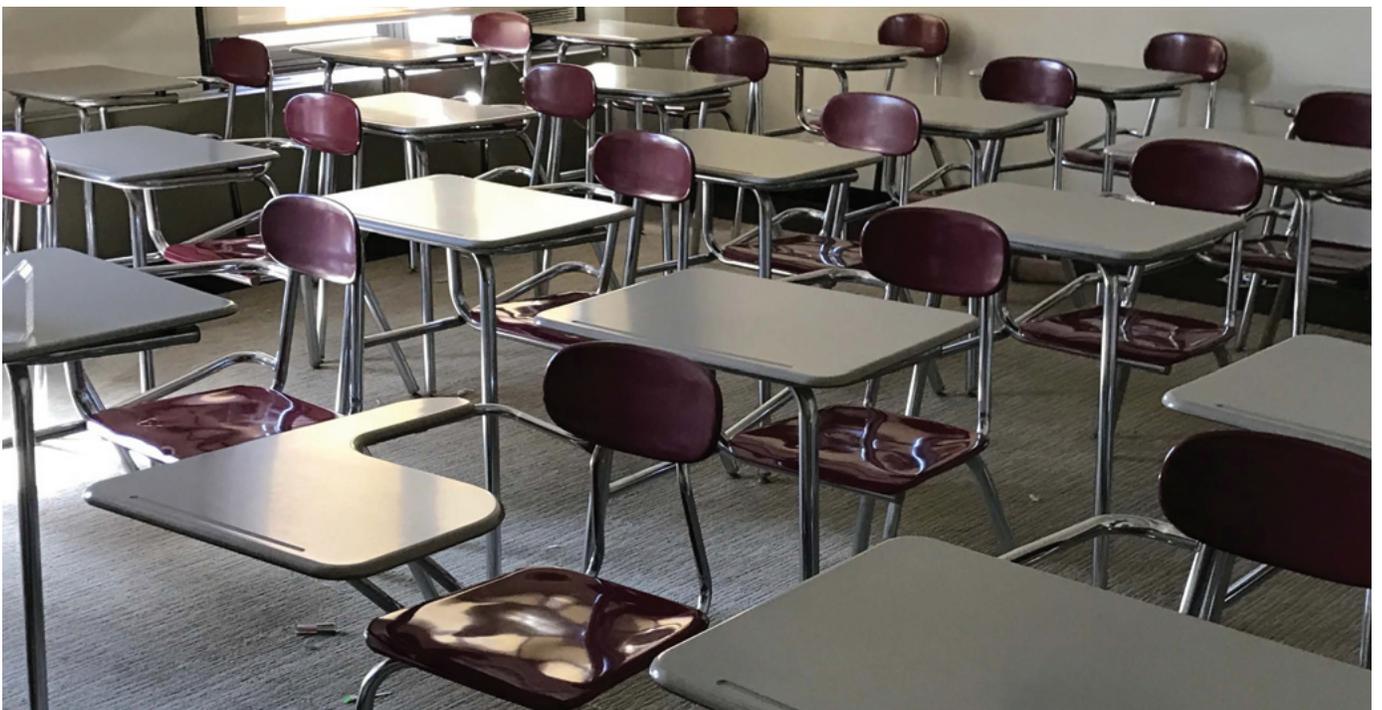
The Turkish Minister of Culture and Tourism, Omer Çelik, stressed to Russell Crowe that the script of “The Water Diviner,” “...which will be shot in Turkey, was important as it showed the common history between Turkey and Australia,” adding that “the Turkish government... would continue to support such productions.”<sup>10</sup> It is this same ministry that omits reference to Armenian, Assyrian and Hellenic heritage in its official publications, perpetuating the genocide.<sup>11</sup>

As “The Ottoman Lieutenant” opens in American theatres, it will be challenged by the release of another film—“The Promise”—on April 21. The latter not only provides a more historically accurate depiction of the genocides of Armenians, Hellenes, and Assyrians, but it reflects more truthfully what Americans witnessed and recorded at the time. □

To read the endnotes and works cited, visit: <http://armenianweekly.com/2017/05/02/babkenian-diamadis-the-ottoman-lieutenant>

# 'Who in this room is familiar with the Armenian Genocide?'

By Perry Giuseppe Rizopoulos



## April 24 in the Classroom

*Dedicated to the Armenian, Greek, and Assyrian people, to my family who lived under Ottoman rule in Greece along with the families of my Cypriot friends who can no longer return to their homes, and to my good Armenian friend, Paul.*

I walked into my classroom in the Bronx, New York, in the fall of 2016. It was 8:20 a.m. I walked across the front of the room, placed my bag on the table there, opened it up, and removed our textbook, which contained the essay, “From Cruelty to Goodness” by Phillip Hallie, that I would use as the basis for my class’s discussion. The class wouldn’t officially start for another 10 minutes, but in reality, we wouldn’t begin until 8:35, when the late students arrived, and I wanted to wait for everyone.

By 8:25, there were a few students in the room. I made small talk with them, asking how their weekends had been. We had a few brief exchanges and a couple of laughs as the others slowly trickled in. I

**What if someone was willing to look me in the eye and say that all of that suffering had meant nothing, that the killing of children, the elderly and the innocent, the burning of homes and the destruction of entire villages, were all punishment for their own actions and not the result of pure evil?**

greeted each of them with a “Hello,” or “Good morning,” or “How are you?” as I usually do. I looked down at my watch, 8:30.

I walked over to the podium with our ethics book in one hand and a piece of chalk in the other. I rested them both on the podium as I continued to greet my students. As I prepared for the class, I thought: What if someone told me that my *yiayia’s* (grandmother) tears had been a lie? What if someone told me that the Nazis hadn’t destroyed Greece? What if someone told me that the book I had been working on for the past three years documenting my *pappou’s* (grandfather) family struggle to survive in Greece was based on a myth told by Greeks about their history? What if someone was willing to look me in the eye and say that all of that suffering had meant nothing, that the killing of children, the elderly and the innocent, the burning of homes and the destruction of entire villages, were all punishment for their own actions and not the result of pure evil? No. I reminded myself that I could not remain silent in the face of such lies. My family’s memories and our collective identity can only survive if I choose to say something instead of saying nothing.

That day was not an ordinary day in my “Intro to Ethics” course. I knew our discussion would be profoundly depressing, horrifying, unfathomable, which was why I have taught this lesson in all of my classes as an adjunct philosophy professor. I looked down at my watch. It read 8:35.

I looked out at the classroom and it was full. I rolled up my sleeves and asked one of the most important questions we would discuss during the semester, “Who in this room is familiar with the Armenian Genocide?”

A couple of hands immediately shot up. The other 46 hands remained on top of their respective desks. It was the fifth time I’d taught the topic, and that class, like the others, confirmed my bleak expectation that the vast majority of the students were entirely unfa-

miliar with what they would soon learn was the first genocide of the 20th century. I turned to the board and wrote an Albert Camus quote: “It is the job of thinking people not to be on the side of executioners.” Below that I wrote, “The Armenian Genocide.” Below that I wrote, “Find three facts.”

Then I turned and addressed the class. “We will begin our discussion by discovering three facts about this genocide. Take out your phones or laptops and let’s learn about what happened. For now, stick to the New York Times.” I wrote out, “New York Times: *Armenian Genocide: An Overview*, by John Kifner, and *A Century After Armenian Genocide, Turkey’s Denial Only Deepens* by Tim Arango.”

I addressed the class as they were looking up the articles. “We’re going to focus on answering the following: What happened and what is currently happening?”

I waited as they quietly researched the topic. A student in the front row, Alex, with a look of genuine shock on his face, said, under his breath, “Holy shit, this is horrible.” The other students seemed equally engaged and affected.

We went around the room and created an outline of what had occurred a century ago. A number of students volunteered to share their findings, so I turned my back to them with chalk in hand and said, “Ok, let’s go. When did it happen?”

Jessie answered, “1915–1917.”<sup>1</sup>

Another said, “1.5 million Armenians were killed.”<sup>2</sup>

I acknowledged this with a nod and wrote it on the board. “How did it start?” I asked.

Sam said, “Hundreds of Armenian intellectuals were killed.”<sup>3</sup>

“Nice work,” I said, “What else?”

Reading directly from the Kifner article, Carlos said, “There were executions with bodies dumped into mass graves, and death marches of men, women, and children across the Syrian desert to concentration camps with many dying along the way from exhaustion, exposure, and starvation.”<sup>4</sup>

“Excellent. Also, scroll up a bit and read the paragraph before, please.

Carlos continued, “A later law allowed the confiscation of abandoned Armenian property. Armenians were ordered to turn in any weapons that they owned to the authorities. Those in the army were disarmed and transferred into labor battalions where they were either killed or worked to death.”<sup>5</sup>

“Thank you.” I continued, “Who was responsible?”



## What is cruelty?

Alex responded “The Young Turks and the Three Pashas. That was the Ottoman Empire, Turkey.”<sup>6</sup>

“Yes. What is going on currently with the Armenian Holocaust?”

Allie began speaking. “Turkey still denies it.”<sup>7</sup>

“Well done. How do they explain the genocide?”

Allie continued by reading another passage from Kifner’s article: “But to Turks, what happened in 1915 was, at most, just one more messy piece of a very messy war that spelled the end of a once-powerful empire. They reject the conclusions of historians and the term genocide, saying there was no premeditation in the deaths, no systematic attempt to destroy a people.”<sup>8</sup>

“Okay, what did the American ambassador say at the end of the article?”

Another student, Will, cut in, “He said that the Turkish government destroyed the whole race of Armenians when they gave the order for the deportations and they knew that.”<sup>9</sup>

“Excellent work, Will. Who else denies it?” I asked.

Sam called out “We do. The U.S. government.”

“Yup,” I responded.

I paused for a second when I noticed that Sam did not have a phone or a laptop on his desk. “Ok, how do you know that, Sam?”

“I’m taking a class on genocide,” he answered.

“Ok, we’ve established what happened and that there is denial about what happened on the part of the U.S. and Turkish governments. What does this mean for truth?”

We then watched a short video that highlighted the brutality and systematic nature of what the Young Turks implemented to eradicate the ethnic minorities in the Ottoman Empire. We then had a basic understanding of the events and I could move on to the philosophical questions I most wanted to ask: What is cruelty? And how does this question relate to our research about the Armenian Genocide?

We shifted our focus to Phillip Hallie’s “From Cruelty to Kindness.” Hallie’s work provides a framework to understanding the kind of Absolute Cruelty the Armenian people have experienced for over a hundred years as a result of the Turkish denial of genocide.

I began our discussion. “Let’s think first about the historical examples given by the author. Everyone open up to page 333.” They all opened our Ethics anthology, *Ethics: The Essential Writings* by Gordon Marino, to Phillip Hallie’s essay, “From Cruelty to Goodness.”

“Hallie talks about the Holocaust,” said Carlos.

“Yes. And what is the other historical example of cruelty Hallie cites?”

Carlos replied “American slavery.”

“Ok. Who’s familiar with these two events?” I asked. This time everyone raised their hands. I turned to the board and wrote, “Examples of Institutionalized Cruelty: American slavery and the Holocaust.”

“Now turn to page 335,” I said, “and let’s define cruelty.” Hallie states that “the etymology of the word cruelty involves the spilling of blood.” I wrote this on the board and then wrote, “physical.”

I turned the page, “Carlos, read on page 336.”

“There is one factor, that the idea of ‘pain’ and the simpler idea of ‘bloodshed’ do not touch: cruelty, not playful, quotidian teasing or ragging, but cruelty involving the maiming of a person’s dignity the crushing of a person’s self-respect.”<sup>10</sup>

I stopped Carlos and wrote below “physical” the word “meta-physical.”

I turned to the class. “Is it cruel to maim or degrade someone’s identity, someone’s history, and to invalidate someone’s memories,

## For the existentialist, a choice is a choice and we must own all of our choices. A choice to not choose or a choice to not act is still . . .

especially in regards to suffering?” I answered my own question by reading aloud: “Institutionalized cruelty, I learned, is the subtlest kind of cruelty.”<sup>11</sup>

I continued to read. “In episodic cruelty, the victim knows he is being hurt, and his victimizer knows it too. But in a persistent pattern of humiliation that endures for years in a community, both the victim and the victimizer find ways of obscuring the harm that is being done.”<sup>12</sup>

I then began to elaborate on how the United States’ treatment of the Armenian Genocide may reflect a persistent pattern of humiliation. “Every year since 1980,” I said, “the American president has done what Hallie describes. They have used every word but the right one. Furthermore, we do not address this form of cruelty at all in our educational system. What could be more subtle than omission? Omission is subtly turned into eventual obscurity. We are responsible for what we omit and what we fail to do. What we do *not* do can bring us—and all around us—equal harm to *doing* something. No?”

The class nodded. I continued, “For the existentialist, a choice is a choice and we must own all of our choices. A choice to not choose or a choice to not act is still...” I pointed to the class, and they responded, “a choice.”

“So when the president stands in front of a microphone and deliberately calls the Armenian Genocide a ‘massacre,’ or an ‘atrocious,’ he is making a choice to not speak the truth. All the presidents who have said this are guilty of being an oppressor.”

“Turn to page 340. Anthony, please read starting from, ‘I found that kindness...’”<sup>13</sup>

“I found that kindness could be the ultimate cruelty, especially when it was given within that unbalanced power relationship. A kind overseer or a kind camp guard can exacerbate cruelty, can remind his victim that there are other relationships than the relationship of cruelty, and can make the victim deeply bitter, especially when he sees the self-satisfied smile of his victimizer.”<sup>14</sup>

I said, “What is the speech on April 24 if not an exacerbation of denial? Each year, the Armenian community petitions the government and writes to the president, and each year they are denied justice.”

I returned to a point we had written down earlier: “The Armenian Genocide began with the execution of hundreds of Armenian intellectuals. Every year is a cold reminder of Turkish oppression and destruction. The genocide also began with the killing of hundreds of intellectuals. What is going on now is a metaphysical perpetuation of this horrible act. It is a complete degradation of not only Armenian memory and intellect but of the very idea of truth.”

I turned to the class and I asked, “Why did I choose to teach this today?” I gave them a moment to think. Gabby responded, “Because it’s an ethics class. We should know about this.”

“You have to.” I responded, “Why am I the first person to tell you about this genocide?” I wrote the following question on the board.

“What is the existential situation we are presented with at the end of the essay?”

There is a section from Hallie’s essay where he includes a letter written to him by someone from Massachusetts:

*I have read your book, and I believe that you mushy minded moralists should be awakened to the facts. Nothing happened in Le Chambon [where residents made the town a haven for Jews fleeing from the Nazis], nothing of any importance whatsoever.*

*The Holocaust, dear Professor, was like a geological event, like an earthquake. No person could start it; no person could change it; and no person could end it... It was the armies and the nations that performed actions that counted. Individuals did nothing. You sentimentalists have got to learn that the great masses and big political ideas make the difference. Your people and the people saved simply do not exist...*<sup>15</sup>

I then directed the class to the final section and then to the final words that Hallie wrote. He refers to a woman he met at a lecture of his, whose children were saved by the very village that Hallie references, Le Chambon, France, in the Haute-Loire. She approached the microphone and said, “The genocide was a storm, lightning, thunder, wind, rain, yes. And Le Chambon was the rainbow.”

Hallie elaborates by saying, “You must choose which perspective is best and your choice will have much to do with your feelings about the preciousness of life and not only the preciousness of other people’s lives. If the lives of others are precious to you, your life will become more precious to you.”<sup>16</sup>

The denial of the Armenian Genocide by the United States government is nothing more than institutionalized cruelty of an absolute nature. 1.5 million people were systematically killed in a genocide and afterward, there has been a 102-year-long genocide of the minds and identities of all those who suffered. Perhaps individuals cannot be held responsible for what they do not know. It is not my students’ fault that they lack the knowledge about what happened. It is *not* arguable, however, that our education system has a moral obligation to teach students about this history just as they learn about the Jewish Holocaust, American slavery, and many other great historical atrocities.

If I think something is wrong, I have the right to express this idea and an obligation to do so with respect, and without crudeness, as a result of my obligation to humanity. What was perpetrated by the Young Turks in 1915–17 was not civilized, was not humane, was not an act of war, and most certainly *was* a genocide. To say that all Turkish people are murderous or wish ill on the Armenians, Greeks, or Assyrians is a crude, unjust, and frankly ignorant assertion. To say with specificity, evidence, and courage that what occurred in the

Ottoman Empire in the early 20th century was a genocide is a truth as per the evidence.

There is a myriad of arguments offered to explain why the United States president will not use the word “genocide,” but it is impossible to justify genocide denial because it is universally wrong.

There is also a more philosophical problem with the United States’ denial. The notion propagated by moral relativity, that all truths are equal in moral value, is a metaphysical and ethical fallacy and does not acknowledge the existence of universality. It completely paralyzes people from doing what is necessary to reach the truth. The truth exists as its own entity. My truth may vary from your truth based on our abilities to perceive, remember, understand, or comprehend. But those differences do not remove either of us from the burden of pursuing

**You must choose which perspective is best and your choice will have much to do with your feelings about the preciousness of life and not only the preciousness of other people’s lives. If the lives of others are precious to you, your life will become more precious to you.**

truth by asking intelligent questions and constructing meaning. The pursuit of truth must be characterized by the use of questions, the gathering of evidence, honesty, and courage.

Albert Camus was a person who understood that we must make choices and acknowledge distinctness and equality among all people. We must be willing to see executioners as executioners. To say that it is the duty of thinkers to not side with the executioners implies that we must have the courage to say who the executioners are.

If Turkey’s truth is a result of its culture and Armenia’s truth is a result of its culture, and the United States has more ties with Turkey, it becomes possible and convenient to forget a genocide. There are truths that transcend cultural norms. Armenian Genocide Denial is evidence of the kind of absolute cruelty that can happen and then be perpetuated when the ethic of a nation is amorphous as a result of “other” considerations.

The relativist misinterprets the importance of “empathy” or “understanding” and carries those concepts beyond the point of acceptability. We should not—we cannot—empathize with and then appease the executioners.

There are truths and there are falsehoods. The modern relativist wantonly applies the personal idea of morality to situations as it pleases the relativist. Imposing sentiment, not truth, prevents us from thinking boldly, or from thinking at all. If we deny the Armenia Genocide to prevent some type of phantom act of Turkish reprisal, we paralyze the brightest minds of our society. A genocide is always wrong and genocide denial is always wrong just as slavery is always wrong.

This essay is a hope that individuals who read this, especially educators and others in control of how knowledge is disseminated, will understand that the suffering of the Armenians, Greeks, and Assyrians

who were killed, tortured, and displaced during the early 20th century by the Ottoman Government must be acknowledged and described as what it was, a genocide.

I think back to the lack of hands raised in my class in answer to my first question, “Who in this room is familiar with the Armenian Genocide?” To have so little knowledge about the first genocide of the 20th century is not ethically acceptable. I am obligated as a human and as an adjunct professor to teach about the Armenian Genocide. I hope that, after reading this essay, you will also feel the obligation to speak about the Armenian Genocide to whoever will listen and, if you have the opportunity to address an audience, that you will take advantage of this opportunity to spread the truth and to end the cruelty of continued denial against the Armenian people.

It is a sadistic joke to let those with power exercise it and to allow those who have yet to express their power believe that they cannot make a difference. This is a grotesque stain that must be removed. If our feet are firmly planted in truth, we should never fear standing, even if we are alone. And as Camus would encourage, we must choose to stand on the correct side. □

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*This page is sponsored by Knarik Meneshian, in memory of Murad Meneshian*

# HONORING

# Balaban Hoja

## *A Hero for Armenian Orphans*

By Dr. Meliné Karakashian



To his students in the Aintab orphanage, Sarkis Balabanian (Balaban Hoja) (1882–1963) was not simply a mathematics teacher, but a role model who risked his life to save them from Turkish attacks.

I honor Balaban Hoja for having saved these orphans in Aintab. My father was among them.

Balaban Hoja's heroism and leadership left a deep impression on my father, whose description of events always led me to visualize them vividly, as if watching a film.

I can still hear his description of Balaban Hoja's hidden gun, and his firm reassurance to the orphans not to be afraid.

## IN HIS MEMOIRS, MY FATHER WROTE:

“... the American organization called Near East Relief opened an orphanage in Aintab. Hundreds of orphans like us would assemble in front of the building; every day, a certain number of them were selected, taken inside, registered, given bath, and dressed. Finally, one day, they took in my younger brother Boghos. When they asked him, ‘Do you have brothers and sisters?’ he gave our names. Thus, Hnazant and I also became charges at the orphanage. They placed Boghos and me in the boys’ division, Hnazant in the girls’. They gave us special uniforms, which had numbers on the shirt-sleeves. Boghos had 101 and I had 102. We were very proud of those numbers, which we wore like military insignia.

“Since I could read a little bit, they put me in a higher grade, while they put Boghos in kindergarten. We had regular classes every day, including music and gym.

This continued until the beginning of 1920 when the French, who had replaced the British in Aintab, started to pull out. The Turks were happy, of course, but the Armenians were fearful. The Armenian organizations began maintaining vigil at the orphanage in order to prevent the Turks from inciting massacres anew. Every night, we used to see armed Armenian young men circling the building and ensuring our safety.

“One morning in April 1920, we were in math class. Our teacher, Balaban hoja, blind in one eye, was very strict. Suddenly hearing gunfire, he ran out of the classroom, then came in and, to our surprise, he took a ten-millimeter gun out of his pocket.

“‘Boys, don’t be afraid,’ he ordered, and went down to the courtyard. He yelled from there, ‘Silah bashena,’ which in Turkish, means ‘call to arms.’

“The fighting started between the Armenians and the Turks.

“There had already been tension between the two groups. There were orphans who had been brought from Aleppo and settled in the Turkish quarters. The Armenian governing body brought them to our orphanage for their safety. The French army had camped behind the American College in the Armenian district, but did not get involved in the fighting. The Turkish attacks continued practically until Autumn of that year. Immediately opposite the orphanage in the Turkish quarter was a mosque from which the Turks constantly fired upon us. Fortunately, behind our orphanage building, there was a large cave where we used to go and take refuge in times of danger. The older boys had opened a passageway from the cave to the orphanage, so we could safely reach our bedrooms. Sandbags protected the bedroom windows.”<sup>1</sup>

*This page is sponsored by Armen Alexanian*

**SARKIS BALABANIAN** was born in Aintab on May 15, 1882, in a quarter of the city where half the residents were Armenian. He had five sisters and four brothers who died young. At age four, young Sarkis lost his right eye in an accident. His mother pledged to let his hair grow until he was 10, and to then cut his hair at Saint Kevork Church, trusting his fate to a saint. But neighborhood children made fun of him, and at age seven Sarkis entered a barber's shop and had his hair cut; his mother was unhappy. At age nine, he lost his father and had to leave the Evangelical School where he was enrolled to start working, to help support his family. He sold cigarettes. Turkish lads did not leave Armenian boys alone, though, and he had to learn the street culture well—attacking the enemy before being attacked.



In his memoirs,<sup>2</sup> written in 1960 and published after his death, Sarkis Balabanian described several instances of helping others. In summer 1916, Evangelical and Catholic Armenians were deported from Turkey; the Apostolics had already been sent into the depths of the deserts. He was asked to work at the American orphanage, where more than 150 Armenian orphans were being cared for. He purchased groceries for the orphanage, but was also a teacher and a father to the orphaned children.

On a cold day in February 1916, while shopping for the orphanage, he met a woman in the bakery who was crying for a little boy being forced to change his religion:

*“For me, this widow’s request was not a surprise since many, like her, had asked for his help to solve difficult situations such as kidnapping, imprisonment, forced Islamization.”<sup>3</sup>*

The widow, from Sivas, had been able to escape the deportations and secure a job at the house of a wealthy Chechen in Aintab, thus saving her life. Yet, she had come not for herself, but for an Armenian child. In tears, she said her boss had purchased this child from Aintab’s Tel Bashar village a week ago and intended to circumcise the boy and convert him to Islam. The child had resisted, and her boss had punished him the old way, keeping him hungry for two days. Nevertheless, the child continued his stubborn resistance. The widow begged Balabanian to save the boy.

*“The widow came out of the bakery. I followed her to learn the location of the little hero. We walked long until we reached Kurd Tepe, on the northern slope of which was the house. Before we separated, we agreed on a way to kidnap the boy.*

*“Late on that snowy night, when everyone [was] indoors, I, on a donkey hurried toward the Chechen’s criminal home, where an Armenian boy looked out for me.*

*“I saw the boy from a distance. As per our agreement, he was outside the door. The poor child, warmed his frozen hands*

*with his breath. I prodded the donkey to move fast. I reached the boy. Carefully, I checked around me; there was no one in sight. Only the wind whistled and sprinkled snow on my face.*

*“Without losing time, I approached the little boy and in Armenian I said, I had come after him to save him. The boy was happy. I put him in the pocket of the saddle and whipped my donkey. And when I felt safe that we were not [being] followed, the boy answered me that his name was Khntir [Problem], his mother’s, Haiganoush, father’s Ardashes, and that he is from Kharpert.*

*“We reached the college door, frozen from the cold. I took the child out of the pocket and entered the room of the doorman. He was barely five. He had black eyes, long eyelashes, red cheeks. The face of a pretty Armenian. Holding him, I went to the orphanage caretaker’s room, Mrs. Ovsanna Kupelian, where I told her the situation.”<sup>4</sup>*

The orphanage caretaker refused to accept the child and advised Balabanian to care for his family instead, since he could be punished for this act. Instead of repeating his request to, Balabanian held the child up and went to Mr. Merryl, the director.

This fine man grabbed the child and invited Balabanian to take a seat. When Balabanian told the boy’s story, he saw tears in Mr. Merryl’s eyes. Soon after, Mrs. Meryl asked her husband if he did not wish to adopt an angel like the little boy; he agreed and Mrs. Merryl handed the child over to the servant to be washed and fed.

Balabanian and the Merryls then prayed to God, asking Him to put an end to the hardships of this people.

Balabanian in his memoirs diverts from the story here to tell how, eight months later, he met a young woman, after being deported. There, in a large factory, as a supervisor of refugees, he noticed a young woman in a corner of the yard who cried and prayed every day. One day, he approached her and asked why she was crying. She said:

*“Brother, my pain has no limit. Before I left Kharpert, my husband was taken away, then I was deported with two children. My infant died on the road. The other, a boy, was grabbed from me near Aintab’s Tlbashar village and to date I hear his shouts, ‘Mama, mama, they are taking me . . . save me mama,’ she said and cried again.”<sup>5</sup>*

Her words broke Balabanian’s heart. When the young woman calmed down and looked at him, Balabanian thought he had seen her eyes somewhere before. He asked what her boy’s name was. She replied, “Khntir, he was my older son. I had begged God to grant me a son and promised to raise him religiously, a good Christian.” Balabanian then asked if her son’s eyes resembled hers. She replied yes, and cried again. He asked her name; when he heard Haiganoush and that her late husband’s name was Ardashes, he was sure that Khntir was her son. He promised to help her, and reassured her that Khntir was alive and in good hands. Balabanian

then wrote to Mrs. Merryl with the story. The fine woman, Mrs. Merryl, sent Khntir to Aleppo to be reunited with his mother.

In 1933, while a teacher at the Oosoomnasirats School in Aleppo, Balabanian was busy with graduation ceremonies when a young man approached him, took off his hat, and hugged him, saying, “Khoja, did you forget Khntir?” As Balabanian was accustomed to solving problems in math class, he asked with amazement what problem (“*khntir*”) the boy was referring to. Khntir then explained who he was. Balabanian remembered and hugged him.

Khntir had arrived from America, looking for an Armenian bride. They found him an Armenian girl from Kharpert, held the wedding, and set them off to America.

“Khntir revenged the Turks, by forming an Armenian family,” Balabanian wrote.

Balabanian’s memoirs are full of similar moving stories of saving lives.

He volunteered in the British Army and was sent to Aintab, wearing a Turkish soldier’s uniform, with a firearm and 150 rounds of ammunition, presenting himself as a Turk along the way. Balabanian described the events at the orphanage on April 1, which my father also referred to in his memoirs:

*“It was April the first. After prayer, we entered class. Suddenly the sound of shellings disturbed our peace. I sent the students immediately to the basement and since I was that day’s guard, ran to hold my position. The groups of youth were in their positions. Here, they fire from the opposite building on the orphanage, leaving women and children panicky in the yard. And the people, under our guard, jam in the buildings of the Americans.”<sup>6</sup>*

Balabanian and the youth held their positions waiting for the sign to counter-attack. The sign came and then silence. The Turkish side, defeated, counts its victims.

In the following days, the city looked like a little fort with the Armenians—7 to 70 years old, men and women—fulfilling their responsibilities.

*“For fifteen days, my eyes have not seen sleep. I have not taken off my shoes, have not seen my family and children. The principal of the orphanage, feeling sorry for me, demanded that I take breaks to rest.*

*“Mr. Boyd, the American principal of the orphanage and director of the red cross, who for a while opposed my activities of making secret military enforcements in the orphanage, now, seeing my and my brave people’s heroic struggle, came and asked for forgiveness, for having hurt me unjustly.*

*“After that we became friends. You can imagine that he even gave me a ‘Browning.’*

*“On the fifth day of the fighting, the Turks suggested a cease-fire. We accepted. Taking advantage, we placed bags full of sand against the upper windows of the orphanage.”*

An Armenian messenger, who had never held arms, on seeing three Turkish watchers had fired on them, breaking the ceasefire at a time when a delegation was trying to draw up the details.

As a result, an organized Turkish army unit then approached the orphanage. The British directors forbid the Armenians from using arms. The hospital, orphanage, and the Armenian quarters risked turning into a blood bath.

*“Therefore, taking the whole responsibility in my hands, I ordered the boys to fire. The Turkish army approaching nonchalantly, became alarmed by our unexpected and violent attacks. The Turks had numerous victims. Those who survived, fled. I do not know the number of their victims, I only know that at the end of the fight, they did not dare approach our positions.*

*“And I, while encouraging my fighters, suddenly, heard a loud voice that called me. I turned around. It was Dr. Shephard, who had forbidden me to fire, who cried:*

*- Hoja, hoja, do you think you can stop?*

*- Doctor, why shall I stop; I shall fire and fire again . . .*

*“Now, it was Dr. Shephard who said,*

*- Bravo, Hoja, bravo, fire, those Turks are liars. The windows of my bedroom were broken from their firings. From here on, I am with you, against them; to death, I will fight by your side.”*

Balabanian proceeds to describe other courageous deeds that marked his lifetime of dedication to the Armenian people.

May Balaban Hoja, mathematics teacher, be kindly remembered for having saved Armenian orphans during and after the Armenian Genocide. □

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*Note from the author: I thank my friends, Cesar Chekijian (for introducing me to the story of Balaban Hoja after reading my father’s memoirs, and for sharing references with me) and Haroutune Terjanian (for finding a student of Sarkis Balabanian’s, who shared his memoirs).*

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Ulash Altay plays on a tree in the garden in front of his home in Chunkush. Ulash is a descendant of the only known genocide survivor of Chunkush. (Photo: Matthew Karanian)

# Building Bridges in Western Armenia

By Matthew Karanian

Thursday was a school day in Chunkush. The children who normally filled its streets with laughter were instead busy with their lessons.

In the village center, a shopkeeper sold yarn to a customer. A few young men lingered outside a dry goods store. And a pair of mostly even-tempered state security agents shadowed me. Otherwise, the streets were empty.

It would have been easy to bypass Chunkush. I suspect that most travelers don't give this village a second thought. But most travelers in this part of the world aren't interested in Armenians, either. I was traveling with a small group of Armenian scholars for whom Chunkush is a gem among the treasures of Armenian history.

Chunkush sits in the remote hard scrabble landscape between Kharpert and Diyarbakir. This village was, until 1915, part of the fabric of Western Armenia. Today, it's largely unknown to outsiders.

Armenian Chunkush had existed almost since forever and was destroyed in a moment in 1915. Ten thousand Armenians—the entire population of the village—were killed. The region around the village became a mass grave.

It has now been 102 years since the start of the genocide known to many as the Armenian Holocaust, and identified by most Armenians as the *Medz Yeghern*, or Great Crime. After all this time, Chunkush still exists. But today it is a Kurdish-populated village in Turkey. Chunkush has been mostly cleansed of its Armenian identity.

I had first visited Chunkush in 2014 to see what was left of our Armenian cultural heritage. I saw the ruins of a monastery, two churches, and a centuries-old neighborhood.

I returned in 2017 to see *who* was left. Chunkush is home not only to the ruins of ancient Armenian buildings. Chunkush is also home to a family that is descendant of a survivor of the Armenian Genocide.

This is how I met Ulash Altai.

Ulash Altai is an 11-year-old boy who lives in Chunkush with his mother and grandmother. His father had been part of the household, too, until his death a few months ago.

When I met Ulash on that Thursday morning in March, he told me that he would celebrate his 12th birthday the very next day. He was supposed to be in school, but on this day, the day before his birthday, he had left school early. He had learned that a group of Armenian Americans was visiting his grandmother. He wanted to be home to meet us.

Ulash isn't a teenager yet, and he didn't quite have the maturity to say this. But I would like to suppose that Ulash wanted to meet us for many of the same reasons we had wanted to see his family. I would like to believe that he wanted to learn about his past, that he wanted to start building a bridge to his future.



**Asiya pauses with her grandson Ulash, during a visit from the author. Ulash is the sole surviving son of Recai Altay, a Kurdish activist who was killed while incarcerated in Turkey last year. (Photo: Matthew Karanian)**

For the past two decades, I have traveled throughout Western Armenia to document the remnants of our homeland. I've recorded our churches, our forts, our ghost towns. But it was not until I met young Ulash that I really appreciated how bridge building has also been a significant, even if unintended, part of my research trips.

When we Armenians visit Western Armenia, we don't go as tourists. We don't go to have fun. Instead, we go to learn

about our past and to see where our grandparents were from. But we accomplish much more than this. We also build bridges to the future with the people who today live in our homeland.

These people, sometimes Kurds, sometimes Turks, are some of the people who use our churches as barns and warehouses. These are the same people who might be tempted to see Armenian ruins as quarry material or as the locations of phantom buried treasure.

And sometimes the people we meet are the so-called “Hidden Armenians” of Turkey. These Hidden Armenians may be full-blooded Armenians who have converted to Islam. Or they may be Turks and Kurds who recall that they had a grandmother who was Armenian.

Our presence, even if brief, is a reminder that we care about our homeland and that we care about the welfare of the Armenians who still live there—whether they are Christian or not, and whether they call themselves Armenian, or not. Our presence in Western Armenia, even if for only a day or a week, is a reminder to the local residents of our shared past.

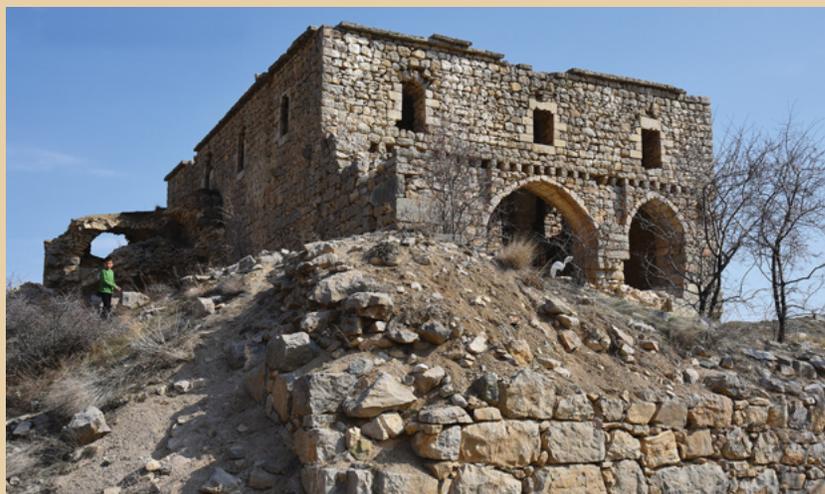
In Chunkush, this shared past includes Sirahayats, an Armenian monastery, and its surviving church, Sourp Astvatsatsin. The English language translation of *Sirahayats* is “the monastery that looks out lovingly.” This monastery is located on a hilltop just a few hundred feet from the home of Ulash. I imagine that the ruins of Sirahayats do indeed look out lovingly on Ulash’s modest home.

It was near this monastery a few years earlier that members of my group of Armenian American scholars had first met Ulash’s father. While in the nearby town square, a middle-aged man from Chunkush had approached them. “I see that you’re interested in old Armenian history,” he observed. He said this in Turkish, or at least he said words to that effect. “Well then, you should meet my mother in law.”

This man’s name was Recai. He was a stranger and he could have been many things, but he wasn’t a liar. He really did have a mother-in-law. Her name was Asiya. And, it also turns out, she really was old and she really was Armenian. Her role in the history of the Armenians of Chunkush was more than we could have imagined.

Asiya had been born in Chunkush in 1920.

At the time of Asiya’s birth, her mother was a 15-year-old genocide survivor—she was born in a town near Chunkush and was the only known survivor of the genocide who was still living in Chunkush. Five years earlier, during the summer of 1915, when



## CHUNKUSH

Chunkush is an historically Armenian region that is located in the northern sector of the province of Diyarbakir. The name of the town appears as *Cungus* on Turkish maps. It is located roughly midway between the cities of Elazig and Diyarbakir.

One of the most important surviving Armenian monuments in Chunkush is the church of Sourp Garabed. Even in ruins today, the building is impressive and attests to the wealth and prominence of Armenians here.

The ruins of an Armenian Catholic church are located on a hill overlooking Sourp Garabed. Only one wall remains of the Catholic church. To get there, travel about 40 kilometers south of Elazig and Kharpert.

Chunkush is also the site of an Armenian monastery that is known as Sirahayats. The surviving church of this monastery, Sourp Astvatsatsin, is located near the home of the oldest surviving Armenian of Chunkush. The English translation of the name Sirahayats is “the monastery that looks out lovingly.”

*Adapted from Historic Armenia After 100 Years (www.HistoricArmeniaBook.com).*



*This page is sponsored by the Bedian Family*



**Asiya pauses with her grandson Ulash, during a visit from the author. Ulash is the sole surviving son of Recai Altay, a Kurdish activist who was killed while incarcerated in Turkey last year. (Photo: Matthew Karanian)**

the appointed time for killing the Armenians of the Chunkush region had been reached, Asiya's mother had been 10 years old.

This little girl was standing alongside her neighbors, at the edge of a precipice, waiting her turn to be bludgeoned and pushed into the seemingly bottomless pit known as the Dudan Gorge. Locals today recall the Dudan Gorge, which is located a short march from Chunkush, as the place where 10,000 Armenians fell to their deaths.

This 10-year-old girl waited, but her turn to die never arrived. Instead, she was spared by a Turkish soldier who took pity on her, and who snatched her from death. He took her as his child bride.

Within just five years, roughly the time it took for that 10-year-old Armenian girl to mature, that Turkish soldier would become Asiya's father.

Asiya's long life has been marked by two traumas: first from the fear that she would be victimized because of her Armenian heritage; and second from her knowledge that her father had participated in killing every Armenian in Chunkush—every Armenian except for the girl who would become her mother.

Asiya is nearly 100 years old now, and for almost a century, her Armenian heritage has been perhaps the worst-kept secret of Chunkush.

Her son-in-law Recai—Ulash's father—was killed last year. Sources describe him as a political prisoner who had been serving time for his support of Kurdish issues. A bomb—some say an ISIS bomb—struck his holding cell.

Now his son Ulash is his family's bridge back in time to the world that existed in

1915, the time when Ulash's great grandmother stepped back from the abyss, literally, to survive the genocide.

Sirahayats, the ancient Armenian monastery that looks out lovingly at Ulash's home, is today at risk of destruction.

So also is Sourp Garabed, the grand cathedral that is close to the center of the village.

Is it reasonable to expect that Ulash's appreciation of his ancestry, encouraged by his grandmother, and also by visits from Armenians, may inspire him to take a stand to protect these sites? I believe it is.

People such as Ulash may even take a stand to protect the Armenians in their midst. If this happens, then we Armenians will have helped to build the most important bridge of our time. □

*This page is sponsored by Hazel Barsamian*

## POEM

# Hudavendigar

By Gaye Ozpinar

Beloved city!  
So much green everywhere,  
So much history.  
The mosques, the churches, the temples, the bedestens  
Beloved Hudavendigar!

Some were leaving their homes to go to the hamam;  
Others were shopping at Koza Han, buying silk and gold.  
Some women were busy taking care of silkworms;  
Some men were in the printing house setting the weekly  
Armenian newspaper ready for publication.

Sarkis and Garabed were out on the street playing  
mischievously as usual.  
Shakeh and Armine were at home helping their mother.  
We were about to sit down to have a meal together,  
Some dolma and tarhana soup.  
The children would later go from house to house for  
*Churpoteek* . . .  
People will douse them with water, it's *Vartavar*.  
They will get soaked, laugh, and have fun.

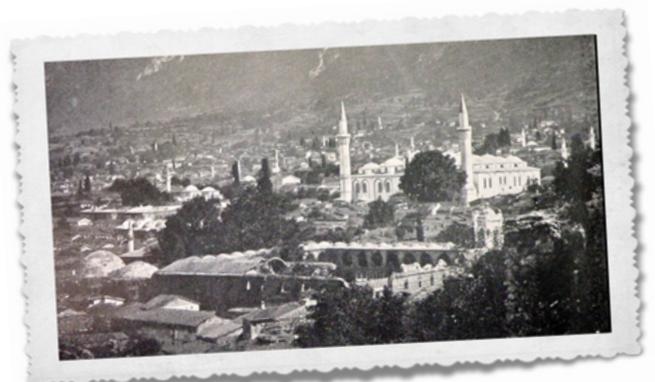
Where are they now?  
O beloved Uludag, didn't you see where they went?  
Iznik, didn't you realize people stopped fishing in your  
waters?  
Where are the people of the villages?  
People of Soloz or Keramet?  
Why the silence?  
You witnessed what happened.

Great grandma, great grandpa,  
Where were you?  
Didn't you hear?  
They sent your neighbors away.  
Where did they go?  
Where did they sleep?  
Did they have enough to eat?  
And their babies?  
Are they alive?

Uludag you stand so tall and strong  
Iznik your waters are so still  
Say something!  
Where are they?!

Now it's just ghosts everywhere.  
Villages, cities, lakes, and rivers are quiet.

Blood then, blood now.  
Blood still running.  
And beloved city  
Hudavendigar  
It remains in our dreams.



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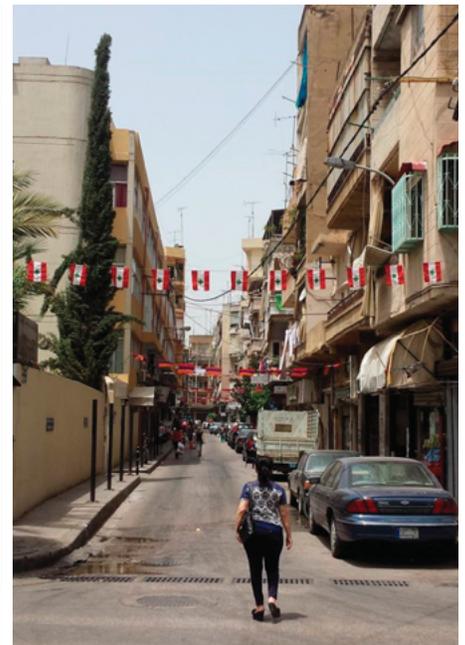
\$50.00 (\$10.00 savings for children under 12)  
Includes access to both dances and dinner

\*Children under 4 are free of charge

## Diaspora Focus:

# Lebanon

By Hagop Toghramadjian



(L to R) The Sardarabad *agoump*, one of the many community centers run by the Lebanese ARF; graffiti commemorating the Armenian Genocide; Armenian and Lebanese flags alternating on a side street near Holy Savior Armenian Catholic Church (Photos: Hagop Toghramadjian)

**M**y grandfather was born in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1924. I know very little about his parents, save that both were young refugees from Erzerum; his father, Der Yeghishe Doghramadjian, was a priest in the Armenian Apostolic Church, and his mother, born Baydzar Ohanessian, was haunted by memories of her older sister's death at the hands of a Turkish officer.

Yeghishe and Baydzar spoke Turkish at home, but here on the shores of the Mediterranean, hundreds of miles from their

mountainous birthplace, their son grew up with a fully Armenian education, mastering the poems, songs, speech, and prayers of his scattered people. He married Nazelie Ohanian, a girl he had met while on a trip to Aleppo, and together they raised Hovhannes, Kayane, Haroutioun, Arshag, Arisdages, and Avedis. They lived in a small apartment in the picturesque seaside town of Byblos, where the children attended school at Trchnots Pouyn (The Bird's Nest), an institution founded to educate refugees of the Armenian Genocide. It was no small task to feed and educate all six children, but my grandfather managed it with

grace, simultaneously keeping a store, working as a mechanic, and serving as the caretaker of the Armenian cathedral in Antelias. All seemed well; in the Doghramadjian household, Armenia had survived, born again and regenerated in the fertile soil of Lebanon.

I grew up in very different circumstances, spending my childhood in the comfortable suburbs of St. Paul, Minn. I knew that I was named after my grandfather, a kind, dignified old man whom I had met on the several occasions we visited him in Lebanon. I knew that he called me on our shared name day, allowing me to recite the only Armenian words I

knew: “*Yes kezi shad ge sirem*” (“I love you very much”). I meant those words. But I was more concerned with baseball games on the radio and violin practice than with pondering the reasons why my grandfather lived in the Middle East, I lived in Minnesota, and neither of us lived in Armenia.

It was only with age that the reality of the situation began to sink in. Driven by the kidnappings and bombings of the 1975–90 Civil War, 4 of my grandfather’s 6 children had left Lebanon, and only 2 of his 11 grandchildren could speak Armenian. The Turks had failed to erase our family’s Armenian spirit—but how long would it survive with us scattered all over the world, thousands of miles from both Erzerum and Byblos, a world away from both our first and second homelands?

By the time I began high school, I had set out to learn the Armenian language, intent on preserving the same songs, poems, and prayers that were so dear to my grandfather. Armed with a battered dictionary, the Internet, and plenty of encouragement from my family, I made steady progress, and after my freshman year of college I solidified my skills by spending a month in the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem. The following summer I was finally ready to make my own pilgrimage to Lebanon, to explore the neighborhoods that had sustained my family and thousands like us. Twenty-five years after the end of the war, I wanted to know: What was the state of the Armenian community in Lebanon? How was this “second homeland” faring?

Lebanon is a nation of minorities, made up of 18 officially recognized religious communities and a population roughly evenly balanced between Sunnis, Shias, and Christians. With no group strong enough to simply impose its will on the others, the nation is in what Lebanese American University (LAU) professor Dr. Imad Salamey calls “permanent formation mode.” While such a lack of resolution has its drawbacks, it also means Lebanese nationalism is “inviting, attractive to keep on engaging.” Without answers imposed from the top down, questions of Lebanese identity must be worked out as a collectivity; Salamey compares this process to students formulating their own curriculum. He views the country’s model as



A shopkeeper’s door on Marash Street, Bourj Hammoud (Photo: Hagop Toghramadjian)

one of “deliberative nationalism,” which differs sharply from the authoritarian brand of national identity found throughout much of the Middle East.

The impossibility of single-group domination also means the nation’s citizens are not oppressed politically. The government has traditionally allowed for communal freedoms and local decision-making, a fact many Lebanese proudly regard as a sign of their state’s distinctiveness. Especially after the outbreak of the Civil War in 1975, the majority of schools, hospitals, and charities have been administered under sectarian self-government. While some services—such as trash collection or maintenance of the airport—require centralized decision-making, local authorities are vested with a high degree of autonomy. In recent years, the

state’s importance has been further reduced; most government-level decisions have moved out of the hands of parliament and the president, to be made by an extra-institutional committee of sectarian elites. What remains of the state is run by a council of ministers, especially after the presidency sat vacant from May 2014 to October 2016. Indeed, as Salamey points out only half-jokingly, the “state pretty much doesn’t need to exist.”<sup>1</sup> Such a condition certainly includes steep disadvantages, but its allowance for local autonomy leads Salamey to suspect that other countries in the region, especially Iraq and Syria, may adopt the Lebanese model.

Competition and autonomy is not the whole story, however. A key component of the Lebanese model is that sectarian groups’ independence coexists with a strong sense of

Lebanese identity. Salamey points to the Armenians as an example of an extremely distinctive community for whom this is true—their “uniqueness does not [preclude them from] sharing Lebanese concerns.”

Armenian voices echo this sentiment: In the words of LAU’s Annie Lachinian-Magarian, “Armenians are part and parcel of the Lebanese political fabric.” Although their early 20th century arrival makes them relative newcomers, and although they are the only Lebanese group to speak a language other than Arabic, Armenians generally feel accepted in Lebanon.

Both reasons for and evidence of this sense of acceptance are evident on a walk through Bourj Hammoud. The headquarters of *mukhtars* (official municipal leaders) are

Armenian Genocide essentially “shut down the country,” in the words of LAU professor Dr. Elise Salem. Thousands of non-Armenians joined in the protest marches, closed their businesses, and put up posters in solidarity. These are just two examples of the Armenian community’s acceptance in Lebanese culture and society. It follows, according to Haigazian professor Dr. Arda Arsenian Ekmekji, that “we are proud to walk on the streets and say we are Armenian.”

This sense of belonging is compounded by the Armenian community’s political position. Ekmekji states, “Politically speaking you cannot be ignored as an Armenian. We do have key positions and people respect us.” Lebanese citizenship was only created in 1926, when the country already contained hundreds of thou-

Party, is also half-Armenian. In other words, rather than concentrating their strength in one place, Lebanese Armenians play a diversified and sophisticated role in the nation’s politics.

While government representation offers Armenians an important sense that they belong in Lebanon, the core of the community’s strength is its own religious, educational, and social institutions. Armenians operate 3 daily newspapers, two 24-hour radio stations, approximately 27 primary and secondary schools, 1 university, 29 churches (16 Orthodox, 7 Catholic, and 6 Protestant), and 2 patriarchates with global jurisdictions (Orthodox and Catholic). These institutions are relatively healthy: The churches have numerous young seminarians and, according to Fr. Ashekian, there are more Orthodox

**“We will live here, we will die here;  
together we will build you up.  
We love the homeland with our heart  
and soul—we are the Armenians  
and we are Lebanon.”**

emblazoned with Armenian script, often announcing that the *mukhtar* himself is Armenian. Balconies fly Armenian and Lebanese flags side by side, and banners praising the Lebanese Army flutter on main Armenian shopping streets. As local priest Fr. Dajad Ashekian emphasizes, “We are *Lebanese* Armenians.”

Evidence of integration is present in wider Lebanese culture as well, from popular music to commemoration of the Armenian Genocide. In 2007, the famous singer Ghassan Rahbani composed and sang “We Live Here,” a song in Arabic and Armenian that proclaims in both languages: “*We will live here, we will die here; together we will build you up. We love the homeland with our heart and soul—we are the Armenians and we are Lebanon.*” In April 2015, the 100th commemoration of the

sands of Armenians; as Ekmekji puts it, “We became Lebanese at the same time as everyone else.”

This means Armenians enjoy official political privileges. According to Lebanon’s unique system of sectarian quotas, 5 to 6 of parliament’s 126 seats are reserved for Armenians, and 2 of the country’s 30 ministers are also usually Armenian. Moreover, the community is well established enough that it does not vote as a single block: there are three Armenian political parties with representation in parliament, one in the ruling March 8 Alliance and two in the opposition March 14 alliance. Armenians are also active outside of their own parties. Emile Lahoud, who served as president from 1998 to 2007, is half-Armenian and married to an Armenian, and Karim Pakradouni, the former leader of the prominent Kataeb

clergy now than at any point in Lebanese-Armenian history. Spring 2015 saw the graduation of over 300 students in a joint ceremony incorporating each of the Armenian high schools. All this means the community is undoubtedly the most vibrant in the global diaspora.

As Ekmekji emphasizes, Lebanon—unlike other major hubs such as Russia, France, or even the United States—remains a net *exporter* of priests, journalists, and educators to Armenian churches, publications, and schools around the world.

Beyond institutions, measuring the community’s health is a less straightforward proposition. The population is difficult to estimate, both because many Armenians split their time between Lebanon and abroad and because no census has been conducted since

*This page is sponsored by Ani Panossian*

1932. Moreover, it is unclear how to count the small but significant number of Armenians who have fully or partially assimilated into Arabic-speaking society. “Numbers are scary in Lebanon,” Ekmekji says, in large part because no community wishes to lose seats from its parliamentary quota. She places the Armenian population at 125,000 at least; LAU’s Annie Lachinian Magarian estimates it at 80,000 to 90,000; and Haigazian’s Dr. Antranig Dakessian guesses 60,000 to 90,000. None of these numbers include Syrian-Armenian refugees, tens of thousands of whom now live in Beirut but who are emigrating to the West at a fast rate. Regardless of statistics, the community has what Dakessian calls “very powerful exposure.” Unlike Armenians in Europe or North America, Lebanon’s Armenians are highly visible. Two Armenian cathedrals occupy extremely prominent spots in central Beirut, Armenian businesses abound across the city, Armenian newspapers are sold at most newsstands, and Armenian is regularly heard on the street in any of the capital’s Christian neighborhoods.

Based on the dozens of instances I heard Armenian spoken outside the core area of Bourj Hammoud, the sheer number of Armenian businesses scattered across the city, and the relative health of community institutions, I believe higher estimates of the population have credence. This premise is reinforced by the fact that *at least* 70,000 people marched in commemoration of the Armenian Genocide on April 24, 2015—the overwhelming majority were Armenian, and tens of thousands of Armenians did not march.

The Armenian story in Lebanon is not completely rosy, however. While many in the community’s prosperous intelligentsia express optimism, working-class inhabitants (concentrated in Bourj Hammoud) are generally less confident. The neighborhood has become less homogeneously Armenian since the end of the Civil War, with many who are able opting to move to comfortable suburbs like Mezher or Dbayeh or even abroad. Meanwhile, the neighborhood has seen an influx of Kurds and South and East Asian migrant workers.

Armenians left in Bourj Hammoud are often filled with nostalgia for the past and

uncertainty—verging on pessimism—towards the future. This was especially clear when I asked Bourj Hammoud residents to estimate the overall Armenian population in Lebanon. One resident, “George,”<sup>2</sup> claimed that the pre-war population had been 500,000,<sup>3</sup> but that it is now closer to 30,000. (In reality, there were probably 250,000 to 300,000 Armenians in Lebanon before the onset of the Civil War in 1975—10 to 12% of the overall national population). His friend “Raffi” agreed, and they both mentioned that with closing factories and dwindling job opportunities there is little hope for improvement. In George’s words, “everything is over”; the government and commerce are controlled by the “mafia,” and there is nothing he can do to improve his situation.

Bourj Hammoud’s youth are scarcely more optimistic. Young adults at the Azilian *agoump* offer their own low population estimates, and while none of them can remember life before the war, they insist it was much better than the current situation.

Residents’ pessimistic views of community health influence how they perceive Lebanese identity. Young adults at the *agoump* indicate that they feel Armenian but not Lebanese; when asked why the Lebanese flag is displayed in their meeting room they say it is only there because “it has to be.” A local shopkeeper, “Harout,” goes even further—he says that ever since the Civil War he has not liked living among Arabs, and as a result he actively encourages his children to emigrate. “You can



Haigazian University is supported by the Armenian Evangelical community  
(Photo: Hagop Toghramadjian)

live as an Armenian in Lebanon,” he says, “but not as a man. Maybe in France or America you can live as both.” While these views are not representative of most Lebanese Armenians or even the bulk of Bourj Hammoud residents, they point to internal diversity in Armenian perceptions of Lebanese identity.

This internal diversity is a vital topic when analyzing the Armenian experience in Lebanon. According to Ekmekji, the community can be divided into three categories: The first lives and works in almost exclusively Armenian circles, without much engagement with the broader Lebanese society. This group is a minority, and while “Harout” and the youth at the *agoump* exemplify its experience, most of its members are elderly. The second and largest group is very well integrated, and moves comfortably through Lebanese society while still firmly maintaining its Armenian heritage. Its members can be found throughout Lebanon, in Bourj Hammoud, and especially in the surrounding suburbs. It is from this class that Armenians active in Lebanese government, arts, and media are generally drawn. A third group, again in the minority, is mostly or completely assimilated into Lebanese culture, with limited ties to its Armenian heritage save perhaps sporadic church attendance.

Multiple reasons lead to loss of Armenian identity. Ekmekji emphasizes that “being Armenian is a lot of work,” and that some families are increasingly reluctant to make time for learning and expressing their heritage. Additionally, rates of intermarriage are increasing—it is no longer uncommon for Armenians to marry individuals from other Lebanese Christian groups.

Beyond fear of assimilation and the aforementioned economic challenges, Lebanese Armenians experience anxiety about their changing global role and the spillover effect of the catastrophic war in Syria. Before the exodus of Armenians from the Middle East in the 1960s to 1980s and the independence of Armenia in 1991, Lebanon viewed itself as the



**Armenian patriotic signs on a street in Bourj Hammoud  
(Photo: Hagop Toghradjian)**

center of the Armenian world. Philanthropic money flowed in from the global diaspora, “financing the survival process,” in the words of Dakessian. This money has since been redirected to Armenia, and the regional leadership Lebanese Armenians once exercised over thriving communities in Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Jordan, and Palestine has become less meaningful as a result of heavy emigration.

The Syrian crisis has further exacerbated Lebanese Armenians’ sense of isolation. As Ekmekji puts it, “The events have [created] a big question mark.” More than ever, Armenians must wonder, “Is Lebanon a permanent place or a stop on the way to something else?” In the back of everyone’s mind is the “fear of being forced out—we always think, will we one day have 24 hours to pack and go?” This scenario has befallen thousands of Armenians in Syria, many of whom have fled to Lebanon; their presence is a stark reminder of the tenuousness of security in the region. In order to prepare for possible future unrest, Ekmekji estimates that 80 percent of Lebanese Armenians have applied for passports from the Republic of Armenia, a step that facilitates travel and opens the door to repatriation.

LAU’s Vatche Papazian relates that there has been a small but noticeable increase in the emigration of native-born Lebanese Armenians since the start of the Syrian conflict; if the status quo continues, this flow is

unlikely to pick up, but additional deteriorations in real and perceived security could lead to large-scale migration and a decline in community numbers.

The question of whether Armenians have a special proclivity for migration is an interesting one. On the one hand, it is “definitely much easier for an Armenian to pack and leave than a Maronite on the land his great-grandfather farmed,” Ekmekji says. Because Armenians are aware that Lebanon is not their original homeland, emigration is not an unprecedented or radical proposition. However, Salem rebuts the idea that Christians are

more likely to emigrate than Muslims. While this was once true, today “the Lebanese all know how to leave.” Especially as economic inequality between the sects has become less and less noticeable, the financial ability to move to the West has become more evenly spread between all Lebanese citizens.

If the Armenians are to remain in Lebanon, the continued viability of the national political system is indispensable. As discussed above, this system offers a number of advantages, allowing for group autonomy while encouraging a sense of shared national identity. However, many Lebanese are severely disillusioned with their political leaders. There is near-universal consensus that party heads (many of whom are holdovers from the Civil War or inherited their positions through family connections) are corrupt and self-interested. Ekmekji and Salem both explain that the perceived problem is not Lebanese laws or political organization; instead, discontent is generally directed toward specific individuals.

A common view of leaders is that they operate based on the tacit agreement, “I’ll let you have your corrupt man if you let me have mine.” There is palpable public anger against this situation. During my time in Beirut I observed multiple anti-corruption protests and heard dozens of complaints in everyday conversations. One man memorably aired his grievances while sitting next to me on a taxi ride from Bourj Hammoud to Mar Mikhayel.

He was traveling to resolve a problem at the electricity ministry, and immediately launched into a colorful and enraged tirade against the government. "Damn the government," he said in Arabic to the driver. "We love our country but the government is made up of animals. I'm Lebanese! Armenian but Lebanese! Damn the whole government from top to bottom. I'm more Lebanese than any of them."

A second problem facing the Lebanese political system is that of gridlock and paralysis. The nation has not had parliamentary elections since 2009, and none are scheduled until later this year. Moreover, the parties spent more than two years without agreeing on a president, before Michel Aoun finally stepped into the position in November 2016. According to Salamey, the frozen nature of national politics is caused by fear—no group wishes to antagonize any of the others, especially in light of the deepening Sunni-Shia divide provoked by the Syrian War.

Ekmekji characterizes the situation bluntly: "Lebanon is not a true democracy,

because every time we make a decision we must do it by consensus. It's like a children's game where everyone wins." Gridlock significantly contributes to the discontent felt by Lebanese citizens about their political system. According to Dakessian, "Whether we are engaged in Lebanon or not, we can't make a difference." While this is certainly a hyperbolic statement, popular participation in the democratic process is undoubtedly muted by a sense that change is unattainable.

Given Lebanon's uncertain political future, there is no guarantee that the nation's Armenian community will remain viable in the long term. But there are also plenty of reasons for hope. Lebanon's Armenians have already proved remarkably resilient, surviving years of war and instability while steadfastly maintaining their community institutions. They are generally well integrated and proud of their Lebanese identity, which many feel allows them to be "fully Armenian" and "fully Lebanese" at the same time. While some in the community are less

content, the reigning mood is one of attachment to Lebanon and desire to remain in the country.

Especially in light of the Syrian War and the devastation it has wrought on the community in Aleppo, Lebanon is more important than ever for the global Armenian Diaspora. It is truly a "second homeland" for the Armenian people, a place where we were reborn from the ashes of the genocide and rebuilt a corner of Western Armenia. This corner continues to survive—and even thrive—today, and Armenians from around the world should celebrate its strength and do what we can to help secure its future. □

### NOTES

- 1 Salamey calls Lebanon a "Lockean state," comparing its governmental structure to the United States under the Articles of Confederation.
- 2 Names have been changed for confidentiality.

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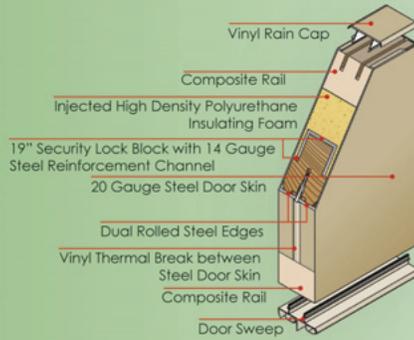
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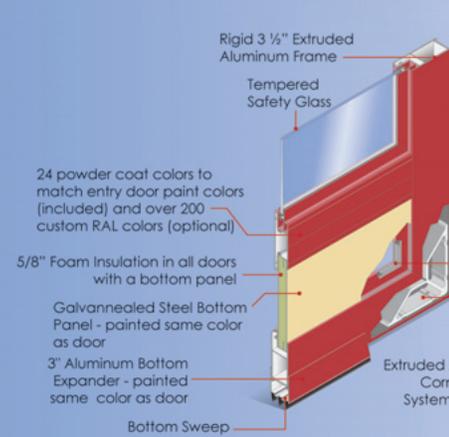
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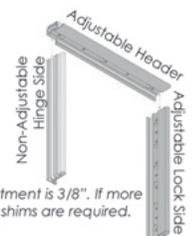
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# Before We Talk about Armenian Genocide Reparations, There Is Another Accounting Due . . .

*Did the USSR Really Lose the Cold War? Maybe as a Whole, but Some Have Turned Loss into Staggering Advantage and Profit. Now It's Time They Pay for the Damage They Have Done—and Are Doing—Before It's Too Late.*

By Henry C. Theriault

## BEYOND HISTORY

**I**n addition to other topics and audiences, I speak somewhat frequently on the legacy of the Armenian Genocide to and with primarily Armenian audiences in the United States and around the world. Quite often, community members and even academics assume I am a historian. I have to correct them—at least when I have the opportunity. I don't mean to suggest that I am insulted by being considered a historian, but as I tell people, that's just not what I do. Now that I am more recognized for work on reparations, the misidentification sometimes shifts to

assuming I am a lawyer or legal scholar. Again, the correction.

It is interesting that, despite the corrections, some interlocutors still go on to ask me about historical points that are not specifically related to my work or ask for legal strategies and even advice about particular individual lawsuit possibilities for thieved Armenian property. Again, there is no insult intended, but at these times I feel almost as if we are speaking different languages and simply cannot understand each other.

I am not an “academic nationalist,” in viewing my discipline of philosophy as the most significant of intellectual pursuits. Sure, the physical and social science disciplines, as well

as aesthetic theory, law as an academic area, political thought, theology, and more, started within the discipline of philosophy, where their foundations remain. Certainly, philosophy students routinely have among the highest averages for standardized testing, examined by discipline. But intellectual pursuits are fundamentally complementary, despite the ways that disciplines are pitted against one another for scarce resources and the political attack on humanities and creative arts today. There quite simply is not science without philosophy (both ethics and metaphysics), no philosophy without history, and so on—or at least no point to doing these things in isolation from the fullness of human existence as registered across the gamut of scholarly pursuits. But, just as historical research is essential to Armenian studies, so is philosophical inquiry, even if this is generally unrecognized.

History is important, especially when past harms are central to the conditions of the present. Indeed, ignoring history is not just a recipe for that well-worn idea of repeating it, but much more importantly history is never history: History is the present; that is, it is what determined the tensions and problems and challenges of the present. Ignoring history in favor of focus on the present renders one incapable of understanding the present. Historians figure out—often through fascinating detective adventures—what happened and try to understand why it happened and how different events and trends are related and interconnected. In their philosophical dimension, they help us understand why certain views of history are more accurate than others, and even the criteria and methods we should use to make such judgments. Their task and skillset, however, does not extend to deciding what should be done about the legacies of that history. That does not mean that historians do not speculate in these areas, much as I might about historical matters; it does, however, mean that they typically lack the conceptual expertise necessary to engage this matter in its full depth and complexity, to understand for instance all the possible objections and underlying/internal tensions that exist within what might appear to be simple notions such as “reparations,” in the same way that I might not understand the complex set of documents relevant to a specific historical incident in 1915. I need an expert to lead me through the process.

Similarly, legal analysis can be very important when considering the practicalities related to the legacy of a genocide. Legal experts help us understand what is possible within the law. The innovative among them figure out ways to push the given boundaries of law in new directions toward greater justice. But, legal scholars are always as players in a game: The board or field and the rules are set and determine what can and cannot be done. Certainly the rules can be revised or even violated in some cases, but the basic play is determined by the physical setup and the rules. Thus, law is great for thinking within a given set of constraints, but it is only when a lawyer abandons law that the lawyer opens up the possibility of genuine system transformation.

Armenian graffiti  
on Clemenceau  
St., Beirut.  
(Photo: Ted  
Swedenburg)



The very point of philosophy, on the other hand, is to identify and comprehend grounding limits, critically engage them, and creatively rebel against all such constraints. It does not determine whether a certain approach to reparations will work within the existing legal framework, but whether that framework itself is adequate to the problem of genocide and, if not, what should replace it. Philosophy even allows the fundamental question of whether genocide is best understood as a crime, or if that imposes limits on comprehending it fully and addressing it adequately and appropriately. Philosophy does not determine whether this or that claim about the past is true or supported by the facts, but rather what it means to be “true,” what criteria are appropriate for such a judgment, and whether this or that particular assertion or judgment should have a claim on our attention or not—and perhaps most importantly, if something should be done about the legacy of the historical event, and what. At our present historical moment, indeed, the question is no longer, “Did the genocide happen?” (that is, proving it against denial) or “What happened?” or even “Why did it happen?” The questions are “What does it mean now?” and “What should be done about it now?”

This suggests something interesting regarding the debate that started about a decade ago among genocide scholars about whether those studying this form of violence should function as disinterested analysts or engage their object of study as concerned human beings. Historians, for instance, advocating the former position rightly point to the ways that victim groups sometimes and, to a much greater extent, perpetrator groups almost always seek to manipulate history—whether they warp history into inaccuracy or employ facts in a dubiously politicized way. But they miss a crucial bias on their own part. They consider this issue only from the perspective of historians seeking accurate representations of past events. Clearly, including in one’s very historiographic method ethical and political concerns is tricky at best and typically leads to compromised work. But ethical and political analysis is the very heart of some aspects of philosophy. Far from compromising such work, it is the work itself. Philosophers take ethical positions, for instance, and argue for them. That does not mean that bias is not a potential problem, when it causes poor arguments. But poor arguments are often found out and criticized as part of an overarching process of reflection on and analysis of a given issue. For a philosopher, to ignore the ethical dimensions,

for example, of a historical issue is inexcusable intellectual negligence. Of course, historians should not be required to be ethically neutral about what they study, so long as their historiographic methodologies are not influenced by their orientations—that is, an orientation toward the relevant history is kept properly bracketed from the research into the facts. On the other hand, it is crucial for philosophers to take positions after careful study of an issue. Bias comes in, of course, when a philosopher simplifies an issue or ignores objections to his/her/their position in order to advance a particular viewpoint as stronger than it actually is.

The advocates of disinterest are inadvertently falling into a trap set by politically repressive forces in our world today. Whatever the ideological and practical differences among various countries at least in North and South America, Europe, Australia, and much of Africa and Asia, one trend that has taken increasing hold over the past decade has been the devaluing of the humanities and creative arts. It would be easy to dismiss this as the function of a growing level of intellectual inability among much of the world's population, as personal mental activity is now shaped by the stunting, even debilitating, structures of communication imposed on us through the supposedly liberatory new media made possible by the internet—the constraining of analysis into 140 characters, for instance (on this issue, I am indebted to my student Ryan Lindsay for his excellent research on the “Inhibition of Nuance in a ‘Fast-Food Facts’ World”). As Lindsay emphasizes, this compression of the realm of thought explains why people as receivers of ideas and information are accepting poorer and poorer ideas and analyses. To it, we need to add a further dimension: intentionality. Those in positions of power the world over—and this means the relative elites within different power structures, from prime ministers and legislators (think of comments by U.S. presidential candidate Ted Cruz about the study of philosophy) to (some) university administrators and media personalities—react so strongly against philosophy and the humanities and creative arts more broadly not, as they might self-delude, because they objectively judge them to be relatively valueless, but because either (1) in their realm of reduced thought they simply do not understand what they do and thus cannot even perceive their tremendous value or (2) they experience work in these areas again and again as critical perspectives that expose the weaknesses of their agendas and their efforts to gain popular support for their ideas. The clever among them—often with philosophical training themselves—understand exactly the danger posed by well-considered, intellectually grounded challenges to the general population to think uncompromisingly critically about those things that appear the most certain and simple, and attempt to crush principled opposition with full awareness of what they are doing. The majority are victims of the denigration and marginalization of philosophically critical thinking and push others into the same exclusion from and loss of anti-analytical confusion, by erecting obstacles to meaningful education. Instead of appreciating the opportunity for progress that thoughtfully, responsibly innovatively discordant ideas provide, they typically

react with a jejune naked imposition of power (from jailing dissidents to cutting departments) against reason and progressive creativity. For them, justice is truly the will of the stronger, as they view themselves as unfairly attacked precisely because they refuse to understand the fairness of the criticisms in what they perceive as a (mere) power struggle against inferiors (because only power shows in their mental framework, not reasonable arguments and evidence). They have the power, and assert it. Indeed, as a colleague of mine has so astutely commented, some seem to take pleasure in vanquishing reason through an irrational assertion of power, as this demonstrates a godlike effectiveness against the very metaphysical/rational structure of the universe.

I don't mean to suggest that all academics are victims in these ways or to equate losing one's academic job with being imprisoned for one's political views, even as these are tending to converge in today's Turkey with the dismissal of many professors and detentions of some. On the contrary, administrators are typically former professors and many fields and departments—philosophy foremost among them—have made themselves irrelevant by retreating into childish academic ego contests and feuds and embracing a positively medieval system of patronage centered in Ivy League and other elite institutions that resists challenging innovation and relentlessly buttresses the political, ethical, cultural, and social status quo by tying the personal identities of participants into the perverse status system that an astute anthropologist might liken to a high school-level culture of cliques.

## THE ARMENIAN AND THE UNIVERSAL

The first point to take from this opening analysis is a general one: In our tech-oriented, childish global culture, genuine intellectual independence, critique, and innovation that are the hallmark of philosophy and the humanities and creative arts more broadly, when done well, are not only marginalized in popular discourse but eliminated from curricula based on the circular argument that those who have not benefitted from this type of education and who have been told that time spent on it is at best wasted and at worst detrimental to future financial stability, are not interested in studying in such areas. The result is that societies have lost the capacity to engage in genuine social, political, ethical, and cultural progress because the very functionality of doing this kind of activity have been reduced or eliminated. Of course, some people struggle to do this work against the nearly overwhelming opposition to it. And some hint of this persists, as students are inundated with “critical thinking” training, while our societies again and again are told how self-critical we in fact are and how advanced, to boot. Without true critical abilities that are produced by more than such facile shadows of it, few are in the position to see the ideological frames and outright propaganda inundating us for what they are. One might go so far as to view the proliferation of “critical thinking” as having reduced it to a mechanical, formulaic exercise that undermines what it is supposed to promote.

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The second is specifically Armenian. Two decades ago, I made an observation and called for an intellectual approach to Armenian studies that fell on deaf ears. Perhaps it is not worthy of significant attention, yet it does seem relevant to the issue I am raising here. Armenian studies has generally treated Armenian identity, history, creative work, etc., as an object of study. Whatever respect scholars might show this object, the academic engagement nevertheless renders Armenian things objects, passive in the face of study of

them. Even art history before some more recent developments by certain innovative scholars treated Armenian artistic creation as a dead husk to be reproduced and essayed about but never to be a dynamic, evolving, living tradition in the present and for the future. As a result of these approaches, Armenian identity became something given in its fully developed form from the past, with the task in the present at best mere preservation. Even as artists, filmmakers, and writers have actually remade and created new forms of identity and life, the focus has remained the past as finished history. One could speculate a great deal about why—a wounded, weakened people latching on to former glory, a moribund political scene determined by a static Cold War, etc.—but that is not the issue here. My concern is that Armenian identity, culture, political life, etc., have been rendered passive even when there has been evidence of activity. While, for instance, certain writers, filmmakers, and artists looked at the world in part through Armenian eyes and established and elaborated an Armenian consciousness and Armenian perspective—or, more accurately, Armenian consciousnesses and Armenian perspectives—our scholars too often presented Armenia to the world through the same old tired Western or Eastern lens. Armenia was an object, not a consciousness, not a perspective, not a framework through which and the basis of which to engage the world.

The impact of this has not been noted but is of the greatest profundity. Today, particularly in political, military, and legal contexts (though not in literary, cinematic, or artistic ones), Armenian activities are largely derivative. A look at the Armenian Republic and its governance reveals the farthest thing from innovation, despite grassroots efforts at inventive progress. Armenia and its power structures sadly mimic standard post-colonial societies of the post-Soviet type and beyond. Its oligarchs are pale imitations of Putin and his cronies, its leaders are the same authoritarians that are such old hats around the post-colonial world, its economy features the same kind of debilitating corrupt parasitism that has marked many societies across the globe since the mid-20th century and before, and on and on. In a moment of cynicism, one might even wonder

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whether Armenia's leaders are intentionally following a Turkish political model, with the exception of silence on a genocide. Lest one dismiss this as the result of Sovietization, a look at Armenian organizations around the world reveals the same kind of imitative mimicry. There are notable exceptions, of course, which I will not list here because I do not want to taint them through association with what is surely to be condemned by regressive forces in what I am writing here. But organization after organization follows the

standard NGO (non-governmental organization) or charitable or religious model, in which wealthy dilettantes and egotists invest their resources in order to see their names on letterhead and be invited to meaningless meetings with celebrities and government officials, so they can adorn their walls with photographs announcing their own importance and relevance. Personalities and wealth, not commitment and insight, dominate the scene for Armenians, as they do for group after group after group across the world's minorities and majorities. Internal infighting and inter-organizational conflict of the most mundane forms mar the public presence of political, cultural, and educational institutions. Millions are given for the institution of Armenian Studies university chairs, only a small percentage of which have produced anything of significance and that are attempts by Armenians to gain academic legitimacy for study of Armenian things in the most blandly traditional ways. The most known Armenian celebrities are vacuous jokes who enact the banal forms of desperate notoriety-seeking and public personas. They are Armenian by descent, but nothing in their actions or words suggests any kind of truly Armenian consciousness. I could go on, but have probably alienated a sufficient number of people in the Armenian community already. My objective is not to do so, but rather to expose the root of the failure of Armenian identity, scholarship, politics, and more.

There are exceptions, of course. For all of the Armenian political action that fits within the safe framework of tame electoral politics, there are groups and individuals who reject this politics as part of the very force oppressing Armenians and seek alternative political, intellectual, and artistic forms and futures. As a journalist and activist, David Barsamian has been at the center of left progressive politics in the United States and globally for decades, creating new forms of political consciousness and activity in the space he has helped carve out. System of a Down took various elements of music, from punk and metal to Armenian folk forms, broke all of it down into a range of components, and reworked and recreated them to produce a clearly Armenian (in lyrics and music) yet global form of music that

shattered old boundaries and is widely imitated. Atom Egoyan refused to treat the Armenian Genocide through a direct and simple reaction to denial, but instead pushed the issue of denial and the meaning of historical events for present-day people in new directions unexplored before in the Armenian community and beyond it. His innovations changed cinema itself in ways that have yet to be fully tapped, even as these innovations challenged Armenians and others to relate to their history and social conflicts in new ways. Scout Tufankjian has merged subject and object to create a new Armenian framework (her camera's eye) through which to see the world that at the same time celebrates and advances a complex, ever-emerging, never fixed, multivalent Armenian identity. In her work, the no-longer-objectified Armenian object becomes agent. Chris Bohjalian has created a new framework for presenting the Armenian Genocide, through the lens of personal, human characters embedded in everyday lives yet with complex identities and relations across difference. He has provided a new kind of consciousness of the genocide that resonates both with Armenians and with the vast number of non-Armenian readers he has across the globe. Eric Nazarian likewise is opening up a new conceptualization of the Armenian-Turkish relationship, mediated through both an engagement of history and a material object that cannot simply be ignored or put aside, and in its persistence is embraced as itself an instrument (in both senses) of reworked sensibilities and relationship. Through poetry, history, and memoir, Peter Balakian crafted a new sensibility that calls attention to the ways in which Armenian issues and identity have long suffused American and universal experiences. In his complex hybridity, he is neither a typical Armenian nor a typical American poet, but something richer, flowing between worlds in a manner that recognizes and forges connections along lines of human rights concern. In this way, he has become a celebrated Armenian and American voice, pushing both toward a new kind of inclusivity. The importance of that voice has been recognized with the highest literary award given in the U.S.—which, combined with his profound and committed human rights activism, has propelled him to likely future consideration for a Nobel Prize in Literature.

And there is Arshile Gorky—the purest example. As art innovative historian Kim Theriault has demonstrated—against previous Orientalist dismissals of the relevance of Gorky's experience of the Armenian Genocide and dislocation as refugee emigrant from his homeland, traumatized by the genocide—

Gorky drew on both Armenian artistic styles and methods and the most inventive in Surrealism and other movements of the global art scene, to create for himself and the world an entirely new movement in art, a leap to pure abstraction linked intimately to deep internal emotional life. Pain, hope, despair, and nostalgia became color and form, and the internal suffering and *jouissance* are expressed in the very nature of his painting, in a way Nietzsche heralded and would have envied. Through him, Armenian art went from an object of specialized historical study to a living production of the most universal appeal that continues to infuse the art world even today. (In doing this, it must be noted that, against the inertia of and resistance in her field, Theriault developed a different methodology for art history itself, further Armenian intellectual agency that helped rescue Gorky from a flattening identity erasure that reduced out of his art its multidimensional Armenian core.)

## THE NEED FOR REPARATIONS FOR THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

It is bad enough that Armenian politics are largely derivative, but that they replicate extensively some of the most negative tendencies of corruption, post-colonial/post-Soviet authoritarianism, cronyism/nepotism, ineffectual electoralism, etc., renders the lack of originality profoundly harmful. I have argued that the challenges currently facing the Armenian Republic, the Artsakh Republic, and the global Armenian Diaspora are heavily determined by the harms done through the 1915 genocide and related mass violence and discrimination against Armenians before and after. The devastating demographic destruction that has resulted in a much smaller share of the regional and global population, along with the territorial losses and massive economic expropriation of virtually all Armenian resources in the Ottoman Empire, as well as the traumatic impacts of the violence and loss, dispersion and family destruction, pressure on identity requiring great effort to maintain, and other aspects of the genocide, have left Armenians a small, weakened, marginalized group politically, geographically, and in terms of identity.

For instance, the poverty in Armenia today as well as the great drain of resources required just to preserve some semblance of Armenian identity throughout the diaspora can be traced back to the massive wealth stolen



Arshile Gorky. *The Liver is the Cock's Comb* (1944), oil on canvas, 73 1/4 × 98" (186 × 249 cm), Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York.

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through the genocide, from factories and farms to shoes and kitchen pots and pans. What is more, Turkey's aggressive approach to Armenia and Armenians manifests the enduring mentality embedded in its culture and political, social, and military institutions and practices, and is all the more effective because of the tremendous resources Turkey has built on the pilfered belongings and assets of Armenians (and Greeks and Assyrians), which were, according to respected analysts, the basis of the entire economy of the Turkish Republic from its origins and the continuing lack of accountability in the international legal and political realms. As much as Armenia and Armenians have been debilitated by the genocide, that much Turkey has gained—and in terms of wealth and power has seemingly endless reserves to use against Armenians.

Given this, reparations are clearly just. What is more, they are absolutely necessary if Armenian identity, culture, and statehood is going to survive in a meaningful way into the future. Unfortunately, the trend for Armenia is not positive. The lack of economic infrastructure and resources, the restricted territory in size and landlocked location, the hostility of Turkey and Azerbaijan, the vassalage to Russia and manipulation by the United States and the European Union, and the general insecurity of Armenia in military, economic, and political terms have driven massive emigration that has cut in half the pre-Soviet-collapse population of almost 4 million and threatens the very existence of Armenia as a viable state. Without substantial, meaningful repair that includes territory (needed for food production, sea access, and other foundations of a viable country) and other economic resources, it is an open question whether a genuinely independent Armenia will exist in 50 years, or whether it will be de facto incorporated into some other state such as Russia. If the genocide is long over, its effects are still far from finished playing out. The final impact of the genocide might still take decades to be consolidated, as the survival of Armenians as an identity group and Armenia as a political entity hang in the balance.

### FROM IMITATIVE CORRUPTION TO TRANSFORMATIVE REPAIR: A LAST HOPE

To say that genocide reparations are necessary for the survival of Armenians as a people and Armenia as a political entity is not to claim that they are sufficient. The genocide is not the only challenge. The legacy of the Soviet Union and its compounding impact on the 1991 republic are substantial and must be addressed as well. There are two dimensions that must be confronted.

First, as discussed in “Resolution with Justice,” the report of the Armenian Genocide Reparations Study Group that I chaired, there are significant questions about the concrete implementation of a reparations process. How and to whom would reparations be made? How would awarded material reparations be used to support the redevelopment of the entire Armenian nation? And so on.

One central problem to be faced was that of the Armenian government itself. Given the rampant corruption through which an

obscene elite class of the super-rich has gorged itself on the lifeblood of the masses and pushed a large percentage of the population into often abject poverty, could the government and other elites be trusted with even a significant part of, let alone sole, leadership in such a process? Their unfolding legacy is, after all, a thriving industry in the trafficking of women and girls into sexual slavery; an all too frequent disregard for and active repression of human rights, from violence against peaceful political protesters to tacit consent to widespread domestic violence and active support for brutal oppression of the LGBT community; and a bureaucratic rigidity and narrow-sightedness that has prevented the government from such basic things as developing an active international political campaign to explain the Karabagh “conflict” as in fact a massive human rights violation against Armenians culminating from a century-long effort to erase the Armenian presence in this homeland. It is telling that, despite strong oppositions between different presidents and those associated with them, in these regards the results of their exploitative and extractive activities have been so similar that it is quite appropriate to count the government since 1991 as a single regime. Even where the government and other elites do support an appropriate approach to the legacy of the genocide, their propagandistic and authoritarian tendencies might well undermine the positive impacts of an educational and commemorative process in Armenia, Turkey, and beyond.

And, in the same manner as characteristic of world leaders and cronies who have enriched themselves by skimming foreign aid to their countries—Suharto of Indonesia is a well-known example but far from alone—one would have to be naïve to believe that Armenia's political elite, regardless of party affiliation, and oligarchs and their minions, will not enrich themselves on the resources coming in that should be used for and are desperately needed by the general population. Unless Armenia changes fundamentally and establishes a genuinely democratic, open, ethical government and political structure, reparations, far from supporting long-term viability for the republic and global diaspora, are likely not just to further enrich the corrupt leeches dominating Armenia today, but in fact to extend their power and advantage over the bulk of the population—that is, to make things yet worse in Armenia, giving a whole new meaning to the criticism of irresponsible reparations as “blood money.”

How can we see the genocide as anything but extended in its effects if territory returned is appropriated by the oligarchs and political elites? For average Armenians, what would the difference be between the situation now, with lands under Turkish control, and lands controlled by a class of cynical exploiters and destroyers whose continued existence is arguably the greatest immediate threat facing the general population of Armenia today? Just because the new lords' names end in “yan” does not mean that these lands will have truly been returned to Armenians and Armenia.

What is more, even a substantial reparations package that includes territory might not be sufficient to support the survival of Armenians as a people and Armenia as a political entity. Despite the

Armenians understand denial in a special way, understand that in the aftermath of mass violence there is another phase of abandonment and ontological, or inertial or entropic, ruin. Armenians understand deterritorialized national identity, which is appropriate for a globalized, shrinking world.

limitations of the Soviet Union, much as Armenians built under the Ottomans, so they built under Moscow. The largescale theft of assets through corruption, “privatization,” and commu-capitalist exploitation of labor (or a hybrid of the three) is a significant factor in the economic vulnerability and desperation of the republic today. By standards of abstract justice and basic need, Armenians who benefited and/or benefit substantially from their use of the Soviet and post-Soviet systems have an obligation to make reparations to provide a basic opportunity for a decent life to the Armenian multitudes who have lost out due to political repression, expropriation of wealth, and exploitation. This includes many if not virtually all political leaders, business leaders, and others besides. While without the slightest prick of conscience they have used Armenia as a vast wealth reserve open to pilfering, their actions are morally deplorable. Indeed, every one of their thefts is a treason.

It is not just those within Armenia who owe reparations. Soviet-era leaders, especially those who have increased their wealth and power since 1991, are just as liable. It is a delusion to think that the United States won the Cold War—or, rather, irrelevant. If the U.S. gained a symbolic victory that sent it desperately in search of a new enemy against which to perpetuate its own dubious economic, political, and military system, the “fall” of the Soviet Union simply swept away the impediments to the power-elite that had emerged in the Soviet Union (organized crime, political bosses, etc.) and whose wealth and power were then being inhibited by the limits allowed in a Soviet system that had at some level to prevent rampant poverty to remain apparently legitimate. In the Soviet era, this class positioned itself with resources, connections, and power to dominate in a zone of economic and political “freedom” from restriction, that is, the post-Soviet vacuum. They won the Cold War, which thus became a war of liberation...for oppressors.

And, they imposed a system—both formal and informal—that retained authoritarian, violent/repressive, and other elements of the Soviet system coupled with a new unfettered, amoral capitalism. This is the system internal to Armenia as well as the neo-colonial

domination of Armenia by Russia. This system has been reproducing itself and evolving steadily. Newer generations and those not necessarily part of the Soviet power class have been integrated into it. It is the post-Soviet kleptocratic/plutocratic/authoritarian state and civil society form that must be held accountable and transformed. It is through meaningful reparations and only through meaningful reparations that this is possible. The wealth must be returned, the guilty punished, and the state(s) and society rehabilitated. To leave the state and civil society structures intact will make any redistribution of political participation and economic resources a temporary step to a regression to the existing order or on the path toward a new repressive form.

### CONTRIBUTION OF AN ARMENIAN FRAMEWORK

If the foregoing analysis suggests that the situation is desperate, it is. However, in that desperation, as in Gorky’s traumatic suffering, there is great potential. Through genocide and Soviet exploitation and oppression, Armenians in Armenia and around the world have understood a broad range of failed, destructive models of social, economic, and political organization. Perhaps they are starting to realize that no existing political system or conceptual framework has worked or will work in the present age: not liberalism/capitalism, socialism, or any of their variations or distinct challengers. Just as Gorky needed to invent a new form of art, the survival and future well-being of Armenians depends on development of a new post-genocidal concept of national identity and a new economic and political form that can (1) be generated from within a corrupt, oppressive local and global system and (2) address the persisting problems of modernity/post-modernity in general and of post-genocide groups in particular. No post-genocide (or post-colonial, post-Apartheid, post-slave, post-communist as well as neoliberal, patriarchal, etc.) group, let alone a dominant group, has accomplished this, though many have contributed to possible solutions. We need new social and political forms. Out of desperate Armenian need there can come great invention and advance, a true contribution to humanity.

In the current era, with environmental degradation and resource scarcity approaching crisis levels, with neofascist movements sweeping across the globe in violent waves, with rampant celebrated militarism, humanity as much as any genocide victim group in particular faces a genuine question of survival. Because Armenia as a microcosm faces similar challenges to the world as a whole, generating useful approaches to Armenian problems means contributing to global solutions. For the first time in centuries if not millennia, Armenia and Armenians have a chance to matter in a real manner. Armenians understand the problems intimately. Armenians understand denial in a special way, understand that in the aftermath of mass violence there is another phase of abandonment and ontological, or inertial or entropic, ruin. Armenians understand deterritorialized national identity, which is appropriate for a globalized, shrinking world. These experiences

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and comprehensions are the foundation of an active, creative Armenian approach to the problems that can be constructed and added to other elements produced by other groups.

Development of an Armenian framework with global implications has already begun, though it remains mostly at the margins of the structures of the republic and diaspora. In the republic, political protestors have opened a space for alternative discourse in the face of 21st-century repressive apparatuses. In the interstices between organizations, individuals and groups in the diaspora routinely produce new ways of thinking and goals, even if at present they have no means to advance (toward) them concretely. Armenians must bring the margin to the center.

Elements that are already in play include ideas about demilitarizing and denationalizing traditional homeland territories in today's Turkey depopulated of Armenians through genocide, to allow Armenians full access to the lands for business and residential purposes, with tax benefits going to the republic. While I do not necessarily endorse this approach, it is innovative and addresses complex problems arising from any consideration of territorial reparations for lands occupied by members of the perpetrator group who were not actively involved in perpetration.

Why can't Armenians also drive a rethinking of political organization of societies toward new forms of participation that transcend the *limits* of democracy, particularly in the (dis)information age in which democratic elections are easily manipulated and also can reinforce the power of reprehensibly oppressive majorities? Through bitter experience, Armenians have the opportunity to recognize that democracy itself, however progressive, can lead to subjugation unless it is supplemented by additional anti-oppressive features. If the solution is not yet apparent, confirming the potential for a solution is surely an important first step. Instead of intentionally or by default imitating bad neo-liberal or bad post-communist political orders, why not develop and propose new possibilities, even if some will be discarded for bad consequences or their inadequacy for the problems faced. Why can't Armenians develop a reparative model that can accommodate effectively contemporary social justice issues and the demands of historical justice, a pairing that has long been presented in philosophical, conflict resolution, and other circles as an irreducible dichotomy?

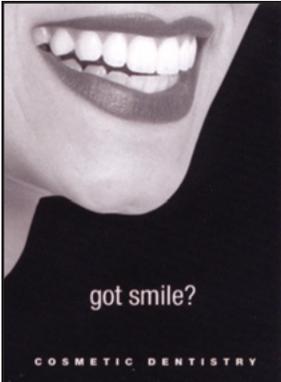
And, Armenians are already rethinking the concept of "reparations" itself. Armenian experience shows that it is not just wrong

to consider reparations as a return to the status quo ante, as the states previous to genocide contain within them the tendency toward genocide.

A notion of repair that reintegrates victims/victim groups into the prevailing legal, political, economic, and social order is just as faulty. For it is not just the local conditions but the global order that drive genocide and a range of other violences and oppressions of our world. Indeed, the present world order has been largely formed through genocide, slavery, apartheid, aggressive war, colonialism, imperialism, patriarchy and mass violence against women and girls (including in its various demographic implications), and economic exploitation. To help one group to fit back into the system after being victimized by it means simply that other groups will be pushed into the role of victims that the system requires for its functioning. Indeed, reparations can reinforce that system, as wealth is pumped into capitalist projects that result in exploitation and related harms. Reparations must be socially, politically, culturally, and economically transformative, such that the very term must change, perhaps to "progressive, creative, and transformative historical justice." We might finally be prepared to recognize that repair is the wrong concept, that there is no comfortable previous state nostalgically to return to, and that the burden of victims is not just to receive reparations conceptualized by others but to create a model for what is necessary in the aftermath of genocide, where no accurate model has yet been produced.

## CONCLUSION

Surely, what I have written will rankle many readers. I have not written to be provocative, but to try to open up a permissive space for genuinely free thought. I expect and invite challenges, disagreements, and even condemnations—so long as they do not rely on restatements of stale ideas. Certainly in the republic but perhaps just as much in the diaspora, we lack this space of experimental innovation. If anything is correct in what I have here written, it is that Armenian survival depends on opening that space and using it to its fullest potential. It is perhaps impossible to convince those intent on remaining part of the corrupt, debilitating establishment to give up their self-interested or ideologically-driven commitments. But, at least they can leave Armenians and Armenia to those willing to serve it. □



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# Commemorating an Ongoing Genocide as an Event of the Past...

By Tatul Sonentz-Papazian

The ruins of Ani (Photo: Rupen Janbazian)

In these troubled times of change and transformation, it can be safely stated that humanity, outpaced by runaway technology, has already embarked on the untested, escapist road of virtual reality. Devoid of collective memory, the human experience would cease to exist. There would be no identity, no history, no culture, and above all, no language to speak of, since each word triggers the memory of a particular experience collectively encountered and defined over the millennia.

Perhaps this is the reason why, throughout history, rulers consumed with a pathological desire to obtain absolute control over their fellow men have resorted to manipulations of memory, by doctoring, or quite simply re-writing, history. The unbounded arrogance of the mighty leads them to believe that truth, as such, either is irrelevant, when in conflict with the exercise of unchallenged rule, or, that it simply does not exist! Thus, the academic pursuit of the truth, the venerated “*VERITAS*” upheld jealously by all centers of learning since the dawn of science and intellectual endeavor—along with history itself—becomes a casualty at the hands of tyrants accountable only to themselves.

The collective memory of the Armenian people spans several millennia. Almost every great, and not so great, civilization has, in some manner, left its mark on the soil and soul of our nation. We remember the past through our consciousness of shared experiences, and face our present problems in a manner that is based on who we are, on the self-image that our collective memory has rendered for us. And they are multitude,

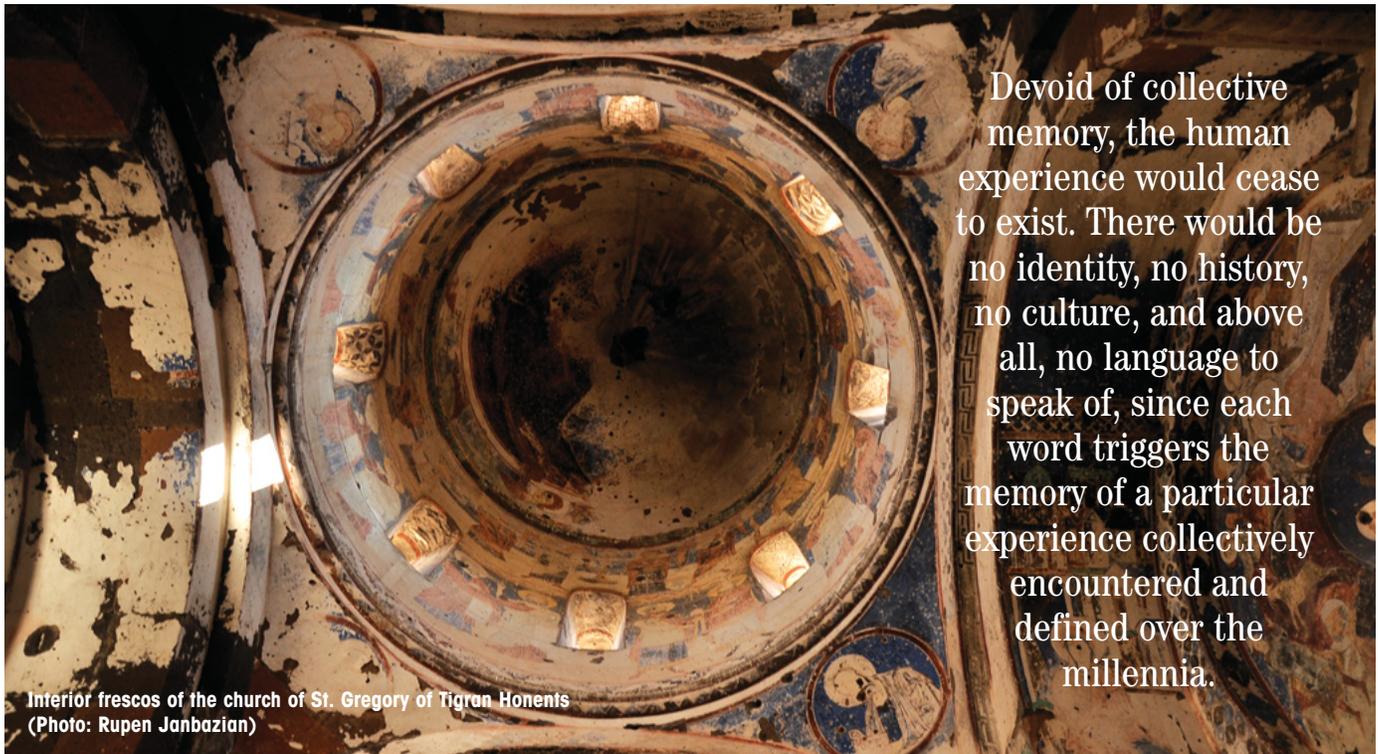
these problems that we have to solve now, as a nation still recovering from dependency, mostly scattered abroad, and struggling at home against political, economic, and social instability and the atavistic appetites of predatory neighbors.

Many of our present problems trace their origins to tragic events of a not-too-distant past, events that we are now being asked—nicely enough, to be sure—to stop remembering. A coterie, made up of “concerned” *odars* and “born-again” Armenians of all shades and colors, for a variety of reasons, keeps wagging a disapproving finger at “militant Armenians,” “Diasporan nationalists,” even “racists” for having “too long a memory for unpleasant events”—events that are better left to historians in the interest of a “normal” present and vacuous promises of a peaceful, brighter future in a “politically correct” world where sins are relative and values are measured by dollars and cents.

To begin with, this “request” tends to put the entire responsibility of scrubbing clean the fermenting gore of a monumental crime squarely on the shoulders of the descendants of the *victims*. Secondly, it tries to maneuver diplomatically the embarrassing and cumbersome “presence” of the Armenian Genocide—an *ongoing* crime, as long as it remains unattended through stubborn denial and refusal of proper restitution—into the realm of unresolved past events without the essential stamp of recognition that would legitimize it as an authenticated page of world history.

Thus, at a very vulnerable time in their long odyssey, the Armenians are being asked to curb their troublesome “long memory” and to forget

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Interior frescos of the church of St. Gregory of Tigran Honents (Photo: Rupen Janbazian)

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an event that, according to the established denial-supported opinion, was never really assessed as genocide by the perpetrator and an array of supporters—“honorable” entities all, in a craven new world of “virtual” ethics.

It seems that, after persistently ignoring the screaming truth of an agonizing reality, which the Armenian nation experienced to the very limits of total annihilation, a “concerned” establishment is trying to relegate our people and their boundless trauma to the never-never land of annual memorials of a non-event—an “alleged” something, that, according to the deniers, never happened...

For a long time we were denied the truth; now we are being robbed of a place in reality itself. This time-juggling shell game, designed to cheat the Armenian people out of their legitimate rights and the promises earned during and after the Great War that spawned the genocide, cannot succeed because it ignores the present and its realities, and insists on dealing with an existing problem as a thing of the past, to be dealt with as a fading manifestation of a festering tribal memory.

Let’s take a good look at where the Armenians are and why. Let’s look at a historic homeland in the west, now mostly inhabited by non-Armenians or forcibly Islamized Armenians as a result of a well-documented act of a state-planned genocide which, as we speak, continues to bear fruit by gradually and inexorably assimilating hundreds of thousands of “remnants of the sword” into the very society and culture that has willingly executed this standing death sentence. Are the Armenians willing and ready to relegate this ongoing genocide of their ethnicity to the realm of “ancient history”? If they are not, they will surely be accused of being obsessed by “events that took place in the past” by the very people who express concern for our present and future.

In Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabagh), which has been historically and culturally Armenian since time immemorial, a fistful of proud and freedom-loving people is being asked to submit to the rule of a neigh-

bor whose entire history as a “nation”—amounting to all of...99 years—has been devoted to the destruction of the Armenian state (whose territory it now calls, “Western Azerbaijan”). Should the Armenian people accept such a “final solution” designed to bring the peace of the graveyard to Caucasian Armenia?

And finally, the diaspora, spread from the Russian Federation to the most remote corners of the earth, contains some 6-7 million Armenians forced into exile, their chances of survival as a distinct cultural entity diminishing, as time goes by.

In the meantime, busy rewriting history, the obvious heir to the Ottoman Empire—the present Turkish state—continues to enjoy the bounty left to her by her genocidal predecessor, with the blessings of her powerful mentors, along with the imperial appetite for her neighbors’ historic patrimonies—an appetite she has yet to curb. On top of it all, Turkey today tries to buy her way into the den of former imperial powers with bribes of lucrative contracts for globally run predatory corporations, while still vehemently denying the veracity of the genocide, with its one and a half million Armenian victims, along with countless other members of its non-Turkic minority groups.

As we can see, on this 102nd anniversary year of the *Medz Yeghern*, what we, and the rest of the world, are being coerced into regarding and accepting as the past, is, in truth, the present, here and now—the ongoing coercive genocidal process of assimilating the remnants of the large, brutalized native Armenian population of Eastern Anatolia—affecting and threatening the future with more of the same attitudes that led to the genocide. What we are being asked to forget and forfeit is our present...and future.

As the saying goes, those who forget the past are condemned to repeat their mistakes. What is to be said of those who mistake the present for the past and erase it from their memory? What kind of a future, if any, could be in store for them? □

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OP-ED

THE CHANGING  
SIGNIFICANCE OF

April 24



A scene from an Armenian Genocide rally in Boston  
(Photo: Araz Chiloyan)

By Michael G. Mensoian

**N**either the Hamidian Massacres (1894–96) nor the Adana Massacre (1909) provided an apocalyptic vision of what the future held for the Armenian people in the Ottoman Turkish Empire. These days were neither better nor worse than what they had learned to expect. The horrific catastrophe that years later would be identified as one of the first genocides of the 20th century began in the spring of 1914 when Armenian soldiers serving in the Ottoman Turkish Army were disarmed and placed in labor battalions where they faced death through privation and murder. On April 24 of the following year, some 275 Armenian intellectuals, residents of Constantinople, were detained by the authorities ostensibly for routine questioning only to be spirited away to be murdered.

With their men in military service disarmed and many of their leaders throughout Anatolia detained or murdered, the Armenians were still not fully aware of what was to happen. How could any one of the more than 2 million Armenians even begin to grasp the magnitude and the bestiality of a plan whose sole purpose was to kill every Armenian man, woman, and child? Their immanent fate was beyond comprehension.

In 1908, the Young Turks, initially responding to the autocratic rule of Abdul Hamid II, became alarmed with the loss of their Balkan provinces to independence movements. Fearing further losses, they turned their attention to protecting the core area of Anatolia and the remaining lands of the empire. In 1913, the ultra-nationalist, xenophobic faction of the Young Turks seized control. With Anatolia's security uppermost, among other objectives, they turned their attention toward imperial Russia, their

*Yes, we continued to remember our martyrs, but an independent Armenia and a liberated Artsakh was a sharp break with the past. For many in the diaspora, it shifted the emphasis from the past to the future.*

traditional enemy to the east, and the Armenians. Much of Anatolia was historic Armenian lands settled by Armenians for millennia. The combination of imperial Russia and continued occupation by Armenians loomed as a potential threat not only to Anatolia's security, but to any possibility of expansion eastward. It was that rationale that fueled the ultra-nationalist's determination that their core region could never be safe as long as Armenians were present.

Since the Armenians were the problem, the obvious solution would be to eliminate them permanently. Russia would lose a potential ally on the ground, and any future attempt by Armenians to regain their historic lands would be weakened. An ancillary benefit of this murderous enterprise, perhaps of greater significance, would be the confiscated wealth of its potential victims.

Between 1915 to 1923, as part of that solution, some 1.5 million Armenians were murdered and tens of thousands of children and young women were taken captive by local villagers to be brought up in servitude in an alien culture. Following the end of World War I, between the Treaty of Sèvres (1918) and the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), any favorable political environment Armenia may have enjoyed unraveled completely. When the Treaty of Lausanne was ratified in 1923, the arbitral award of eastern Anatolia (historic Western Armenia or "Wilsonian" Armenia) to

Armenia in the Treaty of Sèvres (1923) was ignored. The Treaty of Lausanne also recognized the Republic of Turkey as the successor state to the defeated Ottoman Turkish Empire, free of any guilt in the near-annihilation of the Armenian nation. There was no mention of the property stolen from the Armenian victims, which served as the economic foundation of the new Turkey. We were victims once again. Victims of the self-interests and duplicitousness, especially of England and France, the principal authors of the Treaty of Lausanne.

The first observance of April 24 was organized by the few intellectuals in Constantinople in 1919 to remember their compatriots who, on that fateful day in 1915, had been detained and ultimately murdered. For those who had survived the deportations to designated centers where the death marches to Deir ez Zor began, the trauma of seeing loved ones put to death, of not knowing what had

happened to family members and friends, and of being unable to aid those dying from privation were memories that could never be forgotten. These were memories that haunted them daily as they sought to reclaim their lives. Unfortunately, the emotional wounds were too deep and too raw to ever heal properly. For the survivors there was little peace. Remembrance became an integral part of their daily lives. April 24 was a day filled with grief and the always unanswered question as to why.

The coining of the term "genocide" years later by Ralph Lemkin (1943) to refer to politically motivated mass killing of entire ethnic

populations was the first important development that changed the significance of April 24. For the first time our martyrs were identified as victims of a genocide. Prior to this time, the mass killing of ethnic populations was a common occurrence throughout recorded history. However, genocide soon gained traction in the mind of the public as to who the Armenians were. Unfortunately, through newspaper accounts and humanitarian appeals, "starving" also came to identify those who survived—as "starving Armenians." This I know from my childhood. Prior to "genocide" entering the English lexicon, Armenians relied on terms such as *Medz Yeghern* (Great Crime) or *Medz Aghet* (Great Catastrophe) to describe what had happened from 1915 to 1923. Unfortunately, neither term connoted the politically inspired mass killing of entire populations, which was the essence of Lemkin's definition of genocide.

A second significant development affecting the significance of April 24 occurred when the act of genocide was given legal status upon its adoption by the United Nations in 1948, defining the work of its Committee for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Although its application could not be applied retroactively, it strengthened and expanded the meaning of April 24. Remembrance of our martyrs and the legally defined crime of genocide became inseparable. Although this was a significant development for Armenians and April 24, it had no palpable effect

on Turkish leaders who steadfastly denied that what had occurred was genocide. However, it was a significant development for the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), which had ably and faithfully confronted Turkey in the international arena through its local *gomidehs* active throughout the diaspora. During this period, when Armenia was a captive Soviet republic, the ARF was a voice for Armenian interests within the nations that comprised the diaspora. Years later, through their efforts, Uruguay became the first nation to recognize the Armenian Genocide (1965).

When April 24 was officially recognized by the Soviet Armenian Republic in 1965, the day took on added significance throughout the diaspora. Its recognition served as a kind of imprimatur acknowledging April 24 as an official day to be observed. World War II had ended nearly a decade earlier and significant changes had taken place to and within the diaspora. Fifty years into the post-genocide period, the diaspora had become a viable entity of inter-connected communities spanning six continents. The number of survivors present at April 24 observances had steadily decreased, with sons and daughters and grandchildren replacing them. These Armenians born in the diaspora, using the United States as an example, educated in their new environment were well on their way to improving their economic and social status. Many had reached various levels of acculturation that influenced their relationship with the Armenian community and April 24. Some opted to live on the margins of the community while others felt no imperative to be identified as Armenian. Many first- and some second-generation Armenians had formed families of their own and were in the process of migrating from the comfortable ghettos where the survivors had historically gathered (ghetto has no pejorative meaning as used here).

Although Armenians born in the diaspora were weaned on knowledge of what had happened to their people, that knowledge could not and usually did not have the same searing emotional impact it had for the survivors, who had shared the final hours of those who became martyrs. Each generation born in the diaspora was further removed from the genocide. This fact and the loss of our survivors through the passage of time had its effect: The emotional and spiritual qualities associated with April 24 were slowly being replaced by duty and respect. This was another important development that affected the significance of April 24.

For many, the messages on and associated with April 24 were rooted too much in the past. There was little associated with April 24 that projected a vision for the future or awakened the interest of the diasporan-born generations. To the contrary, however unintentional it may have been, a victim mentality was encouraged by continued reference to what had happened to our people and abetted by our inability to achieve justice. To be identified as people who were victims of the first genocide of the 20th century or hearing, as a youngster, my people referred to as “starving Armenians” only reinforced that perception. We were victims



The 'We Are Our Mountains' monument in Stepanakert  
(Photo: Araz Chiloyan)

*April 24* had been the one day when we put aside our ideological differences and institutional loyalties and became spiritually and emotionally united whether in Armenia, Artsakh, or throughout the diaspora.

again when the Treaty of Sèvres (1920), with its favorable provisions for Armenia, was replaced with the ratification of the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). Turkey, our enemy and the successor state to the defeated Ottoman Turkish Empire, was rewarded by land that rightfully should have been ours. And the property that was literally stolen by the Ottoman Turks was gifted to the new republic by Lausanne. The arrogance of Turkish leaders denying what the objective evidence conclusively supported as a genocide generated a feeling of hopelessness and betrayal in the minds of many in the diaspora. Concerned with providing for self and family and in building the infrastructure of their ever expanding communities, the generations born in the diaspora stoically accepted the harsh realities of the past. Without question, the genocide and the victim mentality it fostered has been the most influential factor in developing the Armenian psyche.

The missing counterweight to this passive acceptance of victimhood came several decades later when a series of events occurred within a period of only a few years. In 1989, the Spitak earthquake devastated northwestern Soviet Armenia. Then, during the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the second free and independent Republic of Armenia was declared in 1991. And, when the 1994 ceasefire ended the war initiated by Azerbaijan to thwart the declaration of independence by the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabagh (Artsakh),

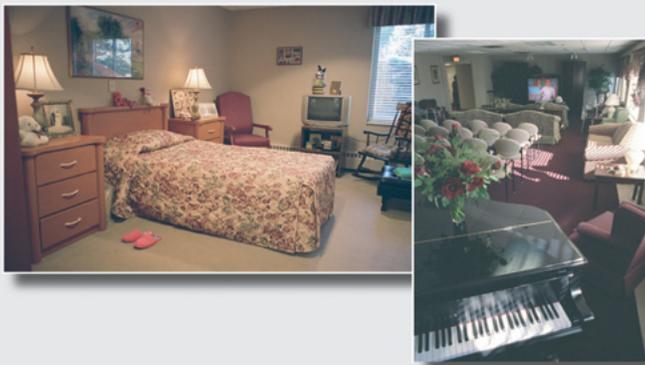
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the de facto state of the Nagorno-Karabagh Republic (now officially renamed the Artsakh Republic) was created. Immediately, as if aroused from their slumber, the diaspora was energized. All kinds of assistance—humanitarian, technological, financial, and professional—was provided. For the first time since 1920, when the first free and independent Armenian Republic was subverted by the Bolsheviks and their allies, a second free and independent Armenian Republic had become a reality. In Artsakh, our brothers and sisters had successfully defended their declaration of independence against Azerbaijan. These were events that had a significance effect on April 24.

Yes, we continued to remember our martyrs, but an independent Armenia and a liberated Artsakh was a sharp break with the past. For many in the diaspora, it shifted the emphasis from the past to the future. Efforts by the ARF and its political action committees throughout the diaspora had achieved significant success during the previous three decades in influencing countries and lesser political entities to recognize the Armenian Genocide, much to the political discomfort of Turkish leaders. ARF-sponsored lobbying committees ably advanced Armenian interests, unimpeded by protocols that circumscribe efforts of government. These developments shifted the emphasis that was solely on the past to the future. This shift from past to future became the missing counterweight to that enervating burden of victimhood that had engulfed many born in the diaspora for so many years.

The final change that affected the significance of April 24 occurred during the 100-year anniversary of the genocide. April 24 had been the one day when we put aside our ideological differences and institutional loyalties and became spiritually and emotionally united whether in Armenia, Artsakh, or throughout the diaspora. This time, in 2015, April 24 would be celebrated during the Centennial Year of a national tragedy that has affected all Armenians presently alive. The Centennial Year of Remembrance was successful on every level imaginable. So many outstanding moments can be cited that made this possible. It was with a mixture of pride and emotion that we saw and heard our president, Serge Sarkisian, representing Armenia at various venues in the United States; or saw His Holiness Karaken II Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians and His Holiness Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia share the same stage; or watched the conferring of Sainthood on the 1.5 million

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Armenians killed during the genocide; or watched as Pope Francis, during Mass in St. Peter's Basilica, in the presence of both Armenian Catholicos, acknowledged that what began on April 24, 1915 was the first genocide of the 21st century.

Given all these memorable events among many, the most significant result was neither contemplated nor intended. The Centennial Year witnessed a celebration of our now Sainted Martyrs without resorting to rancor. It was a celebration without a call for revenge. Of much greater significance, it saw Armenians finally casting off the cloak of victimhood that they had resigned themselves to wearing. For too many years we lived in the past, reliving and remembering the pain that had been inflicted upon our people. Our desire to pay homage to our martyrs as victims of the genocide was a passive acceptance that we were victims as well. The genocide memorial at Tsitsernakaberd conveys the eternal love of our nation for those who were martyred during the genocide. They can never be forgotten. Their suffering has placed an indelible mark on our national psyche, but it is a response that memorializes the past, as it should. However, the time has long since passed for us to shift our emphasis from the past to the future. That cannot be done without paying homage to our survivors, who laid the foundation upon which the diaspora was built. It was this diaspora that made

the Centennial Year of Remembrance a global event. And it will be this diaspora, working with our brothers and sisters in Armenia and Artsakh, that will aid our nation achieve its full potential.

The genocide nearly brought Armenia to its knees. The years immediately following 1915 could not have been darker. Our survivors, traumatized, destitute, and ill, firmly took root wherever the winds of chance took them. No one could have foretold what the future held for our decimated nation. The likes of the Talats, Envers, and Djemals who sought to wipe us off the face of the earth may have rejoiced for winning the battle of the genocide. Fortunately for our nation, it was the faith and resiliency of our survivors that enabled them to win the crucial battle for survival.

It was this determination and devotion to their heritage that allowed the generations born in the diaspora to remain Armenian. The post-genocide period could just as easily have seen the survivors (with their progeny) meld into an amorphous mass of humanity. That fortunately did not happen. As we celebrate April 24, we should remember that it was the martyrdom of our people that spread the seeds of our nation worldwide to form the diaspora. When we remember our Sainted Martyrs of April 24, we should also remember our survivors who gave us life.

Tsitsernakaberd is the memorial by a nation to its Sainted Martyrs and represents our past. The diaspora is the living memorial by our survivors and represents our future. □



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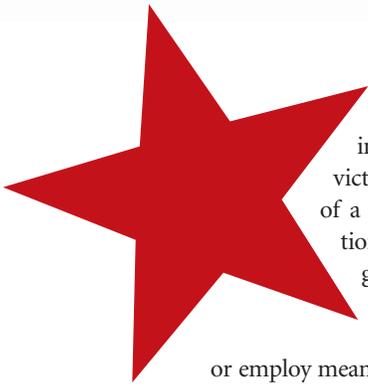
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# Collective Calls for Justice in the Face of Denial and Despotism

By Raffi Sarkissian



As we have seen time and again, genocide is often a crime that involves widespread participation and victimizes whole communities. In light of a greater understanding of the conditions that lead to mass atrocities and genocide, the international community increasingly presses to collectively adopt preventative measures

or employ means to stop the crime of genocide in its tracks. Although the globalized world we live in allows us to exchange information at an unforeseen rate, and we are today summoned as witness to crimes internationally—not necessarily through physical presence but by a digitized proximity (social media)—billions become mere spectators to violence.

We watch with a sense of manufactured helplessness, as *genocidaires*, one emboldened by the other, employ the all too familiar practices of the past, at times in new and more sophisticated ways, to destroy. Nation states continue to fail to intervene, and thus we then witness the transgenerational consequences of genocide.

The failure to intervene is not the international community's sole challenge, unfortunately; we have failed to establish justice in the face of genocide as well. Establishing justice in post-genocide societies is a requirement to move toward a much-needed social transformation. This transformation is the process through which societies learn from the mistakes of the recent past. Identifying the conditions that had led to the violence, learning to rise above the false ideas about the other, learning lessons of equality, equity, and universal human rights are all ways to prevent future cases of violence. Social transformation is only initiated through justice, which establishes truth in the perpetrator state surrounding the events,

acknowledging the acts of violence, and apologizing and providing reparations to victims.

The aggressive state-sponsored denial of the Armenian Genocide continues to make it a unique case. The century-old absence of post-genocidal justice, along with a manufactured and imposed transgenerational amnesia on the issues, has led Turkey to circle back to the very acts of rights abuses that foster an atmosphere of hatred and justification of violence against minorities.

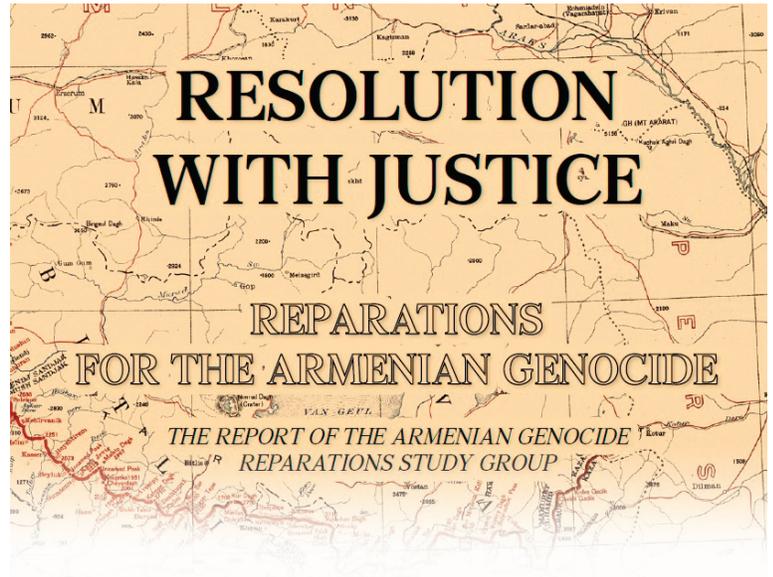
As outlined in a 2015 report by the Armenian Genocide Reparations Study Group—comprised of leading scholars of international law and genocide—justice has several components: responsibility, recognition, reparations, reconstitution, and rehabilitation.

The international community has yet to achieve justice for the Armenian Genocide. The perpetrator state, Turkey, has unjustly profited from this crime, while the victim group continues to suffer its consequences. The private, cultural, and religious properties belonging to Armenians remain confiscated. The Armenian Diaspora, a by-product of the genocide, struggles to preserve language and identity in the four corners of the world. In a world where laws and authority are meant to protect the vulnerable, Armenians are consistently left to defend themselves. Hate speech in the form of genocide denial, inflicted against Armenian communities around the globe, continues to be condoned, victimizing generation upon generation of Armenians and fueling the cycle of genocide.

The Republic of Armenia and its people continue to live uncertain times. The republic covers only one-tenth of the historic Armenian homeland. It continues to suffer the consequences of the Armenian Genocide economically, politically, and socially. Despite being blockaded by hostile neighbors who still vow to complete what was started a century ago, Armenia strives to flourish and strengthen against all odds.

But justice—with its components of responsibility, recognition, reparations, reconstitution, and rehabilitation—remains fragmented. The Turkish government continues to deny the Armenian Genocide at home and abroad with the greatest impunity. Emboldened by international inaction, it has become coercive and reckless. Turkey continues to bully academics and journalists who challenge its actions and policies through the use of defamation, threats, and imprisonment. The Turkish government has been providing ISIS with strategic, financial, and military support to combat Kurds and to destroy Armenian communities in Syria.

State-sponsored and -sanctioned discrimination and intolerance towards minorities—which are institutionalized in the legal and educational frameworks of Turkey—continue to play their role in inciting hatred and violence against Armenians. The real threat of physical destruction continues to show its face, the gravest example of which was seen between



# Justice reparations, reconstitution,

## has several components:

April 1 and 5, 2016. During this time, Azerbaijan, with the full support and encouragement of the Turkish Republic, carried out its most violent ceasefire violation against the people of the Nagorno-Karabagh Republic (NKR/Artsakh) to date. The international community once again witnessed the consequences of crimes gone unpunished: mutilations, beheading, destruction of civilian life and properties, and torture. With an unwillingness to single out the aggressor, the international community is fiddling with the safety and security of the people of Armenia and Karabagh.

Countries who have recognized the Armenian Genocide must now become advocates for the just resolution of the Armenian Genocide. We must acknowledge that it is only through pressuring Turkey to face the truth that we can encourage much-needed social transformation in that country.

The Turkish government insists that statements in support of genocide recognition are divisive and counterproductive. We have witnessed the contrary: These calls have strengthened the will of brave Turkish citizens and civil society groups that are demanding Turkish recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

Applied to the case of the Armenian Genocide and according to the Armenian Genocide Reparations Study Group, these five Rs materialize as follows:

- The Turkish government's responsibility must be restored as it was clearly established through international treaties and military tribunals after World War I.
- The Turkish government "must fully admit all aspects of the genocide and its ethical wrongness through sincere apology, ensure meaningful knowledge and engagement with the history among its population, and promote substantial awareness of it globally."
- It "must return all [available] expropriated... property [and land belonging to Armenia, Armenians and the Armenian communities and] compensate victims... for (a) death and suffering of persons, (b) material expropriations that cannot be directly rectified... (c) slave labor, and (d) loss of cultural, religious, and educational institutions and opportunities."
- It "must create conditions and take actions designed to support the reconstitution and long-term viability of the Armenian people."
- It "must initiate a rehabilitative process to root out all elements of genocidal ideology and propaganda, in order to transform the society's attitudes toward the victim group."

These are the conditions for a just resolution of the Armenian Genocide. Nothing less. These conditions are what will allow neighbors to co-exist peacefully. These are the conditions that will ensure Turkey respects the human rights of its citizens and ends its assault on those who should be championed as heroes. These are the conditions that will restore the Armenian borders and safeguard Armenian heritage and identity. These are the conditions that will prevent the kind of aggression we continue to witness in Artsakh.

Most importantly, these are the conditions that will finally respect and fully honor the memory of the one-and-a-half million Armenians who were brutally murdered. These are the conditions that will also finally honor those who *survived*. Armenian Genocide survivors—the symbols of resilience, rebirth, and endurance—not only lived with the haunting memory of the past, but lived in a world that allowed the perpetrator to deny their pain and inflict more uncontested violence.

True justice through the five Rs is also honoring the legacy of all those who were ready to give their lives for this cause more than 100 years ago.

and why this intended Turkish amnesia and denial set in, Turkish historian Taner Akçam associates it with the formation of the Turkish national identity, which he states played a role first in the decision to execute genocide and subsequently in the effort to erase the memory of it.

“I would characterize amnesia as a social disease in Turkey,” Akçam states. “A discussion of the Armenian Genocide could reveal that this Turkish state was not a result of war fought against the Imperial Powers, but, on the contrary, a product of the war against the Greek and Armenian minorities. It could show that a significant part of the National Forces consisted either of murderers who directly participated in the Armenian Genocide or of thieves who had become rich by plundering Armenian possessions.”

Hülya Adak, associate professor of comparative literature at Sabancı University and guest professor of genocide studies at University of Potsdam, has written about the challenges of teaching the Armenian Genocide in Turkey in an interesting article titled, “Teaching the Armenian Genocide in Turkey: Curriculum, Methods and Sources.” Here, Adak insists on the importance of

# responsibility, recognition, and rehabilitation.

The role of education in achieving justice for the Armenian Genocide is a strictly important one. Although with challenges, employing education on this topic outside of Turkey has become far less difficult as efforts to expose the harms of Turkish state denial have become widely understood. The greatest challenge is establishing education on the Armenian Genocide *within* the Turkish borders. With a deliberate, deep-rooted, transgenerational amnesia and denial of the Armenian Genocide within Turkish society and a legal system that vows to vilify those who dare challenge the government discourse, attempts at educating are deadly.

Within Turkey, a great deal of effort is employed by certain human rights groups, academics, and activists to challenge Turkish government denial, but at great costs. One example is an umbrella group of Turkish human rights organizations, working under the name “100th Year – Stop Denialism,” which has called for Turkey to apologize and make compensation for the genocide in 2015. Collective commemoration and calls for justice support the rights and desires of these agents of change who, despite threats of legal consequences, embody the righteous Turks of the genocide era—memories of whom have been drowned in state denial, while the perpetrators have been lionized.

These heroic upstanders, the torchbearers of the forgotten righteous of 1915, are today villains in Turkey. To describe how

teaching students to approach Turkish national historiography critically. More importantly, she has worked on bringing back Armenian voices to the teaching of the subject through memoirs of survivors, but also ensuring access to literature that examines the genocide in such a way that students identify the names and roles of perpetrators and actors. The latter is necessary in helping students in Turkey understand that there not only was a systematic and planned destruction of the Armenians, but there was individual and state responsibility—and thus the need for justice.

In 2014, Taner Akçam conducted a thorough assessment of Turkish elementary and middle school textbooks in Turkey to give insight on what Turkish students were learning about the Armenian Genocide. He states how “the textbooks characterize Armenians as people ‘who are incited by foreigners, who aim to break apart the state and the country, and who murdered Turks and Muslims.’ Meanwhile, the Armenian Genocide...is described as a lie perpetrated in order to meet these goals, and is defined as the biggest threat to Turkish national security.”

It is no surprise, then, when Adak, in her piece, states how most students “came to college either not knowing anything about the Armenian genocide or denying it altogether. Denial of the Armenian genocide is still pervasive in Turkey; 1915 is identified in history textbooks as the year of the Battle of Gallipoli, the most

important Ottoman victory against the British and French naval forces during World War I. For most of the twentieth century and up until 2005, when the seminal Ottoman Armenians Conference opened a public discussion of the topic, silence regarding the deportation and genocide of the Ottoman Armenians prevailed.”

With such Turkish state control on education and meticulously crafted denial and hate weaved into student textbooks, Turkey, through its foreign embassies and affiliates, works diligently to apply this form of hate speech to curricula abroad.

I have discussed Turkey’s continued attempts to impose genocide denial on curricula in one city—Toronto, Canada—in detail in my chapter “Benefits and Challenges of Genocide Education: A Case Study of the Armenian Genocide” in the book *Understanding Atrocities: Remembering, Representing and Teaching Genocide*.

On July 13, 2005, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) put forward a motion that sparked the development of the Grade 11 “Genocide and Crimes against Humanity” course and, on Dec. 14, 2005, it decided to integrate the Armenian Genocide into the high school-level history curriculum. Once the inclusion of the Armenian Genocide was clear and after the writing of the course had been completed in 2007, the government of Turkey began its usual offensive.

On Aug. 27, 2008, Ottawa’s Embassy Magazine reported on the issue in an article titled, “Turkey Decries Toronto School Board Genocide Course.” The author, Michelle Collins, reported that the Turkish Embassy had begun lobbying against the course together

with the Council of Turkish Canadians (CTC).

Although more than eight years have passed since the introduction of this important course, efforts to alter the curriculum continue to this day.

As Turkey descends into a dictatorship with the most recent referendum, we will unfortunately see a consistent rise of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s use of his increased executive powers to escalate his assault on freedom of speech. Tens of thousands have already been victimized since the attempted coup of 2016; thousands more await the same fate.

The shamefulness of the international community’s decades of appeasement towards Turkish government brutality and abuses in the name of a NATO alliance is now becoming ever more indisputable. The Armenian Genocide and its byproducts form the very foundations of the Turkish Republic and the dangerous state it is currently in. Countries who have aided in silencing Turkey’s genocidal past must now join their voices with the persecuted advocates for justice and reparations in Turkey and become agents of change. It is never too late. Pressure to establish justice for the Armenian Genocide with all its components—responsibility, recognition, reparations, reconstitution, and rehabilitation—must be the starting point when addressing Turkey and its dictatorship today. If we cannot address the past, draw lessons, and start with respecting the rights of past persons, we cannot ensure the rights of persons in the future. □