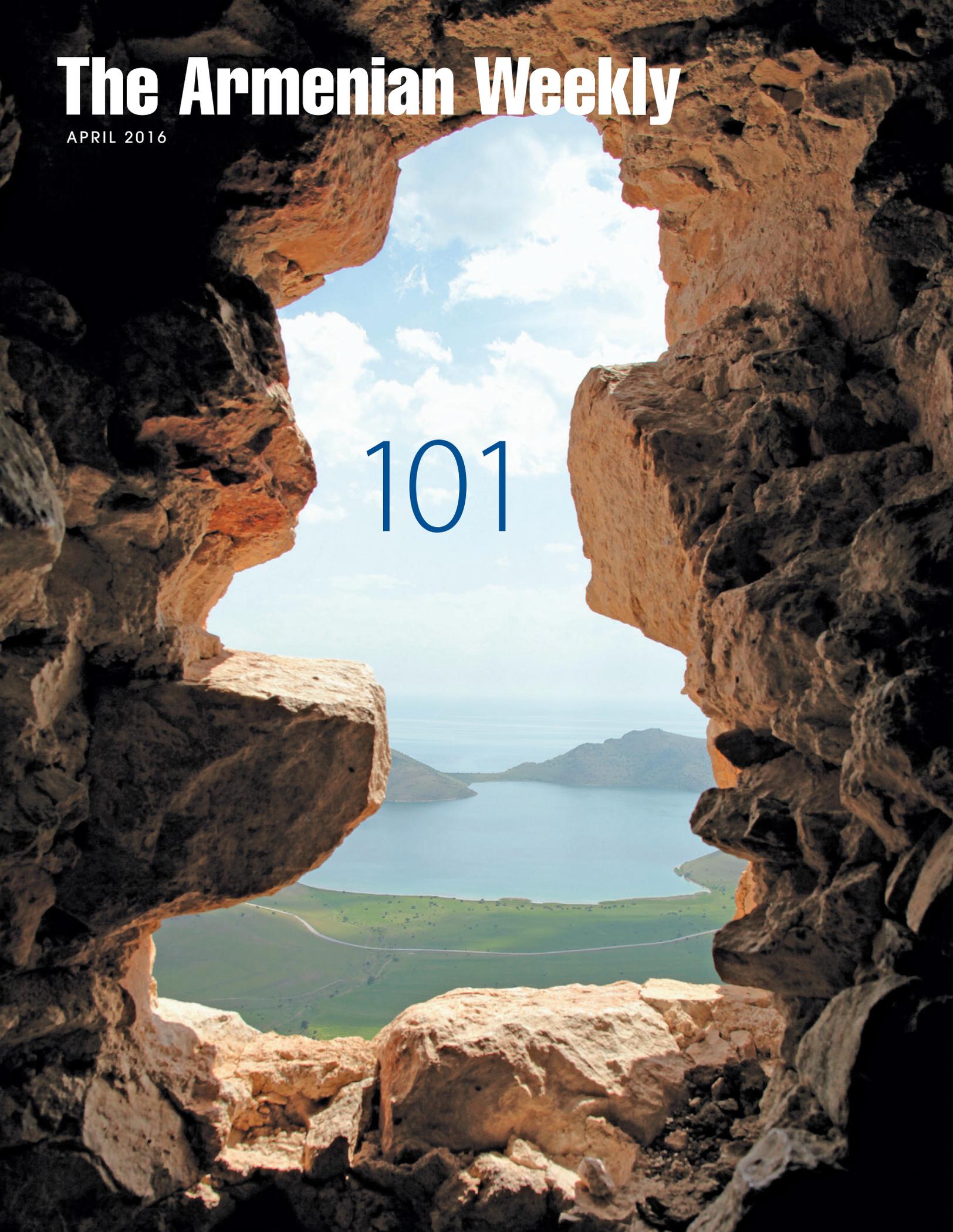


# The Armenian Weekly

APRIL 2016

101



# The Armenian Weekly

APRIL 2016



## NOTES

- 5 Contributors
- 7 Editor's Desk

## RESEARCH

- 8 China as Refuge for Armenian Genocide Survivors  
—By *Khatchig Mouradian*
- 13 Imperial Russia's Response to the Armenian Genocide and the Refugee Crisis on the Caucasus Battlefield of World War I —By *Asya Darbinyan*
- 19 A Glimpse into the Life of the Armenian DPs in Europe  
—By *Knarik O. Meneshian*
- 25 Rescuing Armenian Women and Children After the Genocide: The Story of Ruben Heryan  
—By *Anna Aleksanyan*
- 30 'Memories of a Turkish Statesman—1913–19': A Reflection on Cemal Pasha's Memoirs —By *Varak Ketsemanian*

## BOOK REVIEW

- 35 The Armenian Genocide in the American Humanitarian Imagination: A Review of "Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism"  
—By *Elyse Semerdjian*

## COMMENTARY

- 37 Artsakh Is Our Nation's 21st Century Sardarabad  
—By *Michael G. Mensoian*
- 40 Bearing Witness in the Aftermath of the Armenian Genocide—By *Armen T. Marsoobian*
- 45 Dispatch from Istanbul: Nine Years in the Courtrooms: The Murder Cases of Dink, Balikci, and Kucuk  
—By *Sayat Tekir*

**ON THE COVER:** Lake Van through the crumbling wall of the ancient Armenian Monastery of St. Thomas, built in the 10th–11th centuries (Photo: Nanore Barsoumian)

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WE ARE OUR SURVIVORS, WE ARE OUR ANCESTORS:  
WE ARE THE MUSIC OF GOMIDAS, THE CHILDREN OF SOSE.  
WE ARE THE WORDS OF HRANT DINK AND ARSHAVIR SHIRAGIAN  
WE ARE THE VENGEANCE OF SOGHOMON TEHLIRIAN.



# Contributors



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Nanore Barsoumian is the editor of the Armenian Weekly. From 2010 to 2014, she served as assistant editor of the Armenian Weekly. Her writings focus on human rights, politics, poverty, and environmental and gender issues. She has reported from Armenia, Nagorno-Karabagh, Javakhk, and Turkey. She earned her B.A. degree in political science and English from the University of Massachusetts (Boston), where she is currently pursuing her M.A.



Asya Darbinyan is a Ph.D. Candidate from Clark University’s Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies. Her dissertation, directed by Professor Taner Akçam, explores the Russian response to the Armenian Genocide. With the support of recently obtained Calouste Gulbenkian Short Grant for Armenian Studies, the grant from Friends of Armenian Chair at Clark University and the National Association of Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) grant, Darbinyan explores Russian as well as Armenian and Georgian archival sources focusing on the condition and the treatment of the Armenian refugees in imperial Russia during the Great War.



Varak Ketsemanian received his B.A. in philosophy from the American University of Beirut. He is currently pursuing his M.A. at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Chicago. His articles have appeared in the Lebanese Armenian Aztag Daily, AUB’s Outlook, and the Armenian Weekly.



Dr. Armen T. Marsoobian is Professor and Chair of Philosophy at Southern Connecticut State University and is editor of the journal *Metaphilosophy*. He has lectured and published on topics in philosophy, aesthetics and genocide studies. He has edited many books, including *Genocide’s Aftermath: Responsibility and Repair* and *The Blackwell Guide to American Philosophy*. He is the author of the highly praised, *Fragments of a Lost Homeland: Remembering Armenia* and a recently published companion book *Dildilian Brother—Memories of a Lost Armenian Home: Photography and the Story of an Armenian Family in Anatolia, 1888–1923*. He is editing a forthcoming volume entitled, *Genocide, Memory and*

*Representation: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. He is a descendant of the Dildilian family and has organized exhibitions in Turkey, Armenia, the United Kingdom and the U.S. based upon his family’s Ottoman-era photography collection.



Knarik O. Meneshian was born in Austria. She received her degree in literature and secondary education in Chicago, Ill. In 1988, she served on the Selection Committee of the McDougal, Littell “Young Writers” Collection—Grades 1–8, an anthology of exemplary writing by students across the country.” She is married and lives in Glenview, Ill., with her family. In 1991, Knarik taught English in the earthquake devastated village of Jrashen (Spitak Region), Armenia. In 2002–2003, she and her husband lived and worked as volunteers in Armenia for a year teaching English and computer courses in Gyumri and Tsaghgadzor. Meneshian’s works have been published in *Teachers As Writers*, *American Poetry Anthology* and other American publications. She has authored a book of poems titled *Reflections*, and translated from Armenian to English Reverend D. Antreassian’s book titled *The Banishment of Zeitoun and Suedia’s Revolt*. She regularly contributes to the Armenian Weekly.



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



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Elyse Semerdjian is Associate Professor of Islamic World/Middle Eastern History at Whitman College. A specialist in the history of the Ottoman Empire and Syria, she authored “*Off the Straight Path*”: *Illicit Sex, Law, and Community in Ottoman Aleppo* (Syracuse University Press, 2008) as well as several articles on gender,

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non-Muslims, and law in the Ottoman Empire. She received her M.A. in Middle Eastern Studies from the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor and her Ph.D. in History from Georgetown University. Semerdjian is a two-time Fulbright awardee to Syria. She currently serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* and as a book review editor for the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. In the Spring of 2013, she was the Dumanian Visiting Professor in Armenian Studies in The Department of Near Eastern Cultures and Languages at the University of Chicago. She was awarded a Cornell University Society for the Humanities Fellowship for the 2016–2017 academic year to support her new book project, *Remnants: Gender, Islamized Armenians, and Collective Memory of the Armenian Genocide*. Semerdjian is also an occasional contributor to the *Armenian Weekly*.



**Sayat Tekir** is a Turkey-based human rights activist and member of Istanbul's Nor Zartonk movement. Born in Istanbul in 1984, Tekir received his primary and secondary education at Essayan Armenian School. He majored in Sociology at Istanbul's Minar Sinan Guzel Sanatlar University, and is presently working on his Masters. His thesis focuses on the Turkish-Armenian Border. He has worked as a reporter and editor for *Agos*, *Birgun*, *CNN Turk*, and *Voice of America*. He served as project director for the *Hrant Dink Foundation*. From 2009–14, he became the chief editor of *Nor Radio*. Sayat Tekir is one of the founders and spokespersons of *Nor Zartonk*, and serves as its publishing director. Tekir is also a founding member of the *Armenian Culture and Solidarity Association*.

## Editor's Desk

# 101 Years Later . . .

BY NANORE BARSOUMIAN

**O**n the 101<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, many of the articles in the *Armenian Weekly* April 2016 magazine are dedicated to the humanitarian efforts that secured the lives of countless genocide survivors. The scale and diversity of these efforts, as well as the commitment of those engaged in this work, is remarkable. Reflecting on these stories of sacrifice, we are confronted with the present-day challenges facing the Armenian nation; and we might ask ourselves, are we doing enough?

Following the devastation of the genocide, Armenians became dispersed throughout the world; some were captured and enslaved near the Syrian Desert; others made their way to faraway lands such as China, where they proceeded to build communities (see Mouradian).

Survivors often lifted each other up. The fate of the nation was on the line. Some, like Ruben Heryan, dedicated their entire life to rescue efforts (see Aleksanyan). Meanwhile, committees such as the Near East Relief in the U.S. and the Tatiana Committee in Imperial Russia were formed to assist the surviving Armenians (see Semerdjian and Darbinyan, respectively). Decades later,

humanitarian giants like George Mardikian would once again employ their resources to rescue Armenians from DP camps in Europe (see Meneshian).

As we commemorate the Armenian Genocide, let us also celebrate the work of these countless men and women who dedicated their lives to the relief and rescue efforts.

The colossal work and dedication that guided these efforts at the turn of the last century—glimpses of which we can gain in the pages of this magazine—can guide and inspire us today. As Michael Mensoian stresses in his article, Artsakh today faces hefty challenges; it is up to each and every Diasporan Armenian to help guarantee the future of the Republic.

This magazine also examines injustices against Armenians in Turkey today, as well as efforts to counter the collective amnesia in the country.

Mahatma Ghandi once said, “Whatever you do will be insignificant, but it is very important that you do it.”

It is in that spirit that we share these stories—though they are anything but insignificant. They carry insight and inspiration as we move forward as a nation.

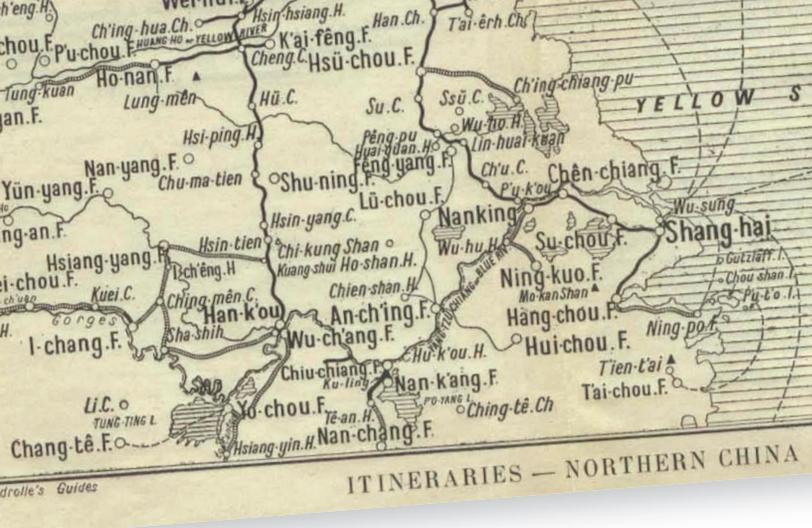
Violence and injustice continue to mar the lives of many today—from Artsakh to Istanbul to Aleppo. What good will we do? □

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## By Khatchig Mouradian

**I**n a letter to his brother Krikor,<sup>2</sup> who had arrived in Boston in 1914, Rev. Asadoor Z. Yeghoyan wrote from Kharpert, “Krikor you traveled all around the world, now you know by experience that the world is round, take care so you will not fall off it.”<sup>3</sup> The reverend’s words were not true, yet they were prophetic. At that point, Krikor had not traveled around the world—he had left the Ottoman Empire and crossed the Atlantic for the United States. However, Krikor returned to his home town shortly thereafter and was caught in the maelstrom of World War I. He survived the Armenian Genocide with the help of Kurds from Dersim and eventually arrived in the Caucasus. Yet conflict in the region kept pushing him eastward, until he reached China. In 1919, he finally arrived in the U.S. via Japan, with help from Diana Apkar, the honorary consul in Japan of the first Republic of Armenia. At that point, he had indeed traveled around the world. In this article, I present a brief history of the several thousand Armenians who, like Krikor, escaped the genocide and found safe haven in China.

Top left: A map of North China (1912)

Top: Armenian boy, Setrak Antonyan, in Tientsin, China (1936)  
(Photo: Meltickian Collection, CSU Fresno Armenian Studies Program Library)

Right: The Armenian community in Manchuli (circa 1919)  
(Photo: Meltickian Collection)

# as Refuge for Armenian Genocide Survivors<sup>1</sup>



## ARMENIANS IN CHINA (1880s–1950s)

**H**undreds of Armenians journeyed eastward to China in the late 19th century in search of opportunity, anchoring themselves in major cities, as well as in Harbin, a town that rose to prominence with the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway.

Initially, Armenian railroad workers and merchants formed the core of the community in Harbin. Their numbers were small—no more than a few dozen. A larger number of Armenians lived in Manzhouli (Manchuli), which had risen to prominence in the early 20th century also thanks to railway projects. A group photograph of the Armenian community in Manzhouli (circa 1919) depicting around 150 men, women, and children, complete with the Armenian tricolor, stands as testament to the size of the Armenian community in the city.<sup>4</sup>

A few thousand Armenians, including Yeghoyan, arrived in the region escaping genocide in Ottoman Turkey and turmoil in the Caucasus. Often, those who followed this path hoped to get to the United States. American missionary Ernest Yarrow encountered some 200 Armenian refugees in Vladivostok in late 1918, most of

whom “have friends in America and are hoping in some way or other to get there.”<sup>6</sup> Yet most stayed in East Asia for years, even decades, helping build communities that thrived, despite conflicts, war, and foreign occupation.

Many of these Armenians coupled their personal success with a dedication to community life, helping develop small but vibrant communities. Despite conflicts, war, and foreign occupation that beset the history of China in the first half of the 20th century, Armenians built a church (Harbin), community centers (Harbin and Shanghai), and established relief organizations, choirs, language schools, and women’s groups. In the years following the Chinese Communist revolution of 1949, Armenians left the country (like most Christians in China) mainly in two directions: Soviet Armenia and the Americas.<sup>6</sup>

Garabed Meltickian was a survivor of the genocide who joined the stream of Armenian refugees traversing the Caucasus and Siberia all the way to China. Originally from Maden, Diyarbakir, Meltickian was conscripted into the Ottoman military in 1914 and dispatched to Erzincan. In 1915, he was among 120 Armenian soldiers who were handcuffed and taken away to be killed. He miraculously survived the carnage, was given shelter by Kurds, saved by advancing Russian troops, fought with Armenian forces in Kars,

and after their withdrawal from the city, went to Tiflis, from there to Siberia, and finally settled in Manchuria.<sup>7</sup> Meltickian became a successful merchant in the city, and played an active role in the Armenian community's life. He helped form a youth group and started a small Armenian library, arranging for the shipment of books from Hairenik publishing house in Boston, Mass.<sup>8</sup>

Soon, the first generation of Armenians born in the city started successful businesses in China. A son of survivors, Yervand Markarian was born in Harbin, where his father had settled after the war. The family moved to Tientsin,<sup>9</sup> China, in 1925.<sup>10</sup> Years later, reflecting upon his life's trajectory, Markarian wrote:

I was a man born outside my ethnic fatherland which by the time of my birth had ceased to exist... As incongruous as it may seem, I was born in China, without having a drop of Chinese blood, where I later volunteered to serve in the French army but was not French, and ended up in the French Foreign Legion in Indochina (Vietnam), under rather strange circumstances. As a family man, I owned and managed restaurants in China, Brazil, and California—all of them Russian/Armenian and all of them called Kavkaz.<sup>11</sup>



Top: Program booklet cover of Vartanants Day event in Harbin (Feb. 24, 1944) (Photo: Meltickian Collection)



Right: Yervand Markarian in Harbin, China, at age 3 years and 6 months (Photo: author's autobiography, Kavkaz)

## NEWSPAPERS IN CHINA AND THE GENOCIDE

Many in China were not oblivious to the fate of Ottoman Armenians as hundreds of survivors arrived in Harbin and other cities. Russian, English, Chinese, and Japanese language newspapers reported on the fate of the Ottoman Armenians. The *North China Herald* (published in Shanghai beginning in 1850), for example, ran dozens of reports on the Hamidian massacres, the Adana massacres, the Armenian Genocide, relief efforts to assist Armenian deportees and refugees in the Caucasus and in Syria, peace treaties and negotiation processes involving Armenian representatives, and the Armenian communities in Harbin and Shanghai as they established a church and a community center. A report titled "Massacres in Armenia. Horrible Atrocities" (4 December 1915), provided details furnished by Viscount Bryce about massacres in Bitlis and Mush and drownings in the River Tigris. Another article, "Awful Massacres in Armenia. Wholesale Drowning at Trebizond" (16 October 1915) noted that in the House of Lords, Earl Cromer said Germany's "moral responsibility [in Armenian massacres] was unquestionable." The author called for "utmost publicity" in India and Egypt expressing belief that educated Muslims there would be equally outraged by the atrocities. The author went on to argue that the

only way to rescue the survivors would be "an expression of opinion from the World, especially from neutrals."

## INTERACTIONS WITH MISSIONARIES

The role of missionaries in providing relief and assistance to Armenians during and in the aftermath of the genocide is well-documented, with focus on humanitarian work in the Ottoman Empire and the Caucasus.<sup>12</sup> Yet missionaries assisted Armenians, including deportees who had escaped the genocide, also in faraway cities like Vladivostok and Harbin. One such missionary was Rev. Ernest A. Yarrow, who spent almost a year in Siberia and Manchuria beginning in late 1918, following a decade of service in Van (September 1904–October 1915) and the Caucasus (191–1919), before another five years in the Caucasus with Near East Relief (1920–1925).

Working for the Red Cross in Vladivostok, Yarrow helped house refugees "among whom were about 200 Armenians who had come from the Caucasus, some of whom I knew personally."<sup>13</sup> Now in East Asia, Yarrow once again embarked upon helping Armenians from the Ottoman Empire and the Caucasus. "Among those whom I knew were Aghavnee and Marina, who were teachers in our school [in Van] and whom I put in charge of the stores until they got permission to leave. I got them good outfits of clothing and left them quite happy," he wrote.<sup>14</sup>

This page is sponsored by Mary B. Stathopoulos (III.)

Yarrow employed several Armenians, and secured jobs for many others. Armenian refugees in Siberia and Manchuria remembered Yarrow fondly for his efforts. In his memoir, Krikor Yeghoyan wrote:

[W]e visited Vladivostok [from Harbin]....The first wagon rolling in was the one with the Armenians. At this instant we noticed one gentleman and two nurses. The nurses came over; they asked us, “Are you Armenians?” in Armenian. We answered, “Yes.” Right away they asked us if there were any tradesmen amongst us. I said I was a carpenter. The man said, “Good.” He left the nurses here and brought me to a town to meet the General. On our way, I asked him how come he knew such good Armenian. He said he was a missionary in Van. He learned it there and his name was Yarrow. I became very interested in the man. I asked him this time if he ever went to Harpoot. “Yes, but only for conventions.” In that case I suppose you must know Rev. Yeghoyan [Krikor’s brother]. “Oh, yes,” he said, he was a powerful minister. I continued saying, I was his brother, that I was in America one time, and doing carpentering there. “Do you speak English?” “Yes, a little,” I said. “Oh, you are just the man we are looking for!” At last I met the General; Yarrow introduced me to him giving all the details of my life and adding that I had been in U.S.A. After this formal conversation, I was appointed as supervisor over all the refugees, and master carpenter with a salary of 400 rubles, also board and lodging.<sup>15</sup>

Not all refugees Yarrow helped in Vladivostok anchored themselves in Siberia and China. Arriving in Egypt in March 1919, Yarrow met with several of the Armenians he had helped in Vladivostok months earlier. They were at the Armenian refugee camp in Port Said that was comprised of several thousand Armenians rescued from Musa Dagh by a French battleship, and a few thousand Armenians from elsewhere. “You remember my writing from Siberia that I had housed and organized the support of about 200 Armenians in Vladivostok?” Yarrow asked in a letter to his friend. “I was amazed to find that 35 of these had reached Port Said and were in the camp. They had been sent by boat by the Red Cross to make their way back to Armenia!”<sup>16</sup>

## CONCLUSION

For several decades, hundreds of genocide survivors called China home, helping build communities that celebrated Armenian heritage and culture across the globe from the Armenian homeland. The Chinese revolution displaced these Armenians once again, scattering them across the globe—to Soviet Armenia, North America, and Australia. Thousands of documents, photographs, artifacts, and mementos from these communities are scattered in archives and family collections across the world. This article, and the more extensive study it is based on, is an effort to



Armenian girl, Sonya Antonyan, in Tientsin, China (1936)  
(Photo: Meltickian Collection)

shed light on this integral yet neglected part of Armenian Genocide and Diaspora studies. □

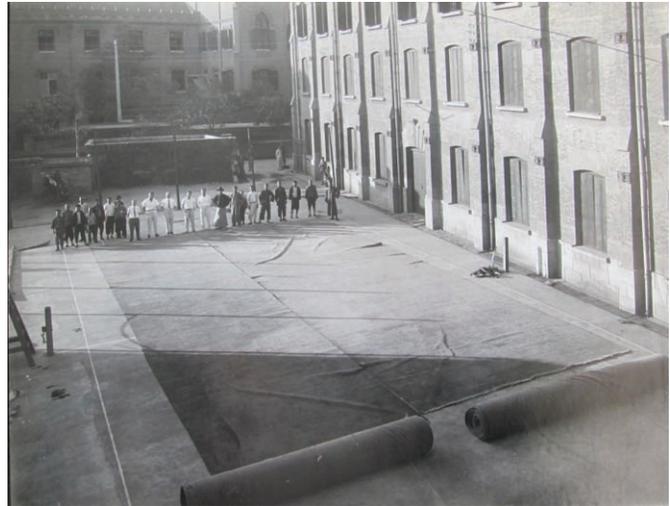
## NOTES

- 1 This article is part of a much more detailed research report on the history of the Armenian communities in China in the 19th and 20th centuries, which will be published in an edited volume. I would like to thank the Gulbenkian Foundation for granting me a research fellowship that made this work possible. I would like to express my gratitude to Razmik Panossian, George Aghjayan, Ara Sanjian, Mimi Malayan, Edward G. Sergoyan, Matthew Karanian, Marc Mamigonian, Liz Chater, Elise Kazanjian, Barlow Der Mugardechian, Henri Arslanian, and Xi Yang, for pointing me to—or providing me with—

*This page is sponsored by Richard Bozian*

documents and photographs that proved crucial for my research. I thank the staff of Shanghai Library, Bibliotheca Zi-Ka-Wei (The Xujiahui Library), Guangzhou Library, The Armenian Studies Program at the University of Fresno, Harvard College Library (special collections and government documents), The National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR), the Armenian Studies Program at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, the Hairenik Association, the National Library of Armenia, and the libraries at Haigazian University for their help during my research.

- 2 Krikor Z. Yeghoyan's unpublished memoir, *The Story of My Life*, was written in 1952. Victoria Dadekian prepared a condensed English translation in 1970, which I cite in this report. I would like to thank Mimi Malayan for bringing the memoir to my attention. It is available at: [http://issuu.com/dianaapcar.org/docs/memoir\\_the\\_story\\_of\\_my\\_life\\_by\\_krikor\\_z.\\_yeghoya/1](http://issuu.com/dianaapcar.org/docs/memoir_the_story_of_my_life_by_krikor_z._yeghoya/1).
- 3 Yeghoyan, *The Story of My Life*, 4.
- 4 "Armenian Community in the City of Manchuli, China circa 1919," in Meltickian Collection, *Armenians in China Album* No. 2, 1916-1953.
- 5 Letter from Yarrow to Rev. Dr. Earle H. Ballou (20 November 1918). ABC 16.9.7, vol. 25d, item 260 (Papers of the ABCFM, reel 717). Dr. Ballou worked for ABCFM in China from 1917 until WWII.
- 6 A few families, for example, settled in Australia.



**The A. & M. Karagheusian rug factory was one of the hugely successful Armenian-owned businesses which employed hundreds in China and the U.S. (Photo: Elise Kazanjian family archive)**

- 7 H. Bsg (Hamazasb Bsgagian), "Garabed Mldigian," *Asbarez Daily*, 12 April 1963.
- 8 Ibid. Meltickian passed away in 1937. His wife and daughter eventually settled in Fresno, Calif. The Meltickian Collection referenced in this article is donated to the University of Fresno's Armenian Studies Program by his daughter, Virginia Meltickian.
- 9 Several dozen Armenians called Tientsin home in the 1920s and 1930s. According to an Etchmiadzin document providing figures for 1933-1934, there were 70 Armenians living in the city. See National archives of Armenia. Fund of the higher spiritual council of St. Echmiadzin. 4732 as cited in I.D. Minasyan, "Socio-Economic Activity of Armenians in China," in B.H. Yerznkyan, ed., *Theory and Practice of Institutional Reforms in Russia / Collection of scientific works* (Moscow, CEMI Russian Academy of Sciences), Issue 22 (2011), 63.
- 10 Yervand Markarian, *Kavkaz: A Biography of Yervand Markarian* (United States: 1996), 7.
- 11 Ibid., 2.
- 12 See, for example, Suzanne E. Moranian, "The Armenian Genocide and American Missionary Relief Efforts," in Jay Winter, ed., *America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003); and Hans-Lukas Kieser, *A Quest for Belonging: Anatolia beyond Empire and Nation (19th-21st centuries)*, (Istanbul: Isis, 2007).
- 13 Letter from Yarrow to Rev. Dr. Earle H. Ballou (20 November 1918). ABC 16.9.7, vol. 25d, item 260 (Papers of the ABCFM, reel 717). Dr. Ballou worked for ABCFM in China from 1917 until WWII.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Krikor Z. Yeghoyan, *The Story of My Life*, 28.
- 16 Letter from Yarrow to Rev. Dr. Earle H. Ballou (14 March 1919). ABC 16.9.7, vol. 25d, item 264 (Papers of the ABCFM, reel 717).

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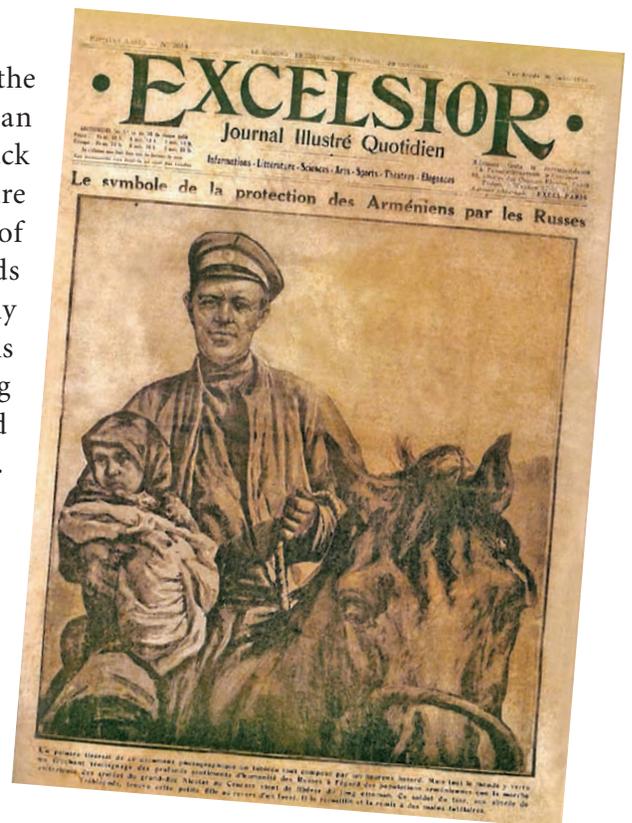
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# Imperial Russia's Response to the Armenian Genocide and the Refugee Crisis on the Caucasus Battlefront of World War I

By Asya Darbinyan

## INTRODUCTION

The front page of the June 30, 1916 issue of the Parisian newspaper “Excelsior” carried an illustration of a Russian soldier on horseback with a refugee child in his arms. The picture was captioned, “The Symbol of Protection of the Armenians by Russians.”<sup>1</sup> The words “Russia” and “humanitarianism” are rarely coupled in the historical literature on the 20th century. This essay, however, emphasizes the importance of exploring imperial Russia’s reaction to the Armenian Genocide and the refugee crisis on the Caucasus battlefront of World War I. It shows how the recognition of an emergency situation transformed political and public reaction into action, and how the Russian imperial government during the Great War and the Armenian Genocide—as well as a number of non-governmental organizations established in the Russian Empire—provided humanitarian assistance to hundreds of thousands of Armenian refugees in need. It also plumbs the motivations for humanitarian assistance and the Russian context of humanitarianism.



## THE GREAT WAR AND THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

While Russian and Ottoman imperial troops fought on the Caucasus front of World War I, hundreds of thousands of Ottoman-Armenian subjects were targeted by Turkish authorities as a potential “strategic threat.” Justifying their actions as militarily necessary, the Ottomans massacred the Armenians or deported them to the deserts of Mesopotamia. Those who did not fall victim became refugees on the Russian-Ottoman battlefield. Armenians suffered numerous hardships during all of the Russo-Turkish wars of the 18th and 19th centuries, but the war that started in fall 1914 had unprecedented consequences for the Armenians, particularly for the Ottoman or Western Armenians. This time the consequences were catastrophic, as the Armenians fell victim to a systematically implemented genocide under the cover of World War I by the Ottoman state.<sup>2</sup>

The Great War began in Europe in July 1914; the war over the Straits and on the Caucasus front between the Ottoman and Russian empires unrolled in November 1914.<sup>3</sup> The murder of Armenian peasants and priests, and the wiping out of entire villages on the Russian-Ottoman border, ensued. German missionary Dr. Johannes Lepsius put the number of Armenian victims in these frontier zones at 7,000<sup>4</sup> in November-December 1914. As Armenian Genocide scholar Raymond Kevorkian has observed, “the majority of the massacres took place before [War Minister of the Ottoman Empire] Enver launched his offensive [on Sarikamish, Kars province, Russian Empire, on Dec. 22, 1914].”<sup>5</sup>

### OFFICIAL POLITICAL REACTION OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE

Reports about the Turkish atrocities against the Armenians quickly reached the Russian Empire. Mikhail Papadjanov, the Russian State Duma representative for the Baku, Yelizavetpol, and Erivan<sup>6</sup> regions, claimed in his July 1915 speech in the Duma that the Turks had targeted Armenians in the bordering regions of the Caucasus front before Russian troops had even entered, annihilating them as “an element having close ties with Russia.”<sup>7</sup> Papadjanov, like many other statesmen in the Russian Empire, attempted to bring the Turks’ violence against the Armenians to wider attention. By spring-summer 1915, the Russian Empire’s southwest—Transcaucasia—was flooded with tens of thousands of Armenian refugees



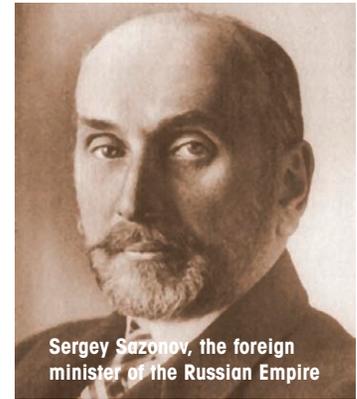
**Mikhail Papadjanov**  
The Russian State Duma representative for the Baku, Yelizavetpol, and Erivan regions

and internally displaced persons who had been forced to abandon their homes in the Russian-Ottoman border regions (Kars, Ardahan, Olti, Ardvin, Alashkert, Basen, and other towns).

In addition to the Armenians displaced by pre-war incidents and then warfare between the two empires, new waves of genocide refugees from the Ottoman Empire were expected every day.<sup>8</sup> These were Armenians who had escaped the massacres and deportations organized by the Turkish authorities in various parts of the Ottoman Empire. According to Armenian Genocide scholar Taner Akçam, the first deportations of Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire began in February 1915,<sup>9</sup> and gained momentum in the months that followed. As historian Ronald Suny has explained, “Deportations ostensibly taken for military reasons rapidly radicalized monstrously into an opportunity to rid Anatolia once and for all of those peoples perceived to be an imminent existential threat to the future of the empire.”<sup>10</sup> The nation-wide deportation and annihilation of Armenians began in April–May 1915 and continued during the entire period of the Great War.

The official response of the Russian Empire to the horrifying developments both in the Ottoman Empire and on the Caucasus front was immediate condemnation. Russia’s joint declaration with Great Britain and France in May 1915 is perhaps one of the best-known documents of the time. The powers defined the atrocities against the Ottoman Armenians as a “crime against humanity” and promised to hold members of the Ottoman government and those “implicated in massacres personally responsible” for those crimes.<sup>11</sup> Yet, little is known about the role played by Sergey Sazonov,<sup>12</sup> the foreign minister of the Russian Empire, in drafting this declaration. Sazonov proposed public condemnation of the Ottoman government for the slaughter of its Armenian subjects, and engaged the British and French diplomats in this process. “The dynamic of internal reporting on the massacres [of Armenians] caused the Russian government to initiate the joint Allied note,”<sup>13</sup> Peter Holquist, an expert in Russian and modern European history, has explained.

A series of undertakings followed the joint declaration. Sazonov reflected on the massacres in his July 1915 speech to the State Duma. “Armenians suffer unprecedented persecution,” he emphasized.<sup>14</sup> The persecution and the refugee movement that ensued were tragic for the Armenian people and highly problematic for the Russian civil and especially military authorities, whose first goal was to win the war. Russian political and public figures not only protested Ottoman violence, but also pressed for relief work to confront this emergency situation.



**Sergey Sazonov, the foreign minister of the Russian Empire**

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## HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE BY RELIEF COMMITTEES AND ORGANIZATIONS

A number of committees and organizations were engaged in the Armenian refugee relief effort, among them the Committee of Her Highness Grand Duchess Tatiana Nikolaevna, the All-Russian Union of Towns, and the All-Russian Union of Zemstvos.<sup>15</sup> These organizations, along with the Russian Society of the Red Cross (RSRC) and national committees, including various Armenian benevolent organizations, participated in refugee assistance on the Caucasus front. Most of the Russian organizations were established as war relief committees to assist the wounded and sick on the frontlines. With the influx of hundreds of thousands of refugees into the interior of the Russian Empire, these institutions developed into refugee and orphan care organizations.<sup>16</sup>

The Tatiana Committee, established on Sept. 14, 1914, by Her Highness Grand Duchess Tatiana Nikolaevna, the daughter of Tsar Nicholas II, and chaired by State Senator Aleksei Neidgardt, was a major initiative.<sup>17</sup> Among the committee's main responsibilities were providing one-time financial support for refugees; assisting in repatriation or resettlement, as well as refugee registration; responding to inquiries from relatives; and arranging employment and housing assistance.

The state treasury supported the activities of the Tatiana Committee, and donations from various institutions, committees, and individual donors offered significant sums.<sup>18</sup> The committee also deployed the power of the press and placed appeals in newspapers to raise money. As a result, by April 20, 1915, it had raised 299,792 rubles and 57 kopeks (about \$150,000).<sup>19</sup> Acknowledging the potential of artistic events in promoting fundraising, the Tatiana Committee hosted charity concerts, auctions, performances, and exhibitions. A.I. Goremykina, the wife of the prime minister,<sup>20</sup> organized an arts night in Marinskii Palace on March 29, 1915, which was a great financial success. An auction of paintings by famous Russian artists brought the Tatiana Committee 25,000 rubles from that one event alone.<sup>21</sup>

The All-Russian Union of Towns was another major relief institution. Founded in August 1914, it quickly grew into a large organization with branches in a number of towns all over the

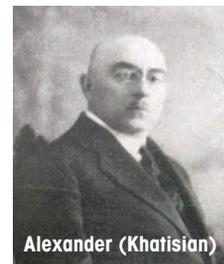


Grand Duchess Tatiana Nikolaevna

empire. Its main task was to aid the wounded and sick on the frontlines, and establish infirmaries, evacuation centers, meal stations, and hospitals.<sup>22</sup> With the escalation of war and opening of the Caucasus front, the union's responsibilities expanded to assisting refugees who were streaming into the Russian Empire in great numbers. A

branch, the Union of Caucasus Towns (later, the Caucasus Department), was founded in Tiflis in September 1914 under the auspices of the Caucasus viceroy.<sup>23</sup> All of the major towns in the region that joined the Caucasus branch soon opened infirmaries. The Special Central Bureau, consisting of Alexander Khatsov [Khatisian], the mayor of Tiflis, and the mayors of other major towns, was to coordinate the organization's activity. The Caucasus Department had several tasks: evacuation of the wounded and sick, transportation of the refugees from the frontline to the interior, establishment of meal stations, sanitary-medical assistance (particularly prevention of epidemics during humanitarian operations), and collection of donations (especially for its clothing depot).<sup>24</sup>

The All-Russian Union of Towns worked in cooperation with the All-Russian Union of Zemstvos, established on July 30, 1914.<sup>25</sup> By the middle of 1915, the Zemstvos Union had also turned to providing for the welfare of large numbers of refugees, many of whom remained in areas under military jurisdiction. The cooperation between these two unions lasted until 1916, when the Zemstvos Union ceased refugee operations because of strained relations with government officials.<sup>26</sup>



Alexander (Khatisian)

The Russian Society of the Red Cross was one of the most powerful and successful organizations in the Russian Empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. By summer 1914, some 39,000 people worked for the RSRC, including 1,000 physicians and 2,500 nurses.<sup>27</sup> The RSRC opened hospitals on the war fronts, including the Caucasus front, and established hundreds of infirmaries, soup kitchens, and evacuation centers. It operated sanitary trains and vehicle squads responsible for transporting the wounded, as well as disinfecting squads to prevent the spread of highly contagious diseases. The RSRC's Printing Bureau,<sup>28</sup> responsible for its publicity campaign, informed the entire population of the Russian Empire about the work of the organization, spurring a great number of donations. Some of these funds were used to assist the Armenian refugees on the Caucasus front and in the interior of the empire.

## GOVERNMENT COORDINATION OF REFUGEE ASSISTANCE

Refugee humanitarian activity and financial affairs fell to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and were coordinated by the Special Council for Refugees in Moscow (*Osoboe soveshchanie po ustroistvu bezhentsev*),<sup>29</sup> which was established on Aug. 30, 1915. The council disbursed funds for refugee relief (the initial plan allotted 25,000 rubles); oversaw the registration and relocation of refugees; assisted in the return of refugees to their place of permanent residence; arranged loans; ascertained the value of property refugees had been forced to

abandon; compensated refugees for losses incurred as a result of military action and for property that had been requisitioned; and addressed the spiritual and educational needs of refugees.<sup>30</sup>

The decree defining “refugee” status was issued on Aug. 30, 1915. “Individuals who left the localities threatened or already occupied by the enemy, or were deported from the military zones at the command of either military or civil authorities, as well as individuals originating from Russia’s enemy states, are to be identified as refugees,” it read. But “individuals deported from the military zones under police oversight” were not to be regarded as refugees.<sup>31</sup> All individuals identified as refugees were supposed to be issued a refugee card or book, which accorded them privileges (access to soup kitchens, financial and medical assistance). At the same time, the authorities recorded the travel routes and workplace changes of the male or female heads of refugee households. The Minister of Interior appointed General Tamamshev<sup>32</sup> plenipotentiary for the organization of relief efforts for the refugees on the Caucasus front; he served as the head of the Department for Refugees on the Caucasus Front until May 1917.

### CONDITION AND NUMBER OF REFUGEES ON THE CAUCASUS FRONT

As many as 120,000 to 150,000<sup>33</sup> refugees passed through the Ottoman-Russian border in summer and fall 1915. The Caucasus Department opened meal and tea stations, as well as medical stations on the Igdir–Etchmiadzin–Erivan–Yelenovka–Dilidjan–Aghstev<sup>34</sup> route for refugees coming from Turkey. The relief organizations aided the refugees transported to and sheltered in the Caucasus internal regions, particularly in the Erivan and Yelizavetpol provinces. When the war escalated, Armenian refugees on the frontline as well as in the regions occupied by Russian troops (in Igdir, Van, Bitlis, and later Erzurum) also received substantial assistance.<sup>35</sup>

Etchmiadzin, the Armenians’ religious center, became a major refugee town in the Caucasus. The number and condition of the refugees were alarming, and the need for assistance urgent. “Number of refugees [in Etchmiadzin] is 30,000; [daily] death toll is above 300. Five hundred corpses remain not buried. Healthy refugees have scattered in panic,” reported Khatsov, the head of the Caucasus Department, on Aug. 29, 1915.<sup>36</sup> Soviet economist and demographer Evgenii Volkov elucidated the dynamic of the refugee movement in the Caucasus, claiming that within the Caucasus viceroyalty on Jan. 1, 1916, there were 220,800 refugees; by May 1, 1916, that number had decreased to 179,200, then climbed to about 182,000 to 185,900 by June 1, finally peaking on Nov. 1, 1916, when there were 367,000 registered refugees in the Caucasus.<sup>37</sup> Because of the great number of refugees, Russian relief agencies welcomed assistance from Armenian local and national organizations, such as the Etchmiadzin Committee of Brotherly Aid, Armenian Central Committee of Tiflis, and the Armenian Red Cross Committee in Moscow.

### RUSSIAN MOTIVATIONS FOR RELIEF WORK AND PLANS FOR ARMENIAN REFUGEES

The Russian Empire had complex motivations for assisting Armenian refugees on the Caucasus front. Because of the variety of actors engaged, there were a variety of agendas. Reflecting on the origins of humanitarianism and the various motives behind humanitarian action—psychological, biological, and utilitarian, among others—scholar of international relations Michael Barnett asserts, “Humanitarianism has many mothers.”<sup>38</sup> My preliminary research suggests that in addition to the humanitarian sentiments and compassion felt in Russian governmental circles as well as among ordinary people, many other factors came together, such as the need to resolve the emergency caused by the refugee crisis in order to secure Russian military success; adherence to the policy towards other ethnic-religious groups in the empire during war; historic ties between Russians and Armenians; and the self-perception of the Russian Empire as the protector of all Christians in the region.

The Russian Empire had a vast Armenian population in Transcaucasia, spreading from the Kars region to the Black Sea coast and Tbilisi, and from the Caspian Sea and Baku to the Russo-Iranian border. The empire’s policy had not always been favorable towards Armenians; in fact, it fluctuated over time in response to economic, political, and military concerns, as well as geopolitical developments in the region. Changes in Russian policy, especially after 1912, led to the empire’s active involvement with the Armenian reform project, which aimed to improve the condition of Ottoman Armenians.<sup>39</sup>

According to diplomat and scholar Manoug Somakian, the shift in Russian policy towards the Armenian reforms occurred for several reasons. First, the Russian Empire planned to use the oppressive rule of Ottoman-Christian subjects in favor of its interests in the Straits. Then, too, it aimed to deploy the Armenian Question, and through Turkish Armenia control northwest Persia also. Russia’s pro-reform policy would regain<sup>40</sup> the loyalty of its Armenian subjects and prevent anarchy in Transcaucasia. And finally, if accomplished, this policy could compensate for the Russian Empire’s disastrous defeat in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 by success elsewhere.<sup>41</sup> Responding to developments in the Ottoman Empire and on the front, as well as unflagging appeals by Armenians to intervene to stop the violence, the tsar in 1914 assured the Armenian Catholicos that “a brilliant future awaited Armenians,” and that after the war “the Armenian Question will be resolved in accordance with Armenian expectations.”<sup>42</sup> The condition of Armenians, however, would deteriorate as the war unfolded.

To understand Russian motivations, we must plumb the Russian Empire’s plan for the refugees and the occupied eastern territories of the Ottoman Empire. Pointing to the colonization plan of Minister of Agriculture Krivoshein, the Armenian historian Avetis Harutyunyan argues that a Russian anti-Armenian position was obvious from the beginning of the war. Krivoshein presented his

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project to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in February 1915, and suggested settling Erzurum, Van, and Bitlis with Cossacks to promote the colonization of Western Armenia and to support the Caucasus 4th Army with food supplies.<sup>43</sup> Historian Peter Holquist, by contrast, argues that Krivoshein's project was only a suggestion, not state policy.<sup>44</sup> He believes that the Russian government did not have a coherent plan or project for those regions when the war was waged, and that annexation was not considered or confirmed officially at that point.<sup>45</sup> Manoug Somakian also mentions Russia's colonization projects, and the resettlement of Cossacks in the occupied areas. He raises another crucial question: Why did the Russian authorities in some instances prohibit the return of Armenian refugees to their homeland, now occupied by Russian troops? Somakian claims that the "intended policy was to settle Cossacks in the *vilayets* of Erzurum and Trabzon, and entry was to be prohibited to Armenians."<sup>46</sup> He emphasizes that permission to return to the valleys of Alashkert, Bayazid, and Diadin was granted only to native inhabitants who could show their right to property or land, or to conclude purchase contracts.<sup>47</sup> These preconditions and requirements made the return of refugees to their homes highly problematic and in many instances impossible. The majority had lost their documents and papers when they fled.

Holquist holds that urgent military interests, rather than an anti-Armenian policy or a colonization plan, shaped those decisions. "The need to supply the army, rather than to prepare the land for Russian colonization, lay behind the army's management of Armenian and other refugees,"<sup>48</sup> he argues. Elaborating further on this point, Holquist explains that the developments in the Russian-occupied eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire were no different from policy elsewhere at the time, and did not target Armenians alone.

Colonization had been a common policy in various regions of the Russian Empire for centuries. Speaking about Russian colonial practices and the use of Cossacks and Russian settlers in the Caucasus, Siberia, and Central Asia, genocide scholar Donald Bloxham explains that it "was a standard method of consolidating control of conquered regions."<sup>49</sup> Russian Empire historian Robert Geraci reflects on the tsarist plan to "clean" the north-east Caucasus area of Muslim tribes and to "replace them with Cossacks and other Russian settlers who would be reliably loyal."<sup>50</sup> Those practices, however, were typically directed against the non-Christian peoples of the Russian Empire or against those identified as "unreliable" subjects. But Armenians did not belong to either of those groups. Thus, addressing and analyzing Russian plans for Armenians both in Russia's interior and in the occupied territories of the Ottoman Empire will shed light on the motivations behind the Armenian relief campaign.



The remains of Armenian children drowned in the Black sea, Trabzon, 1916 (Photo: Armenian Genocide Museum and Institute, Collection of the 'Album of refugees 1915–1916')

## CONCLUSION

Exploring Russian response to the Armenian Genocide is key to analyzing refugee movement as a result of the genocide in the Ottoman Empire and the warfare on the Caucasus front during the Great War, and to scrutinizing the dynamics of the refugee crisis by delving into core questions of motivation, decision-making, and implementation of relief work by Russian civil and military authorities.

The Russian government defined the category "refugee" by law and assigned aid accordingly. The law, however, was adopted only in

August 1915, months after the flow of refugees into the empire's interior. The efficiency of assistance during that initial period, as well as the influence of the new regulations on relief work afterwards, calls for more research and analysis. The relationship between the relief agencies and the government, as well as between various agencies, also yearns for further study. The Tatiana Committee, supported by government circles and the nobility, appears to have enjoyed great advantages. Yet, the All-Russian Union of Towns and the All-Russian Union of Zemstvos, operating in the military zones, developed trusted relations with the military authorities. Scrutinizing these relations will provide a new perspective on the peculiarities of relief work on the Caucasus front.

Finally, regarding the motivations of the Russian authorities to launch such intensive humanitarian and relief work for the Armenian refugees, Canadian academic and former politician Michael Ignatieff holds, "Humanitarian action is not unmasked if it is shown to be the instrument of imperial power. Motives are not discredited just because they are shown to be mixed."<sup>51</sup>

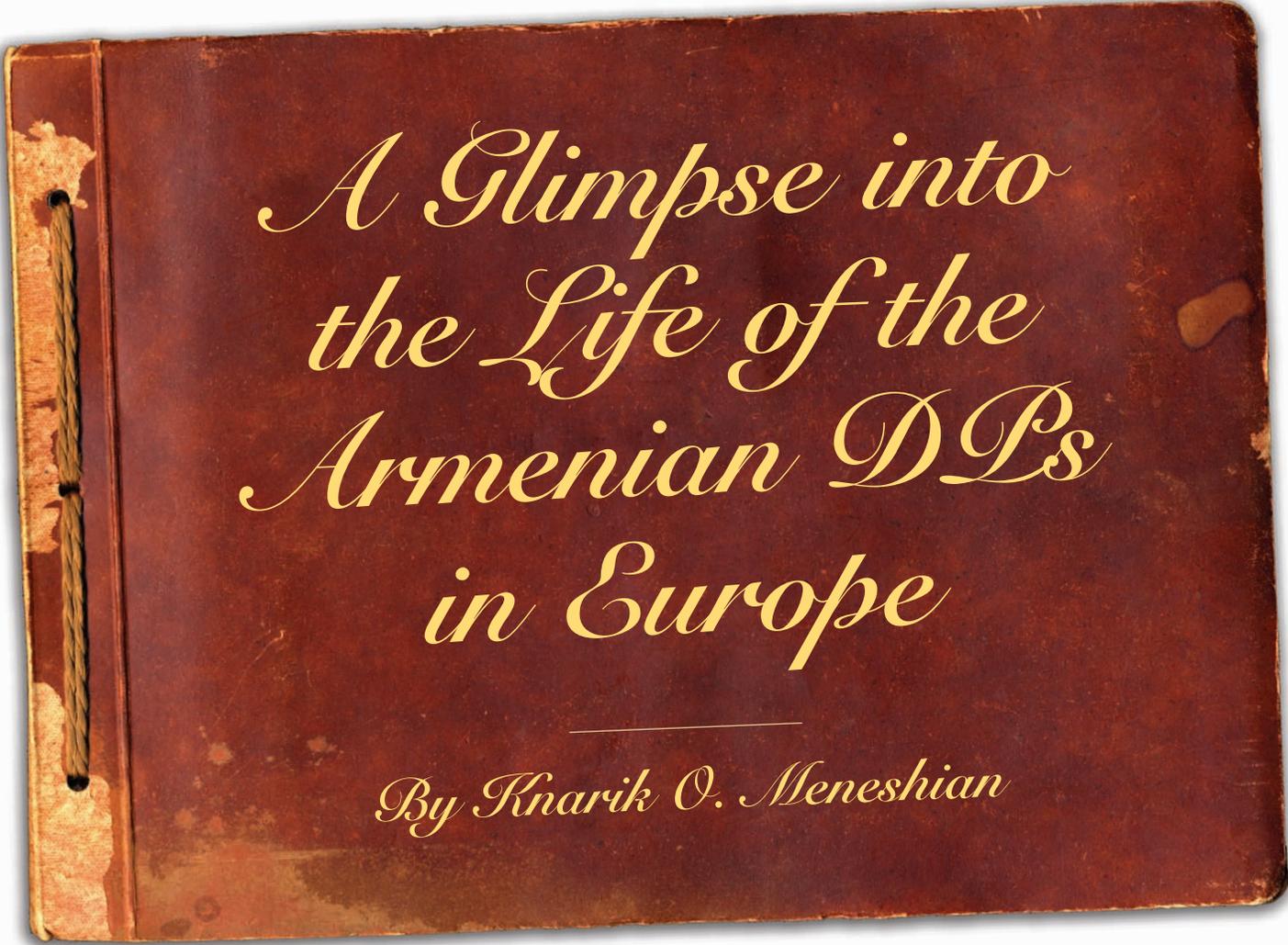
The Great War itself was a challenge to humanitarianism. The early years of the last century were marked by economic changes. New sources of capital investment in philanthropy shifted the contemporary understanding of philanthropy and humanitarianism. The concept of charity evolved into philanthropy, and emergency relief turned into long-term development programs. Elucidating the complexity of Russian humanitarianism during the Great War will prompt us to recontextualize the Russian Empire's policy and will shed new light on the meaning and nature of humanitarianism in the beginning of the 20th century. □

## NOTES

- 1 Excelsior, Paris, France, June 30, 1916.
- 2 For a history of the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire, see Taner Akcam, *Young Turks' Crime Against Humanity: the Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012; Vahakn N. Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus*, Providence, R.I.: Berghahn Books, 1995; Raymond Kevorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History*, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011.

This page is sponsored by Levon & Bethel Charkoudian (Mass.)—In memory of Peter and Jennie Bilezikian

- 3 Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914: The Ottoman Empire and the First World War*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 17.
- 4 Kevorkian, p. 220.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Yerevan, the capital of the current Republic of Armenia, was spelled Erivan in official documents of the Great War era.
- 7 *The Genocide of Armenians: The Responsibility of Turkey and the Obligations of the World Community. Documents and Commentary*, Yuri Barseghov, ed., vol. 1, Moscow 2002, p. 251 [Russian].
- 8 Reports submitted by representatives of various Russian organizations provide information about the number of refugees on the Caucasus front. On his visit to the Caucasus in August 1915, Kishkin, a member of the Head Committee of the All-Russian Union of Towns, reported the number of refugees at 150,000. He emphasized that it was the second time since the beginning of the war with the Ottoman Empire that Transcaucasia was seeing such a huge flow of refugees from Turkish Armenia; the first wave was a result of the Turkish troop offensive in December 1914, while the second came in July 1915, after the sudden retreat of Russian troops from the vilayet of Van (see *Bezheritsi i vyselemtsi. Otdel'nie ottiski iz No17 Izvestii Vserossiiskogo Soiuzu gorodov*, Moskva, 1915, pp. 83, 88). The report by Ionnesian, the commissioner of the Baku Committee for Refugee Relief, stated that by October 1915 in Erivan province there were up to 93,000 displaced persons, and 165,000 in Erivan and the other provinces together (see A.G. Ionnesian, *Polozhenie bezhentsev v Aleksandropol'skom raione*, Baku, 1915). Peter Gatrell mentions that by the beginning of 1916, at least 105,000 ex-Ottoman Armenians had sought refuge in Erivan alone and that the total number of Armenian refugees tripled during the following 12 months (see Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005, p. 26).
- 9 Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006, pp. 145-46.
- 10 Ronald Grigor Suny, *'They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else': A History of the Armenian Genocide*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015, p. 245.
- 11 Kevorkian, p. 763.
- 12 Sergey Sazonov was the Russian Empire's Minister of Foreign Affairs from November 1910 to July 1916.
- 13 Peter Holquist, "The Origins of 'Crimes Against Humanity': the Russian Empire, International Law, and the 1915 Note on the Armenian Genocide," unpublished paper, presented at the conference, "From the Armenian Genocide to the Holocaust: The Foundations of Modern Human Rights," University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich., April 2-4, 2015.
- 14 *The Genocide of Armenians*, Yuri Barseghov, ed., p. 249.
- 15 A *zemstvo* was an elected provincial or district council established in most provinces of Russia by Alexander II in 1864 as part of his reform policy.
- 16 See Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005; *Russian local government during the war and the Union of zemstvos*, T.I. Polner, et al., New Haven: Yale University, 1930.
- 17 GARF (Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii), f. 651 (Tatiana Nikolaevna Romanova), op. 1, d. 39, 1.11.
- 18 Bakhurin Yu, "Tatianinskii Komitet: 1914-1917," *Starii Tseikhgauz*, no. 52 (no. 2/2013), p. 48.
- 19 GARF, f. 651, op. 1, d. 39, p. 1.
- 20 Ivan Goremykin was prime minister of the Russian Empire from February 1914 to February 1916.
- 21 GARF, f. 651, op. 1, d. 39, p. 1.
- 22 *Kratkii otchet o deyatel'nosti Kavkazskogo otdela Vserossiiskogo soiuzu gorodov pomoshchi bol'nym i ranennym voynam* (Tiflis, 1915), p. 1.
- 23 The union was incorporated into the Caucasian department of the All-Russian Union of Towns on Nov. 9, 1914.
- 24 *Kratkii otchet o deyatel'nosti Kavkazskogo otdela Vserossiiskogo soiuzu*, pp. 18, 37-39.
- 25 Gatrell, p. 235.
- 26 GARF, f. 5913 (Astrov Nikolai Ivanovich), op. 1, d. 2a, p. 352.
- 27 O.V. Chistiakov, "Rossiiskoe Obschestvo Krasnogo Kresta vo vremia Pervoi mirovoi voyny," *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, no. 12 (2009), p. 67.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 *Rukovodiashchie polozheniia po ustroistvu bezhentsev*, Petrograd, 1916, p. 1.
- 30 *Zakony i raspolozheniia o bezhentsakh*, Vypusk 1, Moskva, 1916, p. 5.
- 31 *Zakony i raspolozheniia o bezhentsakh*, Vypusk 1, Moskva, 1916, p. 2.
- 32 Avetis Harutyunyan, "Hai gaghtakanutian teghabashkhume yev ognutian kazmakerpume Arevmtian Haiastanum Mets Yegherni tarinerin," *Etchmiadzin*, no. 4, Etchmiadzin, April 2002, p. 86.
- 33 *Kratkie svedeniia o polozhenii bezhentsev na Kavkaze i okazannoi im Soiuзом gorodov pomoshchi za vremia s 20 sentiabria po 1 noyabria 1915g.* (Tiflis, 1915), p. 11.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Harutyunyan, pp. 81-91.
- 36 As quoted in *Bezheritsi i vyselemtsi. Otdel'nie ottiski iz no. 17*, p. 91.
- 37 E.Z. Volkov, *Dinamika narodonaseleniia SSSR za 80 let*, Moskva-Leningrad, 1930, p. 70.
- 38 Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011. For approaches to motivations for humanitarian action and intervention, see also Michael Ignatieff, *Empire Lite: Nation Building in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan*, London: Vintage, 2003; Weiss, Thomas, *Humanitarian Intervention: Ideas in Action*, Cambridge; Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2007; Wheeler, Nicholas J., *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- 39 For the Armenian reform project, see Andre Mandelstam, *Le sort de l'Empire Ottoman*, Paris, 1917; Roderic H. Davison, "The Armenian Crisis, 1912-1914" in the *American Historical Review*, vol. 53, no. 3, April 1948, pp. 481-505.
- 40 The oppressive Russian stance towards Armenian political organizations in the early 1900's had compromised the Transcaucasian Armenians' trust in imperial Russia's policy.
- 41 Manoug J. Somakian, *Empires in Conflict: Armenia and the Great Powers, 1895-1920*, London; New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 1995, pp. 46-48.
- 42 Suny, p. 230.
- 43 Avetis Harutyunyan, "Tsarizmi gaghutain kaghakakanutiune Arevmtian Haiastanum (1914-17)," *Baika Armenian Monthly*, v. IV, no. 5-6 (May-June 1996), p. 31.
- 44 Peter Holquist, "The Politics and Practice of the Russian Occupation of Armenia, 1915 - February 1917," in Suny et al. (eds.), *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the end of the Ottoman Empire*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 155.
- 45 Holquist, p. 154.
- 46 Somakian, p. 98.
- 47 Ibid, p. 109.
- 48 Holquist, p. 168.
- 49 Donald Bloxham, "Internal Colonization, Inter-imperial Conflict and the Armenian Genocide," *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History*, ed. by Moses, Dirk, New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008, p. 331.
- 50 Robert Geraci, "Genocidal Impulses and Fantasies in Imperial Russia," *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History*, ed. by Moses, Dirk, New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008, p. 347.
- 51 Michael Ignatieff, *Empire Lite: Nation Building in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan*, London: Vintage, 2003, p. 23.
- 52 For a history of humanitarianism, see Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011; Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918-1924*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014; Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012; *Humanitarian Intervention: A History*, ed. by Simms, Brendan & Trim, D.J.B. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011; Keith David Watenpaugh, *Bread From Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015.



# *A Glimpse into the Life of the Armenian DPs in Europe*

*By Knarik O. Meneshian*

**T**his story—of Armenian Displaced Persons (DP) in Europe during and after World War II—began to take shape with an old photo I have of three men pictured in the Armenian section at the Weidmannsdorf Lager C of the DP Camp in Klagenfurt, Austria.

One of them is my father. Although the three men were POWs and slave laborers, their life in the camp—even with the meager food rations and harsh living conditions—was a haven for them and the other Armenians in the DP Camps in Germany and Austria. My father's story offers a glimpse into the life and times of these Armenians who eventually, through the assistance of the American National Committee to Aid Homeless Armenians (ANCHA), made America, and other countries, their home—far from the land and loved ones they had been forced to leave.

The Communist takeover in Armenia and in the other countries that became a part of Stalin's "Utopia" drastically altered the life of the people. No longer were

they allowed to own homes, businesses, or belongings of any kind. To make matters worse, taxes were increased to such an extent that efforts to pay them often times became impossible. In this manner, not only was the upper class destroyed, but also the middle class. As a result, a three-class-system was instated. The most favored class, the ones who had nothing, mainly the laborers and shepherds, were considered "a cornerstone of socialism." The next class, those who owned a few goats and chickens and a couple of cows, were considered a "half-hearted ally of socialism." Those who were slightly better off than the first two classes were considered the "enemies of socialism." To maintain Soviet "equality," the rich and middle classes were exiled to Siberia, and those who were opposed to collectivism "were either sent to prison or never heard from again." In this new and *'The Happy Life' Under Stalin's Sun*, ('Yerjaneek Gyankuh' Staleenyany Arevee Dak, *Hairenik Amsagir*, Boston, Mass., January to December, 1966), my father, Suren Hovhannesian, describes his experiences and the political situation during the years 1920–45. He

also describes his life as a political prisoner in Stalin's Siberian and other prisons throughout the vastness that was the Soviet Union, as well as his life as a POW, slave laborer, and DP in Europe.

Born in Armenia's rugged Syunik region and orphaned as a young child, Hovhannesian grew up to become a teacher, writer, and political activist during Stalin's reign. He and other young men who disagreed with this new "equality" and the censorship of a person's every word and movement, the spying, even in the prisons, on one another, as well as the eradication of rights and the confiscation of property, were arrested as "enemies of the state" for writing and distributing pamphlets criticizing the new regime. Hovhannesian spent years in Siberia's political prison, as well as in prisons in Tiflis (Tbilisi), Tashkent, Samarkand, Ufa, Alma-Ata, and Moscow.

How the prisoners, both men and women, survived the horrific and nightmarish conditions in those hellholes is impossible to comprehend, other than to believe that this was a most ruthless testing ground for the "survival of the fittest." The conditions in the prisons were inhuman—overcrowded and disease ridden. Food

and water were scarce, and there was a lack of toilet facilities, but there was always an abundance of torture. Many died in those dark and dank hellholes. During the summer months, "thousands of insects were everywhere," which made the conditions even more unbearable. The prisoners subsisted on one meal a day, which consisted of no more than two small slices of half-baked bread and warm water with a few slivers of cabbage in it. Sometimes, they were given salted fish bones.

"From 1930 to 1935, millions of civilians were murdered, deported, or exiled to die in the frozen tundra of Siberia. Their only 'crime' being that they owned a cow, or a couple of goats, or a house," describes Hovhannesian. The prisoners were from all walks of life. Some were intellectuals; some were villagers. They were charged with having taken part in "anti-revolutionary activities," purportedly in support of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF). In numerous instances, the Cheka (Soviet Secret Police) set up elaborate plots through which they could test the loyalty of the people, especially that of the rural folk. In an attempt to deceive the people even further, they also spread false rumors. Because of their devious undercover activities, the Cheka collected "evidence" that resulted in the imprisonment of countless innocent people.

Among the countless innocents was an Armenian from America who had left his comfortable and secure life behind and moved his thriving furniture business to Yerevan in 1925–26 in the hopes of assisting his parental homeland. A few years after setting up his business, his property and assets were seized, and he was thrown into prison. There, like many others, he languished in his overcrowded cell and became nothing more than a breathing skeleton who sat motionless day and night, while lice

swarmed up and down his body, and

in and out of his long hair and beard, which had grown together into a tangled mess. His clothes, which long ago had disintegrated into shreds of filthy, rotten rags, were all that was left of his worldly possessions. He had become an unrecognizable human being, an apparition with only his eyes offering any expression of life.

Another innocent Armenian prisoner, who was originally from Turkish-occupied Armenia, had been beaten so severely that his eye had to be removed because the Cheka had smashed it. From one village, 120 men had

**Clockwise from top left: Armenian DPs with wives and children in the Klagenfurt DP camp. My father in the front bottom of photo holding my playmate and I; my mother at the very top.**

**My parents' wedding day, Klagenfurt DP camp.**

**The Armenian section of the Klagenfurt DP camp. My mother and father standing behind the group of Armenian men.**



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been gathered and thrown into prison; their crime was “displaying their dismay” of the Soviet regime. In his memoir, my father recalls an event that took place in the women’s cell, across from the men’s. He describes the long and agonizing cries of a woman in labor followed by the cries of a newborn. The infant’s cries could be heard day and night. Then, suddenly, a week later, there was silence. No one ever found out what happened to the mother and child: Were they dead or taken away?

My father wrote about many other situations. He described how the prisons were so overcrowded that it was impossible for the inmates, who slept on the ground, to sleep on their backs. They had to either sleep on their sides or sit with their backs against something or someone. A single bucket was assigned to each cell for the purpose of relieving oneself. Every morning that bucket would be taken away, and a bucket of water would be brought in. That water was to be used for both drinking and washing up. The precious water that was consumed by many was reserved for drinking only. No one even thought of washing themselves. Shuffled from one prison to another, prisoners never knew when they would be gathered and shot to death.

One day years ago, when my father and I were talking about his life, as we did from time to time, he explained, “My prison escape in Siberia happened by chance. I felt that I was on the verge of dying and decided that it was better to die escaping than to die rotting in prison. I waited and looked around as I wondered how I was going to escape. Only one or two out of a thousand were able to escape from Stalin’s prisons—Stalin, ‘the father of all the people!’ Then, one day, the guards in the area where I was assigned to work were not at their stations. It was their ‘off day’ and in their place was a skeleton crew. In such an instance, the guards, occasionally, would be somewhere else. In such a situation, one never knew when a guard would return—perhaps in a second or two, perhaps in a minute or two. Suddenly, a tiny voice within me screamed, ‘If you are going to escape, do it now! You will never have a better chance!’ I obeyed that little voice in me and disappeared into the Siberian landscape.”

Whenever my father and I talked about his life in Stalin’s prisons, he would always say with profound thankfulness, as tears welled in his large, green eyes, “If it were not for the courage and kindness of the Russian people—the country folk—I would never have succeeded, or survived. At great risk to themselves and their families, they hid me in their homes long enough for me to warm up and eat the food they graciously offered. After quickly eating, they would say, ‘Please hurry... any moment someone can come! There are eyes and ears everywhere!’ As I would quickly leave—for in no way did I want to endanger their lives any more than I already had—with a bow of my head, I would always express my deep gratitude to them.



**Top: My mother and I at the Klagenfurt camp, Lager C.**

**Left: My father and I in front of the Funkerkaserne near Stuttgart, Germany**

They in turn, in kind and gentle voices would say, ‘God be with you!’ Their meager rations consisted of bread and watery cabbage soup. In their eyes, in the tone of

their voices, and the clenching of their jaws, they made it known that they despised the regime that had reduced them to muzzled, shackled, starving slaves. They wanted no part of Stalin’s ‘Utopia.’ They knew I was not Russian, for unlike most of them I had black hair and an olive complexion. They knew that the tall, gaunt man in rags standing before them was an Armenian. All of those courageous and selfless souls—from the Russian country folk to the young Russian soldier and the Cheka officer—at great risk to themselves helped me, a stranger, a fugitive they knew nothing about other than I was in dire need. I will never forget their words, ‘God be with you,’ which I believe guided me to freedom.”

After his flight from captivity, my father lived under an assumed name and for a while, as he described, “a relatively peaceful existence,” though he always looked over his shoulder and carefully measured his every spoken word. He explained, “In early 1942, with the onset of World War II, I was called to duty in the Soviet Army. Later in the year, I was assigned to a battalion combating the Germans. There were fierce ground and air bombardments, and we were attacked on all sides. We were ordered by our commander not to retreat without orders, no matter what. Most of the men in my division were killed; those that survived were severely injured. The Germans took us captive in 1942. We became POWs and slave laborers. We worked in various places—Dalmatia, Germany, Poland, Ukraine. We worked 12-18 hours a day, either near shipyards where we took ammunition to the German ships, or on the railroads where we unloaded wood and coal, or sometimes unloaded ammunition, from the train cars. The work was hazardous. Above, the Allied planes flew. We even worked in the forest, where they stored barrels of gasoline. One night, the bombers targeted us, and many perished,

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among them 15-out-of-30 Armenians and 40 other prisoners I was working with. In Poland, which had a great many war prisoners of all nationalities, I remember well the kindness of the Polish people; they gave us food to eat, even money.”

“In May of 1945, the Germans took us to Klagenfurt, Austria, and surrendered us to the British. Not long after, the British told us to report to the Red Army barracks for repatriation. We were warned that if we did not do so, they would forcibly surrender us. As a member of the Red Army in the early years of World War II, I witnessed

*The Communist takeover in Armenia and in the other countries that became a part of Stalin’s ‘Utopia’ drastically altered the life of the people. No longer were they allowed to own homes, businesses, or belongings of any kind.*

with my own eyes the horrific brutality of the Soviet authorities towards Red Army soldiers who had fallen captive to the Germans. These soldiers, who had defied death to escape German detention to make their way back to the Red Army lines, met with a death sentence upon their return. Other Red Army soldiers, however, deserted and exerted effort to be captured by the Germans in order not to continue fighting for Stalin’s tyranny. These deserters were in the hundreds of thousands. Facing the threat that I would be returned, without a doubt, to the Soviet Union—the place from which I had escaped under the most harrowing conditions—left me in an indescribable panic, for I knew that in no uncertain terms a death sentence awaited me, as it did my fellow Armenians and other POWs. Upon hearing this order, I quickly fled, obtained civilian clothing, and falsified my citizenship, as did many others, to prevent, by any means possible, being returned to the Soviets, and went to a DP Camp. The DP camps were under the auspices of UNRRA [the United Nations Refugee and Relief Administration]. I was now a Displaced Person—truly a man without a country, just like countless others. Words cannot adequately express the constant hardships the DPs suffered—the extreme difficulties of daily survival and the constant terror and anticipation of forced repatriation to the Soviet Union at any moment.”

Over the years, I had come to realize that my father was a born reporter and writer from the stories he told me of his life, including those during Armenia’s First Republic. He was always asking questions then, and if the conditions were unsafe or impossible for writing, he would “write notes” in his memory. Even when he was in the Soviet prisons, he asked questions of fellow prisoners. During his escape, he asked the people he met, and those who helped him, questions. Sometimes, my father would talk to me about the conditions of the DP camps in Germany and Austria after the war. He would explain, while every so often gently shaking his head, that the camps were filled with refugees—people who had been forcibly

taken from or fled the Soviet Union. All of them lived in terror that at any moment they would be returned to where they came from. The camps—wooden barracks—were overcrowded and teeming with bedbugs, fleas, and lice. Filth and illness were everywhere. Food and proper clothing were scarce, and the barracks were drafty and cold. There were no blankets, mattresses, or even pillows on the crudely built double-decker beds. Men, women, and children were mixed together. Despite the appalling living conditions, the people were content and thankful, just as long as they did not have to return to the Soviet Union.

After the war, my father worked for a few years as a laborer in several European countries. In Klagenfurt, Austria, he succumbed to tuberculosis and was hospitalized. That is where he met my mother, a nurse assigned to his care. When they eventually married (he was in his forties, and she was in her twenties), she joined him in the DP camp. Together my parents, and other Armenians and their brides, most of whom were Austrian, made the camp their home. To this home, the women brought beauty and cheerfulness in glasses filled with wildflowers they would pick. During those difficult days, people who did not work were not given food coupons. This applied to children and babies as well.

After I was born, and at the age for regular food, my parents shared their meager rations with me. One Christmas, though, my parents managed to get me a priceless gift—an orange! At times, because of illness due to the harsh and difficult living conditions and lack of food, my parents could not always care for me, so arrangements were made for me to be cared for by others—families, kind strangers in Austria, in France, in Germany. Our camp was situated in the British zone. The Allied Agreement had divided Austria into four zones: the British, the French, the U.S., and the Soviet. Living conditions, as mentioned, were extremely difficult, and the people suffered from severe malnutrition and many diseases. They were dusted with DDT in order to stop the spread of typhus fever. My mother contracted the dreaded disease. Eventually, we and other Armenians were moved to the Funkerkaserne (Funker Bunker) near Stuttgart, Germany.

All along, during the war, certain members of the ARF, among them Drastamad Kanayan (Dro) and Misak Torlakian, were active in rescuing Armenian POWs and civilians of the Soviet Union and Europe from German captivity. Kanayan was an Armenian military commander and served as the defense minister of Armenia in 1920, during the country’s brief independence. Torlakian, who witnessed and knew first-hand the sufferings of the Armenians, for his family had been killed in the 1915 genocide, empathized with the people they were rescuing. In 1921, Torlakian was found innocent by a British court in Constantinople for assassinating Azerbaijan’s interior minister, Behbut Khan Jivanshir. The minister had ordered the massacre of the Armenians in Baku and Karabagh/Artsakh. Misak Torlakian’s book, *Oreroos Hed* (Horizon Publication, Los

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**Clockwise from top:**

**In Klagenfurt. Three Armenian men, including my father (right, seated).**

**The Armenian All Saints Church Hall, Chicago. Flowers and an appreciation dinner to honor and thank George Mardikian.**

**Our new home in Chicago. Sharing a meal of Thanksgiving with fellow Hayastantsi families.**



Angeles, Calif., 1953) describes the plight of the Armenian POWs and the DPs, and life in the DP camps.

In his book, Torlakian explains how he and Dro moved freely throughout Germany, Romania, Ukraine, and Crimea searching for and rescuing Armenian POWs and civilians. For example, the two men, along with other comrades, rescued 40 Armenians from a POW camp near Bucharest. In Simferopol, Crimea, the Germans released a group of 200 Armenian POWs and civilians to them. In Feodosia, Crimea, the men rescued 60 POWs; in Kerch, Crimea, they rescued 350 Armenian POWs—all released to them; in Germany, 400 Armenians from Greece were rescued by the men, as were many others in German and Austrian camps. A total of 3,000 Armenians from German-occupied territories were rescued by Dro, Torlakian, and their comrades, and brought to safety.

In his book, Torlakian also explains that the Germans deported mainly POWs and unemployed civilians to work as slave laborers in Germany. To avoid the deportation of unemployed Armenians in Crimea, Dro's men opened a bakery, which produced enough

bread to feed the Armenians. They also opened a barbershop, a sewing shop, a shoe shop, a coffee house, a grocery store, a restaurant, and other businesses totaling 16 in all. Part of the income from these businesses was donated to the local church and school, and a certain amount was used to entertain the German officers.

Eventually, Dro, Torlakian, and others who aided in the rescue efforts were able to draw the attention of American officials to the desperate situation facing Soviet Armenians and the aggressive and forceful methods being used by the Soviets to return them to the Soviet Union. As a result, in October 1945, the Americans allocated the former German dilapidated Funkerkaserne military camp near Stuttgart, Germany, for use by the Armenians.

Torlakian describes in detail the life of the DPs at the Stuttgart camp, and the amazing resolve and industriousness of these battered refugees in cleaning and repairing, within a short period, the dilapidated military barracks that was to be their home for several years. In 3 months' time, for example, all 480 broken windows at the Funkerkaserne were repaired. The American personnel were

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amazed by the transformation. Before the end of 1945, there were 1,413 people of all ages at the camp. Classrooms were set up for 250 students up to the 7th grade. A hall for lectures, theatrical presentations, and orchestral performances was prepared. A church was established, and the Very Reverend Vahan Asgarian, ordained in Etchmiadzin, Armenia, was the camp priest. Occasionally, Archimandrite Grigor Shahlamian, the prelate of Germany, visited the camp. After Asgarian's death in 1948, Shahlamian also became the camp clergyman.

The camp community opened carpenter, barber, shoe, and radio-repair shops. The camp administration opened a driving school, set up a needle-works class, and built bathhouses and public restrooms. They established a printing press and published papers. Those who were physicians established a medical clinic. In early 1948, a chapter of the Armenian Relief Society (ARS) and a boy's scouts group were formed. At the beginning, American soldiers policed the camp, but after one month, this responsibility was turned over to the Armenians. Disagreements and problems were resolved at the camp by a judicial group, which was elected by the camp population. The camp had its constitution approved by the camp population and verified by the American authorities. By the end of 1951, there were 78 weddings and 142 births (my baby brother among them).

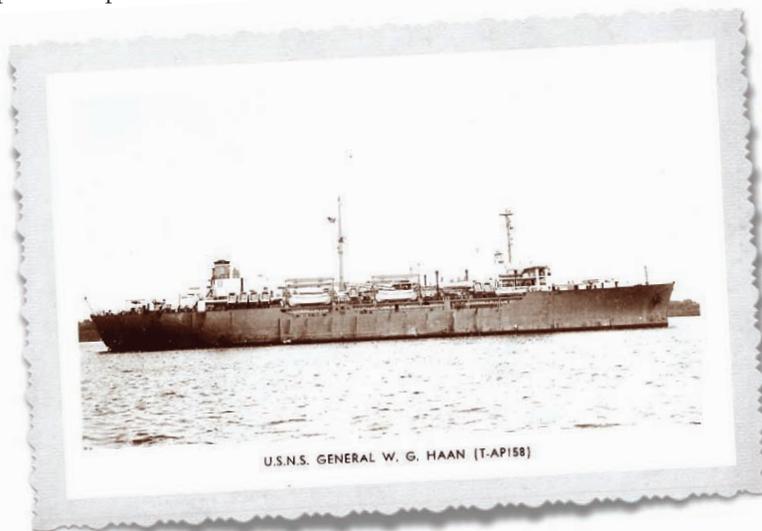
In 1947, George Mardikian, a San Francisco restaurateur, himself a Genocide survivor, seeing the plight of the Armenian DPs in Europe and learning of the many who committed suicide rather than allowing themselves to be returned to the Soviets, determined—along with Suren Saroyan and other compassionate and generous Armenians—to aid these unfortunates. In the book *Our Brothers' Keepers: The American National Committee to Aid Homeless Armenians (ANCHA)* (The Armenian Apostolic Church of America, N.Y., 2012), Prof. Hratch Zadoian describes the founding of the ANCHA, its work, the selfless people and organizations who made it a success, and the extraordinary efforts that went into aiding the Armenians in the DP camps of Europe.

Zadoian poignantly describes the resilient nature of the Armenians who had experienced Stalin's "Utopia" and their eventual placement in Europe's DP camps. A number of them, over time, were taken to the Funkerkaserne. There, as described earlier in Torlakian's account, the Armenians not only cleaned and repaired the camp, but also transformed it into a mini Armenian city. "On a sub-freezing December day, Mardikian was taken to the Funkerkaserne, a former German army barracks that was bombed during the war and now served as an Armenian DP camp," writes

Zadoian. "There Mardikian found some 2,000 Armenians: children and the elderly, workers, artists, peasants, musicians, academics, craftsmen, actors, doctors, housewives, merchants, and writers..." After outlining the accomplishments of the people in the camp, the piece continues: "In sum, they had everything that could be had with creativity and hard work under the circumstances. But they had no future and no reason for hope."

With the assistance of the ANCHA, my parents, brother, and I, along with other DPs, boarded the U.S.N.S. General W. G. Hann in the fall of 1951 for the United States of America. According to my parents, the ocean voyage was difficult. The weather was fierce and cold, and as a result, many people became ill. Since it was a military

ship, the passengers were in charge of cooking, serving, cleaning, and looking after the sick. All able-bodied passengers were assigned specific tasks on a rotating basis. Our destination, after reaching New York, was Chicago. In Chicago, representatives of the local ARS chapter met us at the bus stop, put us in a cab, and handed my father the address of our new home: the second floor of a two-flat apartment building owned by an Armenian family. Once again, like the birds in springtime, we would make a new home—

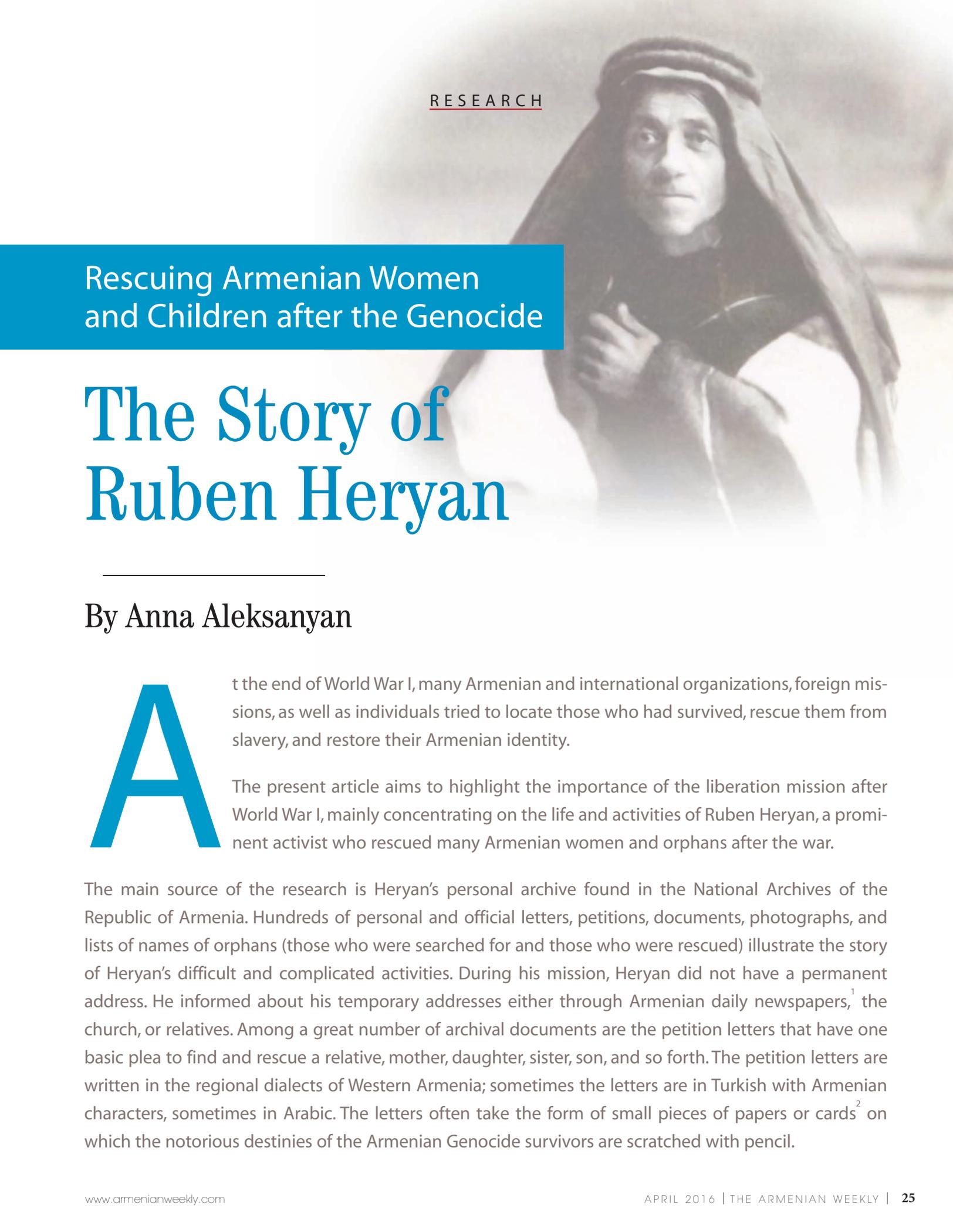


**Our departure from Germany on the U.S.N.S. General W.G. Hann.**

finally, a peaceful and permanent one in America. In America, where there were Armenian communities, churches, centers, and schools; where the DPs, forever longing for their Armenian homeland, could join fellow Armenians from other places in making a "homeland" away from the homeland.

The World War II Armenian DPs in Chicago—one of the many "bereft and endangered DPs of the 40s," Zadoian writes—never forgot what George Mardikian and the other selfless people had done for them. A few years after our arrival, Mardikian visited Chicago. The DPs welcomed him at a dinner in the basement of the Armenian All Saints Apostolic Church (then located on LeMoyné Street in Chicago) with open arms and tears of profound thankfulness. A bouquet of flowers was presented to him.

A few years after Mardikian's visit, Misak Torlakian came to Chicago to visit and spend time with the DPs. He was a soft-spoken, quiet man with a gentle smile and sorrowful eyes. During his visit, my father, the Eastern Armenian, and Torlakian, the Western Armenian, often played chess together for hours, at times not uttering a word—just thinking and playing. The room would fill with cigarette smoke and we children dared not interrupt the men or make any noise. When the chess games were over, they would sit down to a typical *Hayastantsi* meal, and then quietly talk well into the night. □



Rescuing Armenian Women  
and Children after the Genocide

# The Story of Ruben Heryan

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By Anna Aleksanyan

A

t the end of World War I, many Armenian and international organizations, foreign missions, as well as individuals tried to locate those who had survived, rescue them from slavery, and restore their Armenian identity.

The present article aims to highlight the importance of the liberation mission after World War I, mainly concentrating on the life and activities of Ruben Heryan, a prominent activist who rescued many Armenian women and orphans after the war.

The main source of the research is Heryan's personal archive found in the National Archives of the Republic of Armenia. Hundreds of personal and official letters, petitions, documents, photographs, and lists of names of orphans (those who were searched for and those who were rescued) illustrate the story of Heryan's difficult and complicated activities. During his mission, Heryan did not have a permanent address. He informed about his temporary addresses either through Armenian daily newspapers,<sup>1</sup> the church, or relatives. Among a great number of archival documents are the petition letters that have one basic plea to find and rescue a relative, mother, daughter, sister, son, and so forth. The petition letters are written in the regional dialects of Western Armenia; sometimes the letters are in Turkish with Armenian characters, sometimes in Arabic. The letters often take the form of small pieces of papers or cards<sup>2</sup> on which the notorious destinies of the Armenian Genocide survivors are scratched with pencil.

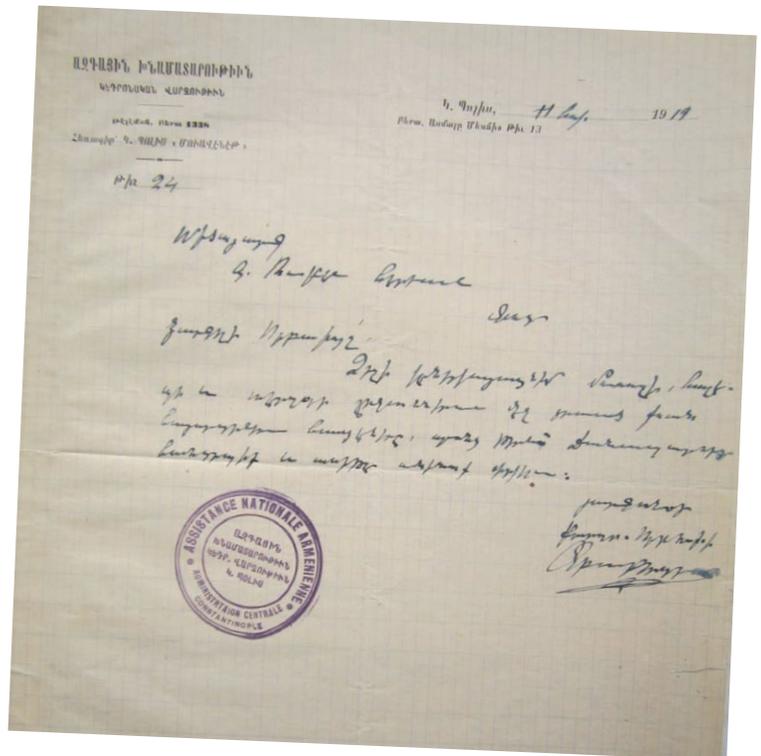
### HERYAN WAS BORN IN 1869 IN TOKAT (EVDOKIA).

In 1883, after graduating from the national seminary of Tokat, he moved to Constantinople, then to New York, where he started his own business. While living in Constantinople, Heryan was a member of the Social Democrat Hunchakian Party; he later became a member of the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party. In New York, he supported the same party and was engaged in solving national issues, and became one of the founders of *Krtasirats Miutyun* (Educational Society).<sup>3</sup>

In 1914, when World War I began, Heryan was already accomplished enough in his business and enjoyed a good reputation among Armenian Americans. Soon after learning about the Armenian Genocide, he left everything behind and, together with the Armenian volunteers, moved to the Near East where he joined the Armenian Legion. In summer 1918, when the Armenian Legion volunteers were transferred to the war front of Palestine, Heryan was not sent because of his age. He was appointed as a guard of a hospital near Cairo. Although Heryan took care of wounded Armenian volunteers and French soldiers, it is apparent in his letters that he wished he had been younger—to join the legionnaires in support of the salvation of his people and homeland.<sup>4</sup> This was his main reason to become one of the most dedicated figures who took every opportunity after the ceasefire to rescue Armenian women and children from Muslim slavery.

Heryan was a member of the Armenian Relief Committee of Mesopotamia (ARCM) headed by Archbishop Moushegh Seropian. The archbishop authorized Heryan to safely transfer Armenian survivors from Der Zor to Aleppo. When Heryan reached Der Zor, he understood that the transfer of Armenians was not that complicated, that it was much more difficult and important to rescue those Armenians who were being held captive in Muslim houses in the desert. Seropian agreed and asked his French commander in Adana to give Heryan permission to go to Der Zor and embark on the rescue mission. Heryan was working mostly in Gezireh, Shamatyeh, Kheryta, Terban, Hawija, Meyadine, Aboukemal, Jibour, and Shawee, which were located around Der Zor. “Der Zor and Liberation are synonymous words for me,” wrote another member of ARCM, Mardiros Kouyoumdjian. “In order to liberate 12 underage Armenian girls from the hands of a very influential chief of a tribe and deliver them to legitimate claimants, we had to pay a sum of 1800 gold only as a present, without taking into account the heavy expenditure we had to undergo for the success of this undertaking, which is so closely related to the future regeneration of Armenia.”<sup>5</sup>

Often, Armenian and international organizations had many issues between each other for political reasons, but mainly, each tried to find solutions by supporting various parties that did not see eye to eye. Nevertheless, Heryan was one of the unique figures who worked with almost all activists in order to carry out his mission. The result was what mattered to him. Heryan collaborated with the English and French military authorities, the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), the Armenian National Union, the

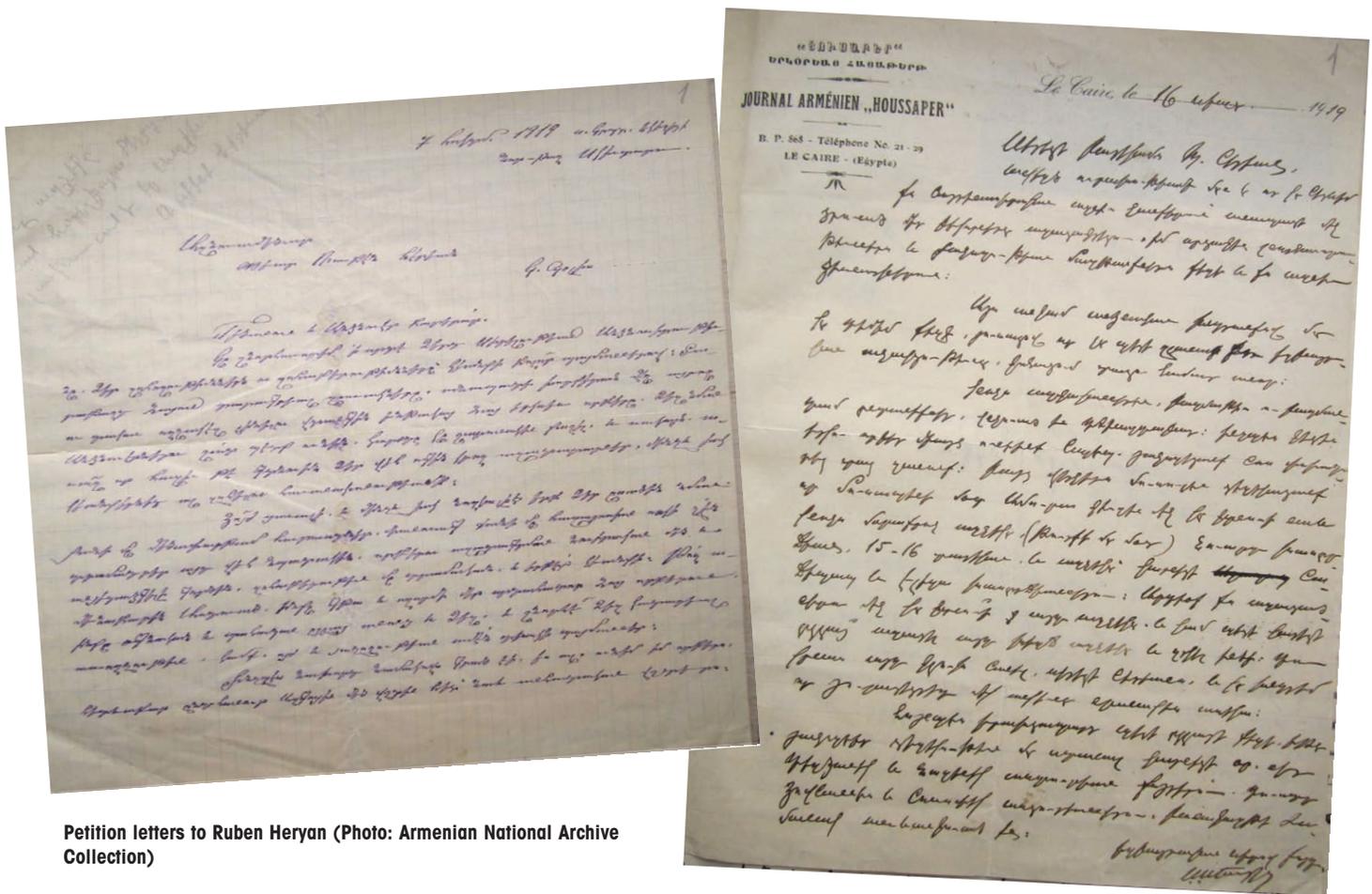


Letter from 'Azgayin Khnamatarutyun' to Ruben Heryan (Photo: Armenian National Archive Collection)

Patriarchate of Constantinople, the representatives of the League of Nations, and the Near East Relief's activists, among others.

The rescue of the Islamized Armenians from Muslim institutions was known as the “Mission of Salvation” or “Liberation Mission.” It was not easy to save Armenians who were adopted by or already married to Turks, Kurds, and Arabs, or who had converted to Islam. Sometimes their patrons did not have any will to send them back, hiding their identity and existence, erasing their traces within the Mesopotamian tribes, moving them from one place to another. Despite having precise information, sometimes the searches could take months and years, often without any result.<sup>6</sup>

The Armenian liberation and rescue groups were formed in spring 1918, headed by Egyptian Armenians. The first group, which was called “Armenian Expeditionary Rescue Group” and led by Levon Yotnakhparian, a soldier who had served in the Fourth Ottoman Army in Damascus, benefited from the support of famous Arab leader Emir Faysal (who struggled for the liberation of Syria from Turks) and the British General Staff. Following the armistice in the Hawran region, the group succeeded in pursuing its operations and transferring rescued Armenians to Dera'a or Damascus.<sup>7</sup> When the Young Turk leaders fled Turkey on Nov. 1, 1918, it gave a new start to the rescue activities. In November 1918, the members of the Egyptian-Armenian National Relief Committee of AGBU, the Armenian National Union, and the United Orphan-caring Union formed a special committee. On Nov. 30, one of the committee organizers, Bishop Torkom, sent an instruction-program to the members of this newly created body,



Petition letters to Ruben Heryan (Photo: Armenian National Archive Collection)

which became a cornerstone for their activities. Heryan was one of the members of this group.

A sample of the instruction-program is found in Heryan's personal archive and consists of 15 points.<sup>8</sup> The third and eighth points, particularly, deal with the rescue mission. The overall idea of these instructions was the following: "All Armenians whose names were changed and who were forcefully converted to Islam must be liberated and sent back, and if they are abducted by Muslims, everything should be done to save them."<sup>9</sup> In February 1919, the anti-Armenian sentiments in Aleppo, which resulted in the death of hundreds of Armenians, complicated the mission of the activists.<sup>10</sup> The British authorities feared rousing the Islamic authorities of Syria against them; wishing to avoid trouble, they tried to postpone the rescue mission. In his letters, Heryan mentions the policy pursued by the English authorities.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, realizing the seriousness and importance of the situation, he made every effort to preserve good relations with them. In any case, Heryan did not stop the rescue mission. After the French authorities assumed the Syrian mandate, Heryan was provided with numerous opportunities to carry out his work.<sup>12</sup>

It should be mentioned that the Treaty of Sèvres incorporated an article dealing with the rescue issue: Article 142 recognized that under the terrorism regime in Turkey, forced conversions to Islam were a widespread tactic during the period 1914–18 and required the empire to co-operate with the Mixed Commissions appointed by the League of Nations to search and rescue those people "in order

to repair so far as possible the wrongs inflicted on individuals in the course of the massacres perpetrated in Turkey during the war."

Heryan was about 50 years old when he came to the Middle East to join the rescue mission. His nickname was the "Young man with grey hair," because of his grey hair as well as for his practical and cheerful character. Over several months he became "the spy of the Armenian orphans," "the liberator," and "the savior." In 1919, the AGBU established a Rescue Fund to carry out "the vital project of the liberation of orphans who are lost or captured in the depth of the desert and at the same time to save the Armenian young girls from harems."<sup>13</sup> In April 1919, Heryan was given a task to search for Armenian women and children in Aleppo and Der Zor and their surroundings. Heryan is unique compared to other liberators, mainly for carrying out his mission in Der Zor—"the city of crime," as he called it.

Heryan was too concerned by the lack of funds. He turned to Armenians to raise money to save as many Armenians as possible. According to Heryan, time was of the essence: The next day could be too late to save the kidnapped women and children. He needed 30,000 gold coins to rescue 500 women and orphans. To collect that money he was traveling from Der Zor to Constantinople, giving talks and lectures, and asking for financial support. From an article published in "Joghovrdy Dzayny" (The Nation's Voice) in 1919, we learn that he managed to raise only 11,000 gold coins,<sup>14</sup> but the following pages of the newspaper are full of the names of those who donated to Heryan's mission. It should be mentioned that not only

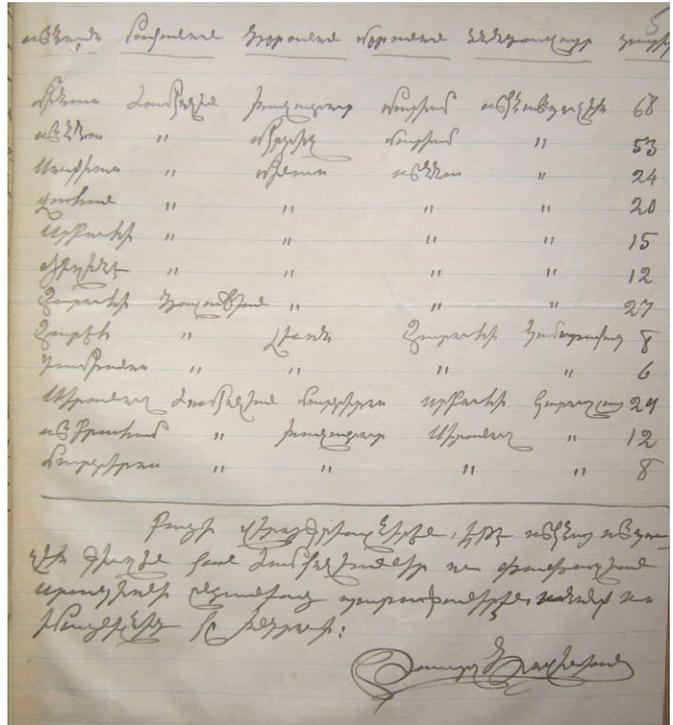
did wealthy Armenians participate in this fundraising effort, but genocide survivors sometimes gave their last coins to the rescuers. For example, in 1919, “Joghovrdy Dzayny” published an article that mentions two women survivors who both escaped from Der Zor and gave their last coin for the rescue mission headed by Heryan.<sup>15</sup>

On Sept. 6, 1919, “Hay Dzayn” (The Armenian Voice), printed in Adana, noted: “The great Desert Man, the incredible Ruben Heryan ... it has been already six months that forgetting about all else, he has thrown himself with selfless enthusiasm into the slaughterhouse to collect the remaining Armenian fragments. The leaders of Ashirs [Kurdish tribes] already recognize him as the *Mufettish el-Ermen* [the Investigator of the Armenians]; it’s impossible without bribery, there is little money, but he seizes any opportunity to save the Armenian captives.”<sup>16</sup>

On the same day, Heryan wrote a letter<sup>17</sup> to his relative and good friend Metaks<sup>18</sup> from Adana describing his poor health, but at the same time noting his energy and enthusiasm to continue helping those he rescued every day, and those who appealed to him to find their relatives. For him, the greatest reward was the happiness of the rescued Armenians.

It is particularly interesting to read his letter, dated July 19, 1919, from Der Zor, to Metaks. The letter indicates the problems he faced while moving the first caravan of 320 people to Aleppo and, afterwards, with the help of *keleks* (rafts) moving 350 orphans to Baghdad; planning to go back to villages and taking the orphans back with him, as well as buying many Armenian women from their captors and searching for those abducted; and, most importantly, because of threats made by the Arabs, convincing the surviving Armenians to be rescued. He also wrote about the main financial problems he had, and about his own savings, which he had depleted to fund his efforts. “My heart bleeds when I think of my financial ruin; I have grown very old; and I cannot reach my goal,” he wrote. “Not only is there no money, but there are no people either.” In the same letter, he wrote about those national activists for whom the liberation of the orphans and women was not a major issue, and how they were therefore busy with other work. He even referred to the members of the “Armenian National Delegation” who participated in the Paris peace conference as “patriots in word.” According to Heryan, the most urgent issue of the day was the rescue mission. “Could it be that I’m stupid, or is it that ‘the patriots of the word’ are clever? Either way, I cannot work against my own principles. The orphans will become the seed of tomorrow’s Armenia; each additional rescued Armenian is a gain; they are the fragments of my heart. When wandering through the deserts, there, in the sun, the white sparkling skulls and bones are crying out loud, ‘Set our orphans free’; and who can be indifferent after seeing all that? ... I will work until I die.”<sup>19</sup>

The cooperation of Heryan with the most remarkable activist of the rescue mission, Misak Melkonian, the adopted son of Karen Jeppe, the representative of the League of Nations in the Near East, was of utmost importance. Melkonian worked both with Armenian and Arab partners, which greatly facilitated the rescue



List of rescued and searched-for orphans (Photo: Armenian National Archive Collection)

operations. He formed groups of horsemen, who under his command sought and rescued Armenian orphans and women from the tents of the Bedouins in the desert. Sometimes, these groups crossed over the border to the Turkish side and set free the women and children abducted by Turks and Kurds.<sup>20</sup> The survivors were stationed in Aleppo, in the gardens called Sheik Daha, located in the northern part of the city, on the bank of the Queiq River. Now one of the most tangled and crowded suburbs, it was then rather far from the city. The tents were shelters for the orphans, refugees, and widows who had fled Turkey or escaped from the Bedouins. All of the survivors were provided with food, medical care, and clothes; their identities were checked, and their names were sent to newspapers, churches, and Armenian communities, in an effort to locate their relatives. There were many people from the city who came to find their siblings among the newcomers or to find information about the fate of their relatives.<sup>21</sup>

In some cases, rescued Armenian boys would not abandon Heryan and tried to help him in his mission. They had the experience of living among Arabs, and knew the locations of the adopted Armenians. There were also groups of youth who would ask Heryan’s advice and permission to participate in the rescue operations, or to carry out a separate one. For example, on Feb. 5, 1920, Heryan received a letter from a group of Tadem (Kharpert) youth who asked Heryan to teach them how to rescue Armenian women and children in the territories of Urfa and Mardin.<sup>22</sup>

Heryan participated not only in the rescue of women and children, but also in their settlement and rehabilitation. The long years of abduction, and the physical and sexual abuse they had endured, caused much physical and psychological pain to the victims. They

needed care before returning to society. One of the first organizations to cooperate with Heryan to this end was the “Halepi Hayuhyats Miutyun” (Union of Armenian Women of Aleppo). The organization established a shelter for the abused Armenian women rescued from Muslim institutions.<sup>23</sup> The Diocese of Aleppo provided one of its houses to shelter the survivors. Since June 1919, 45 Armenian women had found shelter there. In December of the same year, another shelter was founded in Damascus.<sup>24</sup>

One of the most complicated issues of that period was the fate of orphans and women who refused to recognize their Armenian identity, for one reason or another. Most of them had been torn from their Armenian roots at a very young age, and had forgotten their native language and nationality. But there were also orphans and women who despite remembering did not recognize their Armenian origin; “...the impact of horrors and the terror of the past was so high that sometimes they would prefer not to be rescued, but continue to live as concubines of 60-year-old blind men and feel safe in their tents,” Heryan said in an interview.<sup>25</sup> He also mentioned the women and girls who had pled for their freedom, who were praying day and night to be rescued. Even in the harems, some of them never stopped being Christian Armenians; following their rescue, they always wore a cross around their necks and sang, “*Aravot Luso*.”

Typical to a psychologist, Heryan was treating each orphan and woman with special care. Sometimes he succeeded in his work, sometimes he failed, but he never succumbed to despair. In cases where the individual would not acknowledge their Armenian-ness, Heryan kept the rescued with him for five days; on the fifth day, he would ask them a question about their Armenian origin; their response would determine their future.

To solve the uncertainty around survivors’ identity, the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, Zaven Yeghiaian, together with Arakel Chakrian, an activist of the rescue mission, and the British powers established the “Neutral home” with a board comprised of Armenian, American, and Turkish members. The board examined the data on each survivor and determined his or her identity.<sup>26</sup>

Among Heryan’s concerns was the destiny of the Armenian girls saved from harems. Many times he called on Armenian volunteers to marry the orphans and build a family. On April 10, 1919, he wrote the following in his letter to Metaks: “I have started a powerful propaganda for marriage wherever I can. It has a good result—only in the Adana shelter-workshop with 350 widows and girls, we have 1, or 2 or sometimes 4 weddings in a day. Many of the Armenian volunteers from America are getting engaged to them...”<sup>27</sup>

It must be mentioned as well that within his archive, there are a number of letters addressed to Heryan that are micro-stories in their context, where some episodes of the Armenian Genocide are described. The letters are like puzzles containing fragments of lives and the conditions during and after the genocide. At the same time, they also contain details such as the locations, names, and physical descriptions of lost siblings, parents, sons, and daughters who were abducted; Heryan was asked to find them.

In October 1919, Heryan left for Constantinople and returned to Adana to raise money. He took the money raised by his friends and went back to Der Zor to continue his “vital desert mission.”<sup>28</sup> But in December 1919, there was chaos in the desert: An Arab

rebellion had erupted. They attacked Heryan’s house, pillaging and destroying it. Heryan was able to save the liberated women and children by hiding them in his Arab friend’s house. He was barely able to save himself from certain death. The Armenian church in Der Zor was also plundered and desecrated.<sup>29</sup> Heryan went back to Aleppo, then Adana, where he raised more money, and returned to Der Zor to continue his mission.

From his letters, it is apparent that in 1920, while the Armenian organizations and benevolent unions were raising money for the already rescued Armenian orphans and women, Heryan never stopped raising money for the “Rescue Mission,” first in Europe, then in America. When he returned from America, he intended to marry an Armenian orphan and settle down in Mersin, Cilicia, but, unfortunately, on July 7, 1921, Heryan passed away from a heart attack in Cairo, Egypt, several days before his wedding ceremony.<sup>30</sup>

The mission to rescue thousands of Armenian women and children abducted by Turks, Kurds, Arabs, Chechens, Circassians, and others was one of the most crucial problems in the post-genocide period that required an urgent solution. The mission involved not only social organizations, but also private Armenians and sponsors who did everything in their power to carry out this work. One of the most devoted figures of this mission was an Armenian-American businessman, a volunteer of the Armenian Legion, Ruben Heryan, who dedicated his life and resources to the rescue operations until his death in 1921. The rescue mission did not stop after Heryan’s death; thousands of Armenians were rescued thereafter. □

## NOTES

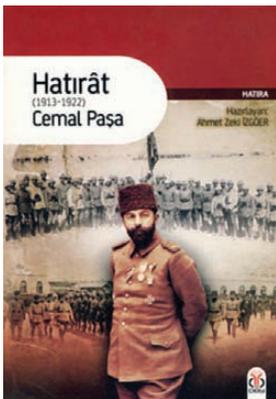
- 1 Heryan’s announcements could mostly be found in the issues of the “Joghovrdy Dzayny” [The Nation’s Voice] and/or “Hay Dzayn” [The Armenian Voice] dailies dating back to 1919-20.
- 2 National Archives of Armenia, fund 420, L. 65, file 27.
- 3 Archag Alboyadjian, *History of the Armenians in Tokat: With Topographical, Historical and Ethnographical Information*, Cairo (Egypt), The New Star Press, 1952, p. 1732.
- 4 National Archives of Armenia, fund 420, L. 65, file 2, pp. 2-3, 5-6.
- 5 National Archives of Armenia, fund 420, L. 65, file 51, p. 5.
- 6 Hagop Tcholakian, *Karen Jeppé: Hay Koghk’or’ayin yev Veradzununtin hed* [Karen Jeppé: With the Armenian Golgotha and Rebirth], Aleppo, Arevelq, 2001, p. 53.
- 7 *Crows of the Desert: The Memoirs of Levon Yotnakhparian*, edited by Levon Parian and Ishkhan Jinbashian, Parian Photographic Design, California, USA, 2012, p. 49–55.
- 8 National Archives of Armenia, fund 420, L. 65, file 5, p. 2.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 10 *The Armenian General Benevolent Union: One Hundred Years of History*, edited by Raymond H. Kévorkian & Vahé Tachjian, vol. 1 (1906-1940), Cairo, Paris, New York: AGBU, 2006, p. 81.
- 11 National Archives of Armenia, fund 420, L. 65, file 2, p. 20.
- 12 Karapet Gabikean, *Eghernapatum: Poqun Hayoc ev Norin Meci Mayraqaghagin Sebastio* [Eghernapatum of the Poqr Hayiq and the New Big Capital Sebastia], Boston, Hairenik Publishing, 1924, p. 549.
- 13 Eduard Melqonyan, *History of the Armenian General Benevolent Union*, vol. 1, (Yerevan, Mughny, 2005), p. 99.
- 14 “Joghovrdy Dzayny,” Constantinople, Oct. 26, 1919, no. 430.
- 15 “Joghovrdy Dzayny,” Constantinople, Sept. 18, 1919, no. 456.
- 16 “Hay Dzayn,” Adana, Sept. 6, 1919, no. 204.
- 17 National Archives of Armenia, fund 420, L. 65, file 2, p. 24.
- 18 Metaks was living in the United States at that time.
- 19 National Archives of Armenia, fund 420, L. 65, file 2, p. 24.
- 20 Tcholakian, p. 52.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 55.
- 22 National Archives of Armenia, fund 420, L. 65, file 21, p. 1.
- 23 *The Armenian General Benevolent Union: One Hundred Years of History*, pp. 72–77.
- 24 *Voskematiyan Haykakan Baregorjakan Yndhanur Miutiun: Artsate Hobelyan 1906-1931* [Voskematiyan of the Armenian General Benevolent Union 1906-1931], vol. 1 (Paris, 1931), pp. 152-181. National Archives of Armenia, fund 420, L. 65, file 33, p. 2.
- 25 “Joghovrdy Dzayny,” Constantinople, Sept. 18, 1919, no. 459.
- 26 Zaven Der Yéghiaian, [My Patriarchal Memoirs], Cairo, Nor Astgh, 1947, pp. 293-298.
- 27 *The Armenian General Benevolent Union: One Hundred Years of History*, p. 99. Raymond Kévorkian: *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History*, I.B. Tauris, London, New York, 2011, pp. 758–762. Lerna Ekmekecioglu, *A Climate of Abduction, a Climate for Redemption: The Politics of Inclusion during and after the Armenian Genocide*, Comparative Studies of Society and History 2013; 55(3), pp. 534–552.
- 27 National Archives of Armenia, fund 420, L. 65, file 2, p. 14.
- 28 “Hay Dzayn,” Adana, Oct. 23, 1919, no. 230.
- 29 “Joghovrdy Dzayny,” Constantinople, Dec. 31, 1919, no. 462.
- 30 “Joghovrdy Dzayny,” Constantinople, July 14, 1921, no. 839.

‘MEMORIES OF A TURKISH STATESMAN—1913–19’

# *A Reflection on* Cemal Pasha’s Memoirs

By Varak Ketsemanian

“[As] however, in spite of all the help given, our foreign enemies point to me as morally responsible for these occurrences, and that caricature of a government which has been set up at Constantinople since the Armistice even went so far as to condemn me to death on an accusation of moral guilt for these banishments and butcheries, I regard it as a just means of self-defense to give some explanation in accordance with the truth.”<sup>1</sup>



The above passage comes in the final pages of Ahmed Cemal’s (Cemal Paşa) memoirs. This excerpt is important insofar as it sheds light on the nature of his memoirs. Although it is difficult to assess the historical accuracy of the claims that Cemal makes within the constraints of a few pages, the following essay is an attempt to address some of the problems and themes discussed in the major sections of his memoirs. Moreover, looking at the history of

the Ottoman Empire from a broader perspective, I will analyze the historical context in which this work was produced, the primary motives that may have prompted its production, and the intended audience as well as the message it attempts to convey. While Cemal’s pre-World War I activities are important insofar as they portray the

way in which the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) consolidated its grip over the Ottoman government (with its various departments, starting in 1913), this essay will focus primarily on the events that occurred during the Great War. This will not merely limit the scope of this article, but will help the reader understand the Ottoman experience of World War I through the perspective of one of the most prominent figures of the governing elite. The subsequent discussion is not an attempt to provide definitive answers to the problems raised in the memoirs, but rather an endeavor to reflect on the dynamics of “memoir politics” and the themes it produces, raising questions that may lead to further discussion and work.

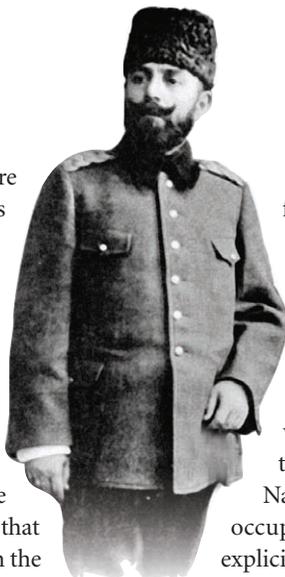
Before embarking upon an examination of the events discussed in Cemal’s memoirs, it is important to illustrate the general situation in which it was written. Four considerations are important in this respect. At the end of World War I in 1918, and the signing of the Mudros Armistice, many cadres of the CUP who had been in power during the years of the conflagration escaped to Europe (mainly to Germany), fleeing Constantinople in a German submarine. Cemal

was one of these officials. Therefore, the memoirs were written in exile and ought to be seen in light of Cemal's attempt to survey the way in which the Ottoman state had come to that very point (i.e., defeat in war). The selection of the year 1913—although there are many references to earlier periods, dating all the way back to 1453!—as a starting point for his memoirs confirms this point, since the Balkan Wars (1912–13), as argued by some historians, marked the beginning of a long, yet exhausting war that culminated in the creation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923.<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that the exact date of the memoirs is unknown, we can surmise that he began writing sometime between 1919 and 1921, with the finished work translated into English and published in 1922.

This period overlaps with the Ottoman courts-martial (1919–20) that were carried after the Mudros Armistice in an attempt to adjudicate, among other functions, the war crimes of many of the CUP cadres. Since Cemal had fled to Germany, he was condemned to death—along with Talat and Enver Beys—in *absentia*. Therefore, the memoirs may be seen as an attempt by Cemal to exonerate himself of guilt. As the bulk of the work deals with the problems the Ottoman Empire faced during the war—the Arab Rebellion, annihilation of the Armenians, failure of the Suez Expedition—rather than its victories, this selection may further be seen as a testament of his desire for justification. Thus, the memoirs ought to be seen as a space or even a “court” where Cemal attempts to justify his conduct during the war.

The period of 1920–22 also overlaps with Operation Nemesis, a plan devised by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF/Dashnaksutyun) to assassinate the primary organizers of the Armenian Genocide.<sup>3</sup> Although Cemal was assassinated in Tbilisi in 1922, the killings of Talat Bey, Cemal Azmi, Behaettin akir, and Said Halim Paşa preceded his. When seen in this context, Cemal's memoirs may be understood first as an attempt to distance himself from his fellow CUP cadres and avoid a similar fate, by denying his participation and role in the execution of the genocide (rather, he asserts the opposite, as having saved and fed the Armenians); and second, as a last attempt to “contribute in every way to make known the truth.”<sup>4</sup> Anticipating his assassination in the near future, Cemal treats his memoirs as a final container of truth.

Finally, the timeframe 1919–21/22 is when the Turkish War of Independence begins. Judging from the expressions he uses to discuss Mustafa Kemal's activities during the war—and his uttering of the phrase “[w]hen I get back to Constantinople, if God wills”—one gets the idea that the author is trying to secure his safe return back home.<sup>5</sup> In other words, criticizing the decisions of the German General Von Falkenhayn (Mustafa Kemal's commander) in a very polemical manner and praising the latter in a very respectable tone (“a fine commander and tactician”), Cemal was attempting to impress the new leader of the Nationalist Movement, while tacitly or indirectly asking for Kemal's approval for his return to Constantinople.<sup>6</sup>



Distancing himself from his former CUP cadres as far as the destruction of the Armenians was concerned, and acknowledging the post-War Ottoman government as an Entente caricature might also have served this purpose. Therefore, looking at the political situation and developments that prevailed after the Mudros Armistice from a broader perspective, Cemal's memoirs make perfect sense in a context in which his fate remained precarious as he navigated through the various situations created by the Turkish Nationalists, the Dashnaks, and the Entente Powers occupying Constantinople. Although none of these are explicitly mentioned in the work, the selection of themes discussed in the memoirs, coupled with the tone Cemal uses to describe, praise, or criticize some figures, complements our understanding of the historical background that prevailed during the completion of the work.

The “I” is at the forefront of every discussion that takes place in the work. As Arnold Toynbee rightly points out in his article in the London Times, the style as reflected in the work gives the impression of a man struggling to perform impossible tasks.<sup>7</sup> Describing the Ottoman Empire's most “critical regions” in their most critical times only reinforces this notion of the “I” throughout the work. Although this article is in no way an attempt to diminish Cemal's role in the organization of the Ottoman defenses during the war, or the other positions he assumed, the discussion does revolve around the stylistic writing of his memoirs and the effects it creates on the readers. In this respect, not only is Cemal portraying himself as a patriot struggling against very thorny problems, but he is weaving a narrative that can be encapsulated in the following way: Cemal as an *agent of change*. The coherence of this feature is maintained throughout the entirety of the work. Cemal uses a stylistic tool to concoct the image—brief comparisons (mainly before his arrival/after his arrival) that only support and reinforce the notion of the “I” with respect to the social, political, and military problems he presents. Importantly, the change that is referred to pertains only to *positive* transformations, and not failures or disruptions. Nevertheless, the point here is not to question the historical accuracy of Cemal's claims; rather, it is to show the way in which he maintains this throughout the work, by discussing in almost every chapter the positive changes he ostensibly brought about and that were nonexistent before his appointment or arrival. To support this, I will give a few examples from various chapters.

In 1913, after the coup d'état against the Sublime Port that brought the CUP to power, Cemal becomes the military governor of Constantinople. Claiming to be a “zealous advocate” of the emancipation of women, Cemal argues that his term brought about the development of women's movements, as women had hitherto been disenfranchised in social life and public affairs.<sup>8</sup> Referring to the lack of security for women in the streets of Constantinople and the molestation they suffered, Cemal attempts to portray himself as a man safeguarding the “cleanliness” of the

capital as well as providing its security. The following excerpt attests to this point:

"I issued a warning that men who used insulting language and women who accosted ladies should be transported to the interior. After four or five examples had been made our women were able to walk in the streets without further molestation. For the first time a definite step had been taken to place to personal freedom of Turkish women on a secure basis. [Nevertheless] the Women's Movement which began with my term of office not only did not die out as time went on, but extended and developed continuously and rendered the greatest service during the War."<sup>9</sup>

Another example is the case of the camels that the Ottoman Army had requisitioned for military purposes. As part of his preparations for the expedition against British forces in the Suez Canal in January 1915, 11,000 camels were requested from the Hejaz. Before Cemal's arrival to the region (Palestine) to assume command of the army, the 8th Corps had been able to secure only 2,000 of the 11,000 camels. The situation changes with his arrival:

"I will merely remark that I alone knew the greatness of the difficulties I had to overcome to procure within a month fourteen thousand camels, including reserves. Yet I ultimately succeeded, and the number of camels provided for in the 8th Corp's plan of campaign was reached by the appointed date."<sup>10</sup>

Interestingly, when discussing the efforts of the officers of the 8th Corps in procuring the camels, the number is merely 11,000. Yet, upon his arrival not only was Cemal able to procure the remaining 9,000, but was also successful in obtaining an additional 3,000—an achievement that the others had failed to do. Although such details may seem too technical or trivial, as far as the writing style of his memoirs is concerned, it tends to shed light more on the achievements of the personal character, and in this case portray the positive adjustments that Cemal brought about with his presence. This is also an effort to distinguish himself from others.

Another case is the unity of the Arabs, and their enthusiasm for protecting the Caliphate (the Ottoman Empire) and Islam, a priority on Cemal's military agenda:

"[The] policy I desired to see pursued in Syria was a policy of clemency and tolerance. I left no stone unturned to create unity of views and sentiments in all the Arab countries. From all these Arab leaders I received answers in which they assured me of their devotion and loyalty to the Khalifate and the religious enthusiasm which inspired them in common with all the Arab countries intent on participating in the Holy War against the foes of our faith."<sup>11</sup>

Cemal thus demonstrates how his arrival in Syria as the commander of the 4th Army Corps was instrumental in unifying the sentiments of the Arabs against the Entente Powers. Moreover, this statement indirectly implies that the situation changed after the latter's arrival, something that conforms to the pattern of comparison maintained throughout the work. Remarking further on the state of the Arab countries, Cemal writes:

"As I knew that one of the most effective ways of pleasing the Arabs was to avoid requisitioning anything from them and pay for what we wanted cash down, the first order I issued on my arrival was that nothing should be taken by way of requisition from the civil population of Syria and Palestine in the 4th Army Area (Syria, Palestine)."<sup>12</sup>

Although he claims to have drastically ameliorated the economic situation in favor of the Arabs through his methods and measures, Linda Schilcher argues that this was not the case. She contends that the gendarmes were still seen as confiscators, and thus the population resisted their confiscation of primary goods.<sup>13</sup> On the one hand, this example is a reiteration of the "I" in terms of the positive changes that Cemal believes to have realized; on the other hand, however, it opens the way for a discussion of the historical accuracy of the claims he makes, a task that is outside the scope of this essay.

A final example on this theme relates to the Adana Massacres of 1909. On page 261 of his work, Cemal claims that 17,000 Armenians and 1,850 Turks were killed in Adana that year, and that an economic and urban disaster ensued.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless a few paragraphs later, he writes:

"Thanks to the steps I took, four months after my arrival all the Armenians houses in the vilayet had been rebuilt and in the provisional capital there was not a single small family house which had not been finished. In brief, within five or six months the Armenians had freely resumed their trade, agriculture, and industry, and between Turks and Armenians there was no trace, at any rate superficially, of the previous hatreds."<sup>15</sup>

The accuracy of this claim is highly questionable, yet such distortions of the truth may well have served to reinforce the theme we have been discussing—that is, Cemal as an agent of change. In this case, he is depicting himself as the man (governor) who restored the welfare of Adana after the brutal massacres. Expressions such as "my steps," "my terms," etc. used in almost all of the cases mentioned so far may be seen as a stylistic tool that Cemal employs in his attempt to concoct a better image for himself, one that is marked by his devotion to the welfare and interests of his homeland. All of the above cases not only show the same pattern applied to different regions at different times during Cemal's career, but also tend to put the notion of the "I" at the forefront of positive change brought about by his tenure. Hence, comparison, a literary tool that helps portray the before (the bad

situation) and the after (the good or improved situation), is a conspicuous feature in Cemal's memoirs.

Although Cemal puts himself at the forefront of the positive changes brought about in the region under his supervision, a different pattern is constructed in the memoirs as far as other historical moments are concerned. This is what I call the feature of "selective appearance." In other words, we hear Cemal's voice mostly in the episodes pertaining to the welfare of the empire, its diplomatic negotiations regarding alliances with other powers, etc. In this respect, the portrayal of "Cemal as the agent of change" ought to be seen in light of this broader feature of the memoirs. Two cases in two different regions can help us understand the notion of "selective appearance." As noted earlier, Cemal is trying to portray himself as the unifier of Islamic sentiments among the Arab population, in addition to having improved the economic situation of the region under his command. Yet, there is a not single word regarding the Great Famine of Syria (1915–17), a catastrophe for which he was primarily responsible.<sup>16</sup> Although he acknowledges the difficulties of providing victuals (grains) to the population as a result of mismanagement of communication systems and the Entente blockade of the coast, he is silent regarding his official policy of starving the coastal regions as a preventive measure against any potential treason or desertion by the Arabs. Thus, Cemal chooses to include only those events that fit coherently into his narrative of *Pax Ottomania*, which he believes was

disrupted by the intervention of the European Powers and particularly the Russians, who utilized "politically blind" persons for their imperial aims.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, he never seems to be responsible for the problems that arose during his command, such as the failure of the Suez expedition or the Arab Revolt.

A complementary element of this "selective appearance" is the pattern of finding scapegoats and leveling opprobrium against them as either manipulators of the truth (U.S. Ambassador Henry Morgenthau), renegades (Sherif Hussein of Mecca), or disrupters of Ottoman internal affairs (imperial Russia). Another case of "selective appearance" pertains to Cemal's position regarding the Armenian Question, "*the thorniest domestic problem.*"<sup>18</sup> Cemal claims to be completely ignorant of his fellow CUP cadres' decision regarding the deportation and eventual destruction of the Armenians. Regarding the Armenian Question, Cemal firmly states:

"I neither took part in the negotiations at Constantinople nor was I consulted. It was through the Government proclamation to the vilayets that I first learned that all Armenians were provisionally to be deported to Mesopotamia, where they were to remain until the end of the War."

In fact, he even develops a narrative of "welfare of the Armenians by Cemal," where he justifies his benevolent and humanitarian character by remembering the aid he provided to the

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Armenian deportees. His statement at the very beginning of this essay confirms the point. In the cases that I have referred to as Cemal’s “selective appearances,” the notion of the “I”—so dominant in other parts of the memoirs, such as the Turco-French rapprochement or the Turco-Bulgarian Alliance—suddenly disappears. Instead, a new narrative emerges, marked by hesitation and ambiguity, where Cemal tries to justify his position: “I thus did everything possible during the whole period of their deportation to give help to the Armenians, as has been confirmed by the Armenians themselves and by all impartial foreigners.”<sup>19</sup>

To conclude, Cemal’s memoirs may be seen as a space where different external factors are in play, and that decide the extent and the form in which the “I” representing the author’s voice appears. In places where it does surface, we can follow a consistent pattern throughout the work, one that portrays Cemal as a benevolent agent of change and a true patriot. As far as Cemal’s role in the organization, and the Armenian Genocide, there is an ongoing debate regarding his complicity and the motives behind his so called “less-brutal” deportation policies towards the Cilician Armenians. Nevertheless, remembering that the massacres that occurred starting in spring 1916 took place in the deserts of Syria—a command area under Cemal’s direct supervision—his attempts at distancing himself from the CUP regime and from what happened to the deportees remain highly dubious. On the one hand, thus, Cemal’s memoirs provide answers to some historical inquiries; yet on the other hand, they pave the way for new ones. □

NOTES

- 1 Ahmed Cemal, *Memories of a Turkish Statesman—1913-1919: By Djemal Pasha, Formerly Governor of Constantinople, Imperial Ottoman Naval Minister, and Commander of the Fourth Army in Sinai, Palestine and Syria*, New York: George H. Doran Company, 1922, p. 279.
- 2 David Stevenson, “From Balkan Conflict to Global Conflict: The Spread of the First World War 1914-1918,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 7, no. 2, April 2011; 169-182; Eyal Ginio, “Mobilizing the Ottoman Nation During the Balkan Wars (1912-1913): Awakening from the Ottoman Dream,” *War in History* 12, April 2005, pp. 156-177.
- 3 Jacques Derogy, *Resistance and Revenge: The Armenian Assassination of the Turkish Leaders Responsible for the 1915 Massacres and Deportations*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990.
- 4 Cemal, p. 93.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 159.
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- 7 Arnold Toynbee, “Djemal Pasha,” *The Times* (London), Oct. 6, 1922.
- 8 Cemal, pp. 17-18.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 151.
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 201-202.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 L. Schatkowski Schilcher, “The Famine of 1915-1918 in Greater Syria,” in *The Modern Middle East in Historical Perspective, Essays in Honour of Albert Hourani*, ed. John Spagnolo, Beirut: Ithaca Press, 1996, p. 237.
- 14 Cemal, p. 262.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 Schilcher, p. 237.
- 17 Cemal, pp. 201-203.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 98.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 278.

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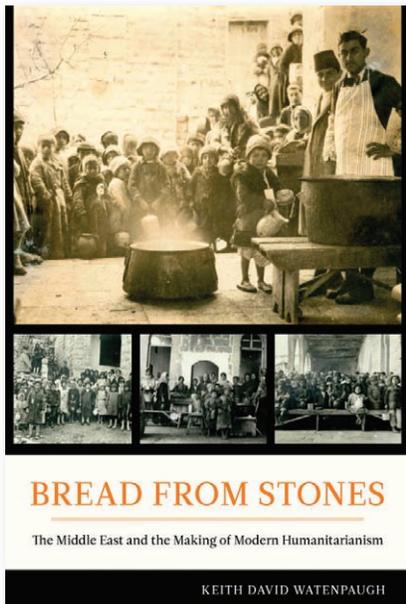
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# The Armenian Genocide in the **American** Humanitarian **Imagination**

A Review of 'Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism'

By Elyse Semerdjian



**Bread from Stones:  
The Middle East and the  
Making of Modern  
Humanitarianism**

By Keith David Watenpaugh  
Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015  
Paperback, 272 pages  
ISBN: 9780520279322  
\$34.95

Among the wealth of recently published Armenian Genocide commemorative books is Keith Watenpaugh’s tour de force *Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism*. With evidence gathered from a half-dozen archives, Watenpaugh situates the Armenian Genocide seamlessly within the larger history of modern humanitarianism. By telling these stories together, Watenpaugh has effectively written the Armenian Genocide back into the American *humanitarian imagination*, a place it once held before it was conveniently forgotten.

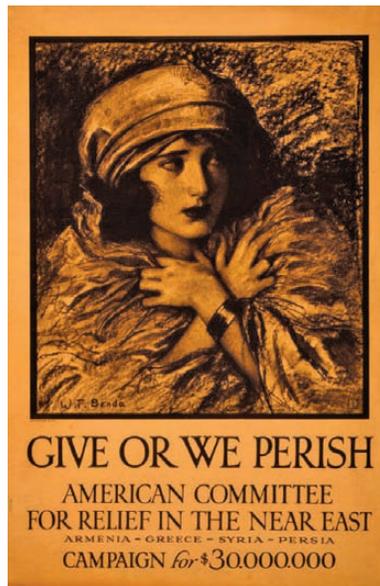
*Bread from Stones* offers an in-depth look at international humanitarian efforts on the eve of World War I, a period when, Watenpaugh argues, missionary-based humanitarian relief transitioned to a modern secular humanitarian approach. He supports this argument with the writings of philanthropists from America and Europe, among them American physician Stanley E. Kerr who stayed behind in Marash to document the atrocities committed by Turkish forces as they overran French forces in 1920 and massacred Armenians, many of whom were genocide victims who had returned at

war’s end. Kerr put his own life at risk in order to document the atrocities, and it is the special care to detailed documentary evidence gathering that sets modern humanitarianism apart from earlier philanthropic models. Production of “humanitarian knowledge” included collecting eyewitness documentary evidence and photography, and the gradual secularization in tone in the writings of humanitarian workers. This shift to document humanitarian crises can also be found during the Hamidian Massacres (1894-96) in the writings of American Red Cross founder Clara Barton, German Protestant missionary Johannes Lepsius, and Ottoman Armenian Zabel Yesayan’s documentation of the massacres in Adana (1909).

The personal writings of relief workers feature prominently in Watenpaugh’s history writing and breathe life into this historic moment for humanitarianism. Noteworthy is the inclusion of writings from women relief workers, American physician Dr. Mabel Evelyn Elliot (1881–1944) of Near East Relief (NER) and Zabel Yesayan (1878–1943) of the American Red Cross. The story of the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, which later evolved into Near East Relief, is told in a

way that includes Armenian philanthropic organizations and the Armenian Apostolic Church within broader international relief efforts. The influence of the memoirs of Armenian orphans who were cared for by NER—Karnig Panian, Asdghig Avakian, and Antranik Zaroukian—helped shape the outlook on the Armenian Genocide as well as note the success of the program on its graduates. So, while Near East Relief was American, Watenpaugh shows how several international players merged to publicize the Armenian cause in an effort to recover national rights, which was emphasized above individual rights.

Watenpaugh documents the way that humanitarian workers and international human rights advocates understood the unfolding crisis in the Ottoman Empire during World War I through the lens of what he calls a *humanitarian imagination*, which marked certain individuals as objects of organized compassion. This compassion, however, did not come without some benefit since it was informed by what Watenpaugh calls *American humanitarian exceptionalism*, which held relief efforts to be “a means to an end of the social, political, and moral reordering of the region.” The political calculation made by international relief agencies can be observed in responses to crises resulting from the famine caused by a combination of locust infestation and the Allied blockade against the Ottoman Empire. The war prompted the Ottoman government to shift the flow of supplies to the front, leaving many of the empire’s poor without food. Discussion of the famine in Beirut, the floods in Baghdad, and food shortages in Jerusalem sets up a context for humanitarianism in the Middle East at the beginning of the war. Organizations like the American Red Cross were already on the ground in Beirut distributing food; yet, humanitarianism was more complex in areas like Palestine, where Zionist relief organizations framed deservingness along sectarian lines. This track is followed up in the coverage of the Armenian Genocide when humanitarian workers understood the genocide in largely civilizational terms and offered targeted assistance to groups considered protégés of aspirational empires.



## Rescuing Armenians was an extension of the white man’s burden and civilizing mission, both situated within the emerging concept of humanitarian intervention.

The richness of documentation offered by Watenpaugh pulls the reader into how international bodies tried to make sense of the senseless act that was the Armenian Genocide. Accounts of trafficking of women and children resonated with 19th-century slavery abolition and fed into civilizational narratives. Rescuing Armenians was an extension of the white man’s burden and civilizing mission, both situated within the emerging concept of humanitarian intervention. In this way, as products of their time, many of these emerging humanitarian agencies “embraced modes of colonialism—most importantly a civilizing mission—without possessing a colony, and consequently without the attendant brutality.”

Deservingness was formulated through unstrangering the object of humanitarian assistance. This was achieved through a number of rhetorical devices, visual and linguistic, to effectively portray Armenians as civilizationaly similar to Americans, thereby unstrangered and legible for

humanitarian relief. “Instead of making new Near Easterners, NER had helped make new Americans in the Middle East, or at least Armenians who were both modern but still ‘out of place’ in the societies where they found refuge.” The issue of deservingness raises a number of interesting questions for the treatment of subsequent refugee flows throughout the 20th century to the present.

A *problem for humanity* because it was a *problem of humanity*, the Armenian Genocide was a staging point for the mobilization of contemporary human rights thinking. Reading Watenpaugh’s work on the fifth anniversary of the Syrian Uprising-turned-proxy war is a potent reminder of how regressive the American—and to a greater degree the world’s—approach to refugees is compared to a hundred years ago. The Armenian Genocide mobilized humanitarian relief to the point where Near East Relief alone raised \$110 million dollars by 1921 and fed 300,000 people daily; such massive humanitarian assistance lies in stark contrast to the decaying ethical standards surrounding the *problem of humanity* today. By the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), the world had abandoned its commitment to national recovery previously offered to Armenian refugees. Importantly, Watenpaugh suggests this may have modeled the approach to future refugee crises, including the Palestinian refugee crisis of 1948. As an international community, we are no longer troubled by statelessness. While we are currently living through the largest refugee crisis since World War II, Watenpaugh gives us food for thought as we think historically and critically about the *problem for humanity*. The turn toward popular vilification and criminalization of refugees over the last year provides us with examples of *strangering* that unravels the humanitarian imagination Watenpaugh so carefully constructs in his work. While we are unlikely to see any end to this suffering, we can consider how Watenpaugh’s broader question of deservingness bears on contemporary realities and ask, What it is that makes some communities less deserving than others of humanitarian assistance? □



PHOTO: ARAZ BOGHOSSIAN PHOTOGRAPHY

# Artsakh **is** Our Nation's Sardarabad 21st Century

By Michael G. Mensoian

**T**he present situation along the Nagorno-Karabagh Republic (NKR/Artsakh) Line of Contact (LoC) is as critical to our nation's survival as was the situation in the weeks leading up to our eventual victory over the Turkish army at Sardarabad in 1918. The intensification of military operations by Azerbaijan is a strategy that was made possible by the acquiescence of the United States and Chancellor Angela Merkel representing the European Union when President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was accepted as a strategic partner. In its struggle for independence, Artsakh faces both Turkey and Azerbaijan. Recall that President Erdogan has often boasted: Turkey and Azerbaijan; two countries; two flags; one people.

## The Unholy Alliance

An unholy alliance connects Berlin and Washington to Ankara. Unfortunately for our legitimate aspirations, President Erdogan's present position of power was bestowed upon him by the feckless leadership of the U.S. and Chancellor Angela Merkel when they accepted him as a strategic partner. Our ally Russian President Vladimir Putin sits on the sidelines playing both sides against the middle as he seeks to seduce Azerbaijan into the Russian orbit knowing that Armenia is firmly under his control. He forgets how his Bolshevik forebears failed in a similar attempt with Ataturk a century earlier. Who paid the price? Armenia did by having Nakhitchevan, Artsakh, and the Kars-Ardahan region gifted to their Azeri and Turkish neighbors. Hopefully Armenia will not pay the price again with the loss of Artsakh. With President Erdogan as his backbone, President Aliyev has *carte blanche* to use his military assets against Artsakh however and whenever he chooses.

To obtain President Erdogan as a strategic ally to support its vacillating policy in the region, the U.S. overlooks his abominable human rights record as well as his ongoing devastating military campaign against his Kurdish citizens. To further placate him, the U.S. does not provide the Kurdish *peshmerga* forces, that have proven to be effective and reliable combat fighters, with the heavy military assets they require. Strengthening President Erdogan's hand is Turkey's valued membership in NATO. Under the German chancellor, the EU has enhanced his power even further. In a complicated arrangement to limit the endless flow of humanity passing through Turkey seeking entry to Europe, the EU has allocated \$6.7 billion for Ankara to implement the agreement. In a further capitulation to obtain his cooperation Turkey's ascension to EU membership, which has been languishing, will be put on a fast track. In addition, visa free travel for Turkish citizens is also being considered. Given this background, should it surprise us that the very best the Minsk Group (including Putin who is pursuing his own agenda) could offer in response to the full-scale attack launched against Artsakh by Azerbaijan was that both sides should refrain from escalating tensions along the LoC. With respect to the verified atrocities committed by the Azeri military against Armenian civilians and soldiers, there was more silence.

## The Pro-Azeri Pre-Conditions

From the beginning (2002) when the countries represented by the Minsk Group (the EU, the U.S., and Russia) decided to seek a political solution through negotiations, Artsakh's future independence was foreclosed by the pre-conditions necessary to achieve a negotiated settlement. They required 1) the removal of all Armenian military forces from the liberated territories (which



Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and German Chancellor Angela Merkel (Photo: Official website of the Azerbaijani President)

have been labeled as "occupied territory"); 2) the right of return of displaced people (Azeris primarily, since few Armenians would elect to return to Azerbaijan); 3) a secure corridor connecting Armenia with Nagorno-Karabagh (presently a common border exists with both a northern and southern connection) together with a guaranteed corridor for Azerbaijan through southern Armenia connecting Azerbaijan with its Nakhitchevan exclave; 4) granting self-governing status to Armenians (who presently govern themselves) until such time when a 6) vote to determine the final status of Nagorno-Karabagh would take place.

During this interim period until the voting takes place, the Artsakh Defense Force would be replaced by an International Peace-keeping Force to protect the Armenians. Since political control would have been returned to Azerbaijan, President Aliyev would have free rein to reshape the demographic make-up of the region to its advantage. The voting to determine Nagorno-Karabagh's status would be a sham. Even at its best, if local autonomy for the Karabagh Armenians were granted, it would be short-lived. Within 10 to 15 years Azerbaijan would have transformed Nagorno-Karabagh into another Nakhitchevan.

While Russia is treaty-bound to come to Armenia's aid if attacked, we do not know if there is a secret protocol that commits it to support Artsakh under certain conditions. We must rely on the fact that a Turkish-Azerbaijani victory would weaken, if not eliminate, Russian influence in the South Caucasus even with their continued dominance of Armenia. Any display of military weakness by Russia or loss of prestige by President Putin could have serious ramifications. Assuming such a scenario, Turkey would dominate the South Caucasus and be free to expand its economic and political influence into central Asia. Although Armenia may be small, with Artsakh it occupies a strategic position that secures Russian interests in the South Caucasus and protects its southern border that extends across the Caspian Sea into Central Asia.

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## Azerbaijan's Strategy

Given the almost *carte blanche* that President Aliyev seemingly has, a military solution to retake Artsakh evidently seems feasible to him. The explosive “blitzkrieg” type full-scale offensive launched during April 1 to 4 of this year is a tactic born of the new strategy. These “blitzkrieg” type operations seek to 1) test Artsakh’s defensive perimeter; 2) seize strategic terrain now controlled by Artsakh; 3) demoralize both the civilian population and military personnel; and 4) put pressure on Stepanakert to provide for people evacuated from villages close to the LoC (note that some 80 percent of Artsakh’s population lives within 20 miles of the LoC). These full scale attacks will continue as long as President Aliyev encounters no serious response from the Minsk Group countries. At some point, a determination will be made to launch a final full-scale attack deploying tanks, mechanized infantry, and artillery with air support along the entire LoC from Talish in the north to the Iranian border in the south. As I have indicated in previous analyses, any Azeri military offensive will have a window of opportunity of between 36 to 72 hours before concerned nations will demand a ceasefire. During this limited period, the Azeri units must breach Artsakh’s primary defensive perimeter. If successful, they will declare a ceasefire to preempt action by the Minsk Group countries. Breaching the LoC with some sectors being pushed further to the west would leave Artsakh in a vulnerable position. It would be at this stage that President Aliyev would want to negotiate.

Fortunately this is all predicated on a campaign faultlessly executed by Azerbaijan. Amassing the number of units required to simultaneously attack along the entire LoC without detection is difficult at best. Also, our defensive forces know the sectors that are most likely to bear the brunt of any full scale operation. If this is their final go-for-broke offensive, the expected staggering battlefield casualties will not be a deterrent. It is to be expected that a force attacking fortified position commanding the high ground will sustain casualties about five times greater than those suffered



'We Are Our Mountains' (Photo: Araz Boghossian)



Hundreds of Armenian Americans across the Eastern United States converged in New York on April 9 to participate in a peaceful protest against Azerbaijani aggression in NKR. (Photo: Araz Chiloyan)

by the defending force. These heavy battlefield losses do affect the moral and the combat effectiveness of the attacking units. If the Artsakh defensive positions cannot be breached within the 72-hour window of opportunity and with battlefield losses in men and equipment mounting, the Azeri high command has to think long and hard if they want to continue. With war raging nearby in Syria and Iraq and with Europe and Turkey facing turmoil, the untended consequences of a prolonged war in the South Caucasus is more than sufficient to cause concerned nations to intervene.

## OUR RESPONSE

The Diaspora is literally Artsakh’s last line of defense. We in the Diaspora must put aside our ideological blinders, our organizational parochialism, and our penchant to let petty differences affect our participation. Artsakh needs us today—there could very well be no tomorrow. Damaged homes and infrastructure must be repaired; the wounded must be cared for; and the children and elderly (the most vulnerable during war-time) require assistance. Artsakh’s needs are far beyond its ability to respond. There is no reason why the diasporan communities, and their organizations and institutions as well as ad hoc groups cannot work cooperatively to raise the millions of dollars in contributions and in-kind donations that is and will be needed in Artsakh for the next two to three years. If Artsakh survives this critical period, victory will be assured. If not, Armenia would forever be economically and politically subservient. Some of our brothers and sisters have already given their lives on the battlefield and others stand in harm’s way prepared to engage a determined enemy. Artsakh is under siege. We in the Diaspora must set our sights high and provide whatever is required to achieve ultimate victory in Artsakh and to assure Armenia’s future. □

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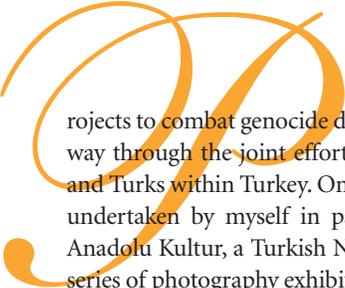
# *Bearing Witness*

in the Aftermath of the  
Armenian Genocide

By Armen T. Marsoobian



*Scholars have long noted that genocide is not just the physical killing of human beings but encompasses the systematic destruction of the cultural artifacts of victim groups. Such destruction began in the early stages of the Armenian Genocide and has continued unabated for 100 years. The perpetrators or their heirs attempt to minimize their crimes by wiping the landscape clean of any reminders of their victims. Great time and effort go into engineering a collective amnesia. The erasure of memory lays the groundwork for a manufactured national narrative that justifies and glorifies the actions of the perpetrators. My work is devoted to reversing this erasure through the art of photography. My ancestors were skilled photographers whose archive survived the killings and deportations. I have employed these images to tell the Armenian story in an attempt to chip away at the collective amnesia of Turkey.*

rojects to combat genocide denial are underway through the joint efforts of Armenians and Turks within Turkey. One such initiative undertaken by myself in partnership with Anadolu Kultur, a Turkish NGO, has been a series of photography exhibitions and publications that tell the story of my extended Armenian family, the Dildilians, in Ottoman Turkey from the 1870's to their expulsion in 1922. The Dildilians documented their lives and their community with photographs and with extensive written and oral memoirs. My family's photography and writings bear witness to their suffering as an oppressed minority in Turkey. For the most part, these photographs do not directly depict the suffering, though some do. What they do bear witness to is the loss of the once-vibrant and culturally advanced Armenian nation.

"Bearing witness" was central to my family's efforts a century ago and to my efforts today. When one bears witness one addresses an audience who is in need of the truth of testimony. My family's early efforts

to bear witness were primarily directed at their descendants. But our project has an important new audience: the citizens of the current Republic of Turkey. While inevitably controversial, this project is intended to have a positive impact on the highly contested arena of memory politics within Turkey.

The contested arena is the collective memory of the Turkish people. Collective memory is a form of remembering together, an activity common to groups and central to the creation of personal identity. Whether it is the shared memories of family members at a family reunion or the communal activities of ethnic groups who come together to memorialize historic wrongs, these conjoint activities both reflect and socially construct collective memory. Such memories often have a broad reach and long endurance. Collective memory does not require the personal first-hand experience of the event recalled. Often through symbolic, artistic, or literary re-enactments of the trauma of others, one may personally have an emotional

response that is not significantly different from the response felt in recollecting a painful personal event. The goal of our memory work is to engender an *empathetic* community of memory by engaging our audiences in the stories and images of the Armenians who once inhabited Turkey.

Understanding the nature of our audience has been crucial. If we are to succeed in positively affecting Turkish historical consciousness, then we must be nuanced in our approach. Our exhibitions have been open and inviting. Great care has been taken in crafting the witness testimony. Avoiding stereotypes, crude or vulgar language, and over-generalizations in the accompanying narrative is crucial. This is especially important because we are often quoting directly from witnesses whose memoirs serve as the basis of the narrative. Stigmatizing a whole population on the basis of the actions of the actual perpetrators and their leadership must be avoided. General claims—such as, "Turks did this..." or "Armenians

*odan Portre Çalışmaları*



were...”—need to be qualified. Yet, the witnessing testimony must not sanitize to the point where it does not reflect how the witness experienced the suffering.

Unlike other forms of remembrance, witness testimony can be reparative of the mental well-being of the witness as well as the audience. When the trauma of loss and suffering is passed down to future generations, the witnessing can take on a memori-

for them and the suffering they endured.

A major component of our memory project has been the photography exhibition, “Bearing Witness to the Lost History of an Armenian Family Through the Lens of the Dildilian Brothers, 1872–1923.” The exhibition opened at the Depo gallery, a converted tobacco warehouse in Istanbul’s Tophane neighborhood on April 25, 2013. The date of the opening was chosen to roughly coincide

floor. We did not avoid the “genocide” word here, but it was sparingly used within the section titled, “Date of Death: 1915.” The second floor was also devoted to thematic displays that provided more information and photos portraying different aspects of Armenian community life. A section highlighting the Armenian role in the development of photography and examples of the studio work were displayed. There were also many photos

*‘The victim’s voice may have been silenced in the past, but now there is someone who speaks for them and the suffering they endured.’*



alizing function that continues to have this healing effect. In the case of the Armenian Genocide, the trauma has in some cases become multi-generational. For Armenians living in Turkey, the fact that generations of survivors could not grieve in public adds an extra salience to the healing effect of our memory projects. Turkey’s Armenians have often come up to me with tears in their eyes to express their gratitude: “We can honor our ancestors for who they *really* were, not who the state tells us they were.”

This is the restorative aspect of bearing witness. I use restorative not in any material sense since victims can never be fully restored to their former state. What is *symbolically* restored is the moral order and the ethical norms that were violated in the wrongdoing. Thus bearing witness symbolically asserts the moral status of the victims and their membership in the moral community by giving them and their suffering a *voice*. When we heed that voice, we reaffirm that moral status, however belatedly. The victim’s voice may have been silenced in the past, but now there is someone who speaks

with the April 24th commemorations that had recently begun to be held in Istanbul. The exhibition drew large numbers over the course of two months. More than 150 photographs were reproduced in panels and wall displays across the gallery’s two floors. A Turkish narrative text, richly illustrated with photographs and drawings, covered the walls. A talented Turkish-Armenian writer, Anna Turay, divided the narrative into 27 illustrated vignettes beginning with the family’s early years in the 1870’s in their ancestral home of Sebastia and concluding with their forced exile to Greece in 1923. A free booklet containing the English translation for non-Turkish speakers was also available.

Our goal was to place the events of the genocide within the larger context of the life of the family and the Armenian community. The emphasis was on the loss not the violence of 1915. We made the conscious choice to use the word “genocide” (in Turkish, “*soykırım*”) sparingly in the main exhibition narrative. For those who wanted to explore further, detailed informational panels were created for the gallery’s second

of orphans after the war; the family founded an orphanage and helped the American-led humanitarian efforts in the region.

A conscious effort was made to provide spaces for people to sit and reflect on their experience. The exhibition designer, Kirkor Sahakoglu, created a darkened space, set off from the main exhibition, for people to light memorial candles. The room contained dozens of portraits of family members who did not survive. Large group photos of Armenian intellectuals and educators who perished in 1915 were also displayed. A musical soundscape created from the Armenian liturgical requiem softly played in the background.

Another vital component of the exhibition was the direct testimony of family survivors through the use of audio and video recordings. Decades earlier my uncle and mother had recorded such testimony, which we subtitled and played in the gallery space. My uncle provided an emotionally upsetting account of watching his neighbors being deported by oxcart, while in contrast, my mother describes happy memories of her

childhood in the warm and loving family home in Marsovan. A leading Turkish newspaper, *Radikal*, and Hürriyet TV posted the videos on the internet, and both have been viewed thousands of times. The media coverage was extensive both in terms of the mainstream media and more progressive outlets. School groups, primarily from the Armenian schools of Istanbul, attended.

In October 2013, we opened a redesigned exhibition in Merzifon (Marsovan), my family’s hometown. It was the town where they survived the genocide because, as pho-

mer of 2015 necessitating a pause in our work. The Diyarbakir exhibition held on the grounds of the Surp Giragos Church in spring 2014 was especially symbolic because we were now on the grounds of a beautifully restored Armenian cultural artifact that survived erasure. It was not a museum but a live space where people of different faiths and ethnicities could gather to generate new threads in the collective fabric of memory that had once been the multi-ethnic city of Dikranagerd-Diyarbakir.

In November 2015, our most recent exhi-

highly readable family history, has been translated into Turkish. *Dildilian Brothers—Memories of a Lost Armenian Home: Photography and the Story of an Armenian Family in Anatolia, 1888-1923*, a bilingual Turkish-English photography book that includes 272 photos, has also been published. Copies have been distributed to libraries in Turkey and around the world.

The final component of our project grows out of many visits to the Merzifon-Sivas region where the Dildilians find their roots. Important locations in the family

*Despite inevitable setbacks, an opening has been made into a closed past—a past once opened that can never be fully closed again.*



tographers essential to the army’s war effort and the local government, the family was exempted from the deportation. Yet, they were still required to “convert” to Islam and given Turkish names and identity papers. During those years, they heroically rescued and hid young men and women in their homes. Merzifon today is an ethnically Turkish town with little reminders of its once-large and vibrant Armenian population. Unlike Istanbul, it is more religiously conservative and nationalistic. Yet even here, I met progressive Turks who worked with us to bring the exhibition to a recently restored 16th century *Taşhan* (inn) in their city. The local chamber of commerce surprisingly agreed to provide financial support.

Additional exhibitions were held in Diyarbakir and in Ankara. We hope to hold more in the future but the political and security climate has deteriorated since the sum-

mer of 2015 necessitating a pause in our work. The Diyarbakir exhibition held on the grounds of the Surp Giragos Church in spring 2014 was especially symbolic because we were now on the grounds of a beautifully restored Armenian cultural artifact that survived erasure. It was not a museum but a live space where people of different faiths and ethnicities could gather to generate new threads in the collective fabric of memory that had once been the multi-ethnic city of Dikranagerd-Diyarbakir.

In November 2015, our most recent exhibition opened at the Çankaya Municipality Contemporary Art Center, located in the center of Ankara near the parliament and important government ministries. This was ground-breaking for it was in a public, government-owned space. In both Diyarbakir and Ankara, as a symbolic act of reversal we added an introductory panel in the Armenian language. While much of the response of those who attended was overwhelmingly positive, there was inevitable criticism in the nationalist press, mostly directed at the mayor for allowing such an exhibition to take place.

narrative have been identified. While much has been destroyed, some remnants of the Armenian presence remain. Our goal is to make these sites more visible both to the local population and to Armenian visitors who in recent years have been making “pilgrimages” to historic Armenia. In partnership with locals, attempts are being made for preservation and proper identification.

It is hard to gauge the progress we have made with our memory work, but the work continues with the hope that incremental change has and will continue to take place. No one, especially my partners, underestimates the obstacles that face us. Collective memory is difficult to change even in more open societies. Despite inevitable setbacks, an opening has been made into a closed past—a past once opened that can never be fully closed again. □

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*Dispatch from Istanbul*

# Nine Years in the Courtrooms

## The Murder Cases of Dink, Balikci, and Kucuk

By Sayat Tekir

# B

eginning in the late 19th century, life has not been easy for the Armenians and other minorities living on these lands. The oppression that started during this period—and that was marked by massacres—culminated in the genocide in 1915. The genocide was neither the first nor the last act of aggression against Turkey’s Armenians. During the Republican period, about every ten years the lives of Armenians were made difficult through abuses, massacres, crimes, and discriminatory laws and acts. The only alternative was to leave Turkey, and a certain segment of the Armenian population chose that path. Those who stayed did so because of the ties that bound them to the land. A glimpse at Armenian history suggests that fleeing or staying put has long been a feature of the Armenian existence.

For those who stayed behind—in other words, for Turkey’s Armenians—certain periods were relatively calm, though in actuality the official state policies remained unchanged. In Turkey, where the endurance of the republic has been the driving principle, Armenians born in the 1980’s and later saw Hrant Dink’s 2007 murder as the embodiment of what they had heard about the Armenian Genocide from their elders.

Following Dink’s assassination, the murders of Sevag Balikci and Maritsa Kucuk—both victims of hate—once again served as reminders of the heavy burden carried by an Armenian in Turkey.



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Hrant Dink

### A CRIME SANCTIONED BY A NATION

**T**he first trial related to Dink's murder began on April 20, 2007; 18 people, including Ogun Samast, Yasin Halal, and Erhan Tuncel, faced charges.

During this trial, there was not a single reference to the negligence of the police, military, secret service, or the local authorities. Five years later, the court ruled that an organization had not been behind the criminal act. Samast, who was being tried in juvenile court, received a prison sentence of 22 years and 10 months. However, following a reduction in the sentencing, Samast will be eligible for parole in 6 years and 9 months. Halal, as the mastermind of the crime, was sentenced to life in prison. Tuncel and Ahmed Iskender were to serve 15 years in prison. The court verdict was declared void on May 13, 2013, by the Court of Cassation.

The case was reexamined when a series of court cases were launched against government officials following clashes between the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the religious Gulen movement. In 2014, investigating prosecutor Gökalp Kökçü attached to the indictment the names of a number of AKP officials. Kökçü had prepared an indictment against 26 state officials, including the Istanbul provincial police chief of the time, Celalettin Cerrah; former Istanbul Intelligence Branch Chief Sabri Uzun; former Trabzon Provincial Police Chief Resat Altay; and former Trabzon Intelligence Branch Director Engin Dinc. The indictment was sent back to the prosecution twice by the Public Prosecutor of Istanbul, and in January of that year, Prosecutor Gökalp Kökçü was removed from office.

The case against the state officials was then joined to the main trial, which took place on April 19. Ahead of the trial, Dink family lawyer Hakan Bakircioglu commented that the court's position toward state officials will become clear following the trial. On April 19, the former police officers Ozkan Mumcu and Muhittin Zenit, accused of “causing death due to negligence” and “professional misconduct,” were released by the court.



Ani and Garabet Balıkcı hold a photograph of their son Sevag (Photo: Elsa Landard)



Maritsa Kucuk (Photo: Nor Zartouk)

## 96 YEARS LATER, ANOTHER CRIME ON APRIL 24

**O**n April 24, 2011, on the anniversary of the start of the Armenian Genocide, ethnically Armenian serviceman Sevag Balıkcı, who was completing his mandatory military service in the Turkish Army, was killed by a bullet from a gun fired by fellow serviceman Kivanc Agaoglu in Batman, where the two were stationed.

The commanders of the post, within an hour and a half of each other, prepared two contradicting reports. The author of the first report insisted that the gun had targeted Balıkcı; the author of the second report claimed that Balıkcı was the victim of an “accident.”

Following a trial that lasted two years, Agaoglu was charged with “causing the death of someone due to inattention” and for “murder as a result of negligence.” He was handed a prison sentence of 4 years and 5 months. Agaoglu, who remained free for most of the duration of his trial, remains free today since the Court of Cassation voided the sentence.

During the trial of Balıkcı’s murder, witness Halil Eksi testified that Agaoglu had intentionally killed Balıkcı, but later changed his testimony—claiming that no argument or fight had taken place between Agaoglu and Balıkcı, and that the latter had been shot while the two were “joking around.” Balıkcı’s family objected, and a court case was launched; Eksi and Bulent Kaya, a relative of Agaoglu’s who had put pressure on Eksi to change his testimony, were convicted.

On Feb. 24, during a trial that was held in Diyarbakir, Balıkcı family lawyer Cem Halavurt insisted that the soldiers had been pressured into testifying to one version of events. Referring to the trial proceedings on the false testimonies and the verdict against Bulent Kaya, Halavurt stated that the crime was committed not as the way the court described—“murder as a result of negligence”—but as “premeditated murder.”

Halavurt also noted that the court had refused to grant another audience to the witnesses and that if the verdict remains the same, he intends to appeal the verdict. The upcoming trial has been postponed to June 4.

## ATTACKS AND MURDER IN SAMATYA

**O**n Dec. 28, 2012, 84-year-old Maritsa Kucuk, a resident of the old Armenian neighborhood of Samatya in Istanbul, was brutally beaten and stabbed to death.

The prosecution imposed a blackout on the trial investigation, as it had done during the Dink murder trial. Between Nov. 28, 2012 and Jan. 26, 2013, a string of attacks targeted elderly Armenian women. Turfanda Asik lost an eye and was hospitalized for some time. Sultan Aykar also lost her eyesight following an attack.

Two months after these crimes, Murat Nazarian, an ethnic Armenian and a drug addict, was arrested. During the trial, Nazarian told the court that he did not remember committing the murder; he told his relatives, “I am scared of speaking. These are very powerful people; they would kill me.” During Nazarian’s interrogation, other attacks took place in Samatya. But no investigation was carried out to look into these attacks or to link them to Kucuk’s murder. The cases on the other attacks were closed.

Following a three-year-long trial, Nazarian was sentenced to life in prison for “murdering an individual unable to physically or mentally defend themselves.” The court also sentenced Nazarian to 10 months imprisonment for breaking into Kucuk’s apartment; but it also presented an inquiry to the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecution Office demanding an investigation to uncover the other criminals who had likely participated in the attacks. Kucuk family lawyer Eren Keskin insisted that from the first moment of this disguised trial, the offense had been a hate crime. Keskin also noted that because of a lack of investigations, she would take the case to the higher court.

All three cases, which have captured the attention of Turkey’s Armenians over the last nine years, carry the traces of another 100-year-old case when we take into account the planning, execution, investigation, and trials related to these crimes. □

*Translated from Armenian by Nanore Barsoumian*

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