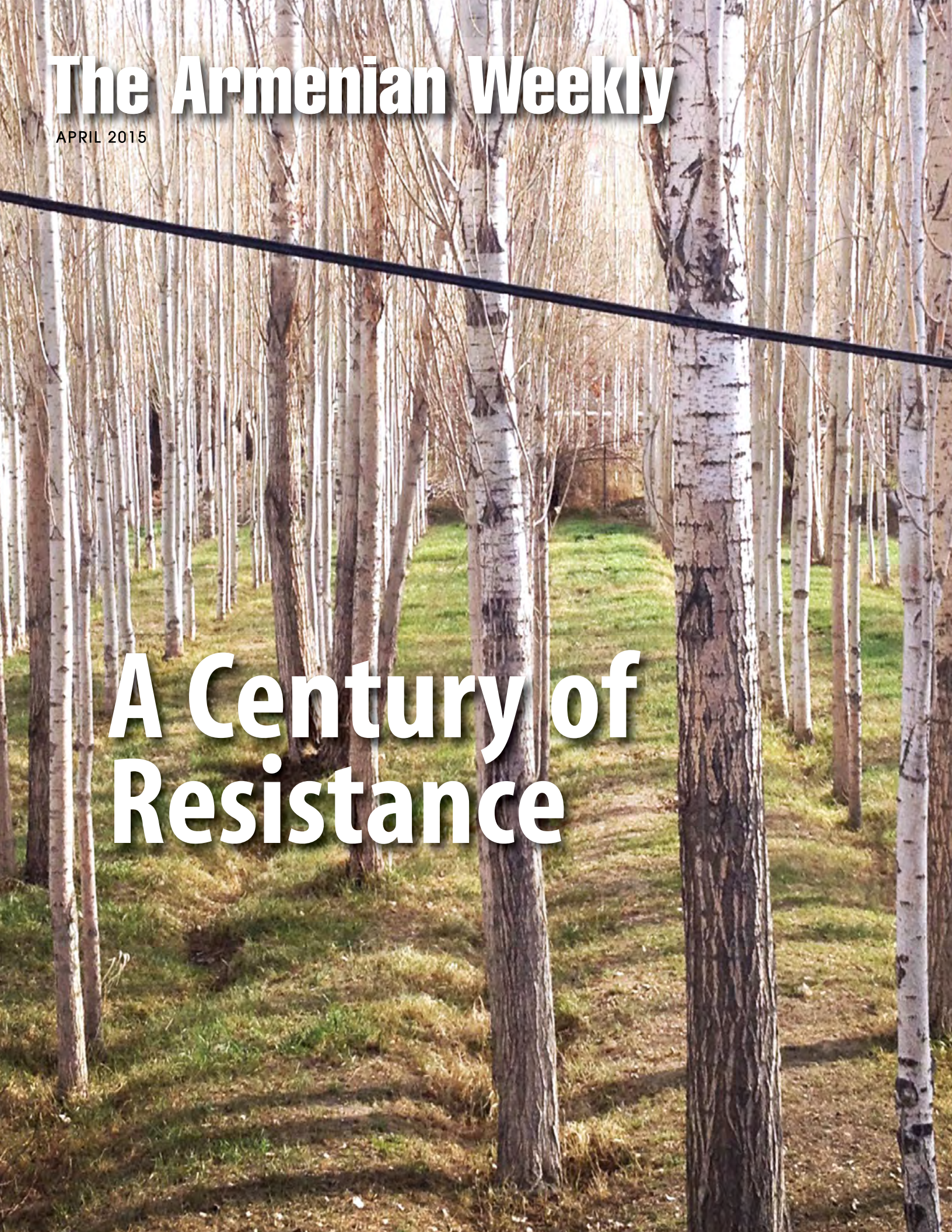


A photograph of a birch forest with a black wire running across the top. The trees are thin and white, with some showing dark bark. The ground is covered in green grass and some dry leaves. The lighting is soft, suggesting a late afternoon or early morning scene.

The Armenian Weekly

APRIL 2015

A Century of Resistance

The Armenian Weekly

APRIL 2015



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ON THE COVER:

Historic Armenian town of Gurun in Sivas, Turkey (Photo: Scout Tufankjian)

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Contributors



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Victoria Blewer left New York City in 1986 to devote herself full-time to fine art photography in the quiet hills of Vermont. Her photographs are shot with black and white film—many with infrared black and white film, printed on a porous photographic paper, and then toned for color and longevity. Blewer's photographs have been featured in the Boston Globe Sunday Magazine, Readers' Digest, Vermont Life, Vermont Magazine, and Yankee Magazine. Her work can also be seen on book covers published by Random House, Simon & Schuster, and the University Press of New England. Her work has won numerous awards.



Chris Bohjalian is the author of 17 books, including the New York Times bestsellers *The Sandcastle Girls*, *The Night Strangers*, *Skeletons at the Feast*, and *The Double Bind*. Bohjalian's *The Sandcastle Girls* is an epic novel set against the backdrop of the Armenian Genocide. His novel *Midwives* was a number one New York Times bestseller and a selection of Oprah's Book Club. He has also won the Anahid Literary Award and the New England Book Award for fiction. His work has been translated into more than 25 languages, and 3 of his novels have become movies (*Secrets of Eden*, *Midwives*, and *Past the Bleachers*). The paperback of Bohjalian's most recent novel, *Close Your Eyes, Hold Hands*, will be published in May.



David Gaunt is Professor of History at Södertörn University College, Stockholm, Sweden. He is a social historian who has written widely on the history of minorities and everyday life. He is the author of *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors: Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia during World War I*, a seminal work on the Assyrian Genocide. His earlier work is the edited volume *Collaboration and Resistance during the Holocaust: Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania* (Bern, 2004).



Nancy Kricorian Nancy Kricorian is a New York City-based writer and activist. She is the author of the novels *Zabelle*, *Dreams of Bread and Fire*, and most recently *All The Light There Was*, which is set in the Armenian community of Paris during World War II. She has been the recipient of a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship, the Anahid Literary Award, a Gold Medal of the Writers Union of Armenia, and the Daniel Varoujan Prize of the New England Poetry Club, among other honors. Kricorian has been on the staff of CODEPINK Women for Peace since 2003.



Marian Mesrobian MacCurdy currently teaches creative non-fiction at Hampshire College in Amherst, Mass. She served as a professor in and chair of the Department of Writing at Ithaca College for many years. She has published articles, essays, and poems in such publications as "Ararat," "Raft," the "Journal of Teaching Writing," and the "Journal of Poetry Therapy." Her books include *Writing and Healing: Toward an Informed Practice*, *The Mind's Eye: Image and Memory in Writing About Trauma*, and *Sacred Justice: The Voices and Legacy of the Armenian Operation Nemesis*, which was released on Feb. 28.

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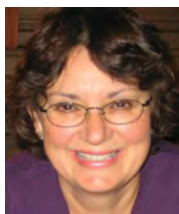
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Khatchig Mouradian is coordinator of the Armenian Genocide Program at the Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights (CGHR) at Rutgers University, where he also teaches in the History and Sociology Departments as adjunct professor. He was the editor of the Armenian Weekly from 2007–14. In January 2015, Mouradian was elected to the ARF Bureau. Mouradian is a Ph.D. candidate at the Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Clark University, currently completing his dissertation on the second phase of the Armenian Genocide.



Henry C. Theriault earned his Ph.D. in philosophy in 1999 from the University of Massachusetts, with a specialization in social and political philosophy. He is currently a professor in and chair of the Philosophy Department at Worcester State College, where he has taught since 1998. Since 2007, he has served as co-editor-in-chief of the peer-reviewed journal “Genocide Studies and Prevention.” He is chair of the Armenian Genocide Reparations Study Group (AGRSG), which published its Final Report in March 2015. His research focuses on philosophical approaches to genocide issues, especially genocide denial, long-term justice, and the role of violence against women in genocide. He has lectured widely in the United States and internationally.



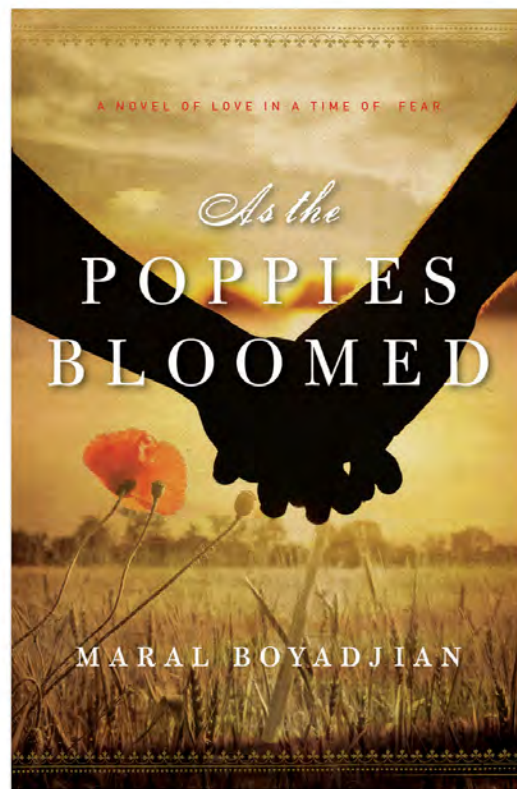
Hannibal Travis is Professor of Law at Florida International University College of Law. He is the author of the first comprehensive legal history of genocide in the Middle East and North Africa, entitled *Genocide in the Middle East: The Ottoman Empire, Iraq, and Sudan* (Carolina Academic Press, 2010). He has also contributed the chapters on the Assyrian Genocide to four anthologies: *Forgotten Genocides*, *Hidden Genocides*, *The Great Catastrophe*, and *Genocide in the Late Ottoman Empire and Early Turkish Republic*. His second book, entitled *Genocide*,

Ethnonationalism, and the United Nations: Exploring the Causes of Mass Killing Since 1945 (Routledge, 2012), used the archives of the United Nations and decades of empirical research to attempt the first in-depth exploration of the causes of genocide and politicide based on primary-source materials and comparative mortality statistics.



Scout Tufankjian is a photojournalist based in Brooklyn, N.Y. Her work has been featured in Newsweek, US News & World Report, Le Monde, Newsday, and the New York Times. Her book featuring a selection of the photographs from Obama’s presidential campaign, *Yes We Can: Barack Obama’s History-Making Presidential Campaign*, sold out its initial 55,000 copy run a month before it was released in December 2008. Tufankjian’s photo of Michelle Obama and President Barack Obama hugging each other, released in November 2012, became the most-liked photo on Facebook and most retweeted Tweet in history. Her most recent work, the Armenian Diaspora Project, culminated in a book, *There Is Only the Earth: Images from the Armenian Diaspora Project*, which was released in April.

KIRKUS REVIEWS: *Powerful and sensitive, this tragic novel helps illuminate a historical episode still too little known or acknowledged.*



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A Century of Resistance

BY NANORE BARSOUMIAN

The genocidal process targeting Armenians had just begun when the Hairenik Daily published this plea on May 6, 1915:

Personal Telegrams

Yerevan (delayed), April 11—The massacre in Vasbouragan continues.

Sophia, May 3—Treason against Armenians in Bolis [Istanbul]. All our *ungers* and the intellectuals of the community, even former Minister Mardigian, former Patriarch Arsharouni, and other clergymen arrested. Situation frightful. Immediately organize protest meetings on international soil and appeal to government to influence through Ambassador in Bolis. Otherwise the Armenian people will be annihilated.

It was the 20th anniversary of the Hamidian Massacres when news began to trickle in that something dark was awaiting the Armenians. “Bloody Twentieth Anniversary,” read the May 8, 1915 editorial headline of the Hairenik Daily. It spoke of the horrific

massacres of 1895, and in anticipation of the bloodshed that was surely on the horizon, called for resistance and unyielding hope.

That’s how reporting on the genocide began in this newspaper—with an impassioned call for resistance and hope.

One hundred years later, we are still driven by hope. Still determined to resist. Various paths to justice are being paved, through lawsuits, resolutions, and educational initiatives. Bridges are being built, whether with human rights activists in Turkey or activists struggling for justice in other communities. And the diaspora is reconnecting with the young republics of Armenia and Artsakh—crafting visions for strengthening communities worldwide and in the Homeland. The path ahead remains long and filled with struggles. But endurance is practiced and learned, and hope is a luxury we have somehow retained and nurtured.

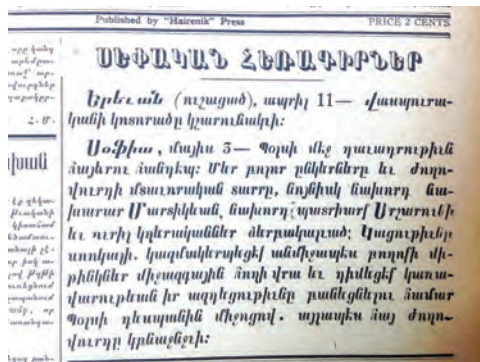
A photograph from 1990 shows a group of old men sitting on a bench, with a large banner resting against their knees that reads, “Struggle until victory.” Today, those men are all gone. They trusted that when they departed this earth, *we* would hold that banner up. They trusted that someday, somehow, their children would inherit the justice owed. After all, hope carries an element of trust.

They laid that trust at our feet.

Today, we light our first candle, a mere punctuation at the end of a chapter. The years have been marked with a stubborn drive for survival—physical, cultural, political, and psychological.

With a vast network of dedicated activists, artists, scholars, organizations, and our fledgling republics, it’s been a century of resistance, one day at a time.

And a century is but a three-digit number—three badges of honor: one for remembrance, one for hope, and one for a hundred years of resistance. □



Two telegrams published in the May 6, 1915 issue of the Hairenik Daily give the news of the beginning of a widespread extermination campaign targeting Armenians.



A group of elderly protesters holds a banner that reads, “Struggle until victory.” (Photo: The Armenian Weekly, April 21, 1990)

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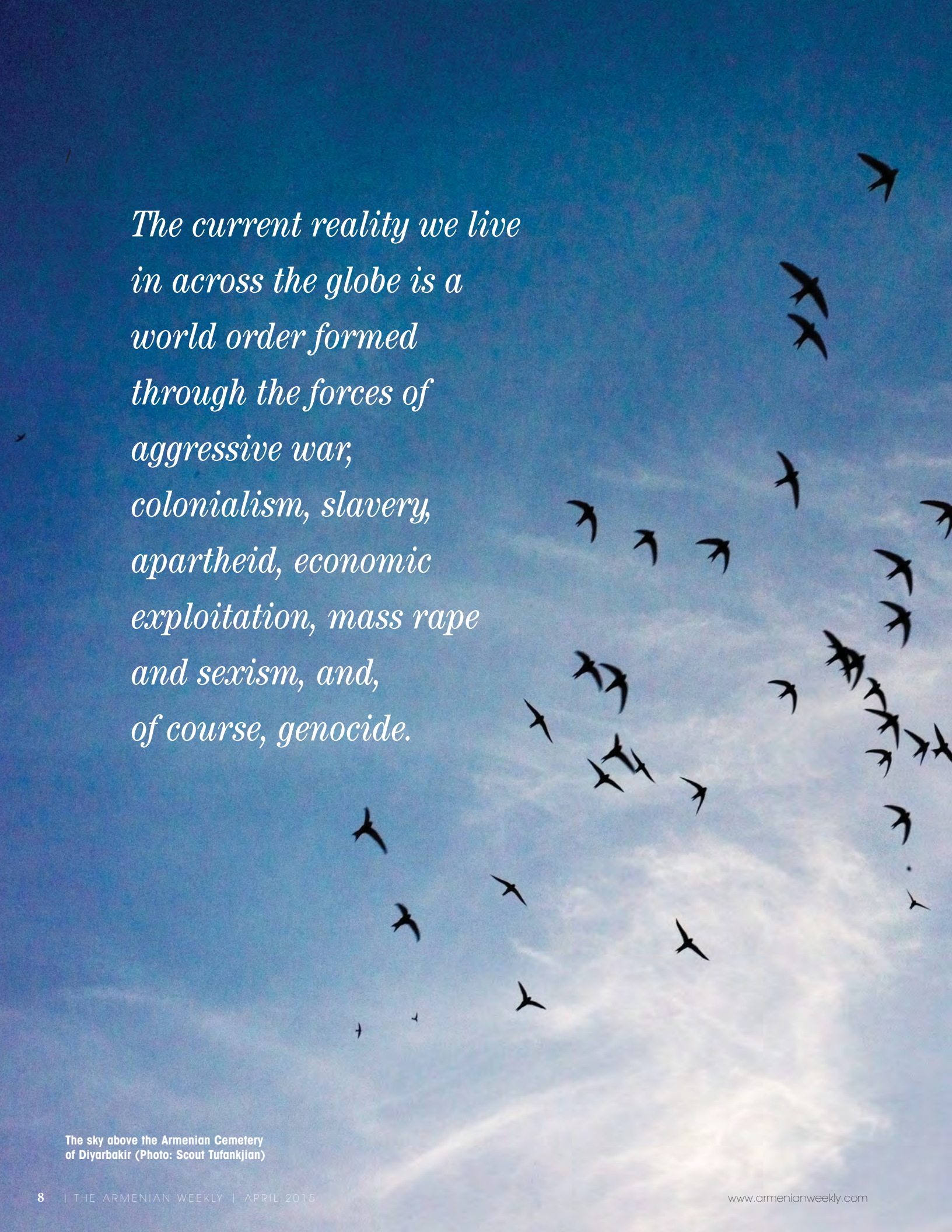
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A large flock of birds, possibly swallows, is captured in flight against a deep blue sky with wispy white clouds. The birds are silhouetted, creating a sense of movement and freedom. They are scattered across the frame, with a higher concentration on the right side.

*The current reality we live
in across the globe is a
world order formed
through the forces of
aggressive war,
colonialism, slavery,
apartheid, economic
exploitation, mass rape
and sexism, and,
of course, genocide.*

The sky above the Armenian Cemetery
of Diyarbakir (Photo: Scout Tufankjian)

2015 and Beyond

Henry C. Theriault

This paper is an expansion of remarks given by the author at McGill University and the University of Toronto on March 18 and 20, 2015, respectively.

There is an oft-repeated false truism about genocide, that denial is the final stage of genocide. It is so unquestionably accepted that it has even made its way into formal stage-theories of genocide. It is, unfortunately, quite wrong. Denial is not the final stage of genocide, but rather present throughout most of the genocidal process. When they are doing it, perpetrators almost inevitably deny that what they are doing is genocide. For instance, Talaat and his cronies were adamant that their violence against Armenians was not one-sided mass extermination, but instead a response to Armenian rebellion and violent perfidy in Van and elsewhere. They maintained that the deportations were intended to move Armenians to other areas of the empire, not a means of destroying the Armenian population of village after village, town after town.

We see variations on this theme in case after case. The United States did not hunt down Native American groups, did not kill those under their control or force them onto destructive reservations; no, my country fought the so-called “savages” in a series of “Indian Wars.” (One need only look at the historical record of hyper-violence by the U.S. military and general population, which tortured, raped, killed, and then mutilated Native Americans, to see

who the real savages have been.) The Tasmanians were killing livestock and even settlers, while the Herero were in revolt. The Jews had a world conspiracy that was out to get decent Aryans and needed to be stopped by the most brutal means possible. Pro-democracy activists in Indonesia were actually a communist insurgency, while Guatemalan Mayans, who appear to have been hardworking people in dire poverty just trying to survive the assaults on them by their government and country’s wealthy elite, were actually communists determined to destroy the good values of their society and impose a horrible political and social order. The Tutsi were hell-bent on dominating the Hutu, who had no choice but to respond, and the Bosnian Muslims, not Serbs were the aggressors, despite the fact that the latter had by far more military power. Today, the supposed rebellion in the Nuba Mountain and Blue Nile regions of Sudan leave “statesman” Omar al-Bashir no choice but to bomb thousands of civilians with Antonov aircraft.

Denial is not a stage of genocide, but part of the commission of genocide, especially as prosecutions have led sophisticated perpetrators to begin their international tribunal defenses while the blood is still flowing.

Denial is certainly prevalent after genocide, as the false truism does capture correctly. It is not a final stage, however. Indeed, as long as denial persists, we can be sure that the genocidal process is still operating. Denial accompanies this operation, and furthers its goals of “eliminating the consequences” of the genocide for the

perpetrator group, even generations and centuries after the violence and destruction. Denial is not the final stage of genocide; consolidation of the genocide is.¹ A genocide is consolidated after the phase of direct destruction—sometimes long after—when the perpetrator group has made final and irrevocable all the various demographic, political, identity, military, cultural, financial, territorial, and other material and symbolic gains achieved through and deriving from the genocide, when the post-genocide state of affairs has become completely, utterly, and irremediably rendered permanent so that, whether the victim group has faded out of existence or still somehow persists, its condition will remain as it is, in the enduring position of victimhood unredeemed and unrepaired.

Denial, geopolitically motivated treaties, and other influences all conspire with the passage of time in the process of consolidation. What is striking about consolidation is that, no matter to what extent complex forces can be blamed for the direct phase of a genocide and leave room for repentance by the perpetrator group, consolidation is done with a full understanding of what was done through a genocide and the moral obligation to repair that it has imposed, and in deliberate rejection by the perpetrator group of somehow doing right by the victims.

A genocide deeply ruptures the pre-existing status quo and in particular devastates the victim community. Just because the violence and destruction of a genocide end does not mean that their consequences are mitigated. On the contrary, so long as the impact of a genocide on its victims remains unrepaired, that impact continues devastating them in perpetuity. Despite the wishful thinking of philosophers such as Jeremy Waldron, as Jermaine McCalpin has emphasized,² time does not heal the wounds of genocide. On the contrary, as generation follows generation, more and more people are injured, demeaned, and assaulted by the original violence. With each day that passes without repair, the scope of the destruction increases. The end limit point of this process is not successful denial, but the point at which denial no longer is necessary because the genocide's impact has become fully irreparable, as the genocide's consequences become everlastingly secured in the global social, political, and economic status quo. Denial ends not with the success of denial, but the total and complete consolidation of genocide. Genocides are denied because their effects—both material and in terms of



Denial is not a stage of genocide, but part of the commission of genocide, especially as prosecutions have led sophisticated perpetrators to begin their international tribunal defenses while the blood is still flowing.

historical memory—are, thankfully, still contested. Consolidation can happen through denial, at the point where denial has erased the genocide completely enough that it will never rate contemporary political and legal consideration, but it can also occur when the genocide is fully known yet considered so far removed from present concerns that its results are generally accepted.

This is evident through a few examples. The genocides of the Herero, Australian Aborigines, Native Canadians, and Native Americans are still denied actively, precisely because the victim groups still experience the impacts of the injuries of direct massacre, religious and cultural destruction, internment on reservations, family degradation through boarding schools and other forced transfers of children from their home groups, and more, and

so a reparative process could actually address these harms. Denial stops reparations. Denial of the Holocaust continues because the evils of anti-Semitism that it maximized horrifically remain vibrant forces in human society across the globe; the Holocaust persists through its legacy of making Jews, already considered fit targets of oppression and violence, the fit targets of mass extermination. Denials of the Bangladesh, East Timor, Cambodian, and other cases continue because perpetrators and survivors yet live, and the deep harm done to each society remains largely unaddressed. The list of denied genocides goes on.

No one denies the genocides of Melos and Carthage, of the Cathars or by Chengis Khan, because the destruction they imparted into the world has long since been completely and irreparably incorporated into the world order. For these and all too many other genocides, utterly and completely “getting away with it” has been the final stage. How many so-called great societies and states celebrated in the present and past are so because of their complete success in consolidating the genocides they committed?

The false truism reflects an important effect of denial. Years of denial after a genocide actually skew the framework through which that genocide is perceived and understood. Faced with a strong denial campaign, survivors and concerned others, including in the perpetrator group, find themselves in a seemingly endless, disheartening, degrading, and exhausting struggle simply to get the truth recognized by enough people that it will not be erased from the annals of human history. Soon enough, the genocide itself is lost in the struggle against denial: The struggle against denial becomes an end in itself. The defeat of denial under such circumstances comes to

be seen as justice for the genocide. With this, defeated or not, denial wins the day, by preventing a victim group from seeing that the defeat of denial does not give it justice, but merely gets it back to the starting point from which a justice process can finally be initiated. For long-past genocides, victim groups and others forget that recognition of the genocide against denial does not repair the harms done by the genocide, but merely addresses the secondary problem of denial. Only by directly and substantially engaging those harms through a comprehensive reparations process can the world do what it can to bring justice to the victim group and all of humanity.³

The recent attention on reparations for the Armenian case represents an important move beyond focus on denial. With this in mind, it is clear that 2015, the 100th anniversary, should not be understood as a culminating point in the post-genocide history of the Ottoman Genocide of Christian Minority Groups. If recognition comes this year, as it could—though I am not holding my breath—it will mean only that finally, after a century, the victim groups and others concerned with human rights can finally start addressing the harms done. But the effects of genocide are not measured in such neat little packages of 10 years, 50 years, or 100 years, which we make special, after all, simply because of the evolutionary accident that has given us 10 fingers to count with. As much as some people, especially those outside of victim communities who need a good story before they are willing to care about a legacy of mass violence, attach significance to such time intervals, the consequences of genocide play out in a complex history of material and social causal chains so that no particular year or date has any great actual meaning. Or, to put it more correctly, *every year* and, indeed, *every day* in the long aftermath of a genocide have great importance, until the injuries are addressed in a substantial way that is appropriately transformative for both the victim and perpetrator groups.

Helping to accomplish this shift in focus toward repair has been the Armenian Genocide Reparations Study Group (AGRSG), which in 2007 I formed with renowned international lawyer and legal scholar Alfred de Zayas, former Armenian Ambassador to Canada and treaty expert Ara Papian, and dynamic Jamaican political scien-

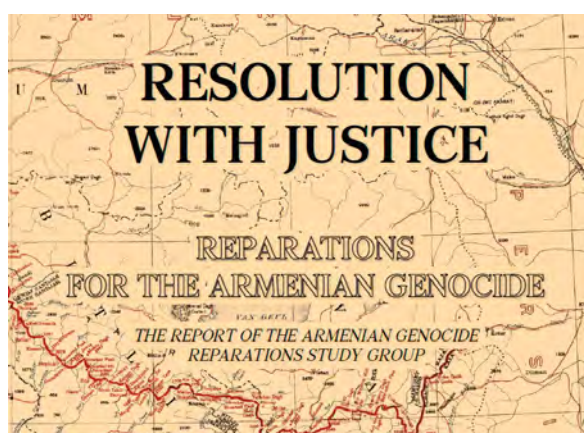
tist Jermaine McCalpin. The AGRSG has done a comprehensive study of reparations for the Armenian Genocide. The AGRSG Final Report⁴ analyzes the harms done and the legal, historical, and ethical justifications for repair, and then proposes an innovative transitional justice process to effect it. The report includes determinations of territorial and other restitution that should be made by Turkey and discussion of the ways in which reparations should be used by the Armenian group as a whole to ensure the future viability of its state and its global identity.

The harms done by the Armenian Genocide are very much present today. They include the dramatic demographic impact on the Armenian population through direct and indirect killing as well as forced assimilation that reduced the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire to less than 40 percent of its pre-genocide number, but also the compounding impact on birthrates and retention of members by rape and other torture; rampant poverty; long-term effects of malnutrition; global dispersion; loss of religious, educational, and other institutions necessary for the cohesion of Armenian communities; and much more. To these harms are added the extensive lost property of Armenians. Not only were virtually all land, businesses, farms, warehouse inventories, food stocks, and other such property taken from Armenians, but the mass expropriation reached down to the most trivial items, from kitchen pots and pans to the clothes on deportees' backs and shoes on their feet. Turkish activist and writer Temel Demirer has stated of this mass theft

that it was with this Armenian property that the national economy of the new 1923 Turkish Republic was founded.⁵ What is more, since this time, Armenians have lost all that would have been built on this wealth, which compounds daily, with many living out their lives over the past century impoverished because what was theirs was denied. And this mass of material resources has not just disappeared: Wealthy Turkish families, the government, and average people have received the cumulative benefits of all that this wealth has allowed them to build, its daily compounding interest. In fact, scholars such as Uğur Ümit Üngör and Mehmet Polatel have traced expropriated Armenian property right through to contemporary national and regional elite families,



'Still waiting for the fair trial' (Design and photo: Ruben Malayan)



Cover of the AGRSG Report on Reparations

some of whose family fortunes were built with the property pilfered from exterminated Armenians.⁶

The destruction of religious, educational, cultural and artistic, and other aspects of Armenian communal existence, coupled with demographic collapse and global dispersion, have rendered Armenian identity and peoplehood fragile, requiring continual, draining efforts by members of the community just to prevent their erasure. The demographic destruction and individual as well as state territorial expropriations of the 1915–23 period are the most important factor in the verity that today's Armenian Republic is a small, landlocked country of barely 3 million facing a gigantic, economically and militarily powerful Turkey of 70 million—a hostile Turkey that enjoys tremendous regional power and geopolitical prominence that allows it nearly free reign in its treatment of the Armenian Republic. Even had the genocide occurred but Atatürk's ultra-nationalist forces not invaded and conquered the

within the world of violence and power of the original harm, feeling always on the edge of being pushed back into the violence, with no escape from the terror, nor space simply to mourn what happened. And perpetrator groups and individuals seem never content even with that level of continuing harm to their victims but, as we have seen with Turkey, continue with such things as repression of non-Muslim minority foundations and expropriation of their property⁸ and the assassination of Hrant Dink.

Reparations for the Armenian Genocide are certainly legally, historically, and morally justified in abstract terms. But, as the Armenian Republic struggles economically and politically, the Armenian Diaspora expends greater and greater energy to be less and less effective in preserving Armenian identity, and Armenians in Turkey continue to live under threat and oppression, reparations are an absolute need if the Armenian Republic, the Armenian Diaspora, and the Turkish-Armenian community have



[A]nother false truism is that time heals all wounds. Nothing could be more wrong, unless by healing we mean that perpetrator groups and the world in general eventually can forget about a past genocide when the victim group finally fades away in the ultimate triumph of genocide. Unless the harms of a genocide are addressed, then they persist and in fact compound over time, with each generation of the victim group grappling with them.

bulk of the 1918 Armenian Republic, historian Richard Hovannisian has estimated that the Armenian Republic today would be a much larger and secure state with a population on the order of 20 million.⁷ What would it mean for such an Armenia to face a territorially and demographically smaller Turkey today? Surely Armenians in the republic and around the world would be infinitely more secure and enjoy a level of community well-being that became a fantasy on April 24, 1915.

Armenians in Turkey have borne a great share of the genocide's impact. After almost a century of suffering in relative silence, the legacy of oppression and violence is now well known. Reflecting on Native Americans in the United States, Mayans in Guatemala, survivors of childhood sexual abuse, and other such groups, it seems clear that the most difficult situation a victim group or individual can find itself, himself, or herself in—even beyond the terrible situation of all victims—is to remain subject to the perpetrator group or individual. Far beyond the painful, demeaning effects of denial for a group that has escaped, the situation of those still under perpetrator hegemony is to be constantly forced to live

any future at all, and the 1915 genocide is not to succeed by 2065. The current trends make it a real possibility that the state will fail in the next half century, the Armenian-Turkish community will become a perpetually subjugated group with no hope of true participation as full citizens in their state and its society, and Armenian identity will become a residual and decaying aftereffect of genocide, rather than the vibrant, living community anchor it should be.

The full history of the Armenian Genocide is far from written.

Coupled with this analysis of the need for reparations, it is useful to consider some of the standard objections raised against reparations in a case such as the Armenian Genocide. First, another false truism is that time heals all wounds. Nothing could be more wrong, unless by healing we mean that perpetrator groups and the world in general eventually can forget about a past genocide when the victim group finally fades away in the ultimate triumph of genocide. Unless the harms of a genocide are addressed, then they persist and in fact compound over time, with each generation of the victim group grappling with them.

If time is running out, it is running out for the perpetrator groups. As Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks join what I will call the “100-plus Club” of groups whose experience of destruction has endured for more than a century, it is Turkey that should regard the sands flowing down in the hourglass with foreboding and disquiet. As time passes, harms become more difficult to repair, and those in the victim communities who have lived and died without justice can never receive it. Already Japan is on the verge of failing utterly to repair in any way at all the harms done to the Comfort Women—actually, many if not most were underage girls—whom its military government subjected to brutal sexual enslavement in the 1931–45 period. These girls and women were interned in hellish stations and raped sometimes 30 times a day, 6 days a week, for months and even years. Many died, but those who survived have for a quarter century demanded an apology and meaningful atonement through material reparations (necessary for such things as their medical bills as they deal with the life-long effects of their horrific captivity, often without children helping them because of the hysterectomies forced on them). Japan has refused and denied, and now many former Comfort Women have passed on. Japan has already lost the opportunity with them, and as a state and society must bear the taint of this terrible human rights abuse as long as it continues to exist. And once the last former Comfort Woman is gone, the taint will be complete. I have termed this kind of impact an “impossible harm.”

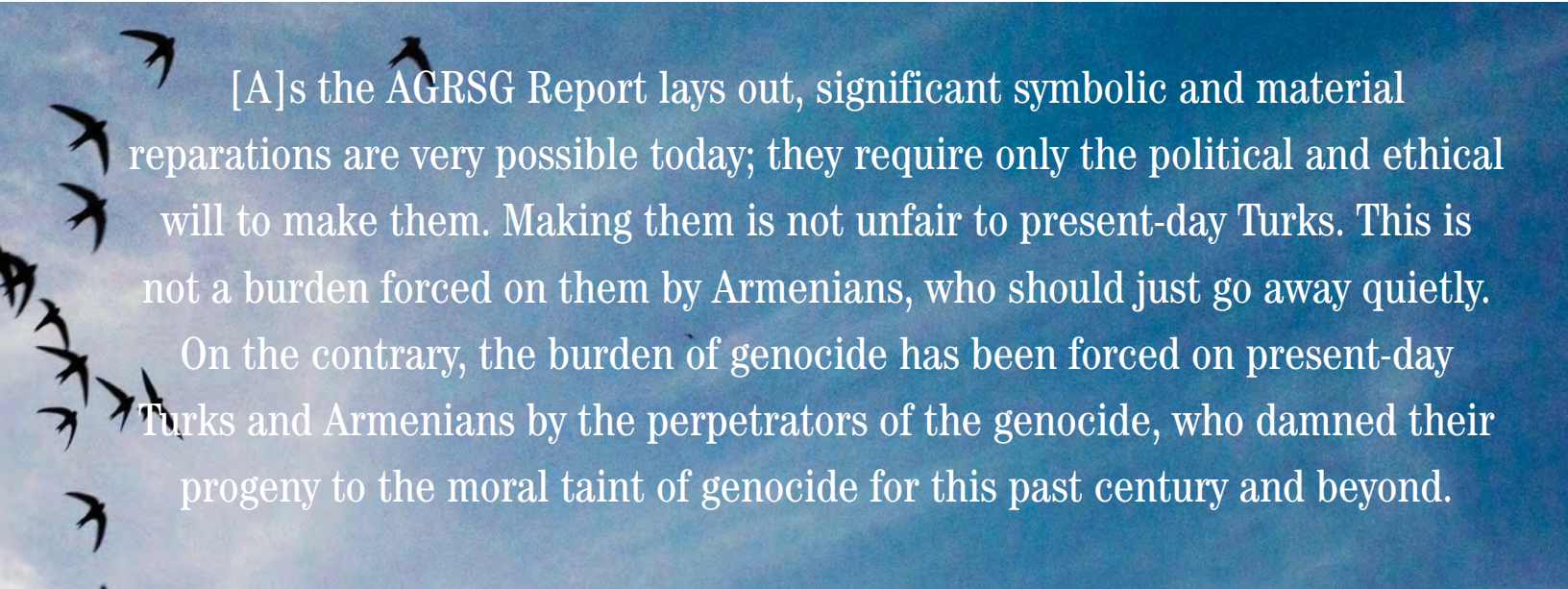
Turkey and other such perpetrators have the benefit that national, ethnic, racial, and religious groups, if they survive attempted annihilation, have identity cohesion over time, and so as long as genocide does not succeed completely, there is always a group that can receive efforts at repair. Of course, Turkey has already irrevocably lost its greatest opportunity to repair the harm to survivors and itself, as there are virtually no direct survivors of the genocide alive today. There is no longer anything to be done about this intentionally lost chance. But much can still be done. Unfortunately, with each passing day the harm grows and there are more and more members of the victim group who have lived and died without repair and who thus represent a growing permanent taint for the perpetrator state and society. Not only have Turkey and states and societies like it so far failed to do right by Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks, and other victim groups, respectively, but they are failing their own future generations by imposing on them the stigma of a more and more irreparable genocide.

Second, even setting aside the legal status of Turkey as the Ottoman Empire’s continuing state and Turkish Republican forces’ perpetration of the second phase of the Armenian Genocide from 1919 to 1923, Turks in the Turkish Republic today do bear responsibility for addressing the harms of the genocide. They are not in any way to blame for it,¹⁰ even when they deny it (though they are separately culpable for denial). But, as their state and society continue to hold the gains made and to benefit from them, and Armenians continue to suffer from the material, polit-

ical, and identity losses sustained, today’s Turks have an obligation to repair the damage as much as possible. Of course, nothing approaching full repair is possible: They cannot bring back the dead, nor can they turn back the denial clock to erase all the damage done as the harms to Armenians who have lived and died have compounded for a century. But, as the AGRSG Report lays out, significant symbolic and material reparations are very possible today; they require only the political and ethical will to make them. Making them is not unfair to present-day Turks. This is not a burden forced on them by Armenians, who should just go away quietly. On the contrary, the burden of genocide has been forced on present-day Turks and Armenians by the perpetrators of the genocide, who damned their progeny to the moral taint of genocide for this past century and beyond. However extensive a reparations package is made by Turks today, the burden they assume in giving reparations is the barest tiny fraction of the burden of loss and suffering the genocide still imposes on Armenians. The push for reparations is asking Turks today to shoulder just a small part of the burden borne by Armenians, to share just a part of the unfairness history has imposed. If this is a sacrifice for Turks today, this is appropriate: Such a sacrifice confirms the true rehabilitation of the Turkish state and society, which were formed in part by the many genocide perpetrators in the Turkish Republic’s government and military, and which have retained deep within their political culture the same genocidal attitudes toward past victims as drove genocide in the first place. Reparations are necessary for the rehabilitation of the Turkish state and society, as surely the Kurds and those residual Armenian and other communities in Turkey could attest.

Even a substantial territorial return to the Armenian Republic, which seems to cause an existential crisis for some Turks, is not an absurdly irrational imposition. How dare, many Turks say or think, Armenians demand *Turkish* land? But that very thought betrays the problem. This land became Turkish through the genocidal ideology that depopulated it of Armenians. Holding that land against what is right means holding on to that genocidal ideology. That is why land reparations are crucial for Turkey’s rehabilitation away from genocide.

Another objection is that the quest for reparations, particularly territorial, is a hopeless pipedream kept alive by deluded so-called “Armenian nationalists” who refuse to live in reality. Realpolitik is the dominant ethic of international relations, and it leaves no room for moral imperatives toward repair. Armenians are too weak to compel reparations, and should focus on what is actually possible. What is more, international law, however much based on the principle that harms should be repaired, simply does not have the legal and procedural mechanisms to deal with the Armenian and other long-standing cases. As the perpetrator groups have held out for so long, they have in fact made law irrelevant. And even where laws and procedures are available, domestic courts usually want no part of such overarching concerns, and international courts are subject to a range of political forces that bring the



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matter back to realpolitik again. Wherever victim groups such as Armenians turn, the situation seems hopeless.

This is just what those who know that their power rests on genocide and oppression want them to think. Again and again victim groups, oppressed groups, are told that there is no hope, that they have no power, that realpolitik trumps morality every time. Why do the powerful say this? Because they know that to hold their power and ill-gotten gains, they must convince their victims to believe it. For, once victim groups believe that nothing can change, nothing will change. We must be thankful that slaves and abolitionists in the United States and around the Western world did not believe that the system of slavery of Africans was inevitable and would not fall. Surely countless slave holders in the U.S. South made this claim in 1855, only to see the end of slavery within the decade. And their descendants said the same thing about segregation, but Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and millions of others refused to believe it and continued pressing, until the world did change. Surely Gandhi was told in 1935 that decolonization was a useless pipe dream, and thankfully he refused to bow to such an oppressive “reality.” Nothing in the world is given, and as much as human history is filled with genocide and oppression, it is filled with the efforts of those who oppose and overcome it. However much we might debate the nature of “justice” as a philosophical context, divergent ethical theories all seem to agree that causing others to suffer is wrong and imposes an obligation to help those caused to suffer. Rather than succumbing to the apparent limits of politics and law, if they do not allow justice (though from ancient times promotion of justice has been their sole validation), then we must transform politics and rewrite the law. Politics and law must conform to genuine justice, not dictate to humanity some stunted, anemic shadow of the just.

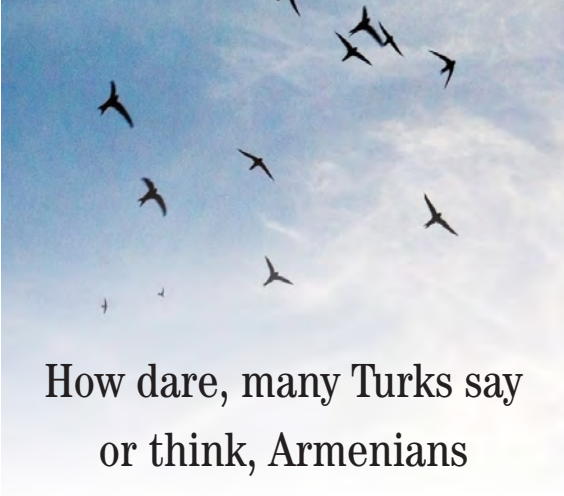
The examples of King, Gandhi, and others suggest something else we should consider. I have written before about the importance of group reparations for such peoples as Armenians, over individual reparations, which do not contribute to the rebuilding and reconstitution of the people as a whole.¹¹ But now I would like to push these ideas further. The current reality we live in across the globe is a world order formed through the forces of aggressive war, colonialism, slavery, apartheid, economic exploitation, mass rape and sexism, and, of course, genocide.

It might be said that, because the deep-reaching forces of destructive change have been so dramatic and blatant, and their result so often absences that mean there is nothing to see, the denial process inherent in human political arrangements and societies has led us all the more readily to miss the impact of the past on the present. Benedict Anderson might have highlighted the process by which what became nations in Europe and elsewhere were built through a linguistic and conceptual homogenizing process,¹² but as Ernst Renan explained a century before him, this process of nation formation is accomplished through a long period of destruction that can include both the physical elimination of divergent populations and the cultural destruction of competing language, ethnic, and other groups.¹³ Let us not forget that the Christianization of Armenians in the 4th Century of the Common Era was accomplished through the rampant and now quite regrettable destruction of the religion, culture, and art of the paganism that existed before. To recognize the forces of destructive change that have made the reality we inhabit is not very hard once we know that we are looking for incongruous presences and bright, shining absences. Consider Europe, for instance, with its multitude of cultures; languages; political arrangements; great philosophical, literary, and artistic

traditions; and cuisines. Yet, in the midst of our gaze, a nagging twinge at the edge of consciousness and history becomes a full question: Where are the Jews? To answer in Israel or the United States, Canada, or elsewhere begs the question. A conglomerate of groups sharing a religion and sense of identity in areas from Russia to France, this group was a central part of the very fabric of European identity and society for a millennium, but now they are largely gone relative to that prior presence, their great contributions erased through centuries-ago expulsions from England, forced conversions in Spain, pogroms in Russia, and more, and then, of course, the maximal moment of anti-Semitic destruction continent-wide, the Holocaust. The world we have today is the product of this treatment of the Jews.

The absence of European Jewry is inverted in the presence of African Americans in the United States. They are there every day, in the highest echelons of celebrityhood, politics, and business, but also in the great ghettos that punctuate major and minor U.S. cities, in the U.S. prison system that incarcerates more people than the rest of world combined, and in the anxieties of polite white society. How many thousands of hours of political talk shows and academic and government reports try to sort out why the majority of African

Americans are in a place of rampant poverty and violence. Why is such a high percentage of Blacks poor? The answer seems so complex that it is unanswerable. But is it? Perhaps I betray the simple limits of my mind by pointing out what seems obvious, but is not Black poverty the direct result of slavery and Jim Crow segregation and discrimination, or more exactly the fact that the extreme damage done by both has never been repaired? The release of slaves followed generations of legally and violently imposed illiteracy and educational exclusion; of family destruction, torture, rape, and degradation that materially undermined and psychologically traumatized the population; and the loss of 250 years of extorted free labor to build the Colonies and then the United States. While for a brief moment during reconstruction some



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small repair was made, in the form of the land necessary for former slaves to become working-class citizens, the 40 acres and mule were quickly repossessed by Uncle Sam and the slave owners then compensated for the loss of *their* property—their *property*. The vast majority of African Americans were plugged into the already genuinely inhospitable capitalist economy of the United States without capital, training or education, or full recognition as human beings. Is it any wonder they started poor? That they stayed poor? Despite some upward (and downward) mobility in the United States, class is generally constant across generations, for the simple reason of inheritance. Those with money give it to their offspring, who are plugged into the economy with property, while those without it have nothing to offer their children, who end up at the same low level as their parents, and grandparents, and great-grandparents. Add to this the powerful exclusions and discriminations of Jim Crow, which kept Blacks from joining the various Caucasian immigrant groups in their upward economic climb and took away whatever they were able to get, to keep them right where they always had been, and Black poverty today is not just explicable, but inevitable.

While setting right each instance of such a historical wrong is a step in the right direction, this approach to reparations is not simply an aggregation

of cases by single groups. Reparations is the process of global transformation through which we can finally begin to rework our world away from the structures resulting from genocide and all these other destructive, terrible forces, toward a vision in which all human beings have dignity and enough to eat, in which all people can live free from violence and degradation. “Solidarity” in its true sense is not just recognizing the similarity of experiences and struggles and lining up different groups together in a mutual support network. It is built on recognition that victim groups are together in a single, unified, shared world formed by genocide, slavery, imperialism, and so on, and that, at the deepest level, they face a common force of oppression and destruction that must be addressed as a whole if the local success

of one group will not be cynically balanced by a shift in the structure that will mean victimization of other groups. The problem is so big and individual groups' parts so interwoven that it can only be solved for each group through a coordinated global approach. As each specific group pursues justice against the legacy of mass violence and oppression it has experienced, it must do so in a way that resonates with and promotes every other group in the struggle for justice across the world.

Explained this way, the task ahead surely appears daunting. If the world has taken more than half a millennium to become what it is today, it is a given that such a broad transformation will not happen overnight through some fantasy of revolution. Fortunately, in the past decade, there has emerged a global reparations movement. Jews, Hereros, African Americans, indigenous North and South Americans, Aborigines, South African Blacks, former Comfort Women, Assyrians, Greeks, a host of other groups, and, yes, Armenians are more and more recognizing their common cause and working toward the great goal of a repaired world. However long it will take, if we are committed to a truly just and good world order, we must all actively participate in this struggle. □

NOTES

1. This concept and approach are first introduced in Henry C. Theriault, "Denial of Ongoing Atrocities as a Rationale for Not Attempting to Prevent or Intervene," in Samuel Totten (ed.), *Impediments to the Prevention and Intervention of Genocide: A Critical Bibliographic Review*. "Genocide: A Critical Bibliographic Review" book series, Vol. 9 (New Brunswick, NJ, USA: Transaction Publishers, 2013). pp. 47–75.
2. Jermaine O. McCalpin, "Reparations and the Politics of Avoidance in America," *The Armenian Review* 53:1–4 (2012): 11–32.
3. This line of argument is developed in Henry C. Theriault, "From Unfair to Shared Burden: The Armenian Genocide's Outstanding Damage and the Complexities of Repair," *The Armenian Review* 53:1–4 (2012): 121–166.
4. The full report is available at www.armeniangenocidereparations.info.
5. Temel Demirer, presentation, "The 'Armenian Issue': What Is and How It Is to Be Done?" panel, "1915 within Its Pre- and Post-historical Periods: Denial and Confrontation" symposium, Ankara, Turkey, April 25, 2010.
6. Uğur Ümit Üngör and Mehmet Polatel, *Confiscation and Destruction: The Young Turk Seizure of Armenian Property* (London, UK: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011).
7. Richard G. Hovannisian, public lecture, Armenian Relief Society Armenian Summer Studies Program, Amherst College, July 1991.
8. Sait Cetinoğlu, "Foundations of Non-Muslim Communities: The Last Object of Confiscation," *International Criminal Law Review* 14:2 (2014): 396–406.
9. Henry C. Theriault, "Repairing the Irreparable: 'Impossible' Harms and the Complexities of 'Justice,'" in José Luis Lanata (ed.), *Prácticas Genocidas y Violencia Estatal: en Perspectiva Transdisciplinar* (San Carlos de Bariloche, Argentina: IIDyPCa-CONICET-UNRN, 2014), pp. 182–215.
10. This distinction is informed by George Sher's treatment of the difference between "blame" and "responsibility" in "Blame for Traits," plenary address, 28th Conference on Value Inquiry, Lamar University, Beaumont, TX, USA, April 14, 2000.
11. Henry C. Theriault, "Reparations for Genocide: Group Harm and the Limits of Liberal Individualism," *International Criminal Law Review* 14:2 (2014): 441–469.
12. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London, UK: Verso-New Left Books, 1991).
13. Ernest Renan, "What Is a Nation?," Martin Thom (trans.), in Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (New York, NY, USA: Routledge, 1990), pp. 8–22.

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Resistance & Resilience

By Marian Mesrobian MacCurdy

I am the product of two divergent familial coping strategies. My maternal grandmother's family, the Der Melkonians, included resisters who defended themselves in the Adana Massacres of 1909. At the siege of Dörtyol, my grandmother, Eliza, loaded rifles while her brothers shot them. One brother, Mihran, became a leader of the Dörtyol resistance, riding out to destroy the dam Turkish soldiers had built in the town's water supply. Dörtyol was one of two Armenian communities left standing in Adana in 1909. Eliza's future husband, my grandfather, Aaron Sachaklian, participated by imploring the foreign consuls to intervene. Later he became a leader of Operation Nemesis.

My father's parents, however, could not fight back: They survived the Hamidian Massacres by fleeing—my grandfather into the woods and my grandmother with her infant daughter in her arms to the American mission. Years later she echoed for my father the high-pitched screams of the Turks as they charged through Kharpert, swords and scimitars raised. Elizabeth, my grandmother, died before I was born, but I can still hear those chilling sounds my father relayed to me.

The effects on the family are just as potent; forced into the role of victim, they became fearful and anxious. My father often said, "There are only two things in life you have to do: die and pay your taxes." Other than that one chilling Turkish yell Elizabeth mim-



Aaron Sachaklian



Zabel Yessayan

icked for my father, she remained silent, her resistance evidenced only by her survival. They lived in fear of the streets of Detroit—not to mention the trauma they carried from the massacres—and their son inhaled this like tomato plants suck up water. When I as a teenager asked to use the family car, my sweet, fearful father's perennial response was, "Why? Do you have to go out?"

"No, Dad, I don't have to. I want to."

"Well, if you go out, something bad could happen to you. If you stay home, nothing bad will."

The logic was impeccable. It also showed me that I was oscillating between the poles of resistance on one side of my family and victimhood on the other.

In July 1909, three months after the massacres that Eliza and her family survived, Zabel Yessayan participated in the delegation sent to Adana by the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople to help "the stricken," as Yessayan referred to the victims. Armenian families had been murdered in churches, schools, wherever they had hidden. Yessayan saw hundreds of orphans, mothers whose children were murdered, men with stumps for limbs. When she returned she wrote to bear witness to what she had seen in order to banish the madness that the unimaginable can precipitate. Yessayan discovered that trauma of this magnitude cannot initially be narrated fully: "Those who lived through it are...incapable of

recounting it as a whole. Everyone stammers, sighs, weeps, and can bring out only bits of pieces of the events.”¹

Yessayan’s narrative itself is a list of terrifying images:

“Despair and terror had been so great that mothers no longer recognized their own children; old women paralyzed and blind, lay forgotten in burned-down houses; people on the point of dying went mad hearing the diabolical laughter of a savage and bloodthirsty crowd; detached limbs and children’s bodies still trembling with pain and life were trampled underfoot. Caught between rifles on one side and flames on the other, children, women, and the wounded who, panic-stricken, had taken refuge in schools and churches, were burning to death entwined with one another.”²

On the wall of a church in one of the Adana towns someone at the last moment wrote the words, “Now there is no longer a God...”³

Yessayan conveys these images, the un-representable, in a kind of iconic testimony—and she is the witness, not the survivor, whose

Telling our stories is a way to resist both the effects of trauma and the efforts of those who would silence survivors.

ability to tell the story may be even more compromised. Traumatic images, non-verbal pictures that carry deep emotional weight, are generally not remembered as narratives but as sensory impressions—fragmented images, smells, sounds, and sensations that live in non-verbal parts of the brain. These fragments can generate inexplicable rage, terror, uncontrollable crying, or disconnected body states and sensations. When these images and sensations are not located, named, and integrated into the rest of life, they can become cut off, recurring when provoked by other stimuli or somaticized into reactive physical symptoms. Renowned researcher and psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk has said of this phenomenon: “the body keeps the score.”

Survivors often avoid speaking of their traumas, especially those denied by the perpetrators. As one Armenian survivor said in a study completed by Donald E. Miller and Lorna Touryan Miller, “Once I started talking, I couldn’t stop and would inevitably end up in tears. So since then I have tried not to talk about it, even to my own children. My story is too sad.”⁴ Yet speaking of trauma can lessen its impact. Researchers



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Armenians marched by Turkish soldiers, 1915

such as James Pennebaker have demonstrated that creating a narrative of emotionally painful experiences can help survivors: Biological markers of illness often improve and the emotional manifestations of trauma abate.⁵ Telling our stories is a way to resist both the effects of trauma and the efforts of those who would silence survivors.⁶ Sharing stories of the Armenian Genocide is a rebellious act; it counters the Turkish government's claim that there was no genocide and that if it did happen the Armenians brought it on themselves.

Armenians transformed themselves into survivors by telling their stories: "They are no longer the silenced victims... they are the empowered group that has maintained their culture, language, and religion through years of persecution," as Soseh Esmaeili has suggested.⁷ And the work of Kalayjian and Weisberg indicates that those parents who share their history appropriately with their children do not harm them, while those who do not speak "reported more disturbances in their children."⁸

My grandmother's memoirs had a permanent home under her picture of the 1919 dinner in Boston honoring the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Armenia. Whoever sat at her table heard the story of that dinner, saw her seated at table 34, but also likely heard her stories of escaping the Turks by jumping from her roof under her mother's arm, or hiding in leather saddlebags, or marching around with broom handles to give the impression that even girls had guns at the siege of Dörtyol.

The only story my father told of the Hamidian Massacres was of the Turks swooping into the town, grasping their scimitars, their knives, their shovels, and screaming that high-pitched yell his parents never forgot. They could not fight back, but they could run; they saved themselves, but was helplessness burned into them with the images of those swords cutting into human flesh? Are some images so traumatic that even to imagine speaking of them brings unimaginable fear? Did their narrative get stuck there instead of on their survival? The strategy was to keep the past in the past, numbing what could not be absorbed, to cope with life in America.

The primary job of the first generation was to survive and to anchor their families into America's economic structures. The second generation focused on further developing their economic

foothold and supporting Armenian culture in America. And the third generation moved into the political arena, actively countering the Turkish government's denial. Some have said that this insistence on recognition is obsessive, but it could more likely be said that resistance to lies and continued oppression can support emotional health.

Resistance requires a healthy dose of anger, an emotion we are often told to avoid. But according to social psychologist Aaron Sell, "We need anger, and there are negative consequences for those without it." Anger helps to mobilize action. As Joann Ellison Rodgers states, "When we get angry, levels of the stress hormone cortisol drop, suggesting that anger helps us calm down and get ready to address a problem, not run from it."¹⁰

Gina O'Connell Higgins argues that the resilient have constructed for themselves master narratives that pull together a "coherent system of beliefs and ideals,"¹¹ convictions that help sustain life and build resilience, that inner fire that sent my grandmother to an unknown land with a man she barely knew and still remain who she was; that allowed Aaron, my grandfather, to break key religious and secular laws by insisting on justice for his people. All survivors must have resilience to persist. What enabled my father's parents to keep going, in spite of their anxieties, having lost virtually everything but their lives? But keeping silence, not telling their stories, made it difficult for them to integrate their traumas into the rest of life, creating a kind of psychological limbo that grew anxiety and did not allow for productive anger. Survivors can feel anger, but if it is not channeled into productive action, it can leak out to bystanders or hide inward as depression and anxiety. Directed anger leads to action, which even when it includes extra-legal acts of justice can resist helplessness, build a sense of agency, and counter trauma.

Shaikh and Kauppi state, "Resistance in the form of resistance to oppression is specifically evident in studies involving marginalized populations."¹² It is necessary to "refrain from categorical judgments about what is and is not adaptation under adversity and stress," including fighting back and seeking justice. The authors imply that such activities may be necessary for the individual—and the ethnic group—to maintain health and a sense that life has meaning, especially when the world community does not act to protect the oppressed.

The men of Operation Nemesis channeled their anger into a plan. They articulated a set of values to guide their efforts: seek justice, protect innocent bystanders—their first principle—and go it alone when necessary. Their motives were "pure" in the sense that they did not seek fame or public recognition—indeed, just the opposite. They had one goal: to bring to justice the men who attempted to annihilate their people. This gave their lives meaning, their wounded psyche agency. As Armen Garo wrote in his letter of March 17, 1921, two days after the assassination of Talaat, "Shahan's success is the only consoling event."¹³ This was high anxiety work,



Armen Garo

yet when it was done, most of them lived relatively long lives as productive members of their communities. Their resistance may have brought them—and their people—a kind of satisfaction in knowing that their actions delivered the only justice yet seen. Most of the Nemesis men died peacefully in their beds of old age while Talaat, the “number one nation-murderer,” as Shahan Natalie described him,¹⁴ ended his life as he had lived it—with a bullet to the head.

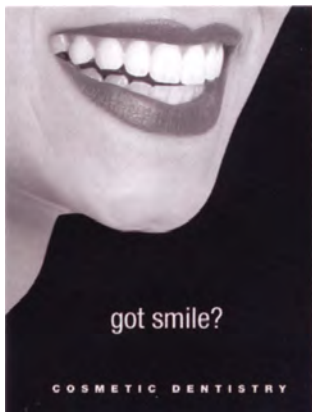
On March 25, 2015, Harvard University hosted a commemorative panel discussion titled, “Armenia 1915–Auschwitz 1945: Small Nations and Great Powers.” The first question asked after the talks was from a member of a group of young Turks—the same question we have heard for several years, aided and abetted by our government: Why don’t you Armenians sit down with us and discuss both sides of what happened in 1915? They then held up placards that offered ironic statements such as “history can’t be distorted.” One attendee commented that he was surprised to see the last stage of genocide—denial—alive and well at Harvard. When a

woman self-identified as a Turk told them she was ashamed of their disruption of a commemorative talk, they continued to hold their placards high in the air. After a somewhat derailed question-and-answer period, Dr. James Russell, one of the speakers, ended the session by leading us in singing the “Hayr Mer.”

We stood in this room at Harvard University singing what Armenians had for generations. We knew who we were. Afterward, as people began to leave, I noticed that one of the young Turkish women in the group was in tears, and I wondered, are those tears of frustration or humiliation? The Armenians know their painful truth; it is now time for the Turks to discover theirs, as many are already doing—from events in Diyarbakir, Tunceli, Istanbul. These young people will have to tunnel out of the prison of government lies just as Turkish scholar Taner Akçam had to dig his way out of Ankara Central Prison to freedom. One hundred years after the genocide, this battle of resistance now belongs to them. □

NOTES

1. Marc Nishanian, “Catastrophic Mourning.” In *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, edited by David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), p. 112.
2. Ibid, pp. 112–113.
3. Ibid, p. 119.
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Choosing 'CO-RESISTANCE' Rather than 'TURKISH-ARMENIAN DIALOGUE'

By Nancy Kricorian

Competing Narratives of Suffering

A global non-governmental and governmental regime has arisen to promote “dialogue,” “reconciliation,” and various “peace processes” among peoples in conflict. I have no abstract objection to any of these terms or practices. In fact, dialogue and negotiation are laudable activities to be used as a means of settling disputes. What I object to are “people-to-people” programs that do not address the power imbalance between communities in conflict, between perpetrators and victims, and do not set as a precondition for their interactions a shared basis in historical truth.

There is government and foundation money to be had in running and participating in these programs, but “dialogue” and “coexistence” efforts have been codified and even industrialized in such a way that they sometimes inflict emotional and political harm on the people they are ostensibly meant to help. What happens when a “dialogue” session devolves into the telling of competing narratives of suffering? What happens when these competing narratives are seen only as individual stories of trauma removed from the political and historical contexts from whence they arose? I believe it is the moral and political duty of



Hundreds of Palestinians and Israelis demonstrate at the Qalandia checkpoint in northern Jerusalem in support of Palestinian independence. (Photo: Sheikh Jarrah Solidarity Movement)



An activist holding poet Daniel Varoujan's photo at one of the commemoration events in Istanbul. (Photo: Khatchig Mouradian)

all involved to recognize and to address these contexts.

Why Can't We All Just Get Along?

In the case of the Israeli and Palestinian conflict, the rhetoric of “peaceful coexistence” has often been used to undermine and criminalize Palestinian resistance to Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and to the discriminatory treatment of Palestinian citizens of Israel. Many Palestinians reject coexistence programs and initiatives because of the way these efforts refuse to acknowledge the vastly unequal underlying power dynamic between the two peoples and in fact “normalize” the system of oppression under which Palestinians live in both Israel and the Occupied Palestinian territories. As an alternative, some Palestinian activists have promoted the idea of “co-resistance.”

Members of anti-occupation, pro-equality Israeli Jewish groups join the ongoing weekly non-violent protests in villages such as Bil'in and Nabi Saleh in the Occupied West Bank. Boycott from Within, a diverse group of citizens of Israel, advocates for the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) Movement in support of Palestinian rights. Sheikh Jarrah Solidarity, a grassroots solidarity movement working

towards civil equality in Israel and for an end to the Israeli occupation, was named for a neighborhood in East Jerusalem that is being colonized by violent, right-wing Israeli settlers with the aid of the Israeli government. Sheikh Jarrah Solidarity organized weekly protests between 2010-12 in support of Palestinians who were being evicted from their homes and displaced by Israeli settlers. The photography collective Active Stills, whose members document anti-occupation protests, includes photojournalists who are Israeli, Palestinian, and international.

One hopes that this model of working together can be furthered in Israel and Palestine, as well as replicated in other situations of oppression. With a common analysis of the problems and a mutual commitment to redress, it is possible for people from opposing sides of a conflict to work together for a shared future, not simply a rehearsal of a painful past.

Removing Splinters of Glass with Tweezers

In my own work as a Palestine solidarity activist, I have watched with admiration as members of Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) have labored within their own communities to help undo a false narrative about Israel as “a land without a people for a people without a land.” Many American Jews were taught that the birth of Israel was an experiment in social justice, when in fact that nation-state was founded upon the mass dispossession and ethnic cleansing of its indigenous Palestinian population. Most, if not all, nation-states were predicated upon the rejection, ejection, and erasure of minority and indigenous populations. For example, the United States was created through genocide against American Indians and its wealth was built upon the enslavement of Africans. Modern Turkey was founded through the expulsion of Greeks, the mass murder of Armenians and Assyrians, and the attempted forced assimilation of Kurds.

All nation-states hide these crimes behind nationalist foundation myths that lionize the perpetrators and dehumanize

the victims. Citizens are then indoctrinated with these myths that become central to collective and individual identity. Undoing the indoctrination is for many a sad, painful, and lonely experience, but JVP provides a safe and welcoming space in which to do it. I have often thought that the process is akin to someone removing splinters of glass from their skin with a pair of tweezers. Some of these splinters are racist ideas and attitudes that are best examined within the group. Palestinians, for example, should not be held responsible for educating American and Israeli Jews any more than black Americans should feel required to undertake the education of white people who are dealing with their internalized racism.

In my work with the Occupy Wall Street movement here in New York City, I was impressed by the White Allies Working Group, whose main purpose was to educate white Occupy activists so that their often-unexamined assumptions and attitudes would not be a burden to black and other activists of color in the movement. Undoing racist indoctrination—even the kindest variety of liberal racism—is also akin to removing splinters of glass with a pair of tweezers, but there is no reason for people who suffer the consequences of that racism to witness and to share your pain.

Rejecting Dialogue in Favor of Conversation and Co-Resistance

This same principle is at play for me in Turkish-Armenian dialogue efforts. Let the progressive, enlightened Turks—those who have recognized and undone the false narratives about Armenians and the history of the founding of Turkey that they were fed in school and in the mainstream media in Turkey—do the hard work of educating their peers. Once each individual has managed to take apart and cart away the denialist propaganda hindering true communication, then we Armenians can engage in conversation with these like-minded citizens of Turkey. We can further join with them in co-resistance efforts, such as the two that I have been involved with in the past year.

In September 2014, I spent a week in Istanbul with a group of feminist academics, artists, and activists as a part of Columbia University’s Women Mobilizing Memory Workshop. Participants were from New York City, Santiago, and Istanbul, and the week was filled with discussions, lectures, and presentations about mass trauma, memorialization, and action for change. The topics we addressed were varied and included the Holocaust, the Pinochet dictatorship, the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center, the Armenian Genocide, the enforced disappearances of Kurds in the 1990’s, and the Dersim Massacre, among others. The Istanbul-based participants without exception used the term genocide in discussing what had happened to the Armenians in the final days of the Ottoman Empire, which was a tremendous relief to me. I didn’t have to “dialogue” or argue to prove what had occurred—we were able to engage in substantive conversations about history, historiography, and possible future amends.

For the past six months, I have been working on Project 2015, an effort to organize a mass fly-in of Armenians to Istanbul for the Centennial Commemoration of the Armenian Genocide. Our board is comprised primarily of Armenian-American scholars and professionals with a few Turkish Americans as well. We have partnered with human rights and civil society activists in Turkey who are helping us to navigate the permitting processes and local politics so that our joint events are respectful and secure. We have received some criticisms from Armenians in the diaspora and in Yerevan, suggesting that we are the “dupes” of our partners in Turkey, or that by going to Istanbul we are offering ourselves like “lambs to the slaughter.” But I firmly believe in the rightness of our efforts and the trustworthiness of our team. I am also committed to standing as a witness against denial and erasure with like-minded citizens of Turkey—Turks, Kurds, Greeks, Jews, Assyrians, and Armenians—as we memorialize the victims and the survivors of the Armenian Genocide. This is co-resistance. □

The Story of Two Armenian Midwives

By Khatchig Mouradian



(L-R) Sevil Turan, Khatchig Mouradian, Attila Tuygan, and Murat Ucanar (Photo: George Aghjayan)

Below is the text of a lecture delivered by scholar and former Armenian Weekly editor Khatchig Mouradian at the first commemoration of the Armenian Genocide in Aintab, held on March 21. The talk was delivered in Turkish. The commemoration was organized by the Greens and the Left Party of the Future. Party spokesperson Sevil Turan, writer Attila Tuygan from Istanbul, and translator Murat Ucanar also spoke. Celal Deniz delivered the opening remarks.

I want to tell you a story.

Siphora, an Armenian woman, worked as a midwife in Aintab from the late 1800's to 1922. She kept a notebook detailing information on the babies she delivered beginning in 1890. By the time she left this city, she had helped deliver 4,274 children.

Four thousand. Two hundred. Seventy-four.

Siphora's sister Nuritsa began practicing midwifery, also here in Aintab, in 1905. She, too, kept a detailed notebook.

Initially, many of the families they served were Armenians in the city. Siphora helped deliver a child for Rapael's wife Zaruhi (January 1892, then March 1893), *kuchuk* (small) Nerses's daughter Ovsanna of Nizib (October 1895), saddle-maker Avak's child (March 1897), *pilavji* Nerses's child (April 1897), *deli* (crazy) Gullu's child (February 1898), carpenter Minas's bride Khanum (June 1899), goldsmith Harutyun's child (October 1899), and hundreds of other Aintab Armenians.

Then, after 1915, we encounter fewer and fewer Armenians in the notebook.

This page is sponsored by Peter "Doc" Bedrosian, Providence AYF "Varantian" Alumni

You know why.

Their clients were now primarily Muslims and Jews: gendarmes commander Kemal bey's child (1916), Salonica refugee Mahmut *effendi's* child (1916), Cabra's wife Sara's child (March 1918), and others.

Almost abruptly, in 1922, Siphora's notebook has a simple entry: *Antep'te işimiz bitti* (We are done/our work is over in Aintab). Nuritsa writes in her notebook that on Nov. 29, they rushed to the train station with a number of orphans and escaped to Aleppo.

There, Siphora and Nuritsa continued their work, helping deliver children of survivors of the massacres.

A simple note at the end of Siphora's notebook informs us that she passed away on May 28, 1940. Her sister continued working as a midwife for another decade and a half.

People of Aintab:

It is symbolic that the first time these notebooks are ever being publicly shown is in Aintab. Through these notebooks, today, the two sisters return to Aintab.

As I stand here today and look at you, I can't help but think that there are many among you who are grandchildren and great-grandchildren of those Nuritsa and Siphora delivered a century ago.

Recall that number: 4,274 babies—Siphora's alone.

It is likely that Nuritsa and Siphora were the first to hold your grandparents and great-grandparents.

Those two women, who served this town for decades, left with pain in their hearts and with three words on their tongue: *Antep'te işimiz bitti*.

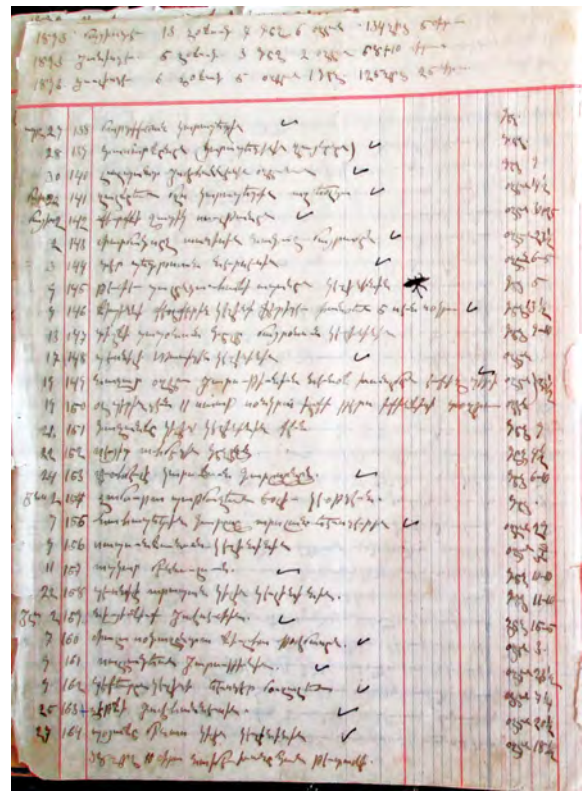
You know why.

Like Nuritsa and Siphora, thousands upon thousands of Armenians left this town, never to be able to return again. But they took a piece of Aintab with them. How could they not? Their memories of their hometown. They lived with longing for their town until they died.

The few who had the opportunity to visit after they were forced to leave had a bittersweet experience rediscovering their ancestral home. George Haig was one of them. He left Aintab in December 1919 "for the United States to study agriculture and return to improve our properties: pistachio, olive, fig groves and vineyards and grain crops." He wouldn't return again.

You know why.

Only after 40 years, as a retired lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army, was George Haig able to visit Aintab. He wrote:



A page from Siphora's notebook

"... I was standing in front of our house. What a thrill, what a feeling, what ecstasy to be back home after so many years. Still, I did not yet realize fully that I was in front of someone else's house. When I knocked at the door I was still under the impression that the door would be opened for me by one of my brothers or sisters. You can dream, can't you? But when the door was opened by a 12-year-old girl, I woke up to the realization that I was now an outsider."

Today, those who committed the massacres against Armenians in 1895, 1909, and then 1915 are long gone. Gone are also those who survived those massacres. Siphora, Nuritsa, and Haig are all dead. But they did not take their memories with them. Through their accounts, their stories, and their notebooks, they passed their memories on to generations of Armenians growing up far from Aintab.

The grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Siphora and Nuritsa are alive. They gave me the notebooks, which I am currently using in my research.

And the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the people of Aintab whom Siphora and Nuritsa delivered are also alive.

Some may be sitting right here in this hall. Look around. They may be right here.

A hundred years after the Armenian Genocide, it is time for their memories to also be *your* memories.

It is time for you to tell the grandchildren of George Haig, Siphora, and Nuritsa that you are committed to truth and justice.

And that the time has come for us to change those three words ringing in our ears today, and say, instead: *Antep'te işimiz başlıyor!* Our work in Aintab is beginning anew. □

The Armenian Key to the Homeland

By George Aghjayan

Approximately 65,000 people identified Armenian as their mother tongue in the 1927 Turkish census. Just over 77,000 professed Armenian Apostolic as their religion. Geographic breakdown is the only additional detail contained in the census, with 70 percent of the stated Armenians living in Istanbul. Outside of Istanbul, those listing Armenian as a religion would occasionally outnumber Armenian speakers, and vice versa. If one assumes the number of Armenians as being the higher of the two by geographic region,* the total number of Armenians would be slightly more than 80,000 and the proportion outside Istanbul increases to approximately 35 percent.

The 1935 Turkish census supplies slightly more information. Mother tongue is further divided into second language spoken. In addition, religion by mother tongue is detailed. Interestingly, there were separate classifications for Gregorian and Armenian within religion.

In Istanbul, the number of people professing either Armenian or Gregorian as their religion dropped from more than 53,000 in 1927 to 48,537 in 1935. The table details the religions of those who listed Armenian as their mother tongue.

More than 8,000 Armenian speakers listed a religion other than Armenian Apostolic. If we add this number to those professing Armenian Apostolic, the total would be more than 57,000. Presumably then, 15 percent of the Armenians of Istanbul did not profess to be Armenian Apostolic. The greatest number of these professed to be Orthodox. It could simply be that through marriage some Armenians accepted Greek Orthodoxy. Similarly, approximately 200 Greek speakers professed to be Armenian Apostolic. Or it could be that some Armenians simply considered Armenian Apostolic as an Orthodox faith for census purposes.

* For instance, in village A, there might be 100 Armenian speakers and 80 Armenian Apostolics, while in village B there might be 80 Armenian speakers and 100 Armenian Apostolics—I take the higher of the two for each region, giving a total population of 200 instead of 180.



George Aghjayan (right) and Steve Mesrobian (left) with the mayor of Uzunova, in the district of Palu

Istanbul 1935 Armenian as Mother Tongue

	Males	Females	Total
Muslim	12	25	37
Catholic	774	1,122	1,896
Orthodox	2,289	2,793	5,082
Protestant	371	495	866
Gregorian	12,161	15,438	27,599
Christian	121	134	255
Armenian	1,419	1,723	3,142
Jewish	24	18	42
No Religion	6	7	13
Other	210	232	442
Unknown	18	22	40
Total	17,405	22,009	39,414

Finally, approximately 4,800 people professed Armenian as their second language. There is no way to discern how many of these have already been accounted for, but it is assumed that most, if not all, are included with non-Armenian speakers classified as Armenian Apostolic.

All of this assumes accurate reporting by the population. “Hidden Armenians” have documented a fear of census takers in their accounts. Clearly, experience would have made most people cautious about self-identifying as Armenians, particularly in the more remote areas of the traditional Armenian homeland. For instance, no Armenian speakers or people professing an Armenian religion were recorded in the Van province in 1927 and only a handful of businessmen were recorded in 1935. Yet, published studies, as well as my own personal experience, indicate that there are many areas of Van where even today descendants of Armenians live. For example, while traveling in the region of Shadakh last year, I met numerous people who stated they had a grandparent that was Armenian.

With the passage of time, the remnants of the Armenian community were assimilated or blended with the much larger Muslim population. The educational system, as well as mandatory military service, contributed to assimilation along with economic and cultural pressures. The district of Beshiri possibly offers an interesting example of assimilation.

In 1927, 1,585 Armenian Apostolics were recorded in the Siirt province; of these, 1,369 were in the Beshiri district, though only 67 were Armenian speakers. While the districts within the Siirt province had changed by 1935 (e.g., Sasun/Sassoun was moved to the Mush province), Beshiri, where most of the recorded Armenians had been in 1927, was still part of the province. The total population of Beshiri grew from 13,000 to more than 16,000 by 1935; yet, the Armenian Apostolic population was recorded as only 70 in the entire Siirt province. The number of Armenian speakers was only 161, and an additional 146 had Armenian listed as a second language. So what happened to the 1,400 Armenians of Beshiri in those 7 years? Interestingly, while in 1927 the number of Apostolic Armenians far outpaced the number of Armenian speakers, the relationship reversed in 1935.

The growth in the population of Beshiri actually outpaced the rest of the province, so there is no indication that a large number had moved. However, in interviewing an Armenian whose family had come from Beshiri, it was learned that in 1929 there were clashes between the Kurds and Armenians and that some of the Armenians

had left for Kamishli. Those that did not move clearly would have had incentive to hide their Armenian identity.

If we think of the great-grandchildren of the 1,400 Armenians of Beshiri, they would be between 100 and 12.5 percent (or 1/8th) Armenian, depending on the rate of intermarriage. In 1927, per the official census, 10.5 percent of the Beshiri district was Armenian. As of the 2000 census, the population of the Beshiri district was 33,106. Ignoring migration and differences in fertility and mortality rates, anywhere from 3,500 to 27,000 of these people could be descended from the original 1,400 Armenians.

Beshiri is not unique as an example.

The point of this detailed analysis is that we simply cannot know, with any reasonable accuracy, the number of Armenians in Turkey, much less those that are “hidden” or Islamized. No matter how much the calculations are fur-

ther refined, they will not lead to a more accurate estimate. The above analysis, though, does explain why those who make such estimates often state widely varying numbers. What we do have is anecdotal evidence of the existence of large numbers of Armenians still living in the traditional Armenian homeland, and of what they endured in the 100 years since the genocide.

There are stories of conversions to Islam, of pressure to leave homes, of relatives lost and found.

Years ago, I met a group of men from my grandfather’s village at the church of Sourp Kevork in Istanbul. The village of Burunkishla was in the Boghazliyan district of Yozgat, and after the genocide many survivors from that region came together in the village. These men told of Muslim refugees from the Balkans coming to Burunkishla in the 1930’s, leading the remaining Armenians to gradually move to Istanbul and other places. In the 1990’s, I believe only one Armenian still retained property in Burunkishla.

Recently, while in Diyarbakir, in the courtyard of Sourp Giragos, I met a man from Istanbul whose family was also from Burunkishla. He supplied more detail to the story of the Muslims refugees. It was not simply that they had moved into the village; the government had demanded that each household supply rooms to these refugees. You can imagine the resulting strain of such an arrangement. I have read similar accounts from other towns as well, and it is clear that every effort was made to make the Armenians feel unwelcome in their own homes.

This pattern of discrimination, lack of security, etc., has continued uninterrupted for 100 years and has led to those remaining Armenians to either leave or burrow further into hiding.



The last saddle-maker of Mezreh, near Kharpert



A woman holding a photo of lost relatives in Sakrat

The most well-known account is Fethiye Çetin's moving book about her grandmother. It can be viewed as marking the beginning of the current era for Hidden Armenians—a period of public recognition. The Hrant Dink Foundation is at the forefront of publicizing their stories, through conferences and books. Each account has significance.

In one account, a man discusses his grandparents: "This power of human beings to endure is beyond my understanding. Your three children are killed in front of your wife and your neighbors know about it. Then you go on living in the same town and give birth to other children. ... I was never able to understand this." Of course, oftentimes, the survivors had to not only live in the same town with the killers but live in the same household.

Thus, you have this intimidation that fosters the suppression of Armenian identity. The process of the genocide itself taught those who survived to remain hidden throughout their lives. Those who believed in periods of safety and increased rights would find that soon the atmosphere had changed and those who exposed themselves as Armenian suffered. Even the opening that presumably exists today is viewed with suspicion by untold thousands of Hidden Armenians.

A couple of years ago, we were in a village in the region of Moks and a man we were talking to said that there was an elderly Armenian woman in the village. He said that she was too ill for us to meet, but that her son was working in the field nearby. We found the man and inquired about his mother. He confirmed that she was indeed too elderly and sick for visitors, but in any event she was not Armenian. He claimed the other man had said she was Armenian because he had something against them. These feelings of insecurity thus linger, along with the need to deny one's identity.

For many, there is also the perception of Armenian as a religion, not an ethnicity. Thus, the conversion to Islam marks a break with their family's Armenian identity.

The rupture of family relationships is particularly emotional. Those that speak of their Armenian origins universally speak of

lost relatives: the last saddle maker of Mezereh, the last Armenian of Chungush, a family from Sakrat. The sadness of loss, the desperation and hope in their eyes haunts me.

One account from Mush speaks of a father, a priest, being killed and the murderer taking his wife as his own. The priest had two children, a boy, age five, and a girl, three. The murderer decides only to keep the boy and throws the girl out of the house. For the rest of his life, the boy searched for his lost sister in vain.

In 1915, in a small village in Palu, there was a family of seven—a mother and father and five daughters. The father was decapitated and his body left by the river. One daughter was forced to marry a Turk in an effort to save her infant son, but the son was murdered anyway.

Another daughter was taken by a Muslim family, yet cried so much that she was taken to an orphanage where she died of starvation. Two of the daughters, one an infant and the other age 17, were sent with their mother on the death march, never to be heard from again. The last daughter was taken as a slave to a Turkish family and lived that way for six years before being rescued. She was my grandmother. Each time I travel to those lands, it is with the hope that I will someday meet the descendents of my grandmother's lost sisters.

I have joined the Armenian DNA Project in hopes that some day, one of the descendents of those lost girls will by chance also take a DNA test and we will find each other.

Until today, Armenians taken during the genocide were counted in the column of deaths. Even those who were taken considered themselves dead to their surviving family, which had managed to survive and escape. There is the story of Karnig Mekredijian, who had survived to form a family in Beirut. Yet, he still thought of his mother trapped in Kharpert. In the 1960's, Karnig sent his wife to Kharpert to rescue his mother and bring her to Beirut. Her response was heartbreaking: "Look at my appearance, how I am dressed. It's very difficult at my age to change and start a new life. I am dead for my kids over there, while here I have also a family, with a husband, kids, and grandchildren..."

We cannot change the victimization. The victims still exist. But to me, allowing the identity to blossom in each Hidden Armenian is to reduce the 1.5 million deaths.

I have stated this previously, but I can think of no better way to end. The Hidden Armenians must be welcomed back to their Armenian heritage. Not as second-class citizens, not to move from one discrimination to another, not to be viewed as less. They are thirsting for it! Each one is a precious miracle of surviving identity and is the key to the return of an Armenian presence on our homeland. Armenian culture and heritage was born of that land, and after 1,000 years of assimilation and purposeful destruction, we demand the right of its return. □

RESIST

Murder Cannot Be Hid Long. The Truth Will Out.

By Chris Bohjalian

Last month I spent three days at “Responsibility 2015,” the conference on the Armenian Genocide sponsored by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation held in Manhattan. At the end of the final day, I was at once invigorated and exhausted. I was inspired by the passion of the artists and activists and intellectuals, and I was emotionally wrung out by the realities of imagining for three days the genocide that a century ago this month was commencing.

St. Sargis Church (Photo: Victoria Blewer)

It was impossible not to contemplate my visits to Western Armenia, and what I have seen there. I was brought back to Van and Kharpert and Diyarbakir. I was brought back to Chunkush and the Dudan Crevasse. And I was brought back to Digor.

Digor isn't on a lot of the maps that we Armenian pilgrims follow on our journeys back into the world that was ours once. It's a town of about 2,500 people, mostly Kurds. But it's not far from Ani. It's no more than 20 miles from the Armenian border. The editor of this newspaper, Nanore Barsoumian, has been there. So has her predecessor, Khatchig Mouradian.

At some point in the 1950's, a small Turkish military contingent drove to a rocky plateau west of Digor and placed dynamite inside the five medieval stone churches that comprised the isolated Armenian monastery of Khdzgonk. And then they blew them up.

Most of them, anyway. I had heard that one proud section of the largest of the five churches, St. Sargis, was still standing.

We all know the appalling lengths to which Turkey will go to deny the genocide. We know the government is pathologic; we know that it approaches the culpability of the Ottoman regime with a despicable, Stalin-like determination to rewrite history via lies and bluster and threats.

But if you want to see firsthand the lengths to which the government has gone to deny the historical reality of the Armenian presence on the Anatolian plains, visit St. Sargis. I journeyed there last summer with my family.

St. Sargis is not easy to find. The monastery compound is only eight miles as the crow flies from Digor, but it sits hidden on a ledge halfway down a steep ravine. We only found it because we were traveling with Khatchig, who knew the mayor of Digor, who, in turn, offered us a guide from the village to lead us there.

But we hiked through the desert-like hills to the edge of a plateau, looked down, and there it was: St. Sargis. The center of the church and the iconic Armenian dome, despite great gaping holes in the walls, had survived the blast.

I remember wondering when I was climbing several hundred feet down the vertigo-inducing ridge into the sheltered ravine, did the Turkish soldiers lower their dynamite over the side of the cliff with pulleys and ropes, or did they carry it in their packs? Clearly they'd needed a lot: I'd seen black and white photographs of the five-church compound. The churches had been constructed between the 11th and 13th centuries, and they had been built to last.



The St. Sargis Church sits hidden on a ledge halfway down a steep ravine. (Photo: Victoria Blewer)

**'Truth will come
to light;
murder cannot
be hid long . . .
at the length
truth will out.'**

I've visited a lot of Armenian ruins across Historic Armenia—perhaps as many as 30 or 40 different monasteries and churches in places that most North Americans outside of our community couldn't find on a map. In some ways, it's reminiscent of visiting a castle keep in Scotland or the ancient city in Rome. The soul wonders at the past and we are left wistful by the ephemerality of our lives.

But here is how it is different: Often these ruins—while as old as some Roman temples or the remnants of a tower in the Scottish highlands—were the homes to vital, vibrant, and active congregations or monasteries a mere

hundred years ago. When Babe Ruth was playing baseball. When Scott Fitzgerald was honing his craft. When Alexander Graham Bell in New York was ringing a fellow named Watson in California.

By the 1950's, when the locals who live in Digor recall the Turkish soldiers blowing up the 5 churches, the monastery had been sitting empty for less than 40 years.

Today much of the rubble has disappeared back into the earth. Scrub brush and dirt have slowly buried the shattered stonework, as well as the walls of the chapels that were blown out and into the nearby crevasse.

The last stage in any genocide is denial. My sense is that's why decades after evicting the monks, the Turks tried to blow up the site—one of perhaps dozens of churches they would destroy in the 1950's.

It wasn't enough to ethnically cleanse the Armenians from the country; it was important to scour away any trace that once upon a time we had lived there, too—even in a ravine in the absolute middle of nowhere. My wife and I speculated that the only reason St. Sargis remains is because the soldiers ran out of dynamite and it was too much work to bother coming back to finish the job.

But, as Shakespeare observed, the truth will out.

The full quote is even more meaningful here: "Truth will come to light; murder cannot be hid long . . . at the length truth will out."

Indeed: Murder cannot be hid long.

As drained as I was at the end of "Responsibility 2015," I was also confident that we—Armenians—are winning. We really are. While so many of our ancestors' voices were stilled, their descendants are speaking more passionately and powerfully than ever. "Long" is a relative word. A century is but a blink in geologic terms.

You can blow up a monastery. But you can't bulldoze the truth. □

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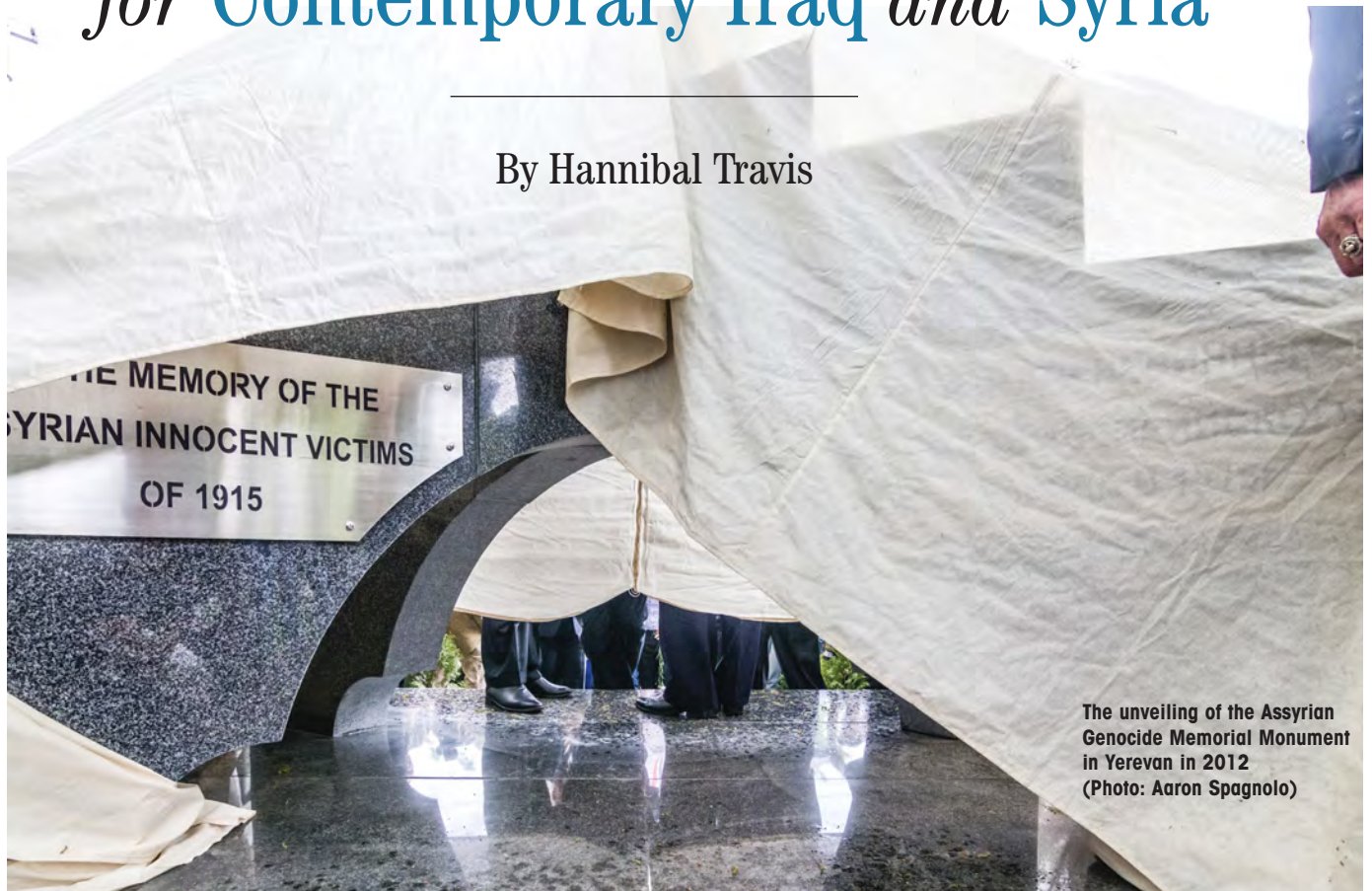
Scholars of genocide studies have begun to explore the constitutional and political causes of genocide. After many years in which theories of evil intention prevailed, structuralist and functionalist theories have gained ground. For example, René Lemarchand's studies in the comparative dynamics of genocide suggest that the colonial and precolonial context of an entire region may make genocide attractive at either the national or the local level. He argues that "social structure" may lead to genocide where groups are "ranked" in terms of access to social goods such as wealth or education, enjoyment of human rights, or power. Adam Jones looks to Cambodia as a "subaltern genocide" in which rebels who fought the U.N.-recognized government for some time took over and began mass executions of those seen as "traitorous" to the new Khmer Rouge system, and starved many others by misrule. Jones observes that the Khmer Rouge served a functional role in the world system, serving as "protégés" to the United States and China in their efforts to limit Vietnam's growing power.



In February 2015, ISIS destroyed ancient Assyrian artifacts in Mosul, Iraq.

The Lessons of Late Ottoman Genocides for Contemporary Iraq and Syria

By Hannibal Travis



The unveiling of the Assyrian Genocide Memorial Monument in Yerevan in 2012
(Photo: Aaron Spagnolo)

Civil strife and refugee flight operate as accelerators to genocidal events. German and Hutu elites sought to preempt what they saw as “annihilation.” Tutsi forces in Burundi and eastern Congo perpetrated mass violence against Hutus for similar reasons. In several cases of genocide, refugee flows have been used as a weapon, as with the case of the German “refugees” from the “free city” of Danzig in 1939, the internally displaced Hutus of northern Rwanda targeted by Tutsi rebels in 1993–94, the Hutu refugees in eastern Congo in 1994–2014, and the remnant of the Khmer Rouge who acted as cross-border terrorists after 1979. The Arab League states used Palestinians as a “refugee weapon” against Israel, and Ronald Reagan used Cambodian refugees as a weapon against Vietnam.

This essay attempts to draw on some of these insights. The aim is to apply the lessons of late Ottoman genocides against Christians to the present-day humanitarian crises in Iraq and Syria. Both crises present some similarities with the geopolitical context of the late Ottoman Empire: a strategy of limiting Russian influence in the eastern Mediterranean, destabilizing refugee flows in the region in the years leading up to the crisis, a transition from an oppressive dictator/monarch to a coalition promising a more liberal and democratic era, the formation of death squads and their support networks on all sides, and rising religious and racial extremism setting the stage for ending the era of pluralism and creating total chaos. A new Khmer Rouge is rising in Iraq and Syria, extremist rebels who may destroy pluralism.

LATE OTTOMAN GENOCIDES: FALSE HOPES AND PLANS FOR VENGEANCE

False promises of a more pluralistic era go back centuries in the Middle East. Crowds in London in the era of the Crimean War held up posters showing the Ottoman sultan, Napoleon Bonaparte III, and Queen Victoria as the “three saviors of



Assyrians rally in Australia in November 2010 demanding an end to violence against their compatriots in Iraq. (Photo: Assyrian Universal Alliance)

civilization.” Viscount Palmerston maintained that the “integrity and independence of the Ottoman Empire are necessary to the maintenance of the tranquility, the liberty, and the balance of power” of the world. The newspapers said that Britain was fighting against Russia as “the personification of Despotism,” and that “God wills the liberty and happiness of mankind,” so Britain was “doing God’s work in fighting for liberty...” Freedom for all was at hand.

Historians of the late Ottoman Empire describe a dynamic of catastrophe, in which attempts to limit Ottoman conquests resulted in massacres of local civilians, counter-massacres of Ottoman settlers and occupation forces, threatened humanitarian interventions, paper promises of equality among Ottoman subjects in the future, and renewed conflict years later. The Russians did not believe in the Ottoman pledge to protect the rights of Orthodox Christians, which had been trampled consistently. In the Crimean War, the British and Austro-Hungarians supported the Ottomans against the Russians, with the result that “Russia was compelled to demolish her fortresses on the Black Sea” and to keep her warships out of the seas adjoining the western Ottoman coasts, while “Turkey made promises (on paper) that Christians should be admitted to equal rights with Mussulmans in her European dominions.” Britain insisted on the “independence and territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire,” eventually signing a pact to defend it against Russian attempts to liberate the Ottoman Christians. The British heavily financed the late Ottoman military machine.

In the 20th century, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) collaborated with the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) or “Young Turks” on plans for a more democratic era in Ottoman history, one in which Armenians and Turks could be treated as equals. According to historian Gerard Libaridian of the University of Michigan, the ARF looked to the Balkan revolutionaries and Russian socialists as models. He implies that its cooperation with the Young Turks

only helped reinforce the new regime’s authority, with disastrous consequences. The Balkan wars and the manipulation of the Armenian issue confirmed the worst instincts of some members of the Young Turks. The resulting Young Turk regime reinforced the Ottoman state with Turkism, one-party rule, and a modernizing national socialism.

REVENGE ON NATIVE CHRISTIANS FOR BRITISH AND SLAVIC VICTORIES

The Young Turks and the Constitution of 1908 pledged a new era of democratic pluralism. Secretly, the Young Turks planned to avenge the human-rights violations against Turks in the Balkans, the Russian Empire, and other places. The plan was to deport Christians from their homes and use brigands or irregulars (*çetes*) or Kurds to perpetrate massacres. The German consul in Erzurum reported that the “non-Muslim and non-Turkish inhabitants” of the Ottoman Empire would be “attacked and exterminated by Kurdish and Turkish brigands.” The extermination operations were often perpetrated by the “brigand cadres” of convicts released from prison to serve in the Ottoman Special Organization, joined by Kurdish tribes, Turkish gendarmes or police, and Muslim refugees from the Balkans or the Russian Empire. The refugees sought revenge on the Orthodox Christians and Slavs for their suffering in the Balkan Wars and the expansion of Russia’s empire. One of the leaders of the Young

Turks, Enver Pasha, remarked that after the Balkan Wars of 1912–13, “our anger is strengthening: revenge, revenge, revenge; there is no other word.” In 1914, the Ottoman Chamber of Deputies prophesied a “day of revenge” against the “Muscovites” and their “allies” for all the “martyrs they have trampled underfoot.” With the start of World War I, the German ambassador predicted that if British forces landed on the Turkish coast, all bets would be off when it came to the massacre of the Armenians. In July 1915, a German diplomat described how the Muslim refugees brought “tales of suffering” to Turkey, which led to “exceptional measures against the Armenians.” Historian Taner Akçam observes that “[a] nation that feels itself on the verge of destruction will not hesitate to destroy another group it holds responsible for its situation.”

With respect to this plan, some of their German allies encouraged the Young Turks.

Ottoman sultan-caliph for a “holy war” against the Christian allies of Britain and Russia. According to the German diplomatic traffic, the Ottoman Minister of Interior, Talaat Pasha, told a German embassy official in mid-1915 that the Turkish government “is intent on taking advantage of the World War in order to [make a] clean sweep of internal enemies—the indigenous Christians—without being hindered in doing so by diplomatic intervention from other countries.” The diplomatic archives indicated that German officials believed that the Ottoman government “resolved...to eliminate the indigenous Christians.” This was consistent with reports that the Young Turks decided in 1910–11 that the “nations that remain from the old times



The Armenian Genocide Memorial Church in Der Zor, which housed the remains of victims of the Armenian Genocide, was blown up by Islamic extremists in September 2014.

The pillars of modern Turkey are threefold: nationalistic intolerance (Turkification), religious intolerance (Sunnification), and political intolerance (the strangulation of dissent).

The German-Turkish League, with the German Foreign Office standing behind it, developed a geopolitics of pitting Germans and Turks against Russians and Armenians. Advocates of this type of geopolitics proposed removing the Armenians from the Ottoman-Russian border area so as to change the racial balance of forces, and to preempt further Russian victories. Arab populations would be deported to the Ottoman north, to be replaced by Armenians who could work the German railway in Mesopotamia, a project that promised agricultural and oil wealth.

After reviewing the German diplomatic cables published by Johannes Lepsius in 1918, German scholar Gabriele Yonan has argued that the kaiser, the German Intelligence Service for the Orient, and the German Embassy in Constantinople had helped bring about an Armenian and Assyrian “Holocaust,” by aiding and abetting plans of the

in our [Ottoman] empire are akin to foreign and harmful weeds that must be uprooted.”

The native Christians, for their part, sought to escape annihilation by flight, appeals for justice, and spotty resistance. In July 1915, the German ambassador to Turkey wrote that under the guise of “relocations,” the Ottomans carried out the “goal of annihilating the Armenian race in Turkey.” The Armenian Patriarchate claimed that 200 churches and about as many other places of worship or religious education were stolen or destroyed. In early 1916, the Assyrian patriarch warned the Russians that Turkish and Kurdish forces “had determined to kill all of us [Assyrians],” so that he led his people to flee their homeland. The German imperial chancellor was told that the Assyrians of eastern Turkey had been “exterminated.” Paul Shimmom, on behalf of the Assyrian patriarch, complained that 70 Assyrian towns and villages had been looted

and ruined by Ottoman troops and Kurdish militias. The Greek foreign minister spoke of the deaths of more than 300,000 Anatolian Greeks along the Black Sea coast. The U.S. ambassador to the Ottoman Empire condemned the murder of 2 million Christians in Turkey by 1918, including Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks. Genocide scholar R.J. Rummel, surveying a variety of sources, has identified 2 periods of killing, involving 300,000 to 1.4 million Armenians in 1914–18, nearly 200,000 Assyrian and Greek Christians in 1914–18, nearly 50,000 Assyrians in Persia in 1914–18, and 800,000 Armenians and Greeks in 1919–25.

Facing military defeat, the Ottoman sultan signed a forward-looking treaty with the Western powers. The treaty adopted many of the tools later utilized by the United Nations to reduce the incidence of mass atrocities: ethnic autonomy, human rights for religious minorities, and nonaggression pacts. In response, Mustafa Kemal and Rauf Orbay waged a national “holy war” (*cihad-ı milliye*) against the remaining Armenians and Greeks. Raphael Lemkin’s notes for a study of Greek-Turkish relations after 1918 stated that after massacres of Turks by Armenians or Greeks, “wave[s] of genocide” reached the Armenians of Cilicia and Yerevan, while at Smyrna some Greek massacres of Turks were followed by attacks by the *çetes* on Greek villages, designed to “end in the elimination of the rival nationality from that particular area.” The Kemalist irregulars (*chêttes* or *bashibozuks* in Lemkin’s sources) murdered villagers, raped women, “cut down” children, and burned

This page is in memory of Hazel Gulkasian Tatson, Genocide Survivor

While the vast majority of Sunnis falling under Iraqi or Syrian government control have not been killed, being outed ‘as Shia or a related sect, such as the Alawites, in Sunni rebel-held parts of Iraq and Syria today, has become as dangerous as being a Jew was in Nazi-controlled parts of Europe in 1940.’ As in Cambodia or Somalia, diversity will be destroyed, pluralism will end, and a formerly functioning society will be devastated.

the villages. In June 1921, the Soviet minister of foreign affairs described the killing of 60,000 Christians in Soviet Armenia and the environs. Later in 1921, Stanley Hopkins of the aid organization Near East Relief confirmed that the “Greeks of Anatolia are suffering the same or worse fate than did the Armenians in the massacres of the Great War.” He described the Kemalists’ intention as “to destroy all Greeks...” A quarter of a million Armenians and Greeks perished in the Kemalists’ reoccupation of Smyrna, mostly of burning, and hunger. By late 1922, the British Prime Minister Lloyd George condemned how the Kemalists had “slaughtered in cold blood ... five hundred thousand Greeks...” In December 1922, the British foreign minister concluded that “a million Greeks have been killed, deported or have died.” A million or more Ottoman Christians may have been slain after 1918, based on census records and the reports of various diplomats and scholars.

The subsequent Treaty of Lausanne promised to achieve what even the Ottoman Empire could not, that is, to seal “the extinction of Christianity” in Turkey. The Europeans and Russians offered moral and material support to Kemal and Orbay, while they rarely helped the Christians north of the Iraqi border. The Assyrians asked to receive the benefits of treatment as an “independent nation,” failing which they feared “their future existence as a nation [was] doomed,” but the British Empire refused. The Ottomans had issued an order to exterminate the Assyrian and Armenian Christians of Mosul during the war, which the German Consul Walter Holstein resisted, prevailing due to an “immense strength of will.”

The Turkish state created in Ankara claims to be the “legitimate successor of the Ottoman State.” The pillars of modern Turkey are threefold: nationalistic intolerance (Turkification), religious intolerance (Sunnification), and political intolerance

(the strangulation of dissent). The Turkish criminal code enforces each of these three pillars of modern Turkish society, with Article 301 codifying the immunity of the Turkish race and its history from criticism, Article 125(b) the immunity of the dominant religion from criticism, and Article 125(a) the immunity of specific Turkish officials from criticism.

THE WAR IN IRAQ: IMITATING THE TURKISH MODEL

In 1990, neoconservatives such as Bernard Lewis and the Brookings Institution’s experts suggested that an “international order” of peace and security would follow a war on the side of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait against Iraq. Secretary of State James A. Baker III, Martin Indyk of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, and Richard Perle of the American Enterprise Institute became boosters for Saudi Arabia’s role in promoting a peaceful Middle East in the 1990’s. On the other hand, Senator Paul Wellstone of Minnesota, in his first Senate speech, accurately predicted that the 1990–91 war would inflict “tremendous destructive power” and “unleash forces of fanaticism in the Middle East and [make] a chronically unstable region...even more unstable...” Senator Strom Thurmond and other Republicans and Democrats disagreed, arguing: “A vote in support of the President [authorizing war against Iraq] is a vote for peace.” Their voices prevailed, and the royal families of the Persian Gulf, including those of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, became hotbeds of the terror fundraising and incitement that led to September 11. They had been saved from secular republican politics by the war to eject Iraq from Kuwait and the border area with Saudi Arabia.

George W. Bush formed a “strategic partnership” with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip

Erdogan of Turkey, the purpose of which was “restructuring Iraq.” Journalists and neoconservatives saw few drawbacks and several potential benefits of invading Iraq. Because they saw Saudi Arabia and Turkey as helpful allies, they thought that the transition to a moderate democracy in Baghdad would be cheap and would not take long. After all, if ibn Saud and Mustafa Kemal could bloodlessly build moderate societies under British and French tutelage in the 1930’s (as the myths handed down say), why couldn’t Tariq al-Hashemi or Iyad Allawi do the same thing in Iraq? In terms of other benefits, Russia’s contracts to drill for oil could be expropriated. Analogous beneficial results had been obtained for the anti-Russian alliance through subversion and financing extremists in 1950’s Iran and 1960’s Iraq.

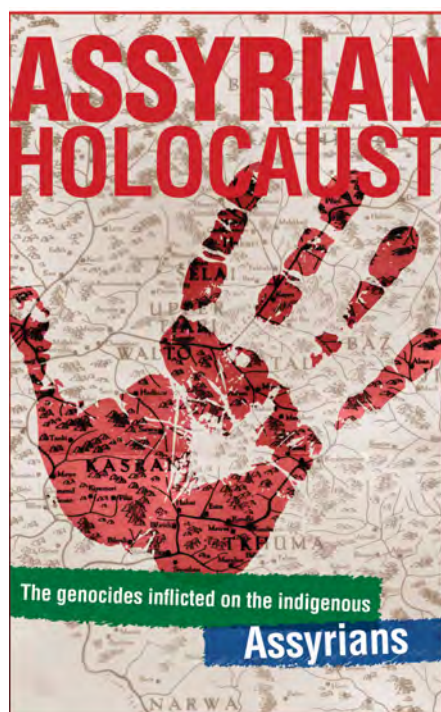
In 2003, Bernard Lewis was a strong supporter of invading Iraq, arguing that a successful democracy like Germany or Japan would be created. In 2012, he welcomed the Arab Spring as cause for optimism that a Turkish-style democracy would emerge in the Arab states, led by “religious organizations,” “craft guilds,” and the “increasing participation of women.” CNN and other corporate media praise Lewis as the “world’s greatest historian of the Middle East.” Foreign domination of the Middle East was brief and ended decades before 2011, he said in 2012. Liberal democracy is “suitable for the English-speaking peoples,” whereas Middle Eastern societies have democracies like that of Turkey, where authority comes from religious organizations, guilds, and other apolitical associations. Erdogan’s Justice and Development Party came to power in a free and fair election, and Turkey in the 1950’s conducted the first genuinely free and fair elections in the Middle East, Lewis claimed. Turkey enjoyed the “best prospects” for a “compromise” between freedom and fundamentalism, he argued. Despite some

“difficulties,” it had a “parliamentary democracy” for “more than half a century.” In fact, restrictive rules disqualifying advocates of liberty or equality from forming political parties in Turkey, along with a series of military coups, have shaped this “democracy.”

Having forgotten or suppressed the actual history of the Middle East, the neo-conservatives and so-called liberal interventionists projected a delusional future if their policies were adopted. In 1992, the second edition of *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, the book by liberal interventionist Michael Walzer that is often read by students of politics and military ethics, argued that humanitarian intervention and preemptive war could promote peace by protecting the “political independence” of nations, while “uphold[ing] the values of individual life of which sovereignty is merely an expression.” In 2002, President George W. Bush declared that by preemptive war, he would guarantee American security and lives while protecting liberty. In his 2004 State of the Union address, Bush posed as a guardian of liberty at home while promoting democracy around the world.

Since 2003, Americans enjoyed deteriorating national security, increasing loss of life, and ever-declining liberty as a result of Bush’s policies. The number of terrorist attacks tripled from 2003–04. More Americans died in Iraq than in all terror attacks under Presidents Clinton and Bush prior to the war. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) reported in 2004 that Americans were trapped in a “surveillance society.” In 2006, the ACLU condemned the “Orwellian doublespeak” that prevented legislative or judicial oversight of how many people had lost their civil freedoms, and for what reasons.

The idea of an alliance to protect freedom, led by Bush and aided by the Saudis and Turkey, could only make sense to those who systematically distorted the English language. For example, the Brookings Institution and Washington Institute for Near East Policy called Turkey “secular” even though it “has created a tradition of ‘state Islam’ whereby the government builds and



'The genocides inflicted on the indigenous Assyrians,' a poster by the Assyrian Information Management (AIM) on Atour.com.

staffs mosques...” Bush aide Paul Wolfowitz went to the absurd extent of saying that Turkey was “committed to the values of separation of religion and government that underlie this modern secular democracy.” Noah Feldman, an aide who helped draft a constitution for the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq, argued that because Turkey had no official religion, there could be a successful democracy in Iraq in which minorities and women were treated equally, there was no “breeding ground” for terrorism, and there was a rule of law. This argument began with a false premise and ended with a delusional prediction. Feldman implied that the fact that many September 11 hijackers were from Saudi Arabia was a reason why Iraq had to have an official religion along with a democratic system. It was an argument that began with a non-sequitur and ended with a contradiction in terms. Kenneth Pollack of the Brookings Institution proposed war with Iraq but only a “hard discussion” with Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the places where the September 11 hijackers were raised.

After Iraq’s democratic government and official religion came on the scene in 2005, the results have been disastrous.

Death squads were formed on religious and sectarian lines, such as al Qaeda in Iraq, the Islamic State of Iraq, the Badr Brigade, the Fury Brigade, the Wolf Brigade, the Mahdi Army, and others. A prosecutor for U.N.-backed Multi-National Force Iraq in cases before the Central Criminal Court of Iraq concluded in 2006 that some Iraqi judges follow “Sunni clerics, who have glorified the insurgency...[while] others have called for the murder of Americans, and have commanded lenient treatment for captured terrorists.” Due to the country’s “official religion,” the Iraqi courts and “Iraqi positive law support this religious discrimination in favor of Islamic insurgents.” This result may have been expected by those who endorsed a theory explained by Richard Falkenrath at the Brookings Institution in 2005: Religious violence in Iraq was good for the United States because it operated as a type of “flypaper” trap for “Sunni terrorists” and “Shiites.”

Refugee movements, regime change, and militia formation are “accelerators” for genocide. The United Nations and antiwar activists like Martin Sheen predicted 2–3 million Iraqi refugees, and refugee groups have in the past been a breeding-ground for violence. About 100,000 excess deaths happened in Iraq by September 2004; 600 car bombs went off in civilian areas by 2006; and half the Christian population fled the country. The median per capita income fell to less than a dollar a day, as food prices surged. Iraqi politicians began complaining of genocide as early as 2005. About 600,000 excess violent deaths took place by the fall of 2006, with gunfire and car bombs being significant causes of death.

As in the late Ottoman Empire, the Assyrian and Armenian communities were decimated in Iraq. By 2010, Assyrians lost three-quarters of a population of 800,000 to religious cleansing, poverty, and premature death, and Armenians lost half of a prewar population of 20,000. While a census of Mosul in 1920 estimated that the city was about one-seventh Assyrian Christian, the city was by 2010 most likely only 1 percent Assyrian or less.

In 2007, a coalition of Iraqi nongovernmental organizations called in for a series of measures to deescalate the cycle of crimes against humanity in the country. They proposed “transparent inquiries into all allegations of international humanitarian law violations,” “inquiries into human rights violations by all parties,” and “ending the state of impunity through adequate judicial mechanisms,” but little interest was shown in such a comprehensive inquiry. As Iraq and other countries warned the U.S. State Department that Saudi Arabia was financing al Qaeda, the Taliban, anti-Hindu extremists in Pakistan, and other terrorist groups, Saudi Arabia was not subjected to the sort of economic sanctions directed at Iraq and Syria.

THE IRAQ WAR COMES TO SYRIA, COURTESY OF THE NEIGHBORS

Nations like Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey stand to benefit from a terrorist victory in Syria when their allies gain control over a gas pipeline from the Persian Gulf through Syria to Turkey and Europe. They seem to be happy to sacrifice pluralism and stability for this aim. In their own countries, the percentage of Christians is 1 percent or less, rather than the 10 percent of 1980's Iraq or 1990's Syria. These countries also financially or rhetorically supported the Bosnian and Chechen wars, in which the leaders of the Syrian rebels gained experience before heading to Iraq or elsewhere. The Bosnian civil war, which Turkey strongly supported along with Pakistan, reduced the Serbian Christian population of Bosnia and Herzegovina by almost 300,000 persons from 1991–97.

In 2011 and early 2012, Saudi Arabia armed the jihadists in Syria through Iraq and Lebanon. It was obvious that the arms flow from the Saudis would also benefit al Qaeda, placing the entire world in danger of extremism. Russia condemned the “foreign governments [who] were arming ‘militants and extremists’ in Syria,” and argued that U.N. economic sanctions were being used to strangle entire economies, and promote

war. Its diplomats estimated that 15,000 foreign terrorists had entered Syria and were killing civilians using those foreign-supplied armaments. The foreign ministries of China, India, Brazil, and South Africa agreed that “external interference in Syria's affairs” should end. The European Union, Turkey, the United States, and the Arab League advocated a “political transition” to a “plural” democracy, as the United States, Turkey, and the United Kingdom had promised in Iraq. The United States called on Russia to deny weapons to the Syrian government, even though Syria alleged that 2,000 government officials had been killed by rebels and infiltrators. U.N. figures suggested a death toll of 5,400 by early 2012.

As in the lead-up to the Armenian-Assyrian-Greek Genocide, Turkey manipulated destabilizing refugee flows during the crisis. In 1911–15, the focus was on inciting refugees from the Balkans and Russia to seek revenge on the Allies and Ottoman Christians. In 2012, the rebel chant became “Christians to Beirut, Alawites to their graves.” The leader of the most powerful so-called moderate rebels in Syria called for the religious cleansing of all Alawites and Shiites in Syria. Just as the Committee of Union and Progress promised democracy and worked with Armenian revolutionaries, the Syrian National Council worked with Christian revolutionaries in Syria. As the Ottoman sultan was supposed to be replaced by a multi-ethnic, Western-looking, parliamentary democracy under the Committee of Union and Progress, the Syrian National Council promised to replace the dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad with a more liberal and democratic era. One might also compare these promises to the transition from the Shah of Iran to the Islamic Republic, and from Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia to the “Democratic Kampuchea” promised by the Khmer Rouge.

Human Rights Watch has concluded that rebels who committed the crimes of hostage taking, massacres, and terrorism in Syria had brought in their “weapons ... [.] money and other supplies” from Turkey. The International Crisis Group, a think-tank partially

financed by contributions from the Turkish Foreign Ministry, recommended in spring 2013 that Turkey reduce “border crossings by Syrian opposition fighters; do not allow them to use refugee camps as rear bases; ensure there is no pressure on young camp residents to join opposition militias; and establish new refugee camps well away from the border.” Turkey apparently rejected this recommendation.

Syrian extremists grew powerful through “direct access to Gulf [i.e., Saudi and Qatari]-based funding” and received “everything they needed” in Turkey. In July 2012, the “Free Syrian Army” (FSA) and al-Qaeda types occupied the Syrian-Turkish border area and declared an Islamic state on YouTube. The FSA's communications strategy includes often “posting [jihadi] propaganda online.” The FSA declared a holy war in Syria after May 2012, if not earlier, and at least 500 Turks joined this war. The rebel groups Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and [Greater] Syria (ISIS) used similar extremist videos. In early 2014, a Turkish official admitted that the former FSA leaders were not a factor on the ground, instead emphasizing the reality of an “Islamic Front” that included Ahrar al-Sham and Liwa al-Tawhid. According to a joint report of Turkish members of parliament, lawyers, and journalists, the Islamic Front involves the cooperation with ISIS of a number of FSA brigades, including Ahrar al-Sham. As these new fronts and states formed, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights that is looked to by the United States due to its pro-FSA orientation reported that deaths in Syria rose from 9,000 in 2012 to 100,000 in late 2013.

The Saudi-backed forces that destroyed churches in Baghdad and Mosul from 2004 through 2011, massacring the Christians inside them as well as thousands of Shi'a, subsequently spread to Syria and acted similarly there. Their leaders traveled from Iraq to Syria and there declared a “holy war” in January 2012. With a core of 15,000–20,000 foreigners, there were 150,000 rebels in Syria in late 2013. In 2012, Abdel Hakim Belhadj, the leader of Libyan extremists that al Qaeda's number two viewed as part

of his organization, traveled to Istanbul to meet the FSA, reportedly taking arms and fighters with him.

During the civil war, out of a death toll of 162,000 estimated by pro-opposition sources, the ratio of Syrian rebels to Syrian regime forces killed from 2011–13 was about 1 to 1.5, meaning that more government officials died than rebels and terrorists, 61,100 to 42,700. By way of comparison, in Turkey's war on "terrorism," the government reported that 5 members of pro-Kurdish forces were killed for every member of the Turkish government's forces, 13,878 to 2,917. In the U.N.-authorized coalition war against Iraq in 1990–91, the ratio of coalition to Iraqi deaths was almost 1 to 100 using the minimum figure for violent Iraqi war deaths, or 343 to 30,000, and almost 1 to 800 including indirect deaths from the health effects of the bombardment and sanctions on Iraq, and the civil strife in 1991, or 343 to 278,000.

The economic sanctions that the United States and European Union adopted inevitably deepened and widened the conflict in Syria. After sanctions cut off Syria's oil exports, its unemployment rate hit 36 percent and probably exceeded 50 percent in 2013–14. Syrian money lost its value. As one expert said about Iraq in 2006, "[a]fter three years of unemployment in excess of 50 percent, there are no people in the world that wouldn't be undergoing violence and militias." A top U.S. commander in Iraq observed that a relatively small rise in unemployment can "have a very serious effect" on sectarian violence in a place like Iraq.

Veteran war correspondent Patrick Cockburn of Britain's the Independent observes that in northwestern Iraq, the Sunni "leadership has been ceded to a pathologically bloodthirsty and intolerant movement, a sort of Islamic Khmer Rouge, which has no aim but war without end." One might say the same about the Sunni leadership adjoining the Turkish border, in Aleppo and Homs, and in eastern Syria. It has built very little and plundered a great deal. While the vast majority of Sunnis falling under Iraqi or Syrian government control have not

The crimes of the insurgents and foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria would already have been recognized as a genocide had their targets not been Shi'as and Christians.

been killed, being outed "as Shia or a related sect, such as the Alawites, in Sunni rebel-held parts of Iraq and Syria today, has become as dangerous as being a Jew was in Nazi-controlled parts of Europe in 1940." As in Cambodia or Somalia, diversity will be destroyed, pluralism will end, and a formerly functioning society will be devastated.

In April 2014, the Washington Post reported that on March 21, the attack on the Armenian community of Kessab, Syria "was launched from Turkish soil," with shelling and machine-gun fire coming from Turkish-based "jihadist rebel groups, which included the al-Qaeda-linked Jabhat al-Nusra and the [FSA's] Ahrar al-Sham." Congressman David Cicilline of Rhode Island drew attention to this attack by "al-Qaeda affiliated terrorists out of Turkey [on] the peaceful Christian-Armenian community in a town that has served as a place of refuge for those trying desperately to escape the bloodshed of the past three years." Christian refugees from Aleppo and Homs told journalist Nuri Kino that they fled because rebel brigades "were trying to kill [them]...because [they] are Christian..." The Armenian Apostolic Church of America, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, and Chaldean Catholic Church have reported that extremists have burned or plundered 30 percent of churches in Syria and "driven out virtually all the population from the Christian towns of Maaloula and Kessab." These churches' leaders warn that "Turkey offers an example of what the future may hold for the region as a whole: the Christian population constitutes a mere 0.15 percent of that country's 79 million people, down from almost a quarter of the population a century ago."

The crimes of the insurgents and foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria would already have been recognized as a genocide

had their targets not been Shi'as and Christians. In 1974, Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit called the civil strife in Cyprus a "genocide" because one Turkish woman was sexually assaulted, hundreds of Turkish Cypriots became displaced, and "the Turkish Cypriot villages are still under siege." Turkey's foreign ministry continues to make this charge today, based on reports that 200–300 Turkish Cypriots went missing in 1963–64, and that dozens of Turkish Cypriot men and 1 Turkish Cypriot teenage girl may have been killed by Greek Cypriots in 1974. In 1986, the Turkish foreign ministry told the United Nations that Bulgaria was committing "cultural genocide" by demolishing mosques, changing Turkish names to Bulgarian ones, restricting the speaking of Turkish, and "dream[ing] of a 'greater Bulgaria.'" In 2002, Turkey called Israeli raids into the West Bank in search of suicide bomb factories and men on Israel's wanted list a genocide, after reports of a massacre in Jenin. In 2009, Prime Minister Erdogan claimed that there was a genocide in China when 148 people died in ethnic clashes between Han Chinese and the Turkic Uighur Muslims of East Turkestan.

CONCLUSION

Censorship, ignorance, and indifference about Turkey's history and the nature of its government contributed to policies that may destroy Iraq and Syria. Poorly planned interventionism, chaotic regime change, alliances with bad actors, and the weaponization of refugee camps have magnified localized strife into religious genocides. Politicians should study the lessons of how the British Empire broke its paper promises to the Ottoman Christians after the Crimean War, after which Ottoman-Christian communities were lost. New promises of a pluralistic and democratic Iraq and Syria ring hollow in light of history. □

Read the annotated version of this article at armenianweekly.com/2014/10/23/travis/

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Painting of Grigor Narekatsi by artist Arshag Fetvadjan

Determined Triumph

By Knarik O. Meneshian

*The voice of a sighing heart, its sobs and mournful cries,
I offer up to you, O seer of Secrets,
Placing the fruits of my wavering mind
As a savory sacrifice on the fire of my grieving soul
To be delivered to you in the censer of my will.*

—ST. GRIGOR NAREKATSI



s I read and look through various books and papers on the Armenian Genocide, I think of the genocide survivors I met and got to know years ago in the Chicago Armenian community. The community elders would say with

reverence, “See that lady over there, she is one of the Survivors . . . That man there, he is one of the Survivors . . .” There were several of them, and they were always working—serving our Armenian community—in the church, church hall, kitchen, school, and on picnic grounds. Occasionally, one of them would begin singing in the church hall’s kitchen. Within no time, others would join in, and as one voice they would sing, as they diligently prepared Armenian dishes for a community function, as they stayed behind after an event to clean and tidy up.

Though the aromas that wafted from the kitchen or picnic grounds were delightful and inviting, the unwavering enthusiasm and devotion these particular individuals felt for their people and community were awe-inspiring and unforgettable, for they had come from a place where they had suffered and survived unspeak-

and towns into barren wastelands” (from *The Pillars of the Armenian Church* by Dickran H. Boyajian).

Mrs. Carlier, the wife of the French consul in Sepastia, an eyewitness to the massacres and deportations that took place in 1895–96, wrote: “They killed everyone in the market place. Not a single Armenian remains. . . . Right at this moment they are killing with bayonets. . . . Since the mob was not armed with weapons, they had grabbed whatever they had found, axes, clubs, stones and shovels. They crushed the heads of the victims . . . Everywhere there is blood; wherever you step, you step on human brains and scalps. . . . I saw dogs dragging human body parts in their mouths . . . blood dripping from their mouths. . . . The majority of the victims were men. A large number of women and girls were put up for auction by the criminal Turks. . . . The women and girls were raped with extreme barbarism . . .” (from *Village World* [*Kiughashkharh*] by Vahan Hambartsumian).

The following are brief excerpts from four of the interviews.

The survivor of the 1896 massacres described the day the Turks came in these words: “My family was from Sepastia, and we Armenians always lived in fear. My father was a priest. I was five

The voice of a sighing heart, its sobs and mournful cries,

able horrors simply because of who they were—Armenians and Christians. As a result, they had lost everything—family and childhood, home and hearth, hopes and dreams, even their identity at times. Despite the carnage, destruction, and immeasurable loss that had befallen them, they were able not only to overcome their sufferings and go on with their lives in far-away lands, learning new languages, customs, and traditions, but also to give of themselves and enrich the lives of others, especially their Diasporan Armenian communities.

Years ago, during interviews I had conducted with some of these survivors in their homes, I noticed that though each had come from different regions in their homeland, and from different socio-economic standings, when they spoke of the horrors they had suffered they all described similar atrocities. And, when they spoke, each had the same heart-wrenching sorrow in his or her eyes.

I began the interviews first with a male survivor of the 1894–96 Hamidian Massacres. The Ottoman Constitution of 1876 had granted the Armenians certain rights. At last, the Armenians thought, they could allow themselves to look forward to a decent life, free of fear, brutality, and massacres. That sentiment, however, was short lived. During the late 1800’s, sporadic massacres of Armenians were carried out, beginning in Van. Upon learning of the atrocities that had begun soon after the signing of the constitution, Patriarch Khrimian Hayrik “charged that the government was guilty of perpetrating the crime and inciting violence.” In a pamphlet called “*Haikouyzh*,” the patriarch wrote, “They fell upon and covered Armenian villages and farms like locust and worm, devoured and withered all vegetation and turned fertile villages

years old and playing with my friends outside, when suddenly we heard a great deal of noise down the street. There was much yelling and screaming. A crowd was coming and they were carrying daggers, pieces of wood, anything with which to kill a person. People were running, and there was blood everywhere. The Turks were killing anyone they could get their hands on. . . . I ran and hid in a hole in the ground, which was filled with ashes, for about two or three days. When I came out of the hole, I was very thirsty and hungry . . . Because of what I had witnessed I developed a severe stutter. Nearly 90 now, I still stutter.”

In 1915, four years after immigrating to the United States and making Chicago his home, this survivor, upon learning of the plight of the Armenians in his homeland, left for the Caucasus to join other “*gamavors*” (volunteers) in fighting the Turks.

A female survivor of the genocide recalled, “I was seven years old when the Turks came to our village in Sepastia. They killed so many Armenians, including my parents, sisters, and brothers—my whole family. I do not know how I survived, but I remember seeing blood everywhere and so many people on the ground. I was walking and walking, calling for my mother, when two gendarmes saw me and hurt me . . . I was full of blood. Someone carried me to a hospital, where the doctor, who knew my family, wept when he saw me . . . Later, I was taken to a Turkish couple and I stayed with them.

“One day, when I was outside, some Turkish boys and girls screamed and shouted ‘gavur’ [nonbeliever or infidel] at me. As they repeated that word, again and again, they threw rocks at me . . . You can still see the scar on my face. . . . After staying with the Turkish couple for a while, I was taken to an orphanage in Marsovan, then to one in Greece, and later, when we orphans were older, some of us were

sent to France. So many lost their minds because of what the Turks had done...Whenever I thought of my family, my home...I could not stop crying...We had such fun playing together, my sisters, brothers, and I. We had a nice home, and a beautiful church before the Turks did the things they did."

A female survivor from Dikranagerd told of her ordeal in 1915 as she looked down at her hands resting in her lap. "I was fortunate to only have my fingers cut off of one hand. Some had hands and other body parts cut off, but mostly they were murdered."

A male survivor from Urfa recalled, "I was 10 years old in 1915 when it happened. I was outside walking down the street, when I saw some Turks killing an Armenian. They were striking him with canes, knives, swords, shovels . . . I was terrified and found a place to hide. When it was safe I ran back home where I found my uncle dead. They had slaughtered him like a lamb on the steps of our house. His head was down and his feet were up; there was blood everywhere. My father and other Armenian men were taken away. We never saw them again. My older brother, who was 19, had his head smashed. Some of my other relatives were killed. My mother suddenly could not speak and died three days after they took away my father and killed my brother. . . . The Turks filled our church with Armenians, and they burned them, even the children. They burned them all! I saw it. I saw a lot. . . . A Turkish family, the one that had earlier taken away my sis-



Painting of Gomidas, 'Vercheen Geesher —Debee Aksor' ('Final Night—Toward Exile')

its ultimate endeavor in the total annihilation of the Armenian people and culture. The following are more examples published in the Chicago Daily Tribune, reporting on the plight of the Armenians.

In the May 18, 1915 issue of the Chicago Daily Tribune, a caption on page 4 announced the slaughter of 6,000 Armenians by the Turks, and that aid to Armenia was needed.

In the Jan. 26, 1916 issue of the same paper, an article titled, "Chicago Asked to Open Purses for Armenians," described the dire plight of the Armenians, growing more critical every day because of the countless massacres, as well as the starvation, disease, exposure to the elements, and homelessness they were suffering.

In the Feb. 1, 1919 issue of the Chicago Daily Tribune, an article titled, "5th Liberty Loan Workers Told of Armenians' Woe," outlined a speech given by the former U.S. Ambassador to Turkey Abram L. Elkus at the Morrison Hotel in Chicago. The ambassador began his speech by telling the audience that he had no real idea what hunger and poverty were until he saw the devastation of Turkey's Armenians. He told of the hunger and poverty, the despair and death, and the 400,000 Armenian orphans that crowded into available buildings. He described how he and a friend had counted on the roads of Asia Minor the skeletons of hundreds of Armenians who had been "butchered by Turks."

I offer up to you, O seer of Secrets,

ter to be a wife, took my little brother and me to their house. There, we were made Turks and given Turkish names. I was called Hasan . . . Eventually, when we got older, we left and once again used our Armenian names. . . . It was God's miracle that the two of us survived. At times, after all these many years, I still see my dead mother and my brother with his smashed head, and all the others who had been killed, before my eyes."

Though the survivors I spoke with, and got to know many years ago, have all passed away, their stories—the story of a nation nearly annihilated by another—can still be "heard" via countless pages of printed material. For example, in the Oct. 7, 1896 issue of the Chicago Daily Tribune, an article titled, "Chicago's Work for the Armenians," described the efforts of the "Chicago Armenian committee" in collecting \$13,000 for the "International committee" in Constantinople to assist destitute Armenians who had survived the 1894–96 massacres. Also mentioned were the efforts of the Salvation Army in preparing to assist these refugees in establishing homes in America once they arrived.

As the sporadic massacres of the later 1800's continued into the early 1900's, behind the backdrop of World War I, methodically and with great acumen, the Turkish government, in 1915, began

In the March 17, 1920 issue of the Chicago Daily Tribune, an article titled, "Evanston Girl One of Three Helping 67,000 Armenians," described the work of Miss Alice K. Clark of Evanston, Ill., the daughter of the manager of the American Stove Company, and 2 other members of the American Relief Committee in Hadjin, Turkey, caring for 67,000 Armenian refugees.

After all these years—One Hundred—Turkey continues to deny any wrongdoing, stating that the Armenian Genocide never took place and that the issue of the Armenians "should be left to historians." Yet, as one reads the numerous eyewitness accounts, reports, newspaper articles, and books, one wonders, How can a crime of such magnitude—a government's systematic annihilation of nearly an entire race—be denied, and for so long? The numerous accounts, reports, and documents do not lie. The bones scattered across the land, the crumbling age-old churches and edifices do not lie.

In New York, the Alliance Weekly: A Journal of Christian Life and Missions published several articles, including eyewitness accounts, of the atrocities against the Armenians from 1909–19. The following are examples.

On Oct. 2, 1915, the Alliance Weekly published a piece titled, "Armenian Atrocities," describing the condition of the Armenians in

Placing the fruits of my wavering mind

Turkey: “An appalling condition prevails in Armenia. A representative committee of Americans have secured and sifted reports from all parts of Turkey. A preliminary statement has been given to the press and a detailed survey will follow in a few days. Atrocities unparalleled in modern history will be revealed. Armenia is being depopulated of its Christian population whether Gregorian or Protestant. At least half a million have perished in massacres or of hunger in the wastes to which they are driven. The missionaries of the American Board at Bitlis, Van, and Diyarbakir have been driven out. . . .”

On Oct. 23, 1915, the Alliance Weekly published the following: “The Christian world is again shocked by the new story of Armenian atrocities. There, horrid cruelties are on a scale surpassing even the frightful wrongs of other years, which justified the title Mr. Gladstone gave to the Turkish ruler, ‘Abdul, the Assassin.’ The present policy of the Turkish authorities, with the tacit support, it is feared, of their German allies, is the utter extermination of this sturdy and superior race . . . the entire destruction of the race.”

In the Oct. 30, 1915 issue of the same publication, a returning missionary from Turkey, Dr. McNaughton, reported, “. . . The missionary work in Asia Minor, under the American Board, has been almost entirely wiped out. . . . Before the war there were 148 stations, 309 missionaries, 158 organized churches, 1,310 native helpers, 26,000 scholars in 450 schools and colleges, and 60,000 in attendance upon the missions. Today these flocks are scattered, and more than 1,000,000 Armenian Christians appear to have perished. . . . Is it the last drop in the full cup of Turkish crime?”

In the Dec. 30, 1916 issue, an article titled, “Famine Horrors in the World War,” by A. E. Thompson describes the Armenian atrocities: “It has not been a conquered province that has suffered, but a subject nation, over which the Turks have ruled for centuries. Abdul Hamid shocked civilization by the massacres of a few thousand Armenians . . . He probably never conceived such horrors as the Young Turks, who dethroned him, have perpetrated. The report published by the Relief Committee states that out of a total Armenian population of 2,000,000 no less than 850,000 have died in massacres or of disease, exhaustion, and starvation . . . The report of the Relief Committee reads: ‘Men were led away in groups outside their villages and killed with clubs and axes. The Consul of one of the European nations reported that on one occasion 10,000 Armenians were taken out in boats, batteries of artillery trained upon them, and the entire company killed. Girls and women were reserved for an indescribable fate in terrible marches; in harems, in the houses of officials, or in tents of the wild tribes. Villages and towns by the hundreds were wrecked. The whole Armenian population of large sections deported. Of 450 in one village only one woman lives . . . Read the most graphic pictures in prophecy of horrors and outrages and you have a mild picture of what has occurred . . .’

In the Jan. 13, 1917 issue of the Alliance Weekly, an article titled, “The Turkey of Tomorrow,” by an author who signed the piece as “A Missionary Resident For Thirty Years In Turkey,” asks the questions, “What, then about the future? How about the wreck of work

for Armenians after the holocaust that has destroyed more than half a million of them, deported and impoverished more than half a million more, forced another quarter million to flee the country? Can the churches ever be revived or the schools reopened? . . .

When many thousands have been faithful unto death, preferring a martyr’s crown to a Moslem life, the people all see that faith and life are the essentials, rather than creeds and ceremonies. The ancient Armenian Church will come forth from this ordeal ‘tried as by the fire.’”

In the Oct. 6, 1917 issue, an article titled, “The Crimes of Turkey,” begins: “An important conference of the friends of the great movement for Armenian and Syrian relief was held in New York City during Tuesday and Wednesday, September 11th and 12th, at which there was a representative attendance from the various churches, charitable and missionary boards and societies. . . . The Alliance Weekly was represented at this conference . . .” The article outlines the account of Dr. Frederick Coan, who was “an eyewitness of both tragedies.” He had stated, “the present massacre [1915] far exceeds in loss of life and desolation of land than that of the massacre of 1894–5.” He said he had stood by “a huge trench—the grave of two thousand Armenians, who had sought to defend themselves from the Turks until their ammunition gave out; who on asking at what terms they might surrender, and on being promised their safety (sworn to on the Koran) by the Turks, surrendered, and were immediately given spades and shovels and ordered to dig a trench. When this trench was completed, those 2,000 Armenians were driven into it at the point of bayonets, and there buried.” He told of standing by a pit, “the grave of 1,600 little children who had been gathered together, saturated with oil, and burned alive, while the fanatical Turks beat drums to drown their dying cries,” and “a bridge from which 1,600 young Armenian maidens had plunged to their deaths rather than live as slaves in Turkish harems.”

The piece included Dr. Coan’s appeal to America: “Christian America—help save those who still can be saved. Hundreds of thousands of refugees have fled to Russia. Here they can be reached, and the Russian government will not refuse their relief. Russia has never refused to help us in relief, even handing money to us to be distributed by us as we thought best.” The doctor’s presentation concluded with: “There are Mohammedans who do not approve of this massacre. Over and over again I have heard them say, ‘I wonder that God in heaven does not bring fire down and smite us for these deeds. . . .’” (When the Russian and Armenian volunteer forces liberated Van in May 1915, working along with the American missionary aid workers were the Countess Aleksandra Lvovna Tolstaya, the youngest daughter of Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, and her aid workers. See the correspondence of Grace H. Knapp [1895–1916], Mt. Holyoke College Archives & Special Collections.)

The article also includes the account of a 17-year-old boy who had been brought to the United States. At the time of the genocide, he was 15 and had escaped. He told of his harrowing experience: “On March 31st or April 1st, 1915, our city was suddenly surrounded by Turkish

*As a savory sacrifice on the fire of my grieving soul
To be delivered to you in the censer of my will.*

soldiers. Most of the prominent Armenians were imprisoned, among them my father, who was a professor in a college. They were asked to give up their guns, but as most of them were merchants, doctors, professors, etc., there were few guns among them. Then the officers beat them. The professor of history in our college was first beaten with a stick; his fingers were then burned, then his hair, and finally he was crucified. . . . The mothers began at once to cut off the hair of the girls, but they could not hide their beautiful eyes. . . . We were surrounded by other Turkish soldiers. They separated the men from the women and put the men in a great dungeon . . . in that prison 550 men were weeping. . . . The women and children were placed in another prison. . . . The next night 549 men were taken to the nearby mountains and killed one by one. . . . From that group only one boy is living—myself. . . . Those 2,500 women and children. . . . they took away their clothing. . . . drove them out to the deserts. Children were taken by the Turks . . . some of the women became Moslems and were spared. Others threw themselves into the river. . . . The prettiest children were selected by the Turks, especially the boys and girls from ten to twelve years. . . . Once they were free as birds, now the girls are imprisoned in Turkish harems, buried alive.” The boy’s account ended with: “A whole nation is being killed and deported by the Turks, and those remaining are dying of starvation . . .”

In the Oct. 25, 1962 issue of *Milliyet* (Istanbul), an article by Gunay Erinal (Assistant to the Agricultural Inspector) titled, “A Modern Turk on the Armenian Past,” describes what the Turkish people experienced years after the genocide. It begins: “There is a famine in Eastern Turkey. Last winter all the newspapers reported that animals were dying of hunger. . . . In the beginning of 1962 in Saimbeyli (Hagin), the villagers said: ‘In the days of the Armenians more people lived here; the grapes and their wine were very well known. At that time there was also a college, which disappeared with the Armenians. . . . In the days of the Armenians here. . . .’ I had heard these words long ago, and I heard them very often recently. . . . ‘The villages of Hunu and Lorsun. . . .’ Afsin and Elbistan as well. . . . ‘When the Armenians were here there was a dam on the river by virtue of which we had no shortage of water. . . .’ In Hakkari also I heard Armenians mentioned. . . . ‘The Armenians, by planting terrace vineyards on the steep mountain-side, produced grapes, and it was very successful. But it does not exist now. . . . Our people neglected the land. . . . In the Catak ‘kaza’ of Van there are thousands of pistachio nut trees, but they are not fertile. . . .’”

As the Armenian communities throughout the world prepare to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the 1915 Genocide, one cannot help but wonder, how has this small nation continued to thrive despite all it has suffered? The answer must lie in the Armenian people’s deep reverence for church, language, heritage, culture, and patriotism.

Author J. Alston Campbell, who was witness to the deplorable conditions and sufferings of the Armenians in Turkey, wrote, “The thousands of Armenians who laid down their lives at the time of the massacres did not die on behalf of a political propaganda, they laid down for the Gospel, as a testimony to the Moslem world of the power of a living Christ. Most of those martyrs, had they wished,

might have saved themselves by holding up one little finger as a sign that they accepted Islam. But they chose death rather than deny His Name. . . .” And, of the patriotism of the Armenians, he wrote, “A strong feature in their character, and this, together with a wonderful recuperative power which they possess, has often enabled them to rise phoenix-like from disasters which would have ruined other nations.”

In April, One Hundred Years of Remembering, Praying, Commemorating, and Demanding Justice for the wrongs committed by the perpetrators of the 1915 Genocide of the Armenians will be marked by an historic event in Armenia at Holy Etchmiadzin—the Canonization of our Martyrs. His Holiness Karekin II and His Holiness Aram I will preside together over this momentous ceremony.

As candles burn, choirs sing, and incense fill Armenian churches on our National Day of Remembrance, I will light three candles: One for our Martyrs, One for Armenia, and One for Armenians Everywhere.

*“Dour ashkharhis khaghaghoutiun,
Azkis Hayots, ser, mioutiun.
Der voghormia, Der voghormia . . .”*

“Bless the world with peace,
and the Armenian Nation with love and unity.
Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy. . . .” —Gomidas Vartabed □

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THE VIEW FROM THE ROOFS OF MARDIN

What Everyone Saw IN THE 'Year of the Sword'

By David Gaunt



Mardin (Source: Michel Paboudjian Collection, Paris)

Mardin is an ancient and beautiful city, built on the steep slope of a mountain that descends from the fortress on top. Houses were literally built on top of each other, with one family's roof becoming another family's terrace. It's a very well-ordered form of residential chaos that evolved over the centuries and withstands modernization. Because of the height of the mountain, people living in Mardin can see for many miles around—far into the surrounding plains, far along the main road to Diyarbakir, sometimes even as far as the Syrian border.

Because of this building pattern, Mardin was also an open-air theater that provided residents with an outstanding view of major events that ripped through the small city in World War I. Although Mardin was far from the frontline, large elements of its population were harassed, deported, imprisoned, tortured, paraded through the streets, and massacred. Residents could also see the caravans of deportees coming from the northern provinces, who were marched past the city on their way to Der Zor. The horrors that took place were observed by many. Some perhaps enjoyed them like the spectators of Roman gladiator fights; others saw it as the wrath of God punishing His people for

some collective sin; still others saw it as the murdering of innocent citizens falsely accused of treason and of plotting revolt. A great number of observers saw the terror as a historical moment that forever shattered the traditional, subtle and balanced multi-religious, multiethnic pattern of life that had evolved in Mardin. Some called it *nakabat*, the Arabic word for catastrophe; some called it *firman*, believing it was decreed by the sultan; and some called it *qasfe*, the Syriac word for massacre. But generally, it is now known as *seyfo*, a general term used in many Middle Eastern languages for sword, as in “1915 the year of the sword.”¹

We know of the chronicles, diaries, and annotations of various people who were residing in Mardin in 1914–15 and who described the reign of terror that was instigated by *mutasarraf* (local governor) Bedri Bey, police chief Memduh, and others beginning in June 1915.² Some of the writers are only known by their initials, such as A.H.B., A.Y.B., and P.V.M.; others published their books anonymously, like Ishaq Armale, who had fled to Lebanon. In some cases, the writings lay unpublished for decades after they were first written down, like those of the French Dominican monks Jacques Rhétoré (whose manuscript was discovered in Mosul after the first Gulf War), Hyacinthe Simone, and Marie-Dominique Berré. A few, like the diary of the American Alpheus Andrus, are still known only in manuscript form.³

These writings are likely just the tip of the iceberg; many other chronicles were probably written, but have disappeared or remain undiscovered. One person that we know wrote a manuscript that has been lost is the Catholic priest Joseph Tfindji. His manuscript presumably contained a great deal of information about the Armenians and Syriacs who escaped from Mardin and were given asylum by the Yezidis in the Sinjar Mountains, as he served as the priest there. At any rate, Mardin is the one place in the Ottoman Empire that provides us with a relatively complete day-by-day description of the persecution of the Armenians, Chaldeans, and Syriacs.

I shall now analyze a few observations from the many eyewitness accounts available. Most are taken from the very detailed descriptions by Armele and Rhétoré. Their usual point of observation was from the terrace of the building that now houses the Mardin museum, but was then the Syriac Catholic patriarchy. But on the morning of July 4, 1915, Armale was outside the city walls taking a walk on the small hills just beyond the western gate. He is broken off from admiring the trees bearing wonderful fruit by a terrible scene:

“What is that I see over at Ömer Agha’s water spring? A great caravan advances like a herd of sheep or cows. I must take up my telescope and look! An enormous army of close to 10,000 people! Most of them are women and children. There are some elderly too. I see soldiers who escort them, but beat them and kick them. They try to flee. Above them rifle barrels appear. My ears hear shots. I see a group that is surrounded by some soldiers. I see them brutally drive them toward a fort. Oh God! Where to? To the water well, just like



The town of Mardin, ca 1915–17 (Source: Gustav Simonsohn Collection, Stadtgeschichtliche Archiv der Zitadelle Spandau, Am Juliusturm)

during the latest weeks! They take off their clothes, pull out knives, and attack them, stabbing them and throwing them down headfirst into the well. And so they go back [to the caravan]. What an atrocity! . . .

“They come nearer in groups like grasshoppers and they must be about 8,000. How strange! A short while before they looked like 10,000. Where are the others? Can these murderers have killed 2,000 in 3 hours? How many were they when they left their homes? They must have been many more. I heard a few days ago that they amounted to 50,000. They come from Erzurum, Lice, Harput, and other Armenian cities . . .

“The leaders of Mardin with their graying hair have arrived [to where I stand]. They sit on horseback and watch how women and children rush about in panic. Their faces show amusement. In their heads are greed and immoral thoughts. They spur on their horses and ride towards the water spring. Some get there first in order to steal and plunder. I watch out so they don’t attack me. I better hide under a tree. . . .

“I see wealthy Muslims with their wives pushing their way through the weeping and sorrowful Christians. They are out to get people. They choose and select among the women and children, especially among the girls. And they demand that they renounce their religion. . . . The wealthy Mardin women manage to get a hold of a large number of boys and girls, and the soldiers don’t object; rather, they invite it. I see some persons return with their catch. Some lead boys from their horses, others have caught girls whom they veil so that the kidnapper’s friends cannot see them and begin to quarrel. One man has filled his pockets with gold and silver and returns laughing. . . . Others converse happily on their way back and cannot hide their joy over the goods they have gotten in such a short time. . . . The soldiers have resumed their harassment of the Armenians, and hit and kick them badly. They force their prisoners forward in the heat of the afternoon.”⁴

What Armale witnessed was the total brutalization of the Christian civilian population following weeks of human caravans being sent through their neighborhood. He saw how the local people were invited by the escort to steal and kidnap. He saw how many participated in the plunder. The deportations and massacres had by this point been going on for a month, and had clearly made the locals nearly immune to the fate of the Christians. This was a far cry from the good neighborliness that was a part of traditional Mardin life. Many of Mardin's Armenians and Syriacs would never have imagined that their neighbors could turn on them. They expected instead to be protected, as had happened in 1895 when local urban Muslim clans, the Mishkeviye and Mandalkaniye, beat off an external attack.

Armale recounts the Armenians' reaction to the first reliable information on plans to eliminate them. "Some leading Muslims employed Christian servants, who by hiding listened to what was said and told of the secrets. We did not believe them and said, 'Our friendship with the Muslims is purer than the eye of a rooster and stronger than iron. It would be impossible to turn such a friendship into hostility and mildness into harshness, because we have no conflicts with each other.' We added that in our area, there were no hundred percent Armenians or opponents to the government. No, we are, praise God, Catholics and loyal to the state and follow its decisions to the letter of the law. Therefore, it has no reason to harass us and claim that we are hostile and plot treason. ... But we were disappointed. The truest friend and the dearest comrade became the worst and most distrustful enemy. The sheep became wolves and the doves became snakes." Here, we can see a remarkable aspect of most genocides—namely, that people who are normally peaceful and trustworthy can change into violent and brutal people. They participate in actions they would otherwise—before, and even later—consider as immoral and impossible.

An absolutely essential step in creating a climate that permits immoral acts has to do with the activities of the leading personalities in the community. Some aspects have to do with dehumanizing the victims, describing them as creatures no longer human. The *vali* (provincial governor) in Diyarbakir did this by viewing the Armenians as bacteria. But other aspects have to do with preparing the population through propaganda and disinformation; and for this, the propaganda must come from a level of authority. In Mardin, we can see a total shift among the leadership. Up until early June, the *mutasarraf* of Mardin was a humane official by the name of Hilmi Bey. Hilmi went out of his way to maintain balance among the Muslim and Christian communities. He showed great kindness towards the Armenian Archbishop Ignace Maloyan and managed to persuade the sultan to grant Maloyan a gold medal in April 1915. Even Hilmi's predecessor, Shefik Bey, took honor in treating the Christians as full Ottoman citizens. Hilmi refused to follow *vali* Reshid Bey's orders to arrest the leading Christians. He is reported to have said, "I see no reason to need to arrest Mardin's Christians. So I cannot agree to your demand." Shefik sent the following message to the Syrian Catholic Archbishop Gabriel Tappuni:

"I have some papers with an order to deport and kill you. But I know they are falsified and have no grounds. As proof of my friendship to you, I have written to the *vali* and sworn my oath of your upright loyalty to the state." Several other Ottoman officials also refused. For this, Hilmi was demoted and transferred to Iraq; some of the lesser officials were assassinated on the orders of the *vali*. In their place came new persons from the outside ready to organize the murders and deportations. Most important was the previously named Bedri Bey, the vice *vali*; Memduh, the provincial police chief; Tevfik, the adjutant of the *vali*; and Harun, the commander of the provincial gendarmerie. They found a few Mardin residents who were willing to collaborate with the criminal court judge Halil Adib, and together collected a volunteer militia that the locals called *Al Khamsin* (the fiftymen).

There was one very big problem that the organizers of the genocide had to confront: Mardin's Muslim leaders had a long-standing tradition of protecting the Christians. In the Hamidiye massacres of 1895, the Mandalkiye and Mishkiye tribes had banded together to protect the city from a well-organized assembly of enemies who sought to massacre the Armenians. The Milli Kurdish confederation under Ibrahim Pasha was also famous for its protection of Christians at that time. Therefore, the provincial government officials had to make every effort to get the Milli, the Mandalkiye, the Miskiye, and other tribes to break with their pro-Christian past and join the government's plans. This was done in May 1915, prior to the major arrests by night time meetings with fanatic anti-Christian propagandists, like Zeki Licevi and his brother Said. On the political level the Ittihadist National Assembly member Feyzi arrived from Diyarbakir and according to Armale said, "Let no Christian remain! He who does not do this duty is no longer a Muslim." On May 15, a large meeting was held under Feyzi's leadership with local members of the *Ittihad ve Terraki* party, some of the leading administrators, a doctor, a mufti, three shayks, as well as aghas from the Dashkiye, Mandalkiye, and Miskiye tribes. Feyzi, according to Rhétoré, provoked those who expressed a lack of interest in killing the Christians. "You surprise me. What is holding you back? Is it the fear of one day having to pay for this? But what happened to those who killed Armenians in Abdul Hamid's time? Today Germany is with us and our enemies are its enemies. This will surely give us victory in this war, and we won't have to answer to anyone. Let us get rid of the Christians so we can be masters in our own house. This is what the government wants." The men at the meeting were required to sign a petition that the Christians were traitors and had to be disposed of. Even those who were not enthusiastic signed the petition, so as not to be different from the others. In this way, they became the core of the planning for the elimination of Mardin's Christian residents and met repeatedly to make plans. The involvement in the genocide of the Christians' once-traditional protectors was thus secured.

All of these preparations were necessary for the swift elimination of the Armenians and of those Syriacs who were Catholic or Protestant. It seems that there was a local agreement that Mardin's Syrian Orthodox Christians (the "orphans of Muhammad") would



The town of Mardin seen from above (Source: Lord Warkworth, *Notes from a diary in Asiatic Turkey*, London, 1898)

be spared. According to Rhétoré, the city of Mardin in this period had a Christian population of 6,500 Armenians; 1,100 Chaldeans; 1,750 Catholic Syriacs; 7,000 Syriac Orthodox; and 125 Protestants. In the entire Mardin *sanjak*, there were nearly 75,000 Christians of all denominations. During the massacres nearly 48,000—or 64 percent—disappeared, and this includes the rural Syriac Orthodox population that was not part of the agreed exclusion.

Perhaps the most horrifying scene witnessed by the Mardin residents was the sending away of the first transport of Christian prisoners on June 10, 1915. Mardin's Christian elite, which amounted to more than 400 adult men, had been imprisoned during the past week on trumped-up charges of planning a revolt, and hiding weapons and bombs. Many had been tortured into giving false confessions. But on the night of June 10, a ghastly spectacle was arranged, intended to terrify the population and break the possibility of any resistance.

"At the fall of darkness, Mardin residents could see soldiers going up to the fort and then returning to the prison. They carried iron rings, chains, and thick ropes. They called out the names of the prisoners one by one, and they tied them with ropes so that they could not flee . . . Then those who were thought to be Armenians were taken from the others. Rings were pressed around their necks and chains around their wrists. In this way they were bound, drawn, and chained for several hours . . . After having arranged the men in rows, they forced them out through the prison gates. Above them weapons and swords shined. The prisoners were kept totally silent. And a town crier cried out, 'The Christian residents who leave their houses will be amputated and put together with their co-religionists.' Then they trudged along the main street 417 priests and other men. Young and old, Armenians, [Catholic] Syriacs, Chaldeans, and Protestants.

"When they passed the Muslim quarter, the women came out and joked. They insulted the prisoners. Children threw stones. When the prisoners came to the Christian quarter, the residents could not go out to talk or say farewell. Many stood by the railings on their roofs and wept, praying to God. . . . The Christians shuffled in silence like pupils on their way to school. They made no sound. . . . When they came to the western city gate, those monks that were still free and the American missionaries went out on the roofs to see their friends for the last time and say farewell. They found them in a tragic state, so that blood could clot in their veins and terror hold them in its grip. There could not have been anything more difficult for the eye to see or more painful for the heart than standing there and looking down on the many chained co-religionists. Every time anyone cast a glance at that street, he would be reminded of the noble archbishop, the venerable priests, and the march of the dear Christians."

In the front marched the police chief Memduh. Many of the 400 prisoners bore the signs of torture and were very weak. Some had bleeding feet and fingers from nails that had been pulled off; broken bones; cuts about the head. Some had to be supported by others to walk at all. Beards had been torn. The chains rattled accentuating the ghostly silence. And at the end of the procession came the Archbishop Maloyan, who was handcuffed, barefoot, and limping after bastinado (foot whipping). All of the men in this first deportation from Mardin were killed in the night between June 10 and 11—some at Omar Agha's water spring, some at Sheykhkan, some at the ruins of the Zarzavan fort. Their families in Mardin were told that they had arrived safely at their destination. No one believed this.

There were few that did not lose a family member that night. This death march through the center of town was an effective announcement of the start of a reign of terror. The silent march in clanking chains through the Muslim and then Christian quarters polarized the population along religious lines. To all it was obvious that the government—through the police chief and the soldiers—had targeted the Armenians; in the case of Mardin, this meant that even the Syriac Catholics and Protestants were considered to be Armenian by the local authorities, for they too had been handcuffed and chained like ordinary criminals. The escorts allowed the Muslim residents to approach the prisoners and abuse them verbally and physically. Thus, the local mob came to be an active participant in the scene orchestrated by the authorities. And it created alliances among the mob, as they would in the future need to rationalize their actions and judge them as being moral. They were no longer just bystanders, but participants, although not of the worst kind.

The Christians that night were confined to their houses and could do nothing but wave and weep. The procession became a show of the absolute power of some, and the absolute weakness of

the targeted victims. Knowledge of this death march spread quickly throughout the Ottoman provinces. In Mosul, the German Consul Walter Holstein heard of it either from Hilmi or Shefik. He informed his ambassador in Istanbul of the ongoing “general massacre,” who in turn wrote to Berlin; the German government protested strongly to Talat Pasha, who was then forced to send a reprimand to the *vali* of Diyarbakir (who ignored it).

Witnesses interpreted this targeting of Mardin’s Armenians as an anti-Christian act, and viewed the victims as martyrs of the Christian faith. There were several *local* reasons behind this conclusion. Foremost was that the group of 400 leaders included not just Armenians of the Catholic Church but also all other Catholics—the Syrians and the Chaldeans—and even Protestants. As all groups spoke the local Arabic dialect and many had Arabic names, the distinguishing feature of the Armenian language was lacking. The various Catholic groups had very close relationships; the priests, particularly, met often across religious lines. Thus, the target group was seen as being constructed on the grounds of religion, not on Armenian background alone. Second, the first wave of imprisonments and the death march that followed included many of the leading religious figures in the city. And they sustained particularly brutal treatment. Third, almost all of the witness testimonies came from those who had received religious education and saw the genocide of 1915 as a repeat of the martyrdom of the early Christian church in Roman times. They highlighted the choice given to the prisoners to either convert to Islam or die, and praised those who chose to die rather than convert. These scenes are told in great detail. They also emphasized that it was the wrath of God that struck the army with the typhus epidemic in 1916. The biblical analogies go back to visions of the Apocalypse, the end of the world, and the coming of the Last Judgment.

This interpretation, however, makes it difficult to find alternative motivations behind the genocide. Material, social, and economic causes play very little role in these testimonies—with one exception, that is: Hyacinthe Simon’s report. Simon gives a very long list of the vast sums of money that police chief Memduh and *mutasarrif* Bedri extorted or stole from the wealthy Christian families. That he could put together this long list indicates that the stolen money, jewelry, and property were common knowledge in Mardin and were discussed widely. The clergymen who were left in Mardin collected and spent large sums of money to get their fellow Christians released from prisoners, or to buy back kidnapped children who were being sold in the marketplace.

Witnesses in Mardin described the step-by-step process of harassment that led from occasional maltreatment to individual acts of murder, and finally to full-scale genocide. This process began with the declaration of mobilization in August 1914. But with the passing of each month, the feeling of a coming catastrophe grew. Archbishop Maloyan predicted his murder weeks in advance. In a letter to his congregation, written on May 1, 1915, he spoke of the decisions made by the government that would lead either to “extermination or martyrdom.” Others probably shared the same fears. The evidence available shows that there was little—

arguably infinitesimal—political agitation that could be used by the government as a pretext for exterminating the Christian groups. On the contrary, local officials attested to their loyalty. As has been shown, new officials from the outside had to be hand-picked for their brutality and groomed for the task of initiating the genocide. After the first death march, more deportations followed until September 1915, when there were very few “Armenians” left in place. The instigators and perpetrators had become very wealthy from the bribes and confiscated property of the victims. None of the perpetrators were ever put on trial. And there is still no monument to those officials who tried to save the Armenians.

Let us finish with the words of Jacques Rhétoré, on why he wrote in such detail of the persecutions of 1915: “The most important thing is not to let these memories be forgotten. I have written down as well as I could. I hope the reader will find what I wished to convey, that is first of all the horror of the terrible crimes that were committed, with an appeal to God’s and people’s judgment over those who so turned against their humanity by ordering and perpetrating them. After that comes my admiration for the victims, who in such high degree honored humanity.” □

NOTES

1. Shabo Thalay, “*Sayfo, Firman, Qafle—Der erste Weltkrieg aus der Sicht der syrischen Christen*,” in *Akten des 5. Symposiums zur Sprache, Geschichte, Theologie und Gegenwartslage der Syrischen Kirchen*, Rainer Voigt, ed. Berlin 2006, 235-249.
2. Ishaq Armale, *Al Qusara fi nakabat al-nasara* (Lebanon 1919); Jacques Rhétoré, “*Les Chrétiens aux bêtes: Souvenirs de la guerre sainte proclamée par les Turcs contre les chrétiens en 1915*” (Paris: Cerf 2005); Hyacinthe Simon, “*Mardine la ville heroique: Autel et tombeau de l’Arménie durant les massacres de 1915*” (Jounieh, Lebanon: 1991); Marie-Dominique Berré, “*Massacres de Mardin*,” in *Haigazian Armenological Journal* 17 (1997) 81-106; A. H. B., “*Mémoires sur Mardine 1915*,” in *Studia Orientalia Christiana Collectanea* (Cairo) 29-30 (1998) 59-189; Vincent Mistrh, “*Mémoires de A. Y. B. sur les massacres de Mardine*,” in *Armenian Perspectives: 10th Anniversary Conference of the Association International des Etudes Arméniennes*, Ed. Nicholas Awde (London 1997) 287-292; P. V. M., “*Autre documents sur les événements de Mardine*,” *Studia Orientalia Christiana Collectanea* 29 (1998) 33-77; Ara Sarafian, Ed., “*The Disasters of Mardin during the Persecutions of the Christians, Especially the Armenians, 1915*” in *Haigazian Armenological Review* 18 (1998) 261-271; Abed Mschiho Na‘man Qarabash, “*Vergossenes Blut: Geschichten der Gruel, die an den Christen in T rkei ver bt, und der Leiden, die ihnen 1895 und 1914-1918 zugeft wurden*” (Glane, Holland 1997).
3. Houghton Library, Harvard University.
4. Armale, 255.

RECOGNITION, & REMEMBRANCE, RECONCILIATION

An Assyrian Narrative

By Emily Masseo

The world has witnessed a number of mass atrocities, in particular, recurrent human rights abuses facing minorities and indigenous peoples. Too often we look back at iniquity and claim ignorance, as a fleeting attempt to defend inaction. This is precisely why genocide still occurs, ethno-religious controversy persists, and people continue to suffer—due to the failure to acknowledge the past and build safeguards to prevent similar atrocities from happening in the future. Before we can focus on reparations and rebuilding, we must first recognize the continuity and common suffering of those affected, so that they, as well as the general populace, can move on. While this does not suggest we relive the past, it does suggest we *acknowledge* it in order to learn. Violence, oppression, and marginalization occur physically, but also mentally and spiritually. As an ethnic-minority persecuted alongside Armenians and Greeks in the Ottoman Empire, why is remembering the Assyrians important and why have they been neglected? Isn't the acknowledgment of human rights abuses, especially pertaining to genocidal violence, a necessity if we are to see an end to atrocities?

Parallels can be drawn from minority narratives in different nations, empires, societies, or even neighborhoods across the world and throughout time. Especially within pluralistic societies that lack suffi-

cient government-backed institutional solutions, minorities have been targeted, ousted, neglected, and disenfranchised, and, in extreme cases, have fallen victim to genocidal intentions. For the Christian minorities of the Ottoman Empire, the successor to the latter has domineered their narrative for well over a hundred years. Yet, it wasn't until



1997 that the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS) passed a resolution unanimously recognizing the 1915 Ottoman massacres of Armenians as genocide, and it wasn't until 2007 that they passed a resolution extending the recognition to include Assyrians and Anatolian and Pontic Greeks among the affected minorities. The Assyrian Genocide was officially "recognized" in 2007 as the period from 1915–23; however, the persecution neither began nor finished on those dates, and the cumulative impact the genocide left on the Assyrian identity is visible today. The Assyrian Genocide has been acknowledged by some scholars but not yet by nation states (including Greece), nor has it been

popularized, which contributes to its lack of recognition today. Although scholarly recognition has started, with recognition often comes a backlash, and denial persists.

Historically one of the most expansive and powerful regions in the world, the Ottoman Empire was a pluralistic, multinational, multilingual empire that spanned much of southeast Europe, western Asia, the Caucasus, and North Africa. Faced with an enormous amount of land and people to rule, the Ottomans created a unique system of governance that included the division of ethnic minorities, such as the Assyrians, into small manageable communities known as *millet*s. By creating this *millet* administration, the Ottoman Empire, religiously Muslim dominated, tolerated Christians as second-class citizens and the *jizya* tax was laid upon them. The system did not, however, protect Assyrians from actions that could be characterized as ethnocide, such as conversion to Islam, economic and social injuries, and physical harassment. The first massacres against the Assyrians date back to the 1840's in upper Mesopotamia, when the Kurdish Amir Badr Khan Bey summoned the Muslim population in the area and gave the order to attack Assyrian villages. As a result, 10,000 Assyrians were killed—the population of half a dozen Assyrian villages was murdered. The women and children who survived became victims of kidnapping and enslavement.



Assyrian Priests (third and fourth from the left) and Armenian National Committee of America Eastern Region (ANCA ER) hold a peaceful protest in front of the United Nations Headquarters in New York City, to rally international support for ending targeted attacks against their brethren in Iraq and Syria.

These massacres are rarely recognized in scholarship or by the international community. Attempts at ethnocide against the Assyrian people continued constantly from this point on by means of forced conversion and policies that “encouraged” assimilation and acculturation. The next most-documented series of massacres were carried out in 1895-96 by Sultan Abdul Hamid II’s Kurdish cavalry, the *Hamidiye* Troops. Almost 20 years later, by proclaiming *jiḥād* (holy war) just 2 weeks after the Allied Powers declared war on the Ottoman Empire on Nov. 14, 1914, the Ottomans separated themselves from their Christian minorities. The declaration of *jiḥād* incited wrath toward the minorities on Ottoman lands, exacerbating the upheaval, dispersion, and massacres that characterized the history of the Assyrians throughout the war and well into the mid-1930’s. It is at this point that scholars and the international community have checked back into the Assyrian narrative, recognizing what was clearly a systematic and calculated attempt at annihilation.

While the brunt and blood of the genocide was mostly concentrated in the aforementioned period, forced assimilation and migration continued to dominate the Assyrian narrative in the 20th century. In Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, Assyrians still compromise pieces of their identity out of fear of persecution, each and every day. For

example, in the 1960’s, Turkish-Assyrians were forced to take on Turkish surnames as part of an Islamization—or “Turkification”—campaign. Non-Turkish geographical names were replaced with Turkish ones, resettlement laws displacing minorities were implemented, and measures were adopted making the Turkish language mandatory in minority schools and in economic institutions.

Similar plights unfolded in the newly sanctioned British-mandated Iraq. An ethnic minority indigenous to the lands of Mesopotamia, the Assyrians were already marginalized, targeted, and on the periphery of the forming state. Because of their status as an ethnic minority, they posed an immediate ideological threat to the Iraqi state amidst a reaffirmation of its status as an “Arab” state. As soon as Iraq gained full statehood in 1932, Iraqi leaders tried to transform and unite “the people” by re-asserting an Arab identity. Henceforth, Assyrians and their non-Arab ancestry became targeted as opponents of the state.

Such Turkification and Islamization campaigns, as well as forced relocation attempts alongside fear-driven migration, resulted in a mass exodus of Assyrians from what had been their homeland. Almost 100 years after the Armenian and Assyrian Genocides, the eradication of indigenous

Christian communities of the Middle East is still a reality. Before 2003, the Christian population of Iraq was 1.3 million. Over the next decade, more than a million Christians (mostly ethnic Assyrians) fled to neighboring countries. Only 330,000 Christians remain in Iraq—a small fraction left to face the threat of Islamic extremists.

The Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIS) now occupies the Nineveh plain, home to Iraq’s remaining Christian villages, and has already taken measures to silence Christians who refuse to follow its ultra-strict rules. In neighboring Syria, ISIS militants have engaged in the destruction of religious and archaeological sites belonging to minorities, in addition to a brutal campaign that has killed a significant number of non-Muslims.

The purpose of this piece is not necessarily to influence legislation or argue semantics, but rather to serve as a reminder of the human elements of genocide and disaster—a reminder that these things did in fact happen. Often when discussing, studying, or teaching genocide and mass atrocities, we wear a mask to protect ourselves from what is painfully real. The Assyrians are a people that co-exist along with Armenians, Greeks, Tutsis, and Jews, and while the list goes on, the legacies must too. The populations of these people would be prodigiously larger if not for the events that occurred, and that is worth acknowledging. Recognition is a necessity, and accountability and culpability are key factors in the recognition process. Yet, recognition is not about pointing fingers; it is about remembrance, reflection, and reconciliation. The Assyrians were once native to a thriving empire: Ancient Assyria. Today, when I mention Assyrians to a friend or acquaintance, 9 times out of 10 I receive 1 of 2 responses: a quizzical look and “Don’t you mean Syrians?” or “Oh, they lived thousands of years ago, the Assyrian Empire, right?” Denial is also a form of violence, one we must be ever vigilant of. Recognition is about remembrance, reflecting on where we’ve been, where we are, what got us here, and where we are going. Reconciling with history is not a simple task, but it will allow humanity to move forward and finally instill those safeguards to break cycles of ignorance and destruction. □

THE ASSYRIAN GENOCIDE

A Gender Perspective

By Sabri Atman

This article is based on remarks given by the author at Arizona State University on Oct. 5, 2014.

The Assyrian nation is one of the most ancient in the world. At present, Assyrians live throughout the Middle East, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey, and due to emigration, now also live in Europe, Russia, Australia, and here in America. They are people who have suffered from severe genocidal persecution. The Assyrian Genocide refers to the mass slaughter of the Assyrian population of the Ottoman Empire during World War I, the Simele massacre in 1933, and to the ethnic cleansing today in Iraq and Syria. However, genocide is not an issue that only concerns targeted people; genocide is a crime against humanity and it demands international recognition, condemnation, and action.

I want to emphasize another related issue, which is the role and participation of Kurdish tribes in the Assyrian Genocide in the cities of Diyarbakir and Urmia. We should attempt to examine why Kurds participated in the genocide—what their motives were and what the nature of economic and social relations were between Kurds and Assyrians in the pre-genocidal period. In my research, I delineate how the genocide was coupled with the involvement of local Kurdish tribes and the attempts of land consolidation, and discuss how participation was rooted in the budding nationalist discourse, deep-seeded tribalism, and religious animosities.



An Assyrian boy holds a cross at the unveiling of the Assyrian Genocide monument in Yerevan (Photo: Aaron Spagnolo)



Children wave the Armenian and Assyrian flags at the Armenian Genocide Memorial in Dzidzernagapert (Photo: Aaron Spagnolo)

This article will be a brief analysis of the Assyrian Genocide from a gender perspective. I will start with a historical overview and provide some key facts about the Assyrian Genocide. Then I will underscore the forms in which violence was perpetrated against women, and conclude with the historical significance of gender-specific crimes.

The homogenizing policy of the Ottomans was declared during World War I with Germany's endorsement. An anti-Christian campaign was declared against all non-Muslim minorities within the Ottoman Empire. Over 2 million men, women, and children of Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek descent were murdered. The modern Turkish Republic was founded as a result of this genocide.

Ottoman primary sources illustrate beyond any doubt that the Armenian deportations and massacres were not isolated acts. The murderous campaign against the Christian "infidels" was supposed to facilitate the ethnic and religious homogenization of the newly created state of Turkey. This policy was meant to fulfil two main goals: firstly, the assimilation of the non-Turkish Muslim population, such as Kurds and migrants from the Balkans, and secondly the removal and annihilation of the Christian population living in Turkey at the time. The successful achievement of this genocidal policy was secured through a number of direct and

indirect methods: massacres, drownings, death marches under the guise of relocation, imposed starvation and diseases, etc.

Let's remember that prior to World War I, the population of Turkey was 14 million, out of which 4.5 million—or 33 percent—were Christian. Today, the total number of Christians in Turkey amounts to only 0.1 percent of the population.

In 1915, the Assyrians living in the Ottoman Empire lost two-thirds of their population. They were expelled from their country of birth. The survivors of the genocide were dispersed throughout the world. Nowadays many of the descendants of the Assyrian survivors are struggling to obtain recognition from the state of Turkey, and moral and financial compensation, and to preserve the historical memory of the crimes against their forebears.

Mosul is Iraq's second largest city and it has been a center of Assyrian life for thousands of years. But today, not a single Assyrian Christian remains in Mosul. What is happening in Mosul is ethnic cleansing, and ethnic cleansing is a crime against humanity. Assyrians have fallen under the ruthless control of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The suffering of women and children is unbelievable.

History shows that males and females are often affected by genocide in different ways, whether as victims or as perpetrators. Focusing on aspects such as gender is important if one seeks to

fully understand the modes, motives, dynamics, and consequences of genocide and other mass crimes. When the ultimate goal of the perpetrators is to secure the disappearance of an entire group of people—men, women, and children—related matters such as sexual abuse, or whether or to what extent factors like gender or age played a role in the selection of victims, may seem of secondary importance.

Rape is a deliberate act of dominance and violence that targets women's sexuality and gender roles. Rape and other forms of sexual violence, such as "abduction" and sexual enslavement, are regularly used as weapons of war to further the military and political goals of the parties engaged in the conflict. The gender aspect of the genocide against Armenians and Assyrians has mainly been ignored in the scholarly work produced so far.

Sexual abuse and rape are some of the used methods in ethnic cleansing campaigns, which continue today against the Assyrian people in Iraq. As was recently reported in the news, a father, whose wife and daughter were raped in front of him, found no option but to kill himself. I want to emphasize that this incident is not an exception. On the contrary, it is a deliberate action by the perpetrators. Their goal is a Middle East without Assyrian Christians.

Next I will examine the role of gender in the Assyrian Genocide by presenting to you the story of one of the many Assyrian females who was targeted for physical destruction, sexual abuse, slavery, and forced marriage or forced assimilation.

History *is* repeating itself. What is happening today in Iraq against Assyrian women happened 100 years ago against Assyrian women, too. Here is Yade Sade's story.

While Assyrian men were killed and children were taken away in the Ottoman Genocide, women were forcefully taken by Muslims. These women were also forced to convert to Islam and to marry Muslims and Kurds. Yade Sade was among the many who witnessed some of the developments during the Armenian and Assyrian Genocide, including the killing of her brethren and the rape of other Christian women like her.

She was 14 years old when she was abducted along with 4 other Assyrian women. She was taken to a Kurdish village close to Mardin, in southeastern Turkey. Once there, Yade had only one option if she wanted to survive: to convert to Islam by marrying a Muslim man. In the end, her Kurdish kidnappers forced her to marry a Muslim man against her will. During her capture, Yade attempted to escape four times, in pursuit of her Assyrian village. However, she was not successful. They controlled her every move, and watched her at all times. For her, the Muslim town where she was held captive was like a prison, as was her marriage to the Kurdish man.

A few months after getting married, Yade became pregnant and gave birth to a child whom they named Hasan. After the birth of Hasan, the Kurds stopped keeping a close watch on Yade, mostly because they did not think she would have the strength to escape and leave her child behind. But they were wrong. When Hasan was three months old, Yade escaped on foot. Finally she was free, but unfortunately she was separated from her child.

Many years later, she remarried an Assyrian man. She had four children with her new husband and tried desperately to forget her

past. Despite all she went through, she now had a somewhat happy life with her new family.

Perhaps you're wondering what happened to the baby she had to leave behind. He was called "infidel" Hasan by the Kurds and was often insulted by people around him. They regarded and treated Hassan as if something was wrong with him, because his mother had left him behind. He grew up with his Kurdish father and the rest of his family, but never forgot that he had a long-lost mother.

When Hasan turned 18 years old, he began searching for his mother. Finally, he found out which village she was living in. He knew that his mother was remarried and that she had other children, but he still wanted to see her, so he went to her village. When Hasan arrived at her house, his mother refused to see him. For many years, she acted oblivious to the fact that she had a Muslim child. When Hasan found her, she told him that he was lying and that she did not want to see him. Hasan kept attempting to see his mother, but she continued to refuse to see him.

At one point Hasan stopped trying and went back home, but he didn't want to give up. He tried two more times, and his mother insisted again and again that she wanted nothing to do with him. Every time she was approached with the subject of her long-lost son, she would cry and deny ever having had a son. You must be wondering why she kept denying that she had a child? I can think of two reasons for this:

Seeing him made her relive her trauma and the abuse she had to endure. Assyrians had inoculated into her mind the idea that it is "shameful" for a Christian woman to give birth to a Muslim son—that it would have been better to commit suicide than give birth to a Muslim.

Hasan tried to see her four times, and once sent his mother a message via a well-known man from the village. She finally agreed to see him, but only for five minutes. Yade said that she forgave him. He kissed her hand and they embraced each other, crying. After the five minutes were up, she told him to leave and that she never wanted to see him again. When Hasan was leaving his mother's house, he ran into her son (his now half-brother), whom he managed to connect and stay in touch with for many years after his visit. Infidel Hasan passed away some years ago. Although I didn't have the privilege to interview him, I did meet and interview two of his half-brothers, one of who lives in Switzerland and the other in Germany. I am also in contact with Hasan's children who are currently living in Izmir, in Turkey.

After all these decades since the crimes took place, the Armenian and Assyrian Genocide continues to be denied by the Turkish state. What the Assyrians and Armenians are demanding is acknowledgment and justice. Turkey should stop its lies and recognize the Armenian, Greek, and Assyrian Genocide.

History has taught us that silence is not an option. Despite everything, we should keep in mind that ISIS and other terror organizations are reactionary organizations. They gave the ultimatum to our people to leave, to convert, or to die by *Seyfo*. They represent the Middle Ages. However, today is not a day to cry and grieve. We are obliged to show these forces that we are representing not only our communities but also all of humanity. □