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MASS DESTRUCTION OF ARMENIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE DURING THE HAMIDIAN MASSACRES (1894-1896)

Seda A. Parsamyan

Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute Foundation, Armenia

Abstract

The policy of destruction of the Armenian cultural heritage in the Ottoman Empire began with the conquest of Western Armenia and has continued until the present day. Over the centuries, Armenian culture, as part of the Empire's Christian culture, has either been destroyed spontaneously, in vast swathes or undergone various manifestations of neutralisation by various Turkish regimes.

The first part of this article will outline the approaches made by Genocide study theorists concerning the origin and definition of the term "cultural genocide" existing until today, including the attempts at revising or even re-naming it. The second part outlines the chronology of Armenian cultural heritage destruction. A detailed description of the policy of demolition of the Armenian cultural heritage during Hamidian massacres as a manifestation of vandalism or cultural genocide will also be presented.

Key Words: vandalism, cultural genocide, genocide, Hamidian massacres, Armenian Genocide, cultural heritage, mass destruction, state policy.

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From the History of the Destruction of Armenian Cultural Heritage

The destruction of Armenian cultural heritage in Turkey has been an ongoing practice linked to the respective policies of the Ottoman Sultans, the Young Turk regime and the Kemalist Republic. Armenian culture has been obliterated in the Ottoman Empire since the conquer of Western Armenia. However, the end of the 19th century and especially the entire 20th century saw a massive, consistent destruction of Armenian cultural heritage as part of the genocidal policy implemented against the Armenian population.

The entire process of the destruction of the Armenian cultural heritage could be divided into three phases.

The first, which could conditionally be called the “forced cultural assimilation” phase, covers the period from the 16th to the end of the 19th century when the destruction of the Armenian cultural heritage was spontaneous and limited. This phase could be described as that of the rejection of Christian heritage by the Ottomans in the newly occupied territories and the establishment and dissemination of the Islamic culture. In this phase, the transformation of monasteries and churches into mosques in the historical Armenian regions which took place alongside plundering and destruction, was a demonstration of the rejection of the Christian heritage. Indeed, the Ottoman sultans had previously accumulated great experience by destroying and/or adapting Byzantine churches.¹

The second phase of the destruction of Armenian cultural heritage took place from 1894 to 1922. This period saw the successive, deliberate and massive destruction of Western Armenian culture by three different regimes: that of Abdul-Hamid, the Young Turks and the Kemalists, accompanied by the physical annihilation of the Armenians. More than this: during this stage, the mechanism of obliterating the entire *urban culture*² or of specific Armenian districts was often put into action, particularly in the historic Armenian territories.³

The third phase of the destruction of Armenian culture was from 1923 until the present day. One of the obstacles in the way of creating a Turkish national identity by

1 By the beginning of the 20th century, about 60 valuable Byzantine Christian monuments in Constantinople alone, built from the 4th to the 15th centuries, had been destroyed or adapted, most being turned into mosques. These included St. Sophia Cathedral (Kyuchuk Hagia Sophia), the churches of St. Pammakaristos (Fethiye Camii), St. Theodosia (Gul Camii) and the Holy Savior Church in Chora (Kahrie Camii), etc. See A. N. Nikolaev, “Современное состояние памятников Византийского зодчества в Стамбуле” [The Current Situation of Byzantine Architectural Monuments in Istanbul], *Byzantine Chronicle* 7, no. 32 (1953): 146-160.

2 In the late 19th and early 20th centuries the *urban culture* of Western Armenia embraced residential districts, monasteries, churches, bridges, cemeteries, educational establishments, administrative bodies, commercial and trades enterprises, printing houses, workshops, studios, markets, stores, kiosks, taverns, etc.

3 Of the several dozen cities of Western Armenia, the most prominent were Van, Baghesh (Bitlis), Mush, Karin (Erzerum), Yerznka (Erzinjan), Sebastia (Sivas), Kharberd (Harpur), Malatia and Akn, most of which (particularly those near the border) were razed to the ground by artillery fire during the Genocide of 1915. See Seda Parsamyan, «Օսմանյան բանակի ներգրավվածությունը հայկական բնակավայրերի և հուշարձանների ոչնչացման գործում՝ Վանի, Բիթլիսի և Էրզրումի նահանգների օրինակով (1915-1918 թթ.)» [The Involvement of the Ottoman army in the destruction of Armenian localities and monuments: the cases of the Van, Bitlis and Erzerum provinces (1915-1918)], *Etchmiadzin* 78, no. 4 (2021): 66-80; Ibidem, *Etchmiadzin* 78, no. 5 (2021): 105-116.

the Kemalist-Republican regime was the remains, especially in the form of architectural monuments, left by the annihilated Armenians that were scattered all over the country. The Kemalists launched and elaborated a state programme of the destruction of any fact relating to the existens of the Armenians, thus completing the Armenian Genocide. Cultural genocide thus became a vital phase of the Armenian Genocide being a part of the state policy and which have some manifestations in the present republican regime.

Cultural Genocide: Theoretical Concepts

The term cultural genocide was coined based on the term “vandalism,” (and also “barbarity”) proposed by Raphael Lemkin before the coinage of the term genocide at the Madrid conference of 1933.⁴ He defined *vandalism* as the destruction of works of art and culture manifesting the “unique genius and achievement of a collectivity,” and *barbarity* as “the premeditated destruction of a national, religious, racial and social collectivity.” Lemkin held that both should be criminalized as international crimes.⁵ According to him, the act of “vandalism” might especially have much graver consequences, as the destruction of works of art (conceived by a unique genius) is an irreparable loss not only to the culture of a specific group but also against humanity and world culture.⁶ In his view, an attack on the culture of a group is, at the same time, an attack on its spiritual and moral integrity as well as on its national characteristics, without which it cannot survive for long.

Both the crimes of “barbarity” and “vandalism” as defined by Lemkin in 1933 were integrated, about a decade later, into the definition of Genocide, becoming important components of that crime.

Lemkin, by introducing the term *genocide* in his fundamental work *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* for the first time in 1944, paid special attention to the problem of the destruction of cultural heritage in its definition.⁷ According to him, Genocide is a systematic programme consisting of various actions aiming at destroying the vitally important fabric of ethnic groups with the intention of annihilating them. “The objectives of such a plan would be the disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion and the economic existence of national groups and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups.”⁸

4 Raphael Lemkin, *Acts Constituting a General (Transnational) Danger Considered as Offences against the Law of Nations*, Additional explications to the Special Report presented to the 5th Conference for the Unification of Penal Law in Madrid (14-20 October 1933), at <http://www.preventGenocide.org/lemkin/madrid1933-english.htm>, accessed 28.02.2022.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944), 79-80.

8 Ibid., 79.

Lemkin describes the eight components or techniques of Genocide as being: political, social, cultural, economic, biological, physical, religious and moral.⁹ In cultural techniques of genocide, he includes the prohibition of the group's national traditions, language, destruction of cultural values – monuments, archives and libraries, as well as annihilation of people representing the culture and art of the group.¹⁰

His focus on cultural genocide or the destruction of a group's culture and the importance of its inclusion in the concept of Genocide was greatly conditioned by the Armenian Genocide.¹¹ Lemkin's perception of the world was shaken, while he was still in his teens, by the Armenian massacres of the 1890s, the Armenian Genocide and the lack of accountability for both events. They later became an important stimulus for the formation and development of the concept of Genocide, including its cultural component.¹² In an article on the Armenian Genocide written some months before his death, he highlighted the fact that during the Genocide in Turkey, the cultural losses suffered by the Armenian people were staggering.¹³ The excerpt from Lemkin's commentary to the memoirs of Jean Nasilian, reads: "...the Armenians, as the 'intellectual core of Turkey,' had valuable personal libraries, archives and historical manuscripts, all of which were scattered and perished; churches, monasteries and monuments of historical and architectural value were destroyed."¹⁴

Cultural genocide, according to Lemkin, may be accomplished in religious and cultural fields predominantly by destroying institutions and objects through which the spiritual life of a human group finds its expression, such as its religious leaders, places of worship, objects of worship, schools and treasures of art and culture. The result of this is the weakening of spiritual cohesion and the onset of the group's disintegration.¹⁵

However, according to Lemkin, not all cases of the extinction of cultural values should be considered to be genocide. Genocidal actions are considered to be instances of cultural destruction aimed at the deliberate annihilation of a target group. He firstly suggests, distinguishing between the two, that the concepts and boundaries of "cultural destruction" and "cultural assimilation" be studied and understood. Cultural assimilation or integration, which is not genocidal by nature, takes place gradually, unintentionally and constitutes "continuous and slow adaptation of the cultural", conditioned by various

9 Ibid., 82-90.

10 Ibid., 84-85.

11 Donna-Lee Frieze, "Genos – the human group: how the concept of culture underscores Raphael Lemkin's notion of Genocide," *The Crime of Genocide: Prevention, Condemnation and Elimination of Consequences* (Proceedings of the International Conference held in Yerevan, December 14-15, 2010, MFA of Armenia, AGMI) (Yerevan 2011), 164-171.

12 Peter Balakian, "Raphael Lemkin, Cultural destruction and the Armenian Genocide," *Holocaust and Genocide studies* 27, no. 1 (2013): 58-61.

13 Raphael Lemkin, "Dr. Lemkin, Father of Genocide Convention, Reviews Work Relating to Turkish Massacres," *The Hairenik Weekly*, Vol. XXV, no. 47, 1 January 1959, 4, at <http://asbarez.com/59792/lemkins-hairenik-weekly-article-50-years-later-a-powerful-reminder/>, accessed 12. 10. 2021.

14 Ibid.

15 *American Jewish Historical Society*, Raphael Lemkin Collection, box 6, folder 2, "Genocide as a crime under international law," 2.

internal and external influences. While cultural genocide is not just an act of destruction, carried out violently, swiftly and completely, it is also manifested in the acts of physically or biologically eliminating a group and is part of the intention and plan of the perpetrator to commit genocide.¹⁶

Lemkin uses the telling episode of the burning down of the famous Jewish Theological Seminary library in Lublin, Poland in 1939 by the Germans as a vivid example of cultural genocide, quoting part of the confession made by a German who participated in it: “For us it was a matter of special pride to destroy the Talmudic Academy, which was known as the greatest in Poland... We threw out of the building the great Talmudic library and carted it to market. There we set fire to the books. The fire lasted for twenty hours. The Jews of Lublin were assembled around and cried bitterly.”¹⁷ In his confession, the German also said: “... their cries almost silenced us. Then we summoned the military band and the joyful shouts of the soldiers silenced the sound of the Jewish cries.”¹⁸ Lemkin points out that with this single episode of the Holocaust, two aspects of the same crime – cultural and physical destruction – underscored, at the same time, the perpetrators’ awareness of their crime, i.e., their intention.

Giving great importance to cultural genocide, he made great efforts to have it criminalised. The two drafts of the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide included only three out of the abovementioned eight components of Genocide, viz.

1. Physical (causing the death of members of a group or injuring their health or physical integrity)
2. Biological (restricting births)
3. Cultural (destroying the specific characteristics of a group).¹⁹

Despite the significance of the issue, however, the inclusion of the cultural aspect, indeed, became a subject of much controversy and opposing views.²⁰ No matter how essential place cultural genocide occupied in Lemkin’s mind – and he understood the extreme importance of including this term in the Convention – he had to step back from that difficult debate to allow the concept of genocide to achieve the force of law. Even after the adoption of the Convention, the issue of expanding the definition of the term *genocide* in international legal documents to include its cultural aspect has been problematic for decades.

Lemkin’s thesis of cultural Genocide was further developed in later years in the theories put forward by genocide scholars and professionals from varied disciplines studying genocide, who can be divided into two groups.

¹⁶ Frieze, “Genos-the human group,” 167.

¹⁷ Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, 84-85.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ First draft of the Genocide Convention, prepared by the UN Secretariat, [May] 1947 [UN Doc. E/447]. Ad Hoc Committee Draft: *Second draft of the Genocide convention* prepared by the Ad Hoc Committee of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), meeting between April 5, 1948 and May 10, 1948 [UN Doc. E/AC.25/SR.1 to 28], at <http://www.preventGenocide.org/law/convention/drafts/>, accessed 12.10.2022.

²⁰ For details, see *The Genocide Convention. The Travaux Préparatoires*, edited by Hiram Abtahi and Philippa Webb (Leiden, Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 2008).

The first, forming the majority (Leo Cooper, Vahagn Dadrian, Samuel Totten, Martin Shaw, Mohammed Abed, Barry Sautman, Donna-Lee Frieze, Pamela de Condappa and others) argues, like Lemkin, that the cultural aspect of genocide is a constituent feature of any genocidal act and that genocide does not necessarily mean physical annihilation of a group.²¹

The second group of researchers is inclined to insist that the destruction of a group's culture should not be included in the concept of genocide. Israel Charny offers using the term *ethnocide* rather than cultural genocide as a definition of the main processes that prohibit or interfere with the natural cycle of reproduction and continuity of a culture or a nation.²²

In 1944, Lemkin put forward, as an alternative to the term *genocide*, the term *ethnocide*,²³ with no distinction being made between the two. However, the term "ethnocide" is more often used in contemporary academic literature in a narrower sense, simply to describe cultural genocide.²⁴

Political scientist and lawyer Barry Sautman argues that the underlying intention of "ethnocide" cannot have the same value as that of "cultural Genocide," as "ethnocide" does not relate to the physical and biological extermination of a group but is specific to forced assimilation and not the annihilation of an ethnic population.²⁵ Characteristically *ethnocide* has most obviously been implemented against indigenous minorities in the context of colonial expansion, the creation of nation-states and state development plans.²⁶

Dirk Moses, noting the tendency of certain academicians to consider the processes of colonising indigenous people as "cultural genocide", questions whether an equal sign could be put between cultural genocide and physical extermination. Moses insists that there is indeed an interrelationship between the two, but the use of the term genocide should be avoided in cases where there is no attempt to forcibly annihilate a group.²⁷

21 Vahagn Dadrian, "A Typology of Genocide," *International Review of Modern Sociology* 5, no. 2 (1975): 205; Leo Kuper, *Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 15; Martin Shaw, *What is Genocide?* (London: Polity Press, 2007), 66-67; Barry Sautman, "Cultural Genocide in International Context," in *Cultural Genocide and Asian State Peripheries*, edited by Barry Sautman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 1-37; Mohammed Abed, "Clarifying the concept of Genocide," *Metaphilosophy* 37, nos. 3-4 (2006): 327; Pamela de Condappa, "Cultural Genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Destroying Heritage, Destroying Identity" at <https://ru.scribd.com/document/86679906/Condappa-Cultural-Genocide-in-Bosnia-Herzegovina>.

22 Israel Charny, "Toward a Generic Definition of Genocide," in *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions*, edited by George J. Andreopoulos (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 84-85, 90; Ibidem, "Classification of Genocide in Multiple Categories," *Encyclopedia of Genocide*, Vol. 1 (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 1999), 9.

23 From the Greek *ethnos* (nation) and Latin *cide* (kill). See Lemkin, *Axis Rule in occupied Europe*, 79.

24 One of the first attempts to do this was the declaration adopted by UNESCO in San Jose in 1981, condemning "ethnocide" or "cultural Genocide" as being equivalent to Genocide and defining it as a violation of international law. See UNESCO and the struggle against ethnocide. declaration of San Jose, December 1981, at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0004/000499/049951eo.pdf>, accessed 12.05.2020.

25 Sautman, "Cultural Genocide in International Context," 11.

26 Alison Palmer, "Ethnocide," in *Genocide in Our Time: An Annotated Bibliography with Analytical Introductions*, edited by Michael Dobkowski and Isidor Wallimann (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Pierian Press, 1992), 1.

27 Dirk Moses, "Conceptual Blockages and Definitional Dilemmas in the 'Racial Century': Genocides of Indigenous Peoples and the Holocaust," *Patterns of Prejudice* 36, no. 4 (2002): 25-26.

According to Martin Shaw, the theory that cultural Genocide differs from genocide involving physical violence is a misunderstanding, as the cultural aspect of Genocide is a part of any genocidal act.²⁸ He makes a distinction between three aspects:

1. Cultural suppression, denial of a group's culture in the pre-genocide stage;
2. The cultural dimension of genocide for suppression, which is a part of the genocidal process;
3. The unintentional destruction of a group, is when a group is destroyed by disease or famine that is not intentional.²⁹

Indeed, in the case of the third point, the unintentional destruction of a group's culture will of course proceed, due to the weakening of cultural links within it. This cannot be considered to be cultural Genocide.

Interdisciplinary perspectives on cultural genocide, particularly from anthropology, have shown that cultural genocide is diverse in practice; while not always physically violent in its means or ends, it is closely associated with historical and modern cases of settler colonialism.³⁰ The term cultural genocide is used, among certain researchers today, to define ethnic assimilation and forms of ethnic cleansing, something that needs future clarification from the international law point of view.³¹

As the various international criminal tribunals with jurisdiction over genocide replicate the Convention verbatim, criminal prosecution for genocide has thus focused on the physical and biological aspects of the crime. Cultural genocide is simply not covered.³² Without clear wording in international law, the term "cultural genocide" is, at best, used as a political campaigning tool to invite the international community's attention and relevant response to grave violations of cultural rights.

The Policy of the Destruction of Armenian Cultural Values during the Hamidian Massacres

The first systematic mass destruction of Armenian cultural heritage was organized during the Hamidian massacres (1894-1896). Abdul-Hamid's policy was aimed at decreasing the numbers and the presence of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.³³ This policy was

28 Shaw, *What is Genocide?*, 66.

29 Ibid., 67.

30 Alana Tiemessen, "Cultural Genocide in Law and Politics," *International Studies*, at <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.762>, accessed 20.09.2023.

31 Elisa Novic, *The Concept of Cultural Genocide: An International Law Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2016), 45-48.

32 David Nersessian, "A Modern Perspective: the Current Status of Cultural Genocide Under International Law," in *Cultural Genocide: Law, Politics, and Global Manifestations*, edited by Jeffrey S. Bachman (New York: Routledge, 2019), 71-74.

33 Robert Tatoyan, «Արևմտահայության թվաքանակի և Արևմտյան Հայաստանի բնակչության էթնիկական կազմի հարցերը XIX դարի 90-ական թթ. կեսերին Հայկական հարցի սրման ժամանակաշրջանում»

also directed against the Armenian culture. Under the tyrannical sultan rule, Armenian monasteries and churches ceased to be mere places of prayer and acted as cultural and educational centres, performing the important function of preserving the nation. In the Western Armenian reality, the Armenian church and the Patriarch heading it were the pivots around which issues of vital importance to the Armenian population were centred. In this sense, the existence of Armenian monasteries and churches in the Ottoman Empire and the extremely important role they played in the work of developing Armenian national and cultural life made them undesirable and they were even seen as dangerous in the eyes of both the Muslim public and the authorities. As noted by Malcolm MacColl,³⁴ a contemporary British clergyman and public figure, Abdul-Hamid's anti-Armenian policy was, in the first place, a war against the education, culture and faith of Armenians.³⁵

Many contemporary documents, reports and, particularly, testimonies of foreign diplomats, prove that the looting and destruction of Armenian cultural values during the Hamidian massacres were carried out as part of state policy, following instructions issued by central and local authorities and at the direct instigation of Islamic spiritual circles.³⁶ More than this, apart from guiding the regular army and ordinary Muslims, the latter also took an active part in the massacres themselves, each using their particular methods.

Every possible technique was used to establish an atmosphere of impunity and to instill hatred among the broad Muslim masses to increase the extent of the destruction. Anarchy prevailed in Ottoman government circles, while the authorities were instigating fanaticism through their example and behaviour.³⁷ This was, in particular, an opportunity to loot Armenian property on the spot without any form of punishment.³⁸ Looting in the cities was carried out by groups specifically created for that purpose.³⁹

There are many testimonies concerning the active participation of regular troops in the robbing and destruction of Armenian spiritual-cultural establishments. As Cambon testified, a colonel named Ismail ordered the soldiers to wreck and burn villages during

[“The Questions of Number of Western Armenians and the Ethnic Composition of the Population of Western Armenia During the Period of the Aggravation of the Armenian Question in the mid-90s of the XIX century”], *Ts'eghaspanagitakan handes* 4, no. 2 (2016): 8, 21.

34 For information about him see: *Rev. Malcolm MacColl and The noblest man whom I ever knew*, Gladstones Library, 5 July 2018, at <https://www.gladstoneslibrary.org/news/volume/rev-malcolm-maccoll-and-the-noblest-man-whom-i-ever-knew>, accessed 12.06.2020.

35 Malcolm MacColl, “The Constantinople Massacre and its Lesson,” in *The Contemporary Review* 68 (1895): 744-745.

36 *Documents diplomatiques. Affaires Arméniennes. Projets de réformes dans l'Empire Ottoman. 1893-1897* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1897); *Documents diplomatiques. Affaires Arméniennes (Supplément). 1895-1896* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1897), includes reports submitted to the French Foreign Ministry by Paul Cambon, French Ambassador to Constantinople, from 1890-1897, in which French diplomats accredited to various regions of the Ottoman Empire describe the Armenian massacres. These reports contain multiple testimonies about the destruction and desecration of Armenian cultural values, specifically concerning monasteries and churches.

37 *Documents diplomatiques*, 34.

38 Arsen Avagyan, *Геноцид армян: механизмы принятия и исполнения решений* [The Armenian Genocide: The Mechanisms of Deceison-Making and Implementation] (Yerevan: AGMI, 2013), 57.

39 *Ibid.*

the massacre in Sasun in 1894, urging them to do whatever they wanted, as these were the Sultan's orders.⁴⁰ The orders were immediately carried out and the soldiers and Kurdish cavalry that had joined them looted and burnt out 48 villages and dozens of churches and schools in the region.⁴¹ Regular army units and gendarmes, openly declaring that they were following the Sultan's orders, actively participated in the destruction of most of the villages of the Gendj (Kinch) district of Mush.⁴²

The French Consul in Mersin, M. Summaripa, addressed a written report to Cambon on 12 November 1895, stating that on November 9 of that same year, soldiers and policemen burst into the Armenian church in Misis, trampled on its holy books and desecrated its ceremonial vessels.⁴³ Cambon wrote, on 13 January 1896, that regular army soldiers created disturbances by desecrating and plundering the Armenian Church in Aghdjagyune (a village in the Djanik district of Trapizon (Trabzon) province) in the presence of the priest, who had been tied up with rope.⁴⁴

Soldiers openly declared, in Sebastia and Kharberd (Harput), that they had orders from the highest authority, which they had followed, to rob Armenians.⁴⁵ They joined the Muslim crowd that plundered and destroyed all the villages and their many churches near Tivrik, Shapin-Garahisar, Akn and Arabkir.⁴⁶ An *Ararat* correspondent, writing from Van, reported how soldiers and Kurdish groups transported gold and silver dishes, massive bowls, crosses, scepters, crowns, censers, silver or gold-covered gospels stolen from the monasteries and churches in the province to the cities for smelting.⁴⁷ Silver items weighing 390 okhas⁴⁸ were looted from three churches in Tamzara (a small town

40 *Documents diplomatiques*, 42.

41 V. Tenisheva, *Позорь Цивилизации. По поводу турецких делъ* [Civilization's Shame. On Turkish Affairs] (St.-Petersburg: B.M Wolf publishing house, 1897), 11.

42 Editorial, «Մշոն վիճակը» [“State of Mush”], *Hnchak* (London), Central Organ of Hnchak Party, no. 3, 15 February 1896, 23.

43 *Documents diplomatiques*, 95-96; Félix Charmetant, *Martyrologe arménien. Tableau officiel des massacres d'Arménie dressé après enquêtes par les six ambassades de Constantinople et statistique dressée par des témoins oculaires* (Paris: Au bureau des œuvres d'orient, s. d.), 69. The French cleric Father Félix Charmetant (1844-1921) presented, in this collection, mainly based on information provided by missionaries operating in various regions of the Ottoman Empire, the real picture of the Abdul-Hamid massacres, including the losses and destruction suffered by Armenian spiritual and cultural establishments in 11 provinces of the Empire. Although the information provided by him does not give a complete picture, it is nonetheless valuable. An excerpt from Father Charmetant's report was published in the journal *Ararat* and included data about the provinces of Trapizon (Trabzon), Erzerum, Van, Bitlis, Sebastia and Kharberd (Mamuret ul Aziz). Editorial, «Հայաստանեայց եկեղեցիին Տաճկաստանում» [“The Armenian Church in Turkey”], *Ararat* 2 (1896): 87-92.

44 *Documents diplomatiques*, 195.

45 Editorial, «Կոստնթաճներ, նամակ Կ.Պոլսից» [“Massacres, a Letter from Constantinople”], *Droshak*, 1 December 1895, 6-7.

46 *Ibid.*, 7.

47 Editorial, «Տեղեկագիր Վասպուրականի կոստնթաճին» [The Bulletin of Vaspurakan Massacre], *Ararat* 12 (1896): 585; and *Братская помощь пострадавшим в Турции армянам* [Brotherly Help to the Aggrieved Armenians in Turkey], Vol. II, Part II (Moscow: Typolithography by K.O. Alexandrov, 1897), 124.

48 One *okha* was equivalent to 1.282 kg.

in the district of Shapin-Garahisar of the Sebastia province) in 1895.⁴⁹

Edwin Bliss, an American missionary and preacher in Aintap, was another eyewitness to the active participation of Turkish troops in plunder and destruction.⁵⁰ According to him, Turkish soldiers set fire to many houses, churches, monasteries, schools and shops after looting them, using oil that they'd brought with them.⁵¹ Unable to burn down large stone-built churches, they resorted to other methods; some churches were converted into mosques, others were desecrated and their holy books torn to shreds.⁵²

In cities such as Shapin-Garahisar and Diarbekir for example, troops targeted churches, using minarets of mosques as positions to shoot at them from. This tactic was used against the St. Prkich (Holy Saviour) church in Shapin-Garahisar, wounding a large number of Armenians who had found refuge inside it. The priest, Rev. Yeghia, was killed.⁵³

The French Vice-Consul in Diarbekir, Gustave Meyrier, witnessing such an occurrence, wrote in his report of 18 December 1895 that he saw, from his window, at 3 p.m. on Sunday, how the soldiers, policemen, Kurds and others jointly opened fire on the Armenian Apostolic Church from roofs and minarets.⁵⁴

Soldiers mainly used artillery, aiming to create as much large-scale destruction in the cities as possible. The St. Gevork church, orphanage and barracks in Marash (Aleppo province) were bombarded by three artillery pieces and the same number of machine guns aimed at them in 1895.⁵⁵ Most of the Armenian national establishments around Kharberd, Huseynik and Mezre were destroyed by troops using two batteries of artillery, each of two of guns.⁵⁶

About 1,600 regular army soldiers participated in the plunder and destruction that took place in Arabkir, resulting in the 4 Armenian churches, namely St. Hakob, St. Gevork, St. Grigor Lusavorich (St. Gregory the Illuminator), St. Mariam Astvatsatsin (St. Mary the Holy Mother of God) as well as the prelacy and all the schools in the city being completely looted and burnt down.⁵⁷ Even the large number of missionary cultural establishments

49 Editorial, «Կոտորածներ. Շապին-Գարահիսար» [Massacres: Shapin-Garahisar], *Droshak*, 25 December 1895, 5-6.

50 Rev. Edwin M. Bliss, *Turkey and the Armenian Atrocities: A Reign of Terror: From Tartar Huts to Constantinople Palaces. Centuries of Oppression – Moslem and Christian – Sultan and Patriarch – Broken Pledges Followed by Massacre and Outrage* (Philadelphia: Edgewood Publishing Company, 1896), 444.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 “The Armenian Church in Turkey,” 90.

54 Probably a reference to St. Kirakos church, Diyarbekir (*Brotherly help to the Aggrieved Armenians*, 104-105):

55 Krikor Kaloustian, *Մարաշ կամ Գերմանիկ և հերոս Զեյթուն* [Marash or Germanik and Heroic Zeytun] (New York: Kochnak publishing house, 1934), 316.

56 Bliss, *Turkey and the Armenian Atrocities*, 444; Հայերի ցեղասպանությունը Օսմանյան կայսրությունում. փաստաթղթերի և նյութերի ժողովածու [The Genocide of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire: A Collection of Documents and Materials], compiled by Mkrtych Nersisyan and Ruben Sahakyan (Yerevan: Hayastan, 1991), 121.

57 Antranig Poladian, *Պատմություն հայոց Արաքկիի* [History of the Armenians of Arapgir] (New York: the Arapgir Association of America, 1969), 643-644; Sargis Bakhtikian, *Արաքկի և շրջակայի գիւղերը* [Arapkir and its Surrounding Villages] (Beirut: Vahagn Publishing House, 1934), 25.

were not spared from destruction. The Euphrates College was also badly damaged, with most of its buildings burnt because of cannon fire.⁵⁸ American missionary Elizabeth Latimer testified that, even though officials had previously guaranteed that the safety of the missionaries and the buildings they owned would be ensured, plans had been made for the missionary buildings to be burnt and the missionaries themselves sent away.⁵⁹

Such active participation in the plunder and destruction of Armenian cultural establishments by regular troops, their absolute freedom to carry out those actions and the impunity they enjoyed is, in itself, proof that it had all been organised at the state policy level.

The Destruction of Monasteries and Churches

During the Hamidian massacres, spiritual institutions were destroyed with particular ferocity; the clergy being subjected to torture before being murdered.⁶⁰ One of the written reports published in 1896 stated that: “The Muslim mob gave vent to its greatest fury against Armenian monasteries, churches, schools and libraries which have generally become piles of ruins today...”⁶¹

Manifestations of hatred and bigotry were most pronounced in the desecration and destruction of Armenian spiritual establishments. The role of the Islamic clergy in stirring up anti-Christian sentiments and the sowing of hatred and bigotry towards the Armenians among the masses was very great. The Muslim clergy, preaching in the mosques, exhorted the Muslim population to increase the crimes of looting and destruction as much as possible, pointing out that they had the prospect of being considered worthy of Mohammad’s approbation.⁶² Brigands, emerging from the Fatih Pasha Mosque in Diarbekir on 20 October 1895, looted St. Sargis church, killing the clergymen found inside it with particular ferocity.⁶³ One of the witnesses testifies “...they destroyed the temples (altars – S. P.) and committed abominable desecration there, shot at and tore down the saints’ images, ripped up the sacred books kept in the library and the school, throwing them into the sewers and wells...”⁶⁴

These manifestations of religious fanaticism were frequently accompanied by specific symbolic actions, such as the throwing down of crosses and removal of bells, desecrating

58 *Յիշատակարան Եփրատ գործի* [Euphrates College Memorial] (Boston: Euphrates College Alumni Association Press, 1942), 12, 118.

59 Elizabeth Latimer, *The Last Years of the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd edition (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1901), 172.

60 *Les massacres d’Arménie. Témoignages des victimes*, Préface de G. Clemenceau (Paris: Édition DV Mercure de France, 1896), 73, 74, 76, 91, 104-105, 108, 110-113, 115, 116, 118, 131, 137, 163, 177, 234-236. This collection of documents includes 34 unsigned eyewitness letters from approximately 20 cities in Western Armenia and Cilicia about the arson, looting and destruction of Armenian monasteries and churches, the murders of the Armenian clergy during the Armenian massacres.

61 The Bulletin of Vaspurakan Massacre: 585.

62 *The Genocide of the Armenians*, 138.

63 *Ibid.*, 140.

64 *Ibid.*

sacred church items, mocking Christian ceremonies and sacraments and cursing the clergy.⁶⁵ The aim was to denigrate the religious sentiments of the targeted ethnic community. The criminals made a demonstration of throwing the bell of the Armenian Church in Huseynik (Kharberd province) down in 1895, rolling it down to the river and throwing it in.⁶⁶ The seven churches in the city of Malatia were destroyed after the gospels and prayer books were torn up and the altars desecrated.⁶⁷ As Johannes Lepsius⁶⁸ reported, the Catholic Church in Erzincan (Yerznka) was turned into a “public latrine”⁶⁹ and, on another occasion, criminals tore the silver cross from the cover of a gospel and threw it into a latrine.⁷⁰

The destruction of the Urfa cathedral was similarly accompanied by mockery and gross insults directed at Christians and the Armenian clergy.⁷¹ According to an eyewitness testimony “...some soiled the sacred vessels and others mocked the clerical robes ... One of them pocketed the box containing the relic of the Tree of Life and the golden dove containing Holy Chrism, while another put the archbishop’s crown on his head and clowned about. Some smashed the crosses by treading them underfoot and others jeered, wearing priestly head-coverings and robes.”⁷²

The mob, during the massacres that took place in Erzerum in 1895, robbed the churches of St. Gevork in the village of Badishen, Christ the King in Kritchk and St. Astvatsatsin in Artsate, dismantling the icons and ornaments on the altars and the pillars one by one.⁷³ On September 30 (October 12, new style), dozens of monasteries and churches in the city of Baberd and its surrounding villages were pillaged, defiled with excrement and their sacred books and icons were trampled underfoot.⁷⁴

Armenian monasteries and churches were often used as venues for murder, defiling women or for burning people alive. The desecration of a monument was viewed, by the criminals, as a symbolic sacrificial act, meant to insult the deepest spiritual feelings and traditions of the ethnic community that was subjected to it. The best illustrating of this is the burning down of Urfa Cathedral (in Aleppo province). According to eyewitness testimony, around 3,000 Armenians, mostly women and children, had taken refuge in the

65 *Les massacres d’Arménie. Témoignages des victimes*, 102; and “The Armenian Church in Turkey,” 87-89; and Dr. Johannes Lepsius, *Հայաստանի ջարդերը. գաղտնի տեղեկագիր* [The Massacres in Armenia: A Confidential Report], translated by Michael Shamdanchian (Constantinople: H. Asadourian and Sons Publishing House, 1919), 273.

66 *Les massacres d’Arménie*, 132; *The Genocide of the Armenians*, 120.

67 *Les massacres d’Arménie. Témoignages des victimes*, 77-178.

68 Johannes Lepsius – a German public figure, clergyman and missionary, travelled through Asia Minor in the spring of 1896 and collected testimonies from eyewitnesses of the massacres.

69 Lepsius, *Massacres in Armenia*, 273.

70 Charmetant, *Martyrologe Arménien des victimes*, 70.

71 Aram Sahagian, *Դիւցազնակաւ Ուրֆան և իր հայորդիները* [Heroic Urfa and its Armenian Sons] (Beirut: Atlas, 1955), 360-361.

72 Ibid.

73 Hagop Kosian, *Բարձր Հայք, Կարնոյ գիւղերը* [Upper Hayk: the villages of Karin], Vol. II (Vienna: Mkhitarian Publishing House, 1926), 26, 58-59, 78-79.

74 “The Armenian Church in Turkey,” 87-88.

cathedral on the afternoon of 29 December 1895. The local Turks gathered in front of it then broke its doors down and forced their way in. Seeing the great number of Armenians inside, they poured oil from containers put in the churchyard onto the building, turning it into a furnace and burning alive the people sheltering in it.⁷⁵ Before firing it, the Turkish mob looted the church of its treasures valued at 4,000 Ottoman gold liras, desecrating the icons and demolishing the altars.⁷⁶ Gerald Henry Fitzmaurice, Great Britain's Vice-Consul in Constantinople, in his report dated 16 March 1896 sent to his Ambassador, Philip Currie,⁷⁷ described the burning of Urfa cathedral as an act unsurpassed, in its atrocious barbarity, by any of the horrors of the Armenian massacres, with its like scarcely being found in history.⁷⁸

It is significant that during and after the Hamidian massacres, such cases of the mass burning of Armenians were described as "Holocaust" in American and European press.⁷⁹

The same method was used to destroy the churches in the villages of Buzsu (Kharberd province), St. Astvatsatsin in Ali-Punar (in Diarbekir province) and St. Touma in Geterpil.⁸⁰ In the last case, the Turks failed to break the church door down, so they destroyed the roof by hurling burning logs onto it.⁸¹ In another instance the Turks collected 600 women in the church, separated fifty of the most beautiful of them and left the rest to the mercy of the soldiers and Kurds. The women were killed after they were defiled and the church was destroyed by cannon fire.⁸² The correspondent of *Ararat*, detailing the June 1896 massacres in the province of Van, wrote that about 1,000 Armenians, including clergymen sheltering in the monastery of Varag,⁸³ were massacred without mercy by the local Muslims and the centuries-old monastery with its antiquities was looted and destroyed on the 10 of June of that year.⁸⁴

75 *Brotherly Help to the Aggrieved Armenians*, 53.

76 Aram Sahagian, *Heroic Urfa and its Armenian Sons*, 411-412.

77 Fitzmaurice, acting on the instructions given to him in March 1895 by Philip Currie, the British Ambassador to Constantinople, personally visited Urfa, Adiyaman, Birecik, Behesni and other localities, notifying the embassy of the massacres of the Armenians through his reports.

78 Ibid.

79 The term *holocaust* is taken from the Greek *holokauston*, which means a burnt offering to a god or immolation. The New York Times published an article describing the Abdul-Hamid massacres, under the title of *Another Armenian Holocaust* on 10th September 1895, at <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9D05E5DD113DE433A25753C1A96F9C94649ED7CF>. The well-known missionary Corinna Shattuck, in a letter published in the *New York Times* on 17th February 1896, used the phrase "a great Holocaust" to describe the mass burning of the Armenians who had taken refuge in Urfa cathedral, with the aim of emphasising the role religion had in the tragedy. See "Three Days of Butchery; A Woman Describes the Massacre of Armenians in Ourfa. Not Less than 3,500 Were Killed. Terrible Slaughterer in a Church," *The New York Times*, 17 February 1896, 1.

80 *The Genocide of the Armenians*, 118, 142-143.

81 Ibid., 143.

82 Ibid., 51-52.

83 A large medieval monastic complex in the historical province of Vaspurakan, at the southern foot of the mountain of the same name, 10 km northeast of the city of Van. It was also known as *Yedi Kilise* (7 churches). It was the residence of the spiritual leader of Van province.

84 *Brotherly Help to the Aggrieved Armenians*, 120-121.

Armenian cemeteries were also desecrated and destroyed.⁸⁵

The most frequently repeated pattern of erasure of the identities of Armenian churches during Hamidian massacres was their conversion into mosques.⁸⁶ Contemporary testimonies to this are provided by the American missionary Frederick Greene⁸⁷ and French journalist Henry Barby.⁸⁸ The latter wrote reports about the destruction of around 2,500 settlements and the demolition or conversion into mosques of 568 churches and monasteries.⁸⁹

Studies were carried out asserting that, as a rule, it was mostly ancient, stone-built, grand church buildings that stood out in their surroundings and were turned into mosques. The appropriation of Christian churches by changing their nature was also an attempt to demonstrate the superiority of Islam. Conversion of churches to mosques was accompanied by such ritualistic-religious ceremonial elements as the taking down of crosses and removing bells from the former church's bell tower by Muslim clerics reciting the Adhan and the forced public conversion of the Armenian clergy to Islam, etc.

The churches in 12 Armenian villages in the district of Erun (Bitlis province) were, after being desecrated, turned into mosques on October 13 (October 25 new style) 1895. The married priests were forced to wear turbans, their wives were given in marriage to mullahs and they were forced to marry one or two Kurdish women to make the conversion stronger.⁹⁰

Such displays of xenophobia were frequently encouraged or guided by Turkish officials themselves, who sought to serve as examples for the Muslim masses with their behaviour. Thus, one of the organisers of the Urfa Armenian massacre, Hussein Pasha, who had repeatedly sworn that he would have the Adhan recited in the church as soon as it was captured, arrived in person before the attack on the church began early on the morning of 17 December 1895, wanting to be present when his pledge was fulfilled.⁹¹

Though the policy of massacres and destruction that took place in 1894-1896 was mainly directed against the Armenians, the Assyrians and their ethnic and religious

85 *Les massacres d'Arménie*, 237.

86 Although the destruction of monuments in the Ottoman Empire in this manner began much earlier (as early as the 16th or 17th centuries as shown in Turkish sources (see *Թուրքական աղբյուրների Հայաստանի, հայերի և Անդրկովկասի վրա ժողովուրդների մասին* [Turkish Sources about Armenia, the Armenians and other Transcaucasian peoples], translated, compiled and annotated by Aram Safrastyan, Vol. II (Yerevan: ArmSSR National Academy, 1964), 34.)), it continued and intensified during the Abdul-Hamid massacres and gained great impetus during the Armenian Genocide and in the following years. For multiple examples of Armenian churches being turned into mosques in 1895-1896 see *Les massacres d'Arménie*, 62, 74, 82, 106, 110, 221 and Charmetant, *Martyrologe arménien des victimes*, 46-71.

87 Frederick Greene, *Armenian Massacres or the Sword of Mohammed* (Philadelphia and Chicago: International Publishing Co., 1896), 261-262.

88 Henry Barby, *Մարտիրի երկրին մէջ. Ըստապուստի Հայաստան* [In the Country of Horror: Martyred Armenia], translated by Michael Shamtanchian (Constantinople: H. Asadourian and Sons Publishing House, 1919), 6-7.

89 Ibid.

90 Charmetant, *Martyrologe Arménien des victimes*, 55.

91 Sahagian, *Heroic Urfa*, 359.

institutions were also significantly affected by it.⁹² Vladimir Maevski, Russian Vice-Consul in Van in 1895-1899, provided testimony concerning the destruction of Assyrian churches, referring to what he heard from one of the Nestorian Assyrian survivors, Melik Abdisho.⁹³ During the Kharberd massacres of 1895, the Assyrian Holy Virgin Church was robbed and desecrated and the priest killed for not giving up his faith. Armenian spiritual establishments also suffered the same fate at that time.⁹⁴

Unlike the Assyrians, the Greek population of the Ottoman Empire was spared massacres and destruction. According to Ioannis Hassiotis, this was connected with the fact that Abdul-Hamid wanted to avoid new complications in the relationship with Greece.⁹⁵

Thus, the 1894-1896 Hamidian massacres were accompanied by mass destruction of Armenian monasteries and churches that, after being pillaged and desecrated, were dealt with using the following methods:

1. They were put to the torch, often becoming a gathering place for killings, defiling of women or of burning people alive;
2. They were destroyed by cannon fire or simply torn down;
3. The most prominent stone churches were turned into mosques, thus losing their original role and identity.

These methods of destroying churches prepared the ground for later organised, greater destruction.

The Loss of Manuscripts and their Repositories

The obliteration of Armenian cultural values that took place in 1894-1896 included the destruction of dozens of manuscript repositories and libraries containing unique ancient manuscripts. Indeed, it is almost impossible to have even an approximate idea of the scale of the loss of Armenian manuscripts due to the Hamidian massacres. The reason, on the one hand, is the absence of complete data concerning Armenian manuscripts preserved in the Ottoman Empire, specifically in Western Armenia, in the years preceding the massacres. Nor are there, on the other, any lists of manuscripts and printed books destroyed during the massacres, even by province. The reports describing the massacres, however, are more often concerned with human losses, only briefly mentioning, in passing, the destruction of cultural establishments, the desecration of shrines and, sometimes, how manuscripts were destroyed. Nonetheless, considering the large number

92 David Gaunt, *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors: Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia during World War I* (New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2006), 41-43. About 55,000 Assyrians become victims of the 1895-1896 massacres (see Joseph Naayem, *Shall this nation die?* (New York: Chaldean rescue, 1921), 274).

93 Vladimir Maevski, «Несториане Ванского вилайета» [Nestorians of the Van Province], *Известия штаба Кавказского военного округа* [Izvestia of the Staff of the Caucasus Military District] no. 35 (Tiflis, 1913): 10-11.

94 *Genocide of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire*, 122.

95 Ioannis Hassiotis, *The Greeks and the Armenian Massacres (1890-1896)* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84.

of monasteries and churches looted and burnt down during the Hamidian massacres and the fact that in those years there was hardly a religious establishment that had less than ten or more examples of ancient manuscripts,⁹⁶ it is possible to get an approximate idea of the scale of the destruction of those cultural values.

There are many eyewitness accounts, memoirs and reports concerning the destruction of specific manuscript repositories or libraries. Thus, before putting the Urfa cathedral to the torch in 1895, the Turks completely pillaged and destroyed the church's library.⁹⁷ The only survivor among the Armenians who sheltered in the Holy Cross monastery of Khizan (Bitlis province) witnessed the destruction of its library of about 1,000 ancient printed books and manuscripts.⁹⁸ The Turks also destroyed, during the burning of Marash's St. Gevork church in 1895, thick parchment volumes kept in a repository attached to it, such as a *Haysmavurk* (Synaxarion), Horologion and other ecclesiastical manuscripts.⁹⁹ The treasury museum of the monastery of Varag, which also held a collection of Armenian manuscripts, suffered great losses in that same year.¹⁰⁰ According to one report, about 30 monasteries and churches holding precious manuscripts, vessels and ornaments were looted in the province of Van; the stolen movable and immovable wealth of the ravaged monasteries of Narek and Varag alone being worth between 500-1,000 liras: "[we] left remarkable antiquities, old manuscripts and libraries behind, all of which were either pillaged or torn to pieces."¹⁰¹

Thus, such unique testimonies, although not allowing the reader to obtain a clear picture of the actual number and extent of the destruction of manuscripts kept in any given repository or museum, show that manuscripts, along with other items of Armenian cultural heritage, were destroyed during the Hamidian massacre years.

The Destruction of Educational Centres

The Hamidian massacres significantly disrupted the natural course of development of Western Armenian educational and cultural life. A government decree published in 1895 closed Armenian schools and prevented them from functioning for over a year in almost every province.¹⁰² The report prepared by priest Ghevond of Trapizon at the request of

96 Suren Kolanjian, «Հայկական կոտորածները եւ մեր ձեռագրական կորուստները» [The Armenian Massacres and Our Manuscript Losses], *Etchmiadzin*, 5-6-7 (1965): 144.

97 *Եդեսիոյ սուկալի դէպքը եւ ողբերգութիւն կոտորածին Եդեսիոյ* [The Terrible Events in Edessa and the Tragedy of the Massacre of Edessa], written by an Edessan Armenian (Shumla: H. Avetarian Publishing House, 1904), 15-18.

98 Editorial, «Նամակներ պարսկա-տաճկական սահմանագլխից» [“Letters form the Persian-Turkish Border”], *Droshak*, no. 16, 1896, 123.

99 Kaloustian, *Marash or Germanik*, 429.

100 *Հայրենագիտութիւն. Վան քաղաք եւ իւր շրջակաները* [Local History: the City of Van and its Surroundings], Vol. I (Van: Meliksetian Publishing House, 1913), 29.

101 “The Bulletin of Vaspurakan Massacre,” 585.

102 Kapriel Simonian, *Յուշանատեսն Պոնտական Ամասիոյ* [Memory Book of Pontic Amasya] (Venice: Mkhitarian Publishing House, 1966), 716-717.

the Catholicos of all Armenians Mkrtych Khrimyan in 1896 noted that Trapizon's eastern villages, which had been making great educational progress, now had only two schools with 90 pupils and two teachers, while all the schools in the villages to the west were closed.¹⁰³ Hundreds of educational centres were looted, destroyed and put to the torch in 1894-1896, such as the Kharberd National Central (named after Tlgatintsi) and Smbatian schools, the St. Karapet and St. Stepannos churches and their schools, Kharberd's (Harput's) Euphrates College, the Partevian School in Chmshkatsag, the Gayanian girls' school in Van, the schools in the villages of Anggh and Averak, St. Mesrobian and Nazlian schools in the village of Binkyan (Sivas province) and many others.¹⁰⁴ Dozens of schools were burnt down in the province of Sebastia in November and December of 1895, including those in the villages of Pyurtk, Tarente, Ashoti, Hajikoy and Enteres.¹⁰⁵ The Armenian prelacy in the city of Tivrik was set on fire on November 4 and the adjacent school was turned into an armoury.¹⁰⁶ In some instances, the gendarmes burnt the original school license, thereby eliminating the legal basis for their existence.¹⁰⁷

Unlike the case of monasteries and churches, not a single report has reached us summing up the losses suffered by Armenian national educational centres, even for the provinces. The data extracted from Matevos Izmirlyan's archive only concern the losses suffered by Armenian Protestant schools, according to which eight schools were destroyed, one burnt and one turned into a barracks.¹⁰⁸

The Effects of the Destruction of Armenian Cultural Values: Statistical Data

Abdul-Hamid's policy of destruction of Armenian cultural values included the Ottoman Empire's 11 administrative units: the six Western Armenian vilayets (Erzerum, Van, Bitlis, Sebastia, Kharberd, Diarbekir), as well as the provinces of Trapizon, Aleppo, Adana, Angora and the sanjak of Izmit. Moreover, the destruction carried out in the abovementioned provinces often covered entire town quarters or villages. According to

103 Hovagim Hovagimian, *Պատմութիւն հայկական Պոնտոսի* [History of Armenian Pontus] (Beirut: Mshak Publishing House, 1967), 168-169.

104 Charmetant, *Martyrologe Arménien*, 46-71; Vahe Hayk, *Խարբերդ եւ անոր ոսկեղէն դաշտը* [Kharberd and its Golden Plain] (New York: Kharberd Armenian Patriotic Union, 1959), 389-392, 402-408; "The Armenian Church in Turkey," 91; Manuk Djizmedjian, *Խարբերդ եւ իր զաւակները* [Kharberd and its Children] (Fresno: 1955), 350; Hampartsoum Kasparian, *Չմշկաւտագ եւ իր գիւղերը*, [Chmshkatsag and its Villages] (Beirut: Paykar Publishing House, 1969), 247-248; Gevorg Sherents, *Սրբաւայրեր* [Holy Places] (Tiflis: Verichev and Kamenmacher Printing House, 1902), 12, 85-86, 100.

105 Charmetant, *Martyrologe Arménien*, 59-61; "The Armenian Church in Turkey," 90-91.

106 Ibid.

107 Yervant Zartarian, *Պատմագիրք Տիւրիկ քաղաքի* [History Book of the City of Tivrik] (Beirut: Hamaskayin Vahe Setian Publishing House, 1972), 282.

108 Matenadaran – Mesrop Mashtots Research Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, *M. Izmirlian's personal archive*, list 34, file 14, doc. 615.

Greene, some 2,500 out of 3,300 Armenian-populated settlements in the Ottoman Empire were ruined because of the 1894-96 massacres.¹⁰⁹ The capital, Constantinople, was perhaps the only place where the massacres and destruction did not include the obliteration of cultural values.¹¹⁰

Archbishop Maghakia Ormanian, Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, in his work *Azgapatum (National History)*, writing about 1896 and 1908, separated the 1895 massacres into three areas:

1. From Trapizon to Gyumushkhane, Baberd, Dercan, Karin, Basen, Bayazet, Kghi, Kamakh, Erzinka, Archesh, Aljavaz, Van, Shatakh, Karchkan, Sgherd, Baghesh, Khizan, Mush and Sasoun;
2. From Samson to Amasia, Marzvan, Eudocia, Sebastia, Nikopolis, Zile, Kesaria, Kharberd, Akn, Arabkir, Edesia, Piregik, Severeke, Balu and Diarbekir;
3. The Cilician diocese: Kyurin, Alpstan, Hadjin, Germanik, Melitine, Adana, Tarson, Mersin, Chokmarzvan, Yenijekale, Aintap, Beria, Iskenderun and Antioch.

Maybe with an excusable exaggeration, he wrote that not one of the specified dioceses or the villages surrounding their central cities was spared from terror. He also informed, that within those boundaries there was not a monastery that remained intact, not a church that wasn't destroyed, desecrated or converted into a mosque; church vessels and ornaments vanished completely, church worship ceased forever; more than half the priestly class was killed, with the remainder escaping [death] by conversion.¹¹¹

Numerous testimonies and reports prove that monasteries and churches, particularly in Western Armenia, suffered significant losses as a result of the Hamidian massacres. Though incomplete, the data presented below are nonetheless important for understanding the extent of the destruction of Armenian national-religious establishments in the six vilayets of Western Armenia.

Kharberd (Harput) province: Kharberd is one of the provinces of the Ottoman Empire in which almost all the settlements suffered due to the massacres, looting and despoilation of 1895-1896 and the destruction of cultural establishments took on a wholesale nature. The report by J. B. Hubble, an American Red Cross worker, sent to the founder and president of that same organisation Clara Barton dated 1 August 1896, shows that Kharberd suffered tremendously and that more than 200 settlements were looted or totally destroyed.¹¹² A letter addressed to the Armenian Patriarchate in Constantinople dated 14 December 1895 provides the information that the massacre in Kharberd province started on October 10 (old style) with the attack on the village of Berdak (Charsanjak region) and

109 Greene, *Armenian Massacres*, 424.

110 Charmetant, *Martyrologe Arménien*, 47-70.

111 Archbishop Maghakia Ormanian, *Uqquuyunnuñ* [National History], Vol. III (Jerusalem: Srbots Hakobians Publishing House, 1927), 5028-5030.

112 Clara Barton, *Report. America's Relief Expedition to Asia Minor under the Red Cross* (Washington: Journal Publishing Company, 1896), 67.

spread to the surrounding villages. Armenian national establishments almost everywhere – monasteries and churches – were desecrated and burnt and the priests and teachers were tortured and killed.¹¹³

One of the few settlements spared from the 1895 massacre in Kharberd province was the city of Akn. Troops were, however, brought from Erzinka (Erzinjan) in September 1896 to destroy it. Its upper quarter, including the St. Astvatsatsin church, was completely destroyed.¹¹⁴ Edwin Bliss reported that calculations were made after the massacres in Kharberd that, in just October 1895 alone, 211 churches, monasteries and schools had been destroyed in the province, of which 108 were in the city of Kharberd and 59 in the surrounding villages, 19 in Arabkir and its surrounding villages, 38 in Akn and its vicinity, 6 in Kapan-Maden district, 13 in Malatia and its vicinity and 27 in the province of Dersim.¹¹⁵

According to the data compiled by the American missionary couple Rendel and Helen Harris, 67 churches and Protestant meetinghouses as well as six monasteries were destroyed, desecrated and burnt down in the city of Kharberd and its surrounding villages in 1895.¹¹⁶

Father Charmetant reported that, as of February 1896, there was no functioning spiritual or educational institution whatsoever operating in around the 60 villages of the Kharberd diocese.¹¹⁷ The churches in the villages of Moserik, Morenik, Berdak, Ashushan, Huseinik, Kok, Mekirik, Shintel, Korpe, Darsik, Zortsaruk, Belmishen, Habur, Lichk, Narver, Azni, the monasteries St. Gevork of Sorsor, St. Astvatsatsin of Tade and Holy Saviour in the neighborhood of Akn were all totally looted, destroyed or put to the torch and the church in the village of Ichme was turned into a mosque.¹¹⁸

Van province: Unlike the holy places in the villages surrounding Van, the majority of which were burnt down and destroyed, the city of Van itself, as well as the district of Moks, suffered relatively little thanks to some people.¹¹⁹ A primary source provides the information that 125 pillaged and destroyed monasteries and churches were counted in just 8 areas of Van province.¹²⁰ It is understood, from the letter written to the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople Matevos B. Izmirlyan by the Catholicos of Akhtamar, Khachatur II Shiroyan, dated 19 December 1895, that after all the monasteries and churches in the Sgherd, Khizan, Mamrtank (Bitlis province) and Shatakh regions

113 *The Genocide of the Armenians*, 116-117, 119.

114 Arakel Kechian, *Ulû lu ulûghp* [Akn and its Residents], Vol. II (Paris: K. Matikian Publishing House, 1952), 137.

115 Bliss, *Turkey and the Armenian Atrocities*, 445.

116 Rendel J. Harris and Helen B. Harris, *Letters from the Scenes of the Recent Massacres in Armenia* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1897), 146.

117 Charmetant, *Martyrologe arménien*, 64.

118 *Ibid.*, 62-67.

119 The city of Van suffered relatively less thanks to the Circassian chief Emin Bey (Sherents, *Holy places*, 29). The governor of Moks, Mahmud-zade-Beydullah-bey, who left for Van at the beginning of the massacre, returned and prevented the massacres of local Armenians and any destruction (*Brotherly Help*, 123).

120 *Les massacres d'Arménie*, 97-101.

(Van province) were looted, some were destroyed and the rest converted to mosques.¹²¹ According to statistics, based on the incomplete data received, produced by the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin regarding the 1895-1896 massacres, 124 villages were looted and destroyed,¹²² 8 churches were pillaged and put to the torch, as were 20 monasteries, including those of Narek, Varag, Karmavor, Holy Cross, St. Gregory the Illuminator, Metsop, St. Astvatsatsin of Anggh, Spitak, Lim, Ktuts and others; 33 clergymen were also killed.¹²³ These statistics, however, are very approximate, as the data on the 24 pillaged, desecrated and destroyed churches in the regions of Karchkan and Aljavaz of the province were not included at all.¹²⁴

Erzerum province: There were a large number of churches and monasteries pillaged and destroyed in the province of Erzerum in October-November 1895. Some 36 churches were looted and burnt down in Baberd and its surrounding areas alone in October 1895.¹²⁵ The churches in the villages of Ksanta, Blur, Blurak, Bukhti, St. Toros, Neg and Balakhor were all turned into mosques.¹²⁶ Some 12 monasteries were robbed and burnt down in the Yerznka (Erzinjan) region.¹²⁷ Twenty two churches and two monasteries were completely destroyed in the district of Kghi during the massacres in the Erzerum region that started on 10 October 1895.¹²⁸ A short table, presented by Cambon to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, summarised the effects of the massacres that took place in the district of Derjan (Erzerum region) during October and November 1895.¹²⁹ According to this table, the Turks broke into the churches in the villages of Bagarich and Khachikoghlu Gom, wounded the priest in the latter and also turned the church in Kyotur into a stable. They looted and burnt down the churches in Piris and destroyed two churches in Karabulagh and Khndzri in Aghater as well. The monasteries of St. Toros and St. David in Espeverek were also destroyed.¹³⁰

Sebastia (Sivas) province: The religious establishments in the province of Sebastia suffered significant losses and destruction during the Hamidian massacres. According to a report compiled by the German Consul in Sebastia on 15 December 1896, the number of pillaged churches alone numbered 87; the number of monasteries also destroyed in the province was 5.¹³¹ More than 20 churches were looted and dozens of clerics butchered

121 *The Genocide of the Armenians*, 122-125.

122 In the summary of the statistical data, the number 125 is incorrect (“The Bulletin of Vaspurakan Massacre,” 586).

123 *Ibid.*, 585-586.

124 Charmetant, *Martyrologe Arménien*, 52-54.

125 For the destroyed churches by locality see Editorial, *Բարեկրօնի գիւղերի սւկրումը* [“Destruction of the Villages of Babert”], *Droshak*, 16 January 1896, 15.

126 “The Armenian Church in Turkey,” 88.

127 Editorial, «Կոտորածներ. Երզնկա» [“Massacres: Yerznka”], *Droshak*, 1 February 1896, 28-29.

128 For the destroyed churches by locality, Charmetant, *Martyrologe Arménien*, 50-51.

129 *Documents diplomatiques*, 237.

130 *Ibid.*

131 Editorial, “Չարդերը” [“The Massacres”], *Nor Giank* (London), 15 March 1898, 93.

during the massacres in the city of Sebastia and the surrounding villages in November 1895.¹³² The church in the small town of Enteres, with the villagers who were sheltering inside it, was set on fire and burnt down. The churches in Tarente and Ashoti villages were also destroyed by arson.¹³³ Those in Zimara and Ghazma were turned into mosques after being partially destroyed.¹³⁴

Diarbekir province: The district of Balu (Araghana-Maden region) should be singled out in terms of the losses suffered by the Armenian national establishments during the massacres in 1895. According to a report by Rendel and Helen Harris, some 44 churches, 2 monasteries and 37 schools were destroyed and 16 clergymen were killed in just the city of Balu and surrounding villages in 1895.¹³⁵ Edwin Bliss reported that some 16 churches, monasteries and schools were destroyed in Balu and its surrounding areas during the 1895 massacres.¹³⁶ The four Armenian churches in the city of Balu were looted on October 31 and then converted into mosques, with seven priests being forced to convert to Islam.¹³⁷

Bitlis province: Most of the Armenian monasteries and churches in Bitlis province were turned into mosques during the 1895 massacres. Some 12 Armenian churches were converted to mosques, as were 10 churches in the district of Shirvan, while the remainder were razed to the ground during the massacres launched in the district of Erun on 13 October.¹³⁸ The churches and monasteries located in the districts of Dere, Sparkert and Khizan in the province of Bitlis were completely looted in August 1895.¹³⁹ The monasteries and most of the churches in Sparkert were totally destroyed, the remainder being turned into mosques.¹⁴⁰ The monastery in Mamrtank, as well as that of the Holy Cross in Aparank, the Holy Cross in Siz and the monastery at Tivrushki and most of the churches in Chapaghjur diocese were also converted to mosques.¹⁴¹

A noteworthy report, titled “The Collective Note of the Ambassadors of the Six Great Powers” that was submitted to the Sublime Port in February 1896, had a unique statistical table attached to it that summed up the consequences of the Hamidian massacres, which is presented below in **Table 1**.¹⁴²

132 “The Armenian Church in Turkey,” 90.

133 Ibid., 91.

134 Ibid.

135 Harris and Harris, *Letters from the Scenes*, 146.

136 Rev. Edwin M. Bliss, *Turkey and the Armenian Atrocities*, 445.

137 Charmetant, *Martyrologe Arménien*, 68; “State of Mush,” 23.

138 “The Armenian Church in Turkey,” 89.

139 Ibid.

140 Editorial, «Մսոսրրսւմնէր» [“Massacres”], *Droshak*, 10 April 1896, 86.

141 “The Armenian Church in Turkey,” 90.

142 Johannes Lepsius, *Armenien und Europa. Eine Anklageschrift wider der Christlichen Großmächte und an das Christliche Deutschland* (Berlin: Verlag der Akademischen Buchhandlung W. Faber & Co, 1896), 238-243.

Administrative area	Looted and destroyed settlements	Looted and destroyed churches	Looted and destroyed monasteries	Churches and monasteries converted into mosques	Slain clergymen
Mamuret ul Aziz (Kharberd)	300	58	3	67	46
Sivas (Sepastia)	350	34	7	0	27
Bitlis (Baghesh)	195	67	7	63	12
Diyarbakir	200	119	1	109	38
Van	825	233	51	82	19
Erzerum (Karin)	267	51	5	7	36
Trapizon	34	0	0	0	0
Ankara	45	0	0	0	0
Adana	25	6	0	0	0
Aleppo	250	2	2	0	13
Izmit	2	0	0	0	0
TOTALS	2493	570	76	328	191

Table 1. *Statistical table attached to the “Collective Note of the Ambassadors of the Six Great Powers” submitted to the Sublime Port in February 1896*

According to the data shown, there were, in 11 administrative units of the Empire, 2,493 settlements, 570 churches¹⁴³ and 76 monasteries¹⁴⁴ looted and destroyed, 328 Christian churches were converted to mosques and 191 clergymen, including 12 of high rank, as well as preachers, were brutally killed in 1895. Despite the report only providing a partial reflection of reality,¹⁴⁵ the table nevertheless enables the reader to understand the extent of the looting and destruction by province.

Patriarch Matevos Izmirlian compiled a unique statistical report summing up the losses and damage suffered by Armenian monasteries and churches during the Hamidian massacre years. It states that, of the Armenian Apostolic monuments existing during the specified period, some 791 churches and 85 monasteries were looted, 157 churches

143 The number 568 given as total in the table, as well as in the text in the original is incorrect. See Johannes Lepsius, *Armenien und Europa*, 243.

144 In the original, the number 77 indicated as total in the table, as well as occurring in the text is inaccurate. See *ibid.*

145 Missing, in particular, are the details of the losses suffered by the Armenians in Trapizon, with 13 churches in the city’s surrounding villages looted and ruined and 6 priests killed. It was the same for the Armenian churches and monasteries in the vilayet of Angora and the sanjak of Izmit. The total number of clergymen killed and of Armenian educational institutions destroyed also amount to a considerable figure. (Félix Charmetant, *Martyrologie Arménien*, 47; “The Armenian Church in Turkey,” 87, 70).

and 26 monasteries demolished, 50 churches and 9 monasteries were burnt down and 48 churches and 10 monasteries were turned into mosques. 11 Armenian Protestant meeting houses were demolished, 19 burnt down, 1 was converted to a mosque and 1 turned into a barracks. Four Armenian Catholic churches were looted, two destroyed and one converted to a mosque.¹⁴⁶

A committee was then created by special order of the Ottoman government to organise a fundraising campaign and use the money raised to build and repair mosques destroyed or damaged in the aftermath of “the disorders that have taken place in Anatolia.”¹⁴⁷ The Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, in his protest note submitted to the Sublime Porte in 1896 in response to that sham act, stated that over 400 Armenian holy places had been destroyed and damaged and that only one mosque, in Arabkir that, being close to the Armenian district, had been burnt down when the houses of the Armenians had been fired.¹⁴⁸ This report by the Patriarch was, however, left unanswered.¹⁴⁹

Evidence concerning the only mosque to be burnt down during the fire in the city of Arabkir is also to be found in the report published in the newspaper *Hnchak* in 1897, under the title of “The unheard-of massacre in Arabkir,” according to which the three Armenian churches and schools of the city were fired, except for the cathedral and the prelacy which were looted and half-destroyed, “...the city marketplace, with the mosque in the middle, has been burnt down from end to end.”¹⁵⁰

Thus, the Hamidian massacres were carried out in the 11 administrative areas of the Ottoman Empire, the mass destruction of Armenian cultural and religious buildings in about 2,500 localities, reaching its greatest extent in the six provinces of Western Armenia. It is possible to single out the province of Kharberd specifically, where massacres, looting and destruction indiscriminately engulfed all the province’s localities. Armenian spiritual and cultural establishments were deliberately targeted for destruction, as the monasteries and churches were deemed to be undesirable and dangerous by both the Muslim population and the authorities, given their important role in preserving the Armenian nation. Local Muslims, gendarmes and the regular army were widely involved in looting and destruction, directed and instigated by the central and local authorities and Muslim clergymen, often with the latter’s immediate participation.

The policy of annihilating of Armenian cultural heritage during the Abdul-Hamid massacres fully accords with the definition of vandalism or cultural genocide put forward by Lemkin, as:

1. It certainly wasn’t a process of cultural assimilation and unification or slow adaptation of culture, which is not of genocidal nature

146 Matenadaran, *M. Izmirlian’s Personal Archive*, list 34, file 14, doc. 615.

147 Editorial, *Նամակ Դոշակ* [A Letter from Constantinople], *Droshak*, 15 May 1896, 100.

148 Ibid.

149 Ibid.

150 Editorial, «Արարկիրի անլուր կոտորածը» [The Unknown Massacre in Arabkir], *Hnchak*, no. 2, 20 February 1897, 14.

2. It was premeditated and carried out on a large scale over a short period, using force and decisiveness and linked to actions aimed at the physical or biological annihilation of the group.
3. Multiple instances of mass immolation in churches were recorded in 1895-1896. These took place to the accompaniment of dhol and zurna (drums and pipes) in attempts to silence the screams of people being burnt alive by the criminal perpetrators, being striking examples of cultural genocide as determined by Lemkin.¹⁵¹
4. These episodes, in their turn, point out the two aspects of the same crime – cultural and physical annihilation – while at the same time emphasising the criminals’ awareness of the crimes they committed, i.e., their intentions.

The abovementioned points prove that the policy adopted was planned and deliberate. The mechanisms used during the Hamidian massacres for the realisation of vandalism and or cultural Genocide were manifested on a much larger scale during the Armenian Genocide.

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¹⁵¹ See the abovementioned example of the Lublin Jewish Theological Seminary library being put to the torch by the Germans in 1939.

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VARIATIONS ON A DIRGE OF EXTERMINATION: “DER ZOR ÇÖLÜNDE” AND THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

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Abstract

In one of his lectures at Northwestern University, Eli Wiesel (1977) stressed that “if the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the epistle, and the Renaissance the sonnet, our generation invented a new literature, that of testimony.” However, Wiesel suggested the generation of the Holocaust and most likely have forgotten the eyewitness survivors of the Armenian Genocide. In this article, I focus on a specific kind of testimony that emerged amongst the survivors of the Armenian Genocide: the song-testimony.

Thinking about music and sound is important as the experience of genocide stretches far beyond the visual-oriented notions of such tragedy. It is in this spirit that I write this essay to investigate “Der Zor Çölünde,” a series of song-testimonies that musically charts the experience of Armenians during the Genocide of 1915–1923. I primarily argue that Armenian deportees appropriated the musical and lyrical template of “Der Zor Çölünde” by creating new verses. In doing so, Armenians illustrated and immortalized what they saw, felt, and experienced during the deportations and forced marches. Considering the multifaceted nature of “Der Zor Çölünde,” this essay reimagines the Armenian Genocide experience through the voice(s) of its protagonists. Furthermore, I emphasize the importance and implication of listening to the performances of “Der Zor Çölünde” *against* the official narratives of genocide denial.

Keywords: Armenian Genocide, testimony, song, music, performance, counterlistening

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Introduction

We left Harpoot on a Thursday, went to Merdin and from there to Tigranakert, to Rasul-Ayn – walking the entire way – most of the time on our bare feet ... We were kept in this area for a week ... When the week was up, the army officer returned and asked us to prepare to leave, and we were marched to the Der Zor wilderness. We suddenly realized it was nearly eight months since we left our homeland. Once again, we came upon a body of water, and again, our fears and suspicions were aroused ... We would be put to death by drowning. Some of us were crying contemplating death, some were laughing hysterically, some were even singing.¹

Johar Aslanian-Mamigonian's sonic triptych – crying, laughing, singing – inscribed in her 1978 survivor testimony letter, explicitly unveils the harrowing cacophony she heard as a deportee during the unspeakable events of 1915 to 1923. Arguably, the first major genocide of the 20th century, the Armenian Genocide, was the Ottoman state's barbaric act to eliminate the Armenians of the Empire and establish the foundations for a Pan-Turkic empire.² When the Great War ended, statistics indicated that the Young Turks uprooted, deported, and murdered nearly ninety per cent of Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire.³ The engraved memories of the sheer inhumanity and tragedy empowered survivors to affront Turkey's continuous denial and narrate their experiences through oral testimonies, narratives, and memoirs. In this essay, I focus on another form of testimony – the song testimony.

Visual and documentary materials (e.g., photographs, documents, and monuments) dominate the representations of the Armenian Genocide. As historical evidence, oral testimonies of traumatic events have received criticism from the history profession due to their subjectivity and inaccuracy.⁴ However, Omer Bartov conversely argues that testimonies not only “provide insight into the lives and minds of men, women, and children who experienced the events” but also, beyond any official documents, illuminate our understanding of the “mental landscape, the psychology of the protagonists, and the views and perceptions of others.”⁵

Thinking about music and sound as testimonies is essential, for the experience in any genocidal event transcends far beyond the visual realm. Consider this: a song reveals

1 Verjine Svazlian, “Johar Aslanian-Mamigonian's Testimony,” in *The Armenian Genocide: Testimonies of the Eyewitness Survivors* (Yerevan: Gitoutyoun Publishing House, 2011), 254–255.

2 Ronald Grigor Suny, “Religion, Ethnicity, and Nationalism: Armenians, Turks, and the End of the Ottoman Empire,” in *In God's Name: Genocide and Religion in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Omer Bartov and Phyllis Mack (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 50.

3 Suny, “Religion Ethnicity, and Nationalism,” 54; Taner Akçam, “The Young Turks and the Plans for the Ethnic Homogenization of Anatolia,” in *Shatterzones of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, edited by Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 269.

4 Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, 2016), 5.

5 Omer Bartov, *Genocide, the Holocaust, and Israel-Palestine: First-Person History in Times of Crisis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), 62.

intimate and complex relationships between people and places. Historians Alun Howkins and Shirli Gilbert reason that, in the context of the British Isles and the Holocaust, respectively, songs from ordinary people stand as an exceptional historical source, orally capturing collective ideas and interpretations within these communities.⁶ Furthermore, studying songs also calls on us to contemplate the act of singing. These essential elements make songs vital and relatively rare records of the Armenian Genocide experience. Inspired by these unique attributes of songs, this essay investigates “Der Zor Çölünde” a song testimony about the Armenian Genocide.

The sui generis nature of “Der Zor Çölünde” – bearing rich literary, archival, cultural, and affective material; its numerous versicle variants, and its embodiment through a survivor’s voice – compels us to reconsider and reimagine the overlooked significance of song testimonies as repositories of historical information on the Armenian Genocide. I reflect on the implications of renewing the voice and sound of “Der Zor Çölünde” a century after the Genocide’s conclusion in order to ask what themes and realities within these verses can we unearth further to illuminate our understanding of the Armenian Genocide experience. Specifically, what role did “Der Zor Çölünde” play in the everyday lives of Armenian deportees? In what ways does a performance of “Der Zor Çölünde” affect a survivor’s singing body?

Using the questions above as points of departure, I engage with the verses of “Der Zor Çölünde” as lyrical relics of collective memory and introduce a musical turn in understanding the complexity of the Armenian Genocide. First, I seek to imagine how we can intertwine these verses with narrative and audiovisual testimonies of survivors from the Armenian diaspora and exhume overlapping genocidal motifs. These themes, textually concealed under the guise of suggestive metaphors, include sexual violence, religion, abduction, suicide, and thirst. In addition, they serve as connecting fulcrum between the different kinds of oral testimonies of the Armenian Genocide.

Further, the abundance of “Der Zor Çölünde” verses demonstrates that Armenian victims orally and repeatedly created lyrical variations along a prescribed template. When examining how victims immortalized a shared experience of the Genocide through these verses, I am grateful to Michel de Certeau’s idea of everyday life and the role of *tactics* as a way for Armenian victims to musically navigate their surroundings despite not having significant control over these environments.⁷ Simply put, I posit that composing verses along a familiar pattern is a form of tactic in everyday deportation life. This musicalized tactic represents a form of musicking – or the communal and inclusive act of engaging with music, including music-making and listening – that accentuates the shared experience of the Genocide.⁸

6 Alun Howkins, “The Voice of the People: The Social Meaning and Context of Country Song,” *Oral History* 3, no. 1 (1975): 50; Shirli Gilbert, *Music in the Holocaust: Confronting Life in the Nazi Ghetto Camps* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3.

7 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 37.

8 Christopher G. Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 9.

Engaging with songs as testimonies means considering them content-driven sources and crucial artifacts rooted in singing. To ethically analyze survivors' singing performances of "Der Zor Çölünde" in their audiovisual testimonies, I adopted Dominick LaCapra's orientation of "empathic unsettlement," previously adopted in viewing Holocaust testimonies, to afford myself the ability to participate and connect with the experience of Armenian Genocide survivors while also recognizing that their experiences are different.⁹ This desirable position combines emotional engagement and an awareness of the limits of that relationship due to the temporal and experiential gap between the past and the present. In a vocal performance or "Der Zor Çölünde", the verses act as temporal bridges that allow the survivors and their traumatized bodies to be both in the past and in the present. I propose that these vocalized verses become embodied memories of the Armenian Genocide. Thus, "Der Zor Çölünde" verses trigger the unique power of song testimonies to allow survivors to work out their trauma. For a secondary witness, listening to a singing survivor and the musical traces of the past can be an act of *listening against* powerful nation-states that continue to deny the Armenian Genocide.¹⁰

My principal source for the numerous lyrical variations of "Der Zor Çölünde" is the English edition of Armenian folklorist and ethnologist Verjine Svazlian's anthology *The Armenian Genocide: Testimonies of the Eyewitness Survivors*. Svazlian's massive collection results from her fifty-year fieldwork, which began in 1955, when discussing the Genocide publicly was forbidden in Soviet Armenia.¹¹ Moreover, I found traces of "Der Zor Çölünde" within audiovisual survivor testimonies from the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation's *Visual History Archive*.

This paper integrates three sections: the first part involves a historical and literary reading of "Der Zor Çölünde" verses recorded in Svazlian's compendium. The second part provides further context by comparing these verses alongside other testimonies to establish "Der Zor Çölünde" as a component of everyday deportation life. In this section, I also introduce a verse from the audiovisual testimony of a Genocide survivor descendant. Finally, the last section delves into the performance aspect of "Der Zor Çölünde." In this study, I consider all testimonies – song, narrative, and audiovisual – sacrosanct sites of historical, sensory, cultural, and affective knowledge. This attention reinforces the importance of recognizing and acknowledging how survivors preserve and embody the historical horror and pain ingrained in the verses of "Der Zor Çölünde."

Musical Memories of Violence in the Borderlands

The Armenian Genocide was the Ottoman government's campaign to expel Armenians from their homelands and subject them to unimaginable forms of abuse.¹² During these

9 Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 41–42.

10 Gascia Ouzounian, "Counterlistening," *English Studies in Canada* 46, no. 2–4 (2023): 311.

11 Svazlian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 568–577. In my analysis, I utilized Svazlian's translation of "Der Zor Çölünde" verses unless specified.

12 Richard G. Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence* (Berkeley: University of California Press,

deportations, Armenians found meaning and solace in the verses of “Der Zor Çölünde”. Svazlian asserts that “Der Zor Çölünde” verses are connected through similar topics and portray Ottoman Turkey’s violence against Armenians.¹³ Therefore, I analyzed the sixty-nine distinct lyrical variations of “Der Zor Çölünde” recorded in Svazlian’s anthology and identified recurring motifs among each verse.¹⁴ Although the original creators of these verses remain unknown, it is essential to consider that these songs emerged in the borderlands – geographical locations cradling diverse cultural, religious, and ethnic composition.

In the Ottoman Empire, religious minorities – Christians and Jews – held an inferior status.¹⁵ The Armenian populations experienced the Ottoman Empire’s sadistic genocidal acts, including sexual assault, violence, looting, and murder.¹⁶ Armenians were forcibly uprooted from their homes and deported to the Syrian deserts, mainly Der Zor,¹⁷ where special killing units of convicted criminals massacred the arriving Armenians.¹⁸

Scholars like Omer Bartov and Eric Weitz insist that sociopolitical memories in the borderlands linger in mind as mementos and vestiges – resonances of once thriving communities, now lost to history.¹⁹ Correspondingly, the verses of “Der Zor Çölünde” set to an unornamented and simple melodic template, serve as music-lyrical memories that offer us traces of the barbarisms in these borderlands.



Figure 1. Melodic template of “Der Zor Çölünde”.²⁰

The tuneful and octave-encompassing melody of “Der Zor Çölünde” is syllabic and declamatory, exhibiting a conversational character (Figure 1). This melodic frame adheres to the symmetrical scheme of its text using two four-bar phrases. The two-note slurs that permeate the song signal a lachrymose quality, reminiscent of medieval

1967), 50–51.

13 Svazlian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 41.

14 Ibid., 568–577, 628–629. In the introductory essay of this source, Svazlian claims that there are up to 80 verses associated to the “Der Zor Çölünde” song series.

15 Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz, “Introduction: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands,” in *Shatterzones of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, edited by Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 10.

16 Donald Miller and Lorna Touryan Miller, *Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 41–42.

17 Norman Naimark, *Genocide: A World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 73.

18 George Shirinian, “Deportations,” in *The Armenian Genocide: The Essential Reference Guide*, edited by Alan Whitehorn (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 2015), 107–109.

19 Bartov and Weitz, “Introduction: Coexistence and Violence,” 12.

20 Svazlian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 629. This is my own engravement adapted from Svazlian’s transcription of the melody.

Armenian folksongs and funeral chants, in contrast to the rigid structure of poetry and the ambiguity surrounding how memory functions in recalling poems, the synergies between a song's melodic and rhythmic patterns operate as effective mnemonic aids.²¹ They facilitate not only the recall of words and images but also of emotions. In performing "Der Zor Çölünde" the simple yet plaintive nature of its tune and the tragedy embedded in the text caused Genocide survivors to sing with crying sobs. The interactions between music and verse further stimulate survivors to recall as many verses as they can. Due to the numerous permutations of "Der Zor Çölünde" and her lack of formal musical training, Svazlian confesses that she needed the assistance of a trained musician to approximate and represent all the survivors' performances into singular notation.²²

Svazlian first encountered verses of "Der Zor Çölünde" from survivor Yeghissabet Kalashian, who imparted four verses in Turkish. Empathically, Svazlian writes that as Kalashian performed these verses, "tears ran down incessantly from her eyes, her voice coarsened, and she could not speak and sing; she took a breath, started to narrate anew and cry again."²³ Women deportees were the primary authors of these songs. Throughout these deportations, exiles, and massacres, Armenian women shouldered the entire burden of suffering and pain on their frail shoulders.²⁴ As I will show later, Armenian women used songs and their voices as a means of emotional release and self-reclamation. Defenseless during the deportations, Armenian women were the subject of constant terror and agony, particularly of sexual abuse, from Turkish soldiers and Kurdish looters.

Experiences of women, particularly of physical and sexual assaults saturate the verses of "Der Zor Çölünde". Scholars of international law concur that sexual violence is more prevalent during a genocide than any other wartime consequences. This is because sexual aggression achieves a specific political and militaristic goal through opportunistic or strategic means.²⁵ Moreover, perpetrators of genocide perceive women as the representations of a particular culture or nation-state.²⁶ Hence, rape and other forms of abuse during the Armenian Genocide were not only physical acts of dominance against Armenian women but also symbolic acts of aggression and degradation to the Armenian community.²⁷ I posit that the Turkish soldiers' acts of sexual assault against Armenian women are beyond gratuitous or irrational. Instead, their malevolence constituted an intricately planned, meticulously executed, and profoundly symbolic violence in the form of sexual violence. To put it even further, sexual violence against Armenian deportees is

21 Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 43.

22 Svazlian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 617. Svazlian confesses that she required the help of musicologist Alina Pahlevanian to translate her fieldwork recordings of "Der Zor Çölünde" to notation.

23 *Ibid.*, 465.

24 *Ibid.*, 18.

25 Doris E. Buss, "Rethinking Rape as a Weapon," *Feminist Legal Studies* 17, no. 2 (2009): 150; Elisabeth Jean Wood, "Variations of Sexual Violence During War," *Politics and Society* 34, no. 3 (2006): 327.

26 Buss, "Rethinking," 148.

27 Sukanya Banerjee, Angana Chatterji, Lubna Nazir Chaudry, and Manali Desai, "Engendering Violence: Boundaries, Histories, and the Everyday," *Cultural Dynamics* 16, no. 2 (2004): 129.

intrinsically entwined with Turkish soldiers' pathological fixation on identity. "Der Zor Çölünde" carries verses that illustrate the experience of women, specifically young girls, during the deportations and death marches:

The place called Der Zor is a large locality,
With uncountable ravished young girls,
Oh, mother! Oh, mother! Our condition is lamentable.
As the time we were in the desert of Der Zor.

The Turks started to kidnap children,
Before mothers had time to kiss their cheeks,
I saw them crying bitterly in secret
Armenians, dying for the sake of faith!

Khabur, make way for me, let me cross the desert,
My child is in the Arab village, bare and naked
Oh, mother! Oh, mother! Our condition was lamentable,
At the time, we were in the desert of Der Zor.²⁸

The verses above also show how themes of religion and abduction accompany the motif of sexual assault. The line, "Armenians dying for the sake of faith" suggests the enduring role of religion as an indicator of Armenians' incompatibility with the Ottoman government.²⁹ A French missionary eyewitness in 1921 stressed the centrality of religion in the atrocities of the Ottoman Empire. He recounted that the situation of Armenians "is intolerable and can be summed up with two terms: systematic plunder and extermination of the Christians."³⁰ Moreover, the Turkish oppressors' custom of assembling and assassinating Armenian women (mostly from deportation caravans) inside Armenian churches gestured a symbolic performance of power.³¹ On the other hand, ordinary men forcibly kidnapped Armenians and subsequently put them up for auction.³² After each purchase, wealthy Turkish men coerced these Armenian children and women – most of whom are of childbearing age – to adopt Turkish names, convert to Islam, undergo Turkification, and enter marriages or sexual slavery under Muslim noblemen.³³

28 Svazlian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 572–573. Svazlian enumerates these verses as 495, 496, and 499. In the English edition of her collection, Svazlian provides both the original Turkish lyrics and English translation.

29 Suny, "Religion Ethnicity, and Nationalism," 53.

30 "La Situation des Chrétiens à l'intérieur," December 17, 1921, file 371/7873-E2762/18/44, Foreign Office Archives, Public Record Office, London.

31 Anthonie Holslag, "Exposed Bodies: A Conceptual Approach to Sexual Violence During the Armenian Genocide," in *Genocide and Gender in the Twentieth Century: A Comparative Survey*, edited by Amy E. Randall (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 96–97.

32 Miller and Miller, *Survivors*, 101.

33 Ara Sarafian, "The Absorption of Armenian Women and Children into Muslim Households as a Structural Component of the Armenian Genocide," in *In God's Name: Genocide and Religion in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Omer Bartov and Phyllis Mack (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 210.

While converted Armenian women and children avoided the terrible experience of the deportations, they still suffered from corporeal colonization and cleansing of their Armenian identities.

Survivor Ovsanna Shavarshoon's audiovisual testimony recounted how other Armenians used the song to warn deportees, her brother's tragic death, and her near abduction:

I had a newborn baby brother, 40 days old. He was in my mother's arms, and then the Turks, Kurds, and Arabs came, I don't know how. They told my mom, "Give us this girl." Before this incident, my mom had given my little baby brother to me, so I could tell them I am not a girl, but a woman. The baby was in my arms. There were Armenian laborers, who broke stones nearby, who let us know through singing, that Armenian girls and women were being kidnapped there: "be careful" ... They took away the baby and threw him on the ground ... Then they pulled me by the hair and took me to a giant wall, a garden wall. They took me to this garden and locked me in there. Then they left me alone and began joking with each other. They thought that I was definitely theirs. But my mom had advised me that, when I see a body of water that I throw myself into the water, choke and to end my life. When they noticed that I was in the water, it was a shallow river, you had to lay flat to drown yourself. When they saw me in the water ... they ran down trying to save me. I gathered some stones and began throwing at them.... But she [mother] had given this watch to the gendarme [police] to save my life.... My mom had taken the baby boy, the caravan donkeys had trampled him, and he had died.³⁴

During the Armenian Genocide, perpetrators often intentionally inflicted psychological damages and inhumane abuses upon Armenian women. Still, Shavarshoon's testimony provides a harrowing detail that augments our understanding of the experiences of Armenian women during the Genocide: her attempted suicide. According to Miller and Miller, suicides were a frequent occurrence in the deportations. Typically, Armenian women held onto each other's arms and leaped from a bridge into the waters of the Euphrates River. The combination of physical fatigue, mental exhaustion, multiple forms of violence, loss of family, and hopelessness drove these women to take their own lives.

Nevertheless, Svazlian collected two songs outside of "Der Zor Çölünde" that capture this scenario. For example, the song "We Are Driven from the Mountains of Armenia" goes:

Hand in hand, Armenian girls threw themselves
Into the Euphrates River,

34 Ovsanna Shavarshoon, "Interview 53308," interview by Jacob Michael Hagopian, *Visual History Archive*, Armenian Film Foundation, August 14, 1977, <https://vha-usc-edu.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/testimony/53308>. I transcribed this testimony from the Shoah Foundation's subtitles.

Two days later, they notified their poor mothers
And made them cry inconsolably.³⁵

An untitled song follows:

The river Euphrates, too,
Became a grave for Armenians, mother!
Armenian girls threw themselves
Into the water, mother!
Blood flowed in [the] “Valley of Blood” mother!
Mountains and valleys!
Were filled with corpses, mother!³⁶

Based on their interviews with Armenian Genocide survivors in California, Miller and Miller categorize suicides into three distinct categories: altruistic suicide, despairing suicide, and defiant suicide. Picture the following scenarios: in an altruistic suicide, a mother neglects her own needs, such as food or water, for the survival of her child.³⁷ Alternatively, despairing suicides can be categorized as either passive, where one is still capable of moving but chooses to give up and die simply; or active, when one intentionally takes their own life.³⁸ Lastly, a defiant suicide means merely taking one’s own life as an act of rebellion against an aggressor. Rather than succumbing at the hands of Turkish soldiers, Armenian women often chose to end their lives as a final act of defiance.³⁹ You might wonder that interlacing motifs of religion and suicide between these song testimonies engender a cognitive dissonance, as the latter goes against the doctrines of Armenian Christianity. However, Armenian women took their own lives in response to the inhuman policies of Ottoman Turkey, rendering the reductive lens of Christian morality inapplicable to the victims of the Genocide.

In any case, several quatrains of “Der Zor Çölünde” speak of the aftermath of these suicides. The daily agonies of thirst that Armenians experienced in these deportations underscore this recurring suicide theme. Three variations on this motif go as follows:

The bridge over the Euphrates River is narrow, impassable.
The water is bloody, you can’t drink a single cup.
Water mixed with the blood of Armenians is undrinkable!
Armenians, dying for the sake of faith!

35 Svazlian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 567.

36 Ibid. This song has no title.

37 Donald Miller and Lorna Touryan Miller, “Women and Children of the Armenian Genocide,” in *The Armenian Genocide: History, Politics, Ethics*, edited by Richard G. Hovannisian (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), 170.

38 Ibid., 171.

39 Ibid.

The deserts of Der Zor are thorny, impassable,
The waters of the river Euphrates are bitter and not potable
Water mixed with the blood of Armenians is undrinkable!
Armenians, dying for the sake of faith!

The deserts of Der Zor are stony, impassable
The waters of the river Euphrates are bitter, not potable
Water mixed with the blood of Armenians is undrinkable!
Armenians, dying for the sake of faith!⁴⁰

These verses, depicting how Ottoman soldiers strategically used thirst as a means of dehumanizing the deportees, heighten our understanding of the Armenian Genocide. Ottoman soldiers deliberately deprived Armenians of water as a means of psychological warfare – to break the spirit and will of the deportees to live. This course of action serves as a chilling reminder of the extent to which basic human needs are cynically exploited as part of genocidal campaigns.⁴¹

Weaving the verses of “Der Zor Çölünde” with narrative and audiovisual testimonies establishes an intimate relationship between these genres of oral history. In addition to their storytelling prowess, the recurring motifs – of sexual violence, religion, abduction, and thirst – serve as connective tissues between these oral artifacts. Through this thematic convergence, historical and cultural realities about the Genocide emerge.⁴² First and foremost, the striking similarities in content among song testimonies, narrative testimonies, and audiovisual testimonies attest to the historical fact of the many tortures that happened during the Armenian Genocide. These overlaps become even more significant when we consider that Svazlian collected these songs after the events of 1915–1923. Like diary entries, these verses have remained unaltered from their original construction and endured under the safekeeping of the survivors. From here, a significant layer of cultural reality materializes the shared language, religion, heritage, and experience of a nearly exterminated group of people.

Resounding “Der Zor Çölünde”, a century after the Genocide, is not merely essential but a moral imperative. These songs testimonies echo not only historical and cultural realities but also human suffering, survival, and resilience. By tethering different kinds of testimonies, identifying thematic overlaps, and letting truths emerge, not only can we

40 Svazlian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 575.

41 Moreover, it is crucial to recognize that the contamination and deprivation of water are also symbolic assaults against Christianity. In the Armenian Apostolic Church, water holds spiritual meaning particularly in traditions such as baptism, theophany/epiphany, and Zatik (Easter). Armenians also embrace the idea of “living water,” signifying Jesus Christ as the wellspring of eternal life. This belief finds its origins in the Gospel of John, where Christ referred to himself as the “living water” or the source that provides spiritual nourishment like the life-giving properties of water. For Armenians, water deprivation desecrated their sacred bodies, epitomizing an allegorical violation of their spirituality. This deliberate denial of a basic human necessity stresses the intersection between the genocidal motifs of thirst and religion.

42 Gascia Ouzounian, “‘Our voices reaches the sky:’ Sonic Memories of the Armenian Genocide,” in *Soundwalking: Through Time, Space, and Technologies*, edited by Jacek Smolicki (London: Focal Press, 2023), 170.

obtain an astute understanding of the Armenian Genocide, but also, more importantly, we can amplify the denied voices of survivors and the silenced voices of those who perished.

Tactical Dirges

“Der Zor Çölünde” is a collection of dirges – music-lyrical cartography that charts and immortalizes the deportation experience of Armenian individuals, particularly women, and children. Bearing the characteristics of oral poetry, dirges follow a specific structure, including repetitive and formulaic patterns that make them easier to remember and transmit to other people.⁴³ Furthermore, dirges serve various purposes, such as preserving memory, providing emotional support and catharsis for the grieving, and often conveying social and cultural values.⁴⁴ The dirge-like verses of “Der Zor Çölünde” communicate not only the experience but also the emotional and psychological gravity that Armenians carry behind their backs as they walk to the percussive beats of their funeral march.

Svazlian reports that the song-testimonies of the Armenian Genocide, including “Der Zor Çölünde”, are lyrical poems fashioned out of the injustice of oppressive and miserable tragedy, “in which the emotional world, the thoughts and the mood, the expectations and demands of the composers are expressed in a picturesque manner.”⁴⁵ Indeed, the number of lyrical permutations of “Der Zor Çölünde” substantiates that Armenians in these deportations and death marches were actively musicking – creating new texts situated on a common template to illustrate their situation at the exact moment of construction.⁴⁶ Since songs operate differently from other forms of communication, singing and listening facilitate an easy transmission and proliferation of songs from one person to another. The aurality of this exchange underscores the social process of this music-making. Taken altogether, these songs constitute a body of shared musical memories among the victims and, as I will show later, survivors of the Armenian Genocide.

Creating new lyrics and singing songs became a common practice in daily deportation life for Armenian victims. This kind of musicking, as part of everyday behavior and routine, helped deportees to navigate their existence within a structured and oppressive environment. In doing so, musicking – or the act of musicalizing the deportation experience – afforded Armenian victims to subtly assert some personal agency to their oppressors. Therefore, constructing lyrical variations of “Der Zor Çölünde” helped victims find meaning in their lives along the borderlands during the deportations. This practice also shaped the social, spatial, and cultural landscape of their journey to death. In turn, as part of Turkey’s margins, musicking in this context espoused a form of resistance against the Ottoman regime.⁴⁷

43 Vansina, *Oral Tradition*, 12.

44 Ibid.

45 Svazlian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 17, 34.

46 Small, *Musicking*, 9.

47 De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 43.

Armenians were one of the several marginalized communities in Ottoman Empire. The othering of Armenians and other Christian minorities aimed to displace them away from Ottoman Turkey's larger political body.⁴⁸ The Genocide of 1915 to 1923, a cultural and optimal genocide, was a destruction of identity and all its forms.⁴⁹ Indicators of Armenian identity – including language, religion, institutions, churches, and businesses – were destroyed. As I virtually soundwalked through the audiovisual testimonies at the Shoah Foundation's *Visual History Archive*, I discovered a perplexing verse of “Der Zor Çölünde” from Juliet Avetisian-Minnassian. While this verse is not included in Svazlian's collection, it tells a vivid story of Armenians' cultural loss.

Minnassian, a descendant of genocide survivors who immigrated to Glendale, California, sang this verse in her audiovisual testimony. Before singing the song, she explained, “the song of exiled Armenians, my mother taught me this song... I don't know where she heard it, how she knows it, if her parents taught it to her if it was sung to her as a lullaby ... maybe that's why she sang it to us as a lullaby.”⁵⁰ Minnassian sang the following verse:

Through the deadly desert of Der Zor
Everything I had – or didn't have – I gave up.
To try and save my life, I gave up my ethnicity and culture.
The children on the religious path, people of faith.⁵¹

Miniassian's verse thoroughly follows the lyrical and musical templates of “Der Zor Çölünde”. In addition, the motif of religion is also present in its last line. That Miniassian is a descendant of genocide survivors and carried a lyrical variation of “Der Zor Çölünde” reinforces the potency of these verses as vessels to hold collective memories, ensure their survival, and relinquish the historical and cultural truths of a contested tragedy to the future generation.

Importantly, Minnassian's verse represented how Ottoman soldiers cold-bloodedly forced Armenians to denounce their identity. The banning of the *hayeren* (Armenian language) is the principal reason why the verses in “Der Zor Çölünde” are all in Turkish. In defiance, Armenians poached their oppressor's language and constructed subversive songs against Turkey. The verses of “Der Zor Çölünde” in Svazlian's collection show how songs became tools for deportees to rupture the Ottoman Empire and their heinous crimes against the Armenian nation:

48 The “Others” in Ottoman Turkey include Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians, other minorities practicing Christian faith, and Jews.

49 Vahakn Dadrian, “A Typology of Genocide,” *International Review of Modern Sociology* 5, no. 2 (1975): 205, 210–211.

50 Juliet Avetisian-Miniassian, “Interview 56588,” interview by Monet Airian, *Visual History Archive*, Hovanisian Oral History Collection, date unknown, <https://vha-usc-edu.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/testimony/56588>. The language of this interview was in Armenian. Meghrie Babikian, an Armenian-American based in Chicago, provided this translation.

51 Ibid. In the interview, Juliet sang the song in Turkish but also provided an Armenian translation. Meghrie Babikian translated the Armenian translation to English for this paper.

The trees I planted became laden with fruits,
Half of the deportees did not come back,
May the person who planned this exile
Be unworthy of paradise!

The fruitless trees became laden with fruits,
Half of the deportees did not come back
May the person who planned this exile
Be sacrificed on the road to hell!⁵²

Furthermore, the reappearance of the second line in both verses exhibits degrees of caution. Given the eight-year span of the Genocide, I imagine that Armenian victims intended these verses as cautionary warnings aimed to reach Christian communities that the Ottoman Turks have yet to victimize. In effect, we can establish solidarity between all Christian minorities in Turkey including Assyrians, Pontiac Greeks, and Aegean Greeks – whose genocides were also enacted during the same period by the same perpetrator.⁵³ George Shirinian further points out that “the experiences of these three peoples [Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks] took place in the same country, during the same period, as part of the same historical, social, economic, and political forces, involving a continuity of perpetrators with the same motive.”⁵⁴

I emphasize that crafting lyrical variations of “Der Zor Çölünde” is a form of nonviolent resistance, meaning the collective effort to delegitimize oppressive systems, undermine the oppressor’s authority, and mobilize people without resorting to violence.⁵⁵ Understood this way, the Armenian victims’ mundane practice of constructing verses demonstrates a form of subtle negotiation, through song, of their existence in everyday deportation life. Rather than a violent opposition, Armenian deportees silently but actively worked within the limits and constraints of the Ottoman Empire’s genocidal campaign. They subtly circumvented elements of the deportation experience to achieve their objectives. To put it even further, these limitations – sexual violence, deprivation of necessities, kidnapping, and forcing Armenians to denounce their identity markers (e.g., language, religion, etc.) – impaired the cognitive ability of Ottoman Turks to perceive these dirges. The surface acquiescence of Armenians and the coerced use of the Turkish language ironically made it difficult for Ottoman soldiers to recognize the oblique protests and resistance embedded in the verses of “Der Zor Çölünde”. In addition, victims created these verses at a personal level, rendering them invisible to their oppressors.

52 Svazlian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 577. Svazlian numbered these verses as 528 and 529. She also provided both the Turkish text and the English translation.

53 Naimark, *Genocide*, 76. Towards the conclusion of his historiography of the Armenian Genocide, Naimark gives visibility to the overlooked suffering of other Christian communities in Anatolia including the Assyrians, Aegean Greeks, and Pontic Greeks, all of whom suffered from Ottoman Turkey’s genocidal campaigns.

54 George Shirinian, “Introduction,” in *Genocide in the Ottoman Empire: Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks 1913-1923*, edited by George Shirinian (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 8.

55 Gene Sharp, *How Nonviolent Struggle Works* (Boston: The Albert Einstein Institution, 2013), 18–20.

By locating the unique characteristics and functions of “Der Zor Çölünde” in the everyday life of Armenians, we gain profound insights into the shared Genocide experience – the pain, terror, emptiness, and trauma – and how victims exercised agency and construct identity through immortalizing these communal experiences as songs.

Voicing a Haunted History and Memory

I noted in the previous section that in the Shoah Foundation’s *Visual History Archive*, audiovisual testimonies from the diaspora contain performances of “Der Zor Çölünde”.⁵⁶ When performed and transposed along the keys of history and memory, these verses act as temporal bridges, granting the survivors’ bodies the ability to achieve liminality. In this acquired liminal condition, survivors can dip their toes and traverse the finite lines between the past and the present. Correspondingly, survivors transfigure the verses of “Der Zor Çölünde” from musical memories to embodied memories through their singing bodies. Singing further empowers the survivor to work through the protracted historical trauma ingrained in the Armenian identity and shatter the tyrannical silence of genocide denial. In addition, a performance innately creates a nuanced relationship between the survivor and the listener. In this setting, listening becomes a way of revealing the erasures of official histories, oppression, and marginalization.⁵⁷

The sheer number of verses that Hovsana Kumjian performed in her audiovisual testimony sets her apart from the other testimonies featuring recitations of “Der Zor Çölünde”. Kumjian, who resettled in Aleppo after the Genocide, opens her testimony with geographical details of the death march trail she endured during her deportation:

We moved from Intilli and went to Bahchesehir. Over there, they put us in an inn. There were 4,000 people. Then, we went to Marash ... to Aintab ... to Nizip ... to Birecik ... to Urfa ... to Siverek ... to Viransehir. Fourth Army was in Viransehir, and we were rescued there. We were saved from slaughters...Nothing happened on the road. But gendarmeries were on their horses. People without water died.⁵⁸

Along these barefooted death marches, Kumjian further describes that “many died out of hunger, thirst. There was no water. Many brave fellows fell begging ‘water, water, water.’ The gendarmerie [police] came, stabbed them with the bayonets, and they died.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ I engaged with 65 audiovisual testimonies of survivors who relocated to the United States and Syria. These are testimonies that the Shoah Foundation indicated to contain musical performances or singing. I observed and listened to each audiovisual testimony with no expectations regarding whether they would contain a verse of “Der Zor Çölünde” or not. In the end, I discovered that at least six testimonies contained traces of the song.

⁵⁷ Ouzounian, “Counterlistening,” 312.

⁵⁸ Hovsana Kumjian, “Interview 53338,” interview by Jacob Michael Hagopian, *Visual History Archive*, Armenian Film Foundation, May 17, 1988, <https://vha-usc-edu.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/testimony/53338>.

⁵⁹ Kumjian, Interview.

When asked how she learned “Der Zor Çölünde,” Kumjian replies: “He was a child, nearby Siverek. We sat down to rest. The kid sang from there [pointing across her]. Since I was a child, when I heard something, I used to write it into my head and heart. My mind was always open. He sang it, and I learned it. I sing it every 24th [April 24] in memory of the people who died.”⁶⁰

In sound studies, walking often means an embodied exploration of a space. For example, Hildegard Westerkamp writes that soundwalking refers to concentrated and focused listening to the environment. It is an activity where one deliberately opens one’s ears to one’s surroundings.⁶¹ As an artistic and heightened form of communication, the child’s act of singing amplified the unique ability of “Der Zor Çölünde” verses to fluidly travel across deportation convoys. I imagine that Kumjian’s acquisition of “Der Zor Çölünde” is an early form of soundwalking, given that Armenian deportees are traveling towards their extermination. Additionally, Kumjian and the singing child, both victims of Ottoman Turkey’s tyranny, shared an unspoken affinity that facilitated the ease of song transmission. This connection and focused listening allowed Kumjian to grasp the song quickly. It also attests to how collective music-making fosters the survival and continuity of the Armenian identity despite Turkey’s genocidal intentions.

With great precision to the melodic frame of “Der Zor Çölünde”, Kumjian sings the following verses in her audiovisual testimony:

I woke up in the morning, the sun is shining,
Chechens are seated, polishing their daggers
Helpless innocents are egregiously crying
Oh, Armenian – dying for your religion’s sake!

I fell wounded in the deserts of Der Zor
I was left so thirsty that I drunk red blood
I fell and was separated from my mom and dad
Oh, Armenian – dying for your religion’s sake!

There are many wounded in Der Zor deserts,
Don’t come doctor, don’t, there is no cure,
We have no one, except for God
Oh, Armenian – dying for your religion’s sake!

I reached the barrack, its gate was closed
Kaymakam (Governor) is coming with a club in his hand
He led the lame and blind
Oh, Armenian – dying for your religion’s sake!⁶²

60 Ibid.

61 Hildegard Westerkamp, “Soundwalking,” in *Autumn Leaves, Sound and the Environment in Artistic Practice*, edited by Angus Carlyle (Paris: Double Entendre, 2007), 49.

62 Kumjian, Interview. This is the Shoah Foundation’s translation.

Without pause, Kumjian continues to sing, infusing a touch of melismatic improvisation with more verses that vividly illustrate the deportation experience.

They took us up to mountain to rob us
Rich are crying for their wealth
Brides are crying for their husband
Girls are crying for their honor

Mothers started to sell their children
If you ask the price, it's half a bread
Leave us, go gendarmeries, we will be on our way
We will die in Der Zor deserts.⁶³

Kumjian's verses overflow with the recurring genocidal motifs I mentioned earlier – sexual violence, religion, abduction, and thirst. This interconnectedness between different verses in “Der Zor Çölünde” reaffirms their capability as vessels of historical and cultural realities and collective and shared memories. Further, including audiovisual testimonies from survivors who carry these verses with them can help us sonically and musically cartograph the movement of survivors along the diaspora.

Yet, a survivor singing “Der Zor Çölünde” shows how the voice is a paramount site of embodying the Armenian Genocide after its occurrence. In the first place, Kumjian connected and engaged in a meaningful relationship with “Der Zor Çölünde” through a child singing voice. When a Genocide survivor sings, multiple performing forces come into play, such as location, the text, the musical structure, and the voice – including tone, quality of sound, and intonation.⁶⁴ A survivor's physical condition, mental state, and emotional well-being also influence the subtleties of their voice in performance. In her performance, Kumjian started with enthusiasm that waned as a palpable transformation overcame her. The initial vigor gave way to a stoicism clouded with sadness. As she cadenced towards the song's final words, she held up her hand, signaling a plea for a silent pause. Her body hunched forward, and her voice became wearied and hoarse as she uttered, “Oh God... Let God not bring those days back. I was 14 years old then.”⁶⁵

Vocal practices take place in the flesh. The voice inhabits a corporeal vessel which influences and manipulates its production. Therefore, when a voice vocalizes, whether in singing or speech, the body and the vocal system operate together.⁶⁶ Going further, the voice is a sound that one creates with the mind and the body. During a vocal performance, an indissoluble connection exists between memory and flesh. A performance of “Der Zor

63 Ibid. Kumjian sang an improvised version of the “Der Zor Çölünde” melody.

64 Abrams, *Oral Tradition*, 140.

65 Kumjian, Interview.

66 Nina Sun Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre, and Vocality in African American Music* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 11.

Colunde,” encompassing both linguistic and musical elements, depends on the deep-seated memories residing not just in the mind but also within the mouth, larynx, vocal folds, tongue, tissues, ligaments, and musculatures. The act of singing becomes anchored in the physical and the mental, that when employed as a means of communication, they take on a meaning that can either harmonize with or contrast against their surroundings.⁶⁷

Furthermore, the voice functions as a conduit that holds a survivor’s power to express their right to exist. A singing survivor – embodying resistance through nonviolent means – participates in a physical expression aimed at communicating an array of meanings to a broader audience.⁶⁸ This makes singing naturally dialectical as it fosters an interactive exchange of emotions, ideas, and interpretations, often encouraging discussions among performers and listeners. Therefore, singing song testimonies can be an integral component of a larger dialogue of the Genocide. Because singing is deeply rooted in the body and memory, survivors like Kumjian use “Der Zor Çölünde” and their earthly voices to express their being, existence, and work through a collective trauma in a post-Genocide world.

Trauma represents a shattering caesura that exceeds an individual’s capacity to fully comprehend and cope with it during its occurrence.⁶⁹ The Armenian Genocide, a historical and collective trauma, continues to deeply disturb the shared identity of the Armenian community. This disruption often shapes and influences their worldview and sociocultural dynamics. Thus, working through trauma suggests a cathartic process that involves an instantaneous engagement with the traumatic past and the present, allowing Armenian Genocide survivors to negotiate these two realms without creating an outright dichotomy between them.⁷⁰ When survivors sing “Der Zor Çölünde” verses, they are ephemerally extended to the past allowing their bodies to exist between two temporal zones. Their evanescent singing voices not only express the pain of their suffering but also mourn and retrieve the silenced voices of those who perished from the Genocide.

Mourning is an active, reflective, and transformative process.⁷¹ It affords survivors of violent events to engage deeply with the traumas of the past and integrate their experience into the collective memory. Here, Armenian Genocide survivors confront the horrific realities of the past, coming to terms with the trauma and its overwhelming impact on their identities. Yet, Turkey’s relentless denial hampers the efforts of Genocide survivors to grieve completely. This denial engendered a collective debility that hindered the Armenian nation from mourning. Furthermore, Armenians’ loss of ancestral lands and forced displacement across the diaspora prevent a unified mourning process.⁷²

67 Angela Impey, “Sound, Memory, and Dis/placement: Exploring Sound, Song, and Performance as Oral History in the Southern African Borderlands,” *Oral History* 36, no. 1 (2008): 38.

68 Louise Du Toit and Jana Vosloo, “When Bodies Speak Differently: Putting Judith Butler in Conversation with Mahatma Gandhi on Nonviolent Resistance,” *Religions* 12, no. 8 (2021): 10.

69 LaCapra, *Writing History*, 186.

70 *Ibid.*, 66.

71 *Ibid.*

72 Falyn Stempler, “104 Years of ‘Incomplete Mourning:’ Students Reflect on House Recognition of Arme-

Incomplete mourning is the Turkish state's continued violence against Armenians. This incompleteness explains how the trauma of the Armenian Genocide continues to haunt survivors and their descendants.

Still, attending to audiovisual testimonies, particularly those that feature performances of “Der Zor Çölünde”, can break the silence of denial through a survivor's incisive voice and performance. In addition, a survivor singing voice fills in the spaces and gaps in the archives and representations of the Armenian Genocide. Listening can, therefore, attune secondary witnesses to the muted and lost voices of Armenian Genocide survivors and victims. It becomes an act of listening along the edges and the margins and *against* the tyranny of state and empire.⁷³ This reverberation – shared between the verses, survivors, and the listeners – underscores the transformative power of song and the human voice to create a connection that binds us all.

Epilogue: Listening to Genocide

Writing a conclusion for a subject as complex as the Armenian Genocide presents significant challenges. A conclusion indicates a closure and resolution, elusive concepts when dealing with an enormous tragedy deeply contested by powerful nation-states. As I observed earlier, the trauma of the Genocide and Turkey's persistent denial – escalating to a point where discussing it in present-day Turkey can lead to severe punishments and even death – continues to afflict the identity of Armenians.⁷⁴ Thus, the descendants of the perpetrators continue to commit violence against the descendants of Genocide victims and survivors, ensuring that the latter dance a perpetual pas de deux of plight and pain.

Recapitulating Bartov's fervent assertion on testimonies, it is an ethical obligation that no history of genocide should be written and taught without hearing the voices of its protagonists. These individuals wanted not only to preserve and entrust these tragic memories to future generations but also to ensure that the voices of those who perished are not relegated to collective amnesia or the dehumanizing tendencies of academic scholarship, which often reduce them to numerical figures and footnotes of their history.⁷⁵ Song testimonies of the Armenian Genocide, such as “Der Zor Çölünde” reveal a horrifying yet poignant reality: the Armenian people continued to sing and compose songs even as they marched towards their annihilation. These songs are compelling musical memories, persistently shattering the stillness of genocide denial. Listening to a singing survivor ensures that the spectral melodies of the Armenian Genocide continue to resonate.

nian Genocide,” *Ithaca Week*, November 18, 2019, <https://www.ithacaweek-ic.com/104-years-of-incomplete-mourning-students-reflect-on-house-recognition-of-armenian-genocide>.

73 Ouzounian, “Counterlistening,” 312.

74 Maureen Freely, “Why They Killed Hrant Dink,” *Index on Censorship* 36, no. 2 (2007): 28–29.

75 Bartov, *Genocide, the Holocaust, and Israel-Palestine*, 79–80.

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ETHNIC CLEANSING IN ARTSAKH (NAGORNO-KARABAKH): ISSUES OF DEFINITION AND CRIMINAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract

After ten months of blockade-resulted starvation and medical emergencies, on 19 September 2023, Nagorno-Karabakh, or Artsakh Republic, was brutally attacked by Azerbaijan, resulting in a forced capitulation of the de facto state. Considering the long-lasting history of violence, institutionalized anti-Armenian hatred, persecution, and annihilation of Armenians by the Republic of Azerbaijan, an exodus of Armenians began in the following days, resulting in forced displacement of nearly 120,000 Armenians from their indigenous lands.

These atrocious events were soon labeled as ethnic cleansing by some actors of the international community. Currently, there is no legal definition of ethnic cleansing; using the term to mark the forced displacement of Armenians from Artsakh raises issues of definition and responsibility.

This article aims to analyze the concept of ethnic cleansing in its historical and legal development and evaluate its application in the context of the forced displacement of Armenians from Artsakh.

Keywords: Nagorno Karabakh, forced displacement, ethnic cleansing, genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, responsibility.

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Introduction

On 27 September 2020, during the outbreak of COVID-19, the Republic of Azerbaijan launched an unprovoked aggression on Nagorno-Karabakh or Artsakh Republic, committing gross violation of human rights and humanitarian law, by targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure, using widely banned cluster munitions and other weaponry.¹ A ceasefire brokered by Russia on 9 November 2020 was soon violated by Azerbaijan through systematic violations of the ceasefire regime and creeping military advances, which culminated in the blocking of the Lachin Corridor – the only connecting road of Artsakh with Armenia.² This marked the beginning of nearly ten months blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh, which was accompanied by a cut-off of essential resources and weaponizing humanitarian aid. The blockade disrupted and nearly severed access to critical goods and services, including food, fuel, and medication, among the population of Artsakh. The low quantity of basic food and supplies (groceries, oil, sugar) that remain in Artsakh were provided to people in minimal portions. There was no formula available to feed babies. The blockade's impact on healthcare provision (through a lack of medication and the physical inhibition of medical care) had resulted in reported deaths. Meanwhile, hundreds of families remained separated for months.

This humanitarian crisis was further aggravated by Azerbaijan's occasional disruption of the natural gas and electricity supply to Artsakh, leaving houses, hospitals, and schools without heating in lethal conditions. Within the ongoing case regarding the Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (*Armenia v. Azerbaijan*), the International Court of Justice, in delivering its judgment on the provisional measures, called upon Azerbaijan to “ensure unimpeded movement of persons, vehicles, and cargo along the Lachin Corridor in both directions.”³

During this period of total blockade, individual experts and institutions had qualified what was happening against the Armenians in Artsakh as a crime of genocide: “This inhumane policy highlights the practice of effectively carrying out genocide by attrition against the 120,000 Armenians living in Artsakh, as this blockade has generated a dire humanitarian crisis that significantly affects every single Armenian in Artsakh” (*Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute Foundation*);⁴ “There is an ongoing Genocide against 120,000

1 “Azerbaijan: Cluster Munitions Used in Nagorno-Karabakh Stop Use of Banned Weapons; Secure and Destroy Stocks,” at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/23/azerbaijan-cluster-munitions-used-nagorno-karabakh>; “Armenia/Azerbaijan: First confirmed use of cluster munitions by Armenia ‘cruel and reckless,’” <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2020/10/armenia-azerbaijan-first-confirmed-use-of-cluster-munitions-by-armenia-cruel-and-reckless/>, accessed 12.10.2023.

2 Lindsey Snell, “Uncovering the Truth behind Azerbaijan’s “Ecological” Blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh: The Role of Government-Linked Volunteer Organizations in the Lachin Corridor,” *Genocide Studies International* 15, No.1(2021): 69-76.

3 Order of 6 July 2023. Document Number 180-20230706-ORD-01-00-EN, Case 180 – Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (*Armenia v. Azerbaijan*), at <https://www.icj-cij.org/node/202958>.

4 Edita Gzoyan, “Artsakh: A Genocide by Attrition,” at <http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/1.19.01.23.php>,

Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh, also known as Artsakh,” (Luis Moreno Ocampo, former Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (2003-2012));⁵ “Evidence presented here suggests that the crime of genocide may already be taking place in the form of the blockade, which is both “Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group” and “deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part” (Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention);⁶ “Under the circumstances, it is my considered opinion that the facts outlined above constitute sufficient reason to proffer an early warning to the international community that the population of Nagorno-Karabakh is at risk of suffering “serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group” (Article 2, paragraph b of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide) (Juan Ernesto Mendez, Former Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide (2004-2007), Professor of Human Rights Law in Residence, Commissioner, International Commission of Jurists, Former UN Special Rapporteur on Torture (2010-16)).⁷

After ten months of blockade-resulted starvation and medical emergencies, on 19 September 2023, the Armenians of Artsakh entered a physical extermination stage, being attacked by drones, airstrikes, and mass shelling. There were deaths and wounded among the civilians, as well as children. Many were reported missing. Considering the long-lasting history of violence, institutionalized anti-Armenian hatred, persecution, and annihilation of Armenians by the Republic of Azerbaijan, the forced exodus of Armenians began in the following days, resulting in the forced displacement of nearly 120,000 Armenians from their indigenous lands. In a matter of several days, the region was ethnically cleansed from its indigenous population.

Ethnic Cleansing in International Law

Ethnic cleansing, a concept known to scholars for quite some time, has been acknowledged within the structures of international law through organs such as the United Nations Security Council (UN SC), the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and the International Criminal Court (ICC). Nevertheless, ethnic cleansing remains a predominantly theoretical concept within the legal lexicon, lacking a universally accepted

accessed 26.09.2023.

5 Luis Moreno Ocampo, “Expert Opinion: Genocide against Armenians in 2023,” at https://luismorenoocampo.com/lmo_en/report-armenia/, accessed 20.10.2023.

6 “Risk Factors and Indicators of the Crime of Genocide in the Republic of Artsakh: Applying the UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes to the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict,” Report 5 September 2023, https://www.lemkininstitute.com/_files/ugd/9bc553_ceb61de5918f4670bec931b3a79d1baa.pdf, accessed 22.10.2023.

7 Juan Ernesto Mendez, “Preliminary Opinion on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and on the need for the international community to adopt measures to prevent atrocity crimes,” 23 August 2023, at chrome-extension://efaidnbmninnipcbajpcgiclfndmkaj/https://un.mfa.am/file_manager/un_mission/Preliminary%20Opinion%20-%2023.08.2023.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0ydh2YB6zd2brS1mQRwUSuCIeSZDqODmB3Js3P5aDfy-wDIGzIoxthcUIA accessed 20.10.2023.

definition and precise qualifications, while serving as a term increasingly utilized by a global community to characterize specific situations worldwide.

The discussion surrounding the role and nature of ethnic cleansing has been ongoing since its inception, with scholars either seeking to refuse it as a distinct crime entirely⁸ or delving into an in-depth examination of this phenomenon. Andrew Bell-Fialkoff argues that the first probable instance of ethnic cleansing dates back to 883–859 B.C. when the Assyrians displaced 4.5 million conquered individuals to expand their territories.⁹ He further posited that similar acts of ethnic cleansing can be traced throughout Ancient History, with examples from the Neo-Babylonian Empire, Ancient Greece, and the Roman Empire, all driven, in Bell-Fialkoff's perspective, by economic motives tied to territorial expansion.¹⁰

Jennifer Jackson-Preece draws attention to the aftermath of World War I and World War II, highlighting various population displacements.¹¹ Jaakko Heiskanen points to the rise of the ethnically homogeneous nation-states in Europe as closely linked to the concept of ethnic cleansing.¹² By referencing Ther, he states that mention of “cleansing” or “purification” of territory can be found in numerous European languages (English, French, German, Czech, Polish, Russian, and Serbo-Croatian) already from the 19th century.¹³ The idea of making the territory homogeneous was also present in the perceptions of Young Turks. In 1914, one of their main ideologues, Zia Gokalp, stated that the state could survive only by relying on one nation because the representatives of different countries cannot love the same homeland and be loyal to it. The Greek, Armenian, and Assyrian population of the empire, according to the ideologue, would always remain a “foreign body” in the Turkish nation-state.¹⁴ The resolution was to cleanse the Ottoman Empire of the unwanted elements. Benjamin Lieberman qualifies the Armenian Genocide as a case when ethnic cleansing resulted in genocide, as was in the case of the Holocaust.¹⁵ During

8 In their article, Gregory H. Stanton, Rony Blum, Shira Sagi, and Elihu D. Richter criticised the use of the term “ethnic cleansing” because it “bleaches” the atrocities of genocide. See, Gregory H. Stanton, Rony Blum, Shira Sagi, and Elihu D. Richter, “Ethnic Cleansing” bleaches the Atrocities of Genocide,” *The European Journal of Public Health* 18, no. 2 (2008): 204.

9 Andrew Bell-Fialkoff, “A Brief History of Ethnic Cleansing,” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no 3 (1993): 117.

10 Ibid, 117-120.

11 Jennifer Jackson-Preece, “Ethnic Cleansing as an Instrument of Nation-State Creation: Changing State Practices and Evolving Legal Norms,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 20 (1998): 818–819.

12 Jaakko Heiskanen, “In the Shadow of Genocide: Ethnocide, Ethnic Cleansing, and International Order,” *Global Studies Quarterly* 2 (2021): 6.

13 Philipp Ther, *The Dark Side of Nation-States: Ethnic Cleansing in Modern Europe*, translated by Charlotte Kreutzmüller (New York: Berghahn, 2014), 4.

14 Uriel Heyd, *Foundations of Turkish Nationalism: The Life and Teachings of Ziya Gökalp* (London: Luzac & Co., 1950), 132. For more on this see Regina A. Galustyan, “Perceptions of “Vital Space” in the Worldview of Union and Progress Committee and the Armenian Genocide,” *Tseghaspanagitakan handes* 9, no. 1 (2021): 9-36.

15 Benjamin Lieberman, ““Ethnic cleansing” versus genocide?” in *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies*, edited by Donald Bloxham and Dirk Moses (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 51, 52.

the Second World War, Nazis invoked the metaphor of “clean of Jews”.¹⁶ Another wide-scale program of “purging” was carried out in the Soviet Union, when from 1937 to 1951, over two million members of ethnic minorities were sent to Siberia, Central Asia, and Ural.¹⁷

Summarizing the characteristics of ethnic cleansings, Norman Naimark mentions that ethnic cleansing always involves violence and is often closely related to war; it has a totalistic quality, as the aim is to remove each member of the targeted nation, is misogynistic, as it usually involves men attacking women, and applies also crimes against property together with crimes against people.¹⁸ According to Lieberman, “As a form of violent social engineering, ethnic cleansing is closely associated with powerful dictatorships.”¹⁹

The modern notion of ethnic cleansing appeared in the discourse recently. Although the majority of experts mention its first use in the context of events that unfolded in Yugoslavia from 1991 to 1995, when specific actions were officially recognized as ethnic cleansing by various international bodies, so far, the first mention is to the Russian equivalent of the expression – *etniceskie chistki/ etnischeskoye chischeniye* – used by Soviet authorities to describe the forced exodus of Armenians from Azerbaijan during the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis in the 1980s.²⁰ However, only in the context of atrocities perpetrated in former Yugoslavia did the term “ethnic cleansing” gradually penetrate the official language of the press²¹, diplomacy, and international law, with the implication, as Schabas explains, to be applied to situations that could not satisfy the intent requirement for a genocide.²²

In response to the atrocities unfolding in Yugoslavia, the United Nations adopted several resolutions addressing the horrors unfolding in Yugoslavia and defining the crimes being perpetrated.

The very first definition was in the report of the Special Rapporteur Tadeusz Mazowiecki in November 1992. It was explicitly noted that “The term ethnic cleansing refers to the elimination by the ethnic group exerting control over a given territory of members of other ethnic groups.”²³ The next reference was in the Interim report of the

16 Bell-Fialkoff, “A Brief History of Ethnic Cleansing,” 114.

17 J. Otto Pohl, “Stalin’s Genocide against the ‘Repressed Peoples,’” *Journal of Genocide Research* 2, no. 2 (2000): 267–293.

18 Norman Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in 20th Century Europe* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: Harvard University Press), 185-198.

19 Lieberman, ““Ethnic cleansing” versus genocide?” 56.

20 Marcus Banks and Monica Wolfe, “Ethnicity and Reports of the 1992-95 Bosnian Conflict,” in *The Media of Conflict: War Reporting and Representations of Ethnic Violence*, edited by Tim Allen and Jean Seaton (London: Zed Books, 1999), 152.

21 Rony Blum, Gregory H. Stanton, Shira Sagi, Elihu D. Richter, ““Ethnic cleansing’ bleaches the atrocities of genocide,” *European Journal of Public Health* 18, No. 2 (2008): 204–209.

22 William Schabas, *Genocide in International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 200.

23 Report on the situation of human rights in the territory of the former Yugoslavia / submitted by Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, pursuant to Commission resolution

United Nations Commission of Experts of February 1993. In their report, the Commission of Experts established by the United Nations officially cited the term ethnic cleansing and defined within the context of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia: “Considered in the context of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, “ethnic cleansing” means rendering an area ethnically homogenous by using force or intimidation to remove persons of given groups from the area. ‘Ethnic cleansing’ is contrary to international law.”²⁴ This definition was further reiterated in the Final Report of the Commission (May 1994), which defined ethnic cleansing as “a purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas.”²⁵

This is the first official definition of the term “ethnic cleansing” within the framework of international law. Although, as was mentioned, the majority of experts and scholars state that the term originates from the Serbo-Croatian expression *etničko čišćenje*, the exact inception of the term in the Commission of Experts’ Report and its specific rationale for selecting it is unclear.²⁶ However, it is known that before the Srebrenica massacre of July 1995, Serbian commanders were using *etničko ciscenj* and *ciscenje prostor* or *ciscenje terena* to express the intent to exterminate everyone.²⁷

Other resolutions adopted by the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly explicitly referenced to ethnic cleansing.²⁸ Among the early resolutions characterizing the term was Security Council Resolution 771, which addresses explicitly “violations of international humanitarian law, strongly condemning practices associated with ‘ethnic cleansing.’”²⁹ While the mentioned Security Council resolutions merely referenced ethnic cleansing without elaborating on the concept, Resolution 47/121 introduced a broader definition:

Gravely concerned about the deterioration of the situation in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina owing to intensified aggressive

1992/S-1/1 of 14 August 1992, at <https://digitalibrary.un.org/record/226088?ln=en>, accessed 08.09.2023.

24 United Nations, Security Council, Final Report of the Commission of Experts established pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 (1992), 27 May 1994, UN Doc. S/1994/674 (1994), Part III: General Studies, B. Ethnic Cleansing, para. 129, p. 33 referring to para. 55 of the Interim Report S/25274.

25 UN Security Council, Report of the Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to United Nations Security Council Resolution 780 (1992), 27 May 1994, s/1994/674, para 130, at <https://www.refworld.org/docid/582060704.html>, accessed 28.09.2023.

26 Drazen Petrovic, “Ethnic Cleansing – An Attempt at Methodology,” *European Journal of International Law* 5 (1994): 343.

27 *Ibid.*, 344-345.

28 See Security Council Resolution 771, 13 August 1992, UN Doc. S/RES/771; Security Council Resolution 780, 6 October 1992, UN Doc. S/RES/780; Security Council Resolution 808, 22 February 1993, UN Doc. S/RES/808; Security Council Resolution 787, 16 November 1992, UN Doc. S/RES/787, General Assembly Resolution 46/242, The Situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 25 August 1992, 91st plenary meeting, UN Doc. A/RES/46/242.

29 Security Council Resolution 771, 13 August 1992, UN Doc. S/RES/771.

acts by the Serbian and Montenegrin forces to acquire more territories by force, characterized by a consistent pattern of gross and systematic violations of human rights, a burgeoning refugee population resulting from mass expulsions of defenseless civilians from their homes and the existence in Serbian and Montenegrin controlled areas of concentration camps and detention centres, in pursuit of the abhorrent policy of “ethnic cleansing”, which is a form of genocide.³⁰

The analysis of the Resolution presents some aspects of the definition and categorization of ethnic cleansing. First, the phrase “mass expulsions of defenseless civilians from their homes” is mentioned as a component of the crime of ethnic cleansing and not a comprehensive depiction. Second, ethnic cleansing is recognized as a crime that implies deliberate planning and organization by the state authorities. The Resolution openly labels ethnic cleansing as a form of genocide. However, this position of recognizing ethnic cleansing as a form of genocide was later debated by not only scholars but also UN bodies.

The Security Council subsequently adopted Resolution 819, which added further details to the understanding of the term “ethnic cleansing”, recognizing the practice as a violation of humanitarian law and the individual responsibility of perpetrators who committed such acts. The Resolution mentions explicitly that the Security Council “Reaffirms its condemnation of all violations of international humanitarian law, in particular, the practice of “ethnic cleansing” and reaffirms that those who commit or order the commission of such acts shall be held individually responsible in respect to such acts.”³¹

This statement is significant as the Security Council unequivocally establishes that ethnic cleansing is a crime punishable under international law, as well as addresses individual responsibility, encompassing two dimensions: the accountability of an individual who directly perpetrates ethnic cleansing and the responsibility of an individual who orders or commands such actions.

In addressing potential questions about the binding nature of resolutions of the Security Council or the General Assembly, it is essential to consider the legal framework established by the United Nations Charter. According to Articles 24 and 25 of the Charter, the Security Council possesses the legal authority to adopt resolutions binding upon all member states of the UN.³² Article 25 specifically articulates, “The Members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council in accordance with the present Charter.”³³

30 The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, G.A. res. 47/121, 47 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 49) at 44, U.N. Doc. A/47/49 (1992).

31 Article 7 of Security Council Resolution 819, 16 April 1993, UN Doc. S/RES/819.

32 UN Charter signed on 26 June 1945 at the San Francisco Conference, article 24, 25.

33 *Ibid.*, article 25.

Despite this, it is crucial to note that not all resolutions of the Security Council possess binding force. In its Advisory Opinion in the *Namibia* case, the International Court of Justice acknowledges the following:

The language of a resolution of the Security Council should be carefully analysed before a conclusion can be made as to its binding effect. In view of the nature of the powers under Article 25, the question whether they have been in fact exercised is to be determined in each case, having regard to the terms of the resolution to be interpreted, the discussions leading to it, the Charter provisions invoked and, in general, all circumstances that might assist in determining the legal consequences of the resolution of the Security Council.³⁴

A critical element that renders a Security Council resolution binding is the robust language employed, particularly for actions deemed a threat to international peace and security. The gravity of ethnic cleansing as a crime that can pose a threat to the global community is exemplified, *inter alia*, in the case of *Prosecutor v Krnojelac*, wherein it is noted that “the Security Council was particularly concerned about acts of ethnic cleansing and wished to confer jurisdiction on the Tribunal to judge such crimes, regardless of whether they had been committed in an internal or an international armed conflict.”³⁵ Linguistically, the term “concerned” may lack an imperative character. Still, the fact that the Security Council was willing to include ethnic cleansing in the crimes to be adjudicated by the Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, highlights the fact that ethnic cleansing has significant impact on the global community.

Thus, even if Security Council resolutions may, in certain circumstances, be devoid of an imperative value (e.g., this might be the case when an SC resolution has not been adopted based on Chapter VII of the UN Charter) and instead be more of hortatory nature, this by far does not diminish or disparage the role of ethnic cleansing as a threat to international peace and security.

Ethnic Cleansing as a Crime against Humanity or War Crime

The ongoing debates surrounding ethnic cleansing underscore the absence of a universally accepted definition. Despite concerted efforts by scholars and international bodies such as the United Nations to establish a common understanding, ambiguity persists. In 1992, the Final Report of the Commission of Experts provided a working definition, stating that

³⁴ Legal Consequences for States of the Continued Presence of South Africa in Namibia (South West Africa) Notwithstanding Security Council Resolution 276 (1970), ICJ, Advisory Opinion, 21 June 1971, ICJ Reports 1971, p. 16, p. 53 para. 114.

³⁵ *Prosecutor v Milorad Krnojelac* (“Foča”), Case No IT-97-25-A, Judgment, Appeals Chamber, 17 September 2003, para. 221.

“ethnic cleansing” involves making an area ethnically homogeneous through the use of force or intimidation to expel individuals from specific ethnic groups.³⁶ This expulsion is accomplished through various means, including murder, torture, arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial executions, rape, and sexual assaults.³⁷ Additionally, it encompasses actions such as confining the civilian population to ghetto areas, forcibly removing, displacing, and deporting civilians, conducting deliberate military attacks on civilians and civilian areas, and wanton destruction of property.³⁸ The challenge of defining ethnic cleansing is further compounded by the document attempting to elucidate the issue. On the one hand, the paper eliminates the boundaries of ethnic cleansing, while on the other, it broadens the concept immensely. The document states that those practices constitute crimes against humanity and can be assimilated into specific war crimes. Furthermore, such acts could also fall within the meaning of the Genocide Convention.³⁹

This definition, while outlining certain specific characteristics of ethnic cleansing, ultimately suggests that ethnic cleansing is not a distinct criminal act. Instead, it is portrayed as crimes against humanity, with the potential for classification as war crimes or genocide in certain situations. The exact categorization of ethnic cleansing under a specific crime is left undefined, prompting a closer examination.

The Charter and Judgment of the Nuremberg Tribunal first defined war crimes.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, war crimes have undergone natural development over time and adapted to the needs of the changing world, as acknowledged by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY).⁴¹ In their ultimate form, war crimes are currently established in the Rome Statute.⁴² The Statute defines “unlawful deportation or transfer or unlawful confinement” as a war crime.⁴³ In the definition of ethnic cleansing, the notion of expelling people to leave their homes is mentioned, raising the question of whether ethnic cleansing can be considered a form of war crime.

Forced population transfers were internationally condemned in 1986, when the International Law Association adopted the Declaration of the Principles of International Law on Mass Expulsions. Although not binding, the Declaration defined expulsion as “an act or a failure to act ... with the intended effect of forcing the departure of persons against

36 UN Security Council: Final Report of the Commission of Experts established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 (1992), para 55.

37 Ibid, para 56.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Agreement for the prosecution and punishment of the major war criminals of the European Axis, signed at London, on 8 August 1945, article 6.

41 *Prosecutor v Dragoljub Kunarac, Radomir Kovac and Zoran Vukovic*, Case No. IT-96-23-A and No. IT-96-23/1-A, Decision, Appeals Chamber, 12 June 2002, paragraph 67.

42 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court adopted by the United Nations Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court on 17 July 1998 UN Doc. A/CONF.183/9, art. 8 (2).

43 Ibid, Article 8 (2), (a), (vii).

their will ... for the reason of race, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.”⁴⁴

The Council of Europe, in its report on Enforced population transfer as a human rights violation, explicitly notes that “Population transfer is a practice or policy having the purpose or effect of moving persons into or out of an area, either within or across an international border, or within, into, or out of an occupied territory, without the free and informed consent of the transferred population and any receiving population. It involves collective expulsions or deportations and often ethnic cleansing.”⁴⁵ A similar position was expressed by the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in Resolution 1997/29.⁴⁶ The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have also declared forced transfer of populations illegal.⁴⁷

The challenge here lies in the fact that unlawful displacement for ethnic cleansing is just one element and does not in and by itself constitute the entirety of the action. Therefore, only a specific subset of acts associated with ethnic cleansing may fall under the category of war crimes.

The next issue is connected with the context of war crimes. According to Article 8 of the Rome Statute, war crimes occur during armed conflicts. However, does ethnic cleansing occur only in times of peace? If we exclusively link ethnic cleansing to war crimes, we automatically exclude acts of ethnic cleansing that may occur in peacetime.

The Rome Statute defines crimes against humanity as a crime committed “...against any identifiable group or collectivity on political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender, as defined in paragraph 3, or other grounds...”⁴⁸ In the *Kupreskic* case, the ICTY noted that there are crimes committed on discriminatory grounds that do not fully correspond to the *mens rea* of genocide, and ethnic cleansing serves as an example to that. In its decision, the Tribunal equates ethnic cleansing with crimes against humanity but separately emphasizes that ethnic cleansing is not a legal term in and of itself.⁴⁹ In *Nikolic* case, ICTY draws parallels between ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, emphasizing the discriminatory motives in both cases. “The implementation

44 Principle 14 of the Declaration of the Principles of International Law on Mass Expulsions, cited in *The Realization of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: The Human Rights Dimensions of Population Transfer, Including the Implantation of Settlers*, UN ESCOR, Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, 45th Session, Provisional Agenda Item 8, UN DOC. E/CN.4/Sub.2/1993/17 (1993), p. 78, para. 354.

45 Council of Europe, Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, *Enforced population transfer as a human rights violation*, Rapporteur: Mr Egidijus Vareikis, Lithuania, Group of the European Peoples’ Party, AS/Jur (2011) 49, 5 December 2011.

46 Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, Resolution 1997/29, “Freedom of Movement and Population Transfer”, 36th meeting, 28 August 1997.

47 For more on this see Clotilde Pégurier, *Ethnic Cleansing: A Legal Qualification* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 141-144.

48 Rome Statute, Article 7 (h).

49 *Prosecutor v Kupreskic et al.* (Case No. IT-95-16 T) Judgment 14 January 2000, para 606.

of that discriminatory policy, commonly referred to as ‘ethnic cleansing,’ over the region of Vlasenica alone seems to have been so widespread as to fall within the Tribunal’s jurisdiction under Article 5 [crimes against humanity⁵⁰].⁵¹

The Rome Statute defines two vital substantive elements of crimes against humanity – “widespread or systematic attack”.⁵² Thus, for acts of ethnic cleansing to fall under crimes against humanity, they must exhibit these two substantive elements.

Although there is no precise definition of “widespread or systematic attack”, the ICTY noted that the interpretation of these elements should be made on a case-by-case basis, noting that “The widespread or systematic nature of the attack is essentially a relative notion. The Trial Chamber must first identify the population which is the object of the attack and, in light of the means, methods, resources and result of the attack upon this population, ascertain whether the attack was indeed widespread or systematic.”⁵³

Experts have also established that ethnic cleansing may have a systematic nature. Thus, in one report, it was articulated that “Ethnic cleansing may be equated with the systematic purge of the civilian population based on ethnic criteria, with the view to forcing it to abandon the territories where it lives.”⁵⁴

Nevertheless, the material element alone is insufficient for us to qualify an act as a crime against humanity; the presence of a mental element is also crucial. As indicated by the Tribunal in the *Tadić* case, “Crimes against humanity are crimes of a special nature to which a greater degree of moral turpitude attaches than an ordinary crime. Thus, to convict an accused of crimes against humanity, it must be proved that the crimes were related to the attack on a civilian population (occurring during an armed conflict) and that the accused knew that his crimes were so related.”⁵⁵

In addition to these two elements, crimes against humanity also require the presence of acts “directed against any civilian population”. In various instances, authors and judicial bodies invoke the concept of the civilian population when defining ethnic cleansing. For example, Judge Lauterpacht, on one occasion, determinatively opined that ethnic cleansing is “the forced migration of civilians”.⁵⁶

50 Article 5 of the ICTY Statute enunciates that “The International Tribunal shall have the power to prosecute persons responsible for the following crimes when committed in armed conflict, whether international or internal in character, and directed against any civilian population: (a) murder; (b) extermination; (c) enslavement; (d) deportation; (e) imprisonment; (f) torture; (g) rape; (h) persecutions on political, racial and religious grounds; (i) other inhumane acts. See https://www.icty.org/x/file/Legal%20Library/Statute/statute_sept09_en.pdf, accessed 12.08.2023.

51 *Prosecutor v Dragan Nikolić* (“Sušica Camp”), Case No IT-94-2-R61, Review of the Indictment Pursuant to Rule 61 of the Rules of Procedure and Evidence, Trial Chamber I, 20 October 1995, para. 27

52 Rome Statute, Article 7.

53 *Prosecutor v Dragoljub Kunarac et al.* (“Foc̆a”), Cases No IT-96-23-T and No IT-96-23/1-T, Judgment, Trial Chamber I, 22 February 2001, para 430.

54 Sixth Mazowiecki Report II, pursuant to paragraph 23 of the Resolution of the Commission on Human Rights 1993/7 of 23 February 1993, Report of 21 February 1994, UN Doc E/CN.4/1994/110, p. 44 para 283.

55 *Prosecutor v. Duško Tadić* (“Prijedor”), Case N° IT-94-1-A, Appeals Judgment, Appeals Chamber, 15 July 1999, para. 271.

56 Case concerning Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Prosecution of the Crime of Genocide

Thus, ethnic cleansing may fall under crimes against humanity if it is widespread and systematic, directed against any civilian population, and it relates to the crimes committed against civilians. Thus, whether ethnic cleansing qualifies as a crime against humanity should be considered on a case-by-case basis, implying that not all acts may align with the elements of crimes against humanity.

Ethnic Cleansing As a Crime of Genocide

The relationship between ethnic cleansing and genocide is more complex. The focal point in this rubric is whether ethnic cleansing is a separate, distinct concept or merely a euphemism that obscures the horrors of genocide, or to phrase in the parlance of legal scholarship, “bleaches the atrocities of genocide”⁵⁷ or “shadowing the genocide”,⁵⁸ “to sugarcoat the cruel reality”.⁵⁹ For some scholars, the link between genocide and ethnic cleansing is a bit complicated.

For Michael Mann, genocide is the most severe form of ethnic cleansing,⁶⁰ a position that Andrew Bell-Fialkoff largely shares. According to him, coercion to leave a territory is vital in labeling an ethnic cleansing genocide.⁶¹

According to Benjamin Lieberman, the significant overlap happens when the forced removal of a population resulted in their destruction.⁶² The idea is to differentiate the intent of the perpetrator, whether the intent is to remove a group from a territory, or to destroy that group.⁶³

Other scholars consider ethnic cleansing as a form of genocide⁶⁴ and consider using “ethnic cleansing” as a lack of willingness to prevent genocide, which, in turn, could lead to higher casualties and undermine legal obligations to acknowledge instances of genocide. Their primary argument was that “ethnic cleansing” did not have an established legal status, unlike genocide, which was clearly defined in international law.⁶⁵

(Bosnia Herzegovina and Others v. Yugoslavia), ICJ, Further Requests for the Indication of Provisional Measures, Order, 13 September 1993, ICJ Reports 1993, p. 325, Separate Opinion of Judge ad hoc Lauterpacht, p. 431, para. 69.

57 Rony Blum, Gregory H. Stanton, Shira Sagi and Elihu D. Richter, “‘Ethnic Cleansing’ bleaches the Atrocities of Genocide’, *The European Journal of Public Health* (2007):1.

58 Jaakko Heiskanen, “In the Shadow of Genocide: Ethnocide, Ethnic Cleansing, and International Order,” *Global Studies Quarterly* 2 (2021): 2.

59 Brooke Chambers, and Joachim Savelsberg, “Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 4. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264079.013.594>

60 Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

61 Bell-Fialkoff, “A Brief History of Ethnic Cleansing.”

62 Lieberman, “‘Ethnic cleansing’ versus genocide?” 42, 46.

63 Ibid.

64 Pégrier, *Ethnic Cleansing*, 58-59; Chambers et al., “Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing,” 4; Heiskanen, “In the Shadow of Genocide.”

65 Blum et al., “‘Ethnic Cleansing.’” 1.

One of the main criticisms is that (a) ethnic cleansing is not established in any international treaty as an international crime, and (b) the UN bodies themselves have expressed conflicting views. The matter becomes more complicated when seen from the perspective that, on the one hand, mention is made that ethnic cleansing is part of international crimes, and on the other, consistently noting that only some acts of ethnic cleansing may fall under specific international crimes.

To understand the connection between ethnic cleansing and genocide, it is necessary to delve into the history of genocide.

According to Raphael Lemkin, genocide is not limited to physical extermination; it is “a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, to annihilate the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be a disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups.”⁶⁶

Jaakko Heiskanen argues that Lemkin’s understanding of genocide “included what today would be called ethnocide – the destruction of the culture of an ethnic group – as well as what today would be called ethnic cleansing – the forced displacement of an ethnic group from a given territory.”⁶⁷ Heiskanen further singled out ethnocide and ethnic cleansing among many neologisms developed by genocide scholars because the concepts have developed outside the theoretical framework and gained international, political significance, and both are rooted in the concept of ethnicity, which is very close to Lemkin’s understanding of genocide.

As the *travaux préparatoires* of the Genocide Convention attest, the omission of cultural genocide from the Convention was connected with the objection stemming from the then colonial powers,⁶⁸ with their long-lasting history of oppression and forced assimilation against the minorities. The issue of ethnic cleansing was also discussed during the drafting of the Convention. An amendment presented by Syria offered to include “measures intended to oblige members of a group to abandon their homes to escape the threat of subsequent ill-treatment” as an act of genocide (A/C.6/234).⁶⁹ The Indian delegate objected to this proposal on the grounds that “abandonment of homes under the threat of ill-treatment and not even the threat of genocide should not be considered genocide.”⁷⁰ The representative of Yugoslavia defended the inclusion of the amendment, referring to the Nazi’s operations in Yugoslavia when a Slav majority was removed from

66 Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944), 79.

67 Heiskanen, “In the Shadow of Genocide.”

68 *The Genocide Convention. The Travaux Préparatoires*, edited by Hiram Abtahi and Philippa Webb (Leiden, Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 2008).

69 *The Genocide Convention*, 1479.

70 *Ibid.*, 1490.

certain territories to establish a German majority there. Other delegates believed that the amendment deviated from the original concept of the genocide, while in the opinion of the USSR delegate, the “measures compelling members of a group to abandon their homes” were already provided for in the draft Convention and would be punishable after the convention would be signed.⁷¹

Although Lemkin used the word ethnocide as a synonym to the word of genocide,⁷² its later articulations served as a supplementary concept that captured those forms of cultural oppression and forced assimilation that escaped the legal definition of genocide.⁷³

From the very beginning of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, the terms “ethnic cleansing” and “genocide” were used interchangeably to describe perpetrated violence. In 1992, the UN General Assembly denounced the “abhorrent policy of “ethnic cleansing” as a form of genocide.⁷⁴

In the case of *Nikolić*, the ICTY established:

In this instance, this policy of “ethnic cleansing” took the form of discriminatory acts of extreme seriousness which tend to show its genocidal character. For instance, the Chamber notes the statements by some witnesses which point, among other crimes, to mass murders being committed in the region. More specifically, the constitutive intent of the crime of genocide may be inferred from the very gravity of those discriminatory acts. [...] The Chamber considers that the Tribunal may possibly have jurisdiction in this case under Article 4 of the Statute [Genocide]. It would therefore invite the Prosecutor to pursue his investigations, if feasible and advisable, with a view to indicting Dragan Nikolić for complicity in genocide or acts of genocide.⁷⁵

Nevertheless, one cannot categorize all cases of ethnic cleansing as genocide due to the clearly defined specific mental element of genocide, *mens rea*.⁷⁶ As noted by Schabas, “where the specified intent is not established, the act remains punishable, but not as genocide. It may be classified as crimes against humanity, or it may be simply a crime under ordinary criminal law.”⁷⁷

Therefore, the intent to destroy expresses the specificity of genocide and constitutes its crucial element in the definition and understanding of this crime. Without it, genocide

71 Ibid., 1490-1491.

72 Lemkin, *Axis Rule*, 79, footnote 1.

73 Ibid.

74 UN General Assembly Resolution 47/121(1992), “The Situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” December 18, 1992, UN Doc. A/RES/47/121; UN Doc. A/47/PV.91, p. 99.

75 *Prosecutor v. Dragan Nikolić* (“Sushica Camp”), Case No. IT-94-2-R61, Review of the Indictment Pursuant to Rule 61 of the Rules of Procedure and Evidence, Trial Chamber I, October 20, 1995, para 34.

76 Rome Statute, art. 6.

77 Schabas, *Genocide in International Law*, 214.

cannot be considered to have been committed. As confirmed by the Trial Chamber in the case of *Kayishema and Ruzindana*:

A distinguishing aspect of the crime of genocide is the specific intent (*dolus specialis*) to destroy a group in whole or in part. The *dolus specialis* applies to all acts of genocide mentioned in Article 2(a) to (e) of the Statute, that is, all the enumerated acts must be committed ‘with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such’. It is this specific intent that distinguishes the crime of genocide from the ordinary crime of murder.⁷⁸

The International Court of Justice, in the case concerning the *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro)*, noted that there are obvious similarities between a genocidal policy and the policy of ethnic cleansing, while also mentioning that “[a] clear distinction must be drawn between physical destruction and mere dissolution of a group. The expulsion of a group or part of a group does not in itself amount to the crime of genocide.”⁷⁹ In other words, to qualify ethnic cleansing as genocide, the acts listed in Article II of the Genocide Convention and the intent to destroy the group as such should be present.

The same ambiguity and inconsistency are also present in the jurisprudence of the International Criminal Court.⁸⁰

Nonetheless, several evolutionary proclamations by the ICC coupled with the respective progressive jurisprudence of the International Court of Justice seem to draw a clearer and unprecedented picture. Thus, in its *Al Bashir* case, the ICC held that “practice of ethnic cleansing ... may result in genocide if it brings about the commission of the objective elements of genocide provided in Article 6 of the Statute and the Elements of Crimes with the specific intent to destroy in whole or in part the targeted group”.⁸¹ Meanwhile, in its *Croatian Genocide* case, the ICJ, in its turn, affirmed that ethnic cleansing may potentially amount to genocide, and that acts of ethnic cleansing may occur in parallel to acts prohibited by Article II of the Genocide Convention, and what is even more that ethnic cleansing may be significant in terms of evidencing the presence of a specific intent (*dolus specialis*) giving rise to or inspiring those acts.⁸² As a demonstration

⁷⁸ *Prosecutor v. Clément Kayishema and Obed Ruzindana*, ICTR, June 1, 2001, para 91.

⁷⁹ *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro)*, 11 July 1996, paragraph 163.

⁸⁰ For more on this see Pégrier, *Ethnic Cleansing*, 58-105.

⁸¹ Situation in Darfur, Sudan, *Prosecutor v Al Bashir* (Omar Hassan Ahmad), Decision on the Prosecution’s application for a warrant of arrest against Omar Hassan Ahmad Al Bashir, Case No ICC-02/05-01/09, ICC-02/05-01/09-3, 4th March 2009, International Criminal Court [ICC]; Pre-Trial Chamber I [ICC], para. 145.

⁸² *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro)* (Judgment) [2007] ICJ Rep 43, paras 162–63, 478. See also, Robin Geiß,

of this, the ICJ directly referenced to “acts described as ethnic cleansing that can be characterized as deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part, contrary to Article II(c) of the Convention, provided such action is carried out with the necessary specific intent (*dolus specialis*).”⁸³

Thus, the concept of ethnic cleansing was mainly used as a euphemistic alternative to genocide to enable the international community to condemn the actions of other states as morally wrong without burdening themselves with the responsibility to intervene or calling into question the universalistic ideals upon which the international order is founded. If the articulation of ethnocide has sought to undo some of the containments and closures of genocide discourse, then the expression of ethnic cleansing has proved to reinforce them.

The Progressive Content of Ethnic Cleansing

During the last decades of the 20th century and on, the world has witnessed the most horrendous crimes. The genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, and Srebrenica, as mass atrocities in Burundi, Bosnia, Angola (the Halloween massacre), Kosovo, Liberia, and elsewhere, exposed the weaknesses of the United Nations Organization and even brought discredit to its viability. And it was not until these events that the international community started to find ways to reconcile between the principles of state sovereignty and the protection of human rights.

In 2000, the Canadian government took the initiative in this regard and created the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), which dramatically shifted from the Westphalian sovereignty model toward a sovereignty based on rights and responsibilities.

The propositions enshrined in the ICISS Report provided a conceptual change in general understanding of humanitarian intervention.⁸⁴ At the outset, the Report states that military intervention may only be resorted to when there is either (a) a large-scale loss of life or (b) a large-scale “ethnic cleansing”.⁸⁵ The latter was qualified as actual or apprehended, whether carried out by killing, forced expulsion, acts of terror, or rape.⁸⁶

Inspired by the ICISS Report, the UN General Assembly adopted the Outcome Document four years later in its 2005 World Summit.⁸⁷ The significance of the Outcome Document is impossible to circumvent for one reason: it was one of the largest

Asli Ozcelik, “Ethnic Cleansing,” *Max Planck Encyclopedias of International Law* (2021), para. 29, at <https://opil.ouplaw.com/display/10.1093/law:epil/9780199231690/law-9780199231690-e789>, accessed 21.09.2023.

83 Geiß and Ozcelik, “Ethnic Cleansing.”

84 Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty. The Responsibility to Protect, [ICISS Report], December 2001.

85 Ibid, p. XII.

86 Ibid.

87 2005 World Summit Outcome, General Assembly Resolution 60/1, U.N. Doc. A/Res/60/1 (2005).

conventions of heads of state and government representing over 170 states, who convened to endorse, *inter alia*, the Responsibility to Protect principle for the first time at this level.

Based on paragraphs 138 and 139 of the Document, states explicitly endorse the principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and acknowledge that each state has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity.⁸⁸ As can be observed, the Outcome Document provides only for international crimes as enshrined in Article 5 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and thereby, significantly limited the scope of R2P, whereas the ICISS Report provided a more expanded scope for the just cause, i.e., “large-scale loss of life” and “large-scale ethnic cleansing.” Besides, the Document stresses the importance of international assistance to “those who are under stress before crises and conflicts break out,” but does not provide appropriate forms of such aid.⁸⁹

Interestingly, another four years later, in 2009, the Secretary-General’s Report on Implementing the Responsibility to Protect stated that acts of ethnic cleansing may constitute one of the other three crimes, that is, genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes.⁹⁰

The cumulative analysis of the above contextual advancements regarding the notion of ethnic cleansing allows us to conclude that ethnic cleansing constitutes a standalone, autonomous form of crime distinct from crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide. Such a reading, nonetheless, does not *per se* exclude the potential overlap that ethnic cleansing might have with the other three forms of crimes. For that, what remains to be answered on a case-by-case basis is whether ethnic cleansing fits out to the necessary prerequisites of either of the other crimes.

Naming the Crime: Ethnic Cleansing in Artsakh

On 19 September 2023, Azerbaijan launched a large-scale assault on Nagorno-Karabakh, proclaiming that it would continue “until the end.”⁹¹ Although it was not specified what was the anticipated end, it was clear – the final destruction of Armenianness in Artsakh. In 24 hours, Azerbaijani forces were using heavy artillery, drones, and mortars, resulting in the loss of hundreds of lives, among them also civilians, and causing substantial damage to civilian infrastructure.⁹²

88 Ibid, 30.

89 General Assembly Resolution 60/1, U.N. Doc. A/Res/60/1.

90 The Secretary-General, Report of the Secretary-General, Implementing the Responsibility to Protect, UN Doc. A/63/677 (2009), p. 5.

91 Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination Armenia v. Azerbaijan, Request by The Republic of Armenia for the Indication of Provisional Measures, Volume I., 28 September 2023, p. 20.

92 Global Center for the responsibility to protect, Atrocity Alert No. 366: Nagorno-Karabakh, Ukraine and Venezuela, at <https://www.globalr2p.org/publications/atrocity-alert-no-366/>, accessed 01.10.2023

After blockading Artsakh for more than nine months, Azerbaijan soon reopened the Lachin corridor as a last accord in its aim to de-Armenize Artsakh. The indigenous Armenians of Artsakh had no other choice than to immediately leave their homeland for fear of violence and physical extermination. According to the President of the RA Special Investigative Committee, more than 70 people died during this forced exodus.⁹³ They were also in “dire humanitarian needs”⁹⁴ because the nine-month siege resulted in physiological issues and shortages of food, medications, and other essential supplies.⁹⁵

The absence or shortage of medicines and medical supplies was regularly recorded in Artsakh with life-threatening consequences.⁹⁶ The blockade has created problems related to all four components of the right to food as defined by the UN: availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability.⁹⁷ Several cases of fainting and death were recorded during the blockade due to chronic malnutrition and deficiency of vital nutrition elements.⁹⁸ Azerbaijan has also entirely or partially interrupted the gas supply from Armenia to Artsakh, which further deteriorated the humanitarian situation in Artsakh, intensifying human rights violations.⁹⁹

September 19 attack was added to decades-long history of persecution, discrimination, and hatred towards Armenians. Azerbaijan has sought to suppress any expression of ethnic Armenian identity in Azerbaijan. It has systematically worked to destroy all traces of Armenian cultural heritage and to rewrite the history of the region to erase the presence of ethnic Armenians.¹⁰⁰

93 “More than 70 people died during the exodus from Nagorno Karabakh. Argishti Kyaramyan provided details,” 04.01.2024, at <https://www.armtimes.com/hy/article/277088>, accessed 04.01.2024.

94 “Azerbaijan: Ensure Civilians’ Rights in Nagorno Karabakh,” *Human Rights Watch*, 23 September 2023, at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/09/23/azerbaijan-ensure-civilians-rights-nagorno-karabakh>, PDF p. 1 (“Thousands of civilians in Nagorno-Karabakh have dire humanitarian needs following Azerbaijan’s military operation to regain control over the region”), accessed 30.09.2023.

95 “Azerbaijan: Ensure Civilians’ Rights in Nagorno Karabakh,” *Human Rights Watch*, 23 September 2023, at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/09/23/azerbaijan-ensure-civilians-rights-nagorno-karabakh>, President of Artsakh Republic declares nationwide disaster, asks UN to intervene, Public Radio of Armenia, 25 July 2023, at <https://en.armradio.am/2023/07/25/174716/>, accessed 10.09.2023.

96 Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Artsakh, Report on the Violations of Individual and Collective Human Rights as a Result of Azerbaijan’s Blockade of Artsakh, 12 June 2023, p.11.

97 OHCHR, Key aspects of the right to food, at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/food>, accessed 09.10.2023.

98 Artsakh Human Rights Defender, Press Release, Person Died from starvation in Artsakh, at <https://artsakhombuds.am/en/news/747>, accessed at 09.10.2023.

99 Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Artsakh, Report on the Violations of Individual and Collective Human Rights, p.17.

100 Simon Maghakyan and Sarah Pickman, “A Regime Conceals Its Erasure of Indigenous Armenian Culture,” *Hyperallergic*, 18.02.2019, at <https://hyperallergic.com/482353/a-regime-conceals-its-erasure-of-indigenous-ar-menian-culture/>; Sylvia Maus, “A Violent Effort to Rewrite History? Destruction of Religious Sites in Nagorno-Karabagh and the Concept of Cultural Genocide,” *Völkerrechtsblog*, 19 April 2021, https://intr2dok.vifa-recht.de/receive/mir_mods_00010644, accessed 05.03.2022. Hayastan Martirosyan, “Azerbaijan’s Policy of Forced Cultural Appropriation after the Second Artsakh War: The Case of Dadivank Monastery,” *International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies* 7, no. 2 (2022): 91-135. For more information see Monument Watch, at <https://monumentwatch.org/en/>. See also different chapters in *Monuments and Identities in the Caucasus. Karabagh, Nakhichevan and Azerbaijan in Contemporary Geopolitical Conflict*, Texts and Studies in Eastern

Prejudice against Armenians “is so ingrained that describing someone as an Armenian in the media” is considered to be “an insult that justifies initiating judicial proceedings against the persons making such statements.”¹⁰¹ Given also the Government’s own “condon[ing] [of] racial hatred and hate crimes,” offenses against Armenians go unpunished. A stamp issued by Azerbaijan’s State-owned postage stamp company in the wake of the armed conflict sought to commemorate those violations by depicting the chemical “disinfecting” of Artsakh. As Alexander Galitsky put it, “[n]ot since Nazi Germany has such a blatant example of genocidal symbolism been deployed so brazenly by a state actor.”¹⁰²

This anti-Armenian rhetoric is being organized and encouraged on a state level.¹⁰³ The president of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev is routinely using derogatory terms to label Armenians as “bandits”, “vandals”, “fascists”, and “barbarians”, and as having a “cowardly nature”, comparing them with “animals”, especially “dogs”. Other government institutions and high-ranking officials are also following this wording.¹⁰⁴

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance has observed that “Azerbaijan’s leadership, education system and media are very prolific in their denigration of Armenians”, and that “an entire generation of Azerbaijanis has now grown up listening to this hateful rhetoric.”¹⁰⁵

Similarly, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed concern about “the repeated and unpunished use of inflammatory language by [Azerbaijani] politicians speaking about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and its adverse impact on the public’s view of ethnic Armenians.”¹⁰⁶

There is also a long history of violence against Armenians. From the beginning of the 1900s, anti-Armenian propaganda and hatred resulted in a series of massacres perpetrated

Christianity, Volume 31, edited by Igor Dorfmann-Lazarev and Haroutioun Khatchadourian (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2023).

101 European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, *ECRI Report on Azerbaijan (fourth monitoring cycle)* (31 May 2011), available at <https://rm.coe.int/third-report-on-azerbaijan/16808b557e>, para. 99.

102 Alexander Galitsky, “Azerbaijan’s Dehumanization of Armenians Echoes Horrors of Holocaust,” *The Times of Israel*, 30 January 2021, at <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/azerbaijans-dehumanization-of-armenians-echoes-horrors-of-holocaust/>, accessed 10.09.2023.

103 Naira E. Sahakyan, “The Rhetorical Face of Enmity: The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and the Dehumanization of Armenians in the Speeches by Ilham Aliyev,” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 23, no. 4 (2023): 863-882.

104 International Court of Justice, Application Instituting Proceedings Containing a Request for Provisional Measures Filed in the Registry of the Court on 16 September 2021. Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Armenia V. Azerbaijan), pp. 27-28.

105 European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, *ECRI Report on Azerbaijan (fifth monitoring cycle)* (7 June 2016), available at <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-report-on-azerbaijan/16808b5581>, pp. 9, 17. See also United States Department of State, *2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Azerbaijan* (11 March 2020), at <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/AZERBAIJAN-2019-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf>, p. 38.

106 CERD Committee, *Concluding Observations on the Combined Seventh to Ninth Periodic Reports of Azerbaijan*, UN doc. CERD/C/AZE/CO/7-9 (10 June 2016), para. 27.

against Armenians in Baku, Shushi,¹⁰⁷ and other places.¹⁰⁸ After the illegal incorporation of Nagorno-Karabakh into the Azerbaijan Soviet Republic, Armenians of the region protested against Azerbaijan's control and oppression. In 1963, a petition addressed to the then-First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Chairman of the USSR's Council of Ministers, Nikita Khrushchev, denounced the "chauvinist policy" of Azerbaijan designed to "ruin the economy of the Armenian population and, eventually, to force the Armenians to leave [Nagorno-Karabakh]."¹⁰⁹ The petition then detailed how discrimination was present in all spheres, from agriculture to education and culture.¹¹⁰ Azerbaijani officials responded with illegal imprisonments, murders committed with impunity, and official threats, forcing many Armenians to go into exile.¹¹¹ Heydar Aliyev, the former President of Azerbaijan and then-First Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, who is also the father of the current President of Azerbaijan, openly acknowledged attempting to alter the local demographics by "increasing the number of Azeris there and reducing the number of the Armenians."¹¹²

In 1968, after an ethnic Azerbaijani teacher reportedly killed an Armenian pupil and was not charged, clashes between Armenians and Azeris erupted in Stepanakert.¹¹³ Instances of violence were reported also during the following years. In 1977, the clashes intensified. In his letter addressed to Breznev, former Armenian Communist Party's Central Committee member Sero Khanzadian complained that "national injustice" in Nagorno-Karabakh was the basis for disorders and casualties and demanded that Nagorno-Karabakh be incorporated into Soviet Armenia.¹¹⁴

At the beginning of 1988, the peaceful demand of Nagorno-Karabakh to be united with Armenia was met with violence, which escalated into armed conflict, lasting from 1988 until 1994. During that period, a series of violent massacres of Armenians were perpetrated. In February 1988, Azerbaijani mobs indiscriminately killed, raped, maimed, and even burned alive ethnic Armenians in Sumgait, currently the second-largest city in Azerbaijan.¹¹⁵ Large massacres occurred in Kirovabad, Shamakhi, Shamkhor in November

107 Vahram Balayan, "The Massacre of the Armenians of Shushi on March 23, 1920 as a Consequence of Impunity of the Armenian Genocide in 1915," *Journal of Armenian Studies* 2 (2016): 95-105.

108 Richard G. Hovannissian, *The Republic of Armenia: The First Year, 1918-1919. Vol. 1.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 237-238; *Ibidem.*, *The First Republic of Armenia. Vol. II. From Versailles to London, 1919-1920* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1982), 168-240.

109 Claude Mutaftian, "The Years of Suppression: 1923-1987," in *Armenia and Karabagh: The Struggle for Unity*, edited by Christopher J. Walker (London: Minority Rights Publications, 1991), 118.

110 *Ibid.*

111 *Ibid.*, 118-119.

112 Mutaftian, "The Years of Suppression," 116.

113 United States Department of State, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Soviet Nationalities Survey. Special Issue: Crisis in the Caucasus, N 15, August 22, 1988, I.

114 *Ibid.*, I-II.

115 Mutaftian, "The Years of Suppression," 124. See also "In Recognition of the Victims of the Baku and Sumgait Pogroms" (Extension of Remarks), *Congressional Record Vol. 166, No. 20* (30 January 2020), at <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2020/01/30/extensions-of-remarks-section/article/E112-3>; Jacques Derrida

1988. During the same period, in November and December 1988, 50 Armenian settlements were displaced. In another attempt, the Azerbaijani policy of systematic attacks against the ethnic Armenian population, Armenians of Baku faced a large-scale series of pogroms from 13 through 19 January 1990. Hundreds of Armenians were murdered, mutilated, persecuted, and displaced.¹¹⁶ Under the threat of extermination, around 250,000 Armenians were forced to flee Azerbaijan.¹¹⁷

When Nagorno-Karabakh declared its independence on 2 September 1991, the Azerbaijani army carried out another series of massacres of Armenians.¹¹⁸ Several years of heavy fighting resulted in further casualties and displacement of Armenians from their homes in Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding region.

Thus, having a long history of persecution and discrimination, with many episodes of violence and massacres, after nearly 10-month blockade and under the imminent threat of physical extermination, Armenians of Artsakh had no other choice than to leave their indigenous lands.

Epilogue

In the case of Artsakh as a state devoid of *de jure* recognition, equally significant is the interplay between the concepts of *deportation* and *forcible transfer*. The two shall not be deemed synonymously. The jurisprudence of international tribunals indicates that even though both deportation and forcible transfer deal with involuntary and illegal uprooting of people from the place of their habitation, deportation nonetheless assumes the transfer of people across State borders. In contrast, forcible transfer may, *inter alia*, presume displacements of people within the boundaries of a State. The Appeals Chamber in *Milutinović*, by narrowing the difference between deportation and forcible transfer, held that under certain circumstances, displacement across a *de facto* border may be sufficient to amount to deportation.¹¹⁹ Such a reading is pivotal in terms of refuting arguments directed to rendering inapplicable the deportation of Artsakh Armenians to ethnic cleansing because Artsakh does not enjoy a *de jure* recognition.

et al., “An Open Letter on Anti-Armenian Pogroms in the Soviet Union”, *The New York Review* (27 September 1990), at <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1990/09/27/an-open-letter-on-anti-armenian-pogroms-in-the-sov/>.

116 For more details see Gayane S. Hovhannisyan, “The Sumgait Massacres: Characteristics and Definitions,” *International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies* 7, no. 2 (2022): 63-90; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, republic of Artsakh, Armenian Pogroms in Azerbaijan 1988-1990, at <https://www.nkr.am/en/armenian-pogroms>, accessed 23.09.2023.

117 Parliamentary Assembly, Written declaration No. 708, Doc. 15064, 31 January 2020.

118 Lucy Poghosyan, “The Maragha Massacre: The Other Face of the Coin in the Karabakh War,” *The Armenian Weekly*, 10 April 2020, at <https://armenianweekly.com/2020/04/10/the-maragha-massacre-the-other-face-of-the-coin-in-the-karabakh-war/>, accessed 03.09.2023.

119 Šainović *et al*, *Prosecutor v Milutinović* (Milan) *et al.*, Trial judgment, Case No IT-05-87-T, 26th February 2009, United Nations [UN]; United Nations Security Council [UNSC]; International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia [ICTY]; Trial Chamber III [ICTY], para. 169.

Another important point here is the *forced* displacement of Armenians. In the Elements of Crimes of the International Criminal Court, in the case of deportation or forcible transfer of population, mention is made that “The term ‘forcibly’ is not restricted to physical force, but may include threat of force or coercion, such as that caused by fear of violence, duress, detention, psychological oppression or abuse of power against such person or persons or another person, or by taking advantage of a coercive environment.”¹²⁰ It was evident that the Armenians of Artsakh were forced to leave their indigenous lands due to imminent and actual threat of force, under the duress, detention, and psychological oppression of more than nine months of blockade and having a clear history of institutionalized violence, hatred, and discrimination.

A closing question that looms is whether ethnic cleansing should be used to describe the forced displacement of Armenians when the concept itself is not criminalized and, as such, does not trigger any criminal liability, and in case of using the concept one needs to understand within what crime it should be used.

The long enduring anti-Armenian policy by Azerbaijan directed against Artsakh Armenians has been a blatant manifestation of long-lasting practice of ethnic cleansing that has ultimately been blended with the objective elements of genocide through the accumulation of isolated yet consistent physical annihilation of Artsakh Armenians along with the deliberate infliction upon the latter non-viable conditions with the purpose of their physical destruction. As for the mental element requirement of genocide, ethnic cleansing in itself evidences the presence of the specific intent that inspired those acts, and as seen, this has been well established through the jurisprudence of international tribunals.

Azerbaijan has executed a master plan of expulsion of Armenians, destruction of Artsakh and now its replacement, along with de-Armenization and Azeriation of Artsakh. It is wiping out the history of Armenian Artsakh to write that of Azeris over it with the continuous imposition of Azeri national patterns over anything that is Armenian. We are witnessing a systematic, scholarly, political, and military attempt to de-armenize the land, its names,¹²¹ geography,¹²² and history,¹²³ which resembles Lemkin’s notion of genocide – process – the destruction of the national pattern of the targeted group and the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor. He further explains that it is not enough to impose a national pattern of the oppressor on the targeted group – the targeted group should also

120 *Elements of Crimes* (The Hague: International Criminal Court, 2013), 4, ft. 12.

121 Mass changes to locations in Artsakh with fake Azerbaijani names on Google maps, at https://www.reddit.com/r/armenia/comments/14obwn2/mass_changes_to_locations_in_artsakh_with_fake/, accessed 12.10.2023.

122 Rouben Galichian, *Clash of Histories in the South Caucasus: Redrawing the map of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Iran* (London: Bennet & Bloom, 2012).

123 See e.g. Hratch Tchilingirian, “Christianity in Karabakh: Azerbaijani Efforts At Rewriting History Are Not New,” *EVN Report*, 22 November 2020, at <https://evnreport.com/spotlight-karabakh/christianity-in-karabakh-azerbaijani-efforts-at-rewriting-history-are-not-new/>; “The Armenian Art That Azerbaijan May ‘Erase’ From Churches,” *Monument Watch*, 12 February 2022, at <https://monumentwatch.org/en/2022/02/12/the-armenian-art-that-azerbaijan-may-erase-from-churches/>, accessed 10.09.2023; Artak Maghalyan, “Falsification Of The History of the Artsakh Meliqdoms by Azerbaijani Historiography,” *Fundamental Armenology* 2 (2015): 328-336.

be attacked in a physical sense and be removed and supplanted by the population of the oppressor nation.¹²⁴

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¹²⁴ Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, 79–80.

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WHY PREVENTION FAILS: CHRONICLING THE GENOCIDE IN ARTSAKH

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Abstract

Azerbaijan's September 19, 2023 attack on the Republic of Artsakh resulted in the almost total displacement of the indigenous Armenian population, making it one of the most successful genocides in history. For over a year before Azerbaijan's attack, the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention viewed Artsakh as the "perfect storm" for genocide prevention and was using as many strategies as possible to urge Western leaders to recognize the threat and take effective action. Any leader willing to challenge Azerbaijan diplomatically would have had the work of many genocide scholars and genocide prevention organizations to back them up. We still believe that coordinated pressure from the Western powers could have had a chance of avoiding genocide and may have resulted in finding a secure, and perhaps independent, space for Artsakh Armenians in their ancestral homeland.

This article aims to show how the case of genocide in Artsakh is an object lesson in how diplomatic silences, shaped by geopolitical interests, can provide the power framework in which genocide can easily take place, offer diplomatic cover for the state or organization committing the crime, and normalizing the crime within international relations. It proposes that the genocide in Artsakh ushered in a new "New Imperialism", in which the post-1945 law-based world order is jettisoned for raw power, threatened communities and unwanted peoples are less safe than they were before September 19, 2023, and genocide will become the order of the day – unless we find new mechanisms to prevent it.

Keywords: Genocide prevention, Nagorno-Karabakh, responsibility to protect, forced displacement, genocidal intent.

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Introduction

Azerbaijan's September 19, 2023 attack on the Republic of Artsakh resulted in the almost total displacement of the indigenous Armenian population, making it one of the most successful genocides in history. For over a year before Azerbaijan's attack, the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention, where I am co-founder and Executive Director, was viewing Artsakh as the "perfect storm" for genocide prevention: the threat was clear, there was an abundance of evidence of genocidal intent within Azerbaijan's state and military and of genocidal acts against Armenians in previous wars, Artsakh was an historical enclave with clear borders, its population was over 99 percent Armenian, and all the large powers were heavily invested in Azerbaijan with leverage over its government. In addition, any leader willing to challenge Azerbaijan diplomatically would have had the work of many genocide scholars and genocide prevention organizations to back them up. We still believe that coordinated pressure from the Western powers would have had a good chance of avoiding genocide and may have resulted in finding a secure and autonomous, and perhaps independent, space for Artsakh Armenians in their ancestral homeland. Naturally, however, we will never know for certain the results of any prevention efforts, since so few were tried.

As we do know, for the three years between the 44-Day War in 2020 and the invasion of September 19, 2023, the Western powers were astonishingly silent about Azerbaijan's extreme Armenophobia and atrocity crimes – so silent, in fact, that it resembled a conspiracy of silence. As the September 19 genocide was underway, and in the days following the flight of almost the entire Artsakh Armenian population into the Republic of Armenia, one could be forgiven for assuming that Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev was in full control of not only the Western world but also the international community. Referring to this phenomenon with respect to the United States, the Washington Examiner columnist Michael Rubin quipped in April 2023 that Aliyev "treats [US Secretary of State Anthony] Blinken and key senators and representatives as useful idiots."¹ The "useful idiots" in the Western world seemed far too happy to oblige the dictator, granting him the diplomatic cover of a respectable "peace process" while he invaded, blockaded, threatened, and again invaded Armenian territory.

The most absurd example of the "useful idiot" syndrome was the United Nations mission to a completely depopulated Stepanakert, the capital of Artsakh, on 1 October 2023. Armenians had been calling for a UN mission to Artsakh throughout Azerbaijan's nine-month blockade that preceded the September 19 military attack, but since 2020 Azerbaijan had prevented the United Nations and all other international organizations from entering the territory.² When the mission finally arrived in October, none of the Armenians were left. According to a UN press release, the mission included representatives from the

1 Michael Rubin, "Washington needs a new approach on Nagorno-Karabakh," *Washington Examiner*, 19 April 2023, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/1414301/washington-needs-a-new-approach-on-nagorno-karabakh/>, accessed 03.09.2023.

2 Asbarez Staff, "TOO LATE: After 30 Years, UN Sends Mission to Stepanakert," *Asbarez*, 2 October 2023, <https://asbarez.com/too-late-after-30-years-un-sends-mission-to-stepanakert/>, accessed 03.10.2023.

Coordination Division of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the UN Refugee Agency, UNICEF, the World Health Organization, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the UN Resident Coordinator's Office, and the UN Department of Safety and Security.³

The mission was operating fully within the Azerbaijani propaganda landscape, using, for example, the Azerbaijani toponym for the region, "Karabakh" instead of Nagorno-Karabakh (or Artsakh), and for the capital, "Khankendi" instead of Stepanakert, demonstrating in their own use of language the totality of Azerbaijan's genocide. Approaching the reality from the point of view of Azerbaijani propaganda, which was insisting that Armenians "left voluntarily," the mission reported that it "was struck by the sudden manner in which the local population left their homes and the suffering the experience must have caused," leaving unsaid why the "local population" may have behaved in this way. Its one-day visit, led by the UN's Resident Coordinator in Azerbaijan, also apparently included interviews. The report notes that the mission "did not hear – from either locals interviewed or others – of incidences of violence against civilians following the latest ceasefire." Finally, the report also observed that "there was no visible damage to public infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, housing, or cultural and religious structures." "Additionally," it added, "shops were closed."⁴

The UN mission was met with astonishment and anger among many Armenian politicians, human rights organizations, and supportive officials in foreign governments. French Senator Valérie Boyer called it a "masquerade."⁵ Armenian Ambassador-at-large Edmon Marukyan wrote on the social media platform X, "The so-called UN mission in Nagorno Karabagh did their best to legitimize the ethnic cleansing, arbitrary detentions, destructions of the civilian infrastructure and other crimes committed by Azerbaijan. These guys are discrediting the UN as an institution. I look forward to the UN investigation on the activities of these "representatives".⁶ Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan called the mission "too late", and noted that the many warnings by Armenian authorities about Azerbaijan's plans for the "ethnic cleansing" of the enclave "did not lead to effective steps by the international community to prevent Baku's policy."⁷

It would be hard to believe that a UN mission would be this credulous, but the report is public.⁸ Its author, the UN Resident Coordinator for Azerbaijan, was a former employee

3 United Nations Azerbaijan, "UN team completes mission to Karabakh," 2 October 2023, <https://azerbaijan.un.org/en/248051-un-team-completes-mission-karabakh>, accessed 03.10.2023.

4 United Nations, "UN Karabakh mission told 'sudden' exodus means as few as 50 ethnic Armenians may remain," *UN News*, 2 October 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/10/1141782>, accessed 03.10.2023.

5 "A masquerade – French senator slams infamous UN mission's visit to Nagorno-Karabakh," *Armenpress*, 4 October 2023, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1121175.html>, accessed 04.10.2023.

6 "Senior Armenian diplomat lambasts 'so-called UN mission' in NK for 'legitimizing ethnic cleansing'," *Armenpress*, 3 October 2023, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1121059.html>, accessed 04.10.2023.

7 Asbarez, "TOO LATE".

8 United Nations Azerbaijan, "UN team completes mission to Karabakh," 2 October 2023, https://azerbaijan.un.org/en/248051-un-team-completes-mission-karabakh?_gl=1*1rcd4u1*_ga*Mzg5Njk2MzEuMTY3M-

at Azerbaijan's state broadcasting agency and is "generally known to be a mouthpiece for the Aliyev regime," according to the *Armenian Weekly*.⁹ The report asks readers to believe that the UN officials who were present during the mission could not understand that people do leave in a "sudden manner" if they are being attacked by a state that has previously tortured, humiliated, and beheaded members of their group, especially one that had, only a few days earlier, threatened them with the "genocide". Moreover, though it is hard to imagine how these intrepid UN investigators missed the very visible and already thoroughly documented destruction of civilian infrastructure in Stepanakert, the report asks us to believe that competent people at the UN could be completely innocent of the idea that one cannot possibly determine that "there was no visible damage" to civilian infrastructure in an investigation that lasted one day. One can only imagine where they found "locals" to interview about possible "incidences of violence against civilians" in a city that was a ghost town, but dictatorships like Azerbaijan are known to find willing volunteers to present to foreign interlocutors, especially those who are accompanied by state-appointed handlers. The absurdist theater of this mission prompted one veteran UN worker to ask "[i]s the UN Whitewashing Azerbaijan's Ethnic Cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh?"¹⁰

The UN mission story would be comedic if it were not such a perfect representation of the tragic and corrupt behavior of the international community towards threats to Armenian life since at least 2020. In fact, the world's dilatory, uncomprehending response extends across that three-year period, exacerbating Aliyev's sense of impunity and disseminating his genocidal Armenophobic narrative by refusing to challenge it. This is particularly the case with the Western powers, who should have known better. Artsakh was a genocide in very slow motion and the world stood by. For many people working in genocide prevention, baffled by the determined blindness of our elected officials, it struck us that we might as well be medieval chroniclers for all the impact our work was having.

What's in a Name?

In the past decade and a half there has been a strong push within Genocide Studies to replace the term "genocide" with the more comprehensive and inclusionary concept of "atrocities crimes,"¹¹ a term that includes war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.

zAzODI2OQ..*_ga_S5EKZKSB78*MTcwNTEwNjc4NC44LjEuMTcwNTEwNzEwNi42MC4wLjA.*_ga_TK-9BQL5X7Z*MTcwNTEwNjc4NC44LjE3MDUxMTY3MzQuMC4wLjA, accessed 03.10.2023.

9 Melody Seraydarian, "(UN)involved in Peace," *Armenian Weekly*, 4 October 2023, <https://armenianweekly.com/2023/10/04/uninvolved-in-peace/>, accessed 04.10.2023.

10 Hasmik Egian, "Is the UN Whitewashing Azerbaijan's Ethnic Cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh?" *PassBlue*, 19 October 2023, <https://www.passblue.com/2023/10/19/is-the-un-whitewashing-azerbaijans-ethnic-cleansing-in-nagorno-karabakh/>, accessed 20.10.2023. Egian reports that a day before the mission's arrival in Stepanakert, Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev gave a gift of \$1 million to the UN Human Settlements Program. "President Ilham Aliyev allocates \$1 million to UN Human Settlements Program," *Azertac*, 30 September 2023, https://azertag.az/en/xeber/president_ilham_aliyev_allocates_1_million_to_un_human_settlements_program-2769745, accessed 03.10.2023.

11 William Schabas, "Atrocities Crimes (Genocide, Crimes against Humanity and War Crimes)," in *The Cam-*

Although these are all very different phenomenon, they share the status of being high crimes in international law that shock the conscience of humanity. While the term “atrocious crime” was meant to help avoid the divisive “definitionalism” within the field of Genocide Studies, which some scholars and practitioners felt was counterproductive, as a prevention tool, the concept of “atrocious crimes” can be more harmful than helpful. The experience of Artsakh Armenians since 2020 has demonstrated the importance of precision in efforts to prevent “atrocious crimes”. It matters greatly if a community is caught within war crimes, crimes against humanity, or genocide. The latter crime is particularly important to identify when present, given that it is a process that does not necessarily end with the cessation of armed struggle or violent crackdown and therefore requires specific interventions to stop.

Since September 19, Azerbaijan’s attack on Artsakh has been referred to in profoundly different ways by the various players and observers. This article will examine the language used by Azerbaijan and its allies, the Western powers, Armenia, and genocide scholars and organizations to refer to what happened in Artsakh. These responses are critical to our understanding of what went wrong because of the West’s importance to Azerbaijan and Russia’s preoccupation with the war and genocide in Ukraine.¹² They paint for us a picture of how geopolitical realities shaped global elite discourse on Armenia, Armenians, and the Armenian enclave of Artsakh in a way that enabled genocide.

Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev cynically referred to the invasion as an “anti-terror” operation, a term that some Western news outlets, such as the BBC, were happy to repeat virtually without question.¹³ This characterization of Azerbaijan’s invasion has the strong support of its close ally and NATO member Türkiye, one of the world’s greatest disseminators of Armenophobia,¹⁴ and Israel, which supports Azerbaijan not only with military aid but also with propaganda narratives and diplomatic cover.¹⁵ The United States, the European Union, and international political organizations have referred to Azerbaijan’s attack in more neutral and vague terms, as a “military operation”, or “flight”, or the “massive displacement of ethnic Armenians”.¹⁶ In the strangely silent political fog that surrounded Azerbaijan’s incursion, almost no powerful external political actor referred to what happened in Artsakh as a *crime*. In fact, words associated with international crimes

bridge Companion to International Criminal Law, edited by William Schabas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 199-213.

12 Alexander Atasuntsev, “Longstanding Ties Between Armenia and Russia are Fraying Fast,” *Carnegie Politika*, 13 October 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/90768>, accessed 30.10.2023.

13 Paul Kirby, “Azerbaijan launches operation against Nagorno-Karabakh and demands surrender,” *BBC News*, 20 September 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-66851975>, accessed 03.10.2023.

14 Jennifer M. Dixon, *Dark Pasts: Changing the State’s Story in Turkey and Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018).

15 Harut Sassounian, “Israeli TV station airs propaganda on Azerbaijan-Israel military relations,” *Armenian Weekly*, 6 February 2023, <https://armenianweekly.com/2023/02/06/israeli-tv-station-airs-propaganda-on-azerbaijan-israel-military-relations/>, accessed 10.09.2023.

16 Human Rights Council, “Joint Statement on the Situation in Nagorno-Karabakh,” 54th Session, 11 October 2023, <https://geneva.usmission.gov/2023/10/11/joint-statement-on-the-situation-in-nagorno-karabakh/>, accessed 12.10.2023.

seemed to be studiously avoided. Samantha Power, author of a Pulitzer Prize winning book on genocide and current Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development, outright refused to use the term “ethnic cleansing” when asked about it by a journalist from POLITICO during her visit to Armenia on September 26.¹⁷

In contrast, many Armenian officials, international genocide scholars, and international genocide prevention organizations were united in identifying Azerbaijan’s actions as a mass atrocity crime, either “ethnic cleansing” or “genocide”.¹⁸ Armenian officials tended to prefer the term “ethnic cleansing” while genocide scholars were convinced that Azerbaijan was committing genocide. The latter includes former ICC chief prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo, Genocide Watch, and the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention. These same organizations, as well as the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS), repeatedly warned about the threat of genocide in the months before Azerbaijan’s September 19 attack, and, after 12 December 2022, about the already genocidal nature of Azerbaijan’s blockade of Artsakh.¹⁹

The two terms – “ethnic cleansing” and “genocide” – are often used interchangeably in situations like the one that occurred in Artsakh, where mass atrocities occurred alongside large-scale forced displacement. While “ethnic cleansing” is not technically a specific crime under international law, it is recognized as a mass atrocity in international mechanisms, such as the Responsibility to Protect doctrine.²⁰ Genocide, on the other

17 Gabriel Gavin, “Biden envoy troubled by reports of ‘violence against civilians’ in Nagorno-Karabakh,” *POLITICO*, 26 September 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/joe-biden-samantha-power-nagorno-karabakh-violence-against-civilians-humanitarian-aid-armenia-azerbaijan/>, accessed 12.10.2023.

18 Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention, “SOS Alert – Artsakh,” 19 September 2023, <https://www.lemkininstitute.com/sos-alerts-1/sos-alert---artsakh->; Genocide Watch, “Genocide Alert: Artsakh surrenders to Azerbaijan,” 20 September 2023, <https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/genocide-alert-azerbaijan-attacks-artsakh>; Luis Moreno Ocampo, “Call what is happening in Nagorno-Karabakh by its proper name,” *Washington Post*, 22 September 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/09/22/nagorno-karabakh-genocide-armenia/>; Kathryn Armstrong & Nataliya Zotova, “Nagorno-Karabakh: Thousands flee as Armenia says ethnic cleansing under way,” *BBC News*, 26 September 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-66905581>; “The fall of an enclave in Azerbaijan stuns the Armenian diaspora, shattering a dream,” *Associated Press*, 29 September 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/09/29/1202576206/the-fall-of-an-enclave-in-azerbaijan-stuns-the-armenian-diaspora-shattering-a-dr>; Anthony Deutsch and Stephanie van den Berg, “Nagorno-Karabakh exodus amounts to a war crime, legal experts say,” *Reuters*, 29 September 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/nagorno-karabakh-exodus-amounts-war-crime-legal-experts-say-2023-09-29/>; David Scheffer, “Ethnic Cleansing is Happening in Nagorno-Karabakh. How Can the World Respond?” *Council on Foreign Relations*, 4 October 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/article/ethnic-cleansing-happening-nagorno-karabakh-how-can-world-respond>, accessed 10.10.2023.

19 Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention, *Report on Risk Factors and Indicators of the Crime of Genocide in the Republic of Artsakh: Applying the UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes to the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, 5 September 2023; International Association of Genocide Scholars Executive and Advisory Boards, “Statement Condemning the Azerbaijani Blockade of the Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh),” <https://genocidescholars.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/IAGS-EB-AB-Statement-on-Azeri-Blockade-of-Artsakh.pdf>; for a list of statements and warnings about red flags for genocide against Artsakh Armenians between 2021 and 2023, see the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention’s Artsakh Timeline, <https://www.lemkininstitute.com/artsakhtimeline>

20 United Nations Office of Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, “Ethnic Cleansing: Background,” <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/ethnic-cleansing.shtml>, accessed 05.09.2023.

hand, is clearly a crime, as established by the 1948 UN Genocide Convention. “Ethnic cleansing” can in fact be seen as a euphemism for genocide,²¹ especially when the term is used by a speaker with vested interests in avoiding a genocide charge. The choice to use “ethnic cleansing” can also be a diplomatic one, as it can be used as a “softer” alternative to the necessarily severe charge of “genocide.” This is one reason that journalists prefer “ethnic cleansing” to “genocide” – in softening the language, they can avoid charges that they are taking sides. Still, few journalists used “ethnic cleansing” in the Artsakh case, except as a quote from someone featured in the article.

The use of “ethnic cleansing” in this case could also have been in response to pressure from the Western world. Given the Western world’s refusal to recognize Aliyev’s clearly genocidal speech acts and threats and other red flags of genocide coming from the Aliyev regime, not to mention its choice to countenance Azerbaijan’s crimes, there was, at the very least, strong implicit pressure placed on Armenian officials and others to avoid the term “genocide.” Ethnic cleansing is a useful substitute in such a situation, as it is a *description* of a process, not an indictment that brings with it responsibilities under international criminal law. “Ethnic cleansing,” in this sense, can be a necessary euphemism for a people caught within great power rivalries when one side or another is demanding their silence. For these reasons, while Armenian officials used the term “ethnic cleansing” to refer to September 19, most genocide experts, including Luis Moreno Ocampo, Gregory Stanton, and myself, used the term “genocide”.

It is important to note that many Western representative bodies were not as meek as their leaders in openly confronting Azerbaijan. While still avoiding the term genocide, they nevertheless did call out ethnic cleansing in strong terms. On 5 October 2023, for example, the Parliament of the European Union approved a resolution decrying “ethnic cleansing” in Nagorno-Karabakh and calling for sanctions on Baku.²² In November, US Congressperson Adam Schiff (D-CA) introduced legislation condemning Azerbaijan’s detention of Artsakh Armenian political prisoners, demanding their release, and calling for sanctions under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act. The text of the proposed law refers to “Azerbaijan’s ethnic cleansing of Artsakh.”²³ Apart from important initiatives like these, the language gap between Western states, on the one hand, and genocide scholars and prevention NGOs, on the other, was glaring.

The different words that have been used by various actors since 19 September 2023 to describe Azerbaijan’s actions towards Artsakh and the fate of the Artsakh Armenians

21 Elihu Richter and Gregory Stanton, “‘Ethnic cleansing’ is a euphemism used to deny genocide,” *Genocide Watch*, 31 May 2023, <https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/ethnic-cleansing-is-a-euphemism-used-to-deny-genocide>, accessed 05.09.2023.

22 Kristina Harazim, “EU Parliament accuses Baku of ‘ethnic cleansing’ in Nagorno-Karabakh,” *EuroNews*, 5 October 2023, <https://www.euronews.com/2023/10/05/eu-parliament-accuses-baku-of-ethnic-cleansing-in-nagorno-karabakh>

23 “Resolution calling on Azerbaijan to immediately comply with international commitments regarding the release and treatment of prisoners of war, hostages, and other detained persons,” US House of Representatives, 118th Congress, First Session, https://anca.org/assets/pdf/110923_Schiff_POWresolution.pdf, accessed 20.09.2023.

are a startlingly clear representation of the geopolitical structures and dynamics that enabled this genocide. Azerbaijan is assured of its impunity, due to its importance to the security, geopolitical, and economic goals and aims of regional and international powers: Turkey, Iran, China, Russia, and the West.²⁴ Türkiye has been a longtime ally, referring to its relationship with Azerbaijan as “two states, one nation,” a moniker first used in this context by Heydar Aliyev, the father of the current Azerbaijani President.²⁵ The elimination of the Republic of Artsakh has been a very public goal for Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.²⁶ China and Russia, having no pretenses to upholding human rights, were of little concern to Azerbaijan in respect to its outrageous treatment of Armenians. The Western world would have been a concern, since Azerbaijan has invested a great deal in cultivating close economic and political ties, had it not demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt its willingness to acquiesce to Azerbaijan’s genocidal threats and behaviors early on. Having witnessed its own impunity within this geopolitical space after the 44-Day War in 2020, when it committed horrific genocidal atrocities against Armenian servicemen and civilians, documented these atrocities on video, and shared them on social media without any negative consequences,²⁷ Azerbaijan was stridently pushing its propaganda in 2023 without concerns about credibility.

Its narrative was simple: the democratic Republic of Artsakh, which had a Freedom House “freedom rating” (37/100) that was much higher than Azerbaijan’s (9/100), was governed and defended by “separatists” and “terrorists”. No matter that Artsakh had always been majority Armenian or that it had never been directly governed by Azerbaijanis.²⁸ According to Aliyev, in invading Artsakh, Azerbaijan was “returning” its “ancestral land”.²⁹ During the peace process, Azerbaijani authorities attempted to portray Azerbaijan internationally as having “good intentions” towards Armenians in Artsakh. President Ilham Aliyev frequently stated that the Armenians of Artsakh could accept

24 Selim Kurt and Göktürk Tüysüzoğlu, “Another Perspective Regarding the 2020 War in Karabakh: The Relationship between a Frozen Conflict and Securitization,” *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 13 no. 2 (2022): 145-155. <https://doi.org/10.1177/18793665221096689>.

25 *Turkish-Azerbaijani Relations. One Nation – Two States?* Edited by Murad Ismayilov and Norman A. Graham (Abingdon: Routledge 2016).

26 “Turkey’s Erdogan backs Azerbaijan’s offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh, as US, Russia urge restraint,” *Al-Monitor*, 29 September 2023, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2023/09/turkeys-erdogan-backs-azerbaijans-offensive-nagorno-karabakh-us-russia-urge>, accessed 04.10.2023.

27 Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Armenia v. Azerbaijan, International Court of Justice, 16 September 2021, <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/180/180-20210916-APP-01-00-EN.pdf>.

28 In the 1920s, the population of Artsakh was estimated to be 94.4 percent Armenian and 5.6 percent Azeri. During the Soviet period, the percentage of Armenians dropped to 76.9 while the percentage of Azeris grew to 21.5. Edmund Herzig, Marina Kurkchyan, *The Armenians: Past and Present in the Making of National Identity* (London: Routledge, 2005), 66, 121. In 1989, 77% of Artsakh’s population was Armenian. In 2015, the population of Artsakh was estimated to be 99.7% Armenian. See Paul Bernard Henze, “The Demography of the Caucasus according to 1989 Soviet Census Data,” *Central Asian Survey* 10, nos. 1-2 (1991): 147–170.

29 Ilham Aliyev on the fate of Karabakh Armenians,” *JAMNews*, 29.05.2023, <https://jam-news.net/aliyev-on-the-fate-of-karabakh-armenians/>, accessed 09.09.2023.

“normal” Azerbaijani citizenship, which he portrays as attractive to them, and live in peace in Azerbaijan: “I am sure most of the Armenian population currently living in Karabakh is ready to accept Azerbaijani citizenship.” But, in a paradoxical manner, he consistently displays his visceral contempt for (and dehumanization of) Armenians in the very same breath. After making the statement above, for example, he immediately added: “Simply put, these leeches [referring to Artsakh’s democratically elected government], these predatory animals, won’t let them do that.”³⁰

While pronounced Armenophobia has been a core part of Azerbaijani national identity from its inception in the early twentieth century,³¹ Azerbaijan under Ilham Aliyev has been developing a massive propaganda machine to push its narratives for over a decade. This machine has relied on direct gifts and payments to Western politicians, journalists, and cultural figures (“caviar diplomacy”) as well as saturation of media and diplomatic spaces to achieve a place of privilege for one of the world’s worst dictatorships.³² The purpose of the propaganda blitz was, in the words of Gerald Knaus, to “to neutralize the ‘naming and shaming’ strategy of the international human-rights movement,” which it very effectively achieved. The propaganda blitz involved a complete rewriting of history, including erasing Armenian land and heritage and claiming it as historically Azerbaijani, as well as the creation of an “alternate reality” into which an entire generation of young Azeris have been indoctrinated.³³ Although Azerbaijan’s claims about itself (as a Western-oriented haven for diversity) and about Armenians (that they were terrorists and the principal historical victimizers) fly in the face of evidence, many Western journalists were happy to go with them, out of ignorance, vested interests, and political sympathies. Certainly no foreign government officials or regional bodies were willing to openly challenge the narrative, given Azerbaijan’s strategic importance to both Russia and the NATO countries as an oil rich state that provides an important land bridge to Central Asia.³⁴ Instead, the United States and the European Union embarked on a “peace process” between Armenia and Azerbaijan that created space for Azerbaijan to pursue genocide under cover of Western-backed “negotiations.”

The voices of Artsakh Armenians, including the democratically elected government, were noticeably absent from the political negotiations. Representatives from Artsakh

30 President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. (2023). “Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by Azerbaijan Television in city of Salyan.” <https://president.az/en/articles/view/59451>, accessed 30.09.2023.

31 Nerses Kopalyan, “Understanding the Aliyev Regime’s Armenophobia,” *EVN Report*, 8 September 2020, <https://evnreport.com/opinion/understanding-the-aliyev-regime-s-armenophobia/>, accessed 06.09.2023.

32 “Caviar Diplomacy: Why Every European Should Care,” *European Strategic Initiative (ESI)*, <https://www.esiweb.org/proposals/caviar-diplomacy>, accessed 10.09.2023.; Gerald Knaus, “Europe and Azerbaijan: The End of Shame,” *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 3 (2015): 5-18; Pjotr Sauer, “Nagorno-Karabakh crisis forces western rethink on Azerbaijan,” *The Guardian*, 26 September 2023, accessed 10.10.2023.

33 Pdraig Reidy, “The Ugliness under Azerbaijan’s Alternate Reality,” *Index on Censorship*, 18 September 2014, <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2014/09/pdraig-reidy-azerbaijan-ilham-aliyev-turkey-armenia/>, accessed 10.09.2023.

34 US Department of State, Integrated Country Strategy: Azerbaijan, 7 June 2022, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/ICS_EUR_Azerbaijan_Public.pdf

were not present at meetings in the US-EU brokered process, which were attended by Aliyev, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, and various Western leaders. Artsakh representatives were not seriously consulted, as far as one can tell, about the future of the enclave during this process.³⁵ Azerbaijan was adamantly against political solutions that would address the primary concern of residents of Artsakh, which was their need for security from a state that openly used genocidal language to threaten them. While the European Union and the US gave some support to the idea of direct talks between Azerbaijan and Artsakh officials,³⁶ bilateral meetings between Artsakh and Azerbaijan only happened within the Russian-brokered mechanism and did not include political negotiations but rather a discussion of smaller, practical matters related to Azerbaijan's ongoing blockade of the enclave.³⁷ Because of the immense asymmetry of power in these meetings, the Artsakh government continued to underscore "the need to restore the international mediation format as an important guarantee" of equal representation and "the irreversibility of the peace process." The proposal for a return to international mediation, such as within the OSCE Minsk Group framework,³⁸ was consistently rejected by Azerbaijan, which was clearly planning an invasion during the entire period.

The marginalization of victims and officials from the victimized community during times of genocide is an unfortunate norm in the history of the crime. Because genocides tend to follow historical dynamics of oppression, the groups being victimized tend to be the ones already marginalized from the circuits of power. As such, their assessments, testimonies, concerns, and needs are easily dismissed. Their oppressors, as the more powerful agents, enjoy relationships of mutual benefit with the states and agencies that would have to do the preventing. Such was most definitely the case here. In fact, in the weeks before September 19, Elchin Amirbayov, a representative of President Aliyev, was so sure of Azerbaijani impunity that he "warned that 'a genocide may happen' in Nagorno-Karabakh if its leaders fail to submit to Azerbaijan's demands," and yet no significant actions were taken to prevent this crime.³⁹

Azerbaijan's use of threats and terror against Armenians is of course not new. It is a

35 For an example of the wishful thinking of the Western world that failed to recognize the extremity of the threat faced by Armenians, see: International Crisis Group, Nagorno-Karabakh: Seeking a Path to Peace in the Ukraine War's Shadow," Briefing Nr. 93, 22 June 2022, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/nagorno-karabakh-conflict/nagorno-karabakh-seeking-path-peace-ukraine>

36 European Parliament, "Joint statement on Azerbaijan's attack on Nagorno-Karabakh," 19 September 2023, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/delegations/en/joint-statement-on-azerbaijan-s-attack-o/product-details/20230919DPU37422>

37 Heydar Isayev, Lilit Shahverdyan, "Azerbaijan-Karabakh dialogue is happening. Azerbaijan has identified a special representative to talk to the Armenians of Karabakh," *Eurasianet*, 2 March 2023, at <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-karabakh-dialogue-is-happening>, accessed 10.09.2023.

38 Edmond Y. Azadian, "The Unfinished Agenda of the Minsk Group," *The Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, 4 February 2021, <https://mirrorspectator.com/2021/02/04/the-unfinished-agenda-of-the-minsk-group/>, accessed 25.08.2023.

39 Caroline Cox, "Genocide Warning in Nagorno-Karabakh," *The Guardian*, 18 September 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/18/genocide-warning-in-nagorno-karabakh>.

tool that can be traced back to the Turkish genocide against the Armenians, in which Azeri (Caucasus Muslim) soldiers took part. Apart from the years of Soviet control of the South Caucasus, Armenians in the South Caucasus have experienced massacres and horrific atrocities at the hands of Azerbaijan nationalists, the Azerbaijani state, which formed after World War I, and its military authorities. During this early period of state building, massacres and outbreaks of political violence began to be instrumentalized by Azerbaijani authorities to punish the people of Artsakh for articulating their desire for independence and asserting their right to self-determination.⁴⁰ Even though officials in the Azerbaijani SSR did not resort to the massacre of Armenians during the Soviet period, persecution and discrimination against Armenians both within the territory of Artsakh and in Azerbaijan were documented.⁴¹ As soon as the Soviet Union fell and Artsakh Armenians, who were organized into the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO), again called for their secession from the Azerbaijan SSR, Azerbaijan organized a series of brutal pogroms against Armenians, which eventually resulted in the First Nagorno Karabakh War and massive population displacement.⁴²

The Struggle Against Impunity

While Azerbaijan's threats against Armenians were not new, what was new was the Western world's absolute deafness to the clear indications that Aliyev is a genocidaire and that Azerbaijan is a genocidal state. The post-1945 human rights agenda, and especially the Genocide Convention itself, were meant to ensure that there were checks on the unfettered barbarism of states. These mechanisms were meant to protect precisely people like the Artsakh Armenians, a small group without an internationally recognized sovereign state, whose 4000-year-old way of life was threatened by a hostile neighboring state that gave them no option but to seek self-determination as a form of genocide prevention. Because of Aliyev's very public threats, the marginalization of genocide experts from the Western discourse around Artsakh before September 19 is more surprising than it may initially appear. Unlike in previous decades, Western states and the United Nations are now quite knowledgeable about genocide and its many different manifestations. Many government officials have been trained specifically in genocide prevention. Genocide prevention has emerged over the past decade as a critical field in US foreign policy. The Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2018 requires the U.S. government to prevent

40 Hamlet Harutyunyan, *Լեռնային Ղարաբաղը 1918-1923* [Nagorno Karabakh in 1918–1923] (Yerevan: Gitutyun, 1996), 67; Richard Hovannissian, *The Republic of Armenia: The First Year, 1918–1919*, Vol. 1. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

41 Shariefuddin Pirzada, "The Nagorny-Karabakh Issue," *Strategic Studies* 11, no. 3 (1988): 9–14. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45182583>.

42 *The Sumgait Tragedy: Pogroms against Armenians in Soviet Azerbaijan, Volume I Eyewitness Accounts*, compiled and edited by Samuel Shahmuratian (New York: Aristide D. Caratzas and Los Angeles, Paris, Toronto: Zoryan Institute, 1990).

atrocities. The US State Department, the US Institute of Peace, USAID, the Auschwitz Institute for Genocide Prevention offer regular trainings to government officials, military officers, and others both inside and outside of the USA.⁴³ American government officials know the warning signs of mass atrocity, have been introduced to diplomatic measures that can help to prevent them, and, at the very least, would recognize the real dangers posed by the red flags that genocide experts had been pointing out for at least three years prior to September 19 and specifically since Azerbaijan instituted its total blockade of Artsakh on 12 December 2022. And yet, instead of taking diplomatic action that would have stemmed Aliyev's impunity, the Western world chose to grant Aliyev wide berth within a "peace process" continued during Azerbaijan's genocidal blockade and his threats not only against the Republic of Artsakh but also against the Republic of Armenia.

To underscore just how strong the evidence of genocide was, well before September 19, we need only to look at the Lemkin Institute's 127-page *Report on the Risk Factors and Indicators of the Crime of Genocide in the Republic of Artsakh: Applying the UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes to the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, which I co-authored with colleagues at the Institute. The Report was released as an emergency draft on 5 September 2023 due to the rapidly intensifying humanitarian crisis in the Republic of Artsakh, caused by the Azerbaijani blockade, and the Lemkin Institute's alarm over the mounting evidence of an impending Azerbaijani invasion.

The Report uses the United Nations' *Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes* to outline and analyze (in detail) the risk factors and indicators for atrocity crimes, with a special focus on the crime of genocide. One of the strengths of the Framework is that it offers a comprehensive snapshot of the risk factors for the "big three" atrocity crimes (war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide) at a given moment in time.⁴⁴ The Institute chose to focus specifically on the crime of genocide because the evidence in the report pointed to the existence of several serious red flags for genocide, many typical genocidal patterns, and alarming evidence of the necessary special intent to commit that crime. In fact, the evidence presented in the report strongly suggested that the crime of genocide was taking place in the form of the blockade, which was both "[c]ausing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group" and "[d]eliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part" (paragraphs II.b. and II.c. of the 1948 Genocide Convention). This finding further corroborated Ocampo's Expert Opinion from August 7, 2023.⁴⁵

Furthermore, the report collected evidence that conformed to several of the Institute's

43 See, for example: US Embassy Tbilisi, "US Provides Training to Prevent Atrocities," 3 November 2020, <https://ge.usembassy.gov/u-s-provides-training-to-prevent-atrocities/>, accessed 01.12.2023.

44 United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, *Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes: A Tool for Prevention*, New York: United Nations, 2014, https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/about-us/Doc.3_Framework%20of%20Analysis%20for%20Atrocity%20Crimes_EN.pdf, accessed 14.01.2024.

45 Luis Moreno Ocampo, "Expert Opinion: Genocide Against Armenians in 2023," 7 August 2023, <https://luis-morenoocampo.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Armenia-Report-Expert-Opinion.pdf>, accessed 30.12.2023.

10 *Patterns of Genocide* mechanism, which is based on historical patterns of the crime. According to the report, Azerbaijan's crimes conformed to Patterns 5 (Gross human rights violations + mass cultural destruction), 6 (Man-made famine / "Genocide by Attrition"), 7 (Environmental despoliation / "Ecocide" and land alienation), and 9 (Denial and/or prevention of identity). It noted that Azerbaijan seemed to be headed towards Patterns 1 (Gender-neutral mass murder characterized by gendered atrocity) and/or 2 (Mass murder of 'battle-aged men' + atrocities against women and children).

A particular feature of the report was its documentation of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's very public commitment to eliminate any remnant of the autonomous historical and cultural community known as the Armenians of Artsakh from the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. Aliyev's speeches are littered with hate speech and incitement: he uses dehumanizing terminology like "dogs", "wild beasts", "jackals", and "rats" to refer to Armenians, which harkens back to the genocidal language of the Young Turks during the Armenian Genocide (when, for example, Armenians were often called "dogs") as well as to the genocidal language employed by other architects of genocide. Armenians are represented as violent "thieves", "terrorists", "separatists", and "mentally ill" persons. During the war in 2020, Aliyev threatened "We will continue to expel these [Armenian] liars. They will see who is who now. They will see that we were teaching them a lesson they will never forget ... They have neither conscience nor morality. They don't even have the brain."⁴⁶ Aliyev tied his "total victory" over the Armenians of Artsakh to an "historic mission" that would restore "national dignity."⁴⁷

Aliyev's public speeches, the Azerbaijani blockade of the Lachin Corridor, repeated breaches of the Tripartite Ceasefire Statement of November 2020, and the destruction of Armenian cultural heritage in areas of Artsakh under Azerbaijani occupation appeared to demonstrate the special intent to commit genocide. The deep imbrication of eliminationist anti-Armenian hate within the Aliyev regime and Azerbaijani institutions of government led the authors to conclude that Azerbaijan was a genocidal state. We clearly stated that this fact obviously must be addressed before there can be any peace in the region.

In addition to an existing fact pattern suggestive of genocide, the Report unearthed alarming evidence that President Aliyev may be planning a military assault on Artsakh in the very near future. The authors noted, for example, President Aliyev's August 16 decree ordering all eligible citizens 18 years of age or older to report for military service between 1 October and 31 October 2023. Furthermore, the Report documented Azerbaijan's frequent military strikes on Armenian territory since 2020, especially the increase in military attacks, particularly on the Gegharkunik Province of the Republic of Armenia, using small arms and mortars, and its movement and concentration of military forces along

46 "Human Rights Violations During the 44-Days War in Artsakh," *OSF Armenia*, https://www.osf.am/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Fact-Finding-Report_FINAL_web.pdf, accessed 04.10.2023.

47 "Victorious Commander-in-Chief, President Ilham Aliyev addressed the nation on the occasion of the Remembrance Day," *Azerrag.az*. https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Victorious_Commander_in_Chief_President_Ilham_Aliyev_addressed_the_nation_on_the_occasion_of_the_Remembrance_Day_VIDEO-1886079, accessed 01.09.2023.

the entire line of contact with Artsakh.

We warned that a military assault on Artsakh could lead to the mass murder stage of genocide and noted that it would almost assuredly result in the forced displacement of Armenians from Artsakh and the widespread commission of genocidal atrocities, recapitulating those committed in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War of 2020 and subsequent hostilities. If the Armenians of Artsakh were to be displaced, we stated, it would not only create an enormous movement of refugees en masse that could further destabilize the region, but also it would result in the genocidal destruction of a people, as the Artsakh Armenians would lose their distinct identity as Artsakhtsis, an identity that had been forged through centuries – millennia – of independent cultural flourishing in their mountains and valleys.

Very unfortunately, only two weeks after the release of the Report, Azerbaijan attacked. Having followed the case very closely since 2020, and having just completed a detailed accounting of Azerbaijan's preparedness to commit genocide, we understood the threat. Our first SOS Alert, written and published on September 19, read in its entirety:

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention is issuing an SOS for the Armenians of Artsakh, who are currently being attacked by the genocidal regime of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev.

Residents of Artsakh are now facing not only starvation and related medical emergencies after a 9-month siege by Azerbaijan, but also immediate death from airstrikes, drones strikes and the mass shelling of civilian areas. Azerbaijan's military attack came only one day after the country was finally forced to allow into the enclave the first aid shipment since June 15, 2023.

At this moment in time, it is imperative that powerful leaders and states stand up to Azerbaijan and demonstrate clearly that any further aggression against Armenians will not be tolerated and will be met with all available options within the genocide prevention toolbox. Failure to do so will result in these leaders and states being responsible for complicity in genocide.

Failure to stand up to Azerbaijan could also result in an escalation that leads not only to the total destruction of the Armenians of Artsakh but also to a wider war in the region as Azerbaijan and its ally Turkey pursue territorial ambitions in southern Armenia and northern Iran.

There is no doubt in the minds of experts in genocide prevention – at the Lemkin Institute, but also at Genocide Watch, the International Association of Genocide Scholars, and among legal experts such as former ICC chief prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo – that what Armenians are facing from Azerbaijan is genocide.

We express our heartfelt solidarity with the people of Artsakh, whose identity and whose lives matter and must be protected.⁴⁸

Of course, during the first days after Azerbaijan's invasion, the Lemkin Institute was concerned that Azerbaijan would pursue the mass murder form of genocide. At the time there were unconfirmed reports of atrocities and massacres of civilians by Azerbaijani forces. Azerbaijani social media channels were openly threatening civilians with abuse, ranging from bounties on missing children, to threats of rape against missing women, to images and reports of massacres of residents who refused to leave their homes, leading to frantic civilian efforts to evacuate ahead of the arrival of the Azerbaijani military. At that time, Azerbaijan had cut electricity, natural gas, and telecommunication services, so very little information was coming out of Artsakh. In our second SOS Alert, published on September 22, we voiced our grave concern that the people of Artsakh, "currently under the yoke of the armed forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan," are "in critical danger of genocide."⁴⁹ Many stories of atrocity turned out to be true.⁵⁰ In the end, rather than slaughter tens of thousands of Armenians, Azerbaijan was pressured to open the Lachin corridor so that Artsakh Armenians were able to flee the enclave after days of shelling and terrorization. Although Azerbaijan finally lifted the blockade to allow Armenians to leave, it captured and detained ordinary civilians as well as key figures from the democratically-elected Artsakh government and members of its armed forces, who are still in prison in Azerbaijan as "separatists."

There is evidence that the Western world was aware of Azerbaijan's plans, even if it refused to recognize them officially or integrate that knowledge into its pursuit of "peace." On September 14, Yuri Kim, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, testified in her remarks before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that "I want to be clear about a critical issue: the United States will not countenance any action or effort – short-term or long-term – to ethnically cleanse or commit other atrocities against the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh."⁵¹ Of course, the United States demonstrated on September 19 that it absolutely would countenance the "ethnic cleansing" of Artsakh, but this revelation by the Acting Assistant Secretary on September 15 suggests that the Biden administration was not without information.

Ms. Kim received predictable backlash from Azerbaijan for her testimony. Azerbaijan used the occasion to make the many "accusations in the mirror"⁵² against Armenia that

48 Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention, SOS Alert – Artsakh, 19 September 2023, <https://www.lemkininstitute.com/sos-alerts-1/sos-alert---artsakh->

49 Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention, SOS Alert #2 – Artsakh, 22 September 2023, <https://www.lemkininstitute.com/sos-alerts-1/sos-alert---artsakh---2>

50 Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia, "Preliminary Ad Hoc Report on Results of Fact Finding Missions Conducted from September 24 to September 30, 2023," <https://www.ombuds.am/images/files/a35f-939de3e1ce0aebb9a4248f7a5868.pdf>, accessed 30.09.2023.

51 Yuri Kim, "Statement of Yuri Kim, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee," 14 September 2023, https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/6667fb89-a975-4fab-d8b8-e8875312e37e/091423_Kim_Testimony.pdf, accessed 20.09.2023.

52 Kenneth Marcus, "Accusations in a Mirror," *Loyola University Chicago Law Journal* 43 (2012): 357-393, at

it had been making throughout the Western peace process: Armenians in Artsakh are terrorists, Artsakh is Azerbaijani land, the Republic of Armenia has troops in Artsakh, the Republic of Armenia has been militarily attacking Azerbaijan, and so forth – all untrue. The response of the spokesperson of the Azerbaijan Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Yuri Kim is one of the most telltale cases of “mirroring” in recent history, especially given that Azerbaijan invaded Artsakh only four days later. He said, in part, “Although the [2020] war and conflict is over, unfortunately hindering peace and stability in the region, the imitation of negotiations and the continuous military-political provocations of Armenia, as it was during almost 30-year occupation, have not ceased. In this regard, instead of denying the historical opportunity after 30 years of the conflict, we believe that ending provocations committed by Armenia and, most importantly, demanding immediate withdrawal of Armenian armed forces, which have not yet left the territories of Azerbaijan is critical and fair, and we call on the US side to act based on this position.”⁵³

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention’s *Report on the Risk Factors and Indicators of the Crime of Genocide in the Republic of Artsakh* offered the Western world and the international community twelve recommendations for steps that could be taken to protect Artsakh Armenians and forge a lasting peace in the region. They were not unlike other proposals made at other times in relation to this intractable conflict, underscoring the importance of addressing the root causes, immediate threats, potential triggers, and the need for justice and accountability. But one suggestion was very particular to the work of genocide prevention. We considered it so important that we put it first: “Recognize publicly the threat of genocide against Armenians in the Republics of Artsakh and Armenia that is evidenced by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev’s statements as well as the actions of his regime.”

Conclusion

Without the clarity offered by the term “genocide” when red flags of that crime are present, it is easier for the international community to pursue incoherent policies towards genocidal states or groups, putting targeted communities and international security at risk in the short and the long term. Refusing to use the term, for whatever reason, even when the evidence is strong, further has the effect of legitimizing forms of mass atrocity as unavoidable or necessary. The case of Artsakh is an object lesson in the normalization of certain forms of genocide as a part of Western foreign policy. Western powers knew very well the threats that Azerbaijan posed to Armenians, but chose to look the other way in order to pursue goals that they decided were more important than international

https://francegenocidetutsi.org/marcus_mirror_accusation.pdf.

53 Azerbaijan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Allegations made by US official are just disappointing,” 15 September 2023, <https://report.az/en/foreign-politics/mfa-allegations-made-by-us-official-are-just-disappointing/>, accessed 25.09.2023.

law and genocide prevention. We know that the problem in the Artsakh case was not that people did not know enough, or there was not enough information, or diplomats did not have access to the perpetrators, or the perpetrators were secretive and surprising, or there was no time. Quite the contrary. Western powers, and particularly the United States, had the training, the knowledge, the access, and the time necessary to come to the same conclusions as the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention. They could have written their own report using the UN's *Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes*. They simply chose not to, making them complicit in the crime of genocide in Artsakh.

This poses serious questions for genocide prevention experts, scholars, and practitioners. If we are not to be mere chroniclers of genocide, as we were in the case of Artsakh, we need to build mechanisms that do not rely on the good behavior of well-trained Western government and military officials. In fact, we should be concerned that such training may be counterproductive, aiding Western governments in orchestrating catastrophes that will be harder to identify and adjudicate as genocide. Given what we now know about events in the last three months of 2023, it is even possible to view the Artsakh case as a primer for things to come in Israel-Palestine, where the Western powers again find themselves complicit in genocide.

We are in a new world order where genocide is becoming a routine and acceptable policy to solve perceived or real political problems. Marginalized communities all over the world are much more vulnerable to genocidal policies after 19 September 2023 than they were beforehand. The West is giving birth to a new language of “freedom” and “peace” – a freedom of Manifest Destiny, a peace of the graveyard. In many ways, this new world harkens back to the old world, the world prior to World War I, before concerted efforts to forge an international community and a rule-based international order. It is the new “New Imperialism.” And one of the tasks for genocide prevention is to prevent this new world from forming with every tool at our disposal, starting with a restoration of Artsakh to its indigenous inhabitants, protection of the sovereign borders of the Republic of Armenia, and an eventual transformation of the genocidal regime of Ilham Aliyev. A reversal of the events of September 19 could help to delegitimize and defamiliarize a form of genocide that is now effectively normalized.

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BOOK REVIEW

Karnig G. Bodourian, *Տարազի յուշեր 1915-1917* [Memoirs of a Deportee 1915-1917], *Memoirs of Survivors of the Armenian Genocide*, 8. Editor, author of the preface and references Mihran A. Minassian, Yerevan: AGMI Publishing, 2022, 527 pp.

Mihran A. Minassian

Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute Foundation, Armenia

In 2020, by the initiative and editorship of its Director Dr. Harutyun Marutyan the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute Foundation launched a series of books titled *Memoirs of Survivors of the Armenian Genocide*. The aim of the series is to publish handwritten memories kept in the archive of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute. Karnig G. Bodourian's written memoir is a classic example of a survivor's legacy, in which the author, before describing the exile and massacres, provides a wide-ranging description of his birthplace (Bardizag) – geography, cultural-educational life, history, his family's life and the town itself before WWI. Then, he presents his arrest and deportation from Bardizag to Aleppo and the difficulties encountered on the road to exile (massacres, kidnappings, epidemics, hunger, the cruelty of Turkish authorities and population, etc.).

Karnig G. Bodourian's Biography

Karnig G. Bodourian's memoir is the primary source for his biography. The main events in his life were outlined by adding the few pieces of information available to us from other sources.

Bodourian was born in the small town of Bardizag in the autonomous province of Nicomedia in 1879. After obtaining his initial education in the school in his birthplace, he entered the nearby seminary of Armash in 1895, where he studied for four years under the supervision of bishops Ormanian and Tourian. His classmates were future well-known names who served the Armenian Church, such as the archimandrites (*vartabeds*) Mesrob Naroyian, Sahag Odabashian, Meroujan Kondolian (Dikran Ashkharhouni), Yervant Perdahdjian, Ardavast Kalenderian, Goriun Yesayian, Ghevont Tourian, Karekin Khachadourian (Drabizoni), Krikoris Balakian and Yeghishe Khacherian.¹

Bodourian was ordained as a chorister (*tbir*). Still, despite his parents' and relatives' earnest desire, he left the seminary in 1899 without being ordained as a celibate priest and became a teacher. He worked as such for two years in Balekeser, a year in Adabazar, three years, from November 1902 until August 1905, in the Armash seminary (where he taught science), then three years in Smyrna. He returned to his birthplace in 1908 and served as a teacher until his arrest and exile on 22 April 1915. He taught in the community school in his place of exile and gave private tuition to various individuals.²

1 *Արմաշու դարձվածքին 25 ամեայ յոթնամյակին առթիւ 1889-1914* [On the 25th Anniversary of the Armash Seminary 1889-1914] (Constantinople: M. Hovagimian Publishing House, 1914), 384, 404-405.

2 According to one source, he apparently was the director of the Bardizag community school, which is incor-

Bodourian mainly taught mathematics and bookkeeping. According to his compatriot Krikor Mkhalian, Bodourian was a “teacher who was appreciated”³ and, by someone else, as being “honest and conscientious and aware of his position. His students became real Armenians and real men.”⁴

During his years in Bardizag, he founded the economic-tradesmen’s Carpenters Association and actively participated in the work of others of a similar nature, which was very useful for the local Armenian community, easing their difficult economic situations to a certain extent.

When the Bardizag branch of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF, Dashnaksoutiun) decided to found a Consumers’ Co-operative Shop for its members, which looked like a grocery shop and would sell quality items to its members at reasonable prices and there was no one in its ranks who was competent to run it, “the work of organising it, the responsibility for running it and overseeing its financial affairs,” was entirely entrusted by it to Bodourian as the best of all candidates,⁵ which was an eloquent testimony to his administrative abilities and the trust he enjoyed.

A positive affirmation was provided by his compatriot and historian Minas Veradzin (Kasabian), in whose words, “...one of Bardizag’s real economic organisers was Mr. Karnig Bodourian, an able, competent and trained teacher who, after the armistice, unfortunately died in Cairo, the victim of an epidemic. He was a notable organising force later equalled by Krikor Mkhalian, an industrious and talented teacher.”⁶

After the proclamation of the Ottoman Constitution and his return to Bardizag, Bodourian was engaged to be married in August 1908 to Denchali H. Manougian. They were married in December of the same year and subsequently had four children: Anahid (1910-1910), Sarko (b. 1911 and still living in 1938), Adrine (1914-1914), and Vshdadzin Makrig or Makrouhi (b. 1915 in exile and still living in 1938).

Karnig Bodourian’s Exile

Before the general deportation of Bardizag’s population took place, Karnig Bodourian, with 21 other compatriots, was arrested in Bardizag on 22 April 1915 and sent, with the others, to the provincial centre, Nicomedia (Izmit) by carriage the very next day. Then,

rect. See Asatur Magarian, *Անկողի համայնապատկեր Բիթլիանիոյ հայրութեան մեծ ողբերգութեան* [A resumé of the panorama of the great tragedy of the Armenians of Bithynia] in *Յուշամատենան մեծ եղեռնի. 1915-1965* [Memorial Book of Medz Yeghern 1915-1965] edited by Kersam Aharonian, 3rd edition (Beirut: Zartong, 1987), 309. He was only a teacher there. The director of the Bardizag community school in 1915 was Antranig Garabedian (Krikor Mkhalian, *Պարտիզակն ու պարտիզակցին* [Bardizag and Its People] (Cairo: Onnik Mkhalian, 1938), 566-567).

3 Krikor Mkhalian, *Bardizag and Its People*, 572.

4 Martiros Voskian, *Եգիպտոսի սուրեցողը 1919* [The Egyptian Armenian Yearbook] (Aleksandria: Aram Stepanian publ., 1919), 36-37.

5 Mkhalian, *Bardizag and Its People*, 594.

6 Minas Veradzin, *Բնքնանախտում եւ դաշնակցական ղեկավարներ* [Self-Awareness and ARF Leaders], *Hairnik* Monthly (Boston), 9th year, no. 4 (100), February 1931, 172.

after crossing the Sakaria River, they were taken by train to Biledjik (Ertoghroul), then to Eski-Shehir, Afion Karahisar, Konya, Karaman and, on April 25, to the town of Sultanie (Karapounar), where they remained until July 31. It was there that they witnessed the wretched state of the exiled Armenians from Zeitoun and Frnouz. They then went from Sultanie to another town in the province of Konya, Ereyli, where they stayed for more than a month, from 1 August until 3 September 1915. They were sent, after that, to Oulou Kshla, Bozanti and Guleg station near Darson (Tarsus). Their time there was relatively longer, from September 7 until November 12.

While in Darson, he received a telegram on 5 October 1915, sent via Afion Karahisar, telling him that his wife Denchali had given birth to a girl. The Bodourians had previously decided that if they were blessed with a girl, they would name her Voskedzin⁷ Anahid. Still, taking into account the circumstances of the baby's birth and her parents being in exile, they decided not to give her those names, calling her, instead, Vshdadzin⁸ Makrouhi.

In the meantime, Bodourian's Golgotha-like journey continued, taking him further south, towards Cilicia, passing through the towns of Osmanie, Mamoure, Hasan Beyli, and Islahie, and finally reaching Aleppo. He tried to get to Jerusalem via Damascus from there, even getting into the train going there with a few friends, but, at the eleventh hour, due to a mistake made by their companion, Yervant Odian, their departure was prevented. All of them returned to the city and rejoined the group included their erstwhile companion for their departure to Mounboudj; Archimandrite Karekin Khachadourian. Because of this, two carriages were prepared for Archimandrite Karekin, his mother, Odian, Bodourian, and the group's other members to transfer them to Mounboudj. They begged the chief of police many times to delay their departure until the heavy rain stopped, but their requests remained unanswered. By sheer providence, however, "just at the moment of departure, the military authorities came and took the horses pulling the carriages" for use by the army. Thus, the group's departure was automatically stopped. Odian heard, the next day, from well-known community people and Hovhannes-Onnig Mazlounian, who was in permanent contact with government circles, that it was only Rev. Karekin's mother and sister that were to be left in Mounboudj, everyone else was to be taken to Der Zor.⁹

Odian was able, after receiving this news, to hide and later escape to Hama. At the same time, Rev. Karekin, his mother (Iskouhi) and sister (Vartouhi), Karnig Bodourian as well as Garabed Seropian (Bishop Moushegh's brother) who was part of the group and later exiled to the desert with his wife and daughter, took the road to Mounboudj a day later, on the morning of 13 December 1915.

This part of Bodourian's memoirs, which we have at our disposal and are publishing, ends when the group leaves Aleppo. We know, however, that Bodourian later reached the banks of the Euphrates in the Syrian desert, staying for some time in the town

7 Voskedzin is translated from Armenian as "born of gold".

8 Vshdadzin is translated from Armenian as "born of grief".

9 Yervant Odian, *Անիծեալ տարիներ 1914-1919 (Անձնական յիշատակներ)* [Accursed Years 1914-1919 (Personal Memories)] worked on by Krikor Hagopian and edited by Kourken Kasbarian (Yerevan: Nairi, 2004), 214-217.

of Mounboudj near the river, then in Rakka, also on the river. After that, he continued his journey southwards to Basra, then made his way to Jordan, Jerusalem, and his final destination, Cairo.

Bodourian's journey of exile from Bardizag on 22 April 1915 until he reached Jerusalem in October 1916 lasted about twenty months. According to his testimony, he walked about 2,500 km during that time...

Unfortunately, the second notebook of his memoirs is unavailable to us, something that we will refer to later. In it, he perhaps describes his leaving Aleppo and his journey into the depths of the Syrian desert, to the places mentioned above.

From the explanatory map he prepared showing his journey into exile, we know that Bodourian, after staying in Rakka, went to Der Zor and, after going through the desert, reached Basra on the Persian Gulf. By routes unknown to us, he then appeared in Damascus, from where he went to Jerusalem. There, through arrangements made by his former principal of the Armash seminary, Archbishop Ormanian, he began to teach in the senior classes of the Jerusalem seminary. He then acted as secretary to the local body that aided the refugees after the British entered Jerusalem. The reports and accounts he so carefully prepared during the period he held this position were so appreciated by the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) central executive that it invited him to Cairo to be the overseer of its newly established workshop in Port Said.¹⁰ Implementation of this AGBU decision was, however, delayed several times for various reasons. Meanwhile, the executive of the Boghosian school in Cairo decided to offer him a position within the school if the AGBU withdrew the undertaking it had made to him.¹¹

Reaching Cairo, he enjoyed the care and patronage of his sister's son, Bishop Torkom Koushagian, the diocesan leader of the Egyptian Armenian community, but his life in Cairo didn't last long. He contracted typhoid fever a short time after his arrival¹² and was transferred to the French hospital, where he died a few days later, at 5 am on the morning of 24 August/6 September, aged 39. His funeral took place the following day with "fitting grace," presided over by his Armash classmate and old friend Archpriest Yervant Perdahdjian, who had specially rushed to Cairo from Alexandria only a day or two before his death to see him. As Bishop Torkom Koushagian was unwell in Alexandria, he couldn't preside over the burial ceremony.¹³

Bodourian was buried in the Armenian cemetery in Cairo, near the grave of his prematurely deceased talented cousin, the poet Kegham Koushagian.

In any event, Bodourian wasn't able to rejoin his exiled family in Afion Karahisar, and

10 «Ազգային քրոնիկլ» [National chronicle], *Արևիկ* [Sun] (Alexandria), 4th year, no. 50 (516), 6 September 1918, 2.

11 Vosgian, *The Egyptian Armenian Yearbook*, 37.

12 According to prelacy burial records, Bodourian died from brain fever (see the Cairo Prelacy Burial Records, p. 90, record No. 2630).

13 «Տխրունի» [Sadness] *Յուսուբեր* [Harbinger of Hope] newspaper (Cairo), 8 September 1918, no. 68, 3, «Ազգային քրոնիկլ», [National Chronicle] *Արևիկ* [Sun], 4th year, no. 50, (216), 6 September 1918, 2, Mkhalian, *Bardizag and Its People*, 594.

he finally closed his eyes without seeing his newest daughter, Vshdadzin Makrouhi. Thus, his wish remained unfulfilled: “I have many, many things to tell my children, many sad, eyewitness stories.”¹⁴ Those stories weren’t told to his children, who perhaps didn’t hear of the fate that awaited their exiled father and the death he suffered after his tragic life.

The Small Armenian Town of Bardizag

Bodourian’s birthplace, the small town (or large village) of Bardizag (Bahçecik), was located in the independent district of Nicomedia in Nicomedia province, on the (southern) side of Nicomedia Bay, opposite the town of Nicomedia (Izmit, now Kocaeli) itself. It was built at the foot of Mount St. Minas and was the administrative centre of the group of villages (nahie) of the same name, comprising five Armenian, one Greek, and two Muslim villages. One of the last was inhabited by Muslim Georgians (Gurdjis), the other by the Laz people.¹⁵ Although the actual date of Bardizag’s foundation is unknown, it is thought that it already existed from the beginning of the 17th century.

Bardizag was an entirely Armenian town. The number of its inhabitants varies according to different sources, which sometimes disagree with each other. According to the diocesan authorities’ census carried out in 1902, it had 4,850 male and 4,760 female Armenian Apostolic Church adherents totaling 9,610 people (the historian Minas K. Kasabian [Minas Veradzin] has expressed doubts concerning the accuracy of these figures, writing “This accuracy of these figures is suspect.”¹⁶) There also were, according to the same census, 518 Armenian Protestants, of whom 19 were 7th Day Adventists. There were 182 Catholics, of whom 120 were actually Catholics, the remaining 62-72 probably being sympathizers. The town had approximately 100 households made up of 500 individuals who were Armenian Protestants in 1906.¹⁷

According to the census prepared between 1909 and 1910 by the historian Minas K. Kasabian, who studied the history of the Armenians living in the province of Nicomedia, Bardizag had 1,460 Armenian Apostolic households comprising 1,500 families, made up of 4,156 males and 4,100 females, totaling 8,256 individuals. There were 116 households containing 135 Protestant families comprising 274 males and 269 females, totaling 543 individuals and 30 7th Day Adventists or Pentecostal individuals. There were also 41

14 Karnig G. Bodourian, “Memoirs of a Deportee 1915-1917,” The Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute’s Archives, Section 8, Collection 306, File 188.

15 Hagop Der-Hagopian, *Պարտիզակը խառնուրդիկ, յանդրաձայնար Մանուշակ և իր հէքեայթները*, [Dappled Bardizag with, in Addition, Manoushag and Its Tales] (Paris: Ter-Yakobian Publishing House, 1960), 32. Teotig states: “the following villages were part of the village group (nahie): the Armenian villges of Zakar, Manoushag, Deongel, Deongeli Sourpe, Ovadjek, Jamavair, Arslanbeg and Dagh.” (Teotig, *Գողգոթա հայ հոգևորականության և իր հօտին աղէտայի 1915 տարիին* [The Golgotha of the Armenian Clergy and its Flock in Devastating 1915], edited by Ara Kalaydjian (New York: St. Vartan Press, 1985), 253-258, 554.

16 Minas K. Kasabian (Farhat) *Հայերը Նիկոմիդիոյ գաւառին մէջ* [The Armenians in the Province of Nicomedia] (Bardizag-Constantinople: Azatamart, 1913), 242.

17 Rev. Garabed B. Adanalian, *Յուշարձան հայ աւետարանականաց և Աւետարանական եկեղեցւոյ* [Memorial to the Evangelical Movement and the Evangelical Church] (Fresno: Crown Printing Co., 1952), 240.

Catholic households comprising 41 families of approximately 120 males and 105 females, totaling 225 individuals.¹⁸

The census carried out by the diocesan authorities in 1913 is also available to us, according to which Bardizag had 1,378 Armenian Apostolic households comprising 3,559 males and 3,534 females, totaling 7,093 individuals.¹⁹ This, naturally, did not include Armenian Catholics or Protestants, whose numbers were, nonetheless, significant. Minas K. Kasabian provides us, for 1913, with the figure of 1,460 households, a number very close to the one quoted above.²⁰

Bardizag had, in 1915, according to this census, 1,617 households comprising 9,024 individuals,²¹ while according to Hagop Der-Hagopian, the former mayor (*mudir*) of the town, it had, at that same period, 2,000 houses or 2,500 families, made up of 10,050 individuals, including those who were absent from the city.²² Another source increased its population figure to 17,000.²³

Bardizag had two Armenian Apostolic churches, St. James (*Sourp Hagop*) and Holy King (*Sourp Takavor*), as well as the pilgrimage site of St. Minas.²⁴ The local Armenian Catholics and Protestants also had their churches. The Armenian Catholics also had a nunnery.

The town has six named wards, as follows: Church (*Yegeghetsi*), Valley (*Tsor*), Sandy (*Avazoud*), New Upper Fields (*Nor Veri Galer*), Protestant (*Protestan*) and Catholic (*Gatolig*), each of which had its ward chairman (*mukhtar*).²⁵

Bardizag's Nerses-Shoushanian co-educational community school had 330 male and 290 female pupils in the school year 1909-1910. The community kindergarten had 305 boys and girls, while the local Protestant kindergarten had 119 boys and 51 girls, with the Mekhitarian school having 110 boys and 60 girls pupils.²⁶ The American High School in Bardizag was renowned and, during that 1909-1910 school year, had 421 students, with the Favre Boys' Home having 120. These two schools had a significant number of local boys as students.²⁷

Bardizag also had about 30 cultural-humanitarian and cooperative associations such as the "Torkomian Company," "Aramian Company," "Armenian Youth Company," "Steamship Company," "Carpenters' Company" etc. Several theatrical groups performed in the town, and lectures were also held there. The ARF (*Dashnaktsoutiun*) and the

18 Kasabian, *The Armenians in the Province of Nicomedia*, 243-244.

19 Armenian National Archives, fond 1388, list 1, dossier 111, p. 1.

20 Kasabian, *The Armenians in the Province of Nicomedia*, 31.

21 Raymond H. Kevorkian, Paul B. Paboudjian, *Les Arméniens Dans L'empire Ottoman a la Veille du Génocide* (Paris: ARHIS, 1992), 128.

22 Der-Hagopian, *Dappled Bardizag*, 32.

23 Sargis Tsots'ikian, *Արևմտահայ աշխարհ* [The Western Armenian World] (New York: A. Y. Leilekian, 1947), 478.

24 Der-Hagopian, *Dappled Bardizag*, 32.

25 Ibid.

26 Kasabian, *The Armenians in the Province of Nicomedia*, 259-260, 262-263.

27 Ibid., 263.

Social Democrat (Hnchak) party branches opened their clubhouses in the city after the proclamation of the Ottoman constitution. Bardizag had two printing houses and more than 20 calotype and manuscript Armenian newspapers, such as *Bardizag*, *Geran*, *Paros*, *Meghou*, *Baikar*, etc. The trades carried on in the town were sericulture, horseshoe manufacture, charcoal production, basket weaving and, tobacco production etc.

Bardizag, too, was subjected to the Turkish government's Armenian extermination policy. We will not go into details, because the book's pages often refer to it; let us just say that, after the armistice, people who survived returned and re-opened the church and schools and attempted to rebuild their ruined homes and re-establish the shattered economy. That effort, however, did not last very long as, very soon, the Turkish nationalist movement, growing more and more powerful, combined with the increasing ferocity of the Greco-Turkish war, meant that many people were massacred and others found refuge in Constantinople. From there, they went to different countries, resulting in the centuries-old town of Bardizag passing into history.

“Memoirs of a Deportee 1915-1917”

This volume is only the first notebook of Bodourian's memoirs, the photocopy of which is in the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute's Archives, Section 8, Collection 306, File 188. The manuscript comprises 420 pages. It was brought to the museum “after a journey in foreign places” from the United States of America in February 2014, as is noted in the museum's register. Still, unfortunately there is nothing recorded or pointed out concerning the donor, so it is impossible to determine who they were. We are confident, however, that the work did have a second volume that, despite many searches, has been impossible to locate in Armenian book repositories or archival centres in Armenia or abroad.

The existence of a second volume is confirmed firstly because, immediately after his death, the Cairo newspaper *Arev*, thanks to permission granted by Bodourian's sister's son Bishop Torkom Koushagian, a significant excerpt from it was published over five editions, titled *The Widow*.²⁸ This chapter isn't in the volume at our disposal and concerns the days Bodourian spent in Mounboudj. Similarly, we understand from his preface that he reached the Euphrates during his exile, while the map that he prepared in the volume, showing his route into exile, tells us that he reached Baghdad on the Persian Gulf. This volume tells us that the last place he halted at was Aleppo, after which he appeared in Jerusalem, where he began to write his memoirs.

Bodourian in his preface, writes, “My journey of more than 2,500 km from Bithynia to Cilicia, from the Euphrates to Jordan taking twenty months does not compare to the painful journey of the cross...”²⁹

28 Karnig G. Bodourian, *Memoirs of a Deportee 1915-1917, Memoirs of Survivors of the Armenian Genocide*, 8, editor, author of the preface and references Mihran A. Minassian (Yerevan: AGMI Publishing, 2022), 434-461.

29 Ibid., 37.

He has deliberately explained that he had reached the Euphrates and Jordan, regions about which there is not a single mention in this published volume. In one place in his memoirs, he speaks about the Syrian town of Rakka with a citation concerning a statement by the town's lieutenant governor about bribery.

The manuscript of the work *A deportee's memoirs 1915-1917* was found immediately after his death with his sister's son Bishop Torkom Koushagian. We also know that when the bishop was elected as Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem in 1931, he took his archive to Jerusalem with him. It was accidentally burnt much later due to a fire in the monastery, which was caused by negligence and indifferent attitudes.³⁰

It might be more correct to suppose that volume was saved from probable destruction as Patriarch Koushagian would have handed it to the author's wife Denchali or one or other of his children who, until 1938, lived in Constantinople and/or to any of his relatives. We should also add, however, that the list of Bodourian family names listed in the memoir (in which the birth and death dates of family members are noted) was completed, after the author's death by an unknown person who added the death dates of other family members, the last being added for 1935, something that makes us think that the manuscript was being kept until that date by a family member or someone who knew them and who would have added the dates mentioned above.

Karnig Bodourian begins his memoirs with a short preface titled "Aim," in which he explains why he wrote his recollections down and confessed: "...I don't aim to write the history of the calamity that befell the Armenians who lived in Turkey. That is well beyond my capabilities and is not something that one person can write..."³¹

By the word of the author, his work is merely

...an undertaking to write a long, sorrow-filled letter which is my only legacy for my surviving children... I hope that one day my dear Sarko, whom I left when he was a sweet four-year-old, and my little Vshdadzin Makrig [Makrouhi] who, six months after her father's deportation, opened her little eyes near Afion Karahisar castle under an angry sun and in a tent, have the good fortune to decipher their father's handwriting. They should know that, during their childhood, the planet swallowed millions of human corpses on the war's front lines.³²

This is the author's simple and modest aim. He never had the pretention that he would let his biography see the light of day. We cannot see, at least in the portion of his memoirs available to us, any allusion to such an aim.

30 Kegham Koushagian (*Յայտք մը՝ ոսկեճանուկ Պարտիզակէն, Փունջ մը իր ստեղծագործութիւններէն. Վկայութիւններ իր մասին*, [(A Golden Splash of Bardizag) A Bouquet of His Poetry, Testimonies About Him] collected by Sarkis Sarouni (Los Angeles-Beirut: Shirak, 1969), 11-12, 107-108. Although it is said here that the "whole archive" belonging to Koushagian had been destroyed, we saw, above, that several files of his personal papers still exist. It would appear that the archive was only partially destroyed.

31 Bodourian, "Memoirs of a Deportee 1915-1917," 37.

32 Ibid., 37-38.

The first 150 pages of the work are dedicated to his birthplace, Bardizag, with written descriptions of it, its history, churches, associations, places of pilgrimage, and schools. The author's notes on the trades carried on in Bardizag are critical; with some of them being described in great detail as he was a person who knew and saw the work himself. His recording of local songs is similarly valuable. The first chapter ends with a brief history of the Bodourian family and the declaration of WWI.

The second part, which is somewhat more significant, is titled "Exile and deportation". This is the author's life story, beginning with his arrest in Bardizag and exile until his arrival in Aleppo. Among the exciting chapters in this part is, for example, the description of the arrival in Soultanie of thousands of people from Zeitoun who were in a wretched condition and the author's meetings and conversations with them.

His description of the dreadful road to exile, its dominant wretchedness, famine, violence, beatings, killings, and the deaths of thousands of people from hunger and epidemics, the inhumane attitude of the officials and the Turkish population generally, as well as profiteering and abductions, etc. are all of the interest.

If we accept that the Armenian Genocide was carried out in three stages, the first being in home settlements and their surrounding areas, the second, taking place on the road to exile as far as Aleppo and the Syrian deserts, and the third being the mass killings that took place in the Syrian deserts, then Bodourian is, without doubt, the person whose work best describes the second stage.

He lived, for a time during the deportations, with his classmates from the Armash seminary, namely Archpriest Karekin Khachadourian (Karekin Drabizoni, the future Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople) and the satirist Yervant Odian under the same roof. Because of fears for their safety, they presented themselves as being of one family. Thus, many points in Bodourian memoirs complement the information given by Odian in his precious work, proving its veracity.³³ The two of them independently describe various events, each using his style and seeing them from his perspective. Bodourian often writes about events that Odian may have ignored or forgotten. Therefore, the comparison of these two works provides exciting data.

When Bodourian arrived anywhere, he would not forget to refer, in the form of an introduction, to the history of the town and its topography, often devoting many pages to it, recalling statistics, dates, and details before writing about the days he spent there. It is possible that, when he wrote his memoirs in Jerusalem, he might have utilized the monastery's rich library for those pages. However, he only mentions one source, Father Ghevont Alishan's book *Sisouan*.³⁴

The presented volume in the series of *Memoirs of Survivors of the Armenian Genocide* is a valuable addition to the already published memoirs of the eyewitnesses of the Armenian Genocide.

33 Odian, *Accursed years*, 174, 203-205, 213 etc.

34 Ghevont Alishan, *Ujumuul* [Sisouan] (Venice: St. Lazaro, 1885).

Harutyun Grigoryan, *Իմ կենսագրությունը* [My Biography], *Memoirs of Survivors of the Armenian Genocide*, 10. Editor, author of the preface and references Regina Galustyan. Yerevan: AGMI, 2023, 304 pp.

Regina A. Galustyan,
Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute Foundation, Armenia

This memoir, titled *My Biography*, volume 10 in the series, is Harutyun Toros Grigoryan's account of his personal experience of the struggle to preserve his identity as an Armenian going through the genocide.

The author was born in the village of Avrdnik, Kghi district of Erzurum province, in 1898. Relatives took Harutyun and his sister, after the death of their father and mother, to an orphanage belonging to the German mission in Mezre. At the age of eight, he was transferred to its Beri branch. Two years later, he was brought back to the one in Mezre. Tired of orphanage life, he decided to escape to Dalem with a friend. After his friend was accepted by his relatives in Dalem, Harutyun was left alone.

He became a servant in different Armenian houses to earn a living, until Gabriel Ulohochyan's family accepted him. Harutyun remained with this family for four years. Apart from his household duties, he studied at the local Catholic school. He found his uncle's (father's brother) daughter (his cousin), Shushan, and her daughter Mariam when he was fourteen years old, learning from them that his sister, Varder, had died. With his cousin Shushan's advice and Gabriel Ulohochyan's encouragement, Harutyun began to learn the blacksmith's trade. This became an important factor in his life.

Harutyun Grigoryan was deported with his blacksmith master's family in 1915. The life of an orphan was disrupted again. As a survivor, he recalled, "At the time of the Kharberd Yeghern [Genocide], I was 17 years old and had a good memory." The province of Kharberd, called "the slaughterhouse province" by contemporaries, occupies an essential place in the history of the genocide due to its central geographical location.¹ Caravans of displaced Armenians from Trabzon, Erzurum, Sebastia, and Ankara all passed through it. Kharberd was where temporary camps existed, as well as sites of mass killings.²

The intellectuals in the province of Kharberd were arrested in May-June 1915 following the general procedures used in the implementation of the Armenian Genocide. The men were drafted into the army, posted to local army labour battalions, then killed. Caravans of women and children were exiled to Mesopotamia at the end of June. The first caravan of about 2,500 people left Mezre on July 1st, 1915, traveling in the direction of Diyarbekir under the leadership of Adam Pasha. It reached one of the Armenian Genocide

1 Leslie Davis, *Մասնիկ նահանգը: Ամերիկյան դիվանագետի զեկրուցագիրը հայկական ցեղասպանության մասին, 1915-1917 թթ.* [The Slaughterhouse Province: An American Diplomat's Report on the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1917] (Yerevan: Dall, 2001), 181-182.

2 Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 381.

mass killing sites in Kharberd, Lake Tsovk (Goljuk), the next day. The second caravan of about 3,000 people left Mezre on July 2nd, heading towards Malatya.³ This caravan of deportees comprised notable families from Kharberd, including the Fabricatorians, who are mentioned in this memoir several times. Harutyun Grigoryan was in the first caravan, whose members were forced to walk to the desert of Der Zor, the main concentration camp for Armenians.

In his biography, Harutyun Grigoryan provided information about the nature and geographical location of his native Dalem and Kharberd, as well as interesting ethnographic and dialectal information and details of the customs of the Arab population of Der Zor and Ras ul Ain. The memoir helps us understand the daily life and problems of the newly formed Armenian community in Syria. All the details provided add interest to the narrative. The historiographical value of the memoir consists of material relating to the actual course of the Armenian Genocide and the methods used in its implementation. The author provided information on almost every aspect of the crime. This eyewitness account of the Armenian Genocide is an addition to its factual documentation: it places the individual at the center of the crime carried out by the state.

After describing the arrest of Mezre's intellectuals, the massacre of Armenian men, and giving facts about the state policy of expropriation of Armenian properties,⁴ Harutyun described the months-long exile. Each sentence in the memoir substantiates the statement established in historiography: that the Turkish government used deportation as a method of exterminating the Armenian nation.⁵ Henry Morgenthau, US Ambassador to the Sublime Porte, clarifies, in his memoir:

When the Turkish authorities gave the orders for these deportations, they were merely giving the death warrant to a whole race; they understood this well, and in their conversations with me, they made no particular attempt to conceal the fact.⁶

Describing the passage of a caravan from one place to another and the changing of the Turkish military escorts, Grigoryan quoted the words of one of the soldiers:

There is no order to slaughter. The order is only to prolong the journey. No one asks how many people died on the road. They didn't hand you over to us after counting so that they could receive you from us by counting.⁷

3 Ibid., 393.

4 See also: Uğur Ümit Üngör, Mehmet Polatel, *Confiscation and Destruction: The Young Turk Seizure of Armenian Property* (London, New York: Continuum, 2011), 66-68.

5 *The Armenian Genocide: Evidence from the German Foreign Office Archives, 1915-1916*, ed. Wolfgang Gust (New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 2014), 523, 526.

6 Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1918), 309.

7 Harutyun Grigoryan, «Իմ կենսագրությունը» [My Biography], notebook 1, AGMI scientific archives, Sec-

The survivor also testified to the existence of sites on the deportation route where mass killings took place, outside of which the soldiers accompanying the deportees did not even allow the Kurds and Arabs to attack them, claiming that “there is no order from the padishah.” Grigoryan gave examples of violence inflicted on Armenians on the road (abduction of children, sexual harassment of women, etc.), stressing that the caravan was intentionally driven through waterless places; he described the effects of road and weather conditions on the deportees:

No shoes remained on our feet. We would tie a piece of cloth under our feet so the sand wouldn't burn them; we didn't even have any cloth left, exchanging bread for old or new pieces. While walking on the road, we would tread on the grass to not burn our feet. The place we were in was a desert.⁸

Many of the episodes he presented show the use of deportation as a method of slaughter. On his way to Der Zor along the Euphrates, Grigoryan saved an Armenian boy from drowning. The boys of his age tried to convince him to go to the survivor's mother to get a reward:

I refused, saying that I had done a good deed; I had saved an Armenian. I didn't want a gift, but no one paid attention to me. They dragged me to his mother. When they revealed the situation, she picked up a stone and threw it at me: “Why didn't you let him die? At least it would relieve him from these sufferings. He would die once and be released, but exile is suffering and death every day.”⁹

Upon arrival in Der Zor, non-disabled Armenian men were taken to a place called Salean and offered work on the construction of buildings for very little payment (two *kurush*). Hunger forced Grigoryan to agree,¹⁰ as the government had set a monthly allowance of 30 *kurush* for the exiles, which was allocated for only two months.¹¹

Grigoryan, presenting the events that happened to him sequentially, showed the situation in the concentration camps of Der Zor and Ras ul Ain (famine, epidemics, etc.) by mentioning daily death tolls, allowing the reader to imagine the extent of the disaster inflicted on the Armenian people through the genocide. He testified that in Der Zor, infected people were quarantined in an area over the bridge outside the city and were not

tion 8, No. 8, File 31, 95. The pages of references are as in the original Armenian handwritten memoir, not the published version.

8 Ibid., 107.

9 Ibid., 111.

10 Ibid., 113.

11 Ibid., 117. This testimony is also provided by Khatchig Mouradian. On this issue and on the conditions of the deported Armenians in Aleppo and Zor region see Khatchig Mouradian, *The Resistance Network: The Armenian Genocide and Humanitarianism in Ottoman Syria, 1915-1918* (Michigan State University Press, 2021), 22-24.

allowed to enter it. Poor sanitation and lack of food and medication contributed to the humanitarian disaster. Grigoryan presented the expression of a group of women: “Death is better than starvation. The bullet will kill once, but hunger melts and wears us down every day, every hour.”¹²

Parallel to all this, the government continued the deliberate killing of the Armenians who reached the concentration camps. The police, after catching Grigoryan, sent him with another group of Armenians from Der Zor to Sheddadiye¹³ to face his death:

A day and a half away from Der Zor, the carnage began. Crying, lamenting, asking for God’s mercy was no use. There was no killing using bullets. They simply said “one bullet is one *kurush*, you’re not worth one *kurush*, why should we waste money?” They would kill us with a sword, sickle, axe, stick, or a piece of iron. They opened the bolt of the railway line, replaced it with a stick, and hit us with it.¹⁴

Grigoryan fainted after being hit on the head. The following thought expressed the psychological hopelessness of a survivor of a massacre: “When I opened my eyes [after the massacre – *R.G.*], I saw that all the Armenian people were lying down.”¹⁵

Harutyun Grigoryan also addressed the issue of Arab complicity: direct participation in murders, assimilation of Armenian women and children, and exploitation of the latter. Giving several examples in his memoir, the author unwittingly highlighted the ambiguity of physical “rescue”.¹⁶ Grigoryan recalls that the Arab master did not provide him with food while exploiting him. When he complained, he got the following answer: “This is how Armenians should be treated. If you were a Muslim, we would look after you better.”¹⁷ After beating him numerous times for not working instead of him, Harutyun’s master’s neighbor warned him:

If you tell anyone that Ahmed beat you, I will kill you with one bullet. Who’s going to ask you? You are Armenian. They’ve killed so many Armenians in Der Zor. Who did ask that they will ask you?¹⁸

Grigoryan managed to survive the slaughter in Sheddadiye and escape to Aleppo. From there, he undertook a long and dangerous journey back to his homeland. He passed

12 Grigoryan, *My Biography*, notebook 1, 127.

13 See the approximate number of Armenians killed in Sheddadiye in *The Armenian Genocide*, 712.

14 Grigoryan, *My Biography*, notebook 1, 132.

15 Ibid.

16 Harutyun Marutyun, “The Issue of the Rescue of Armenians by Ottoman Subjects During the Armenian Genocide,” *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*, vol. 26 (2017): 39-61.

17 Grigoryan, *My Biography*, notebook 1, 169.

18 Ibid., 144:

through the towns of Nisibin, Adiyaman, Malatya and finally reached Dater, which had been almost completely destroyed and then Mezre. Here, the survivor found his foster mother and the relatives who managed to escape deportation by converting to Islam. He got married in Mezre and, after working for some time for Muslim masters, opened his own workshop.

It seemed to him that Der Zor's events were in the past, and with honest work, it would be possible to restore the routine of life. These hopes, however, weren't justified. After another incident, when he refused to share his professional experience with a Turkish craftsman, false testimony was given against him. Harutyun settled the issue with a bribe: "The case would become much bigger if they take me to the police station because I am Armenian. They could not bear that an Armenian had a good job and a fine life."¹⁹

It should be noted that the author of the memoir did not express any political views regarding the Republic of Turkey or the Turkish people. He simply narrated the story of his life, specific episodes of which proved the genocidal state policy of the Ottoman Empire followed by the Republic of Turkey's anti-Armenian policy. It could be seen even in the daily life of the survivor: "Being Armenian is a big disadvantage for us; we cannot even go out at night."²⁰ After being returned to the police station, Harutyun Grigoryan asked what crime he had committed. The police chief answered: "Your crime is being Armenian; don't you know that?" Grigoryan was threatened with death for demanding payment for the repair of a stove in the house of a new official in Mezre appointed from Constantinople:

I have lived my life; my living is unnecessary. They hit me in Der Zor, but I didn't die. Will I die now? Instead of dying every day, I will die only once. This isn't a life we are living. Wherever we go, they say the same thing because of being Armenian.²¹

After being thrown into prison once again, Harutyun ponders: "What is my crime? Just being Armenian, nothing else."²²

The targeting of Armenians was noticeable even to Grigoryan's fellow Muslim craftsmen. As the Turkish barber Reshid told the commissioner who came to Harutyun's workshop to arrest him again: "In Europe, anyone who creates an invention is given a gift, but here you fine him for being Armenian."²³

Grigoryan brings many episodes of the dehumanisation of Armenians in his memoir, with forcing deported people to walk naked being one example. The description of women's experiences in the memoir deserves special attention. Grigoryan showed the

19 Ibid., 197.

20 Grigoryan, *My Biography*, notebook 2, 19.

21 Grigoryan, *My Biography*, notebook 1, 199.

22 Grigoryan, *My Biography*, notebook 2, 56.

23 Grigoryan, *My Biography*, notebook 1, 197.

psychological dilemma faced by Armenian women on the way to deportation and in the concentration camps and their methods of survival, from earning bread to fulfilling certain social duties. He provided examples of how exhausted, starving Armenian women in the caravan were forced to abandon other women giving birth and newborn children. A girl from Grigoryan's caravan in Ras ul Ain agreed to marry a Turkish policeman. After describing that step as "voluntary", the author elaborated, that the girl was convinced that there was an order to massacre all Armenians, but whoever became a Turk would be saved. He mentioned that there were other Armenian women who married Turks in Ras ul Ain and not deported.²⁴ He talked about a girl named Margaret who married an Arab "to save her life."²⁵ Grigoryan also narrated a case when an Arab sheik fed the people in the caravan, admitting that he had an Armenian wife and would like to take another from that caravan if anyone agreed. Grigoryan noted that no Armenian woman paid any attention to that proposal.²⁶ Examples of such marriages described in the memoir seem to have been a survival strategy in the absence of any other option for survival in a genocidal environment rather than a voluntary act.

When describing a personal episode, Grigoryan also mentioned the shelter in Aleppo. Several shelters operated in Aleppo under the auspices of the League of Nations, the Near East Relief Organization, the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), and other national and international humanitarian organizations in the post-WWI period. The Union of Armenian Women of Aleppo also opened a shelter in February 1919. The president was Aleppo's locum tenens priest, Rev. Harutyun Yesayan, and the Armenian Prelacy of Aleppo provided the building for the institution.²⁷ I believe the shelter the author referred to is this very facility. Funded from different sources, all these institutions had one common overarching goal: the liberation of Armenian women and children enslaved by Muslims during the genocide. That goal was achieved through negotiation, bribery, and ransom, as well as by encouraging Armenians to flee on their own.²⁸

The rescue of Armenian orphans and thousands of women became possible due to the efforts of these organisations. It was these remnants that revived the Armenian nation after it suffered genocide. Although the author had a negative attitude towards both the prelacy and the shelter, such institutions should, however, be evaluated in the context of their Armenian preservation activities.

Through Grigoryan's memoir, we are dealing with another phenomenon: the corruption of Turkish officials. We regularly encounter episodes of bribes being given to state officials and power structure representatives. Although the sentence "he pocketed

24 Ibid., 105.

25 Ibid., 133.

26 Ibid., 108.

27 Vahe Tachjian, "Post-War Aleppo, a Place of Fear and Trembling for the Armenian Refugees" in *The Armenian General Benevolent Union One Hundred Years of History*, vol. I, 1906-1940 (Cairo, Paris, New York, Chirat, 2006), 83.

28 *The Aleppo Rescue Home: 1464 Accounts of Armenian Genocide Survivors*, ed. Edita Gzoyan (Yerevan: AGMI, 2021), 28.

one *mejid* and everything was fixed”²⁹ is written in only one place, this idea is present throughout the narrative. This phenomenon had become a window of salvation. Many Armenians were saved from the genocide simply by bribing the person in charge of the deportation of a particular region.³⁰ This was the reason that Interior Minister Mehmed Talaat sent a particular order to the governor of Aleppo, dated October 22nd, 1915, stating once more that “The rights of Armenians on Turkish soil, such as the rights to live and work, have been eliminated, and not one is to be left – not even the infant in the cradle.”³¹ Talaat explained that, contrary to the government’s decision, the patriotic feelings of some officials in the Aleppo region had given way to material interests. Due to this, some Armenians were not sent to their final places of deportation. The interior minister, therefore, ordered the local governor to accomplish the task he was given.³²

A Danish historian, Matthias Bjornlund, dealing with the relief activities of the Danish branch of Women Missionary Workers (WMW) (Danish: *Kvindelige Missions Arbejdere*) in Kharberd during the First World War notes that bribery was one, if not the main, factor preventing the missionaries from being expelled from the country. WMW employees in Kharberd could set aside sums of money for bribing Turkish officials from that received from Denmark and the USA through the Constantinople office of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. As Bjornlund writes: “Luckily, many local soldiers and officials, including the *vali* Sabit Bey himself, were corrupt.”³³

In addition to bribery, the blacksmith’s craft became a means of exploitation and survival for Harutyun Grigoryan. In the case of some professions, the only Armenian craftsman of a given region was forcibly converted to Islam and made exempt from deportation. Armenian deportees, especially minors, were used as free labor. While the boys were taken to boarding schools and workshops, girls were made servants in urban Muslim families under the guise of adoptees.³⁴ Armenian children served as free labor

29 Grigoryan, *My Biography*, notebook 2, 51.

30 There are many examples in survivors’ memoirs. See for example Disaster Survivors, 1915 Աղէտ և վերածնունդ [1915 Disaster and Revival], (Paris: Araks, 1952), 33.

31 Taner Akçam, *Killing Orders: Talaat Pasha’s Telegrams and the Armenian Genocide* (Palgrave Studies in the History of Genocide), 1st ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 184.

32 Ibid.

33 Matthias Bjørnlund, “‘If I Die, I Die’: Women Missionary Workers Among Danes, Armenians, and Turks, 1900-1920,” *International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies* 4, no. 2 (1919): 76. Many foreigners in Kharberd province speak about corruption of state officials. Tacy Atkinson, wife of Dr. Herbert Atkinson, a missionary stationed at Mezre describes in her diary, that Mezre’s kaymakam took bribes from the deportees and ordered them to hide in their hospital, which, however, brought only temporary salvation (Tacy Atkinson, “*The German, the Turk and the Devil Made a Triple Alliance*,” *Harpoor Diaries, 1908-1917* (Princeton, New Jersey: Gomidas Institute, 2000), 48). Grace Knapp, a missionary stationed in Bitlis, describes a scene during which the policemen releases the women that gave them money from the caravan, who then try to run away. However, they were followed and after a short time, they were found and placed in the next caravan (Grace H. Knapp, *The Tragedy of Bitlis* (London: Taderon Press, 2002), 44).

34 *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures: Family Law and Politics*, vol. 2, ed. Suad Joseph (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2005), 6.

on farms and in the households of Turks, Kurds, Arabs, and Circassians.³⁵ Before being killed, aged men and young people “were dispersed along the roads of the empire where they break stones, requisitioned for the needs of the army, occupied with work for the benefit of the State.”³⁶

Armenian men drafted into the army were posted to labor battalions and, after carrying out construction work, were killed or simply died of exhaustion.³⁷ Armenian women who had reached their final places of deportation were employed in special workshops in Aleppo for their daily bread. They were forced to sew military uniforms and other items needed by the army.³⁸ Grigoryan’s life was a prime example of the genocidal mechanism of exploiting Armenians at the state level. Even in the post-genocide period, Grigoryan, as a sought-after blacksmith, encountered problems getting paid for his work.

In the general atmosphere of the anti-Armenian policy in the Turkish Republic, it became impossible for Harutyun Grigoryan to stay in Mezre any longer. He moved to Aleppo and started working alongside the blacksmiths of the Aleppo railway station. He joined the French army as a blacksmith to avoid imprisonment due to a fight in the prelaycy.

Harutyun Grigoryan responded to the call of the Soviet authorities in the 1940s and took the road to repatriation in September 1946. Grigoryan’s family arrived in Batumi with a group of repatriates on October 2nd; they went from there by train to Yerevan, arriving in the city on October 22nd, 1946: “I walked to the square saying to myself our ancestors died saying “homeland, homeland.” How lucky we are that we came to see the motherland with our eyes and will live here.”³⁹

Harutyun Grigoryan wrote his memoir, including every detail, clearly and precisely, giving the names and the locations of geographical places, settlements, and streets. Dialogues give a unique tone to the narrative. The memoir has a unique style; it also allows the reader to recognize the author. Harutyun Grigoryan is principled and fair-minded, with a great zest for life and a code of conduct. He was proud of his national identity, religion, and profession. This was, apparently, also due to the importance of blacksmiths’ role in Armenian community life and the respect they enjoyed.⁴⁰ Grigoryan believed in honest work, and even the genocidal environment could not undermine that belief. His granddaughter, Varduhi Grigoryan, also confirmed this during a conversation with the editor. She fondly remembered her paternal grandfather’s relationship with her

35 Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks’ Crime against Humanity: the Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 338.

36 *The Armenian Genocide*, 652.

37 *Ibid.*, 343, 620.

38 Disaster Survivors, *1915 Disaster and Revival*, 418; Disaster Survivors, Տէր-Զօր [Der Zor] (Paris: P. Elekean, 1955), 58; Mouradian, *The Resistance Network*, 27.

39 Grigoryan, *My Biography*, notebook 3, 27.

40 For the role of blacksmiths in the Armenian socio-cultural system see Aghasi Tadevosyan, *Դարբինը հայոց ծիսակարգում (Պատմաագագրական հետազոտություն)* [The Blacksmith in the Armenian Ritual (Historical Ethnographic Research)], in *Hay azgagrutyun ev banahyusutyun: Nyuter ev Usumnasirutyunnerm, Vol. 23*, ed. D. Vardumyan (Yerevan: Gitutyan, 2007), 105.

father, as well as the unique caring attitude of the grandfather and grandmother towards their grandchildren.

Harutyun Grigoryan completed his biography in 1975, dying a year later. It is not known when he started writing it. It is inscribed in three notebooks, which are kept in the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute's archives. The memoir has not been previously published, although ethnographer Verjine Svazlian has included an abridged and heavily edited version of the survivor's memoir (or interview) in her collection of survivor interviews.⁴¹

Grigoryan's linguistic style and speech is direct, without rich artistic expressions or unnecessary adjectives, which gives additional value to this testimony to the Armenian Genocide. The dryness of Grigoryan's speech and cold-hearted descriptions of violent scenes are due not to the author's character but to the fact that violence was routine. This is a phenomenon in which the genocidal elite legitimizes murder, robbery, sexual violence, and other acts aimed at exterminating the targeted group and, through repetition, makes it a daily procedure. It "desensitizes" both the perpetrator and the victim and facilitates genocide.⁴² This, however, could not suppress Grigoryan's and many other survivors' moral qualities, sense of empathy, and assisting their kin, but left a psychological mark on them that is so visible in this memoir.

41 Vejiné Svazlian, *The Armenian Genocide: Testimonies of the Eyewitness Survivors* (Yerevan: "Gitoutyoun" 2011), 209-214.

42 Timothy Williams, *The Complexity of Evil: Perpetration and Genocide* (New Brunswick, Camden, Newark, New Jersey, London: Rutgers University Press, 2020), 159-161.

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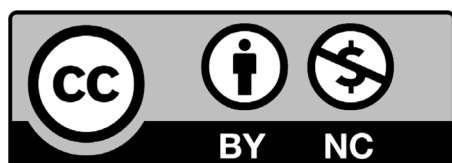
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