



## THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

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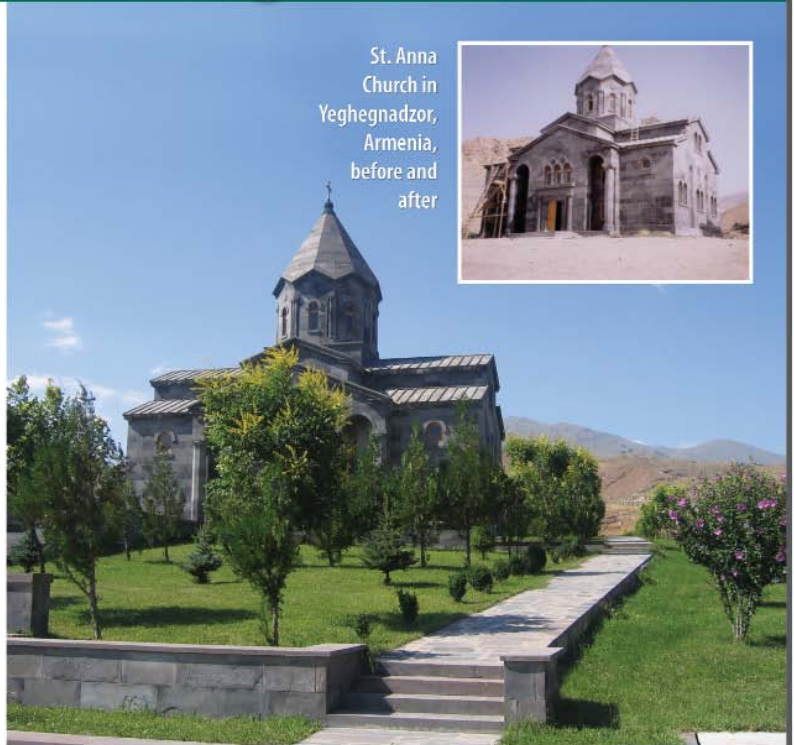
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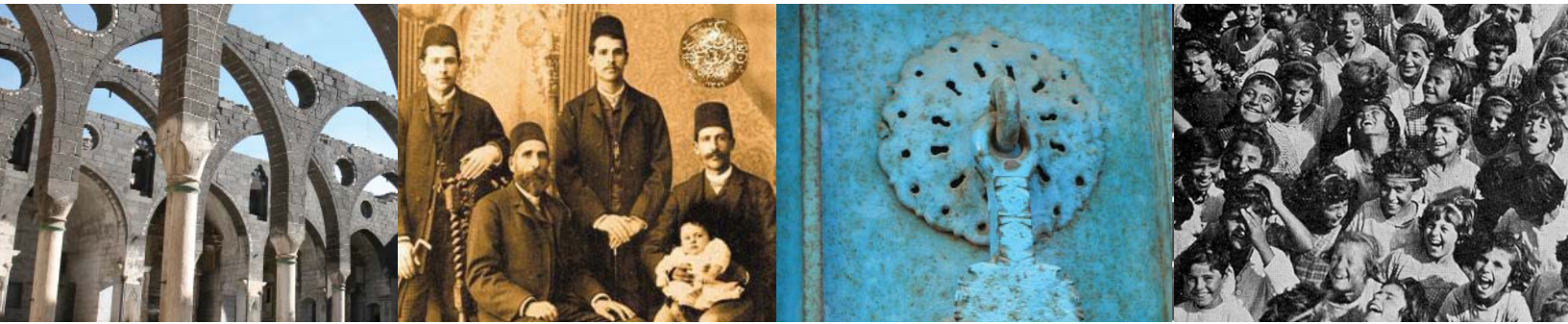
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St. Anna  
Church in  
Yeghegnadzor,  
Armenia,  
before and  
after

# The Armenian Weekly

APRIL 25, 2009



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## Editor's Desk

### Knocking on the Doors of Justice

BY KHATCHIG MOURADIAN

I can't stop looking at Mujgan Arpat's photographs of doors and windows of old Armenian houses in Diyarbekir (p. 30). They seem to have the immediacy of a Komitas song, a Daniel Varoujan poem, a page from Krikor Zohrab's stories.

I feel a deep desire to knock on them. And perhaps one day I will.

But at the moment, dear reader, this magazine you are holding in your hands is another way of knocking on those doors.

\*\*\*

In April 2007, at one of my lectures, I heard the story of an Armenian Genocide survivor in Boston. When asked about her family's experiences in 1915, she would talk

about them, then she would laugh after speaking a sentence or two. Then she would apologize for laughing and continue her story. By the time she had finished, she had laughed and apologized several times. In the end, she said, "I am really sorry. But I have no tears anymore."

A few days later, I gave a talk in New York about the legacy of Hrant Dink. After my talk, I was chatting with some members of the audience when a young woman approached me and introduced herself. She was a Turkish student doing her Ph.D. in New York. We asked her to join our discussion. A short time later, when a slideshow about Hrant Dink was being shown, I saw tears running down her cheeks.

"What is your story?" I asked her.

"I don't have a story," she said. "I did not know anything about Hrant or about 1915 before his assassination. Now I read all I can find on the Armenian Genocide."

As she was saying those words, I felt that somewhere, on a certain plane of consciousness, the laughter of the genocide survivor and the tears of the Turkish woman had met.

\*\*\*

The scholars and commentators who have contributed to this magazine also have a meeting point: They are all knocking on the same door. A door that has the immediacy of a Komitas song, a Daniel Varoujan poem, a page from Krikor Zohrab's stories.

And a door that, one day, will inevitably open.

# Contributors

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**Taner Akcam** is the Robert Aram and Marianne Kaloosdian and Stephen and Marion Mugar Chair in Armenian Genocide Studies at Clark University. Born in the province of Ardahan, Akcam graduated from Middle East Technical University in Ankara and emigrated to Germany, where he worked as a research scientist in the sociology department at the Hamburg Institute for Social Research. Akcam earned his doctorate from the University of Hannover with a dissertation on The Turkish National Movement and the Armenian Genocide Against the Background of the Military Tribunals in Istanbul Between 1919 and 1922. Akcam's initial research topic was the history of political violence and torture in late Ottoman and early Republican Turkey. Since 1990, however, he has focused his attention on Turkish nationalism and the Armenian Genocide, with eleven books and numerous articles to his credit. Prof. Akcam's life and work have been featured in four critically acclaimed documentary films. He serves on the editorial board of Genocide Studies and Prevention.



**Mujgan Arpat** is a photographer of German-Turkish parentage whose photographs have been published in various magazines and newspapers in Germany and the web sites of a number of news agencies. An exhibition of her photographs was organized in Berlin under the title "Racism in Germany." Her photographs have also been published in various dailies and magazines in Turkey such as Gundem, Birgun, Postespress, Agos and Amargi. She is one of the photographers whose work has been featured in the album "We are all Hrant Dink," published after the assassination of Dink. She currently works at a German TV channel as a reporter in Istanbul. Her exhibition, titled "Gavur Mahallesi: Gidenler, Kalanlar" (The Giavour Neighborhood: Those who left and those who stayed) about the old Armenian quarter Hancepek in Diyarbakir was held both in Istanbul and in Diyarbakir in 2008.

**Bilgin Ayata** is completing her Ph.D. at the department of political science at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore. Her research interests include the politics of displacement, trans-nationalism, social movements, and migration. Her dissertation examines the displacement of Kurds in Turkey and Europe. She currently lives in Berlin.



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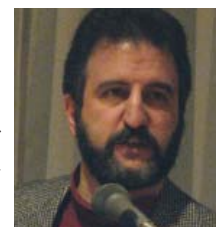


**Rev. Paul Ara Haidostian**, an ordained minister in the Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East, is the President of Haigazian University in Beirut, Lebanon since 2002. Prior to this, since 1993, he served on the faculty of the Near East School of Theology in Beirut as professor of pastoral theology. Rev. Haidostian was born in 1961 in Beirut, Lebanon. He has a BA degree in Psychology from Haigazian University, a Master of Divinity from the NEST, a Master of Theology and Ph.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary. Rev. Haidostian holds a number of leadership positions in the Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East, the Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and other numerous educational, ecumenical, international and local organizations and institutions. He is married to Maral Purzekian, and they have two daughters, Garin (15) and Talar (10).

**Ayse Hur** was born in Artvin, Turkey, in 1956. She lived with her parents in Urfa, Nazilli (Aydin), and Edirne, then moved to Istanbul. Having completed her double major in 1992 from the departments of history and international relations at Bogazici University, she joined the History Foundation of Turkey and worked on such projects as the Istanbul Encyclopedia. In 2004, she completed her master's thesis on "The European Union's Policies of Reconciling with History and the Armenian Question" at the Ataturk Institute of Bogazici University. She is currently pursuing her doctorate degree at the same institution. She is a member of the editorial board of Social History, and writes historical and political articles in various newspapers and journals, including Taraf, Radikal, Birikim, and Agos.



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**Firuz Kutsal** was born in Born in Luleburgaz, Turkey and currently resides in Norway. His drawings have been published in various media since 1978. In 1982, he created a political corner in the Turkish newspaper Cumhuriyet. In 1990, he received his MA in Graphic Design and Illustration from the Oslo National Collage of Applied Art. His works on Hrant Dink's assassination created interest both among Armenian and Turkish intellectuals. He has given 7 personal exhibitions and has participated in many group exhibitions worldwide.

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



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## FACING HISTORY

## DENIAL and the Turkish

By Taner Akcam

In 2009, in a raid against the ultra-nationalist shadowy terror organization Ergenekon, which is composed of mostly army and police officers and bureaucrats, Turkish police confiscated some documents. Among those documents was a file listing the names of five people along with their photos; they were targeted for assassination. My name was among that group. Turkish Nobel Prize winner Orhan Pamuk and the Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, who was assassinated in January 2007, were two other names. The title of the document was “Traitors to National Security.” All of the people listed were known for having spoken out on the Armenian Genocide and for asking the Turkish government to face this historic reality honestly. One can therefore draw the conclusion that to be outspoken about the genocide is to be considered a threat, by certain groups, to Turkish national security.

This is not just the view of the political elite or an ultra-nationalist terror organization. It also underpins legal decision-making. In a judgment in 2007 against two Turkish-Armenian journalists—Arat Dink, the son of Hrant Dink, and Sarkis Seropyan, who received suspended sentences of a one-year imprisonment for using the term genocide—the Turkish court stated: “Talk about genocide, both in Turkey and in other countries, unfavorably affects national security and the national interest. The claim of genocide...has become part of and the means of special plans aiming to change the geographic political boundaries of Turkey... and a campaign to demolish its physical and legal structure.” The ruling further stated that the Republic of Turkey is under “a hostile diplomatic siege consisting of genocide resolutions... The acceptance of this claim may lead in future centuries to a questioning of the sovereignty rights of the Republic of Turkey over the lands on

which it is claimed these events occurred.” Due to these national security concerns, the court declared that the claim of genocide in 1915 is not protected speech, and that “the use of these freedoms can be limited in accordance with aims such as the protection of national security, of public order, of public security.”<sup>1</sup>

The situation is not that different here in the United States: Even though April 24 was declared a “National Day of Remembrance” for the Armenian Genocide by a joint declaration of Congress on Sept. 9, 1975, and the president of the United States is authorized and requested to issue a proclamation, since then no U.S. president, except Ronald Reagan in 1981, has used the term genocide. The main reason for this attitude is “national security concerns of the United States in the Middle East.”

The same argument is used against proposals for recognizing the Armenian Genocide on the floor of Congress, which has been brought up almost every year in the form of resolutions. Both U.S. presidents and opponents of the genocide resolutions have very similar arguments to the Turkish court’s decision above. Indeed, it would appear that, as the court stated, using the term genocide “unfavorably affects national security and the national interest” of Turkey and the United States.

We have two sets of arguments here that are brought up in opposition of one another: national security versus morality, or in other phraseology, “realists” versus “moral fundamentalists.” The realists emphasize the national security concerns of their country. In Turkey today, any attempt to openly discuss historic wrongs is denounced as a covert move in a master plan to partition the country—a move, therefore, against the “national security of Turkey.” Here in the United States, the realists consider the acknowledgment of the Armenian Genocide by Congress or the use of the term by the president to be “against U.S. strategic interests.”



In September 2005, Turkish intellectuals who questioned the Turkish state's denial policy on the deportation and killings of Armenians during World War I gathered for a conference in Istanbul. Outside, in the streets, demonstrators also gathered in protest against the conference. One of the placards read: "Not Genocide, but Defense of the Fatherland." Two parallel convictions are at work here, one referring to the past, the other to the present. Both the events of 1915 and the denial policy nine decades later are framed in terms of Turkish national security and self-defense.

# National Security Concept\*



One often hears: “Turkey is a close friend of ours and we should not upset them,” or “we should not jeopardize our strategic interests in the Middle East because of a moral issue, which occurred in the distant past.” On the other side we have the fundamentalist moralists who emphasize the supremacy of morality against “real interests.”

Pitting national interests against morality as mutually exclusive is wrong. Any security policy in the Middle East that excludes morality cannot ultimately work. Eventually it comes to undermine national security. Indeed, if one knows Turkey and the Middle East, one would easily recognize that history and historical injustices are not just dead issues from the past; the past *is* the present in the Middle East. There is a strong interconnection between security, democracy, and facing history in the Middle East. Even a passing glance at the region makes it clear that historical injustices and the persistent denial of these injustices by one or another state or ethnic/religious group is a major stumbling block—not only for the democratization of the region, but also for the establishment of stable relations between different ethnic and religious groups. My central argument is that the failure to confront history honestly is one of the major reasons for insecurity and instability in the region.

Why is the discussion of historical injustices perceived as a threat to Turkish national security? Let us try to examine the roots of this mentality, and try to show the reasons why it must be changed. The mindset that an open discussion of history engenders a security problem originates from the breakup of the Ottoman Empire into nation-states beginning in the 19th century. From late Ottoman times to the present, there has been continuous tension between the state’s concern for secure borders and society’s need to come to terms with human rights abuses. In this history, human right abuses and the security and territorial integrity of a crumbling empire can be likened to the two faces of a coin—the two separate faces of the same coin caused the rise of two opposing historical narratives.

Until recently, the dominant narrative has been the story of the partition of the Ottoman Empire among the Great Powers, which ended with its total collapse and disintegration. If one were to review the books in

**Any security policy in the Middle East that excludes morality cannot ultimately work. Eventually, it comes to undermine national security.**

Turkey that recount this narrative, one would be hard pressed to find a reference to the massacres and genocide during the late 19th and early 20th century. Instead, Christian communities are painted as the seditious agents of the imperialist Great Powers, continually conspiring against the state.

**T**he other narrative has been developed by those ethnic and religious minorities who were subjected to a different level of human rights abuses during that period. The history of the 19th century is mostly formulated in terms of human rights and the intervention of the Great Powers on behalf of the minority groups. It is plain to see the contrast in both positions. In one perspective the Great Powers are portrayed as “evil” and must be criticized for having intervened *too much*. In the other perspective, the Great Powers have been characterized as “positive” or “benign,” and are criticized for not having intervened *enough*.

Hence, Turkish controversies about facing national history, in particular the Armenian Genocide, can be understood, in part, as the deployment of two apparently contradictory narratives against one another. Whenever proponents of acknowledgment bring up the history of human rights abuses, they are confronted with an opposing narrative, that of the decline and breakup of the Ottoman Empire and the seditious agents who quickened the process.

Indeed, there have been certain moments in that history where national security and human rights became inseparably intertwined. One such moment came immediately after WWI, between 1918 and 1923.

When that war ended with an Ottoman defeat, the political decision-makers of the

time grappled with two distinct, yet related issues when working out the terms of a peace settlement—the answers to which determined their various relationships and alliances: The first was the territorial integrity of the Ottoman state. The second was the wartime atrocities committed by the ruling Union and Progress Party against its Ottoman Armenian citizens.

The questions about the first issue were: Should the Ottoman state retain its independence? Should new states be permitted to arise on the territory of the Ottoman state? If so, how should the borders of these new states be defined? The questions regarding the second issue were: What can be done about the wartime crimes against the Armenians and the perpetrators of these atrocities? How should the perpetrators be punished? These questions related two different sets of issues that hadn’t been tackled separately and were rather intertwined with each other.

The questions related to the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire led to the formation of two different viewpoints. The Turkish nationalist movement, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal, favored continued sovereignty within reduced borders as defined by the 1918 Moudros Ceasefire Treaty. The Allied Powers and ethnic/religious groups such as the Greeks, Armenians, and to a lesser degree the Kurds, on the other hand argued for the establishment of new states on both occupied and unoccupied territory of the Ottoman Empire. The successive treaties of Sevres (1920) and Lausanne (1923) reflected these divergent points of view.

As a result of this fight over territory in the period of the republic, a general understanding of history in modern Turkey emerged: We, the Turks, who see ourselves as the legitimate successors of the Ottoman Empire, defended our sole remaining territory against the Armenians, Greeks, and to a lesser extent the Kurds, who were trying to carve up Anatolia into nation-states, with the support of the British, French, and Italians. The 1920 Treaty of Sevres resolved the question of territory in favor of the non-Turkish nationalities. For the Turks, therefore, Sevres remains a black mark in our history. For the other ethnic/religious groups, however, the significance of Sevres is quite different.



Although it did not fully reflect their demands for territory, the treaty represented an unprecedented historical opportunity to resolve the territorial issue in their favor. Conversely, the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which guaranteed Turkish dominance in Anatolia, stands as a milestone and validation of our continued national existence. Meanwhile, the other nationalities regard it as a great historical injustice.

Nevertheless, both treaties were not merely symbols of territorial conflict; they also symbolized how the injustices committed against the Armenians and other Christians during the war would be addressed. The central question concerned how the perpetrators of human rights abuses during the war would be punished. Although everyone, including the Turkish nationalists, agreed that these crimes should not be left unpunished, there was uncertainty about the scope of the penalty. One group advocated for the trial and punishment of only some first-hand criminals as well as some of the top Union and Progress leaders. Another group advocated for the trials of individual suspects, casting the net as wide as possible, and for the punitive dismemberment of the Ottoman state into new states created on its territory.

The position of the Entente Powers was that “the Turks,” so to speak, organized the massacres of other peoples, in particular the Armenians, during World War I, and that it was therefore necessary to punish “the Turks” collectively in order to rescue the subject peoples (Arabs as well as Greeks, Armenians, etc.) from Turkish domination. Punishing “the Turks” was to be accomplished in two phases: First, the members of the Ottoman government and other officials were to be tried for the crimes against religious and ethnic communities. Second, “the Turks” would henceforth inhabit a state that would be rendered as small and as weak as possible. A telegram sent to the Paris Peace Conference on April 3, 1919 by the assistant high commissioner of Istanbul, Webb, clearly illustrates this policy; it read:

In order to punish all of those persons who are guilty of the Armenian horrors, it is necessary to punish the Turks as a group. Therefore, I propose that

the punishment be given on a national level through the partitioning up of the last Turkish Empire, and on a personal level by trying those high officials who are on the list in my possession, and in a manner that would serve as an example for their successors.<sup>3</sup>

In short, casting the net as widely as possible, the Allied Powers advocated for the trials of individual suspects and for the punitive dismemberment of the Ottoman state into new states created on its territory. So, the main ostensible reason for partitioning Anatolia among the various national groups was motivated by the Great Powers’ desire to punish “the Turks” for the barbarous acts they had committed.

What was the attitude of the “Turkish” position relative to the punishments of the criminals? Recall that postwar Turkey was governed from two political centers: Istanbul, the seat of the Ottoman government, and Ankara, the headquarters of the Turkish Nationalist movement led by Mustafa Kemal. Both the Istanbul and Ankara governments acknowledged the massacres of the Armenians and agreed with the Allies that the perpetrators should be tried and that the trials were considered “just and necessary.” However, Ankara and Istanbul vehemently opposed the punitive partition of Anatolia.

This was one of the central issues when both governments met in October 1919 to call an election of an Ottoman parliament in accordance with the constitution. They signed five protocols to regulate the process of the upcoming elections. The first and third protocols were directly related to the topic at hand. The first protocol declared: “1. Ittihadism (Party of Union and Progress) [which organized the genocide against the Armenians] or any hint of its reawakening is politically very damaging... 4. It is judicially and politically necessary to punish those who committed crimes in connection with the deportation.” In the third protocol, both parties agreed that the fugitive members of “Ittihat,” who were wanted in connection with wartime atrocities, were not to participate in the elections. The protocol described the atrocities as “the evil deeds” of the Union and Progress Party. The perpetrators were defined as persons “who have been sullied by

the nefarious acts of the deportation and massacre,” and so their participation in the election was qualified as “contrary to the true interests of the nation.”

The founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal, when addressing the parliament on April 24, 1920, called the atrocities a “shameful act.” Now, keep in mind that Mustafa Kemal was not a human rights activist or an altruist, but a politician. The underlying reason in supporting the punishment of the perpetrators was his expectation from the ongoing Paris Peace conference; the commanders of the British and French occupying forces in Istanbul had grabbed every opportunity to remind “the Turks” that if they expected a positive outcome from the Paris peace talks, action had to be taken against the perpetrators of the war crimes. So, the Mustafa Kemal-led government in Ankara and the administration in Istanbul believed that the war crime trials were the price for obtaining national sovereignty. In a memo written by Mustafa Kemal in September 1919 to the Istanbul government, this point was underlined in a very clear way: “The punishment of perpetrators,” he wrote, “should not stay only on paper...but should be carried out, since this would successfully impress the foreign elements.” In exchange for this concession, the Turkish leadership expected a more favorable peace settlement without the loss of territory.

This strategy failed. In April 1920, the provisions of Sevres became known, according to which it was proposed to punish “the Turks” for the war crimes by partitioning the Ottoman territory. In the same month, the Istanbul Court Martial, which had been established in November 1918 and which was in the process of trying the perpetrators of the Armenian atrocities, now under pressure from the Allied Powers, began trying almost the entire Turkish national leadership, Mustafa Kemal foremost among them, who were opposed to the partitioning of Anatolia. Mustafa Kemal and around 100 nationalists were sentenced to death *in absentia*.

When the Turkish nationalists realized that their support for the punishment of war criminals was not going to prevent the partitioning of Anatolia, and was in fact going to lead to their own prosecution and punishment, their attitude changed. As

Mustafa Kemal wrote to Istanbul on Aug. 20, 1920: “[t]he Ottoman government... continues to hang the children of the homeland on accusations of [having perpetrated] deportation and massacres, which now became totally senseless.”<sup>4</sup> What Mustafa Kemal meant was that the policy whereby the Ottoman government punished Turks for what they had done to the Christian minorities would make sense *only* if Turkey received some positive results in terms of a better treaty to secure the Ottoman territories. However, Sevres had been signed, Ottoman sovereignty had not been acknowledged, and the Ottoman territories were distributed among different nations. Therefore, Mustafa Kemal concluded that these “senseless” death sentences should be halted.

We can conclude that had the Western forces agreed to territorial integrity in exchange for trials for “crimes against humanity,” we might be talking about a very different history.

**T**oday, we can say that the court martial in Istanbul is a symbol of these two interwoven but distinct strands of Turkish history: “territory and borders,” or expressed another way, “national security” on the one side, and “human rights,” or “facing history and addressing historic wrongdoings,” on the other. The fact is that the attempt to dismember and partition the state as a form of punishment for the atrocities committed during the war years, and the proposed punishment of its nationalist leaders for seeking the territorial integrity of their state, created the mindset in Turkey today that views any reference to the historic wrongdoings in the past as an issue of national security.

A product of this mindset is therefore a belief that democratization, freedom of thought and speech, open and frank debate about history, and the acknowledgment of one’s past historical misdeeds is a threat to national security. Those who invite society to engage in an open examination of the past are therefore labeled as “traitors,” made targets of smear campaigns, and dragged into courts for “insulting Turkishness.” It is this kind of mindset that was behind the murder of Hrant Dink in 2007.

Reviewing Turkish history from this perspective reveals four important new perspectives. First, Mustafa Kemal’s condemnation of the Armenian massacres is diametrically opposed to the current official Turkish policy of denial. His position during the difficult war years could be a positive starting point for a resolution. To become truly democratic, Turkey must confront this “dark chapter” of its history, this “shameful act,” as Mustafa Kemal called it.

Secondly, until now, the Turkish-Armenian problem has been perceived within the old paradigm that produced these conflicts, namely, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the clash of different ethnic or national groups over land and boundaries. We have to change this understanding. What we need is a new paradigm, and we need to rethink the Armenian-Turkish conflict. We have to reposition the Armenian-Turkish conflict within the new paradigm of transitional justice, that is, as a part of the democratization effort within existing nation-states. The conflict should not be regarded as a territorial dispute, but rather as a human rights issue and as a problem of historic injustices that must be rectified in order to establish a just and democratic society.

Thirdly, the concept of Turkish national security must be revised and changed. The main flaw of this concept is its perception that the promotion of basic democratic rights such as equality under the law, social reform, and freedom of speech are a threat to national security. In the past, the emergence of the so-called “Armenian Question” was the result of Armenian demands for equality and social reform, which arguably would have led to a better Ottoman society. Their demands and the Armenians themselves were considered a security threat, leading to them being targeted for massacres and deportations. Today, the demand for an honest account of history is being handled in the same way: as a security problem.

The irony is that criminalizing historical inquiries for national security reasons is not only a huge obstacle on the path to democracy, but is also counterproductive and leads directly to real security problems for the country. This “self-fulfilling prophecy” can be shown not only in the case of the Armenian Genocide of the past but in the

Kurdish problem today. Just as the Armenians and their social and political demands for a more just society were considered a threat in the past, a democratic future for Kurds today is also considered a threat to Turkish national security. So, instead of solving the Kurdish problem by seeking solutions that would lead to a more democratic society, the old—and, I would argue, now useless—security concept has been resurrected and has declared that Kurdish demands are essentially a security problem for the nation.

As long as Turkey continues to regard moral principles (one of which is facing historical injustice with honesty) and national security as two opposing poles that are mutually exclusive, and refuses to come to terms with the past for national security reasons—indeed, as long as Turkey’s national security is defined in opposition to an honest historical reckoning—further problems will be created.

Fourth, the United States should change its policy towards the recognition of the Armenian Genocide and the security concept towards Turkey. The best way to summarize *why* is with the French concept of “Bon pour l’Orient!” translated as “It is good enough for the East.” During the 19th century, this concept legitimized French colonialism and provided justification for the humiliation of the eastern countries they colonized and the acts committed there. The U.S. has to rid itself of this classic colonial patronization. If it’s good for the U.S., then the same should be demanded of Turkey.

The idea of criminalizing discussion about American slavery or the treatment of Native Americans because of “security issues”; or of maintaining federal government websites where these historical events are uniformly referred to as “so-called” or “alleged” and filled with openly racist, hate-filled propaganda; or of forcing American children to watch films denying that the slavery of Africans or subjugation of Native Americans ever took place would be viewed as a sick joke in the U.S., but American foreign policy makers have had no problems supporting Turkey, a country that has been doing virtually the same consistently for decades, even going so far as to establish a coordination committee among the different ministries to coordinate the fight against “so-called Armenian genocide lies.”

Any argument here, in the U.S., that brings up America's national interest as the reason to reject the official acknowledgment of the genocide, will result in supporting those in Turkey who still hunt down intellectuals because they are opposed to this inhumane, racist mindset.

The U.S. government should recognize that any argument here, in the U.S., that brings up America's national interest as the reason to reject the official acknowledgment of the genocide, will result in supporting those in Turkey who still hunt down intellectuals because they are opposed to this inhumane, racist mindset.

There is a security aspect of the problem, as well: A non-democratic, authoritarian Turkey creates a security problem when it makes denial of historical injustices an integral part of its security policy. It is exactly this attitude that not only delays democratization in the region, but also destabilizes relationships in the volatile Middle East.

A main problem in the region is the insecurity felt by different groups towards each other as a result of past events. When you make the denial of these pain-filled acts a part of your security policy, this brings with it insecurity towards the other. This is what I call the security dilemma: What one does to enhance one's own security causes a reaction that, in the end, can make one even less secure. Often statesmen do not recognize that this may be a probable outcome; they do not empathize this with their neighbors and are unaware that their own actions can appear threatening. The existing sense of mistrust engendered by denial is an obstacle to the creation of security in the region. For this reason, any security concept, any policies of *realpolitik* in and for the region that ignores morality and forgets to address historical wrongdoings are doomed to fail.

So, instead of helping those who deny past injustices, U.S. policy should integrate an honest confrontation with history into a policy of national interest in the Middle East.

Lastly, there are some pragmatic reasons why existing U.S. policy regarding Turkey should change. First, there's an ongoing theatrical drama (or perhaps comedy would be a better term) that all the parties engage in every year and that has started to grow old. It's time to end this dishonorable playacting. As we know, each time the administration or Congress has the issue of the

Armenian Genocide on their table, they don't vote for/against what they think about the events of 1915. They end up denying for one day what they believe the other 364 days of the year. All of the parties involved know very well what the administration and Congress think about 1915, but Turkey asks them to tell a lie only for one day. I have never understood why the Turkish government extracts so much joy out of making the United States lie for one day. I also find it completely dishonorable. Not only does this lie fail to lead to a resolution, it needlessly locks up the debate. All of the parties involved, arguably using all of their energy and effort, wait for this one day and get completely locked into a single word that may or may not be used by Congress or the president. Placing so much expectation and energy on a specific day and around a single word that may be uttered by the U.S. government creates incredible tension. It builds up into an impenetrable gridlock that impedes any solution. The United States should stop being a gridlock that prevents resolution. The time has come for the United States to stop allowing itself to play that role.

If the United States declares what it believes to be the truth and stands behind it, not only will it gain some self-respect on the subject, but it will liberate both Turks and Armenians and itself in the process.

After stating what it believes to be the truth, the U.S. could step away from being a part of the problem and could step into the role of mediator. That would bring about the realization to the opposing sides that the solution lies within them, not in expending all of their energy trying to get a U.S. president to state something or to keep quiet. The border between the two countries should immediately be reopened, diplomatic relations re-established, and a series of meetings planned where all subjects, not just history alone, are discussed and debated. Turkey needs to stop treating the discussion of history as a category of crime. This can only be possible when the U.S. puts an end to this

gridlock and is honest with its statements about history.

The problem has another important aspect to it. At a time when Turkey is making an effort to engage in foreign policy mediation between Arabs and Israel and is attempting to be seen as an international team player, it might be an eye-opener for Turkey to understand that bullying and threatening others is not the behavior of an international actor. Turkey cannot continue with the same repressive domestic policies towards its own history and minorities—under the guise of national security; it cannot continue to threaten other countries in expressing their thoughts on 1915, while at the same time pretending to be a democratic country. An open official acknowledgment by the U.S. government might force Turkey to understand that blackmailing and threatening other states and suppressing and persecuting its own intellectuals do not offer solutions for historical problems nor for security.

I believe that we will enter a new era where morality and *realpolitik* will not be considered mutually exclusive—if President Barack Obama should put an end to this lingering problem and liberate everybody in the process by an official acknowledgment of genocide. □

#### ENDNOTES

\* This article is based on the inaugural lecture of the author at Clark University.

1 Court decree, Second Penal Court of First Instance for the district of Sisli, file number: 2006/1208, decree no. 2007/1106, prosecution no. 2006/8617.

2 I place the term "Turks" within quotation marks. Although the term was used in the discussions of the time, it is clear that in explaining historical events general terms such as this are not only wrong to use, but also incorrect from the standpoint of attempting to write a history.

3 FO 371/4173/53351, folios 192-3.

4 Bilal Simsir, *Malta Surgunleri* (Ankara, 1985), p. 334. The letter was written to the first Grand Vizier of the Armistice period, Ahmet Izzet Pasa, with the aim of its contents being communicated to the British High Commission.

# Where Do We Go From Here?

Rethinking the Challenge of the Armenian Genocide  
and Progressive Turkish Politics

By Henry C. Theriault

In previous *Armenian Weekly* magazine articles, I have raised objections to some of the reigning views of Turkish

progressivism. In “Post-Genocide Imperial Domination” (“Controversy and Debate,” *The Armenian Weekly*, April 21, 2007), I argue that, contrary to the prevalent view that Armenians and Turks could enter a mutual dialogue toward better future relations, underlying all aspects of Turkish-Armenian relation was oppression that had been maximized through the Armenian Genocide and that rendered all Turkish-Armenian relations dominance relations. Only through changing the dominance relation could Turkish-Armenian relations improve in a meaningful way. I highlighted the ways in which this dominance relation, with its imperial roots, infused even the attitudes and actions of many progressive Turks, and that this was difficult to see only because such Turks were evaluated against the extreme cases of hyper-evil genocide perpetrators and morally bad genocide deniers, not against objective standards of ethics. In “From Past Genocide to Present Perpetrator-Victim Group Relations” (“Commemorating Genocide: Images, Per-

spectives, Research,” *The Armenian Weekly*, April 26, 2008), I argued that the prevalent view that the democratization of Turkey would lead to an end to anti-Armenian attitudes and institutional structures in Turkish state and society was, in fact, wrong; that democracy was consistent with oppression of an outgroup and that the Armenian Genocide and the dominance relation it maximized needed to be addressed explicitly in addition to democratization efforts in Turkey. I maintain the soundness of the arguments, within the context of Armenian-Turkish relations, and believe they represent important interventions in ongoing efforts to improve these relations. But it is possible to look at the progressive movement in Turkey not against an objective ethical analysis of the proper response to the Armenian Genocide, but against other societies that share similar pasts. This brings into relief positive elements of progressive Turkish politics that deserve recognition.

An important limitation of almost all discussions of Armenian-Turkish relations and

Turkish democratization is that they occur within a conceptual and historical vacuum. That is, they are not informed by the experiences of other societies who have faced or who face similar challenges as the Turkish state and society in facing the contemporary challenge of the Armenian Genocide. On the one hand, this is laudable: Progressive Turks do not draw attention from that challenge by discussing other cases, as deniers of the Armenian Genocide (and other genocides, such as the Holocaust, Native American Genocides, the Nanjing Massacre, and many others) do. But it also means that complex critical insights by innovative theorists (I cited a number of such theorists for my 2007 article in this regard) who have addressed U.S. race relations, for instance, are lost to the discussion, and the resulting ideas about Armenian-Turkish relations often subject to obvious criticisms based on those critical insights. Similarly, the Armenian Genocide and the situation of contemporary Turkey is rarely—especially in Turkish discussions—put within a comparative context with other genocide perpetrator societies, and there are dozens of major perpetrators who would qualify for this. Again, this is positive in so far as progressives keep focus squarely on the Armenian Genocide rather than diluting it with discussion of other genocides as a way of giving comfort to Turks who are uncomfortable with

# The most fundamental—and the most fundamentally obvious, for anyone looking with some kind of basic objectivity—fact about the United States is that our country was formed territorially through genocide.

a direct engagement with their own history; but it also means that important conceptual and historical resources for understanding are not available in discussions and reflection.

The situation is not much better from an Armenian standpoint. While some rudimentary comparative attempts are made, usually to the Holocaust, few genuine attempts to contextualize the Armenian Genocide in a comprehensive history of genocide and other mass violence are made. By extension, with certain noteworthy exceptions (such as the Armenian National Committee of America), there is little commitment among Armenians to serious engagement with the genocides and other mass violence suffered by other groups. A little lip service at commemorations does not count.

I have been using the term “Turkish progressive” without definition so far. With regard to the Armenian Genocide, this term applies to politically active Turkish individuals who (1) fully recognize the Armenian Genocide and (2) recognize the link of the Armenian Genocide to (a) the politics of the Turkish republic, including the repressive nature of some social and political institutions and human rights practices, and (b) the future of Turkish politics, particularly regarding the possibility and obstacles to full democratization. In this sense, Turkish progressives—perhaps the most outstanding being Ragip Zarakolu, Hrant Dink’s close friend, who has been charged with such things as “insulting the Turkish state” merely for publishing the truth about the Armenian Genocide—are doing more than courageously challenging the status quo of genocide denial and domination in Turkey, and that at great risk to themselves. They are setting an important example for other perpetrator states.

Specifically, they have recognized and proclaim publicly that the Armenian Genocide is a fundamental part of the formation of the

Turkish Republic and contemporary Turkish national identity. Improving that identity and the state requires directly engaging the role of and benefits from the Armenian Genocide and reworking them away from the genocidal elements in their roots. Can one say (as I have) that some or even all have particular agendas that are not necessarily only concerned with justice for the Armenian Genocide? Certainly, the improvement of Turkish society is paramount for many. Is there a significant limitation in their approach because it typically bars even consideration of territorial reparations? Just as certainly, the preservation of the Turkish claim to the land in question is a confirmation of the attitudes driving the Armenian Genocide in the first place, the rendering of that land “Turkish” rather than “Armenian.” And yet, even given these points, what these progressives are attempting and the vision and ethical commitments that motivate it are impressive and important. They are also rare, even when compared with perpetrator societies with much stronger freedom of speech guarantees. These Turkish progressives have been willing to confront the foundations of their society against tremendous pressures from all quarters, out of a commitment to the truth and to a just social and political order.

Perhaps the closest case would be the movement by progressive scholars and activists in Japan to push for full, unequivocal recognition of Japanese atrocities during the Pacific War, including especially the Nanjing Massacre (a genocide) and the horrific Comfort Women system of sexual slavery; an official state apology for these acts; and proper reparations to their victims. The commitment of some has been tested by threats of and actual violence from right-wing extremists, and is tied to a deep ethical commitment to non-aggression through the prevention of the re-militarization of Japan, which is the goal of many deniers of these atrocities. The struggle of textbook

contents in Japan, which has been an international issue for a decade and more, is a central aspect. What is promising in Japan is that a high percentage of the population supports this recognition, despite powerful and well-organized denial campaigns with support from some government officials.

**W**hat is striking against the Turkish example is the United States and our own genocidal and other mass violence history, which is virtually unknown by the general population, is utterly marginal as a political issue, and is allowed to continue through various political institutions and practices, such as the “School of the Americas,” noteworthy as a U.S. training base teaching torture techniques to Latin American military personnel.

One can begin with the aggressive wars we have pursued. The 1936 Mexican War was a classic war of conquest, through which we acquired huge swaths of territory from Mexico, from Texas, through the southwest, to California. It is safe to say that without this injustice, which was protested by that great American Henry David Thoreau, resulting in his imprisonment, the United States would be radically different and radically less than it is now, and Mexico much more powerful and stable. The 1898 Spanish War is another example, as are dozens of military invasions on behalf of corporations such as United Fruit in Central American, Caribbean, and South American countries over the course of the 20th century, punctuated by such crimes as the U.S.-backed Chile coup against the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende—begun, coincidentally enough, on Sept. 11, 1973 (the first September 11, which eventually left at least 9,000 Chileans dead and how many thousands tortured)—the Panama Invasion, both Iraq Wars, the Vietnam War, the illegal

mass civilian killing bombings of Cambodia and Laos, and beyond.

One can add our support for human rights-abusing and mass killer regimes and rebel blocks the world over, from Nicaragua and El Salvador to South Africa, Iraq, the Shah of Iran, and Indonesia, just to name a few of the more publicized examples. And let us not forget the U.S. role in genocides, such as our active support of the Guatemalan genocide of the Mayans to the East Timor Genocide—and on and on. Should we not add the “free fire zones” used in the Vietnam War as genocidal acts fitting the United Nations definition of genocide? Unfortunately, one could go on.

And above and ahead of all this, beneath it and behind it, is the genocidal process that has since its beginning involved and implicated every aspect of the United States: the Native American Genocides. (For a full account of what I reference here, see Ward Churchill’s important *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas 1492 to the Present* [San Francisco: City Lights, 1997].) Statistics are shocking and yet convey only the most abstract sense of the wonton destruction: In 1600, there were on the order of 10 million indigenous people in what would become the continental United States; by 1900, there were 237,000 remaining. From George Washington on, U.S. governments pursued a policy of deportation and destruction of Native American groups, through direct massacre; destruction of food supplies to impose conditions of starvation; deportation into harsh environments such as deserts, making survival difficult; forced removal of Native American children from families and cultures; forced sterilization of Native American women; and more—acts falling only too neatly into the UN definition of genocide.

The dominant ideology of American expansionism of the 19th century, institutionalized in our territorial boundaries in the 20th, “Manifest Destiny,” was genocidal at its core: the continent for Americans of White European descent, for the United States. The Native Americans were in the way. They had to be destroyed or, if the numbers got low enough, interred on reservations where conditions were often genocidal as well.

The most fundamental—and the most fundamentally *obvious*, for anyone looking with some kind of basic objectivity—fact about the United States is that our country was formed territorially through genocide. Basic ethics today requires calling into question the legitimacy of the very formation of the United States, but most people in the United States who are not Native American or a minority that has suffered similarly forsake a simple, honest ethical analysis in favor of preserving nationalist identity and a host of benefits built on denial and fabrication—denial and fabrication that are still the core of what we teach our children and discuss publicly today (fantasies about the Puritans, for instance, who were as thirsty for indigenous blood as Chivington’s Third Colorado Volunteer Cavalry Regiment). We still fail to deal with real recognition, even of the conditions of Native Americans now, the racism and violence against them, the imposed poverty, the resource thefts, etc. Most of us refuse to confront the truth and cannot even conceive the question of what we must do to repair the damage.

The U.S. Armenian community reflects the broader society on this. Yes, there are some Armenians who advocate for recognition and reparation for Native American Genocides (I have often had Armenian audiences take up the issue with seriousness and commitment), but they are relatively few and their voices dampened. It is certainly our duty to advocate for recognition and justice for the Armenian Genocide. As the progeny of its victims, absent our Armenian activism, the world beyond us would know and care little about the issue. But it is just as much our duty *not* to stop at recognizing injustice when our people are its victims: We must also recognize it when we are its beneficiaries. And we are the beneficiaries of Native American Genocides, enjoying land and power and American identity all secure and strong. It is our duty to recognize and to challenge our society and government to recognize and repair.

And here we can look to those in Turkey who are doing just that. We have an absolute duty to do more than we as Armenians are doing now, that is, to follow the example of

Turkish progressives: However uncomfortable and even dangerous, we must stand up for what is right in our own country.



How to start? During the March 13, 2009 symposium in Washington, D.C. on “Preventing Genocide: A Blueprint for U.S. Policy Makers,” a report by the Genocide Prevention Task Force co-chaired by Madeleine Albright and William Cohen (and sponsored by “Genocide Studies and Prevention,” the International Association of Genocide Scholars, and the Zoryan Institute’s International Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies), I presented a critique of the report for its failure to acknowledge the true U.S. relationship to genocide, aggressive war, and other mass violence. The report presented genocide as something others—especially Africans—do somewhere else. My argument was simple: If we want to prevent genocide, we should start by changing our relationship to it, so that we no longer support it or the kinds of regimes that perpetrate it; to do that, we need an honest appraisal of the way genocide is a part of our society and political culture. I proposed that this honest appraisal could be done by a high-profile, well-publicized United States Genocide Truth and Responsibility Commission (TRC), which would document and present to the public all the regrettable details of our history with genocide, as well as recommend meaningful reparations, including territory returns if deemed appropriate. I amend that here to a U.S. Human Rights TRC, which would encompass military aggression, slavery, and other human rights violations, along with genocide.

I call on Armenians in the United States to join the movement for a true appraisal of U.S. history and a taking of responsibility for it. The USHRTRC is one possible avenue that might deserve specific support, but the broader need is for Armenians to make a practice of recognizing the realities of this history, starting with Native American Genocides, and supporting efforts to secure acknowledgment and justice for them. In the face of such historical wrongs, advocacy on the Armenian Genocide without advocacy against U.S. injustices becomes hypocrisy. □

# I Apologize for *not* APOLOGIZING

By Ayse Hur

**t**he concept *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, which we first heard from Theodor Heuss, the first president of Federal Germany following World War II, was difficult to translate to other languages. This German term was translated as “coming to terms with the past” to some languages, and as “coping with the past” or “dealing with the past” to others. Those who wanted to avoid the negative tone in these phrases used more neutral terms such as “relationship with the past,” “politics of the past,” “processing the past,” and “culture of remembrance.” Mithat Sencer, who has significant contributions in this field, makes his choice in favor of “coming to terms with the past,” as the title of his book *Coming to Terms with the Past* (Iletisim, 2007) shows. The phrase “coming to terms with the past” (*gecmisle hesaplasma*) captures not only the courage and openness to debate the past, bring it to light, and accept its “realities,” but also other deeds (for instance, legal consequences such as trial, compensation, and punishment) related to the past. The term that I prefer is “making peace with the past” because of its more positive tone.

## *The attractiveness of forgetting*

In Ancient Greece, after the Peloponnesian War, remembering the unpleasant events of the past was forbidden. In Rome, after Caesar’s murder, the great orator Cicero said in the Senate, “All memories about this event must be consigned to eternal oblivion.” One of the conditions of the Peace of Westphalia (1648) that ended the bloody Thirty Years’ War in Europe was about forgetting the crimes committed during the war. After the French Revolution, first Napoleon, and then Louis XVIII who acceded to the throne after Napoleon’s exile, outlawed the remembrance of the revolution. More or less until the end of World War II, forgetting bad events of the past and forgiving them was the rule.

## *Cosmopolitan memory*

At the present, however, a radical change is occurring. Although, as happened in Spain, Austria, and Mozambique, some preferred to move on to more peaceful relations without much talk about the atrocities committed by one generation, the general inclination today is to face the past. One of the main reasons for this is that the 20th century witnessed the most horrible massacres in history, in particular the Holocaust. But another reason is that globalization has changed and improved the ways in which individuals and societies observe others. Today—fortunately—wrongdoings can hardly remain secret. With globalization, local and national memory is evolving into global (cosmopolitan) memory. Cosmopolitan memory, unlike traditional (national, communal, local) collective memory, cannot limit itself to what happens on a piece of land. Contrary to national and ethnic memories, cosmopolitan memory filters everything that happens through the totality of all national memories. This is one of the most important components of the modernization project. In this sense, genocide is one of the most important sources for cosmopolitan memory. Because in genocide we can see all the elements of the ideas of good and evil. Because genocide is the most significant breaking point of civilization.

TRANSLATED FROM TURKISH BY MELIS ERDUR

## *Virtual' memory*

“Collective memory,” the main element of facing the past, became a major research topic in the social sciences. In that context, the relationship between individual and collective memories are put under a lens. The more we know about the workings of memory, the better we can understand that memory is not a mirror to reflect the exact historical reality. No memory can quite preserve the past as it is. On the contrary, what remains is what the individual's group is able to reconstruct according to its context. For instance, “identities,” which cause passionate arguments nowadays, cannot be built without appeal to “real” and “made up/created” virtual memory.

Let's take a quick look at some types of memory. Communicational memory covers more recent memories. Some have more communicational memory than others. After a period of 40 years or so, communicational memory turns into something else and “cultural memory” enters the stage. The main components of cultural memory are processes such as symbolization, mythologizing, and ritualization. Shamans, priests, teachers,

## Why must we Remember?

Why is the past remembered? For two main reasons: First, in order to not diverge from the direction of the past, and second, in order to diverge from it. In the first case, what is important is to “reconstruct” the past according to the needs of the present. The glorious aspects of the past are emphasized and the bad aspects are swept under the carpet. Those societies, especially, that want to make a fresh start use strategies of “suppression” in an attempt to “draw a thick line on the past” and set a “zero point” so that they can turn their faces to the future. Suppression sometimes occurs as “public silence” and sometimes as an “official ban on remembering.” “Forgetting” and “remembering” (including the remembrance of the past in a different way) are combined because, as the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said, “Man ... cannot learn to forget, but hangs on the past: however far or fast he runs, that chain runs with him.”

writers, philosophers, and other community leaders, pass this memory from generation to generation using tools like monuments, sculptures, history books, place names, memorial days, and anthems. These two types of memory heavily interact with one another.

## *What must we remember?*

An overwhelming majority of scientists working in this area emphasize the need to remember past injustices and victimizations, because suppressing and not remembering the past constitutes a second victimization of the victims. This is a very new approach in the history of humanity, because until today collective/national memory was constructed either by taking a heroic past as a reference point, or by the actual perpetrator's embracing the role of the victim. Today's politics of “facing the past,” however, suggests that a nation define itself in terms of its wrongdoings.

Germany, which built its official political identity on rejecting and condemning the Nazi regime, is the first example of what we may call “negative memory.” To be sure, Germany did not do this wholly voluntarily. In fact, if there hadn't been a “caught red-handed” situation, perhaps they would have kept their old ways. Nevertheless, given the fact that hundreds of crimes have been swept under the carpet in Turkey since the 1970's, we cannot but admit that the German experience deserves praise despite everything.

## *Looking through the eyes of the victim*

At this point, I want to draw attention to something, especially the attention of those who immediately think of trials and punishments (as in the Germany case) when they hear the phrase “coming to terms with the past”: The point here is not to declare some people to be guilty, but to put an end to human suffering and victimization. The best way to stop such suffering is to look at the past through the eyes of the victim and mourn with them. In this way, the dignity of the victims, which has been trampled on by the perpetrators, is restored to some extent. And there arises a stronger sense of trust and solidarity between the individuals, generations, and societies, who are now ready to talk. Establishing social peace and understanding becomes easier between people who trust one another. Moreover, learning from the experiences of the past helps us in preventing the same evils from occurring again.

## *Collective guilt/collective apology*

Here, I will turn to the “I apologize to Armenians” campaign, which was started by a group of intellectuals in Turkey. I did not put my signature on this statement, which was signed by some 30,000 people. Before explaining why I didn't, I want to summarize my views about collective apologies in general. Although many scientists claim that apologizing is a rhetoric aimed at fixing



one's image, I wholeheartedly believe in its virtue. I never hesitate for a second to apologize for my mistakes. Collective apology, on the other hand, has its merits as well as defects. In order to understand collective apology, we must understand collective guilt. Collective guilt, which is a concept from social science rather than law, can be understood as the society's collaborating with the perpetrator of a crime and then taking responsibility for the crime. Collaboration may be overt and direct, as well as covert and indirect. In a society whose past contains events that can be regarded as "crimes against humanity," coming to terms with the past may be the way to prevent the crime from turning into a collective burden carried from generation to generation. Thus, collective apology has a very important function in "coming to terms with the past" or "making peace with the past/history."

### *Original sin*

Some claim that this new "culture of apology" is closely related to the Judeo-Christian concept of "original sin" and the practice of "confessing," and argue that it may lead to an escapist attitude that may be summarized as "confess and be done with it." Some draw attention to such examples as the United States' and NATO's legitimization of their intervention in Kosovo through appeal to Auschwitz, and Israel's legitimization of its strategies in Palestine through appeal to the Holocaust, and point out that memory politics aimed at forming a universal morality can be misused. Others, on the other hand, do not dwell on such analyses and see an apology by the highest representatives of a society for the crimes committed by its members in a positive light, because of the collective responsibility that lies behind it. However, everyone agrees that great care must be taken in order to avoid the trivialization of these apologies.

### *Dialogical process*

What has to be done is to consider an apology in its context, as part of a certain process. What experts describe as a "legitimate," "consummate," or "perfect" apology (or similar terms) must satisfy certain conditions. First of all, "apologizing" must be dialogical rather than one-sided. An "apology" is meaningful when seen as part of a process of correcting an injustice or putting a peaceful end to a dispute. Experts call such a process "coming to terms with the past" or "making peace with the past." In the terms that I favor, this process of making peace with the past has political, scientific, cultural, psychological, and legal dimensions and stages. When these stages are disregarded, apology does not serve its purpose, and even results in unwanted consequences.

### *The apology campaign in Turkey*

In my view, the "I apologize to Armenians" campaign did not satisfy the above conditions. The apology did not seem to be

## Who is the Subject?

Here are my views on issuing a collective apology:

- 1** A collective apology must be based on the demands of a determinate, defined victim group.
- 2** A collective apology must be constituted by the apologies of the representatives of the groups who played a role in the crimes, not by the apologies of those who identify with such groups.
- 3** Those who apologize by saying "we" must be saying that they identify with that "we" of the past, that they belong to the same politics, that they once approved of these crimes, or that they at least could not prevent the crimes from being committed.
- 4** Those who apologize by saying "we" must not speak for those who do not want to apologize.
- 5** Those who say "we" must not apply contemporary moral criteria to the past, and they must not apologize in the name of the dead who committed the crimes and regarded them as moral or legal.
- 6** Those who say "we" must not merely express regret and sympathy for the victims; they must at the same time express a collective responsibility for the continuing effects of the crimes on the victims and their descendants.
- 7** The apology must be supplied with a firm, clear, and determinate commitment. Those who say "we" must be ready to take every compensatory, reparatory, and restorative step, including tangible and/or symbolic wrongs.

part of a proper, well-thought out, and comprehensive "facing the past" campaign. If there was such a background, I was not aware of it.

### *Who?*

Who were those that "apologize[d] on [their] part"? Those, whose conscience cannot accept the indifference towards the "Great Catastrophe" (*Medz Yeghern*, in Armenian) that Ottoman Armenians suffered in 1915 and its denial, and who reject this injustice?

Are they the Turks, the intellectuals, the citizens of Turkey? If we are apologizing as Turks, why should I apologize in the name of an ethnic group that I have never seen myself as belonging to? If we are apologizing as intellectuals, wouldn't it be insincere for me to apologize, given that I do everything I can to fight the injustices that Armenians suffer? If we are apologizing as Turkish citizens, would Turkish citizens of Armenian descent apologize too? If yes, to whom and for what?

## To Whom?

It was not clear from the text to whom the apology was extended. Does “my Armenian brothers and sisters” mean those who are alive or those who have passed away, those who were personally subjected to the terrible crimes, or those who were badly affected by them? It was hard to tell. Why were we apologizing only for 1915? Did the Great Catastrophe happen only in 1915? What about the things that Armenians were subjected to between 1915 and 1923, and throughout the republican history? Did the aforementioned conscience accept them? Was there no need to apologize to Assyrians and Yezidis who were deported along with Armenians?

## For what?

It was not clear for what the apology was offered. I don't think that the term Great Catastrophe is the right term for what Armenians

were subjected to in 1915. Unless this term is meant to replace the term “genocide,” which causes negative reactions in Turkey for understandable reasons—if, that is, this new terminology is only a suggestion—then the text should have included other alternatives such as massacre, slaughter, elimination, and genocide, or the terminology should have been left blank to be filled in by those who signed the statement. If, on the other hand, the terminology was the public declaration of a decision by the group that started the campaign, then it amounted to an imposition and did not fit the dialogical nature of peace processes.

## Who is the Perpetrator?

It was also a shortcoming of the text that it wasn't clear who the perpetrator of this Great Catastrophe was: the Ottoman state? The Ittihadist (CUP) government? The Ittihadists? Turks, Kurds, Circassians, others, all of the above?

## What is our Commitment?

In the text, we only apologized “on [our] part.” As a general principle, those who deal with human rights violations in the past must have the following two aims: first, to make sure that such violations and injustices do not happen again in the future; and second, to repair the damages that these injustices have caused. There was no such promise in the text. For instance, why weren't we demanding reparations for the material and moral damages that our Armenian brothers and sisters suffered after 1915? Why weren't we asking the people who appropriated Armenian properties and accounts, and destroyed their cultural inheritance, to compensate for these material and moral damages?

## Conclusion

Wouldn't I have to apologize also to Kurds, inhabitants of Dersim, Alawites, Assyrians, Yezidis, Gypsies, communists, Islamists, and many other groups who have suffered in front of my eyes? Where does it end? Might there be groups that I was forgetting about? Would it be best to play it safe and say *mea culpa!*, in accordance with the Judeo-Christian tradition that considers even being human as sinful? In the end, I thought it would be insincere to sign such a document that I disagreed with in many respects. □



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# Commentary on the Turkish Apology Campaign

By Marc Mamigonian

*“My conscience does not accept the insensitivity showed to and the denial of the Great Catastrophe that the Ottoman Armenians were subjected to in 1915. I reject this injustice and for my share, I empathize with the feelings and pain of my Armenian brothers. I apologize to them.”*

—English-language text of Turkish apology from the official website,  
[www.ozurdiliyoruz.com](http://www.ozurdiliyoruz.com).

*“We feel in England that we have treated you [Irish] rather unfairly. It seems history is to blame.*

—James Joyce, *Ulysses*

In Joyce’s novel, those words are spoken by the Englishman Haines to the Irishman Stephen Dedalus. There is no further comment, and none is needed to explain the point: Haines is the voice of paternalistic British complacency. Not evil—Stephen has also just noted that Haines is “not all unkind,” and the additional irony is that Haines is an enthusiast of Irish culture and is the only character in *Ulysses* who speaks Irish Gaelic. He does not hate the Irish; in fact, he is actually very interested in them. But in his statement there is no acceptance of responsibility: “history is to blame.” He does not apologize, yet he feels badly for the way things are and the way they have been.

What is an apology? It is more than an expression of sorrow or sadness. This is not to say an expression of sorrow or sadness is insignificant. It just is not an apology.

An apology is an expression of remorse for wrongdoing. An apology is a way of saying, “I did something wrong and I regret the harm

it caused.” I am *sorry* when people die in a car crash or suffer from disease. But it makes no sense for me to *apologize* for these things unless I have caused them or have gained from them.

I believe that one can only apologize for something one has done oneself, or by extension, for something that someone else has done from which one has derived benefit. For example, if one belongs to a group in a society that has benefited from human rights abuses against, or exploitation of, another group in that society—as white Americans historically have, for example, vis-à-vis African Americans or Native Americans—such historical wrongs should be addressed.

Being a white American means, to some extent, deriving benefits from actions taken by others long before one was born and which one finds reprehensible; but, short of leaving the country, one cannot resign one’s membership in the dominant group in American society. Thus, even though my ancestors could not have

been slave owners and could not have participated in the displacement or massacre of Native Americans, I understand that I derive benefits that are a result of these injustices. Consequently, it was gratifying, if not sufficient, when in 2007 the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution apologizing for slavery and the Senate apologized for atrocities against Native Americans. Many corporations that benefited from these actions have also apologized.

A substantive discussion of the subject of reparations for human rights abuses such as the Armenian Genocide lies beyond the scope of this article. It is, however, an important subject and one that calls for serious discussion, both within Armenian circles and between Armenians and Turks.

Apologies cannot wipe the slate clean and they are seldom sufficient in themselves, but a frank and sincere apology can contribute to a societal process of addressing historical injustices. Individual and non-official apologies can be meaningful on an interpersonal level, but ultimately, in most conceivable cases, such injustices, and any reparations for them, must be addressed on the state level.

Perhaps the most noteworthy example of this in the U.S. has been the government's apology and financial reparations for the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. The internment, at the time it took place, was rationalized on the premise that all Japanese were potentially disloyal, a fifth column, and would pose a threat, especially on the west coast, in the event of a Japanese attack. The action was motivated far more by prejudice and wartime hysteria than by any actual security concerns, and, in fact, many Americans profited handsomely from it. In rationale and economic impact, the internment bears comparison to the Armenian Genocide, although the results were quite different, as it did not lead to massive deaths and the almost total elimination of Japanese Americans from the U.S.

The U.S. apology came in the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, "Restitution for World War II Internment of Japanese-Americans and Aleuts," which served to:

1. acknowledge the fundamental injustice of the evacuation, relocation, and internment of United States citizens and permanent resident aliens of Japanese ancestry during World War II;
2. apologize on behalf of the people of the United States for the evacuation, relocation, and internment of such citizens and permanent resident aliens;
3. provide for a public education fund to finance efforts to inform the public about the internment of such individuals so as to prevent the recurrence of any similar event;
4. make restitution to those individuals of Japanese ancestry who were interned;
5. make restitution to Aleut residents of the Pribilof Islands and the Aleutian Islands west of Unimak Island, in settlement of United States obligations in equity and at law;

6. discourage the occurrence of similar injustices and violations of civil liberties in the future; and
7. make more credible and sincere any declaration of concern by the United States over violations of human rights committed by other nations.

I do not intend to hold up the U.S. as the exemplar for the world in dealing with the dark chapters of its history. Undoubtedly it has a better record than many, but not as good a record as others. But in the "Japanese-American Apology," I think there are lessons that might be learned.

The apology and reparations came about only after a great deal of effort on the part of Japanese Americans to insure that some measure of justice was achieved, and not merely through the good will of the government. The U.S. apology to the Japanese Americans, as one can readily detect, spoke directly about the improper actions themselves, and, of course, it was issued from the government. In addition, it offered restitution—not because the amount offered (for internees, \$20,000) could compensate for the action taken against them, but as a symbolic act and as an added deterrent against other such actions.

Of course, there are significant differences between the Ottoman Armenian and Japanese American cases that preclude equating the two or using the one as a model for the other. Not the least of these is that in the four decades or so between the end of World War II and the passing of this legislation, Japanese Americans had achieved positions of prestige, influence, and power in the U.S., including key Congressional positions; furthermore, for the most part they and their descendants were still living in the country where the actions occurred—that is, the internment did not create a substantial Japanese-American diaspora. Thus, they were able to work within the U.S. system in a way that the remnants of the Armenian community in Turkey have never been able to because of their minuscule numbers and continued second-class citizen status.

Let us then look carefully at the Turkish apology, which was made public in December 2008 and has generated a great deal of discussion and media coverage. The declaration is not an official or state-sanctioned apology (in fact, it has been roundly condemned by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and other officials), but has been presented as principally the work of four writers: Ahmet Insel, Ali Bayramoglu, Baskin Oran, and Cengiz Aktar. It is taken as a given that the authors of the apology, who are well-known public intellectuals in Turkey, are acutely aware of the effects of language, that they chose their words with great care, and thus that the apology text was not arrived at by accident or in haste. It is appropriate, then, to subject the apology to a close reading.

The following remarks ought, I think, to go without saying; yet, nonetheless, one feels obliged to offer them. Several of the authors of the apology have commented that the campaign aims at, among other things, generating discussion—and in this respect, certainly, it has been successful. Naturally, discussion involves thinking critically and not necessarily offering unreserved praise. One criticizes such an ini-

tiative as this apology campaign with the knowledge that the authors and signatories, through their participation, may be risking prosecution under Turkey's Article 301 for "insulting Turkishness"; and one is aware, furthermore, that any apology of any kind is opposed by the most reactionary and nationalist forces in the country.

One presupposes that a serious critical discussion of the apology and the issues it raises is at the precisely opposite pole from such forces, yet one also notes a tendency among some members of the Turkish left to view any critical discussion, even when it has been explicitly asked for, especially from members of the Armenian Diaspora, as an act of ingratitude and hostility that can be equated with the efforts of the Turkish right to silence progressive Turkish voices through intimidation, violence, or assassination. If a meaningful dialogue is to take place, any attempt to monopolize the discussion—be it from the Turkish right or left, the Armenian Diaspora, the Armenian Republic, or anywhere else—must be rejected.

**“My conscience does not accept the insensitivity showed to and the denial of the Great Catastrophe that the Ottoman Armenians were subjected to in 1915.”**

The apology begins by expressing a non-acceptance by one's conscience of the "insensitivity" and "denial" towards "the Great Catastrophe."

Significantly, the apology begins by situating the matter in the realm of conscience and not in the realm of politics. The statement, for better or for worse, is not a call to action—it does not, for example, call upon the Turkish government to do anything, such as ending its massive efforts to deny history.

Nor does the apology acknowledge anything; rather, it expresses a non-acceptance of insensitivity and of denial of what it calls "the Great Catastrophe." Yes, the Armenians were subjected to a "Great Catastrophe"—but by whom? There is a history of denial and insensitivity—but who or what has promoted and continues to promote this? That is to say, the statement might have begun: "I acknowledge the Great Catastrophe to which the Ottoman Armenians were subjected by their government in 1915, and I reject the denial of this history and the lack of sensitivity shown towards it."

As with any piece of writing, the words that are used—and not used—are telling.

No other aspect of the apology has generated more discussion than the choice of the term "Great Catastrophe." "Great Catastrophe" is intended to be a translation of the Armenian *Medz Yeghern*.

Statement co-author Baskin Oran revealed the reasoning behind this usage in an interview with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation on Dec. 12, 2008: "You see, 'Great Catastrophe,' in

Armenian '*Medz Yeghern*,' was the only definition, the only expression, used until the Armenian Diaspora discovered the PR value of 'Armenian Genocide.' Therefore, we use 'Great Catastrophe.'"

Oran has written or stated on other occasions that, although he acknowledges the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Armenians during World War I and deplores the official denial of this tragedy, "[t]he Armenian diaspora has put the term [genocide] forward for propagandistic reasons in order to pretend that this event is the same as the genocide of the Jews." ("*Ermeni diasporasi bu terimi bu olayın Yahudi jenosidiyle aynı fley oldugunu soylemek için propaganda amaciyla ortaya atti.*") The text appeared in a summary of Oran's positions distributed in 2007 when he ran for parliament in Turkey.) This position appears to be widespread in Turkey.

The development of Armenian terminology for the events of 1915 has been researched extensively by Armenian Weekly editor Khatchig Mouradian, who has given detailed presentations on this subject. Mouradian's research, which thus far has focused on Armenian-language sources, is, of necessity, limited to publications and is not an attempt to determine what terms were prevalent in speech.

He has found that although *Yeghern*/*Medz Yeghern* may once have been the most widespread term, a number of others, such as *chart*, *aghed*, and *medz vojir*, have also been used. While it is true that *tseghasbanutiun* (the Armenian calque, or loan-translation, on "genocide") did not become *normative* until after 1965 and that, in English, "genocide" (rather than, for example, "massacre") did not become prevalent until after 1965, the word cannot be dismissed as a late "discovery" on the part of Armenians motivated by "PR," because, as Mouradian demonstrates, the word was used in Armenian newspapers shortly after it was coined, and even before the ratification of the Genocide Convention.

Mouradian writes: "Deniers of the Armenian Genocide argue that the Armenians themselves never referred to 1915 as 'genocide' before the 1980s... [T]heir argument, popular in the Turkish media and academic circles, does not stand." Unfortunately, such arguments are also employed by others who are not generally classified as deniers, but who in some respects reproduce the rhetoric of the deniers.

At any rate, despite efforts to turn the discussion of terms into proof that Armenians (read: diaspora Armenians) are, as is often asserted, "obsessed with 'the g-word,'" what is at issue in the apology is *not* the absence of "genocide" (which many Armenians would overlook, given the risks of using the word in Turkey) or objections to the use of *Medz Yeghern*, or *chart*, or *aghed*, or *medz vojir*, or other terms that have been used historically.

What is at issue are two things: The first is that to deny "the events of 1915" is to reject not only the *term* "genocide" but, even more importantly, its *meaning*—in brief, that the death of a million or so Armenians (and in addition, Greeks and Assyrians) was the intended result of a process directed and implemented by the Ottoman state.

The second is that the expression *Medz Yeghern*/Great Catastrophe has been appropriated and superimposed onto the discussion as if those doing so—those who have themselves only lately discovered the term—possess either the moral or the scholarly authority to assert what terms should or should not be used. It is an odd sort of an apology when the apologizer determines what the apology is for.

Although *Medz Yeghern* is Armenian and has had a history of use among some Armenians (while holding no special significance for English-speakers), it does not predominate among Armenians now; and if members of the dominant ethnic group in Turkey can properly impose this term on the descendants of genocide survivors, then white Americans might just as well go back to labeling African Americans as “negroes.” After all, it is a word that they themselves formerly used.

Furthermore, *Medz Yeghern*/Great Catastrophe has a much more recent and, for this discussion, extremely relevant history as a term used with the specific intention of dodging the word “genocide” for political purposes. This is “PR” *par excellence*.

Pope John Paul II, during his 2001 visit to Armenia, referred to “the call of the dead from the depths of the *Metz Yeghern*.” The BBC reported that “The Pope has skirted controversy on his visit to Armenia by avoiding the word ‘genocide’ in his prayers for those who died at the hands of Ottoman Turks...His use of the Armenian term, ‘Metz Yeghern,’ which means great calamity, to refer to the murders staved off the potential diplomatic storm which the word ‘genocide’ might have provoked from Turkey.”<sup>1</sup>

On April 24, 2005, President George W. Bush issued a statement reading, in part, “On Armenian Remembrance Day, we remember the forced exile and mass killings of as many as 1.5 million Armenians during the last days of the Ottoman Empire. This terrible event is what many Armenian people have come to call the ‘Great Calamity.’” The official Armenian-language version of the statement translated “Great Calamity” as *metz yeghern*.<sup>2</sup> It is unreasonable to suppose that during the reportedly two years that the apology was being pondered, the authors did not notice that *Medz Yeghern*/Great Catastrophe/Great Calamity was becoming the “not g-word” of choice when a political agenda disallows the ineffable g-word. Unfortunately, rather than openly acknowledge this concession to political expediency, an imaginary history has been conjured in which this usage is the only one Armenians knew before *they* were tainted by political agendas and started insisting on “genocide.”

Of course, as Mouradian has noted, this line of argument is common among those openly aligned with the Turkish state who wish, above all else, to cut the word “genocide” out of the picture; but, ostensibly, those who have promoted the apology campaign and who are viewed by many as working toward an acknowledgment by Turkey of the Armenian Genocide would not want to be associated with such a position that is part of the state’s rhetoric of denial.

Yet the potential synergy between the seemingly polar opposites of the perennial efforts of the Turkish state to remove the term “genocide” from the discussion and the altogether kinder and gentler efforts of the apologizers was noted by no less than apology co-author Oran in the Turkish newspaper *Milliyet*: “The Prime Minister should be praying for our campaign. Parliaments around the world were passing automatically resolutions. These are going to stop now. The diaspora has softened. The international media has started to no longer use the word genocide” (Dec. 19, 2008).<sup>3</sup> This statement casts a long shadow. The sworn enemies of any efforts towards dialogue could not have done a more effective job of generating suspicion that the campaign is about quashing talk of genocide recognition rather than about facing history. At the same

time, one must be careful not to attach too much importance to the assessment, since there is little reason to rely on its accuracy or, indeed, that of the international media, which has frequently, though inaccurately, described the campaign as “an apology for the Armenian Genocide of 1915.”

The point is not to excoriate the authors of the apology for not using the word “genocide” but rather to question the message that is conveyed by continuing to stigmatize people who affirm its use and to ponder the curious alignment of forces against it. As Turkish journalist Ayse Gunaysu wrote, explaining why she opted not to sign the apology statement, “we now hear some of the initiators of the campaign trying to use the apology as a means to fight the use of the word genocide and hamper the work of those who seek the recognition of the Armenian Genocide. They portray those seeking recognition as the twin sisters and brothers of the Turkish fascists, and they present the ‘diaspora’ as the enemy of any reconciliation...[B]y their discourse, they contribute to the demonization of those who do use the word genocide.”<sup>4</sup>

Gunaysu is right, and such statements and such efforts as she describes should be repudiated. It would not be fair to ascribe such motivations to the many thousands of people who signed the apology with the sincere intention of making a gesture of kindness towards Armenians, perhaps even as a means of moving Turkey towards a recognition of 1915 as genocide, *contra* the intentions of the authors.

**“I reject this injustice and for my share, I empathize with the feelings and pain of my Armenian brothers. I apologize to them.”**

The apology statement then rejects “this injustice,” which could refer to “insensitivity,” the “denial,” or “the Great Catastrophe” itself, but (grammatically, anyway, since it is singular) cannot refer to all of them. It then empathizes with the “pain of my Armenian brothers” (which, in some versions, has become the more inclusive “brothers and sisters”).

The statement then “apologizes.” For what, though? For “insensitivity”? For “denial”? For “the Great Catastrophe”? For “pain”? All of these?

One could take a post-structuralist theoretical approach and note that the authors, ever alert to the openness of any text, resisted trying to impose a particular reading on the apology in order to allow the signatory or the reader to “inscribe” his or her own meaning.

Or one could say that the apology is for *effects* (denial, insensitivity, pain) relating to “the Great Catastrophe” rather than for “the Great Catastrophe” itself, making it a kind of meta-apology. Such a meta-apology could be seen as significant in its own right,

and an apology for decades of denial and insensitivity is not to be dismissed; but it is not an apology for the thing itself—the thing that has been denied and towards which insensitivity has been shown—and should be understood as such.

One could also take the approach that an apology should, at minimum, be clear about its intentions. It has become commonplace to note that any text can and will take on meanings far beyond the intentions of the author(s), and thus one should not venture down the famously slippery slope of authorial intent. But, speaking personally, I confess that I am a little old-fashioned and a pre-post-structuralist when it comes to apologies: I want to feel that *I know* what the apologizers are apologizing for, and that *they know* what they are apologizing for.

Increasing numbers of Turks acknowledge that, as members of Turkish society, they may have unknowingly and unwillingly benefited from the extermination of the Ottoman Armenians, the confiscation of their wealth and property, etc., and some have stated that this knowledge motivated them to sign the apology statement. This stance is worthy of respect, but the very need for explanation highlights what is missing from the apology.

Moreover, such an acknowledgment can be made without using the word “genocide.” “I, as an ethnically Turkish citizen, am not guilty, but am responsible for what happened to the Armenians in 1915,” declared sociologist Fatma Muge Gocek in a public statement on April 24, 2006. “I am responsible for the wounds that were first delivered upon you through an unjust deportation from your ancestral lands and through massacres in the hands of a government that should have been there to protect you. I am also responsible for the wounds caused by the Turkish state denial to this day of what happened to you back then. I am responsible because all of this occurred and still occurs in the country of which I am a citizen.”

Though her statement did not use the word “genocide,” it was received as an honest and empathetic statement of her recognition of 1915 and as an acknowledgment, as she made clear, not of guilt but of responsibility. It helps, of course, that Gocek, though she generally refrains from using the word, on many occasions has acknowledged its applicability to 1915. One can agree or disagree with her for not using the word, but she in no way denies its appropriateness.

Apologies have also been offered by others involved as perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide: Many Kurdish groups, including political parties, NGOs, and newspapers, have explicitly apologized for the genocide of 1915 and the Kurdish role in it.

What we have, then, is an apology at odds with itself, a text that strains to express sorrow, regret—for *something*, one hardly knows what.

Whether someday it will be seen as a step in a process that led to an official Turkish state apology remains to be seen. With some 30,000 people having signed the statement, many of them, certainly, with the honorable intention of making some kind of positive statement—a show of empathy, an apology for 1915—one can view the petition as a landmark of sorts in the ongoing process that some call Turkish-Armenian dialogue and others call Turkish-Armenian reconciliation. But the question, then, is: What do we actually mean by reconciliation?

“Where there is a  
reconciliation . . . there  
must first have been  
a sundering.”

—James Joyce, *Ulysses*

It is hard to comprehend any reconciliation that does not address the reason for the sundering in the first place; and, for that matter, reconciliation implies a previous state that one wishes to return to, which is hardly the case unless one buys the mythology that Armenians and Turks lived in an Edenic state of bliss for the more than 500 years before 1915, instead of the reality that Armenians lived as a conquered people under Ottoman domination. Unfortunately, a number of proponents of so-called reconciliation—better, I think, to call it “conciliation”—do not want to address the cause of the sundering, which means facing 1915 squarely and seriously.

As if in deliberate contrast, one week before the appearance of the apology statement, an article by Taner Akcam was published in the *Armenian Reporter* that, while it has generated little discussion compared to the apology media campaign, is such a square and serious analysis of 1915 and its repercussions, and as such is almost the mirror-image of the apology and many of the comments of the apologizers.<sup>5</sup> The point of the apology, according to its authors, is to be able to “tell our Armenian brothers and sisters we apologize for not being able to discuss this issue for almost 100 years” (in the words of Cengiz Aktar) and being able “to look into the mirror every morning I get up” (in the words of Baskin Oran). There is nothing wrong with either of these motivations. But they are more focused on the apologizers themselves and really do not have anything to do with the people to whom the apology is directed.

Akcam, meanwhile, challenges his readers (the article was originally published in the Turkish newspaper *Taraf*) and especially many of his Turkish colleagues and peers to do something very difficult. He, too, is asking them to look in the mirror, but *not* in order to feel better about themselves; rather, so they can start to see their blind spots, as it were, or at least to acknowledge that these blind spots exist. Thus, he writes:

“I need to state that intellectuals who have dealt with the subject, myself included, carry a great deal of responsibility for the creation of an image of ‘good neighbor’ Armenia and ‘bogeyman and bad’ diaspora, in Turkey. Intellectuals who have been closely involved with the subject and written many articles on it have, as a body, insisted on a definition that required the diaspora to be “bad” and contributed to the creation of this image in public opinion . . .

“Instead of openly confronting the mentality that defines Armenians as ‘negative,’ ‘bogeyman,’ or ‘bad’ and instead of explaining that a desire for ‘recognition of genocide’ is a completely understandable democratic demand, [Turkish intellectuals have] accepted the main lines of the reasoning that undergirds this aggressive mentality . . .

“In other words, instead of directly stating that the problem has to do with defining Armenians as ‘the bogeyman’ and ‘bad,’ they accepted those definitions but changed the object of those definitions; instead of saying Armenians are ‘bad,’ they stated that the diaspora is ‘bad.’ In conclusion, the mentality that predominates in Turkey continued unabated in our intellectuals and continues to do so. In my opinion, the problem starts here... If we continue to use those adjectives, ‘bad’ and ‘bogeyman,’ to define something, we have merely slid the issue sideways; the problem will remain exactly as it was.”

In my opinion, when the mindset that Akcam so pointedly describes ceases to be seen as acceptable among the progressive, dem-

ocratic circles in Turkey, that is when dialogue will begin in earnest and a more meaningful apology may emerge—one that acknowledges and renounces the mentality he has described so well. Because it is one thing to express “good feelings for the grandsons and granddaughters of the Armenians who had been massacred” (as Oran did in his interview with the CBC) and another to stop portraying them as vengeful ultra-nationalists when most of them want nothing more (and nothing less) than a proper recognition of and some measure of justice for the crime committed against their grandparents.

To end where we began: It cannot be enough to blame “history.” What is absent from the Englishman Haines’ statement and what is absent from the Turkish apology is an awareness of agency or responsibility: History is made of human decisions and actions, and to the extent that history can be changed, human actions and decisions must be acknowledged and understood. When that day comes, an apology can be made and accepted. □

ENDNOTES

- 1 BBC News, “Pope avoids Armenia controversy,” news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1564257.stm.
- 2 See Emil Danielyan, “Bush Remembers Armenian ‘Great Calamity,’” www.armenialiberty.org/armeniareport/report/en/2005/04/C168BA10-8B42-4CC0-8C74-B6C865D140DE.ASP.
- 3 The translation is as used in Ayse Gunaysu’s “Letters from Istanbul: About the Apology Campaign,” Armenian Weekly, Jan. 10, 2009, p. 11.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 “Armenia, diaspora, and facing history,” The Armenian Reporter, Dec. 1, 2008.

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# ‘DEATH WELLS’ and the Suppression of Truth

By Ayse Gunaysu

“

*All suppressed truths  
become poisonous.*

— FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE IN HIS THUS SPOKE ZARATHUSTRA

Suppressed truth poisons the suppressor; it also poisons those who are deprived of the knowledge of the truth. Not only that, but suppressed truth poisons the entire environment in which both the suppressor and those who are subjected to that suppression live. So, it poisons everything.

Nearly a century after the genocide of the Armenians and Assyrians/Syriacs, as well as other Christian peoples of Asia Minor, Turkey is still being poisoned by the suppression of the truth. And because the suppressed truth concerns a crime, because the suppressors are those in power, and because those deprived of the

truth are the whole nation, it is the very future of that nation that is also poisoned.

If you are a ruler suppressing a truth, you have to suppress those who seek the truth as well. The poison feeds you with self-glorification in order to evade guilt, hatred to justify your lying, and cru-

elty to sustain the lie at all costs. Bits of truth may be known to some of the people you rule. So you either have to make them join your self-deception—by offering excuses for the crime you committed to persuade them that there was no other choice—or declare them traitors and carry on an endless war against those who resist persuasion.

But people tend to be persuaded. In Turkey, the great majority of people sincerely believe that if it is a question of life or death for the “fatherland,” then

the state machinery may rightfully resort to unlawful methods—that the so-called “national interests” justify all means. This is how the suppressed truth and the methods of that suppression poison minds, generation after generation; and how in the referendum two years after the military takeover of 1980, 92 percent of the voters endorsed the new constitution legitimizing the military dictatorship and elected the leader of the coup, Kenan Evren, as president.

Very recently, excavations began in Silopi, Sirkak (at the facilities of Turkey’s national pipeline corporation, Botas) to investigate allegations that in the 1990’s the bodies of those who went missing while under the custody of security forces had been dumped there. So far, some bones, hair, and pieces of clothing have been found—what was left after the clean-up—and sent to a forensic laboratory for analysis. The excavations continued in Cizre, again a district of Sirkak. In connection with the findings, several people were arrested, including a colonel, which is a very extraordinary case in Turkey.

Sirkak is one of the places that has suffered the most from the suspension of rule of law for the sake of the “unity of Turkey.”

And it is the same place where, 94 years ago, masses of mostly Assyrians/Syriacs, but Armenians as well, though in smaller number, were either massacred outright or driven on foot to the mountains, where death was certain as a result of starvation, destitution, and exposure to harsh weather without any shelter. This was what happened in many places to the Armenians throughout Asia Minor during that reign of terror.

Now the “death wells” represent the continuation of the bloodshed and suppressed truths. After 94 years there are still unburied dead bodies to be searched through excavations.

There is a case in Turkey, popularly known as the Ergenekon case, where suspects of plotting in favor of a military coup are being tried. The defendants include ultra-nationalist retired military officials such as Veli Kucuk, whom Hrant Dink had pointed out as a threat to his life, and activists such as Kemal Kerincsiz, a leading figure in violent public protests *against* people contradicting anti-Armenian sentiments.

“  
All suppressed truths become  
poisonous . . . and let everything  
break up—which can be broken  
up by our truths! Many a house  
is still to be built!”

However, the investigation seems to focus more on the illegal organizations acting against the government than on the crimes committed in the Kurdish provinces in the southeast—which represents the direct legacy of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), the perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide.

Besides, to a great extent we owe this breakthrough in the prosecution of criminals within the state machinery to the AKP Islamist government’s struggle for survival in the face of the military’s long-

standing power—which has as its ideological foundations authoritarian, anti-democratic, and racist secularism. This struggle between two powers, neither of which can have anything to do with the ideals of a really pluralistic way of life, leaves true dissidents in a position of continuously wavering between supporting the AK Party’s steps for relative transparency and resolutely opposing its display of typical Turkish-Islamic synthesis ideology. So, within the context of the Ergenekon case, although every little step to throw light on the anti-democratic, ultra-nationalist, and militaristic schemes in Turkey deserves full support, there is still very little to rejoice.

That may sound overly pessimistic, but as long as Turkey goes on suppressing the truth, no real progress can be made.

The genocide of the Armenians and Assyrians in 1915 in the Ottoman Empire is the foremost truth that should be acknowledged; and it will be the key for the denial, for the renouncement of a system, that presupposes and imposes presupposition of this country to be the homeland of Sunni Turks only. However, in reality, it’s simultaneously the other way round: As long as this system prevails, no acknowledgement of genocide is possible. Here we reach a point representing all the complexity and potentiality of life—a point where any progress towards shaking the ideological and ontological foundations of the system will be a step forward in the long, stumbling process of approaching the acknowledgement of the genocide by the state and by the Turkish public.

Yes, “All suppressed truths become poisonous,” said Nietzsche many, many years ago, but he continued: “—And let everything break up—which can be broken up by our truths! Many a house is still to be built!”

This is the only way that will bring justice to our lives—I mean recognizing the damage done and making amends; I mean honoring the memory of the victims and at least try to share the unsharable pain inflicted on the grandchildren of the victims; I mean displaying a will, a willingness, a readiness to conceive the unconceivable catastrophe that in 1915 fell upon the most talented, most skilled, most enlightened, and most industrious nation in Asia Minor. □

# Critical Interventions

## Kurdish Intellectuals Confronting the Armenian Genocide

By Bilgin Ayata

In my contribution to last year's special issue, I had argued that an intensified Armenian-Kurdish dialogue carries the promising potential to become an alternative approach to the ongoing Armenian-Turkish discourse on reconciliation, which has traversed dialogue into a form of domination and containment.<sup>1</sup> I also argued that the compartmentalization of the Armenian and Kurdish issues into separate discussions represents a continuation of a divide-and-rule mentality that only serves the interests of the Turkish state and weakens the position of Armenian and Kurdish intellectuals in these isolated debates. In order to overcome this compartmentalization, I called for an intensified Armenian-Kurdish dialogue, and the cultivation of an empowering alliance to confront the atrocities of the past and engage with them as a challenge of and for the present.

One year after that last issue, I believe that such an Armenian-Kurdish dialogue is ever more important, especially in light of the following three developments: At the intergovernmental level, the diplomatic traffic regarding Armenian-Turkish relations has intensified with the election of President Obama who had pledged during his campaign to address the Armenian Genocide as a genocide. Second, at the domestic level, the recent municipal elections in Turkey on March 29 paved the way for a new political beginning in Armenian-Kurdish relations that I will discuss at the end of this article. Third, at the societal level, I believe that the general trend in the activities of some Turkish intellectuals and members of civil society has further degraded the reconciliation process from "reconciliation *without* recognition" to an agenda of "reconciliation

instead of recognition." The "We apologize" petition initiated online in December 2008 illustrates such an attempt in its timing and content, and the subsequent statements made by the initiators of the campaign.<sup>2</sup> As other articles in this issue already critically engage with aspects of the campaign, it shall suffice to state here that the use of the term "Great Catastrophe" (or *Medz Yeghern*, in Armenian) in the apology statement allows one to talk about the genocide without acknowledging responsibility for it. I argue that this shows a striking resemblance with the Turkish state's strategy to deal with those issues that can no longer be denied.

In recent years, the Turkish government has proved very adept in shifting its policy of denial to a policy of regulation in response to international and domestic challenges, thus enabling it to circumvent the issues at hand by introducing half-hearted formulas to ward off further pressure and demands.<sup>3</sup> The recent example of Kurdish broadcasting illustrates these insincere attempts: After many decades of denying the very existence of the Kurds, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan himself uttered a sentence in Kurdish during his inaugural speech of the Kurdish channel 6 on state television (TRT) in January 2009. Notwithstanding that a 24-hour broadcast in Kurdish on state television constitutes a historic moment indeed for Turkey, court cases against privately owned channels that broadcast in Kurdish continue as usual. More strikingly, the speech by Ahmet Turk, the chairman of the pro-Kurdish party DTP, that he gave in Kurdish during a parliamentary session only a few weeks later was cut off and censored. Rather than a promising paradigm shift in the state's approach to the issue, initiatives such as the TRT 6 channel and other steps<sup>4</sup> appear as

unwilling concessions that are only tolerated as long as the terms are set by the Turkish state.

What seems like a step forward becomes in fact two steps backwards when the state claims ownership of a long-contested political claim (e.g., Kurdish broadcasting and education, for example) to merely regulate and deplete it instead of truly fulfilling and realizing it. Unfortunately, such a regulatory approach was also replicated in the apology campaign initiated by a group of Turkish intellectuals. While on the one hand, the campaign appears as a step forward, the use of the term Great Catastrophe instead of genocide in the apology statement takes the discussion in Turkey and elsewhere two steps back. Some human rights activists and organizations within Turkey have already employed the term genocide, and hence not to use the term means a step backwards for their courageous efforts. More significantly, the choice of Great Catastrophe reveals a great ignorance towards those to whom the apology is expressed; after all, what was the one political claim that united Armenians around the world if not the recognition of the genocide? To me, the campaign looks like an act of appeasement rather than an apology, that has taken the sensitivities of the Turkish state into account rather than the sensitivities of the genocide survivors. My criticism refers, of course, only to the initiators of the campaign and not the 30,000 signatories who have signed the petition with good intentions. The positive aspects of raising the issue in Turkey notwithstanding, one has yet to see how the campaign will affect Armenian-Turkish dialogue. As a contrast to this regulatory approach, I will give examples from select actions by Kurdish intellectuals and activists who have sought to confront the Armenian Genocide rather differently from the current apology campaign, in order to show how an alternative apology or confrontation with the genocide is also possible.



A number of Kurdish intellectuals and activists articulated their objections to the use of the term Great Catastrophe in the apology campaign with a joint declaration that was circulated among the Kurdish virtual community on the web. In the declaration “It’s not a catastrophe, but genocide—this is the entire matter at heart,”<sup>5</sup> a dozen Kurdish intellectuals and activists sharply criticize the failure of not calling the events genocide. While acknowledging that the intention of the campaign contains positive goals—such as enabling a discussion of the problem and opening up a taboo—the failure of stating the problem by its rightful name, and the failure to mention other communities that also fell victim to a genocide, such as the Assyrians, Yezidis or Greeks, led them to ask: “With such a content, are we really apologizing to our Armenian brothers and sisters, to the victims of the genocide? Is it really then an apology?”<sup>6</sup> Linking the apology campaign with the recent history of the Kurds, the declaration states that “in fact, it is quite sad to see that Turkish academics still upheld their regulatory attitude when it comes to calling phenomena by their names. For instance, for several decades they have either ignored or refrained from calling the Kurds ‘Kurds.’ Instead, they have managed to use other words when there was no way around it.” The declaration calls for an open and honest confrontation with past atrocities instead of merely circling the issue.

Some of the signatories of the declaration had initiated a campaign entitled “Dialogue and Solidarity with the Victims of Genocide” back in 2004.<sup>7</sup> In a longer statement of this initiative, the initiators addressed not only the role of the CUP, but also the role of Kurdish gangs in the genocide, and called upon everybody in the region where the genocide occurred to take an active part in confronting the past, and to take responsibility for one’s own history. The signatories declared that they are ready for such an open and critical engagement and expressed their apology to all victims of the genocide. Both in its tone and content, the statement was remarkable for its self-critical and courageous take on the issue. It was mainly circulated on the internet, and did not reach a wide audience even among the Kurdish community, as the initiators were all exiled Kurdish intellectuals and activists critical of the PKK. The initiative faded away soon thereafter without much effect. Yet, even if it did not receive much attention, the quality of the arguments in the apology statement serves as a reminder that for an honest confrontation and engagement, courage may be a better source of strength than cleverness.



One key figure behind both the Dialogue and Solidarity with the Victims of Genocide initiative of 2004 and the declaration “Great Catastrophe or Genocide?” is the Kurdish publisher Recep Marasli. A leader of the Kurdish organization Rîzgari, he was detained during the 1980’s in the Diyarbekir prison, infamous for the brutal torture of political prisoners. Upon his release, he began running a publishing house, and was yet again detained for publishing books. Today, he lives as a political refugee in Germany and has recently completed his book, *The Armenian National Democratic Movement and the 1915 Genocide*, which was published in November 2008 in Turkey.<sup>8</sup> In the book, he forcefully argues that “genocide is not a matter of documentation forgery” (*evrak sahtekarligi*), and criticizes the ongoing debate about archives and documents in order to find “proof.” When I met this soft-spoken, pensive man, who still carries the physical signs of torture and several hunger strikes, he pointed to the cover of the book, which features a black and white photograph of an Armenian school in Vartan (Varto) from 1913. About 100 children posed with their teachers in front of their school building. “Neither the school, nor the children have survived.” he said. “This is what genocide is.”

The book begins with an outline of his framework for an approach to the history of the region, which takes the pre-genocide plurality as its main reference point. He then traces the emergence of the Armenian National Democratic movement, explores the 1915 genocide and analyzes the effects of Kemalist rule on Armenians, Kurds, and other communities in the region. The book, which he began to write in 1990 when he was in prison, is a remarkable effort by a Kurdish intellectual to confront the Armenian Genocide and represents an important contribution for a sincere Armenian-Kurdish dialogue.

Another Kurdish writer deserves particular attention in this context. Berzan Boti, a Kurd from Siirt who spent 11 years in prison for political offenses and still lives in Turkey, approached the Seyfo Center in Sweden in 2007 after he found out that his forefathers had

unlawfully confiscated land from Assyrians in their village who had been killed during the genocide. In an unprecedented act, Boti declared that he wanted to return this property. As he could not return the property to the original owners, he returned the land to the Seyfo Center in a legal process that was concluded in December 2008. Details of this honorable act will be made public in April 2009 during a press conference in Sweden; yet Boti expressed earlier this year in a statement that “When I found out that the properties I and my brothers inherited from our father wasn’t our own, but properties taken from the murdered Assyrians in 1915, I felt an indescribable feeling of guilt and shame. I’ve been thinking long and hard before I have come to this decision. I tried to put myself in their position. I have personally apologized to every Assyrian and Armenian I’ve met. But this does not get rid of the crime our ancestors committed. Even if I am personally not responsible for what happened in 1915, I felt as I had to do more than just to apologize. Finally, I came to the decision to give back all properties that I inherited from my forefathers to Seyfo Center, who struggles for a confession of the Seyfo Genocide in 1915.”<sup>10</sup> In light of the fact that issues of justice and reparation are excluded and treated as anachronistic in the dominant Armenian-Turkish dialogue, this act by Berzan Boti not only stands out as an honorable individual act, but shows what an apology can or should entail.

**C**ertainly, these brief examples of critical interventions by Kurdish intellectuals are not representative of all Kurds, nor do they stand for a pressing urge in the Kurdish community to engage with the Armenian Genocide. These are rare but very important examples that deserve attention in the current debates on reconciliation. In stark contrast to the attempt of “reconciliation *instead of recognition*” in Turkish politics, those Kurdish intellectuals and activists who call for reconciliation take the demands and sensitivities and voices of the genocide survivors as their starting point for action, and not the sensitivities of the Turkish state. This gives hope for an alternative dialogue and reconciliation process that is grounded in justice and acknowledgment.

Let me conclude with a political opportunity that may open a new page in Armenian-Kurdish relations and foster a sincere dialogue. News reports in early March 2009 suggested that the Armenian-Turkish border that was closed upon Turkey’s initiative in 1993 may be reopened in April of this year. While this has not been officially confirmed, the possibility of reopening the border gained a different dimension with the recent regional elections on March 29, in which the Pro-Kurdish Party DTP firmly established itself as the key regional party in the Kurdish-populated areas in southeast Turkey, and took over the municipality of Iğdir that had been governed by the ultra-nationalist party MHP for the past decade. Iğdir is the province that borders Armenia, with Yerevan only 40 kilometers away from the province capital, where the population consists of mainly Kurds and Azeris. The political atmosphere there until recently had been extremely nationalistic and

hostile toward its Armenian neighbor, which is sadly symbolized in the 45 meter-high Iğdir “Genocide Memorial”—the highest monument in Turkey—that was opened in the attendance of then-president Süleyman Demirel, chief of staff Kivrikoglu, and other high-ranking officials in 1999, with its stated aim to commemorate the Armenian massacres against the Turks in Iğdir. The monument replicates five large swords, with their ends meeting at the top and forming the star of the Turkish national flag when seen from above. The sharp edges of the swords are turned outwards, to symbolize the readiness against any intrusions from the outside. It is an aggressive, nationalistic, and outright hostile monument that is strategically located on the road from Iğdir to the Armenian border. In light of this political atmosphere, it will certainly not be easy for the new mayor Mehmet Nuri Gunes of the DTP to make a new beginning in the region. However, irrespective of whether or not the border reopens, the DTP’s victory in Iğdir is a positive and hopeful development for better neighbor relations. It is time to replace the disgraceful monument with peaceful visions for the future. □

#### ENDNOTES

1. See Armenian Weekly Special Insert “Commemorating Genocide,” April 26, 2008.
2. See [www.ozurdiliyoruz.com](http://www.ozurdiliyoruz.com). For a critique of the campaign, see articles by Ayşe Hur and Marc Mamigonian in this issue.
3. This argument is further developed by Bilgin Ayata and Deniz Yukseker in “Inkar Siyasetinden ‘Idare’ Politikasına: Kurtlerin Zorunlu Goc u,” in *Birikimdergisi*, vol. 213, January 2007, pp. 42–60 [from the Politics of Denial to the Policy of Regulation: The Forced Displacement of Kurds] and Bilgin Ayata and, Deniz Yukseker, “A Belated Awakening: National and International Responses to the Internal Displacement of Kurds in Turkey,” in *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 32, fall 2005, pp. 5–42.
4. In the case of the massive internal displacement of the Kurds in the 1990’s, the Turkish government gave in to international pressure and shifted its policy from denial to regulation by engaging in an international dialogue on the issue in order to reach EU-candidacy status. Up until 2002, state representatives denied the very existence of mass-scale displacement efforts and merely conceded that less than 400,000 were forcibly moved for security reasons, whereas in reality over 1.2 million Kurdish civilians lost their homes and had to flee. In the course of Turkey’s efforts to achieve EU-candidacy status, the government launched several policy measures, including a compensation law that retrospectively enabled legal remedies for the displaced. Yet, remarkably to this day, there has been no official acknowledgement or apology regarding the depopulation of the rural areas in the region. Instead, acknowledgement and accountability were cleverly bypassed with regulatory measures of unfulfilled promises of resettlement policies and some payments to a fraction of the displaced population. Since then, international pressure on the government on the issue of internal displacement has subsided considerably, while the actual living conditions of the displaced and dispossessed Kurds has hardly changed (for references, see endnote 3).
5. See [www.nasname.com/tr/2464.html](http://www.nasname.com/tr/2464.html).
6. *ibid*, my translations.
7. See [www.kurdistan-post.com/Sections-artid-84.html](http://www.kurdistan-post.com/Sections-artid-84.html).
8. Recep Marasli: *Ermeni Ulusal Demokratik Hareketi ve 1915 Soykirimini*, Peri Yayinlari, 2008.
9. My interview with Marasli, March 2009.
10. See [www.assyriatimes.com/engine/modules/news/article.php?storyid=3355](http://www.assyriatimes.com/engine/modules/news/article.php?storyid=3355).



1



2



**Armenian Memories from Hancepek, Diyarbekir**  
 Photographs by Mujgan Arpat

1. St. Giragos Church in Hancepek, Diyarbekir.
2. Details from doors of Armenian houses in Hancepek, Diyarbekir.
3. The last Armenians in Diyarbekir: sisters Bayzer and Victoria Teyze, sisters.
4. St. Giragos Church seen from a window.
5. Roman Catholic Armenian church.
6. Armenian graves destroyed by gold hunters in Diyarbekir.
7. A Kurdish woman in an old Armenian house.
8. Sarkis Amca with wife Bayzer Teyze (middle) and Victoria Teyze.



4



3





# Family Matters

## Local Elites and the Structures of Genocide

By Ugur Umit Ungor

**O**n May 23, 1915, the Ottoman Interior Minister, Mehmed Talaat Pasha, decreed the integral deportation of all Armenians to the Syrian desert. Two days later in the remote province of Diyarbekir, the governor, Dr. Mehmed Reshid, organized the destruction of the Armenian elite by ordering the execution of 807 notables. The victims were handcuffed, sailed down the Tigris to a gorge, moored, stripped of their assets and clothes, and murdered with daggers and axes. On May 30, the process was repeated with 674 Diyarbekir Armenians. The destruction of the elite was followed by that of the general Armenian population, which in the summer of 1915 developed into perhaps the most ruthless genocidal process of all the Ottoman provinces.<sup>1</sup>

This qualitative characterization of the genocide in Diyarbekir can be complemented with a quantitative component. The recent publication of Talaat Pasha's *Black Book* has reignited the debate on the quantitative aspects of the deportation and destruction process, and has shed light on this question.<sup>2</sup> The book is based on Talaat's handwritten notebook that was kept by his widow and

given to the Turkish journalist, Murat Bardakci, in 1982, and charts the statistics of the deportations per province.<sup>3</sup> It answers some of the most fundamental questions about the Armenian Genocide, but also conjures other pertinent questions. For example, the statistics clearly demonstrate what historians have been suggesting for some time now—that the overall destruction process manifests a discrepancy between the western and eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire; the death rates in the eastern provinces are higher than that of the western provinces. For example, whereas the deportation and destruction of Armenians in Diyarbekir was nearly total (97 percent), in Konya province this proportion was 61 percent. How can this difference be accounted for? Why was the Armenian Genocide so intense in Diyarbekir?

This article will discuss some of the social processes and power structures that may have shaped this divergence in the destruction process. It will focus on how the local Young Turk elite in Diyarbekir managed their power bases, and suggest how this may have affected the course of the genocide in that province. The emphasis will be placed on interethnic relations in Diyarbekir on the eve of World War I.

*This page is sponsored by Robert Kaprelian*



## LOCAL YOUNG TURKS IN DIYARBEKIR PROVINCE

Deeply embedded within the social structure of Diyarbekir were overlapping and competing networks of rich, influential families of Muslim notables who had historically played the role of local power wielders in the city. These were, for example, the Cizrelizade and Ekinci families, who lived near the square. The very powerful Pirinccizade dynasty lived near the Great Mosque and the Ocak family near the Melik Ahmed Mosque, whereas the Cizrelizade lived in a large mansion next to the Iskender Pasha Mosque. Their neighbors were the powerful Ekinci family on one side, and the Iskender Pasha family on the other. Several important Kurdish dynasties such as the Zazazade and Cemilpasazade, as well as major chieftains from Hazro, Kulp, and Lice, had houses in the Ali Pasha neighborhood. They often commuted between their region of origin and the city. The Cemilpasazade were in particular important as pioneers of Kurdish nationalism.<sup>4</sup> To various degrees, all these local elites were connected to each other through multiple familial ties: the Cizrelizade were in-laws of the Yasinzade, the Muftuzade were related to and partly overlapped with the Direkcizade, several women of the Zazazade had married into the Gevranizade family, the Cemilpasazade were relatives-in-law of the Azizoglu, and the powerful Pirinccizade dynasty was connected to most of these families through marital ties.<sup>5</sup>

The ebb and flow of Diyarbekir city's politics was often decisive for provincial politics as well. The competition between these families could rise to a boiling point as they engaged in fierce competition over access to local state resources. This often resulted in forms of corruption and nepotism, witnessed by the British traveler David Fraser, who argued in 1909 that in Diyarbekir "misgovernment is at its height, and within its walls there is neither justice for the righteous nor protection for the weak."<sup>6</sup> Competition within the urban landed notable class coupled with a relatively weak central state authority produced these conditions.

Even in Diyarbekir, far away from the direct heat of the Balkan troubles, tensions between Muslims and Christians materialized. In the city, national discussions on identity and ideas on population politics had already fuelled competition and conflict between the ethnically organized political factions. Well before the war, Muftuzade Seref Ulug had proposed declaring an economic boycott against the "treacherous Armenians" in order to strengthen Muslim economic power.<sup>7</sup> The Armenians of Diyarbekir, in turn, were generally anti-Russian and many adhered to the Dashnaksutium Party, which desired Armenian autonomy. Concretely, its program aimed at more freedom and more decentralization in the Ottoman administration of the eastern provinces, the introduction of Armenian as an educational and official language, and an end to injustice, usurpation, and expropriation committed mostly by certain Kurdish tribes



A street in Diyarbekir, 1925. Source: Republican Archives, Ankara.

against (Armenian) peasants.<sup>8</sup> Kurdish nationalism, though not as organized and established as its Armenian counterpart, also existed in the province. On Sept. 19, 1908, Kurdish nationalists founded the Diyarbekir office of the Kurdish Assistance and Progress Society in the city.<sup>9</sup> According to its statutes, it aimed to observe the constitution, pursue

the notion of Ottomanism, end tribal warfare, and maintain "harmony and good relations between their compatriots the Armenians, Nestorians, and other Ottoman subjects."<sup>10</sup>

The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) had not remained idle in Diyarbekir province either. The first CUP office in Diyarbekir was opened on July 23, 1908 by Ziya Gokalp, who after all was a native of the region, and was also its representative in the party's Central Committee.<sup>11</sup> Gokalp began publishing the newspaper *Peyman*, which adopted a relatively modest tone and emphasized coexistence among the various Ottoman subjects.<sup>12</sup> But after the catastrophic defeats of the Balkan wars, the atmosphere changed and interethnic relations became polarized. The CUP dictatorship exerted its influence in this province through a network of mainly urban Kurdish members. The most influential CUP members in Diyarbekir were those related to the wealthy and powerful Pirinccizade dynasty, who owned large estates in the province, including the rice fields west of Diyarbekir city. Reportedly, the Pirinccizade dynasty owned 30 vil-lages in the vicinity of Diyarbekir city.<sup>13</sup>

One of their kinsmen was deputy Aziz Feyzi (1879–1933), the son of Pirinccizade Arif, who had adhered to the Kurdish Assistance and Progress Society. According to a German report, Feyzi had undertaken a study trip to Germany in 1911.<sup>14</sup> On behalf of many other Diyarbekir notables, he vehemently protested in the Ottoman



**Pirinccizade Aziz Feyzi  
(1879–1933).**

Source: Sevket Beysanoglu, *Anıtları ve Kitabeleri ile Diyarbakir Tarihi* (Diyarbakir: Diyarbakir Buyuksehir Belediyesi Kultur ve Sanat Yayinlari, 1996).

parliament against the proposed government plan of expropriating the powerful landowners, and in time Feyzi became a Young Turk hardliner. He had held fierce and hostile dis-

cussions with the Armenian member of parliament, Vartkes Serengulian (1871–1915), in which he accused Vartkes of Armenian separatist designs.<sup>15</sup> He became more and more fanatic in his anti-Armenian sentiments, and reportedly had Ohannes Kazazian, a Catholic Armenian from Mardin and his political rival in the elections, assassinated in 1913.<sup>16</sup> Given his reputation, Feyzi's assignment to Diyarbekir caused unrest and anxiety among Armenian politicians there.<sup>17</sup> Other CUP sympathizers in Diyarbekir were Pirinccizade Sidki (Taranci), Yasinzade Sevki (Ekinci), his brother Yasinzade Yahya (Ekinci), Muftuzade Seref (Ulug), and less prominent others.<sup>18</sup>

## POLARIZATION OF INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS, 1913–14

The loss of the Balkans in 1913 reverberated throughout Ottoman society, including distant Diyarbekir. As if that had not been traumatic enough, vague talks of and slow but deliberate steps towards a reform plan to “solve” the Armenian Question, by which European “inspectors” would be appointed to ensure more Armenian and Kurdish autonomy, triggered even more concern and fear among Muslims, including those in Diyarbekir. Right after the signing of the London Treaty, Diyarbekir’s governor sent a report to the government that talk of a reform plan was causing turmoil and social unrest among Diyarbekir’s ethnic groups. According to the governor, rumors of reform were “causing much excitement and alarm among the Islamic population.” Speculative reports in newspapers about the alleged endorsement and possible implementation of a reform plan were “offending the sentiments and minds of Muslims and were lately giving rise to tumult.” The governor argued that the Muslim middle class in Diyarbekir had faith in the government, but could not remain “indifferent to such a question affecting the life and and future of our homeland (*istikbal-i memleketimiz*).” The Muslims, he concluded in his report, would reject such a reform plan and he “began expressing the possibility that terrible consequences (*fena neticeler*) could emerge from it in the future.”<sup>19</sup>

The final reform plan envisaged the formation of two provinces from six vilayets (Erzurum, Van, Bitlis, Diyarbekir, Mamuret-ul Aziz, and Sivas), and assigned two European inspectors to oversee Armenian affairs. The reform package was signed into law in February 1914. In the spring of 1914, the backlash by Muslims eventuated as expected by the governor. In another report, he mentioned clashes and riots between Muslims and Christians in the bazaar and inner city of Diyarbekir. The Muslims expressed their hatred of Armenians by painting anti-Christian graffiti on walls and insulting Christian symbols such as crucifixes with “repulsive profanity.” The governor concluded that the situation in Diyarbekir was firmly “unfavorable for Christians” and that Christian communities were “in complete despair.”<sup>20</sup> The ones who capitalized on this climate of anti-Armenian hatred were local CUP powerholders. In the summer of 1914, as the European crisis was deepening, the Ottoman civil inspector, Mihran Boyadjian, was travelling to Diyarbekir and encountered the Young Turk political hardliner Pirincizade Aziz Feyzi on the way. Feyzi quite openly threatened the Armenians in a bitter condemnation:

On the road, we often spoke about politics in the car. Feyzi Bey did not fail to slip in, in his conversations, several threats against my coreligionists. ‘The Armenians,’ he repeated, with bitterness, ‘have misbehaved towards us in our days of distress during the Balkan Wars. Patriarch Zaven, the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin and Nubar have sought to appeal to foreign intervention; that will cost you dearly my friend, your future is in danger.’<sup>21</sup>

Finally, Aziz Feyzi warned: “You will see now, what it means to demand reforms.”<sup>22</sup> The radicalization of political elites heralded a general deep crisis of interethnic relations in Diyarbekir, which had now reached the threshold between hatred and violence. That threshold was crossed when in August 1914, the grain market of Diyarbekir became the scene of mass plunder as many Muslim merchants joined in seizing the opportunity to loot the stores of Christians and set fire to their shops. It soon became known that the Young Turk loyalist police chief, Memduh Bey, had “allowed Kurds and Muslims to pillage Armenian stores.”<sup>23</sup> According to Mihran Boyadjian, Memduh Bey had started the fire himself to create opportunities for pillage.<sup>24</sup> Not only was the involvement widespread, but the inaction by local authorities implied tacit approval of the pogrom.

The war and ensuing violence in the Balkans triggered a severe radicalization in Young Turk thinking and politics. Their view that the catastrophe of the Balkans should never be allowed to happen in the remaining territories of the Ottoman Empire, especially the eastern provinces, would give birth to unprecedented forms of population politics. One major outcome of these processes was a deep fear, or perhaps a complex, of loss. The fear of losing territory was a persistent phobia of both late Ottoman and Turkish political culture. Some Ottomans foresaw the looming cataclysm. In his 1913 book on the Balkan wars, Aram Andonian wrote with considerable concern that “the principle of nationality” had spelled disaster in the Balkans and was utterly untenable in the eastern provinces, where most Armenians lived.<sup>25</sup> Andonian had planned to write a second volume to his book. He was never able to do so.

## DISCUSSION: LOCAL ELITES AND GENOCIDE

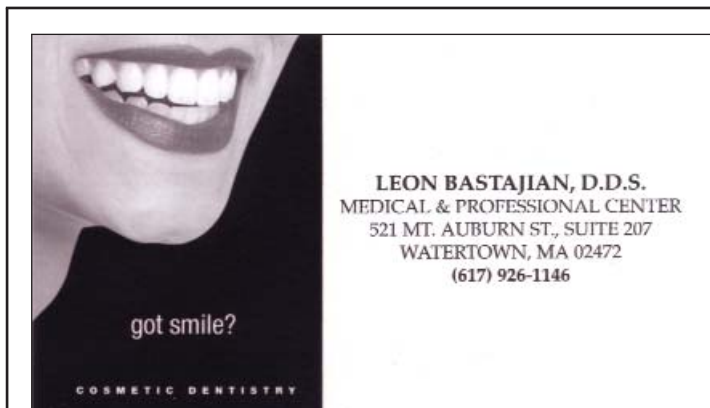
Scholars of genocide have argued that local dynamics can influence the course and intensity of genocidal processes. Local political or social elites can expedite and intensify, or delay and resist, genocidal destruction steered from above.<sup>26</sup> Political elites can recruit local powerholders for their ends, and conversely local powerholders can manipulate political elites to further their own interests. The potential of powerful local families to mobilize dozens or in some cases hundreds of potential killers can contribute to them being favored by the center. Mass murder can develop from this mutual dependence and tacit pact: Local elites depend on the center to secure a power base, and the center depends on local elites to carry out genocide. This dynamic can give rise to a mobilization process in which men participate in mass killing in exchange for economic and political benefits granted by the regime. Thus, ethnic hatred may significantly contribute but not necessarily satisfactorily explain the mobilization of perpetrators. Rather, maintaining and increasing power for local actors can shape patterns of recruitment for and participation in genocide.

The Ottoman province of Diyarbekir served as a platform for exemplifying how local dynamics shaped the Armenian Genocide at

the provincial level as a product of competition between families. The competition between urban elites was a major factor that contributed to the intensity of the violence in Diyarbekir. Before the war, the main families in the city were engaged in a fierce struggle for political and economic power. Such a structural factor could easily be manipulated by the CUP dictatorship for its own ends as collaboration would be rewarded. The war put even more pressure on this field of competition as resources became scarcer and passivity posed a threat to one's livelihood. A leading family such as the Pirinccizade emerged victorious from this competition by volunteering in the Special Organization militias, by being more ruthless in their competitive efforts, and by actively collaborating with the campaign the CUP regime deemed most salient: the murder of their Armenian neighbors. The genocide then emerged as an opportunity for perpetrators to solidify kin ties. When, during the genocide, a man like Aziz Feyzi proved to be a most ruthless tormentor of Armenians, it is likely that in his eyes he was only pursuing the interests of his family amidst the difficult conditions of war. From this subjective perspective, the genocide evolved not as a clear evil but rather as the shadow of virtue. After all, family matters. □

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# ARF-CUP Relations Under Ottoman Constitutional Rule

By Dikran Kaligian

**T**he Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) and the Hnchak Party entered into a dialogue with Turkish opposition groups in Paris in 1900 and took part in the First Congress of Ottoman Opposition Forces in 1902. At the end of 1907, the Second Congress of Ottoman Opposition Forces resolved to overthrow the Sultan and to restore the Ottoman constitution using much more radical means, including refusal to pay taxes, propaganda, and armed resistance, if necessary.

Thus, the successful Constitutional Revolution of 1908, initiated by a rebellion of the Turkish army in Macedonia, was greeted with jubilation by all opposition parties and much of the population of the empire.

The ARF published and distributed a proclamation that celebrated the success of the revolution and looked forward to freedom, equality, and justice under the constitutional regime. Accordingly, the party published a program that recognized the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. The program called for a federal form of government with a decentralized administration that would provide the widest degree of local autonomy.

The CUP (Committee of Union and Progress or Ittihad) and the ARF became key players in Ottoman constitutional politics.

For the ARF to influence government policies to improve conditions for the Armenians, it would have to work closely with the CUP. Communication between the parties was immediately hampered, however, by the fact that neither was headquartered in the imperial capital, Constantinople.

At the end of 1908, elections were held throughout the empire and a multi-ethnic parliament was seated. Of the 11 Armenians elected, 4 were ARF members representing the eastern provinces. The restoration of the constitution allowed the Armenian parties to openly campaign in the elections and start publishing newspapers within the empire.

In this atmosphere of increasing liberties, an armed insurrection broke out on April 12, 1909 in Constantinople and succeeded in driving the CUP out of the city. Liberal opponents of the CUP as well as reactionaries and supporters of Sultan Abdul Hamid supported the coup. However, within two weeks, troops under Mahmut Sevket Pasha had suppressed the revolt. Taking advantage of the political unrest, anti-Armenian massacres broke out in the city of Adana and the towns and villages of Adana province. In all, some 25,000 Armenians perished in the two rounds of massacres.

The Adana massacres created the first major test for ARF-CUP relations. The ARF had to decide, in the face of Armenian public opinion, whether to continue its cooperation with the CUP. This was dependent, on

the one hand, on an evaluation of the degree of culpability of the CUP. On the other hand, the ARF had to weigh the substantial potential benefits to the Armenian community and all Ottoman citizens if the CUP instituted a true constitutional regime.

## WEIGHING THE OPTIONS

**T**he ARF found itself in a serious dilemma. The party was torn between its solidarity with the progressive elements of the CUP and its revulsion at the murderous acts of its chauvinist elements. The Western Bureau desired to help the progressive elements consolidate power within the party and the empire. Yet should the progressives lose the upper hand, the consequences for the Armenians would be deadly. The ARF self-defense units had been disbanded, which would leave the population in the eastern provinces and Cilicia at the mercy of Kurdish tribes or Turkish mobs.

After weighing all these considerations, the Western Bureau decided to make a final attempt at continued cooperation with the CUP. The attempt would be conditional on the government taking action on a number of critical items arising from the massacres.

The CUP took great pains to reassure the ARF of their sincerity and support of reforms. They met in Salonika to draw up an accord that committed the two parties to preserve the empire, provide an increased

# The unrest in the interior had brought home to the CUP the need to have the backing of a trustworthy organization like the ARF.

devolution of power to the provinces, and to defend the constitution against reactionary movements.

The agreement to continue cooperation was a serious political gamble by the ARF. The credibility that the ARF had gained through years of self-defense actions and political education and organizing activities would be lost if the CUP did not deliver on its promises. But such was the belief of the ARF leadership in the benefits of constitutionalism that they were willing to give it one more try.

There would no longer be an endless supply of patience or goodwill, however. There was a heightened level of distrust by the party ranks, and power struggles within the CUP would have to be monitored closely to determine which group held the upper hand. The CUP's room to maneuver was thus seriously circumscribed. If the CUP were unable to deliver promptly on its promises, due to the serious institutional and political obstacles, the ARF would be unable to give much slack before breaking off relations.

## ARF-CUP RELATIONS

For the first 18 months after the Constitutional Revolution, the Western Bureau's relations with the CUP were irregular due to internal problems within the CUP. The relationship and communications started to become more regular at the beginning of 1910 when a "Joint Body" was formed. It was composed of three ARF members and three CUP members.

A critical component of the relations between the parties was correcting the many false reports and rumors that were circulating. In order to foster support of the constitution and constitutional regime, it was also important to send fieldworkers into the provinces to extol the virtues of a constitutional regime and to counsel patience for improvements. From the

beginning, the ARF stressed the need for joint ARF-CUP delegations, as they would demonstrate to Turks and Armenians that the constitution would not benefit any one ethnic group to the exclusion of others.

The Western Bureau felt obliged to take action as for more than a year their numerous protests and demands had remained unanswered and the condition of the provinces had gradually worsened. On March 20, 1910, they sent Harutiun Shahrigian and Arshag Vramian to Salonika with official documents to meet with the CUP Central Committee members. The most important subjects were the lands issue, the security of the Armenians, and the educational issue. Their reception was very cordial. The Central Committee tried in every way to convince the Bureau representatives that the CUP's policy had not changed toward the ARF. They emphasized that they knew that the Armenians had stood by the constitution and loyally supported it. The Bureau deemed the results of the Salonika meeting to have been satisfactory.

In July, the Western Bureau reported that their relationship with the CUP had become closer and friendlier. The unrest in the interior had brought home to the CUP the need to have the backing of a trustworthy organization like the ARF. Also, the appointment of Talaat and Cavid Beys to the cabinet created a steadier channel for communication and improved relations between the parties.

Yet, in reporting on two years of relations with the CUP, the Western Bureau stated that despite its best efforts, the Joint Body meetings did not convene regularly; sometimes months would pass without a meeting. From its formation until mid-1911, only 16 meetings were held. Among the reasons cited were the frequent crises within the CUP or in their ministries, their inexperience and inefficiency, and their discomfort at having to admit their inability to accomplish the objectives agreed upon with the ARF. Outside of

the formal meetings, however, there were a number of encounters with individual ministers or CUP leaders that were productive.

## THE DETERIORATION OF RELATIONS WITH THE CUP

The ARF-CUP joint body met in February 1911. They had a heated discussion regarding events and conditions in the provinces. The CUP representatives had to admit that their party was not a strong presence in the interior.

The Western Bureau later had a joint meeting with the Armenian parliamentary deputies. They concluded that: the government had not shown good will towards the Armenians, protests had been growing stronger in the provinces, local government employees were still biased against Armenians, and the government had not made any strong and serious effort to change these conditions. On this basis, the meeting decided to again send Vramian and Shahrigian to Salonika to present the lands, security, and educational problems faced by the Armenians to the CUP and to demand satisfaction. The Bureau stated that they would determine their position towards the CUP based on its response to the ARF demands.

Vramian and Shahrigian met with the CUP Central Committee and reported that they had received satisfactory responses to their demands. The lands issue was the top ARF priority and the CUP agreed that it would be resolved administratively and not sent to parliament. On security issues, they agreed to try to send trouble-making *beys* out of the country to prevent the nomads from doing further damage.

The joint body met in Constantinople in April. The Bureau decided to postpone other issues and concentrate only on the lands and security issues at the meeting. At the meeting, the CUP agreed to take steps to control persecution, although it would have to be done

over time. To do this, it was agreed to have the government arm all villages, Armenian and Kurdish. This would allow the villagers to defend themselves against nomadic Kurds.

On April 24, the Western Bureau met with Talaat, Haji Adil, and Midhat Beys. They discussed the promises made at the Salonika meeting. The CUP representatives explained that they were in a weak position and would be unable to push for any reforms for the present. They proposed to have their deputies introduce the issues in parliament and they had already passed on copies of the accord articles to the deputies.

In June, it was noted that the Armenian deputies would soon be presenting a written application detailing their specific demands to the Interior Ministry and that the Western Bureau would present the same to the CUP. The response to these demands would help determine the position of the Bureau towards the government until the ARF World Congress.

These were the circumstances when the ARF Sixth World Congress convened in Constantinople in the summer of 1911. The main agenda item was the question of cooperation with the CUP. Despite ratifying the past actions concerning cooperation, the meeting was extremely critical of the CUP's duplicity and failure to live up to its promises. After evaluating the prospects and dangers of continued cooperation, the World Congress passed a resolution that stated: "...in the three years of constitutional rule the government's policies not only haven't created an improved life...but they have generally given way to creating distrust between peoples and the denial of national rights. The CUP, rather than progressively eliminating the land privileges of the feudal classes left over from the Middle Ages, has encouraged those elements... The CUP has gradually withdrawn from constitutional and democratic principles. The CUP has failed to take steps to combat and cleanse itself of right-wing elements..." The resolution directed the Western Bureau to send the CUP a description of the anarchy in the Armenian provinces and an ultimatum that if action wasn't taken by a set deadline, they would end cooperation between the parties.

### THE 1912 ELECTIONS AND THE END OF COOPERATION WITH THE CUP

The lack of progress in land reform and improved conditions for Armenians, and the ascendancy of reactionary elements within and without the CUP, had brought ARF-CUP cooperation almost to the breaking point. Early 1912 would bring an immediate test of this cooperation in the form of parliamentary elections. In the run up to the elections, the CUP leadership felt it had to strengthen the cabinet, and its own position in it. Therefore three CUP members were added to the cabinet: Haji Adil as Interior Minister, Talaat as Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, and Cavid as Minister of Public Works.

The agreement between the CUP and Western Bureau was that Armenian candidates would be put forward in all locations where the Armenian population comprised a significant percentage. In planning for an Armenian bloc in parliament, the Eastern Bureau was counting not only those seats conceded to them by the CUP, but also those Armenians who had joined the CUP.

Negotiations continued with the CUP agreeing upon 13 Armenian deputies, to that point, and which districts they would be elected from. Negotiations continued regarding the other 10 seats. However, they found that the local CUP was trying to renege on its promises of Armenian representation for a number of locations including Erzincan, Diyarbekir, Kharpert, and Marash.

The Western Bureau's relations with the CUP deteriorated greatly as the electoral machinations continued. The Bureau had concentrated on reaching an agreement on improvements in conditions for Armenians before they began negotiations specifically on parliamentary representation, as the former was such an urgent issue. The CUP did not deal honestly with the ARF, particularly when they improperly decreased the number of Armenian deputies to be elected. Even more important to the ARF, they complied with almost none of the demands contained in the accord they had signed with the ARF two and a half months before the elections.

As a result, the Bureau presented an ultimatum to the CUP that provided a final chance to implement the accord conditions including: forming a committee to oversee accord implementation, creating Armenian and Kurdish village guards in Van and Bitlis provinces, ensuring the right of return with a government subsidy for Armenian refugees, recruiting 200 Armenian soldiers for each Armenian province to serve as gendarmes, and appropriating promised government funds for Armenian schools.

If the CUP failed to order these administrative changes within 15 days, the ARF would end cooperation, consistent with the decision of the Sixth World Congress. The Eastern Bureau disagreed with the Western Bureau's condemnations of the CUP. They called for the Bureau to keep perspective on the fact that the CUP signing of the preliminary agreement before the election did not mean that all its points would be immediately executed.

The Eastern Bureau argued that even though the World Congress had authorized the Western Bureau to break relations, it was premature to do so. There had been changes in conditions and the elections and other political complexities had not been anticipated by the congress. They felt that the ARF should wait a little longer for the CUP to regroup its strength and thus have a chance to execute the ARF demands.

On July 15, 1912, Said Pasha's cabinet won a vote of confidence; yet two days later, it fell. The Western Bureau saw that they were in a no-win situation. In spite of the CUP's deceptions, manipulations, false promises, and delays in reforms, they were still the only party that the ARF could negotiate with. The Bureau saw the CUP as a lesser evil when compared to their opponents, and for that reason ended its press criticism of them. It was important to jolt them into awareness but a complete disintegration of interrelations would be bad for the Armenians.

During the second week of August, the bureaus announced in "Azadamard" in Constantinople and in "Haratch" in Erzerum that they had broken off relations with the CUP. Further they stated that they would maintain a position of neutrality during the conflict between the Turkish parties in the parliament.

The outbreak of the First Balkan War and the party's break with the CUP increased the danger to the Armenian population. Thus, Rosdom and Mourad [of Sepastia] went to Constantinople to meet with Simon Zavarian, the only agenda item of their meeting being how to arm themselves and protect the people. In the course of the meeting, they determined that to reestablish the self-defense structure was going to require years, money, resources, and leadership, none of which was currently available.

During 1913, the ARF and the Patriarchate worked together to gain the support of the European powers for an effective reform plan for the Armenian provinces. With German support, the Ottomans succeeded in delaying the appointment of two European inspectors-general until the eve of World War I.

### THE ARF EIGHTH WORLD CONGRESS AND THE APPROACH OF WAR

The ARF World Congress was held in Erzerum in August 1914. A committee of nine was formed to stay and while they were meeting, Dr. Behaeddin

Shakir and Naji Bey arrived as representatives of the CUP and the government. They met for three days and asked what the ARF stance would be if Russia invaded the Ottoman Empire. The ARF representatives responded that the party would obviously defend the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire.

After lengthy discussions, the CUP representatives disclosed that the government had decided to take advantage of what they hoped would be the German defeat of France and Russia to take care of their own unfinished business to recover lost lands. Further, should the Russians be completely defeated, they would advance to the Caucasus to either conquer or incite a revolution. The Armenians were a key to success, because they believed that the ARF had the power and ability to persuade the Russian government to remain loyal to the Russian government until a critical juncture at which time they would shift their allegiance to the Turks. The government had no interest in occupying the Caucasus, but merely wanted to pull it out of Russia's orbit and then give it autonomy.

The ARF representatives responded that Russian Armenians no longer had the enthusiasm for Ottoman constitutional rule they had had from 1908–10. The errors made by the government and CUP in regards to Ottoman Armenians would give Russian Armenians no confidence that support for the Ottoman government would improve conditions for their compatriots across the border.

In Constantinople, Talaat expressed his disappointment in the party's stance to ARF parliamentary Armen Garo. The Bureau called a consultative meeting with its key members as well as Krikor Zohrab. The meeting was divided between those who expected a speedy Russian victory over the Ottoman armies and those who feared a lengthy campaign fought largely in Armenian-populated lands. In either case, volunteer units had to be ready to defend the Armenian population if massacres began, while somehow not appearing to be a fifth column and thus providing a pretext for such massacres. This was the tightrope the ARF had to walk as the guns of war approached. □



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# Haigazian University

*and the*

## Armenian Genocide

When one explores the foundations on which Haigazian University was established in Beirut in 1955, a number of momentous names and conditions surface, namely, the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA), the Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East (UAECNE), Rev. Dr. Armenag Haigazian, Mr. Stephen Philibosian, Mr. and Mrs. Steven and Mary Mehagian, and Elizabeth and Mary Webb. In there somewhere, a lucid and noteworthy thread imposes itself: the enduring shadow of the Armenian Genocide and the ensuing will of rebirth.

Haigazian College (as it was known at the time of its foundation) was born through the partnership of a local Armenian Middle Eastern church and an American Armenian association, both of which had manifested themselves as instruments of the rebirth of the Armenian people, spiritually, socially, and physically.

Indeed, the UAECNE was organized in continuation, in memory, and in resurrection of the 137 or so Armenian Evangelical Church congregations in various parts of the Armenian homeland. These churches, in line with the congregational system of governance, had administratively grouped themselves throughout the subsequent decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in unions of churches, such as the Bithynia Union (Constantinople), the Central Union, the Cilician Union, and the Eastern Union. The UAECNE, billing itself as a direct successor of the Cilicia Union, was formally established in Beirut in 1924 to group the Armenian Evangelical communities that worshiped in close to 30 congregations in Syria, Lebanon, Cyprus, Greece, Egypt, and Persia, most but not all of which were established by the genocide survivors themselves. The UAECNE efficiently gathered the believers for worship, spiritual nourishment, and encouragement. It established schools, youth group movements, orphanages, and social work centers, and

The deportation of education to the institution of rebirth

By Rev. Paul Haidostian



issued a number of religious and educational publications. More than any other ministry, however, its success in organizing an impressive chain of Armenian Evangelical high schools and training programs in Beirut led to the idea of a training college for teachers and ministers, a vision that led to the birth of Haigazian College.

In parallel providential action to that of the UAECNE, the AMAA worked diligently in the United States to bring the higher educational vision of the Middle Eastern Armenian Evangelical community to concrete reality. The AMAA itself was a response to the atrocities of the genocide and the consequences of entire communities being uprooted, destroyed, and deported to an uncertain fate. The AMAA was established in the Armenian Evangelical Church of Worcester, Mass., in 1918 and incorporated in the state of New York in 1920. Its mission was to rebuild what was destroyed in the homeland: ministries, churches, schools, and lives. While the original mission was later expanded, the same missionary direction was maintained, and the spiritual and physical development of the Armenian people worldwide continued to be a focal concern.

What brought the UAECNE and the AMAA together was not only the com-

mon belonging to one church and nation and the consciousness of brokenness in a dark phase of human history, but also the dedication of a number of individuals—people of the church whose hearts and memories linked the east and the west with bonds of sacrifice and service. As a significant outcome, the AMAA took upon itself the enthusiastic benevolence of providing all that was necessary for starting and sustaining the new-born Haigazian.

In the history of the foundation of Haigazian as a college, the names of Stephen Philibosian<sup>1</sup> and Steven Mehagian are both inseparable and treasured. It is true that the UAECNE, under the leadership of Rev. Hovhannes Aharonian, and the AMAA, under



“

Three million  
of our people were  
driven to the dessert to  
perish; many did perish,  
but with God's infinite  
help, we who remained  
have created through  
Christian education an  
oasis for the minds of  
our young people.”

the leadership of Rev. Puzant Kalfayan, were the institutional legs on which the new college was to stand, but it was Philibosian's leadership and unequivocal dedication, and Mehagian's dream and initial donation, that gave birth to Haigazian.

Philibosian was born to dedicated Christian parents in Hadjin, a town north of Adana. He moved to Tarsus when he was only 10 years old and arrived in the U.S. at the age of 17 on May 1, 1909, around the time of the Adana massacres. His childhood dream of going to America was realized, but his equally sincere hope to return home was shattered to pieces with the news of the massacres; thanks to the courageous efforts of the missionaries at St. Paul's College in Tarsus, his parents were saved from those massacres. The following quotation from young Philibosian summarized his personal mission statement: "I want to go to America to make a lot of money and return to the town of Hadjin to start an industry and pay the workers two or three times as much as they are being paid now."<sup>2</sup>

Philibosian succeeded in America and soon enough earned the title of "the dean of oriental rug retailing." In 1932, he made his first trip to the Middle East with his uncle Harry Philibosian, Rev. Deverian, and Mr. G. Gertmenian. With the consent of the Lebanese government, and with funds invested by these Hadjin compatriots, the plan of the construction of Nor Hadjin in Beirut began. Furthermore, they gave food and shelter to the widows, the blind, and the orphaned. Stephen Philibosian's major contributions included the launching of the Child Sponsorship Program at the AMAA, support to the Armenian Sanatorium in Azounieh, Lebanon, the renovation of schools in Lebanon, and the establishment of an endowment fund with the AMAA. All of the above led in 1965 to his decoration by the Lebanese president with the Order of the Cedar. But above all, the founding and support of Haigazian College became his passionate vision, which continues today after his death by the dedication of his family.

Philibosian's long-standing enthusiasm for the education and support of the Armenian communities in the Near East met with Mr. and Mrs. Steven Mehagian's dream in 1954, when the two discussed plans for setting up a college in Beirut, with the AMAA as the organizational context and the UAECNE as the local community framework.

Mehagian,<sup>3</sup> also born in Hadjin, the son of a famous shoe manufacturer, had become a renowned rug and furniture storeowner in Phoenix, Az. He had studied both in the Apostolic Institute of Konia's Jenanyan College as well as St. Paul's College in Tarsus, where he had earned a bachelor's degree in 1914. Soon after, and in a short span of time, he had been jailed, released by bribery, and deported, and moved from Aleppo to Damascus, then Beirut, Egypt, and eventually the University of California at Berkeley. His dream of returning to Hadjin as an educator had been always present, but he received the sad news that would change his plans: His parents and three sisters had been slain back in Hadjin. In 1925, he married Mary

Haigazian, daughter of the president of the college he had attended in Konia.

With the clear conviction that the Armenian people need trained and educated leaders, two choices were very clear and convincing to Mehagian: to start a college, and to call it Haigazian. The choice of the city, however, seems to have been Philibosian's, who had a good knowledge of the region as well as contacts with the AMAA and the UAECNE. The Mehagians crowned their moral commitment with sufficient funds to start the project.

Mehagian tells it himself: "During the spring of 1955, my wife and I took a trip to the Middle East, Greece, and Beirut, and consulted with local leaders about the possibility and realization of such a college. The response was

instantaneous and enthusiastic. Many stated that, and I quote, "This is the answer to our wish and prayers of the past 35 to 40 year."<sup>4</sup>

Speaking in 1960 in Los Angeles at a fundraiser for Haigazian College, Mehagian said: "Forty-four years ago when our people were driven by the Turks to the deserts of Arabia, deprived of all their possessions, they were not in a position to think about education: Their primary struggle was to avert hunger and starvation. Now they have come to the realization of their educational needs."

His hopes were high and not unrealistic: "You may be assured that some future graduates of Haigazian College, in time and in turn, will help to guide the destiny of close to half a million of our people scattered in all the Middle Eastern countries where *hays* [Armenians] will remain as *hays* and not be assimilated."<sup>5</sup>

One also finds a strong sense of Christian calling behind the Mehagians' support of a college project: "Three million of our people were driven to the dessert to perish; many did perish, but with God's infinite help, we who remained have created through the medium of Christian education a fertile oasis for the minds of our young people."<sup>6</sup>

It could not have taken too much time for the Mehagians to decide on the name of the college. Steven Mehagian had studied under Rev. Armenag Haigazian, and Mary Mehagian was Haigazian's daughter. They remembered Haigazian as a father, father-in-law, educator, Christian leader, and martyr. It was more than memory they were looking for; Haigazian College was to resurrect an educational mission and institutional network that had been torn apart. The UAECNE, the AMAA, Philibosian, Mehagian, and others were all too aware of the heritage of colleges and seminaries in Cilicia that were lost to history: the Bebek Seminary in Istanbul, the central Turkey colleges at Aintab and Marash, the Euphrates (or Armenia) College in Harpoot, the Marash Girls' College, the Anatolia College in Marsovan, St. Paul's Institute in Tarsus, the Jenanyan Apostolic Institute in Konia, the International College in Smyrna, the Theological Seminary in Harpoot, and many others.<sup>7</sup>

Armenag Haigazian<sup>8</sup> was a symbol of American higher education among the Armenian and Near Eastern circles. He was a man of many talents, born in Hadjin on Sept. 22, 1870. Having graduated from the Central Turkey College with a bachelor's degree in 1889

and from the Theological Seminary at Marash in 1892, he had joined the faculty of St. Paul's Institute in Tarsus and worked under another famous academician, the Rev. Haroutune Jenanyan. His ambition to go even higher in education took him to the United States, where he studied ancient Near Eastern languages at the Hartford Theological Seminary. He was then able to obtain a scholarship for doctoral study at the Yale Divinity School, which he entered in 1896. Two years later, Haigazian received his Ph.D., after which he spent six months at the University of Toronto, studying music and harmony. Haigazian returned to Turkey at Jenanyan's invitation, joining the faculty of the Apostolic Institute as its dean on April 8, 1899. He became president of the Institute in 1901 and on July 14, 1902 married Matilda Surpouhi Garabedian, the daughter of a prominent Armenian Evangelical minister in Constantinople. Under his leadership, the Apostolic Institute flourished and Haigazian was successful in raising funds in the U.S., where it was incorporated in the state of New York in 1907. It was organized in four departments: a three-year primary department for boys, a four-year program for girls, a four-year academy or preparatory department for boys, and then a five-year collegiate course in what was known as Jenanyan College. At the time of the deportation of the Armenian population from Konia in 1915, Jenanyan was closed down for a while but later reopened.

When the Allied troops left Konia, Haigazian was arrested by the Kemalist forces on May 22, 1921. He was transferred to Harpoot on May 31. He fell sick on the road to exile and reached Harpoot near collapse. Although he was eventually admitted to the mission hospital there, he died on July 7, 1921. It was only on May 26, 1922 that the New York Times reported the death in a news article titled "Professor Haigazian Dies of Typhus at Harpoot: President of American College at Konia was Being Deported into the Interior." The article called him "the most prominent Armenian educator in the Near East," adding that "the disease was contracted while Professor Haigazian was being deported with a group of influential Armenian and Greeks into the interior of the country."

Be it Stephen Philibosian, or Steven Mehagian, or Judge Nazareth Barsoumian (a prominent judge who was born in Aintab, graduated from the Central Turkey College, and became a founding Board member of Haigazian College and a benefactor), or other Armenian Americans, the names were many but the background was similar—the story of suffering was one, the Christian

experience of visionary action was one. The Armenian people needed to be reborn in every sense. However, there was often this additional component: Between the Armenian experience from the genocide and the story of re-establishment was the continued ministry of a number of self-sacrificing American missionaries who sustained the Armenians refugees where they had settled.

Two such names were Elizabeth and Mary Webb, workers of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, originally from Bunker Hill, Ill., who had served the Armenian people as educators and social workers in Adana. These devoted missionaries had witnessed, among other tragedies that befell the Armenian people, the atrocities and massacres of Adana in 1909.<sup>9</sup> Having moved to Beirut alongside the Armenian community, they had established programs for the multi-faceted care of young Armenian girls in the Trad sector of Beirut as well as in Kantari. They had bequeathed a property of theirs, formerly used as their residence and care center for needy Armenian girls, to the American Board, with a wish that proceeds be used for the education of Armenian girls, a cause they had been devoted to their entire life. It is that same property on Mexique Street in Beirut that was purchased, for a subsidized price, by the AMAA, with Mehagian funding, Philibosian supervision, and UAECNE administration. A complete embryonic circle of rebirth saw light.

Haigazian College was born in 1955 and with it came the rebirth of a higher educational heritage. Accordingly, Haigazian University is seen by some as a continuation of the Apostolic Institute's Jenanyan College. For others, it is a torchbearer on behalf of all the colleges and seminaries that were left behind to be consumed by the injustices of history. In all, the Christian experience of being a resurrected people dominates.

In the history of those who helped Haigazian University become a reality—as the only Armenian university in the diaspora today—the lessons have been many: the centrality of education in the Armenian evangelical ethos; the unequivocal commitment of genocide survivors to the preservation of identity and rebirth of all aspects of life; the critical role of the Armenian American community in providing financial and moral resources for their Middle Eastern compatriots to replace loss by rebuilding; the major role played by the Middle Eastern community in the preservation of culture, training of Armenian leadership, and a genuine sense of ownership of the Armenian genocide/post-genocide experience. □

ENDNOTES

- 1 "Armenian/American Outlook," vol. 8, no 1, spring 1972.
- 2 Ibid. 5.
- 3 Nazareth Barsoumian, *Stowaway to Heaven*. Tower Lakes, Ill.: Armenian Information Bureau, 1960.
- 4 Ibid. 200.
- 5 Ibid. 202.
- 6 Ibid. 202.
- 7 Frank Andrews Stone, *Academies for Anatolia: A Study of the Rationale, Program and Impact of the Educational Institutions Sponsored by the American Board in Turkey: 1830–1980*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1984.
- 8 Rev. Hampartoum H. Ashjian, *The Genocide of Adana and Memories of Konia* (In Armenian, *Adanayi Yegherne yev Koniayi Housher*). New York: Gochnag Dbaran, 1950, pp. 238–240.
- 9 Elizabeth Webbs' recollection of the massacres ("Woman Describes Riot at Adana") was reported in the New York Times on May 3, 1909.



# Ginj/Genj *and* Jabaghchour/Chapakchour

By George Aghjayan \*

**I**n the years since the end of the Armenian presence in their western Armenian homeland, the Turkish government has changed the names of many of the towns and villages once inhabited by Armenians. The systematic and purposeful changing of non-Turkish names to Turkish ones can be seen as a continuation of the Armenian Genocide. Not only have the name transformations removed the last bit of evidence of the Armenian presence, but also it has served to rupture the historical and emotional ties Armenians have to the land of their ancestors.

I have a great interest in reconnecting Armenians to that lost knowledge by identifying the villages inhabited by Armenians prior to the genocide. In the past, I have done so for the districts of Palu, Kughi and Kochhisar, as well as assisting in individual requests and in particular the routes taken on the death marches. The effort is difficult and time consuming, requiring the research of varied sources.

Sometimes it is impossible to identify villages that were obliterated during the genocide and never rebuilt. In addition, the information on some areas is sparse and often times conflicting. The districts of Ginj and Jabaghchour are prime examples of areas where confusion has existed.

Centered between Garin, Kharpert, Mush, and Dikranagerd, the Armenian presence in Ginj and Jabaghchour would seem obvious. Yet very little is known about the Armenians who lived in this fertile yet ultimately dangerous region.

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, Ginj and Jabaghchour were attached to multiple and varied provinces. It is informative to track the available data over time. Before the separation of the Diyarbekir province, Ginj was attached to the kaza (county) of Lije, while Jabaghchour was attached to the kaza of Palu. The 1871–2 Diyarbekir provincial yearbook states there were 234 non-Muslim males and 1394 Muslim males in 659 households in the 29 villages (other yearbooks indicate 32 villages) of the Ginj nahiye (sub-district). Armenians were the only non-Muslims living

in the district. The nahiye of Jabaghchour is left blank in the same yearbook but 90 villages are stated to exist. I believe the lack of data is indicative of the remoteness of the region.

In the 1882–3 Mamuretulaziz provincial yearbook, during the brief time Jabaghchour was attached to that province, 472 Armenian males and 4730 Muslim males were stated to live in 2718 households in 94 villages. Also in the early 1880's, Boghos Natanian

(“Ardosr Hayasdani”) indicates there were 4875 Armenians in 1544 households in 14 villages of Jabaghchour.

Vital Cuinet (“La Turquie d’Asie”) in the early 1890's, when Jabaghchour and Ginj were attached to the Bitlis province, states an Armenian population of 7930 in the district of Ginj and 4,335 Armenians in the district of Jabaghchour. Cuinet states the Muslim population as 18,467 in Ginj and 16,465 in Jabaghchour.

Armenian sources detail 25 villages in these districts with an Armenian population prior to the genocide. The 1912–3 census of the Armenian Patriarchate states there were approximately 4300 Armenians in almost 500 households (see Raymond Kevorkian and Paul Paboudjian, *Les Arméniens dans l’Empire Ottoman al la veille du Genocide* and Teotig, *Koghkoto Trkahai Hokevoraganoutiun*). These totals indicate a substantial decline in the Armenian population following the Hamidian massacres.

Ottoman census records also support the massive reduction in the Armenian population of Ginj and Jabaghchour from 1890 to 1914. Ottoman records indicate an increase in the Muslim population of Genj (including the district of Khoulp) from 30,845 in 1890 to 39,263 in 1906 to 51,011 in 1914. While the same records indicate the Armenian population as 5,166 in 1890, 5,952 in 1906 and 5,910 in 1914. Thus, the Ottoman census indicates the Muslim population growing 4.5 times the Armenian population.

\* I wish to thank Rev. Dr. George Leylegian and Armen Aroyan for their kind help, limitless wealth of information and shared passion for our homeland.

These figures are unadjusted for migration (thought to be minimal from this region) and the undercounting of women, children and Armenians, but do give a sense of the stunted growth in the Armenian population. I estimate that over 30 percent of the Armenian population of this region was either wiped out or converted to Islam during the 1890's. In addition, of the 14 villages in Jabaghchour indicated by Natanian (and confirmed by travelers to some of these villages) to have an Armenian population around 1,880, 8 no longer did in 1914.

There are very few sources that contain maps of the region with the Armenian villages properly identified with their current names. The Kevorkian/Papoudjian book mentioned attempts this as does Robert Hewsen in the massive tome *Armenia: An*

*Historical Atlas*. However, both have errors and omissions for the region of Ginj.

Hewsen leaves most of the villages unidentified and misstates the location for the ones he does present. While not meant to be an exact representation, Kevorkian/Papoudjian suffers from similar mistakes. Other sources most often simply do not identify all of the villages.

Some of the problems stem from the numerous and conflicting name changes. For instance, Jabaghchour is now known as Bingol, but in the 1935 Turkish census there was another town by the name of Bingol (now called Karlioiva, previously known as Kaniresh). In addition, what is now known as Genj was called Darahini or Dara Yeni whereas what was Genj (Ginj) is now called Kalekoy. □

## Armenian Inhabited Villages

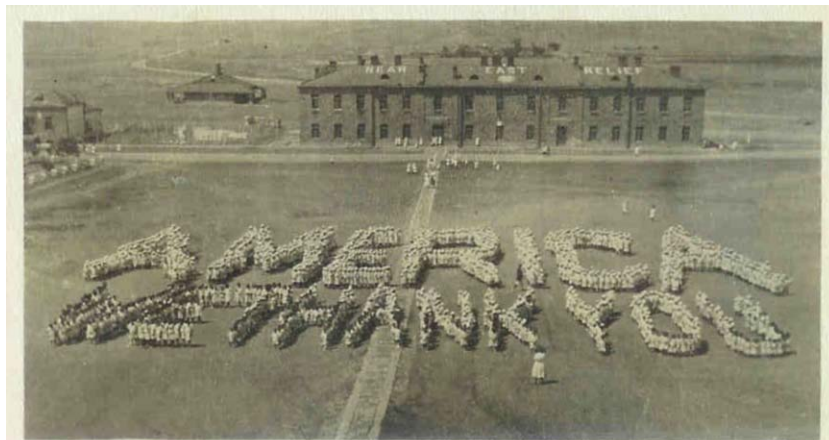
The following table details the Armenian inhabited villages along with alternate names, location and population according to the 1912–3 Armenian census. The roads are represented as they are today.

Village	Variants	Current Name	Latitude	Longitude	Households	Armenians
Alipiran	Alipunar, Alipunarköy	Serpmekeya	391600	410300	13	150
Ankak	Angig, Ankig, Angag		385500	410100	6	63
Artushen	Ardushin, Ardushen, Arshen	Yenibaflak	384900	410000	35	240
Boglan	Poklan, Boghlan, Buglan	Solhan	385800	410300	8	77
Churuk	Chirik, Cherik, Chesseg	Taslicay	391700	405700	4	30
Darbasan	Tarbassan	Tarbasan	385400	403600	8	64
Dik	Duk, Dek	Dikköy	385000	403900	18	22
Gelan	Kilen, Kalan, Gealan, Geylan	Geçitli	392500	410500	20	200
Gudzou	Gedzou-Kiugh, Koulaz, Kouzou, Guzi		384600	410900	20	100
Jabaghchour	Chevlik, Chavlig, Cholig, Chalig, Chapakchur	Bingol	385300	402900	65	590
Jabugnoud	Janut, Chapugnoud, Nederan	Yenisu	384600	405300	24	250
Kamaran	Ghamara, Khumaran, Gameran	Arslanbeyli	384400	410800	8	56
Kekhmoud	Kehmut, Kekhmout, Kakhmout	Gelintepe	385100	405500	2	17
Kerengan	Kurungan, Krengan, Kerikan, Kezikan		384200	411000	3	34
Kharabe	Kharab, Harabe	Harabe Köy	385700	410200	15	161
Madrak	Madrag, Madrakkilotan	Kilçadir	385100	403500	50	453
Mousyan	Musyan	Yamaç	384700	402700	5	
Noreg	Nourik	Norik	385300	405800	6	59
Oghnoud	Oghnut, Oghnat, Gönük	Göynük	390800	405300	74	800
Parkhant	Farkhan, Parkhand, Farhan	İçpınar	385900	403700	60	529
Parkhou	Perkhi, Perho	Asmakaya	384700	410700	11	80
Poghi	Pohik, Boghe, Bor	Elmasirti	385100	410300	7	42
Simsor		Ekinyolu	385500	403500	6	54
Tokhlan	Toplar, Tokliyan	Toklular	391600	405900	20	150
Veysimerik	Vosemerg	Esmetafl	385400	410400	5	
<b>Total</b>					<b>493</b>	<b>4,221</b>

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# Rescue of a Nation

By Knarik O. Meneshian



"Orphan City," Alexandropol. Photo courtesy of Stepan Karadian

**“Early in September, 1915,**

a cable came to the Department of State at Washington from the American Ambassador, Henry Morgenthau, at Constantinople, urging the formation of a committee to raise funds and provide ways and means for saving some of the Armenians, adding ‘The destruction of the Armenian race in Turkey is rapidly progressing.’ This message was transmitted to James L. Barton, Foreign Secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, in Boston, who wrote on September 14 to Cleveland H. Dodge in New York: ‘...I am convinced that an early and comprehensive conference should be convened in your office for the consideration of Armenian matters. You are nominated convener... The situation is certainly critical. The Armenians have no one to speak for them and it is without question a time when the voice of Christianity should be raised.’”

On Sept. 16, 1915, an emergency volunteer organization, named the Armenian Relief Committee, was formed in New York. Hoping to raise \$100,000 for relief aid, the organization received over \$91 million along with some \$25 million in food and supplies provided by the United States government and others. In November 1915, the committee was renamed the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief. “The volunteer relief committee was, from the beginning, a national organization of the United States, manned by our people and incorporated by a special act of Congress in 1919 as the Near East Relief.”

Because of the selfless and heroic efforts of this American relief organization, which for many years involved nationwide participation in the collection of not only funds, but also food, clothing, and medicine, more than a million people were rescued from death by starvation, disease, and exposure. From the earliest relief efforts, “attention was focused on helping the rescued orphans



Left: Orphans waiting admittance to "Orphan City," Alexandropol. Photo from: Story of Near East Relief, by James L. Barton

Right: Refugee march through Alexandropol. Barton photo.

become self-supporting and contributing members of the communities that absorbed them.” The Near East Relief “provided hope, home, training, and education to a generation ‘without a childhood.’”

During the 1915 Genocide of the Armenians by the Ottoman Turkish government, cables and reports made it clear that “a campaign of race extermination” was in progress. Those that survived, among them numerous children left parentless, found refuge in Near East countries and in France and Greece, where the Near East Relief operated refugee centers, schools, and orphanages for them. A great number of them fled from eastern Turkey and from Persia to the Russian Caucasus, where over 300,000 Armenians sought refuge.

“A cable from Echmiadzin, dated Aug. 12, 1915, reported: The road from Igdyr, near the Turkish frontier, to Echmiadzin is choked with groups of sick and destitute refugees... The whole countryside is full to overflowing... The majority are women and children, barefoot, exhausted, and starving.”

“A second message, dated the 21<sup>st</sup> of August, 1915: The stream of refugees still flows... The situation is extraordinarily harrowing... There is a shortage of bread... The majority of the refugees are ill... In the Etchmiadzin School, 3,500 children who lost their parents are huddled together... 110 babies lying naked on the floor.”

The Russian government during that period assisted the refugees to the best of their abilities, but soon appealed to the United States of America for help. The first amount, \$40,000, was sent to the Caucasus in October 1915, followed by relief workers from the United States, some who were already in Turkey, and a few, including Quakers, from England. In Erivan (Yerevan) and Alexandropol, assistance, including the policy of providing work as a relief measure, was placed in operation. Earning their bread, male refugees restored irrigation canals, roads, and buildings. They made spinning wheels and looms, so that female refugees could spin cotton and wool for the knitting of stockings for distribution, and the making of quilts for the orphans and the extremely destitute.

Witnessing the great and ongoing suffering of the refugees, F. Willoughby Smith, the American Consul in Tiflis, Georgia, sent a message to the Committee in July 1917, stating: “General condition of refugees has reached critical stage. Nearly two years exiled from their homes... Great distress from hunger... Appalling

number of widows with dependent children... Estimate 40,000 orphans here. Need for aid at this time greater than ever before. Urge and implore that New York Committee continue efforts with renewed vigor if the many thousands it has helped are to be saved. We need million dollars for the next twelve months.”

In September 1917, Ambassador Smith sent another message stating: “Have had conference with members of provisional government regard to relief need... Orphanages should be established immediately... Provisional government appreciates committee’s work and promises all facilities...”

But, after the collapse of Russia at the end of 1917, no assistance was available to the 300,000 refugees. Over 25,000 people died of starvation and disease during the winter months of 1918–19 in the Caucasus. After the Armistice on Oct. 30, 1918, relief work once again resumed and the lives of countless refugees were saved. In the Caucasus, dilapidated military barracks were made available to the Near East Committee relief workers, who renovated them with the help of refugee labor. The relief workers hoped to provide relief for at least 120,000 children before the end of 1920. Not only did the Near East Committee run orphanages in places such as Kars, Alexandropol, and Erivan, but they also took over the orphanages that were run by the Republic of Armenia government because they did not have the personnel, food, medical care, and supplies necessary to properly run the institutions. Diseases such as cholera, favus, intestinal parasites, malaria, scabies, smallpox, trachoma, tuberculosis, typhoid, and typhus were widespread. Because of the orphanages, the lives of thousands of children were saved. Whether in the refugee camps, the remote and forgotten villages of the country, or the orphanages, the Near East Relief workers treated all with kindness. Always mindful of the plight of the children—victims of unspeakable horrors and cruelty—they taught them tenderness and affection and generosity, and they taught them how to play and smile again. The relief workers cared for them like parents, and guided them towards productive and better futures through education. Succumbing to illnesses themselves, a number of the relief workers lost their lives through the years in the service of saving the lives of others. And, of those that returned home, some developed “broken health from years of neglecting themselves as they worked.”

The great refugee and orphanage center, Alexandropol, was the largest orphanage city in the world, “with a second city of children of

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lesser size installed in Kars.” Alexandropol was known as “Orphan City,” and over the years for over 30,000 children it was both home and school. Every day, from morning until night, ragged, starving children huddled together in lines waiting to be admitted to “Orphan City.” The orphanage complex encompassed the city’s three former Russian military barracks (built 1860–1900): Kazachi Post (Cossack’s Checkpoint), Polygon, and Seversky Kazachi Post, or Seversky for short. In Armenian, the orphanages were called *Amergomee Vorpanotsneruh* (the American Committee Orphanages). Alexandropol (renamed Leninakan, now Gyumri) served not only as the great refugee and orphanage center, but also as the administrative headquarters for the region, with relief branches in Erivan, Dilijan, Djalal-Oghlou (Stepanavan), Karakala (south of Sardarabad on the other side of the Arax River, in Armenia at that time), Karakalis (Kirovakan, now Hayots Dzor), and Darachichak (Tsaghadzor).

For every staff member, there were between 15–20 children under their care. An American visitor had written, “I have never seen children anywhere take care of themselves more splendidly with so few older supervisors, nor have I seen in any institution a better balance between discipline and individual initiative.” In the dormitories, which were neat, clean, and airy, children slept in bunk beds—two sharing a lower bed and two the upper—with several hundred in each room. In the orphanage hospital at Kazachi Post, filled with sick children, three or four shared one narrow bed. In the dining hall, 5,000 children ate at the same time. There were playgrounds for the children. Western games such as basketball, football, volleyball, and baseball were “introduced and readily learned.” While the boys competed in track meets, the girls too held their own competitions. Both boys and girls developed a love for games and exercise.

At the orphanage hospital, staffed with American and Armenian doctors, not only were the children treated, but also their relatives and anyone in need of medical attention. Some “came from long distances to get treatment.” Patients lay on iron beds on clean white sheets. There were two wards, one for internal diseases, and one for surgical cases; in addition, there were dental clinics. A vast number of the children required treatment for trachoma and other lingering illnesses. Those afflicted with tuberculosis of the lungs and bones were segregated and treated. In their ambulant health clinics on wagons or vehicles, the Near East Relief



Bunk beds and hospital ward, “Orphan City,” Alexandropol. Barton photos.

medical staff regularly traveled to remote villages to treat the sick. The health wagon was pulled by Polygon’s “famous two white mules.” In the villages, large families lived in single rooms, hygiene and sanitation were not known, and “poverty, disease, dirt, and ignorance” were common. As a result of these visits, the standard of health was raised in the villages. One American nurse wrote, “In 27 days we visited 36 villages where I gave medical aid to 250 children. Of them, 150 had malaria, 25 had eye diseases, 45 had throat trouble, 20 had stomach trouble, and 10 had favus. I also rendered medical help to many poor villagers.”

In the schools, some of the teachers were local teachers trained by the Near East Relief. The children were provided with a well-rounded education, including a variety of vocational courses, such as bookkeeping and typing, mechanical and electrical subjects, agricultural training, and teacher and nurse training, so that when the orphans and half-orphans became of age they could sup-

port themselves. Both the agricultural school as well as the boys’ and girls’ industrial schools “required a half day of classroom work and a half day of practical work.”

There were workshops with divisions for the various handicrafts: carpentry, joinery, shoemaker, and tinsmith shops. There were classes in tailoring, bookbinding, and pottery making. The boys began their vocational studies and agricultural courses at the age of 12, and continued their education until they left the orphanage at the age of 16. For the girls, there were needlework rooms, and they were taught how to weave, embroider, and make lace. They learned how to make clothes, including caps, stockings, and sweaters, and they learned dyeing and rug weaving. Since blindness was prevalent due to widespread disease of the eyes, a school for the blind was established. Blind children were taught, among other things, to make items, such as brushes and combs, by using their sense of touch. For the further enrichment of the lives of all the children, lectures and theatrical performances were offered at the lecture and assembly room.

In the summer, the children enjoyed themselves at the orphanage’s summer camp near the Arpa-Chai (Akhourian River). At Sardarabad, a colony of young men who had been educated at “Orphan City” was “cultivating new land.” They had studied at the orphanage’s Agricultural School and Agricultural Station “where boys learned scientific methods of agriculture.” As a result of the school and station, “old methods of agriculture were gradually

superseded by new: tractors, seed drill, and mowing machines were introduced; blooded stock was imported to replace the weak, exhausted stock of the country; dairying and cheese making were modernized; new seeds, new methods of planting and fertilizing were used. Native farmers were invited to visit and inspect the orphanage farm. They were given seed, and surplus young stock was sold to them. American agricultural teachers improved the method of instruction and the quality of production.”

The boys at the Polygon trade school built model village homes of stone. At these homes, “groups of fifty fifteen-year old girls” lived in the homes for three months in order to practice “living an ordinary village life.” They were taught to cook native dishes, made purchases at the market, and kept accounts of everything they spent. The model village had its own sheep, lambs, cows, and poultry. All the work in the village was done by the girls, which included taking care of the homes and gardens.

In whatever fields the orphans eventually chose, the majority carried with them “the spirit of honest endeavor . . . and fair play” taught to them by the Near East Relief workers. Some orphans earned distinction in their chosen careers. For example, one girl became a renowned vocalist, another became a specialist in agriculture; one boy became a military engineer, another, who had lost his eyesight due to trachoma, became a solo violinist; several became orchestra leaders, some became principal nurses in the city hospital of Erivan, and many took an “active part in public life either in the various official commissions for education or in welfare work.”

In memory of an American nurse who assisted in the relief work in Armenia and died of typhus in Erivan on May 17, 1919, a nurse’s training school was opened in Alexandropol. Called the Edith May Winchester Hospital, it was later transferred to Erivan



Refugees restoring canals, Erivan. Barton photo.

where it was united with the Armenian Red Cross and a government hospital. “From this school the first nurses registered in the Armenian Republic have graduated. These nurses, mostly trained orphans, have been the nuclei for the governmental public health service.” Taught and inspired by the Near East Relief workers, many of the orphans who became nurses followed in the footsteps of their teachers and worked in the neglected and rural areas of the country. “All the nurses trained in the Edith Winchester School of Nursing in the Caucasus [Erivan], without exception chose to work in the wretched and needy villages rather than in the cities. To serve where the need is greatest even at extreme personal sacrifice seems to be the motive that dominates the graduates everywhere.”

The orphans were also educated “in the religion and in the church of their parents.” Where no religious instruction was observed, as in the countries during the Soviet period, the children were taught instead “To Do for Others . . . Always be Courteous . . . Always be Neat . . . Kind in Word and Deed . . . Dependable and Truthful . . .” In order to prevent the orphans from “pitying themselves or considering that they were special objects of favors from America,” they were taught to share with those less fortunate and to help others so that in receiving care and attention they would not become “self-centered and think of themselves as the only ones needing care and help, forgetting that there were still other children in the world who were more destitute, without even an orphanage for a home.” In each of the orphanages, the boys and girls did their share of work in cleaning, serving in the dining room, helping in the kitchen, making their own clothes and shoes, working in the garden and on the farm, and taking care of the animals.

Dr. Fridtjof Nansen, upon visiting “Orphan City,” wrote: “After visiting the hospital and the blind school of



“Orphan City” trade school classes—young masons and carpenters, Alexandropol. Barton Photos.



this community, we paid a visit to the town to see the new Government cotton-mill, a large factory which had been running for a month, but was going to be enlarged so that it could manufacture cloth from all the cotton produced in the country...Practically all the girls in charge of the looms were from the Near East Relief homes for children...It was surprising to see how expertly they managed the machines after only a month's practice, and how easily and methodically all the work was done. It gave one an excellent impression of the education they had received."

Today, Kazachi Post, Polygon, and Seversky are once again military barracks. Kazachi Post is used by the Armenian and Russian military, and Polygon and Seversky are used by the Russian military. And, in Gyumri's Seversky *taghamas* (neighborhood), located outside of the barracks compound, 70 boys and girls between the ages of 3 and 15 call the Terchoonian Home Orphanage their home. The orphanage was founded in 2003 by the Terchoonian Family in memory of Vahan Terchoonian, a genocide survivor from Turkey who had found refuge at the Seversky Post orphanage. It had been his wish to someday return the great kindness shown to him by the Near East Relief and its dedicated workers by helping other orphans. The orphanage is run by the Terchoonian Children's Home Foundation, a non-profit charitable organization based in Detroit, Mich.

In an article by Frank C. Bray, quoted in James L. Barton's book *The Story of Near East Relief (1915-1930)*, the author writes of "Orphan City": "The physical dimensions of the three major orphanage posts of Polygon, Kazachi, and Seversky, all in the city of Alexandropol, are enormous. To say that there are 170 buildings in the three posts may help one to comprehend the size of the job; among them are half a dozen warehouses somewhere near 1,000 feet long, about 40 two-story converted barracks of capacities ranging from 250 up to 1,000 child inhabitants, school buildings of 24 to 30 classrooms, all kinds and sizes of service buildings, administration, medical, policing, fueling, lighting, cooking, baking, laundries, bath houses, etc. Stables and garages are important because the railroad touches only one post and supplies of every kind must be transported to the other separate centers on the outskirts of the town four miles distant..."

A Near East Relief worker and the daughter of a senator, Elsie May Kimball, who was born on July 23, 1887, in Bennington, N.H., and attended Mount Holyoke College, offers a glimpse into some of the things she witnessed and experienced, in her letters to her family back home. She describes, "the horrific lives of the children in her care, the difficulty of providing for them during famines, defending them from Turks and looters, massacres of Armenians, conditions in refugee camps, the impact of the Greco-Turkish War in the region, and the effects of earthquakes in Tiflis, Georgia, in 1920, and Alexandropol in 1926..."



"Orphan City" playground, Alexandropol. Barton photo.

The letters, dated 1919–21 and 1923–27, were from Akhalkalaki, Russia (later Akhalkalaki, Georgia); Kars, Armenia, (later Kars, Turkey); Trebizond, Turkey; Alexandropol, later Leninakan during Soviet rule; and Djalal-Oghlou, Armenia. One of Kimball's early experiences was described in the Jan. 3, 1928 issue of the Boston Herald upon being awarded a distinguished service medal after working for years in the midst of starvation and disease: "Miss Kimball went out to the Near East in July, 1919. She was in charge of one of the Near East Relief Orphanages in Kars when the city fell... and was turned over to bands of Turks bent on loot. One of these bands attempted to carry off blankets from Miss Kimball's orphanage, but she drove them off with a whip." In addition, she and her co-workers reported to the general secretary of the Near East Relief, "Unless American aid is continued to Armenia the thousands of children that it has saved in the past will now perish." During her years of service, she not only cared for Armenian orphans and refugees in Armenia and in Georgia and organized soup kitchens there, but she also worked as secretary for Near East Relief administrators in Armenia and Georgia.

In her letter dated Nov. 25, 1919, from Akhalkalaki, Miss Kimball describes the wretched condition of the Armenians both in Akhalkalaki and Alexandropol as follows:

**ALEXANDROPOL:** "It is impossible for the committee to care for all the Armenian refugees who have collected in the city...75,000 are still uncared for, and we saw hundreds and hundreds of people walking the streets half-naked, and many were bare-footed. It was bitterly cold too, and it was terrible to see those people shaking and shivering in their scanty rags. Unless something can be done for their provision, many of them will freeze to death this winter."

**AHALKALAKI:** “Conditions are bad enough here, but in Alexandropol they are infinitely worse. During these last two or three days, since the very cold weather has come on, I have picked up several children on the streets of Ahalkalaki and have dressed them in our old clothes, of which we have sixty bales at the orphanage for distribution in the towns of this district. These children were practically naked, and were bare-footed. One of them who walked along with me cried all the way to the orphanage, and I thought she would shiver right out of her rags. Another child whom I took in was brought here to the house Sunday morning by an Armenian woman who had picked him up the night before and taken him into her home. She is very poor herself and could not care for him longer, so she brought him over to me to look after. Through an interpreter I learned that the boy had come from Akhaltsikh with a Doukhobor [Russians closely related to the Molokans], who had found him on the road and had brought him fifty versts [old Russian unit of length: 3,500 feet=1 verst] in his oxcart... the boy was given a good bath, a haircut, clean clothes and a physical examination... and now he is happy.”

**ALEXANDROPOL:** “There were no human beings in those refugee camps—only beasts. Long ago these people ceased to be human. Men, women, and children by the score were huddled together in each room, and in the middle of the floor was a feeble fire, around which as many people as possible gathered for warmth. When the Major, Mr. Gilman, Miss Wolfe, and I entered the place, we were surrounded by a mob of beggars, and they tugged at our clothes and whined like animals. They are fed with bread and soup once a day and with bread and tea twice a day, or something like that. This suffices to keep the body together, but the soul doesn’t exist any longer. Women are lying on the hard floor all around us, almost too weak to move. And then there were tiny babies who were mere scraps of skin and bone...”

*Loads and loads of love, Elsie”*

In Kimball’s letter dated Dec. 15, 1920, from Kars, she writes:

“The Bolsheviks, as you doubtless know, now occupy Alexandropol... We don’t know whether the Bolsheviks are going to try to take Kars away from the Turks or not... We serve only two meals a day, and even those two are very scanty and very poor in quality. So the orphans are in excellent condition for the development of disease, and if they are obliged to travel a great distance in this cold climate, it will be their finish. Besides, they haven’t enough to wear. The Alexandropol children are better off than ours here for the Turks didn’t loot so much there as in Kars... We are carrying on our work under tremendous handicaps. Not only is there a lack of supplies of food, but there is a shortage of wood and water... Everything depends upon the cooperation we get from the Turks in that direction. They do what all conquering

armies do—grab everything that they can lay their hands on, and the little wood that we had laid by, they have forbidden us to use, except in small doses which they dole out to us. They put seals on our wood warehouses and refuse to let us take out a single armful without first going through a whole lot of red tape with the government. Since they captured Kars, our water supply has been cut off... soldiers, or other raiders, continue to go to our city orphanages and force the orphans to pass blankets, sheets, food—anything they want—out through the windows... So you see... it is awfully discouraging to work under such conditions... Mr. Yarrow [Ernest A. Yarrow, one of the Near East Relief directors closely identified with relief work in the Caucasus] announced yesterday that he would permit anybody to leave today—anybody who did not care to remain longer... I haven’t had time yet to transcribe the rest of my letter relating to the Turkish invasion... I am writing this letter reservedly, for it may be censored. I can’t tell half of the things that I would like to, for if the Bolsheviks get hold of our mail, they will cut out nearly everything, I suppose...

*Heaps of love, Elsie”*

In Kimball’s letter from Kars, dated Jan. 9, 1921, she writes:

“The Turks are constantly asking Mr. Yarrow when he is going to move the orphans, and if we do have to move them, it looks as if we will have to send them to Alexandropol... All the remaining supplies have been brought to Kars for our orphans here, and the Turks help to get them here. Some of us said at the time that there was method in the efforts to assist us—that probably, just as soon as the supplies reached Kars, the Turks would commandeer them for their own use. And it certainly looks suspicious... We are having a constant struggle to secure wood for the orphanages and hospitals... The condition of the orphans is pitiful. They look just as emaciated as when they were first taken over, after the massacres, and the death rate is high now. I could give you many instances of their ravenous hunger. Here is one: Two days ago, when I went into the kitchens, I saw three boys kneeling down on the floor with their noses in a pile of dirt, in which they were madly groveling for a few crumbs of bread which had been swept there by the girl who takes care of the corridors... We have so little water that we can bathe the children only once a month, or perhaps not so often as that, and we haven’t sufficient clothes to go around... Every drop of water we get has to be drawn in buckets from the river, and it is a long hard climb over steep hills, in freezing weather... Quite frequently we have two or three celebrities here at the house, in the evening. Nuri Pasha and Kemal Bey, two Turks high in the ranks... visit us very often and they are learning to dance American style. Nuri Pasha is brother of the world-famous Enver Pasha, who is being sought everywhere by the Allies. Enver is somewhere in this country, cleverly evading the Allies, and never remaining in one place long enough to get caught... Kars is beginning to

look like a real Turkish center, now, and everything Armenian has faded away...

*Loads of love to you, Elsie*

In another letter from Kars, dated Jan. 29, 1921, Kimball writes:

“Mr. White has asked us to make our letters home very brief, this time, for they have to be censored by Refat Effendi, our Turkish Liaison Officer who lives with us here at the house... we have received official notice from the Turks to the effect that we must remove the orphans to Alexandropol, beginning immediately... Therefore, we are going to leave Kars just as soon as we can get the children moved. The Bolsheviks will have to take care of the orphans, in Armenia...

*Heaps of love, Elsie*

In Kimball’s letter from Trebizond, dated April 25, 1921, she writes:

“We’re on our way again. The Americans in the Caucasus are as nomadic as the Kurds... The Turks ordered us to send our six thousand Armenian orphans (1,000 had died during the winter after the Turks came in) to Alexandropol, which, by that time, was the center for the Armenians and which was no longer under Bolshevik control. Alexandropol is ruled by the Turks, but it is about the only place, except Erivan, where Armenians are permitted to make their abode. The few Armenians who remained in Kars after it was taken by the Turks in October [1920] have recently been forced to leave their homes and go to Alexandropol, so that now Kars is entirely Turkish. So we spent two months evacuating the children and the Armenian personnel—who numbered about twelve hundred—and in shipping supplies to Alexandropol, closing accounts, etc. Each train that went out carried an average of six hundred children and personnel—packed into boxcars like sardines in a can, only worse. We had troubles galore, especially in getting our supplies, which the Turks wanted for themselves and which they continually requisitioned for their army or their schools or their hospitals or their institutions, until poor Mr. White... was nearly frantic trying to make diplomatic adjustments and hang onto as much of our own property as possible. You simply can’t imagine the difficulties that we encountered from October 30, the day the Turks entered Kars, until April 5, when we left Kars. I have already told you of the awful trouble we had trying to get wood and water and food and clothes... It is a winter that none of us can ever forget—one of the hardships such as people in America can’t conceive. And these hardships are not ended, either, for in Alexandropol, at this very moment, are 18,000 orphans and many Armenian personnel facing starvation and suffering from disease on account of the lack of supplies, which, we understand are plentiful in Constantinople, but which cannot be shipped... the orphans are in a very weakened condition, owing to a lack of proper nourishment during the last few



“Orphan City” children and teacher, Alexandropol. Photo courtesy of Ashot Mirzayan, City Research Center, Gyumri.

months... Just a little while ago, the children were dying in Alexandropol at the rate of twenty a day, and now the death rate must be even worse... Mr. Yarrow and Mr. Barton are in Tiflis... Of course, you have heard that Tiflis has been taken by the Bolsheviks. We don’t know what their attitude toward us is, and can’t know, until we hear from Captain Yarrow... Most of the Armenian men who were left in Kars after the Turks came in, were deported to Sarakamish or other places south in Turkey, to do scrub work for the Turks, and before being packed off on the trains, they were stripped bare of their clothing, sometimes right in the streets, and as a consequence of this cruelty, many were frozen to death before they got to their destinations. Those who survived were later killed by hard work or by lack of food and sufficient clothing. When we came through Sarakamish on our way out, we saw many terrible specimens—more like animals than human beings... Sarakamish is a region of deep snows and terrific cold, you can guess how many would survive the winter...

*Love to you, Elsie*

In Kimball’s letter from Kazachi Post in Alexandropol, dated June 10, 1923, she writes:

“Here we are, all safe and sound... Things have changed a lot... The Bolsheviks were most chivalrous to us... Peg and I were assigned to Kazachi Post and Miss Riordan to Polygon... Tennis is the big game here now. Two courts have been built at Kazachi Post, one at Polygon, and one at Seversky Barracks... Alexandropol is different now. The city has been built up a lot, the streets have been repaired, there is scarcely any disease, people are much better dressed and the refugees are well cared for. Our own children in the orphanages are distressingly well and healthy... Conditions in Caucasus much better than before—so don’t worry.

*With a heap o’ love, Elsie*

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In Kimball's April 11, 1924, letter from Djalal-Oghlou, she writes:

"Alexandropol' is now 'Leninakan'. . . I am still having difficulty in adjusting myself to the change. . . A Special Order came from Captain Yarrow the other day, instructing me to report for duty at Leninakan on the 15 of this month. . ."

*Heaps of love, Elsie*"

In Kimball's letter, dated Jan. 13, 1925, from Leninakan, she writes:

"The Armenian Christmas on January 6 was observed by the orphanages in the usual manner. Of course, it is not possible to give elaborate presents to all the children, but we gave extra food, and at night, when the tree was lit, the children danced around it, the band played, and there were recitations and various kinds of entertainment. Each child was given a handkerchief containing nuts, raisins, an apple, candy and cake. New shoes and stockings were also given out during the day. . ."

*Heaps of love, Elsie*"

Finally, in her Nov. 7, 1926, letter from Tchiaturi, Georgia, Kimball writes:

"Doubtless you have read about the big earthquake which occurred recently in Leninakan. . . Alexandropol was always a great place for shocks, as I believe I used to write you when I was there. We were continually being scared by minor quakes. . . I will enclose. . . a letter written by a girl I know in Alexandropol to one of our former N.E.R. employees working here in Tchiaturi. This describes the earthquake in some detail. . . The house where I lived in 1921. . . was almost wholly demolished. Do you remember 'No. 51'? This was at Kazachi Post. All the posts were less seriously affected than the city, where the buildings are not so substantial. We lived, for the most part, in huge barracks, built to withstand almost any shock. The children also were in barracks, as you know. . . I think I wrote you in my last letter that all the Stepanavan (Djalal-Oghlou) children were recently moved to Leninakan. . ."

*Heaps of love, Elsie*"

The 1926 earthquake is described in James L. Barton's book as follows:

"The whole country was shaken for a period of weeks by violent earthquakes which centered with destructive intensity around Leninakan. The orphanage and residence buildings were seriously damaged and made uninhabitable. Orphans and personnel lived in tents and the emergency hospitals were under canvas. The city itself was shaken into ruins and in the

surrounding villages the houses collapsed frequently, burying their owners. It was another beginning again, with greatly added expense for repairing the orphanages and assisting in the rehabilitation of the city and the neighboring villages. . ."

The Near East Relief continued aiding Armenia until its expulsion by the Soviets in 1927. It was the "only foreign agency allowed to operate in the Caucasus even after the Sovietization of the region." During its many years of assistance in Armenia, the organization provided for the care and education of orphans, maintained orphanages, supervised ex-orphans, "outplaced thousands of orphan children into hundreds of villages in Armenia, Georgia. . .," assisted refugees, and established "rescue homes for women and girls, with their babies, escaped or discharged from Moslem harems, giving them the same care as the orphans. . .," and supported and taught those women trades in order to improve their economic condition. It provided medical and sanitary relief, not only for the orphaned children, "but as far as possible for the people of the country." They maintained itinerant health centers, conducted community health programs where people were educated on issues of hygiene and health, and offered recreational programs. It established a variety of vocational schools and modernized the country's agricultural methods. In short, the relief organization not only saved a nation during her darkest hour, but also cultivated it. Unfortunately, after its expulsion during the Soviet regime, the monumental work of the organization was, for the most part, forgotten in Armenia, except by those who had been helped, and especially by those who had "No parents, no country, no guardians except the great American heart, as expressed through the Near East Relief, which had already rescued them from a cruel fate."



"Orphan City" cooking class, Alexandropol. Barton photo.

One person who never forgot the countless kindnesses of the American Near East Relief was Dr. Tigranouhi Barkhoudaryan. She was born in Van in 1908 and escaped with her brother and grandmother to Armenia in 1915. Her parents and other family members were killed in the massacres. Tigranouhi was placed in the orphanage in Alexandropol, where she later studied nursing. Upon completion of her studies, she began working as a nurse in one of Yerevan’s tropical diseases hospital. Malaria was prevalent throughout Armenia at the time. Eventually, she became a physician, specializing in tropical diseases, and practiced medicine in Artashad, where “there was lots of malaria because of the rice fields.” She was the village doctor.

In a July 2006 interview with her daughter, Dr. Eleanora Giragosyan-Koloyan (now deceased) of Yerevan, she said, “Because of the way my mother was treated by the relief workers, and the education and training she received at the American orphanage, throughout her life she treated others the same way, despite the harshness of the Soviet times, especially during those early years when we were ruled by fear and threat. The compassion and teachings of the Near East Relief workers left a profound impression on her, and all her life my mother helped others, even going against the inhuman dictates of the *golkhoz* (commune) leader by excusing the village women from their work in the rice fields when they were burning up with fever from malaria. Yes, she treated people with the same kindness she received at the orphanage, and she taught me to do the same. In turn, I have taught my two sons, who are both physicians, and my grandchildren to do the same.”

From 1915–30, the Near East Relief, now known as the Near East Foundation, raised “\$110 million for refugees...about \$1.25 billion in today’s dollars—including \$25 million in in-kind food and supplies. This remarkable outpouring occurred at a time when bread cost a nickel a loaf.” All of this, and much more, including the resettlement of the Armenians in various parts of the world, in response to “the Armenian genocide and deportations and in the process pioneered international humanitarian assistance.”

Today, the philanthropic institution once again is working in Armenia—this time to rescue the country’s street children. □

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“Orphan City” summer camp, 1925, Alexandropol. Barton photo.