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NETWORKS OF DENIAL AND JUSTIFICATION: SOUTH ASIAN RESPONSES TO THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

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Abstract

The second decade of the 20th century saw two pivotal events from the Middle East and South Asia: the Armenian Genocide and the Khilafat movement. Both events were influential in setting into motion a cascade of events whose repercussions are still felt acutely to this day. Simultaneous interest in these two pivotal moments has generated considerable scholarship over the last few decades. However, the prospect that these two events could be interlinked in underlying ways is a proposition that has not yet found any traction. Using a range of sources, this article attempts an initial foray into a critically understudied area: the denial and justification of the Armenian Genocide that was integral to the Khilafat movement in South Asia. Arguably one of the most potent examples of denial perpetuated by a non-perpetrator, the South Asian version of this narrative was cobbled together through a convergence of interests between the Muslim and Hindu elite in the region. Unraveling this vast network of denialism and justification warrants attention to underlying motivations and power configurations across a kaleidoscope of identities and geography – which this article seeks to uncover.

Keywords: Armenian Genocide, Khilafat Movement, Genocide Denialism, South Asia, Mushir Hosain Kidwai, Gandhi.

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Introduction

In September 1919, I. S. Johannes, vicar of the Armenian Church in Calcutta, submitted an appeal on behalf of Armenians located within India to the Viceroy of India requesting the intervention of the British cabinet “urgently and respectfully” to stop the “further massacres and annihilation of Armenia.” A second appeal was submitted in January 1920.¹ Discounting the bureaucratic *fait accompli* of both these appeals being transmitted to the British government’s India Office in London, we do not know much about the official responses to these specific appeals from a prominent representative of the Armenian community in India.²

These fateful years coincided with the period when the Khilafat movement gained traction across India. Remembered as a critical junction in the history of South Asia, the main objective of the “famous Khilafat movement” was to save “Ottoman integrity and sovereignty.”³ The movement sought “to preserve the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire as they had been in 1914.”⁴

How do these two singularly influential events of the 20th century connect? Having been neglected in scholarship up to the present, this article seeks to shed light on an essential element of the Khilafat movement that forms a bedrock of the South Asian post-colonial state-building project: the historical denial of the Armenian Genocide. Using a range of untapped sources, including archival materials sourced from multiple archives and libraries, political party documents, private papers, memoirs, religious periodicals, newspapers, and pamphlets, this article seeks to address four interrelated questions about Armenian Genocide denial that radiated from South Asia:

1) Why did one of the most vociferous non-perpetrator denialisms of the Armenian Genocide emerge from South Asia? What were the antecedents to this denialism that emerged post-1915, and how central was this denialist discourse to the Khilafat movement? How did prominent Khilafatists mount such a denial across geographies conversing in multiple ideological registers?

2) What centrality does the Khilafat movement hold within the elitist discourse and post-colonial South Asian statist historiography? How did Indian troops make sense of the tribulations they found themselves in alongside Armenians at Kut-al-Amarah?

3) How did the denialist narratives from multiple competing groups diverge or converge, and what warranted Islamic religious sects to front a united and calibrated

1 Appeal from I.S. Johannes, Vicar of the Armenian church, Calcutta. Foreign and Political Department, September 1920, 531-534, National Archives of India.

2 For more about the Armenian Genocide, see Raymond H. Kevorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London, New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011); Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks’ Crime Against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

3 Azmi Özcan, *Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, the Ottomans and Britain, 1877-1924* (Leiden, New York: Brill, 1997), 189.

4 Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1.

denialism? What role did newspapers and journals play in raising, disseminating, or contesting the reportage on Armenian massacres?

4) How was the assassination of Talaat Pasha covered in South Asia? And finally, did this non-perpetrator-sponsored denial have any consequences for Armenians at the Lausanne Conference?

For any reader, a cursory reading of the events leading up to the mobilization for the Khilafat movement, which radiated from South Asia to stave off the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, the prospect of genocide denialism becomes easily discernible. As the war progressed and damning evidence emerged about the role of Turkish leadership in the perpetration of the genocide, for many, it became the *raison d'être* in the case of arguing for Turkish misrule. Accordingly, for those invested in salvaging the empire, denial was necessary. And for those who saw the Ottoman Empire as a surviving ember of religion and religious identity, especially the South Asian Muslim elite grappling with the loss of power and prestige within the Indian subcontinent after 1857, which brought the Mughal dynasty to an end,⁵ denial of the genocide was a strategy of paramount importance. Denial of the Armenian Genocide and advocacy for restoring the Ottoman Empire to its pre-war status were intricately entwined and did not exist in isolation; in fact, the latter was predicated on the former.

This relationship, however, has not found space in scholarship in the last hundred years. Except for passing reference in a small body of research,⁶ a broader, systematic examination of denialist discourse around the Armenian Genocide inherent to the Khilafat movement is practically nonexistent in Middle Eastern and South Asian historiographies.

An important notice is warranted here concerning the usage of the term “genocide denialism.” While the coinage and conceptualization of genocide would materialize in the wake of the Second World War, denotative terms reflective of the import of the term “genocide” were widely known and wielded across the political spectrum within South Asia – including among imperial policymakers. Like the appeal of the Vicar from Calcutta, secret intelligence reports from colonial Delhi refer to the “annihilation of Armenia.”⁷ Telegrams dispatched from the British Commanding officer in Baghdad in September 1918 to the Director of Military Intelligence in London show how knowledge about the extermination of the “Armenian race” was marshaled for propaganda in which saving Armenians was the secondary objective; the primary objective involved influencing German public opinion towards anti-war attitudes, recognition of German state’s complicity in massacres and, thereby Turkey.⁸ By 1919, Army correspondence in South Asia shows us that the extermination of Armenians was used as a heuristic reference to

5 Khalid Ali, *Ali Brothers: The Life and Times of Maulana Mohamed Ali and Shaukat Ali* (Karachi: Royal Book Co, 2012), 16-18

6 Simone Panter-Brick, *Gandhi and the Middle East: Jews, Arabs and Imperial Interests* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 55.

7 Weekly Report of the Director, Central Intelligence, 15th March 1920. Home Department Proceedings, National Archives of India.

8 War Diary, Force D, Volume 50 Part 1, From 1st to 15th September 1918, National Archives of India.

make sense of similar attempts at the extermination of other groups. For instance, when calls for “practically direct extermination of Bashgul Kafirs” were issued by the “Amir,” the British commanding officer in Chitral remarked, “as a sort of Armenian massacre, on our door-steps as it were, would be most undesirable.”⁹ South Asian missionaries, through their contacts from the Middle East, also mention the methods of extermination used during the Armenian Genocide, in which entire towns were depopulated.¹⁰ Similarly, prominent reports by the German missionary Dr. Johannes Lepsius, written on the large-scale massacres of Armenians, were extensively used and cited by German missionaries in South Asia, such as Weitbrecht Stanton.¹¹ Finally, prominent newspapers, where elite discourse was disseminated, such as *The Leader*, *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *Andhra Patrika*, and *Civil and Military Gazette*, ran multiple reports in both English and Indic languages from late 1915 that invariably captured the imported concepts behind the contemporary term of “genocide.”

To be precise, this article is less about the Armenian Genocide of 1915 and more about what came to pass afterward. It is an inquiry into how a systematic and coordinated denial was mounted from South Asia, embodied by South Asian actors. As such, South Asian denial of the genocide is one of the most prominent non-perpetrator denialist narratives to have a discernible impact on the victims themselves – manifesting in the Lausanne settlement of 1923. It is also one of the most understudied cases of this phenomenon; it would not be farfetched to state that the scholarship on the Khilafat movement has not yet captured its true connection to the Armenian Genocide. Most of the members of the Khilafat movement, which also saw participation and advocacy from the Hindu elite as well, are now part of the “Modern India” canon of figures foundational to the freedom movement and the very conceptual idea of contemporary India. Most biographies and autobiographies of the leaders who participated in the Khilafat movement maintain a studied silence or completely evade the massacre of Armenians. In some cases, there is a subtle rationalization for this practice among particular figures, the most prominent being Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru had an unstated admiration for Mustafa Kemal for his ability to break with the past and steer the Turks towards nationhood. In the process of charting out modern Turkey’s development in one of his proverbial works, Nehru deployed the denialist trope of Armenians being “used,” resulting in “bloody massacres.”¹² In addition to being punctuated by silences, this framework essentially informed the INC’s (Indian National Congress) rendition of its involvement in the “freedom movement,” which translated into the statist historiography. In AICC (All India Congress Committee)

9 Collection of Army Department correspondence relating to The European Crisis, 1914. Volume 710. 1919, National Archives of India. Since the correspondence is dated June 1919, the “Amir” referred to here is Aman-ullah Khan, who proclaimed himself Emir in February 1919.

10 “At the hand of the Turk,” *India’s Women and China’s Daughters*. December 1915. No.354, 233. Church of England Zenana Missionary Society, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

11 *The Church Missionary Review*. December 1920. No.832. Church Missionary Society, Crowther Mission Studies Library.

12 Jawaharlal Nehru, *Glimpses of World History* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1934), 783.

pamphlets distributed from 1970, the Khilafat movement is considered part of the “Nehru worldview.” The pamphlets note that it was the first time that “Indian leadership took a direct interest in a foreign event” to “settle the Turkish question in accordance with the just and legitimate sentiments of the Indian Musalmans.”¹³

This article is divided into four segments. The first part addresses the state of current scholarship on the Khilafat movement, its place in the historiography, and a brief encapsulation of how denial of the Armenian Genocide was central to it. The second part traces the antecedents of South Asian Muslim engagement with the Ottoman Empire and the institution of a culture of “soft denial.” This is followed by a detailed exploration and discussion of the denialist discourse through the writings of Khilafatists and prominent supporters of this ideology, such as Moshir Hosain Kidwai and Gandhi. The third segment is a foray into the role of religious sects in confronting the denialist discourse, followed by a brief snapshot of how Indians engaged with the Armenians at Kut-al-Amarah, including an analysis of contending societal narratives and responses to the assassination of Talaat Pasha. The fourth part constitutes an evaluation of the implications of South Asian denial of the Armenian Genocide at the Lausanne Conference.

Contextualizing the Khilafat Movement

As the article explores the nodes through which genocide denial was mounted within this context, it is vital to contextualize how the Khilafat movement is remembered and disseminated today.

Two contrasting narratives gel together within this historical moment: (1) this was an unprecedented event that saw the forging of unity between Hindus and Muslims, and yet, this religious comity is (2) a symptomatic trait of Indian society at large. This narrative dichotomy was simultaneously ever-present, yet it could also be torn apart when subjected to the slightest trial or interrogation. While the forging of this purported unity was fragile,¹⁴ Gandhi saw an unprecedented opportunity in the Khilafat movement.

Following the partition of South Asia and the violence it spawned, this moment acquired greater importance for the newly independent Republic of India – as exemplified by Rajendra Prasad in 1949, almost a year before he became India’s first president, in his foreword to the book “Communal Unity.”¹⁵ – encompassing a collection of articles written by Gandhi. Stressing the need for unity, these leaders looked back at the Khilafat movement as the apotheosis of an ideal: it was seen as a historical moment India “should aspire for” and strive to reach – regardless of how it was realized in actuality- partially or unsuccessfully.

13 “Congress Approach to International Affairs Sharma, Shanker Dayal, and Indian National Congress. All India Congress Committee Publication, 1970, 6. Senate House Library, University of London.

14 Shabnum Tejani, *Indian Secularism: A Social and Intellectual History, 1890-1950* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 145.

15 Mahatma Gandhi, *Communal Unity* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1949), 3-5.

As Krishna Kumar notes, “For the Indian school historian, the Khilafat marks the high point of Hindu-Muslim unity and hence the triumph of secularism as a guiding value of the nationalist movement.”¹⁶ Textbooks also further a dual-pronged argument that the movement reflected a religious-political consciousness that did not materialize at the higher plane of secular political consciousness. Simultaneously, the movement is depicted as a manifestation of anti-imperialistic feelings among Muslims.¹⁷

However, among prominent Khilafatists such as Mohamed Ali and Mushir Hosain Kidwai, this movement sought the perpetuation of the Ottoman Empire and, by extension, the British Empire. It was a movement for the imperial *status quo*, returning to the pre-war era. Rumbold notes, “What most of them preferred was not so much the end of the Raj, as its support.”¹⁸ Inherent to framing the Khilafat movement as an anti-colonial or anti-imperialistic mobilization is a tacit understanding popular within the post-colonial critique that saw colonialism as synonymous with Western empires.

It does not help that one of the dominant modes of historical thinking in South Asia, Subaltern Studies, while focused on investigating the “ills of colonialism,” has largely ignored a dominant, non-Western empire. Deringil writes in a footnote: “Witness the fact that there is no mention of the politics of pan-Islamism in Subaltern Studies vols. 1–10 (1982–1999).”¹⁹ Monika Albrecht diagnoses this tendency to exclude the Ottoman Empire from postcolonial scholarship as having originated from Edward Said, who cast the Ottoman Empire as a “mere victim of Western imperialism or colonialism.”²⁰ An extremely influential and widely cited figure across disciplines, Said is well known for deconstructing the colonial discourse and the imbrications of power/knowledge.

Within Turkey, the foundations of the modern Turkish state are premised on the denial of the Armenian Genocide. Any questioning of those ideological foundations may be perceived as abrupt to the very founding ideas of the Turkish state.²¹

If denialism is foundational to modern Turkey, the affirmation of the Khilafat movement in South Asia (especially within India) has had its complicated relationship with state-building. The institutionalization of denialist discourse within Turkey would only actualize in the 1970s, giving rise to a peculiar idiom: ‘Sözde soykırım,’ or the “so-called genocide/alleged genocide.”²² Simultaneously, the Khilafat movement occupies

16 Krishna Kumar, *Prejudice and Pride: School Histories of the Freedom Struggle in India and Pakistan* (New Delhi: Viking, 2001), 131.

17 *Ibid.*, 149.

18 Algernon Rumbold, *Watershed in India, 1914-1922* (London: Athlone Press, 1979), 196.

19 Selim Deringil, “‘They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery’: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2 (2003): 311-342.

20 Monika Albrecht, ed., *Postcolonialism Cross-Examined: Multidirectional Perspectives on Imperial and Colonial Pasts and the Neocolonial Present* (London, New York: Routledge, 2020), 186.

21 Paul Behrens, Nicholas Terry and Olaf Jensen, eds., *Holocaust and Genocide Denial: A Contextual Perspective* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 185.

22 Doğan Gürpınar, “The Manufacturing of Denial: The Making of the Turkish ‘Official Thesis’ on the Armenian Genocide Between 1974 and 1990,” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 18, no. 3 (2016), 217-240.

a similar status in crafting the foundational narrative of modern India. It is vital in fashioning an epistemic reservoir of self-perpetuating knowledge through education, remembrance, and commemoration.

While this element of denial itself warrants an extensive examination, this article is by no means a comprehensive study of how the process unfolded across newspapers, speeches, resolutions, and documents. Instead, the aim is to capture a snapshot of the zeitgeist underpinned by this denial narrative and discuss how invested figures marshaled and coordinated it. Accordingly, the article focuses on individuals at the forefront of footing the denialist discourse, such as Mushir Hosain Kidwai, Yakub Hasan Sait, the Ali Brothers, and others. While elites from different ideological/religious dispositions partook in denialist discourse, this article will focus on the Muslim Khilafatist elite since they engendered and championed this narrative vociferously with a disproportionate influence relative to society at large. While some Hindu elite also saw political value in vindicating the Khilafatist stand, the rationale and terms of the movement itself were primarily dictated by the Muslim elite.

Seema Alavi's study on Muslim cosmopolitanism concluded that the Ottoman Empire nurtured a cosmopolis,²³ and that "Indian Muslim cosmopolitans who traversed this cosmopolis put up a fight to save it." Additionally, "the fight to protect the temporal power of the caliph, who had a global reputation of being the sultan of an ethnically and religiously diverse population that stretched across Asia and Europe, is often ignored in the Khilafatists' story. The movement's support for the caliph, per Alavi, represented a fight to save an important investor in the cultural empire of Muslims."²⁴

However, this assessment is untenable for several reasons. Simplistic at best, it mirrors the perspective Muslim imperial proselytizers from South Asia offered. Furthermore, the Khilafat movement was an *anti-cosmopolitan* project. Deeply inattentive to history and lived experiences, the movement's prominent entrepreneurs, such as Abul Kalam Azad, sought to flatten identities and geographies to impose a monolithic character on a demographically complex region.²⁵ This was best exemplified in the relentless marshaling of the idea of *Jazirat-al-Arab*, which catered to the "exclusive rights of Muslims" throughout the movement.²⁶

Similar sentiments, often conspiratorial and instrumentalized for this denialist discourse, were echoed by other Khilafat leaders such as Mohamed Ali at the All-India Khilafat Conference (AIKC) held in July 1921, who claimed that Armenians in Mesopotamia "would take advantage of their nearness to the holy places and revive their

23 Alavi's formulation defines the cosmopolis positively as a zone that transcends political, cultural, and territorial particularities.

24 Seema Alavi, *Muslim Cosmopolitanism in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 404–405.

25 John M. Willis, "Azad's Mecca: On the Limits of Indian Ocean Cosmopolitanism," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 34, no. 3 (2014): 574–581.

26 Aijaz Ahmad, *Lineages of the Present: Ideology and Politics in Contemporary South Asia* (London, New York: Verso, 2000), 69.

old enmities towards Islam. This Conference, therefore, demands that the above country be immediately vacated.”²⁷

At the 10th session of the AIKC in December 1923, Shaukat Ali would speak with a condescending tone towards Arabs for the revolt that had begun years before; Arabs in this Khilafatist worldview were dubbed as “quite ignorant of religion and worldly affairs, and their moral condition is hopelessly bad.”²⁸

One hallmark of the Khilafat movement was its support and dismissal from the Hindu elite, who acceded to a demand for unconditional subscription to particular religious precepts as prescribed and positioned by the Muslim elite. Leaders such as Motilal Lal Nehru adopted this frame of praxis, evident in the INC presidential address of 1919: “Muslim opinion alone to decide.”²⁹ Nehru’s speech is also essential for marshaling the logic of self-determination through religious majoritarianism in contexts such as Palestine and Armenia, favoring Muslims (and Turks) in both settings – something that the Khilafat elite had been demanding for years while eschewing the same belief in India. The “Muslim opinion” is evident from the Khilafat delegation’s letter to British Prime Minister Lloyd George, dated 10 July 1920, which explicitly denied the massacres and termed them as “interested propaganda.”³⁰

These narratives of denial became more acute and candid as time passed. As newspapers of various political and ideological persuasions within India had widely covered the massacres of the Armenian Genocide from late 1915 onwards, this coverage would include incontrovertible evidence that had been public from 1919 onwards.³¹ Additionally, the Sultan issued an edict on December 14, 1918, that set legal measures into motion to hold the perpetrators responsible for the Armenian Genocide to account. However, the tribunals came to an end amid the rise of Mustafa Kemal in the early 1920s.³²

Devoid of consensus-building measures concerning Khilafatist demands, the proceedings of INC and Khilafat meetings alike betray a display of non-negotiable claims regarding the denial of the Armenian Genocide drawn from religious precepts. The acceptance of these claims and the subsequent mobilization of large masses under this context by figures such as Gandhi would have detrimental consequences for the Armenians at the Lausanne Conference of 1923.

27 Khursheed Kamal Aziz, *The Indian Khilafat Movement, 1915-1933: A Documentary Record* (Karachi: Pak Publishers, 1972), 186.

28 *Ibid.*, 276.

29 Resolution 8 of the All-India Muslim League session, 1918 stated that the question of Khilafat is the prerogative of Muslims alone to decide. It strongly noted that any departure from such policy would lead to resentment and ill feeling amongst Muslims. This was a widely held opinion among Muslim elite.

30 Khursheed Kamal Aziz, *The Indian Khilafat Movement, 1915-1933*, 145.

31 Eugene L. Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 389.

32 Michelle Elizabeth Tusan, *The British Empire and the Armenian Genocide: Humanitarianism and Imperial Politics from Gladstone to Churchill* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 191.

Precedents

From 1857 onwards, as the South Asian Muslim elite saw the manifestation of the last remaining Islamic imperial power in the form of the Ottoman Empire, they imbued their perception of the Empire with a wholly “Islamic” lens. In their view of the Empire, the emergence of a Turkish identity was merely incidental. Amid such a framing, defending the caliphate meant, by extension, denying any wrongdoing on the part of the empire. To implicate the empire is to implicate Islam and Muslim identity.

Most of the core members of the Khilafat movement were deeply invested in the Ottoman Empire before WWI began. After the subscriptions³³ raised by Zafar Ali Khan’s newspaper *Zamindar* for Turks were submitted in 1912, Khalid Bey, the Turkish Consul General, visited the Badshahi mosque in Lahore in early 1914 to present a carpet. In the ensuing meeting, Abul Kalam Azad noted that “after the lapse of six centuries, Muhammadans, who were one family, had been brought together again; nothing could destroy this brotherhood.”³⁴ Eager to forge a fellowship between the Muslims of India and Turkey, in 1913, Zafar Khan announced that a committee comprising himself, Mohamed Ali, and Talaat Bey had been established to actualize the proposal of setting up colonies in the names of “Zamindar” and “Comrade” in Anatolia.³⁵

In an article from 1913, Zafar Ali Khan argues that the fortunes of Muslims and their trans-territorial brotherhood were best exemplified in the last remaining empire: the Young Turk-governed Ottoman Empire. He noted that his Ottoman acquaintances told him that they were Muslims first and only Ottomans later. Co-operating and standing by the Empire was crucial and meant the difference between destruction and existence for Indian Muslims. Accordingly, they (Indian Muslims) “have made up their mind to stand by Turkey through thick and thin.” Khan found an endorsement for this stand from the Prophet, arguing that “A Moslem is unto another Moslem as a wall which is propped up by its various parts.”³⁶

From such a standpoint, the denial of the Armenian Genocide inherent to the Khilafat movement may not strike readers as a surprising development. It reflects the extension of a worldview that saw fraternal bonds inscribed through religiosity as paramount in importance. This becomes even more palpable later in this article, in which Mushir Hosain Kidwai’s advocacy during the movement is explored. Additionally, there existed a culture of soft denial and justification of violence against Armenians from the late 19th century onwards, specifically proliferating among Muslim elites; voices in support of Armenians existed within this context, but the Khilafatist establishment far outnumbered them.

33 Subscriptions here refers to the funds raised by the newspaper *Zamindar*. Zafar Ali Khan had travelled to Constantinople to deliver these funds, probably to the Grand Vizier. Such subscriptions for the Ottoman cause were raised multiple times during the Khilafat movement as well.

34 Chief Commissioner’s Office, File no 54/1918, Delhi Archives.

35 *Zamindar*, 28 April 1913, Selections from the Indian Newspapers published in the Punjab, Vol.26, No.1., Uttar Pradesh State Archives.

36 “Indian Mussalmans and Pan-Islamism,” *The Comrade*, 14 June 1913, 480.

For instance, Mirza Hairat, writing in *Akhbar-i-Islam* (published from Agra) in 1896, stated that the “alleged Armenian atrocities” were untrue because the Russian Ambassador at Constantinople had publicly announced that “Armenians themselves were at fault” and, therefore, “the Turkish soldiers could not be blamed for massacring the rebels.”³⁷

Tangentially understood through this temporal framework, this interpretation of denialism from the late 19th century hews closer to that offered by Kevorkian’s extensive scholarship on the Armenian Genocide.³⁸ The “collective thought process” that eventually culminated in the destruction of Ottoman Armenians “went back a long way.”³⁹ Similarly, the genocidal process drawn out over the decades saw the state complicit in the “legal” robbery of the Armenians through laws that demonstrated the “eliminationist intent of successive Ottoman and Turkish governments.”⁴⁰

Germany, too, was impacted by widespread denial and justification of the Armenian Genocide.⁴¹ But the most potent proliferation of non-perpetrator denialism and justification for the atrocities stemmed from South Asia – which has so far seen a surprising historiographical silence. A crucial and qualitative difference makes this element of South Asian denial more potent and detrimental than other types. As a détente power and one on the losing side of the war, German denialism did not have similar implications to South Asian denialism situated within the rubric of the British empire. South Asian denial translated to tangible diplomatic, strategic, and policy implications at a global scale.

Within specialized scholarship on the Khilafatist movement, in addition to neglect and inattention, the issue of Armenians had been nullified by frequent regurgitation of Turkish denialism. One of the most comprehensive works on the Khilafat movement refers to the genocide of 1915 as “alleged Armenian massacres.”⁴² Qureshi cites Salahı Sonyel as his source; Dyer refers to Sonyel as a Turkish apologist for his “extremely partisan stance” on the matter.⁴³ Gandy remarked that Sonyel was using inverted commas to engender disbelief about the Armenian massacres.⁴⁴ Gurpinar critiques Sonyel for having made a career through the propagation of denialist literature.⁴⁵ Other extensive works on the

37 Selections from the Vernacular Newspapers Published in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh, Received up to 8th January 1896. IOR L/R/5/73, British Library.

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

39 *Ibid.*, 808.

40 Taner Akçam and Ümit Kurt, *The Spirit of the Laws: The Plunder of Wealth in the Armenian Genocide* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 192.

41 Stefan Ihrig, *Justifying Genocide: Germany and the Armenians from Bismarck to Hitler* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 272.

42 M. Naeem Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics: A Study of the Khilafat Movement, 1918–1924* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 139.

43 Gwynne Dyer, “Turkish ‘Falsifiers’ and Armenian ‘Deceivers’: Historiography and the Armenian Massacres,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 12, no. 1 (1976): 99-107.

44 Christopher Gandy, “Clio with One Eye: A New Book on the Armenians in Ottoman Turkey,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* 120, no. 2 (1988): 370-377.

45 Dogan Gurpinar, “The Manufacturing of Denial,”

Khilafat movement written in the late 20th century barely make any reference to the Armenian Genocide.

Within the Genocide Studies discipline, in tracing genocide denialism, Hovannisian identifies four different phases of denial that overlap with one another: “(1) absolute denial, (2) suppression, (3) rationalization, and (4) relativization.”⁴⁶ It is interesting to note that all these phases existed simultaneously within South Asian discourse on the massacres of Armenians.

Mapping the Denialist Discourse

As scholarship investigating South Asian denialist discourse on the Armenian Genocide remains practically nonexistent and lacks any inherent theorization, this article should be viewed as an initial foray into figures and writings little understood and written about within this context.

A *taluqdar* who belonged to a prominent family, Mushir Hosain Kidwai had long been a proponent of the proliferation of the Ottoman Empire. A proselytizer of sorts, he viewed himself as a *Pan-Islamist* whose ideals were most evidently visible within the Ottoman Empire. In April of 1909, referring to the deportation of Indians from the Transvaal, he would advise in “Telegraph” that, if not for the unfavorable situation, Hindus and Muslims facing persecution should opt to settle somewhere in the Ottoman Empire since the Turkish government was “the most tolerant under the sun.”⁴⁷ Incidentally, at the time of this comment, the infamous Adana massacres would ensue shortly afterward.

Earlier research on Kidwai had framed him as a “champion” of the Ottoman cause.⁴⁸ Recent scholarship has characterized Kidwai as one of the “most significant Indian communist intellectuals”⁴⁹ or possessing a “sympathy for Bolshevism.”⁵⁰ For Aydin, Kidwai and his pan-Islamic thought “contained powerful and universalist ideals such as the demands for dignity and justice for religious, civilizational, and racial groups.”⁵¹ Stephens has sought to paint Kidwai as a figure who sought to critique capitalist exploitation from an anti-colonial and Islamic lens and simultaneously propose an alternative system endemic to Islamic socialism.⁵²

46 Richard G. Hovannisian, “Denial of the Armenian Genocide 100 Years Later: The New Practitioners and Their Trade,” *Genocide Studies International* 9, no. 2 (2015): 228-247..

47 “Advice of a Mahomedan,” *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 21 April 1909.

48 Syed Tanvir Wasti, “Mushir Hosain Kidwai and the Ottoman Cause,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 30, no. 2 (1994): 252-261.

49 Kris Manjapra, *M. N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism* (London, New York: Routledge, 2010), 46.

50 Cemil Aydin, “The Ottoman Empire and the Global Muslim Identity in the Formation of Eurocentric World Order, 1815-1919,” in *Civilizations and World Order: Geopolitics and Cultural Difference*, eds. Fred R. Dallmayr, M. A. Kayapınar and İsmail Yaylacı (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 144.

51 Cemil Aydin, “Globalizing the Intellectual History of the Idea of the “Muslim World”,” in *Global Intellectual History*, eds. Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 180.

52 Julia Anne Stephens, *Governing Islam: Law, Empire, and Secularism in Modern South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 157.

In an earlier influential work, Aydın cites Kidwai's works "The future of the Muslim Empire" and "İslama çekilen kılıç, yahut, Alemdaran-ı İslamı müdafaa: Osmanlı heyet-i Murahhasasının sulh konferansına takdim ettiği muhtıra ve Paris sulh konferansı onlar meclisi tarafından aldığı cevaba nazaran Osmanlı devlet İslamiyesi meselesinin tenkidi"⁵³ – published by The Central Islamic Society, London, calling it "an articulate expression of both the early pan-Islamic embrace of Wilsonianism and pan-Islamic disillusionment with the Paris Peace Conference."⁵⁴ Founded in 1886, the Central Islamic Society had prominent denialists, many of whom held high office.⁵⁵ Incidentally, the works cited and utilized by Aydın as symptomatic of Kidwai's thought indulge in Armenian Genocide denial and justification; both of these phenomena will be explored later in this article.

Even if we are to hazard the idea that these interpretations stem from an "emic" reading of the texts, the conclusions derived from such readings are untenable. This is especially telling when the numerous claims in Kidwai's works can easily be identified as falsifiable. Within the existing scholarship on Kidwai's role and influence in this respect, perhaps only Lerna Ekmekcioglu has referred to Kidwai's propagandist booklets and denialism for what they are.⁵⁶

Kidwai's overarching motivation, through his letters, articles, books, pamphlets, and speeches from 1905 to 1935, ensured the propagation of Pan-Islamism.

Similarly, colonial intelligence would idiomatically "miss the forest for the trees" when assessing Kidwai and Yakub Hasan, another prominent Khilafatist from Madras presidency. Both were dubbed as "pro-Bolsheviks" in intelligence reports.⁵⁷

Kidwai's overarching motivations become more discernible as we trace his views to all the ideological camps he sought to inhabit.

As a member of the National Liberal Club, Kidwai wrote to Lord Curzon and Edwin Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, in May 1921, suggesting that Britain should revert to "her traditional friendship" with the Turkish "empire"⁵⁸ and "regain the goodwill of Islam" since that would nullify any necessity for Muslim states and people to look elsewhere for friendship. In this six-page letter to Montagu, Kidwai expresses the Khilafat delegation's viewpoint concerning the modifications to the Treaty of Sevres. Divided into

53 This is the Turkish translation of Kidwai's book. The full title of the book in English goes thus – "The Sword Against Islam or A Defence of Islam's Standard-Bearers: A Close and Critical Study of the Question of the Muslim Ottoman Empire with Reference to the Memorandum of the Ottoman Delegates and Its Reply by the Council of Ten at Paris."

54 Cemil Aydın, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 133-134.

55 For instance, see the members listed. *The African Times and Orient Review*, February 1918.

56 Lerna Ekmekcioglu, "Republic of Paradox: The League of Nations, Minority Protection Regime and the New Turkey's Step-Citizens," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46, no. 4 (2014): 657-679.

57 Report on Bolshevik activity in India, File no 5(a), CCO, December 1920, Delhi Archives.

58 The Turkish Empire in Kidwai's worldview stood as an Islamic power furthering the cause of Islam. Much of the subcontinent's Muslim elite saw Mustafa Kemal as a "Ghazi" championing the cause of Islam. The abolition of the Caliphate was an unexpected shock to many. In his later writings, Kidwai severely chastised Mustafa Kemal.

two parts, the letter dwells on the Turkish population, which would become contemporary Turkey and the Arabic-speaking populations of the Ottoman Empire. A notable absence of any reference to Armenia or Armenians also marks it. The urgency in Kidwai's writing is palpable when he remarks that "319 million people felt deeply irritated at these repeated rebuffs,"⁵⁹ referring to the whole population of India.

Writing in "Muslim Outlook," a letter titled "Bolshevism in the East," Kidwai noted how the Turkish empire reflected a bulwark against advances by the Czars. He opined, "With Britain now destroying Turkey and alienating Islam, it is effectively unchecking the Russian domination of the East. And as things stand, people in India, Asia Minor, Persia, Mesopotamia, and Afghanistan would welcome Russia even if it is Bolshevik."⁶⁰

Very often, the urgency of action that Kidwai sought to extract from Gandhi in support of his Pan-Islamic priorities (Khilafatism and Ottoman Empire) pitted him against other movements that sought to facilitate Indian society, evident from a letter he wrote to the newspaper *The Leader*.⁶¹ His frustration with Gandhi's emphasis on *charkha*, for example, is also evident in his letter to Seth Chotani: "In the head of our brothers no other thing except charkha (spinning wheel) comes. May the curse of God be on this charkha."⁶²

As a motivated investor in the preservation and propagation of Islam and Islamic identity, which (according to Kidwai) had entered a state of crisis due to the looming disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, he employed all cards at his disposal to restrain and roll back these developments. If genocide denial was one metaphorical "arrow in the quiver," speaking on behalf of British interests to the British in British newspapers was another: "The greatest bulwark of the British rule in India were Muslims." If the Khilafat movement's demands were not heeded, India could become "an Ireland."⁶³ He warned audiences that "Englishmen should not wreck the British Empire in the East for "any alien people, whether they be Greeks or Armenians, Bulgars or Serbians."⁶⁴

Kidwai wrote to prominent stakeholders and politicians worldwide, including US President Woodrow Wilson, as part of his advocacy work.⁶⁵ He attached his pamphlet "The Future of the Muslim Empire," with Marmaduke Pickthall writing the preface. In his endorsement, Pickthall remarked that these views were "held by a population" more significant than that of the British Isles. Including several excerpts in this article for analysis is necessary to understand the Khilafatist worldview present within this work fully.

59 Turkey. FO 800/151, The National Archives. UK.

60 Weekly Report of the Special Bureau of Information, October 1920, FO 262/1459, The National Archives. UK.

61 *The Leader*, 14 May 1922.

62 Afzal Iqbal, *Life and Times of Mohamed Ali: An Analysis of the Hopes, Fears and Aspirations of Muslim India from 1878 to 1931* (New Delhi: Idarah-I Adabiyat-I-Delli, 1978), 291.

63 "Disaffection in India," *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 27 August 1920.

64 "The Claims of Greece to Thrace," *The Westminster Gazette*, 24 September 1919.

65 Woodrow Wilson Papers, Series 5 Peace Conference Correspondence and Documents, 1914-1921, Subseries D Unofficial Correspondence, 1919 March, Library Of Congress. Washington, D.C.

Kidwai notes that “My interest, like that of other Muslims, in the Ottoman Empire is religious.” For him, the Ottoman Empire was the only “non-Christian Empire” within the international order. As a true Muslim, he has “no community of interest with Turks” except for a religious affinity. Accordingly, the interests of Islam transcend the “limitations of narrow nationalism or local patriotism,” and non-Muslims “fail to appreciate this unique characteristic” of this relationship fully. In trying to make a strong case for supporting the Turks and their “civilizing genius,” Kidwai would end up conjuring and purveying essentialized images for consumption: that the Turks got tainted by that part of certain “nationalities” which had once been great but had “completely degenerated.” The Turks gave “full liberty to the Arabs,” but they “robbed and murdered the pilgrims” of the Empire. They gave the same liberty to Jews and the ones who settled in Palestine, who “were mostly the scum of foreign countries.” As a nation, Kidwai notes that the Turks did not contribute as much in terms of civilization, culture, the progress of humanity, and the cause of Islam as the Arabs and Persians did. In the civilizational hierarchy, the Turks as a nation have “no claim to equality with the Arabs or Persians,” but Islam does not accord legitimacy to nationality. If the Turks can claim allegiance today from other Muslims, per Kidwai, it is solely because they kept the banner of Islam flying high.

Kidwai had a distaste for pan-ethnic ideologies such as Pan-Turanianism and Pan-Arabism. These ideas were deemed “tolerable” if they aided Pan-Islamism but not if they militated against it. The Turks “deserve[d] to be given a fair trial” not because they were Turks – but only because the grandness of Islam is actualized through them. This is where Wasti’s assessment of Kidwai falters, as though this line of thought is an Ottoman cause *only* as long as Islam holds a central binding component to this movement: “If the Turks gave up Islam and their sovereign became a heretic, then the Muslims would no longer recognize him as their Khalifa and would do their best to retake from him the Banner of Islam. They might even seek the help of non-Muslim powers in their task, but all this should be left to Muslims themselves.”

If it was denialism that was championed elsewhere, here we see a justification for the massacres in question: “It is not a matter of surprise if on rare occasions the Turks lost their self-control and committed some excesses which were trumpeted in the world as atrocities.” Attached as an appendix is M.A. Ansari’s speech delivered to the All-India Muslim League Session in Delhi in 1918. In contrast to Aydin, if Kidwai’s works proved to be a testament to denialism and justification of the Armenian Genocide, Ansari’s references to Jerusalem and Palestine sought to appeal to Wilson’s racial prejudices and the raw logic of conquest:

Just as President Wilson would refuse to hand over the government of the United States to the head of some forgotten Red Indian tribe or just as the whites in the European colonies would decline to withdraw in favor of the native locals, or even just as we would oppose a revival of the Bhil and Gond Empire in India, Palestine cannot be handed over to

the Zionists, whose sole claim to that land is, that centuries before the birth of Christ, the ancestors of the wandering sons of Israel had once lived in it. The achievements of Salahuddin Ayyubi and the blood of millions of mujahideen did not flow, in the days of the Crusades, to lose it to a people who cannot put forward any recognizable claim to it.⁶⁶

Kidwai and the views of Khilafatist advocacy can be broadly summed up in an article that Kidwai would attach to the pamphlet as capturing the sentiment: *“The Indian Mahomedan attitude towards Turkey is not one of reason but of strong religious feeling and passionate sentiment. It takes no account of the hard facts of the situation brought about by Turkey’s participation in the war on the side of Germany and the treatment of races like the Armenians.”*⁶⁷

Other members of the Khilafat delegation, including Mohamed Ali, Sulaiman Nadvi, and Syud Hossain, also sent cables to President Wilson. The cable insinuates an acknowledgment of the Armenian massacres – but does not directly refer to it: *“The delegation urges that protection of Christian populations in Asia Minor does not necessitate or justify an affront to the conscience of Islam.”*⁶⁸

This is the closest that the Muslim members of the Khilafat movement would ever come to acknowledging the genocide, and it should be understood within the context of how the Armenian Genocide was primarily understood and accepted as an indisputable fact in the United States. It ends with warning the Allied powers that pursuing such a course would result in “unfortunate consequences in India.”⁶⁹ Similar messages were addressed to the “Premiers and leading men of England, France, Italy” and Japan.⁷⁰

A couple of weeks later, the same trio would float the demand for the formation of an inquiry commission on the “alleged massacres” with representatives selected by the All-India Moslem League. It would accuse the reports about Armenian massacres as “propagandist” produced by partisans of the Armenian cause. The commission, the delegation demanded, should include men acquainted with the “laws of war” and those initiated into the “peoples and languages” of Anatolia. According to the trio, the candidates that fit the bill are Indian Muslims. And so, there ought to be a certain number on the inquiry commission.⁷¹

Among the significant, influential newspapers, one of the most discernible turnarounds concerning coverage around the Armenian massacres was the *Bombay Chronicle* – primarily through the editorship of Marmaduke Pickthall. In the initial years of the war,

66 Woodrow Wilson Papers, Series 5 Peace Conference Correspondence and Documents, 1914-1921, Subseries D Unofficial Correspondence, 1919 March.

67 “Moslems’ Concern for Caliphate,” *The Times*, 20 January 1919.

68 Cable to President Wilson. Central File: Decimal File 867.00/1173, Internal Affairs of States, Turkey, Political Affairs. Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1910-1929., National Archives (United States).

69 Ibid.

70 “Khilafat Deputation’s Appeal to Allies,” *The Bombay Chronicle*, 26 March 1920.

71 “Letter to Daily Herald,” *The Bombay Chronicle*, 1 April 1920.

the Chronicle covered the massacres extensively as the battle ended. As measures seen as debilitating to the existence of the Ottoman Empire were inflicted within treaties and legislation, denialism took root. Pickthall, an Anglo convert to Islam, had worked with Indian Muslims through the Islamic Information Bureau (IIB), which produced a weekly newspaper titled “Muslim Outlook.” The IIB was an “active center of pro-Turkish propaganda,” and Yakub Hasan would go on to found its French equivalent, “Bureau Islamique,” and its journal, the “Echo de l’Islam.”⁷² Kidwai had invited Pickthall to work on the weekly newspaper “Muslim Outlook,” although the two had divergent viewpoints.⁷³

1920 brought about a serendipitous alignment of interests between the Khilafat delegation in Britain, which needed a public figure to champion their cause, and Pickthall’s need for financial security: Pickthall was invited by Omar Subhani, the spokesperson for the Bombay Chronicle’s management team, to take over the mantle upon the departure of its “Radical pro-Turk editor,” Benjamin Guy Horniman. Horniman had earlier insisted that solely Muslim viewpoints mattered in the Ottoman Empire, referring to any non-Muslim contestation as “absurd and perverse.”⁷⁴

Pickthall’s mandate at the Bombay Chronicle included explaining the “Turkish problem” to readers and working to “co-operate with the Ali Brothers and Mahatma Gandhi” as editor.⁷⁵ In April of 1920, Gandhi cited Pickthall’s article in the influential British weekly magazine “The New Age” to perpetuate the denial of Armenian massacres in response to Edmund Candler’s open letter to Gandhi on the “plight of Armenians” during the genocide.⁷⁶

By 1921, Pickthall became close to Gandhi, opting to share platforms with him.⁷⁷ Necessary to our understanding is that Pickthall had held deep-seated animus against Armenians years before he had begun to work with IIB or the *Bombay Chronicle*.⁷⁸ In December 1915, contesting reports of Armenian massacres, Pickthall remarked in one of his letters to the editor of “The New Age” that “the Christianity of the Armenians is not the Christianity of an enlightened Englishman.”⁷⁹ In May 1919, almost a year before Pickthall’s article was cited by Gandhi, Pickthall rationalized and justified the massacre of Armenians in an article in “The New Age.” For Pickthall, the “hot-blooded” Christians

72 Kenneth McPherson, “How Best Do We Survive?”: *A Modern Political History of the Tamil Muslims* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2010), 106.

73 K. Humayun Ansari, “Pickthall, Muslims of South Asia, and the British Muslim Community of the Early 1900s,” in *Marmaduke Pickthall: Islam and the Modern World*, ed. Geoffrey P. Nash (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017), 23-46.

74 Milton Israel, *Communications and Power: Propaganda and the Press in the Indian Nationalist Struggle, 1920-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 226.

75 Anne Fremantle, *Loyal Enemy* (London: Hutchinson, 1938), 75.

76 *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi: Vol 17* (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1977), 456-460.

77 Peter Clark, *Marmaduke Pickthall: British Muslim* (London, New York: Quartet Books, 1986), 57.

78 Anne Fremantle, *Loyal Enemy*, 133.

79 Marmaduke Pickthall, “Letters to the Editor. The Armenian Massacres.” *The New Age*, December 1915, 141-142.

of the Turkish Empire were enamored by the “hopes” held out by the “Russian agents” and began “to plan rebellion with the simple object of despoiling and exterminating the non-Christian Turk.” This invited the anger of the “wilder sort” expressed in “wild ways”-deportation of Armenians was a means of “vengeance on a race of traitors.” The article also extended this rationalization and justification to the 19th-century massacres.⁸⁰ Writing a couple of weeks later in a letter to the editor of *The New Age*, Pickthall remarked that “in the eyes of Asia,” Armenians were a “race of traitors, spies, blacklegs, perjurers, lickspittles, liars, utterly devoid of shame or honor.”⁸¹

Contrary to several arguments made within existing scholarship, as Congress and Khilafat resolutions from this period demonstrate, endorsement for Gandhian non-violence was often paired alongside the championing of a contrasting zeitgeist that supported both permissive violence and “violence as resistance.” We get a snapshot of this worldview alongside an attempt at underplaying Armenian massacres from a Khilafat-sponsored event that took place in 1920 – which Gandhi and Kidwai both attended. Gandhi’s message while advocating for a resolution during the event hints at his enumeration and understanding of his religion, Hinduism – and that of Islam, mediated and informed by collaborations with the Muslim elite. While his religion taught him to resort to non-violence by default, there were no such criticisms for Muslims if they were to follow their religion. If the Turkish settlement was in dissonance with the efforts of the Hindu-Muslim coalition, Muslims had a carte blanche to “follow the law of Shariat” to achieve their goals. Implicit to this framing and distinction was a permissiveness for a display of strength and, if the situation warranted, one of violence; Kidwai supported the resolution and remarked on the “exaggerated stories of Armenian massacres” during the event.⁸² Gandhi’s rationale for joining the Khilafat movement, which started in April 1920, would hinge on this denialist narrative.⁸³

In May of 1920, a particularly influential liberal newspaper, *The Leader*, would remark on Gandhi’s doubts surrounding the massacres of Armenians. Noting that the Turkish delegates had admitted their role in massacres in 1919, the publication also pointed out the widely publicized and influential work by the American ambassador in Constantinople, Henry Morgenthau, titled “Secrets of the Bosphorus.”⁸⁴ In the same issue, extracts from Morgenthau’s work were published, which detailed the massacres that took place during the genocide. Knowledge about the massacres was widely known, yet the practice of engaging in denial had its utility for Gandhi and other elites.

Another resolution, passed in 1922 at the Indian National Congress 37th session at Gaya, congratulated “Ghazi Kemal Pasha and the Turkish nation on their recent successes,” alluding to the military victories. Sarojini Naidu, who moved the resolution,

80 Marmaduke Pickthall, “The Cause of Massacres,” *The New Age*, 1 May 1919, 4-7.

81 Marmaduke Pickthall, “Asia and the Armenians: Letters to the Editor,” *The New Age*, 15 May 1919, 49-50.

82 “The Khilafat Day at Bombay,” *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 24 March 1920.

83 *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, 349–52.

84 “Armenia’s Agony” *The Leader*, 15 May 1920.

remarked that Kemal Pasha “had broken once for all the bondage of Asiatic peoples.” One of the speakers, G.H. Rao, provided the reasoning for this stand: though Satyagraha (i.e., non-violence) is the supreme and the highest of the methods in achieving the objectives, there are other imperfect yet legitimate methods to achieve legitimate ends – such as the deployment of violence.⁸⁵

Sects and Denialism

Integral to this denialist discourse was the coalescence of the Muslim elite from various sects to mounting a collective denial of the massacres despite having been driven apart by unpalatable disagreements in the past.

While Aga Khan’s involvement in the Khilafat movement has been covered elsewhere,⁸⁶ his role in furthering genocide denialism is yet to be studied. Similarly, the Ahmadiyya Community’s role in denial and justification has received no attention. Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad, then the head of the Ahmadiyya Community, would write to the All-India Moslem Conference, held at Lucknow on the 21st of September 1919: his position, in short, was that Ahmadis would not accept the Sultan as the Khalifa – but would support the Khilafat movement. This issue is also crucial because Ahmad denied the veracity of reports about massacres yet goes on to note that even in the unlikeliest case of them being genuine, similar and more severe killings have taken place elsewhere.⁸⁷

As the leading publication of the Ahmadiyya movement, the *Review of Religions* sheds valuable light on the community’s positions on Turkey and Armenians’ fate. It published multiple articles spread across a range of topics that trivialized the massacres through the use of systematic juxtaposition,⁸⁸ in which it simultaneously rationalized and denied the massacres.⁸⁹ The movement saw any mention of Armenian massacres as “unfounded” and as deliberately tarring Islam and, by extension, as a gross impediment to the proselytizing efforts it was leading, especially in England – “But the invitation to Islam is not confined to selected people and learned societies only. The masses are invited to Islam in open-air lectures in Hyde Park three days a week, and hundreds of English men and women attend our lectures.”

85 “The Indian National Congress- Thirty-Seventh Session at Gaya,” *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 28 December 1922.

86 Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics*, 110; Soumen Mukherjee, *Ismailism and Islam in Modern South Asia: Community and Identity in the Age of Religious Internationalists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 82; B. R. Nanda, *Gandhi: Pan-Islamism, Imperialism, and Nationalism in India* (Bombay, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 366.

87 “The Future of Turkey,” *The Review of Religions* Vol 28 (Oct & Nov 1919): 289-316.

88 “The Turkish Peace and the Muslims’ Duty and Cross as a Symbol of Meekness and Love: A Study of Facts,” *The Review of Religions* Vol 19 (June 1920), 161-192.

89 “Jewish Massacres,” *The Review of Religions* Vol 21 (October 1921), 401.

And so, Mubarak Ali, the Imam of the mosque at Southfields, London, argued that – “Questions regarding the intolerance of the Turks and Armenian massacres are often raised, and we have to answer these charges unfounded.”⁹⁰

This is also evident from other ancillary publications of the Ahmadiyya movement, such as “The Light and Islamic Review.” The December 1922 issue would carry a story from the “Moslem world” wherein a young Turk, after witnessing many atrocities on Armenians, deserts and ultimately converts to Christianity. The publication would see this as representative of an onslaught on Islam by proselytizing “Christian literature” and would strongly emphasize the necessity of disseminating “Islamic literature” to combat this trend.⁹¹

Khalid Sheldrake would also pen an article challenging the death toll of Armenians during the genocide, asking, “Where do these people come from? We are told that time after time, they are massacred, yet they still claim numerical superiority.”⁹² This would be an oft-repeated line of rhetorical questioning about the genocide employed to call into question the severity and impact of the massacres.

The September 1925 issue of “Islamic Review” trivialized the issue by claiming that “stories of atrocities often get largely magnified, and I have heard it said that if less than half of all the massacres of Armenians had taken place, there would not now be a single Armenian left!”⁹³

Far from being only pro-Turkish propaganda, these efforts constitute a deliberately calibrated skepticism of the reality of massacres, which were seen as an impediment to proselytization efforts. The remedy to this concern was a resounding denial of the atrocities.

From the Madras Presidency, denial, coupled with disinformation efforts, would be spearheaded by Yakub Hasan Sait. In his address as the chairman of the reception committee of the Madras Khilafat Conference, Hasan claimed that “Armenian bands massacred more than one million Muslims previous to the measures of deportation.”⁹⁴

An Urdu-speaking Muslim who had settled in the Madras presidency, Hasan would gradually gain the support of the local mercantile community. Largely Urdu-speaking, these wealthy merchants were “well suited to provide leadership.” They had performed the *haj* and had a “reputation for piety.”⁹⁵ During the Khilafat movement, Yakub Hasan engaged in a patronage relationship with Abdul Hakeem, Vice President of the Muslim League of Madras, who had made his fortune in the “skin and hides trade.” Hasan, in turn, would patronage “Muslim Outlook” through the dissemination of Khilafat-affiliated funds. While navigating these relationships, Hasan would be accused of

90 Mubarak Ali, “Islam in England,” *The Review of Religions* Vol 21 (March & May 1922), 187-189.

91 “How Muslims Become Christians,” *The Light*, 1 December 1922, 1.

92 “More ‘massacres,’” *The Islamic Review* 10, June-July 1922, 267-271.

93 “The Islamic Reverence for Women,” *The Islamic Review* 28, September 1925, 314-319.

94 “The Khilafat Question,” *The Leader*, 21 April 1920.

95 Mchpherson, “*How Best Do We Survive?*”, 46.

embezzlement of Khilafat funds, leading to differences with another Pan-Islamist from the Madras Presidency, Abdul Majid Sharar, the proprietor and Editor of “Qaumi Report.”⁹⁶

Within the Madras Presidency, as McPherson notes, there were divergences between Tamil and Urdu Muslim worldviews.⁹⁷ Hasan’s advocacy towards Turkey was strengthened further through his marriage to the daughter of Turkish diplomat Ahmad Attaoullah Bey, a former Turkish consul in Singapore.

As a strong advocate of mercantile interests, Hasan’s commitment to non-cooperation and *swaraj* appears to have only extended so far: it did not ask for political *swaraj*.⁹⁸ Hasan’s commitment to *Swaraj* was merely an extension of the mercantilist interests. It did not possess the intellectual and multi-dimensional heft Gandhi had developed in his conception of *swaraj*. At its bare minimum, *swaraj* meant “self-rule.”⁹⁹

To contextualize this, Hasan was backed by Muslim businessmen and traders affiliated with the Madras Presidency – many of whom were “goaded into support of the [K]hilafat movement,” not from a concern for the Turkish Sultan’s fate, but more for the post-war “contraction of piece goods, skin and leather trades.”¹⁰⁰

The Andhra Provincial Conference also passed a resolution “promising every possible [means of] support to Turks” if war were to break out with Britain. While the new Secretary of State would express apprehensiveness and concern at the resolution and its impact, the British Home Department would brush away any consequences this action could have, terming it “hot air.” However, a concern existed that the Turks might use the resolution as a “moral support” for their aims at the Lausanne Conference. Eventually, the Home Department handled the issue by starving the resolution of any attention or action.¹⁰¹

In contrast, the influential non-Brahmin movement in the Madras Presidency – consisting of landowning castes – would cover the plight of Armenians in multiple issues through its chief publication, “Justice,” while simultaneously opining on the issue of self-determination.¹⁰² In doing so, the movement appeared to support its aims and concerns selectively. This sociopolitical contrast demonstrates a superficial, if not incongruent, juxtaposition in which the non-Brahmin stood for the Armenian – and the Brahmin for the Turk.

Broadly, South Asian denialist discourse may be understood as radiating from two sources: those within India and those outside India. Interestingly, this disinformation

96 History of Freedom Movement, NO 81, 1919, Tamil Nadu State Archives.

97 Mcpherson, “How Best Do We Survive?”, 75.

98 “Indian Reforms: A Symposium,” *The Indian Review*, October 1919.

99 Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi’s Rise to Power, Indian Politics 1915-1922* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 12.

100 David Arnold, *The Congress in Tamilnad: Nationalist Politics in South India, 1919-1937* (Columbia: South Asia Books, 1977), 41.

101 Resolution passed at the Andhra Provincial Conference, Home Political, file no. 14, 1922, National Archives of India.

102 “The Armenians,” *Justice*, 20 December 1918, 6.

campaign took the form of a “circular” flow of information where information relayed from local sources would be printed as part of publications elsewhere – only to be replicated back in India and published again at the regional level, thus giving these reports a veneer of corroboration and objectivity. This circular relationship is candidly demonstrated in the “Muslim Outlook” case, published from London – yet funded through Yakub Hasan from the Madras Presidency.

The Debacle at Kut-al-Amarah

Three developments would substantially inform and alter the worldviews of many as World War I raged: the Armenian Genocide, the Arab Revolt, and the debacle for the Indian and British army troops at Kut-al-Amarah. While the Arab Revolt has received some treatment within the existing Khilafat scholarship,¹⁰³ Discussion on the other two events has been largely absent. With regard to diplomacy and policy formulation, strong reactions to the treatment of prisoners at Kut-al-Amarah would produce some movement. This same pattern, however, did not happen with the Armenians, as the outcome of the Lausanne Settlement would attest.

After the Ottoman siege of General Charles Townshend’s troops at Kut-al-Amarah, British and Indian troops held on from December 7, 1915, to April 29, 1916, surrendering amid 2000 Allied soldier deaths – and resulting in the capture of 12,000 men.¹⁰⁴ The surrender would place prisoners of war (POWs) in conditions of severe humanitarian crisis, leading to human suffering on an enormous scale.¹⁰⁵

However, the debacle at Kut is essential for another interrelated reason: it was here that British and Indian troops encountered Armenians – in a qualitatively different state from the context of the deportations during the atrocities and massacres, but in a harrowing and deplorable state. While both groups were subjected to death marches, the Ottoman interplay between design and nonchalance constituted a key difference: the Armenians were driven across the Syrian desert in a “coordinated policy of extermination” while the Kut prisoners were not “slated for killing” – but no attempt was made to rescue them.¹⁰⁶ The troops of the Maratha Light Infantry, hidden under the appellation of 1/17th Infantry

103 Minault, *The Khilafat Movement*; Ali A. Allawi, *Faisal I of Iraq* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); Conor Meleady, “Negotiating the Caliphate: British Responses to Pan-Islamic Appeals, 1914-1924,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 52, no. 2 (2016), 182-197; Timothy J. Paris, *Britain, the Hashemites, and Arab Rule, 1920-1925: The Sherifian Solution* (London : Frank Cass, 2003); John Slight, *The British Empire and the Hajj, 1865-1956* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); A. C. Niemeijer, *The Khilafat Movement in India, 1919-1924* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1972).

104 In 1916, Kut al Amarah, situated 250 miles from Baghdad, saw the surrender of the British-Indian army. The debacle at Kut was one of Britain’s first major military disasters in the Middle East. It is also widely believed among military historians to be one of the worst humiliations ever faced by the British army.

105 Michelle Elizabeth Tusan, *The Last Treaty: Lausanne and the End of the First World War in the Middle East* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 30.

106 Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans*, 272.

in the Welsh division, consisted of a large part of the body of POWs at Kut-al Amarah in Mesopotamia in 1915.¹⁰⁷

Indian and British troops would frequently find themselves marching in the opposite direction of the deported Armenians. Krikoris Balakian, a priest, wrote: They wore short pants that came down to their knees; their legs were covered in wounds and sores; they were dirty and desiccated ... their cheekbones were protruding, their eyes withdrawn deep into the sockets. The Indians were practically naked, some with just a few rags on their heads, according to custom; in the darkness, there was an illusion of moving ghosts. ‘Are there any Armenians among you? ... Give us a piece of bread ... We haven’t had anything to eat for days.’ We were dumbfounded that they spoke English ... that they were British ... distant friends sharing our fate, asking us for bread ... What an irony indeed.¹⁰⁸

Indian troops such as Sisir Prasad Sarbadhikari of the Bengal Ambulance Corps, a survivor of the death marches and imprisonment, would later write in 1918 of how Armenians were massacred – and how Indians helped in concealing Armenian children from Turkish officers.¹⁰⁹ Newspapers in India would also cover stories of prisoners in Kut-al-Amarah returning and being celebrated for their perseverance in the face of such a crisis.

Despite this, the humanitarian crisis at Kut would be systematically denied by Khilafatists, and the much later development of the exchange of wounded prisoners would be touted as an affirmation of Turkish “humaneness and bravery.” Writing from London in 1919, Kidwai hailed the “heroes of Gallipoli and Kut” while leaving absent any reference to Indian troops and the trials they faced. Years before, *Resalat* published from Calcutta that a “still greater sorrow” was that “some of the lying journals always falsely charge the Turks with oppression and cruelty.”¹¹⁰ M. N. Roy would also note that Indian troops captured at Kut were exposed to “anti-British propaganda” at the behest of the Berlin committee through a group of Indians.¹¹¹

The Berlin committee’s function “was to advise the German Foreign Office and to devise methods of damaging the prestige of England.”¹¹²

Roy is also one of the few revolutionary communists from India who was acquainted with the Turkish elite and did not rationalize, deny, or justify the massacre of Armenians. Roy noted in his memoirs that Djemal Pasha “shared Enver Pasha’s fear of assassination, with a greater warrant, having been personally responsible for the massacre of Armenians.”¹¹³

107 John D. Grainger, *The Battle for Syria, 1918-1920* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013), 38.

108 Grigoris Balakian, *Armenian Golgotha: A Memoir of the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1918* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 295.

109 “Sisir Prasad Sarbadhikari, “Thirty Months a Prisoner in Turkey,” *The Calcutta Review*, 1918, 150-159.

110 Report on Indian Newspapers and Periodicals in Bengal for the week ending the 1st of January 1916, No. 27 of 1915, Uttar Pradesh State Archives.

111 M.N. Roy, *Memoirs* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications/Ajanta Books International, 1987), 322.

112 Tilak Raj Sareen, *Indian Revolutionary Movement Abroad, 1905-1921* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1979), 121.

113 M.N. Roy, *Memoirs*, 399.

These developments should be placed within a larger contextual canvas of denial that was intricately linked to the proliferation of both Turkey and Turkishness. A culture of denial intricately linked to the positive affirmation of Muslim identity through the Ottoman Empire was already in place. Likewise, as demonstrated through the Khilafat desire to establish colonies in Anatolia to forge a fraternal bond, imperial proselytization by actors such as Kidwai is interconnected on behalf of the Ottoman Empire. In short, most South Asian elite and activists of the Khilafat movement saw “Muslimness” as inherent and inextricable to Ottoman/Turkish identity – even if the Turks themselves did not necessarily reach this same conclusion. The fact that these elites could marshal and disseminate these views relentlessly through speeches and the press led to such notions percolating to the masses and ensconcing themselves within popular opinion.

At the societal level, contending symbols and narratives surrounding the outcome of Kut-al-Allah led to deep social friction. Maratha sepoys stationed in Belgaum protested the use of Turkish flags during the Khilafat demonstrations, as “many of their comrades met a cruel death at the hands of the Turks.”¹¹⁴ Reports from the Special Department in Mahabaleshwar mentioned the above exchange, in addition to stating that Juma Masjid at Belgaum (in the present day state of Karnataka) also flew four Turkish flags – which would result in a complaint from an officer, an enquiry and eventually hauling down of the flags.¹¹⁵

In December of 1918, prisoners rescued from Kut would hold a meeting in Bombay with Risaldar Ajab Singh Sarkaria, the 7th Lancers, narrating their ordeal at the hands of the Turks and dubbing the two and half a year captivity they endured as “a period of untold suffering.”¹¹⁶

Another interlinked facet to the denialism is the response to the assassination of Talaat Pasha, one of the architects of the Armenian Genocide.¹¹⁷ Responses to his assassination offer an insight into how the denial and justification was normalized within Khilafatist circles. Pasha’s assassination immediately resulted in orations at the cemetery; one prominent speech was given by the noted activist and revolutionary Chempakaraman Pillai, who had been appointed vice-president of the Berlin Oriental Club by Talaat earlier,¹¹⁸ who created it in the name of “all oppressed nations.”¹¹⁹

114 Belgaum Samachar and Indu Prakash, Report on Newspapers published in the Bombay Presidency for the week ending 15th May 1920, Uttar Pradesh State Archives.

115 Montgomerie to McPherson, Fortnightly report May 1920, Home Department, National Archives of India.

116 “Kut Prisoners in Bombay,” *Justice*, December 6, 1918, 8.

117 Vahakn N. Dadrian and Taner Akçam, *Judgment at Istanbul: The Armenian Genocide Trials* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011); Ihrig, *Justifying Genocide*; Marc David Baer, *Sultanic Saviors and Tolerant Turks: Writing Ottoman Jewish History, Denying the Armenian Genocide* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020); Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Talaat Pasha. Father of Modern Turkey, Architect of Genocide* (Lawrenceville: Princeton University Press, 2018); Joachim J. Savelsberg, *Knowing About Genocide: Armenian Suffering and Epistemic Struggles* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2021); Alp Yenen, “The Talat-Tehlirian Complex: Contentious Narratives of Martyrdom and Revenge in Post-Conflict Societies,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 64, no. 2 (2022): 394-421.

118 IB Weekly Report, May 1921, National Archives of India.

119 “Praising the Terrible,” *The Times of India*, 11 May 1921.

Within India, *The Bombay Chronicle* ran an unsigned paean titled “Shaheed Talaat Pasha.”¹²⁰ The cruelties inflicted upon Armenians, per this piece, took place without his own will and knowledge, for “Talaat never told a lie... [...] he had done desperate things which he considered for his country’s good, and he avowed them proudly. All that he ordered with regard to the Armenian people in Turkey was their deportation from all regions near the frontier and the coast to concentration camps in the interior. The rest was the result of public indignation.”

In short, this narrative projects Talaat as an unwitting victim of “staying true to himself.” Pickthall in his opening speech in the March condolence meeting would refer to the assassination as a “blow to Islam.” Talaat led a “life of simple devotion” and “no man in his life was more calumniated than Talaat Pasha.” Shaukat Ali appreciated the “imperishable services to the cause of Islam” and considered Talaat’s death to be “an irreparable loss to the Islamic world.”¹²¹

In April of 1921, the All-India Khilafat Conference passed a resolution at Meerut bemoaning the assassination of Talaat Pasha, noting that “The Mussalmans of India feel that Turkey and Islam has lost a brave son, a noble patriot and an able organizer and administrator.”¹²²

The Settlement at Lausanne

Minassian and Matiossian show how the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne buried the Armenian question permanently, with Turkey using its veto to refuse the Armenians a seat at the conference.¹²³ From undermining the Treaty of Sèvres to gaining such strategic advantages at Lausanne, this shift marked quite an exchange in fortune for the Turkish delegation. The settlement at Lausanne decidedly relegated the massacres of Armenians to a mnemonic “black hole.” It led to the silencing of the issue “internationally and in official Turkish discourse.”¹²⁴ At Lausanne, the Turkish delegation had a “selective and entirely self-serving definition of self-determination, one that did not extend to the Armenians or the Kurdish people.”¹²⁵

This brings us to an important question: What was the impact of the Khilafat movement and the Government of India, by extension, on the outcome at the Lausanne conference? For Aydin, the “triumph at Lausanne,” which saw Turkish diplomatic victories, was

120 “Shaheed Talaat Pasha,” *The Bombay Chronicle*, 19 March 1921.

121 “Tributes to Memory of Talaat Pasha,” *The Bombay Chronicle*, 23 March 1921.

122 “Late Talaat Pasha. Indian Muslims’ Tribute,” *The Bombay Chronicle*, 23 April 1921.

123 Gaidz Minassian, *The Armenian Experience: From Ancient Times to Independence* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2020), 60; Vartan Matiossian, *The Politics of Naming the Armenian Genocide: Language, History and Medz Yeghern* (I.B. Tauris, 2022), 6.

124 Jennifer M. Dixon, *Dark Pasts: Changing the State’s Story in Turkey and Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 38.

125 Jay Winter, *The Day the Great War Ended, 24 July 1923: The Civilianization of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 44.

effectively enabled by Indian support.¹²⁶ Conversely, Niemeijer's detailed work on the Khilafat movement argued that the Khilafatist influence at Lausanne was exaggerated. In marshalling the evidence, Niemeijer conclusively points to Mohamed Ali's speech at Cocanada – where Ali downplays any influence of England or Indian Muslims in charting out the settlement at Lausanne.¹²⁷ However, the Ali Brothers would go on to claim otherwise in the following years: while Mohamed Ali credited the battle exploits of Mustafa Kemal Pasha to the outcome achieved at Lausanne, he also notes the “no[n-]inappreciable contribution from the force generated among Indian Musalmans by the Khilafat Movement.”¹²⁸ Shaukat Ali would directly credit Edwin Montagu, the previous Secretary of State for India, in a letter to Sir Harry Haig in 1933 for the revision of the Treaty of Lausanne.¹²⁹ Materially, the Khilafat movement was also deeply invested in the success of the Turkish national struggle; to this extent, the Indian fund contributed £125,000 to this effort, part of which was used to pay for the army.¹³⁰

Nevertheless, the desire to amend the Treaty of Sèvres and secure an outcome on palatable terms – to avoid a rebellion or a conflagration in India that complicated the British position at the conference – was widely prevalent in imperial and strategic circles. While Montagu would champion this cause, Curzon would offer the same reflection in 1919.¹³¹

The India Office would write to the Undersecretary of State for India requesting that the agreement generated from Lausanne be amended in favor of the Turks, attaching a letter from the London Muslim League.¹³² The League was founded in 1908 by Syeed Ameer Ali,¹³³ another pro-Turk denier of the Armenian Genocide. Ameer Ali would also employ denialist discourse in his address to the Grotius Society in 1919.¹³⁴

That an unfavorable deal for Turkey would turn out to be unpalatable for India is a refrain that appears in discourse from many meetings and speeches that took place years before the conclusion of the issue at Lausanne. At the Paris Peace Congress of 1919, the Indian delegation – comprising Montagu, the Maharaja of Bikaner, Lord Sinha, the Aga Khan, Aftab Ahmad, and Yusuf Ali – all expressed similar views.¹³⁵

126 Cemil Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 136.

127 Niemeijer, *The Khilafat Movement in India*, 154.

128 “Before All Muslim Parties Conference,” *The Comrade*, 10 July 1925, 32-33.

129 Shan Muhammad, *Unpublished Letters of the Ali Brothers* (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 1979), 289.

130 Lord Kinross, *Atatürk: The Rebirth of a Nation* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), 298.

131 Papers written by Curzon on the Near and Middle East, Mss Eur F112/278, British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers.

132 Sean Oliver-Dee, *The Caliphate Question: The British Government and Islamic Governance* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 126.

133 Syed Razi Wasti, *Memoirs and Other Writings of Syed Ameer Ali* (Delhi: Renaissance Publishing House, 1996), 74-75.

134 Syed Ameer Ali, “Address by the Right Hon. Syed Ameer Ali on Islam in the League of Nations,” *Transactions of the Grotius Society* 5 (1919): 126-144.

135 The Dominions and the Peace Conference, CAB 29/80, The National Archives. UK.

With India home to many Muslims, there existed a strain of thought within British imperial circles that sought to calibrate and marshal Pan-Islamism: as Mark Sykes noted in a letter, “After the Indian mutiny we invented the caliphate of the Ottomans, the title up to then had been no more than honorific; but as an Anti-Russian move, we boomed the Caliphate until we actually invented [P]an-Islamism”.¹³⁶

Multiple attempts would be made to instrumentalize this phenomenon further. When the Emir of Afghanistan proclaimed a holy war against the British in 1919, the Viceroy Lord Chelmsford wrote to British Prime Minister David Lloyd George and Lord Balfour suggested that the event gave the Sultan of Turkey “a great opportunity of proving his sincerity by forbidding jihad and denouncing those who proclaim it.”¹³⁷

This was a concern shared by administrators from other regions of the British Empire. The Governor General of Australia would argue to the Secretary of State for Colonies in November of 1922 that “the Treaty of Sèvres will affect Moslem world and so India and Egypt. If it affects India, it will not leave Far East as it is”.¹³⁸

Writing from an Asianist and anti-imperialist perspective, Taraknath Das would recount that the “real diplomatic victory” at the Treaty of Lausanne was largely due to Britain’s attempt at trying to “curry favor” with the Indian Muslims.¹³⁹ In February 1924, Sir Maneekjee Dadabhoy presented a resolution in the Council of States recommending Aga Khan for the Nobel Peace Prize – arguing that one key reason was the “prominent part” he played at the Lausanne Conference that brought about the “final settlement of the Turkish question.”¹⁴⁰

Conclusion

Broadly speaking, South Asian responses to the Armenian Genocide and the survival of the Ottoman Empire could be dubbed as an interplay and extension of South Asian “political ventriloquism.” Each group/subset of the Muslim and Hindu elite sought to interject its own objectives onto the larger canvas of empire and imperialism – including the Khilafat movement. One of the unstated features of the Khilafat movement was the ambiguity that was central to its appeal. Within certain presidencies and provinces, it had fluctuating traction, while it failed to make any inroads elsewhere. The Khilafat movement also saw its objectives and claims fused into other movements at this time, such as the “non-cooperation movement.” In Surat, for instance, this fusion of movements with palpable differences produced “serious psychic strains among the most active of

136 Papers of the late Sir Mark Sykes, FO 800/ 221, The National Archives. UK.

137 Private Telegram for the Prime Minister and Mr Balfour, FO 800/199, The National Archives. UK.

138 The Dominions and The Lausanne Conference, CAB 24/139/98, The National Archives. UK.

139 “England’s War Against China- a Lesson for Indian Nationalists,” *Modern Review*, April 1927, 423-424.

140 “Nobel Peace Prize. Council of State’s Recommendation,” *The Bombay Chronicle*, 6 February 1924.

participants,” in which “militant Islamic rhetoric” was dichotomously wedded to the Gandhian principle of *ahimsa*.¹⁴¹

In such an atmosphere, efforts for the Khilafat elite to mount genocide denial as a component of resuscitating an empire and, by extension, salvaging, structuring, and disseminating their model of religious identity required well-coordinated networks that included political societies, journals, and newspapers. Complementing the efforts engaged by the Muslim elite, key actors of the influential Hindu elite, such as Gandhi, Motilal Nehru, and Lala Lajpat Rai, provided additional traction for the perpetuation of these views. While they participated in this denial as a political exercise, interpolating their aims and objectives through engagement with this discourse, their understanding of the Ottoman Empire, Turks and Islam was effectively mediated by the Muslim Khilafatists – who recognized the importance of projecting strength through purported unity and numbers. The leadership routinely projected numbers of “319 million” etc. to suggest huge popular support and unison of voices in context when that certainly was not the case.

While publications such as *The Leader*, *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, and *Justice* (to a limited extent) took a sympathetic view of the Armenians and raised their issues, this impact was minimal and did not have any consequences on Armenian political security – as the Treaty of Lausanne showed. South Asian denialism also raises uncomfortable questions of how colonized peoples may indulge and instrumentalize denial of genocide against other colonized populations to further their objectives. As such, the South Asian case, unique as it is, demonstrates a clear social marshaling of genocide denial in the service of anticolonialism and strengthening of religious bonds.

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141 Douglas E. Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India: The Shaping of a Public Culture in Surat City, 1852-1928* (Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras: Oxford University Press, 1992), 271.

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ECHOES OF LOSS: EXAMINING GENDERED VIOLENCE AND LEGACY IN THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

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Abstract

This article explores the intergenerational transmission of memories among descendants of Armenian Genocide survivors, focusing on perspectives from both males and females. Using an oral history methodology in three provinces—Erznka (modern-day Erzincan), Malatya, and Dersim – the study investigates how narratives of the genocide have been passed down and changed within families. The research emphasizes the gender-specific tactics of the genocide, where Armenian men were often targeted for extermination, while women and children endured forced marches, sexual violence, abductions and forced marriages. By connecting with descendants who carry the post-memory of these events, the study reveals the deep and lasting impact of these atrocities on the Armenian community. Their stories unveil the intricate layers of trauma and resilience that define the Armenian experience and contribute to a broader understanding of genocide and its enduring effects on future generations.

Key Words: Armenian Genocide, women, children, post-memory, sexual violence, orphans, forced marriage.

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Introduction

“If you ask about the past, sadness is always at the door.”

This excerpt is from one of the interviews I conducted as part of an oral history study that covered the following three provinces: Erzznka (modern-day Erzincan), Malatya, and Dersim. I selected these provinces referencing Sevan Nishanyan’s *Turkish Dictionary of Place Names*,¹ which thoroughly examines the names of all locations in the country, including the smallest and most forgotten or unidentified settlements. This resource aided me in identifying regions with significant Armenian population densities in the past and historical Armenian village names. The goal of this project was to examine the aftermath of violence against Armenians during the Late Ottoman Empire and Early Republic, in order to illuminate historical events and their lasting effects. Furthermore, the research aimed to delve into events that had been transmitted as a post-memory² of the Armenian Genocide from older generations to Armenians who did not personally witness these events.

The term “genocide” was ultimately coined to describe a systematic effort to annihilate an entire ethnic group.³ The Armenian Genocide of 1915 stands as the most historically and psychologically significant event in Armenian history, profoundly shaping the development of the Armenian collective identity.⁴ It resulted in the deaths of approximately 1.5 million Armenians, nearly half of the ethnic population at the time.⁵ Armenian women bore a unique burden of the genocide during this period.⁶ They witnessed the murder of male community members, mourned their children, and took on the responsibility of sustaining their families by smuggling weapons, providing for jailed relatives, negotiating with oppressors, and nurturing distressed offspring, all while the Ottoman government systematically orchestrated the destruction of their community.⁷ Furthermore, this policy of annihilation involved significant gender-based violence. Men often faced immediate execution, while women, spared from instant death, were subjected to sexual violence, kidnapping, and forced into marriages or servitude. This illustrates a

1 Sevan Nishanyan, *Türkiye Yer Adları Sözlüğü Index Anatolicus* (Istanbul: Liberus Yayınları, 2020), 521.

2 I adopt Marianne Hirsch’s term “post-memory” to refer to a hybrid form of memory that stands apart from personal memory due to generational distance, and from history due to its profound personal connection. For further reference, see Marianne Hirsch. “Family Pictures: Maus, Mourning, and Post-Memory,” *Discourse* 15, no. 2 (1992): 3-29.

3 George S. Yacoubian, “The Artsakh Conflict as a Violation of the Genocide Convention: Toward a Referral to the International Criminal Court,” *Advances in Applied Sociology* 13 (2023): 172.

4 Selina L. Mangassarian, “100 Years of Trauma: The Armenian Genocide and Intergenerational Cultural Trauma,” *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma* 25, no. 4 (2016): 373.

5 Max Schaub, “Demographic and Attitudinal Legacies of the Armenian Genocide,” *Post Soviet Affairs* 39, no. 3 (2023): 155.

6 Nikki Marczak, “The Early Days: Illuminating Armenian Women’s Experiences,” in *Genocide Perspectives V: A Global Crime, Australian Voices*, ed. Nikki Marczak and Kirril Shields (Sydney: UTS ePRESS, 2017), 115.

7 *Ibid.*

strategy of targeting victims based on gender.⁸

In order to gain a better understanding of the Armenian Genocide and how its traumas were experienced by victims and survivors, I conducted research using the oral history method. This method allows for a deeper understanding of how individuals in the past shaped their environments, including their beliefs, imaginations, and values by focusing on descendants spanning three generations – the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of survivors.⁹ It also enables an examination of how memories of violence are passed down through generations and the silence that often accompanies these memories, leading to their eventual fading. Furthermore, this approach facilitates a detailed analysis of how memories of traumatic events persist over time and space and how they are shared within communities and among groups of victims.¹⁰

In this project, my primary approach was to obtain interviewees through reliable personal networks. Each interviewer reached out to their own network to identify potential people. Additionally, it was crucial to document the stories of Turkish Muslim intermediaries who were encountered while connecting with individuals of Armenian descent. Their perspectives and narratives were deemed valuable and were therefore included in the research.

The Armenians interviewed, with the exception of one, stated that they adhere to a religious belief, while the rest identified themselves as Alevi Armenians with Armenian heritage. One mentioned that in the region where they live, nobody recognizes them as Armenians anymore, so they do not encounter any issues.

Avedis Hadjian conducted a similar analysis of the descendants of survivors of the 1915 Genocide who chose to remain in Turkey after being forcibly converted to Islam. Many of them continue to keep their true identity hidden.¹¹ Within this group, there are devout Muslims, followers of Alevi beliefs, and a small number who still practice Christianity in secret. Additionally, there are many individuals within this community who identify as agnostics or atheists. This diverse cohort, often called “secret Armenians” or “hidden Armenians,” represents a wide range of religious and ideological beliefs found in Turkey, although some within this group find these labels offensive.

The project began in Istanbul, the starting point of the canvas where mass deportations of hundreds of thousands of Armenians took place, stretching to the eastern ends of the Ottoman Empire.¹²

8 Stefan Ionescu, “Perpetrators, Bystanders, and Rescuers: Popular Attitudes Towards Ottoman Christians during the Armenian Genocide,” *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review* 11, no. 2 (2011): 336.

9 Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences* (United Kingdom: AltaMira Press, 2005), 3.

10 Ibid.

11 Avedis Hadjian, *Secret Nation: The Hidden Armenians of Turkey* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 32.

12 Ronald Grigor Suny, “Empire and Nation: Armenians, Turks, and the End of the Ottoman Empire,” *Armenian Forum* 1, no. 2 (1998): 46.

Kemaliye- Erzuka

The first stop on the journey was Armidan, a village located in the Erzuka province of Turkey. Historically known as Garin in Armenian, this village was part of the *Kuruchay* District during the Ottoman Empire era. Today, it is referred to as Buyuk (*Medz*) *Armutlu*, and is situated in the Ilich district. The village is made up of two settlements, Buyuk [big] and Kuchuk [small] Armidan, nestled amidst mountains. The villagers primarily rely on agriculture for their livelihoods. During our visit, we were graciously hosted by a local resident named Musa, who provided us with lunch and shared valuable insights about the Armenians who once inhabited the village.

*Musa S. – a Window with a View of Armidan*¹³

Musa S. clarified that he had Kurdish heritage and shared how his family sought refuge in Armidan after fleeing from their village's *agha*.¹⁴ He gestured towards a house a short distance from his balcony, explaining that it was once the residence of an old Armenian woman who lived there until her passing. While her family used to be the only inhabitants of the village, they now seem to have vanished, leaving no trace of their presence. Nevertheless, Musa kindly offered to guide us to the Armenian Church of Armidan after lunch. As we walked among the church's ruins, Musa informed us that treasure seekers had excavated pits in the church grounds. These treasure hunters, aware of the village's Armenian history, speculated that Armenians may have buried their valuables before their exile. Musa also mentioned that a significant number of villagers had willingly assisted these treasure seekers in the hopes of sharing their findings.

Bedross Der Matossian's scholarship addresses diverse perspectives from American and European sources, offering an alternative narrative to what official records present. A significant amount of movable Armenian property was stolen, and parts of immovable properties were sold in auctions for much less than their original value.¹⁵ Additionally, some immovable properties were given to Kurdish tribes as rewards to incentivize their involvement in the conflict. During episodes of mass violence, there is a consistent trend of property being seized and transferred by those responsible for the violence,¹⁶ often for their own financial gain. The confiscation of Armenian properties during the genocide was meticulously regulated by the Unionist government, which issued numerous decrees, laws,

13 Musa, interviewed by author, Armidan village, June 23, 2021, 3:00 pm, one-hour duration; first half-hour at his house, second half-hour guided by him through the village.

14 The Turkish word *ağa* (*agha*) means "ruler, elder brother," and in Ottoman times also "master, leader." The term can also refer to a landowner or a butler in a household.

15 Bedross Der Matossian, "The Taboo within the Taboo: The Fate of 'Armenian Capital' at the End of the Ottoman Empire," *European Journal of Turkish Studies* (2011): 10. <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejts.4411>

16 Timothy Williams, *The Complexity of Evil: Perpetration: Perpetration and Genocide* (Chicago: Rutgers University Press, 2020), 110.

orders, and decisions to manage the process.¹⁷ Commissions were tasked with confiscating all money, goods, and belongings taken into government protection from the deportees.¹⁸ Additionally, these commissions demanded that banks, other institutions, and individuals provide accounts of the money and properties left behind by the Armenians. Those asked were required to promptly submit the accounts, along with any necessary documents, receipts, and letters for verification. This allowed the government to also seize belongings that deported Armenians had entrusted to others. These confiscated items were later sold by Liquidation Commissions at public auctions.¹⁹

In this village, while the valuable contents of this grand church were stolen, and the base of its walls were excavated by treasure seekers, the environment still exuded a sense of peaceful nostalgia. Musa pointed out visible signs of digging on the church walls and concluded the conversation with a notable remark: “*If you know Armenians from Armidan, feel free to share my phone number with them. If they are interested in coming here to unearth the buried treasure, I will assist them in exchange for a small share.*”

He viewed Armenian heritage as a valuable asset that could be uncovered to yield wealth.

*Huseyin M.- the Unfortunate Women in his Family*²⁰

My first interview took place in a remote village surrounded by mountains. The elderly men of the village gathered at a local spot to play cards together. One of the elders mentioned that their village had historical ties to the Armenian community, pointing out that harmonious relations had traditionally existed between the villagers and their Armenian neighbors.

Afterwards, I was directed to Huseyin M.’s house, which was located a distance away from the village. Hüseyin identified himself as being half Kurdish from his father’s side and half Armenian from his mother’s side. He made a living through beekeeping in the village during the summer months. Huseyin seemed like a cheerful person who enjoyed making jokes. He mentioned that he and his wife preferred to spend the summers in the village and the winters in their house in Istanbul. His first wife, an Armenian woman, who suffered from breast cancer, passed away ten years ago. He told me that their daughter was pursuing a master’s degree in Ankara, while their son was self-employed in Istanbul. After his first wife’s death, Huseyin got married again. His second wife, a middle-aged Alevi woman, informed me that her family did not approve of Huseyin’s Armenian background. Ultimately, they treated him as if he were not Armenian.

17 Mehmet Polatel, “A Historiographical Review of the Literature on Armenian Properties and New Prospects,” *New Perspectives on Turkey* 53 (2015): 181.

18 Umit Kurt, “The Political Micro-Economy of the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1922,” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 20, no. 6 (2018): 622.

19 Ibid.

20 Huseyin, interviewed by author, Gozaydın village, June 25, 2021, 10:25 am, 40-minute duration.

Before our conversation started, Huseyin expressed his willingness to show me the handcrafted pillows that held sentimental value and a legacy from his mother. He believed artisanship was a heritage passed down from generation to generation among Armenians. When I asked him to elaborate on this, he shared the story of his grandfather, who was a master tailor known for sewing the governor's clothes: "*His skill was such that the buttons on the jackets he sewed aligned perfectly with the buttonholes. Despite working closely with a government governor, neither he nor his family received any assistance during the deportations.*"

It was evident that Huseyin believed his grandfather and family might have survived the genocide if they had received support from the governor. However, his grandfather and two sons were among the Armenian men forcibly removed from their village and never returned.

Huseyin continued with his grandmother's story, recounting how after the men in the family were killed, the grandmother, her daughter, and her brother were deported to the Syrian desert. Despite all their struggles and efforts to survive, his grandmother unfortunately succumbed to an epidemic. She entrusted her little daughter to her older son, hoping that if they survived, they would one day return to their homeland. The "settlement policy" enforced by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) did not guarantee better conditions or prevent deaths for refugees in Syria.²¹ In these sparsely populated desert areas, deportees faced a different approach, being placed in numerous concentration camps, where many perished from exhaustion, starvation, and disease.²²

Huseyin also shared another intriguing story with me about the eldest daughter of his grandparents. She owed her survival to an unfortunate event that occurred before the gendarmes reached their village. He heard this story from his uncle fifteen years ago:

My uncle described my aunt as a beautiful and talented young woman. She was preparing to marry an Armenian blacksmith when the agha from a distant village abducted her. Despite all the pleas and cries from her family, that man did not return my aunt to her own family. To cut the long word short, he forcibly took possession of her against her will.

After some time, Huseyin's family learned that that village *agha* changed his aunt's name and forced her to convert to Islam. Even if the aghas allowed the girls they had forcibly taken to return home the next day, the girls no longer had the courage to go back to their father's house. In addition to fear, many women also refused to return to their family homes and villages due to the shame associated with losing their virginity.²³ Under these circumstances,

21 Taner Akcam, *The Young Turks' Crime against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 269.

22 Raymond Kevorkian, "Earth, Fire, Water: Or How to Make the Armenian Corpses Disappear," in *Destruction and Human Remains: Disposal and Concealment in Genocide and Mass Violence*, ed. Elisabeth Anstett and Jean-Marc Dreyfus (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 96.

23 Katherine Derderian, "Common Fate, Different Experience: Gender-Specific Aspects of the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1917," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 19, no. 1 (2005): 3.

losing their virginity would subject them to enduring social disgrace and terminate their chances of marriage. Hence, forced conversion inflicted even more distress on women, as it encompassed systematic rape disguised as a “marital” union with their captors.

Huseyin expressed that he was deeply saddened by all the pain that has been experienced, but he emphasized his strong connection to the land of his birth.

*Mustafa A. – Armenian Lullaby*²⁴

Before leaving the Erzuka province, I arranged another interview with Mustafa A., who had been previous governor of the village close to Huseyin M.’s.

Mustafa A., a middle-aged farmer, lived in the same village all his life. He mentioned having five sons and three daughters, but only two of them were currently living with the family, while the others were working in Istanbul. Their main source of income came from selling dairy products made from their livestock. His wife also helped by working in the fields and garden. Mustafa was proud of their good relationship with their neighbors, regardless of differences in language, religion, or ethnicity. He also said that they shared similar political view with the local villagers, often meeting at the village coffee house to discuss the country’s political situation.

He admitted that despite his Armenian roots from his grandparents, he was raised far from that identity. Mustafa did not know how to be Armenian or feel Armenian, but he remembered his grandmother’s story well. He heard it often from his mother:

My grandmother was a young girl abandoned by the Euphrates River, beaten severely by the gendarmes. They left her there to die, but a man named Ismail from a different village found her. Ismail and his wife raised my grandmother as their own child ...and they called my grandmother by a Turkish name: Hacer.

Ismail’s family kept his grandmother with them until she reached old age and later forced her to marry a Muslim boy. This practice of forcing Armenian women into marriages with partners chosen by others was a deliberate strategy to erase their identities. As Tachjian argued, integrating young Armenian women and children into Muslim society was intended to ensure that these individuals would lose their ‘national identity.’²⁵

In an attempt to erase the footprints of their past, they tried to forget who they were. They believed forgetting the notion of being an Armenian, language and traditions could make life easier. According to Anna Aleksanyan, in cases of forced marriages, Armenian women were given Muslim names and made to abandon their Christianity.²⁶ They were not

24 Mustafa, interviewed by author, Agil village, June 25, 2021, 1:40 pm, one-hour duration.

25 Vahe Tachjian, “Gender, Nationalism, Exclusion: The Reintegration Process of Female Survivors of the Armenian Genocide,” *Nations and Nationalism* 15, no. 1 (2009): 65.

26 Anna Aleksanyan, “Between Love, Pain and Identity: Armenian Women after WWI,” in *Women’s Everyday Life and Politics in the South Caucasus*, ed. Ulrike Ziemer (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 105.

allowed to communicate in their mother tongue and also there was no one present to speak with them in their native language. Aleksanyan also argues that these women had to let go of memories of their Armenian heritage.²⁷

Mustafa shared that his grandmother preferred to hide her Armenian identity and concentrate on caring for her three children. Her husband neglected his parental and household duties, so she found herself shouldering the responsibilities alone. She would softly sing Armenian lullabies to her daughters; however, she avoided teaching them the language. Mustafa recalled some of those lullabies while going to sleep: “*Nothing is ever truly lost. When my mother cradled me in her arms, she would sing one of those lullabies. Her voice was so beautiful that it brought me a sense of indescribable peace.*”

In her article, Melissa Bilal referenced Hirsch and Spitzer to explain how a lullaby can serve as a connection between the survivor generation’s memory and the present.²⁸ What we typically refer to as memory is not just memory, but rather a reflection of the past.²⁹ Our memories are essentially a culmination of those memories within the larger context of history. The search for memory involves exploring one’s own personal history. The lullabies were the heritage that he inherited from his grandmother.

The Old Shepherd without Sheep

As the second stop of the project, I visited Arapgir, a town located in the larger Malatya region. Historically Arapgir is known for its significant Armenian population and its proximity to several former Armenian villages. On a hot summer day, the town seemed empty. Eventually, I came across an elderly shepherd on the roadside, watching over a lone sheep. I stopped to inquire if he had any knowledge of Armenians who had previously lived in the area. At first, he was suspicious, much like Musa had been, but he eventually shared some details about two Armenian brothers who took care of the local Armenian cemetery and lived in the town center. He also mentioned an elderly Armenian man in a nearby village called Shepik could potentially contribute to the study. The shepherd gave me his home address and promised to take me to the brothers’ house the following day. When I visited him as planned, I noticed a change in dynamics. The shepherd seemed more assertive with anxious behaviors. It was clear that he talked about me with his family members, who looked at me with a sense of recognition. His youngest son pulled his father aside and approached me to inquire my motivation for researching Armenians. Before showing me the way to the house of the Armenian brothers, he suggested accompanying me in exchange for some money. It became clear that the family expected a piece of compensation, viewing Armenians and their heritage solely in terms of potential material gain. I decided to find the address on my own and immediately left there.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Melissa Bilal, “Lullabies and the Memory of Pain: Armenian Women’s Remembrance of the Past in Turkey,” *Dialectical Anthropology* 43, no. 2 (2019): 190.

²⁹ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire.” *Representations* 26 (1989): 13.

Two Armenian Brothers

Upon my arrival, I heard a song in an unfamiliar language, evoking the sense of a prayer from the house. Sarkis then greeted me in priestly robes. He explained that he was engaged in a peaceful prayer in his vestment that was given to him as a gift by the largest Armenian church in Istanbul. Then, he quickly called his brother to tell him that they had a guest. Unfortunately, his brother was occupied with too much work throughout the day, therefore we could not meet. During his phone conversation, I had a chance to glance around the living room, which resembled a small chapel decorated with icons of Jesus Christ and Mary. These religious images, along with family photographs reflected a blend of personal and religious heritage maintained by Sarkis and his brother.

Sarkis O. – Stigmatization with Tattoos³⁰

Sarkis O. was a 50-year-old Armenian man originally from Arapgir, who lived in a two-story house, with his brother. Before we started our conversation, he wanted to explain the source of their household income. His brother was frequently employed in woodcutting, while Sarkis received a salary from the Armenian community in Istanbul for his responsibilities such as maintaining the Armenian cemetery and managing funeral preparations. After losing their father at a young age, the two brothers, who took care of their widowed mother, never married.

He enthusiastically fetched his family album and showed the photographs of his parents. The black and white photographs not only had a sense of nostalgia but also conveyed a poignant narrative of the past. One particularly captivating element in one of the photos was the small, dark tattoo on Sarkis' grandmother's forehead and chin, which Elyse Semerdjian also discusses in her book.³¹ Her investigation centers on the enduring imprints left in the memories and on the bodies of female survivors of the genocide. Among these survivors were Armenian women like Khanum, the grandmother of filmmaker Suzanne Khardalian, who silently lived with these marks all her life. On the other hand, women like Aghavni Kabakian sought surgical interventions to remove the lasting tattoos that had left an enduring imprint on their skin and memories. These images held curiosity-arousing life stories, and I asked Sarkis about the significance behind the tattoos on her face.

He briefly looked at the photograph and explained the meaning of the tattoos that had been marked on Armenian women. Sarkis' grandmother was entrusted to a wealthy family when their village was being pillaged. The family used her as a servant, while the women in the household put henna tattoos on his grandmother's face, serving as a symbol that she was distinct from them, namely an Armenian.

³⁰ Sarkis, interviewed by author, Arapgir, June 27, 2021, 12:25 pm, one-hour duration.

³¹ Elyse Semerdjian, *Remnants Embodied Archives of the Armenian Genocide* (Redwood: Stanford University Press, 2023), 149.

Ulrike Luise Glum shares accounts of several female victims who were tattooed on the face in the course of the Armenian Genocide.³² She clarified that tattooing was a widespread practice in eastern parts of the Ottoman Empire and the northern Levant at that time. Many ethnic groups, including Kurds, Turks, Arabs and Yazidis adorned their bodies with tattoos. However, in Armenian culture, tattooing was not common. Armenians would only receive a cross tattoo on their arms when they undertook on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Although tattoos are typically a form of self-expression, during the genocide, they were used as a means of assimilation and exclusion.³³ Rebecca Jinks also describes tattooing as a form of “degrading slavery” that had lasting moral and racial effects on the women who were held captive.³⁴ It was also a method of stigmatizing Armenian women, as tattoos evoked a sense of sexual subjugation and corruption of innocence and purity. Many poor girls were often unable to return home due to the stigma they carried on their faces, unable to expose themselves to their countrymen’s eyes.³⁵ The tattoo evolved to symbolize both a tangible injury and a metaphorical scar that remained perpetually unhealed.

Holding his grandmother’s photograph, I waited for Sarkis to guide me to the Armenian cemetery. After he changed out of his priestly attire, we left his home. The cemetery was conveniently close to his house and very clean. I read some Armenian names on the tombstones and asked Sarkis if he knew any nice stories about the Armenians who used to live in Arapgir. Since he did not understand my question, he whispered, “*they were our dear people.*” I looked at his face posing a question, “*What do people call you here?*” He replied with a smile, “*they call me Sarkis.*” My second question followed, “*Is Sarkis the name on your identity card?*” He nodded and showed his card to me with a vacant expression. Reading his Turkish name, “Lutfi,” on the card created a sense of dissonance and I asked, “*Sarkis, are you literate?*” or “*Can you read and write?*” He simply answered, “*No.*”

Soon after our visit to the cemetery, Sarkis agreed to accompany me to the village of Shepik. He cheered up like a child as “*Let’s go! Let’s go! I miss Uncle Papgen so much!*”

*Papgen Y. – A Life Beyond Words*³⁶

Because Papgen was old and unable to get out of bed due to his illness, Sarkis opened the front door, and we entered together. Papgen seemed pleased to have visitors. After Sarkis introduced me to him, he asked, “*Is this girl a dajik?*”³⁷

32 Ulrike Luise Glum, “The Tattoos of Armenian Genocide Survivors: Inscribing the Female Body as a Practice of Regulation,” *Journal for Religion, Film and Media* 7, no. 1 (2021): 124.

33 Ibid.

34 Rebecca Jinks, “‘Marks Hard to Erase’: The Troubled Reclamation of ‘Absorbed’ Armenian Women, 1919–1927,” *The American Historical Review* 123, no. 1 (2018): 105.

35 Ibid.

36 Papgen, interviewed by author, Shepik village, June 27, 2021, 2:20 pm, two and a half hour duration with short breaks.

37 A term used by Armenians in Turkey to refer to Turks.

One hundred and two-year-old man, Papgen, introduced himself as the only second-generation Armenian alive. He stated that he had a son who was a well-known poet in the community. Despite living in the village away from his son and daughter in Istanbul, he said he called them almost every day. Following the unfortunate passing of his sister half a decade ago, Papgen remained completely alone in the village house.

He looked at me with a slightly shy expression and said, “*What can I tell you?*” I kindly detailed him the nature and purpose of the project. After that, I requested him to tell me some stories related to his family, relatives or neighbors as far as he remembered. While I initially had less expectations due to his age and, he unpacked a multiple of stories that his memory had preserved for many years. They flowed like a river during our deep conversation.

“*If you ask about the past, sadness is always at the door*” Papgen murmured with his raspy voice. Then continued, “*My father always questioned why God ignored evil during the Armenian Genocide. I wondered what the answer could be throughout my entire life.*” Afterwards, he shared his sadness about the diminishing number of Armenians in Turkey. He assumed it was because of the ongoing oppression in the country. Since they lost their freedom long ago, they were in a climate of fear. Many Armenians changed their surnames to avoid revealing their true identity. Papgen also adopted a Turkish name to facilitate his bureaucratic processes in the city.

He articulated his interest in history and shared a somber personal experience with me:

Once, I had my mind to visit the large inn called as the “Arnaud Inn” in a nearby small district close to Kemaliye. The inn’s name attracted my curiosity, particularly because, to the best of my knowledge, there were no Albanians residing in that area. It did not take me long time to realize the unsettling truth that the inn was converted from a magnificent Armenian church and named “Arnaud Inn.” Yet, I still don’t understand, what have we done to deserve this? Even before 1915, the Sultan was taking actions to incite the people in the East against the Armenians. If the Sultan of the empire ordered it, what would the subjects do?

Aysenur Korkmaz explores the extent of violence targeted towards Armenians before the 1915 genocide, namely, during the Hamidian massacres of 1894-1896.³⁸ She argues that these events represented a pivotal moment in late Ottoman history. A significant number of individuals lost their lives in the massacres carried out by the Ottoman army and Kurdish militia. Additionally, the Sultan imposed heavy taxes on Armenian peasants and turned a blind eye to the subsequent atrocities committed by Kurdish tribes. The

38 Aysenur Korkmaz, “The Hamidian Massacres: Gendered Violence, Biopolitics and National Honour,” in *Collective and State Violence in Turkey: The Construction of a National Identity from Empire to Nation-State*, ed. Stephan H. Astourian and Raymond H. Kevorkian (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2021), 97-121.

outcome of these massacres was the death of at least one hundred thousand Armenians, leaving around fifty thousand children orphaned.³⁹

Papgen's vast knowledge and strong memory were astonishing, prompting me to continue asking more questions about the fate of his family. Despite feeling weak, he was determined to share the narrative of his family's experience. "Well," he continued:

When the earlier massacres ceased, the villagers who had been hiding in the mountains and caves returned to their homes. Unfortunately, they were unaware that the worst was yet to come. About twenty years later during the 1915 genocide, the gendarmes rounded up eight hundred Armenians near our village, in the Agin region and marched them to the edge of the Euphrates.

He paused, took a deep breath as if reliving the moment, and described how the gendarmes had executed the captured Armenians, including his grandfather Kirkor, with firing squads. Meanwhile, a Muslim neighbor named Haci Effendi sheltered Papgen's father and uncle in his barn. However, when the gendarmes arrived in the village searching for more Armenians, a fellow villager reported Haci Effendi for hiding the two children. Shortly thereafter, the gendarmes swiftly raided Haci Effendi's house.

Haci Effendi brought the children to the gendarmes and defended himself against the rumors saying, "Well, I pitied the boys because we shared each other's bread with their family." Papgen continued the story, his eyes lighting up, "Fortunately, the gendarmes were in a hurry to catch up with the others, so they left my father and uncle with Haci Effendi".

Papgen recounted the fate of his father and uncle as follows:

After my father and uncle sought shelter in that house for a while, a man from Pulkoy discovered that there were two Armenian boys in Haci's house. He then approached Haci Effendi and asked to take my father as a servant. Without hesitation, Haci Effendi greeted to the offer.

Richard Hovannisian investigates this incident in the context of Muslims who, for various reasons, played a role in rescuing Armenian lives during the genocide.⁴⁰ Hovannisian discusses that in rural societies, the families operated as economic units, and accounts of Armenian family life before the genocide suggest that children often helped with tasks like tend to livestock, farming, cooking, weaving, and other domestic duties. As a result, outsiders stood to benefit from the additional help provided by Armenian children's unpaid labor. Nazan Maksudyan argues that a significant number of Armenian boys and girls were placed in state-run orphanages, where they were mainly used as

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Richard Hovannisian, "Intervention and Shades of Altruism during the Armenian Genocide," in *The Armenian Genocide: History, Politics, Ethics*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 176.

laborers. These labor roles were often assigned based on their gender.⁴¹ In contrast to state orphanages for boys, the ones designed for girls were equipped with facilities for sewing, needlework, and various other handicrafts. Utilizing this gender-specific division of labor, converted Armenian girls were allocated to Muslim households, while converted boys were sent to work in factories, workshops, ranches, and small businesses across Istanbul and Anatolia. It was customary to assign Turkish names to these children, prohibit them from speaking Armenian, and perform circumcision on boys, all aimed at raising them as Muslim Turks within these institutions.⁴² Thus, the distinct treatment of Armenian orphaned girls and boys in state institutions showcases how girls were taught domestic skills while boys were assigned to various industries. The process included a deliberate effort to assimilate them into Turkish Muslim culture by changing their names, language, and religious practices. As a consequence of forced transfers and marriages, thousands of Armenian women and children were absorbed into the perpetrating group. Young girls and boys were placed in government-run orphanages or Muslim households. Boys were mainly assigned to work in factories, workshops, farms, and small businesses, or were taken by Muslims from deportation caravans. Meanwhile, girls and young women were often forcibly married to Muslims.⁴³

Umit Kurt emphasizes that genocide involves more than just the destruction of a specific group; it is a process that involves the rebuilding of society in place of the destroyed group.⁴⁴ He explains that the impact of is far-reaching, not only resulting in the destruction of a particular group but also triggering a complex process of societal reconstruction in its aftermath. This highlights the deep and lasting scars left on both the victims and the perpetrators. Also, it is characterized by the forced adoption of the lifestyle, culture, and institutions of a dominant and oppressive group by a targeted group, nation, or religious community.⁴⁵ During the Armenian Genocide, abducting children and assimilation were clearly convenient methods of achieving this goal. Similarly, Ekmekcioglu sheds light on Muslim households that usually used abducted boys as slaves or servants.⁴⁶ A typical way Armenians became assimilated was by changing their religion, names, and languages (Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic etc.). While narrating the fate of his family, Papgen also mentioned the Turkish name of his father, Bunyamin. It seemed as if he had experienced the events just yesterday as he continued to speak, “*Let me talk a little bit about women in my family. My mother, aunts, uncle and my grandmother survived the*

41 Nazan Maksudyan, “The Armenian Genocide and Survival Narratives of Children,” *Childhood Vulnerability Journal* 1, no. 1-3 (2018): 5.

42 Ibid.

43 Edita Gzoyan and Regina Galustyan, “Forced Marriages as a Tool of Genocide: the Armenian Case,” *The International Journal of Human Rights* 25, no. 10 (2021): 1730.

44 Umit Kurt, “Cultural Erasure: The Absorption and Forced Conversion of Armenian Women and Children, 1915- 1916”, *Études arméniennes contemporaines* 7 (2016): 26.

45 Ibid.

46 Lerna Ekmekcioglu, “A Climate for Abduction, a Climate for Redemption: The Politics of Inclusion during and after the Armenian Genocide,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55, no. 3 (2013): 529.

genocide by hiding in a secret room in their house.” However, his uncle and one of his aunts were captured and deported to the Syrian desert. By a rather interesting coincidence, the man who took Papgen’s father from Haci later brought his mother into the house as a servant and, after some time, married her to Papgen’s father.

His father had a sister who also survived the Armenian Genocide and whose story was truly heartbreaking. When the Armenian men in the village were attacked, Kurdish men from the neighboring village of Horoch arrived with the intention of taking the remaining women.

In response to the women’s strong resistance, they forced them, including Papgen’s aunt, to march from the hill to the banks of the Euphrates River. Tragically, they undressed them and then cruelly threw them into the stream. Sexual violence played a central role in degrading and dehumanizing during the Armenian Genocide.⁴⁷ Rape, for instance, served as a means for perpetrators to display, communicate, produce or maintain dominance over Armenians, both as individuals and as communities.⁴⁸ It was also demonstrated by the common practice of making women undress before their execution to humiliate them and arouse perpetrators.⁴⁹ As the cruelty became unbearable for his aunt, she reacted more swiftly than the attackers, leaping into the river. Her suicide represented an act of resistance, symbolizing her refusal to let the perpetrators have power over her life and body. The concept of suicide in such cases is no longer regarded as a sinful death but rather as a heroic act.⁵⁰ Vahe Tachjian asserts that in Armenian culture, a conventional heroine was often seen as either the woman who instructed her child the Armenian alphabet in a desert setting or the woman who deliberately leaped from a steep cliff into the Euphrates to avoid being captured by the perpetrators.⁵¹ In most cases, this was done out of desperation, fear or as a result of sexual abuse and having witnessed the murder of a close relative. To illustrate women’s feelings concerning sexual abuse, Tachjian provides a striking example about a young Korean girl who was captured by the Japanese army and forced into prostitution in WWII. After the Japanese defeat, at the end of her story, she explained her fear of returning to Korea as *“How can I go back home and meet my family with this dirty body?”*⁵²

Papgen’s aunt was swept ashore by the Euphrates River when the current pushed her into a hollow at the edge. Papgen continued:

My aunt felt very helpless and did not know what to do. At that moment, a man on horseback noticed her walking in her wet clothes.

47 Matthias Bjornlund, “‘A Fate Worse Than Dying’: Sexual Violence During the Armenian Genocide,” in *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe’s Twentieth Century*, ed. Dagmar Herzog (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 30.

48 Toygun Altintas, “Violence, Armenian Women, and the ‘Armenian Question’ in the Late Ottoman Empire,” *Journal of Women’s History* 34, no. 3 (2022): 14.

49 Williams, *The Complexity of Evil*, 12.

50 Bjornlund, “A Fate Worse Than Dying,” 27.

51 Vahe Tachjian, “Gender, Nationalism, Exclusion,” 76.

52 Ibid.

He approached her and asked what had happened. My aunt was so exhausted that she simply told him to kill her if he intended to harm her. The man turned out to be the Imam of a nearby village and he gazed at my aunt with compassion in his eyes.

The situation of Papgen's aunt, as mentioned in Hermann Cohen's statement "*man discovers his Mitmensch*⁵³ not through suffering but in suffering,"⁵⁴ highlights the profound nature of human empathy and connection. Often, it requires experiencing of hardships together to truly understand and appreciate one another. "*The Imam got my aunt on his horse and he said, 'God let you live; how can I kill you!'*" George N. Shirinian has uncovered instances of "humanity" amidst the genocide in his research, citing a report from a German public official involved with the Baghdad Railway.⁵⁵ In this report, Shirinian illustrates that even Muslims expressed their disapproval of the Armenian atrocities.⁵⁶ Similarly, Papgen concluded his narrative, "*you see, we can't generalize and say everyone is cruel; there are compassionate people among them,*" with his words conveying a mix of weariness and relief.

Dersim

I set out towards the third city, Tunceli, that was formerly called Dersim. The Turkish Parliament issued a decree specifically for Dersim and officially renamed it Tunceli in 1935.⁵⁷ However, from the perspective of the wide population, it is of great importance to still refer to the city as "Dersim" as a matter of principle.

When I arrived in Dersim, the owner of a bookstore in the city center gave me a piece of information about the socio-economic and cultural structure of the city. He mentioned that the majority of the people living in the city have Armenian ancestry, either through their mothers or fathers. However, he explained that gradually, the Armenians of Dersim embraced Alevism and nearly forgot their origins. Instead, Alevism became a defining identity for them, and the term "Armenian" or "Armenianness" remained merely a word or expression. In an interview with Yetvart Danzikyan for Agos newspaper, Kazim Gundogan, the author of a newly published book on this subject, focused that Armenians did not willingly welcome Alevism, but were instead compelled to do so.⁵⁸ Their religious leaders

53 The German word *Mitmensch* means "fellow human being," see:

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/de/worterbuch/deutsch-englisch/mitmensch>, accessed 04.10.2023.

54 Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995), 147.

55 George N. Shirinian, "Turks Who Saved Armenians: Righteous Muslims during the Armenian Genocide," *Genocide Studies International* 9, no. 2 (2015): 221.

56 Ibid.

57 Ulker Sozen, "Culture, Politics and Contested Identity among the 'Kurdish' Alevis of Dersim: The Case of the Munzur Culture and Nature Festival," *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies* 6, no. 1 (2019): 65.

58 Yetvart Danzikyan, "Alevileş(tiril)miş Ermeniler konuşuyor" ["Alevised Armenians speak out"], *Agos*, December 17 2022, <https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/27923/aleviles-tiril-mis-ermeniler-konusuyor>, accessed 04.11.2023.

were exterminated, and the state intentionally destroyed their places of worship, including churches and monasteries where they could practice their faith. Furthermore, the local community did not protect the remaining churches and monasteries; rather they used stones from these religious sites in the construction of homes and schools: “*To the extent that when Armenians are mentioned in some parts of Dersim, the first thing that comes to mind is the “Armenian Gold,” which describes this situation. And in the quest to find and possess this gold, almost no church, monastery ruin, or Armenian grave was left untouched.*”⁵⁹

Similar to the previous regions I visited for my interviews; Armenian heritage here also meant only the gold that was believed to have been buried before the exile. Then, the owner of the bookshop introduced me to a third-generation Armenian woman who was a teacher at the Fine Arts High School.

*Saadet E. – “The Cut” in her Family History*⁶⁰

Saadet E. introduced herself as holding the unique status of being the eldest granddaughter in a family with Armenian origins on both her maternal and paternal sides. In addition to openly acknowledging her Armenian roots, she also expressed a deep sense of pride in her Armenian identity.

Saadet told me that her hometown was *Adiyaman*, but she had spent several years working as a teacher in Dersim. She unexpectedly discovered her being Armenian by eavesdropping on a conversation between her aunt and mother. They spoke openly because Saadet was supposed to be asleep. There was a “conspiracy of silence”⁶¹ in the family. This concept refers to an unspoken agreement within a family to avoid discussing certain traumatic experiences and keeping them separate from their daily lives.⁶² After that, Saadet learned the full chronicle of her family’s history from her father’s elder sister. She was excited to share her family’s record and expressed her desire to prioritize her grandfather’s:

My grandfather was originally an Armenian man named Dikran from Malazgirt, a town in the city of Mush. His house was located on a hill just above the village, which allowed him to flee with his cousin when the village was set on fire during the events of 1915.

Her grandfather and his cousin embarked on a long and unfamiliar journey searching for shelter among the mountains and abandoned areas. However, they faced countless challenges, such as fear, bouts of hunger, and thirst as they made their way through these isolated paths.

59 Ibid.

60 Saadet, interviewed by author, Sharoglu Hotel cafe, June 29, 2021, 11:15 am, one and a half hour duration.

61 Hadas Wiseman, Einat Metz, and Jacques Barber, “Anger, Guilt, and Intergenerational Communication of Trauma in the Interpersonal Narratives of Second-Generation Holocaust Survivors,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 76, no. 2 (2006): 178.

62 Ibid.

She paused her narrative for a moment and suggested watching the movie “The Cut,” directed by Fatih Akin. Following her realization of her Armenian ancestry, the film held a much deeper significance for her. She recalled that one of the characters in the movie, named Dikran, was portrayed as a survivor of the Armenian Genocide. Interestingly, her own grandfather shared the name Dikran. In the film, the character Dikran faced extreme hunger while escaping from those responsible for the genocide, resorting to consuming the bones of deceased animals found along the road or between the railroad tracks. Saadet was deeply moved upon witnessing a scene in the movie that closely mirrored her grandfather’s ordeal. In a parallel to the film’s character, her grandfather and his cousin also stumbled upon animal bones in the fields while in hiding. They crushed the bones into a powder using stones, just as depicted in the movie, to consume in the cave they had found. After emerging from the cave, they arrived in *Diyarbakir* in a miserable condition and were met with an unfortunate fate. Her grandfather’s cousin went out to find food, but he never returned. When her grandfather searched in panic for his cousin, people suggested he had been taken to a missionary orphanage that cared for orphaned Armenian children. However, her grandfather could not call out his cousin’s name in the streets for fear of revealing himself. Saadet also noted that the cousin was indeed found in the street and taken to the orphanage because, years later, they found traces of him in the United States.

Keith David Watenpaugh suggests that orphanages were present in every major urban center in the Ottoman Empire.⁶³ He also indicates that late Ottoman social policy involved converting orphans to Sunni Islam, the empire’s official religion. Many Armenian orphans sought refuge with American missionaries,⁶⁴ showing how the state aimed to assimilate orphaned children into Sunni Islam and highlighting the influence of the state on its subjects’ religious identity. Additionally, the significant presence and impact of American missionaries in caring for and supporting Armenian orphans may have provided a counterbalancing influence on the religious and cultural landscape of the era.

Saadet sighed and continued, “*I can’t help but imagine how different our destinies would have been if the genocide never happened. I might have gone to a non-Muslim school and developed different skills.*” She envisioned a life where the genocide had not occurred, understanding how the devastation of a nation can completely alter the future and lifestyles of future generations. Despite the challenges, she was grateful for Dikran’s survival, which allowed her to build a large family of her own. Similarly, in a newspaper interview, Fatih Akin explains that genocide does not end with the loss of human lives; rather, it marks the beginning of a new journey that includes both material and spiritual aspects.⁶⁵

63 Keith David Watenpaugh, “‘Are There any Children for Sale?’: Genocide and the Transfer of Armenian Children (1915-1922),” *Journal of Human Rights* 12, no. 3 (2013): 283-295.

64 Selim Deringil, “Your Religion is Worn and Outdated,” *Études arméniennes contemporaines* 12 (2019): 33-65.

65 Ovgu Gokce, Fatih Akin’la ‘Kesik’ Üzerine: “Öfkeyi Azaltmak,” [Fatih Akin on ‘The Cut’: ‘Reducing Anger’], *Altyazı*, December 5 2014, <https://altyazi.net/soylesiler/tarihimizde-bir-kesik-fatih-akinla-cut-uzerine/> accessed 19.12.2022.

Saadet continued her story about her grandfather, Dikran. Despite surviving the genocide and making it safely to *Kahta*, a district of Adiyaman, his life was still plagued by misfortune. However, a ray of hope appeared when he met an Armenian merchant who brought astonishing news: there was a woman in Diyarbekir who looked like Dikran.

Saadet kept on, “*When my grandfather reached the location described by the Armenian merchant, he gently knocked on the door and found his uncle’s daughter standing directly before him.*” However, the woman did not recognize Dikran, as she had lost her sanity after being abducted and forced into marriage with the son of a Kurdish tribal leader. As discussed in the research by Edita Gzoyan and Regina Galustyan, the prevalence of violence during abductions made young women and girls particularly susceptible to forced marriages.⁶⁶ They experienced severe mental trauma from coerced into marriage, leading to lasting effects on their sanity. This highlights how the pervasive violence surrounding their abductions made them vulnerable to forced marriages, revealing the significant mental trauma they endured in such coercive environments, resulting in lasting and harmful effects on their mental health. In her concluding remarks, Saadet underlined her deep satisfaction in discovering her Armenian roots.

*Enver D. – Sorrow in the Tales*⁶⁷

Saadet led me to Enver’s house, where he was hosting a family get-together with his brothers and their families. Enver began the gathering by introducing himself and his family, noting that he is the second oldest among his three brothers. His younger brother lived next door to Enver’s house. Their elder brother, on the other hand, revealed that he had immigrated to a foreign country many years ago. Unlike Enver and their younger brother, he had an Armenian name. He shared that after discovering his true identity, he was baptized in an Armenian church. On the other hand, Enver expressed his frustration, highlighting that the existing political oppression and cultural conditions in the country created substantial obstacles for Armenians to come together as a cohesive community. From his perspective, Enver believed that the Armenian community was predominantly concentrated in Istanbul, unaware of the substantial Armenian population residing in various other regions. His deepest regret was reserved for his own homeland. He also emphasized the importance of teaching the languages and religions of minority groups in schools to ensure the preservation of their cultures.

Enver’s response to my inquiry about the discovery of his Armenian heritage was a poignant narrative. He recalled:

I was around six or seven years old when I first learned about my Armenian identity. The kids I played with outside would call me ‘son of gavur (infidel)’ and warn me not to cheat in our games, using that

⁶⁶ Gzoyan, Galustyan, “Forced Marriages,” 1729.

⁶⁷ Enver, interviewed by author, in the garden of his house, June 29, 2021, 1:50 pm, two and a half hours total with a coffee break.

term. So, I approached my mother and asked her what ‘gavur’ meant. She explained it to me in a way that a child could understand.

In his narrative, Enver depicted his family as quite large, with numerous members. When his family escaped the Hamidian massacres, the *aghas* from the Dersim region of their village provided protection. Gradually, his family assimilated into the Alevi community, adopting the Alevi faith while also preserving some enduring Armenian traditions. He illustrated this by sharing a story from his wife’s family: “*My wife and her family followed the Alevi faith, but my wife always believed that her mother was an Armenian who embraced the Alevi faith. This belief may have stemmed from the fact that her mother would make the sign of the cross before baking bread.*”

In her memoir *My Grandmother*, Fethiye Cetin recounted a similar story. Years later, Cetin obtained information about her grandmother Seher’s identity and learned that her real name was Hranush. Her grandmother was one of the thousands of children who were converted and made to forget their identities. Cetin also mentioned that after her grandmother’s passing, she discovered that her grandmother had quietly maintained Armenian traditions in her home, including the tradition of baking *choreg*⁶⁸ at Easter,⁶⁹ without openly revealing them to anyone.

When I asked Enver about his definition of identity and belonging in either the Alevi or Armenian community, he stated that in Dersim, Armenians primarily shaped their traditions, rituals or social roles through their Alevi beliefs, not intending the denial of their origins. Contrary to this, both identities added unique values and colors to their lives. Moreover, he acknowledged his deepest respect for the women who struggled with several problems in his family. As we were about to leave their house, he wanted to share a tale that was passed to him through generations:

Let me tell you a story that I have heard from my elders. When an Armenian mother and her daughter finally arrived at the Syrian desert, Deir-ez Zor, they were extremely hungry. As they sat among the crowd in a corner, they witnessed another Armenian mother plucking and eating the flesh of her deceased child. Overwhelmed by their own hunger, the starving mother mustered the courage to approach the grieving mother and ask for a small portion of the dead child’s flesh. To her dismay, the other mother vehemently refused, reacting with anger. The little girl, sensing her mother’s disappointment, turned to her and said, “Don’t be sad, mommy. When I die, don’t give her my flesh!”

68 “Çöreg” is defined here as a round loaf of bread. This definition is based on the author’s interpretation and understanding of the term as used in the local context.

69 Fethiye Cetin, *My Grandmother: A Memoir* (New York: Verso Books, 2021), 75.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the journey undertaken in the pursuit of understanding the past, as recounted in this article, has shed light on the enduring legacy of the Armenian Genocide in the collective memory of individuals residing in Turkey. The choice of Erzrnka, Malatya, and Dersim provinces as research locations, guided by the meticulous investigation of place names, revealed not only the geographical markers of Armenian presence but also the depth of historical connections.

The study focused on exploring post-memories, which are stories and accounts passed down through generations, related to the Armenian Genocide. These stories included persecution not only of Armenian men and children, but also the cultural, physical or sexual violence against women that contributed to the destruction of the community as a whole. The narratives shared by Armenian interviewees, rooted in their family histories, vividly portrayed of the suffering endured by Armenian women during that tragic period. These stories served as a poignant reminder of the importance of preserving historical memory and acknowledging the pain experienced by past generations. The stories of Turkish Muslim intermediaries encountered along the way were also included, providing insight into the complex layers of memory surrounding Armenian heritage.

Therefore, it is crucial to understand that this type of violence against women is an integral element of genocide while feeling the depth in the words of Fethiye Cetin's grandmother, "*Let those days go and never come back.*"⁷⁰

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⁷⁰ Cetin, *My Grandmother*, 76.

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LEGAL AND POLITICAL ASPECTS OF THE DE-ARMENIZATION OF NAGORNO-KARABAKH: ETHNIC CLEANSING, GENOCIDE, FORCED DISPLACEMENT OR VOLUNTARY EXODUS?

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Abstract

From September 2020 to September 2023, Azerbaijan applied a combination of hard and soft tactics, military and hybrid methods to depopulate Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) of its indigenous Armenian population.

Different terms are used by various official, policy and academic circles to describe the de-Armenization of Nagorno-Karabakh. The choice of term often depends on their stance, beliefs, interests and expertise. These terms include “genocide”, “ethnic cleansing”, “forced displacement”, “displacement”, “exodus”, “voluntary exodus”, “migration”, among others. Some also use terms that mock or deny the genocide and ethnic cleansing.

This article explores the most accurate terms to describe the de-Armenization of Nagorno-Karabakh. It does this by comparing various perspectives and examining the compliance of the used terms with those implied in international law and relations, as well as their political applicability. The article also revisits the methods and scenarios employed by Azerbaijan, which resulted in the depopulation of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians. The combined analysis of those aspects and overwhelming evidence shows that the de-Armenization of Nagorno-Karabakh is ethnic cleansing. Legally, it also corresponds to most of the genocide criteria; however, it may be a difficult claim politically and compared with other ongoing conflicts.

Keywords: ethnic cleansing, genocide, forced displacement, Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh, Armenians, Azerbaijan

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Various Positions and Perspectives

Armenian officials, including the diplomatic corps,¹ most of the civil society, as well as many non-Armenians in international political,² policy³ and academic circles refer to the displacement of Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh and the events leading to it as an “ethnic cleansing”. On 16 April 2024, during the hearing in relation to the Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) (Armenia v. Azerbaijan) filed in September 2021,⁴ Armenia urged the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to hold Azerbaijan responsible for ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh. Yeghishe Kirakosyan, Armenia’s official representative for international legal cases stated during the ICJ hearing in relation to Armenia’s case under the CERD: “After threatening to do so for years, Azerbaijan has completed the ethnic cleansing of the region and is now systematically erasing all traces of ethnic Armenians’ presence.”⁵

According to other scholars, it is questionable “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.”⁶ Some Armenians, especially from Nagorno-Karabakh⁷ and the Diaspora, as well as international human rights lawyers and watchdogs, also disagree with the term “ethnic cleansing”. They characterize the forced displacement of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh as a genocide, and as such, a continuation of the Armenian Genocide carried out by the Ottoman Empire and culminating in 1915, largely recognized as such by the governments and parliaments of many countries. In his report published in August 2023, the first prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Luis Ocampo Moreno, called the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh a genocide when it reached its critical stage, became total, and started

1 Mirzoyan emphasized that Nagorno-Karabakh was factually subjected to ethnic cleansing, despite numerous targeted appeals of international partners, including the USA, *Aravot*, 11 October 2023, <https://en.aravot.am/2023/10/11/334975/>, accessed 18.10.2023.

2 H.R.5686 - Preventing Ethnic Cleansing and Atrocities in Nagorno-Karabakh Act of 2023 118th Congress (2023-2024), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/5686/text?s=1&r=93>, accessed 19.12.2023.

3 David J. Scheffer, “Ethnic Cleansing is Happening in Nagorno-Karabakh. How Can the World Respond?,” <https://www.cfr.org/article/ethnic-cleansing-happening-nagorno-karabakh-how-can-world-respond#:~:text=The%20ethnic%20Armenian%20population%20of,have%20fled%20west%20to%20Armenia>, accessed 10.11.2023.

4 “Application instituting proceedings and request for the indication of provisional measures,” *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>, accessed 11.12.2023.

5 Yeghishe Kirakosyan Represents Armenia in Case Against Azerbaijan at ICJ, *The Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, 18 April 2024, <https://mirrorspectator.com/2024/04/18/yeghishe-kirakosyan-represents-armenia-in-case-against-azerbaijan-at-icj/>, accessed 11.05.2024.

6 Edita G. Gzoyan, Svetah A. Chakhmakhchyan, and Edgar S. Meyroyan, “Ethnic Cleansing in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh): Issues of Definition and Criminal Responsibility,” *International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies* 8, no. 2 (2023): 77.

7 Stepanyan and Beglaryan advocate for rights and safe return of Artsakh’s Armenians. ANCA News, *Armenian Weekly*, 16 February 2024, <https://armenianweekly.com/2024/02/16/stepanyan-and-beglaryan-advocate-for-rights-and-safe-return-of-artsakhs-armenians/>, accessed 12.05.2024.

evolving into a genocide through starvation. He repeated the same opinion in September 2023, right in the aftermath of Azerbaijan's military offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh.⁸

He took it further in May 2024, publishing an article suggesting the International Criminal Court consider the genocide petition of Armenian human rights defenders because it is not only about the Armenian community in Nagorno-Karabakh but different forms of genocide committed against Armenians in Armenia itself.⁹ The petition was submitted to the ICC by the Center for Truth and Justice (CFTJ) on 18 April 2024,¹⁰ based on their detailed report on "The Planning, Inciting, Ordering, Instigating, and Implementing of Genocide by President Ilham Aliyev and Other High Ranking Officials" to prove the state-planned nature of Azerbaijan's actions, which is another criterion under the Genocide Convention.¹¹

The Lemkin Institute uses both terms – genocide and ethnic cleansing – for the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. Its director, Dr. Elisa von Joeden-Forge, urges the international community to call it a genocide.¹² She refers to the impossible conditions for livelihood created by Azerbaijan for Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians and to the threats and Armenophobic language used by Azerbaijan's President Aliyev and other key figures as indicators of genocidal intent.¹³ She has called it "one of the most successful genocides in history."¹⁴

The European Parliament (EP) used the term "ethnic cleansing" in the resolutions adopted in October 2023¹⁵ and March 2024.¹⁶ The resolution adopted by the Parliamentary

8 Luis Ocampo Moreno, "A Genocide is Unfolding in Nagorno-Karabakh," *Washington Post*, 22 September 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/09/22/nagorno-karabakh-genocide-armenia/>, accessed 12.11.2023.

9 Luis Moreno Ocampo, "The ICC Should Consider the New Armenian Genocide Petition," *Politico*, 10 May 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/icc-armenian-genocide-nagorno-karabakh-azerbaijan-ilham-aliyev/>, accessed 12.05.2024.

10 Molly Quell and Mike Corder, "Armenian Victims Group Asks International Criminal Court to Investigate Genocide Claim," *Associated Press*, 18 April 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/armenia-azerbaijan-genocide-claim-international-court-4331781a6213e82a78b9ce152ed8d27c>, accessed 13.05.2024.

11 "The Planning, Inciting, Ordering, Instigating, and Implementing of Genocide by President Ilham Aliyev and Other High Ranking Officials," *Center for Truth & Justice*, 18 April 2024, <https://www.cftjustice.org/the-planning-inciting-ordering-instigating-and-implementing-of-genocide-by-president-ilham-aliyev-and-other-high-ranking-officials/>, accessed 13.05.2024.

12 "Forced Deportation in Nagorno Karabakh is Genocide: Lemkin Institute Director," 1 May 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jHtokNiQln4>, accessed 14.05.2024.

13 Davit Mamyán, "Lemkin Institute Director Urges to Call Azerbaijan's Actions in Karabakh as Genocide and Apply Relevant Convention," *Armenpress*, 8 April 2024, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1134238.html>, accessed 14.05.2024.

14 Elisa von Joeden-Forgey, "Why Prevention Fails: Chronicling the Genocide in Artsakh," *International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies* 8, no. 2 (2023): 87.

15 P9_TA(2024)0158 Closer ties between the EU and Armenia and the need for a peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia European Parliament resolution of 13 March 2024 on closer ties between the EU and Armenia and the need for a peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia (2024/2580(RSP)), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0158_EN.pdf, accessed 14.04.2024.

16 "European Parliament resolution of 5 October 2023 on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh after Azerbaijan's attack and the continuing threats against Armenia (2023/2879(RSP))," *European Parliament*, 5 October 2023, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0356_EN.html, accessed 14.10.2024.

Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in October 2023, regrets the “long-standing and continuing failure on the part of the authorities of Azerbaijan to reassure the Armenian population of the region of their safety and the full respect of their rights”, which has led to “allegations and reasonable suspicion that this can amount to ethnic cleansing”.¹⁷ They urge the creation of a climate of trust and conditions to ensure the return of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh. However, Armenians are not likely to return without minimal conditions, such as an international multilateral (UN or EU) presence and a level of self-governance, to which Azerbaijan will not agree.¹⁸

The U.S.,¹⁹ the EU²⁰ and the governments of its member states, and international intergovernmental organizations like the UN use more neutral and reserved language. They use terms like “displacement” or “exodus” to describe the de-Armenization of Nagorno-Karabakh. The UNHCR refers to Armenians who have fled Nagorno-Karabakh as “refugees” or “refugee-like persons”.²¹ This suggests forced displacement under the Refugee Convention, which defines refugees as those “unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality[...]”.²²

Azerbaijan denies the allegations of ethnic cleansing of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh. After the mass exodus of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan and its lobbyists began asserting that the exodus of Armenians is a “personal and individual decision,”²³ and they have rejected Azerbaijan’s offer of “reintegration”.²⁴ During the blockade leading to breaking resilience of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh before the

17 “PACE Calls on Azerbaijan to ‘Prove its Goodwill’ Towards the Armenian Population of Nagorno-Karabakh,” *Council of Europe*, Parliamentary Assembly session, 13 October 2023, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/pace-calls-on-azerbaijan-to-prove-its-goodwill-towards-the-armenian-population-of-nagorno-karabakh>, accessed 14.11.2023.

18 Sossi Tatikyan, “Can the International Community Reverse the Ethnic Cleansing of Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh? How to Overcome the Failure of Preventive Diplomacy and Humanitarianism? The Role of the U.S., EU and UN,” Part 2, *EVN Report*, 17 October 2023, <https://evnreport.com/politics/can-the-international-community-reverse-the-ethnic-cleansing-of-armenians-of-nagorno-karabakh-part-2/>, accessed 15.11.2023.

19 Suren Sargsyan, “Key Takeaways from an Interview with US Ambassador Kvien,” *The Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, 14 April 2024, <https://mirrorspectator.com/2024/04/14/key-takeaways-from-an-interview-with-us-ambassador-kvien/>, accessed 15.05.2024.

20 “Azerbaijan: Statement by the Spokesperson on the Displacement of People from Nagorno-Karabakh,” *European Union External Action*, 29 September 2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/azerbaijan-statement-spokesperson-displacement-people-nagorno-karabakh-0_en, accessed 15.10.2023.

21 “UNHCR Increasingly Concerned for Refugees Fleeing Karabakh Region,” *UNHCR*, 23 September 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/09/1141457>, accessed 15.10.2023.

22 “The 1951 Refugee Convention,” *UNHCR*, <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-are/1951-refugee-convention>, accessed 15.10.2023.

23 Jack Parrock, “Armenians Leaving ‘in a Free Manner:’ Azerbaijan Official,” *DW*, 26 September 2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/armenians-leaving-in-a-free-manner-azerbaijan-presidential-advisor/video-66932505>, accessed 16.10.2023.

24 Sossi Tatikyan, “‘Integration’ of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians. A Tool for Subjugation and Ethnic Cleansing by Azerbaijan,” Part I, *EVN Report*, 28 July 2023, <https://evnreport.com/politics/integration-of-nagorno-karabakh-armenians-a-tool-for-subjugation-and-ethnic-cleansing-by-azerbaijan/>, accessed 16.08.2023.

military offensive, Azerbaijan and its advocates were denying the fact of the blockade through disinformation and false narratives. Moreover, Baku mocked the situation, claiming that it is self-imposed, for which Azerbaijani propagandists even invented the term “self-genocide”.²⁵

However, as underlined in the Elements of Crimes of the International Criminal Court, “the term ‘forcibly’ is not restricted to physical force, but may include a 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.”²⁶

Azerbaijani narratives have implied that Azerbaijan conducted military operations against Armenians without harming civilians. They suggested that Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians feared retaliation by Azerbaijan for the first Karabakh war and harbored “ethnic hatred to Azerbaijanis, and that is why they did not want to co-exist with them.”²⁷ Earlier, the Azerbaijani propaganda machine was trying to prove throughout the nine and half months of the blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh that there was no blockade, including when starvation started in July 2023.²⁸ A spokesperson of the Russian Foreign Ministry echoed the Azerbaijani perspective, claiming that there is no evidence of ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh.²⁹

On 15 April 2024, Azerbaijan urged ICJ to dismiss the Armenian case under the CERD, while continuing to pursue its mirroring case against Armenia under the same Convention.³⁰ Its experts and supporters argue for the dismissal of Armenia v. Azerbaijan case at the ICJ, denying the allegations of ethnic cleansing.³¹ This is part of Azerbaijan’s war of narratives and lawfare against Armenians.³²

25 Sossi Tatikyan, “Deliberate Starvation of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians. A Tool for Subjugation and Ethnic Cleansing by Azerbaijan,” Part II, *EVN Report*, 10 August 2023, https://evnreport.com/politics/deliberate-starvation-of-nagorno-karabakh-armenians/?fbclid=IwAR2pITwvD2ekUW3baQdo8EIOpNYYNNMCC0OQX-8zfkOIQOotUZglDJ_yyoWI, accessed 16.09.2023.

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

27 “Presidential Aide: Baku, Yerevan Working Directly on Drafting Peace Treaty,” *Caliber.az.*, 4 January 2024, <https://caliber.az/en/post/214892/>, accessed 06.01.2024.

28 Tatikyan, “Deliberate Starvation of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians,” Part II.

29 “Zakharova Has No Evidence of Ethnic Cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh: False and Manipulative Statements of the Russian Foreign Ministry,” *Fact-investigation Platform*, 12 January 2024, <https://fip.am/en/23928>, accessed 13.01.2024.

30 “Azerbaijan Asks World Court to Throw out Armenian Ethnic Cleansing Case,” *Reuters*, 15 April 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/azerbaijan-asks-world-court-throw-out-armenian-ethnic-cleansing-case-2024-04-15/>, accessed 15.04.2024.

31 Nurlan Mustafayev, “Azerbaijan v. Armenia Before the ICJ: When Military Occupation is Racial Discrimination under CERD?,” <https://cilj.co.uk/2024/04/20/azerbaijan-v-armenia-before-the-icj-when-military-occupation-is-racial-discrimination-under-cerd/>, accessed 20.04.2024.

32 Sossi Tatikyan, “Azerbaijan’s War of Narratives Against Armenians,” Narratives in Relation to Nagorno-Karabakh, Part II, *EVN Report*, 7 September 2022, <https://evnreport.com/politics/azerbaijans-war-of-narratives-against-armenians-part-ii/>, accessed 16.02.2023.

Lastly, Azerbaijan is reportedly pressuring Armenia to withdraw its claim v. Azerbaijan at the ICJ as a pre-condition for signing a peace agreement, claiming that the lawsuit indicates a territorial claim by Armenia to Azerbaijan. That demand is based on the main narrative of Azerbaijan's lawfare against Armenians, claiming that Armenia is an aggressor that occupied part of Azerbaijan's territory.³³ It relies on autocratic legalism, misusing sovereignty and territorial integrity notions to justify its methods.³⁴ This was reflected in the official statements of President Aliyev and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan in early 2024.³⁵ The latter also negatively reacted to Armenia's ratification of the Rome Statute in October 2023 and the accession of Armenia to the ICC in February 2024.³⁶

During the press conference on 12 March 2024, Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan admitted that the withdrawal of lawsuits between the two countries was being considered during peace treaty negotiations. Human rights lawyers and defenders from both conservative³⁷ and liberal³⁸ camps in Armenia have expressed strong opposition to the withdrawal of the interstate lawsuits of Armenia v. Azerbaijan from international legal bodies, such as the ICJ and the European Court of Human Rights.

Finally, those Armenian and international human rights defenders and criminal justice lawyers who suggest using the term "genocide" instead of ethnic cleansing for Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians underline that de-Armenization of Nagorno-Karabakh is the continuation of the genocidal policies carried out by the Ottoman empire at the beginning of the 20th century and it aims to continue in Armenia itself through Azerbaijan's expansionist policies manifested by its military offensives in the territory of the Republic of Armenia and occupation of part of its territory accompanied with war crimes and grave human security issues. This is also the main argument of Ocampo's article published in May 2024, urging the ICC to consider the genocide petition submitted by Armenian human rights defenders and lawyers in April 2024.³⁹

33 Sossi Tatikyan, "How Azerbaijan Deceives and Harasses the International Community: Baku's Expansionist Objectives Under the Spotlight," Part I, *EVN Report*, <https://evnreport.com/politics/how-azerbaijan-deceives-and-harasses-the-international-community/>, accessed 27.02.2024.

34 Nerses Kopalyan, "Autocratic Legalism and Azerbaijan's Abuse of Territorial Integrity," *EVN Report*, 18 August 2023, <https://evnreport.com/politics/autocratic-legalism-and-azerbajians-abuse-of-territorial-integrity/>, accessed 19.08.2023.

35 "In Azerbaijan, President Says Peace Treaty Only Possible after Amendments to Armenia's Constitution," *ConstitutionNet*, *International IDEA*, 2 February 2024, <https://constitutionnet.org/news/azerbaijan-president-says-peace-treaty-only-possible-after-amendments-armenias-constitution>, accessed 02.03.2024.

36 No:051/24, Commentary by Aykhan Hajizada, MFA Spokesperson, regarding the speech of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan during the ceremony dedicated to the accession of Armenia to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), <https://www.mfa.gov.az/en/news/no05124>, accessed 05.05.2024.

37 "Withdrawal from Lawsuits against Azerbaijan in International Courts will Cause Irreparable Damage to Armenia, Armenians," *News.am*, 18 March 2024, <https://news.am/eng/news/812811.html>, accessed 18.05.2024.

38 "On the Inadmissibility of Withdrawing Interstate Complaints of Armenia vs Azerbaijan," *Helsinki Citizens' Assembly-Vanadzor*, 18 March 2024, <https://hcav.am/en/statement-19-03-2024/>, accessed 18.05.2024.

39 Ocampo, "The ICC Should Consider the New Armenian Genocide Petition."

Meanwhile, Armenia's PM Pashinyan made an unconventional statement on the day of commemoration of the Armenian genocide in April 2024, suggesting learning lessons from the experience and transcending its trauma. Andranik Kocharyan, Head of the Defense and Security Committee of the National Assembly of Armenia, representing the ruling political faction,⁴⁰ suggested to constitute the list of the victims of the Armenian Genocide. Both statements were perceived by many as an attempt to question the Armenian Genocide, echoing some of the Turkish narratives aimed to justify it.⁴¹ They were criticized domestically, by the Armenian Diaspora, as well as by the Lemkin Institute that made an unprecedented statement in May 2024, condemning PM Pashinyan's "cryptic engagement with genocide denial".⁴² The statement urges to stand firmly against genocide and its denial while working toward acknowledging historical truths to foster healing and prevent future atrocity crimes. It suggests that it is harmful and unacceptable for the leader of a nation that has experienced genocide to engage in narratives crafted by perpetrators to deny their responsibility, not to downplay genocides, as it sets a dangerous precedent that can embolden perpetrators and diminish the urgency of preventing future atrocities.⁴³ Commenting on that statement, Ruben Rubinyan, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly from the ruling party and Armenia's Special Envoy for Armenia-Türkiye dialogue process, implied that the Lemkin Institute has been influenced by the Armenian opposition.⁴⁴

The Applicability of the Terms “Ethnic Cleansing” and “Genocide”

The term ethnic cleansing means “rendering an area ethnically homogeneous by using force or intimidation to remove from a given area persons of another ethnic or religious group, which is contrary to international law.”⁴⁵

Ethnic cleansing has not been fully recognized as an independent crime under international law. The term first appeared during the conflict in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s; it is believed to derive from a literal translation of the Serbo-Croatian

40 Arshaluys Barseghyan, “Armenian MP Accused of Promoting Genocide Denial,” *OC Media*, 16 April 2024, <https://oc-media.org/armenian-mp-accused-of-promoting-genocide-denial/>, accessed 16.05.2024.

41 George Aghjayan, “MP Andranik Kocharyan Proposes a List of Victims of the Armenian Genocide – Why and How?” *The Armenian Weekly*, 17 April 2024, <https://armenianweekly.com/2024/04/17/mp-andranik-kocharyan-proposes-a-list-of-victims-of-the-armenian-genocide-why-and-how/>, accessed 17.05.2024.

42 “Statement Condemning Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s Cryptic Engagement with Genocide Denial,” Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention, 10 May 2024, https://www.lemkininstitute.com/statements-new-page/statement-condemning-prime-minister-nikol-pashinyan’s-cryptic-engagement-with-genocide-denial?fbclid=I-wZXh0bgNhZw0CMTAAAR0to-G2vA0ot_-Q-oFJlky-6ffEloYv_Nl3cPAaFhoMMzR-jt03a4ZaK8w_aem_ARXecDnFk1Y3qctT6hJ3wtmoX3m4bYhbi4Aj-GgWfK6JYJY14chKEIBN940WDtcr5UFR_kudTE-QEBhh0rjo8hCo2, accessed 10.06.2024.

43 Ibid.

44 Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly Ruben Rubinyan’s briefing, *Factor TV*, 11 June 2024, <https://factor.am/782164.html>, accessed 28.06.2024

45 George J. Andreopoulos, “Ethnic cleansing,” *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ethnic-cleansing>, accessed 10.06.2024.

expression “etničko čišćenje”. Although it has been used in the UN Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and recognized in the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) judgments and indictments, it has not constituted a count for prosecution.

A UN Commission of Experts defined ethnic cleansing in its interim report S/25274 as “... rendering an area ethnically homogeneous by using force or intimidation to remove persons of given groups from the area.” In its final report S/1994/674, the same Commission described 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.”⁴⁶

The Commission identified several coercive practices that could be used to remove a civilian population. These include murder, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, extrajudicial executions, rape and sexual assaults, severe physical injury to civilians, confinement of civilian population in ghetto areas, forcible removal, displacement and deportation of civilian population, deliberate military attacks or threats of attacks on civilians and civilian areas, use of civilians as human shields, destruction of property, robbery of personal property, attacks on hospitals, medical personnel, and locations with the Red Cross/Red Crescent emblem, among others. The Commission of Experts added that these practices can “... constitute crimes against humanity and can be assimilated to specific war crimes. Furthermore, such acts could also fall within the meaning of the Genocide Convention.”⁴⁷

Later, ethnic cleansing was classified as a crime against humanity, alongside genocide, mass atrocities, and war crimes in the Responsibility to Protect principle (R2P).⁴⁸ UN member states endorsed R2P at the 2005 World Summit as a global political commitment. This principle evolved with the 2009 UN SC Resolution 1894 on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.⁴⁹

The 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention) and the 1998 Rome Statute of the ICC (Rome Statute) criminalize genocide; however, they do not specifically mention ethnic cleansing. The Genocide Convention defines genocide as any of the five acts deliberately inflicted on conditions of life for a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, with the intent to physically destroy it, in whole or in part. These five acts include killing members of the group, causing them serious bodily or mental harm, imposing living conditions intended to destroy the group, preventing births, and forcibly transferring children out

46 Ethnic Cleansing. United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and The Responsibility to Protect. <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/ethnic-cleansing.shtml>, accessed 28.06.2024.

47 “Ethnic Cleansing,” United Nations, *Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility of Protect*, <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/ethnic-cleansing.shtml>, accessed 11.06.2024.

48 “What is R2P?” Global Center for Responsibility to Protect, <https://www.globalr2p.org/what-is-r2p/>, accessed 12.06.2024.

49 Security Council Resolution 1894 (2009) [on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict], United Nations Digital Library, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/671179?ln=en>, accessed 12.06.2024.

of the group.⁵⁰ The intent to destroy constitutes a crucial element in the definition and understanding of genocide.⁵¹ According to 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.”⁵²

The International Criminal Court (ICC) was founded in 2002 based on the Rome Statute to prosecute individuals for perpetrating the most serious international crimes. These include genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, but its mandate doesn’t mention ethnic cleansing.⁵³

Thus, unlike genocide, “ethnic cleansing” is a political rather than a legal term. However, it is based on ethnic discrimination and is therefore covered by the CERD in line with which Armenia has filed a case against Azerbaijan in the ICJ in 2021, following the 2020 Karabakh war.⁵⁴ While initially the case was aimed to prevent impunity for Azerbaijan’s 2020 military aggression in Nagorno-Karabakh accompanied with war crimes against Armenians based on their ethnicity, it also sought to prevent further discrimination and execution against them in the territory. However, Azerbaijan first rejected and neglected, then deliberately misinterpreted and even mocked the provisional measures by ICJ, to justify its non-compliance with them.

Due to the slow pace of the trial and the lack of enforcement mechanisms, ICJ provisional measures adopted between 2021 and 2023 were unable to prevent and stop the blockade imposed on Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians to prevent the military offensive against them and their forced displacement.⁵⁵ In the January 11 hearing of the South African case v. Israel, Blinne Ní Ghrálaigh KC, an Irish lawyer serving as Counsel and Advocate for the Republic of South Africa to the International Court of Justice, referred to the fact that ICJ provisional measures did not prevent the forced displacement of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh.⁵⁶ Due to its politicization, the UN Security Council did not follow up on ICJ measures on Nagorno-Karabakh and did not adopt a resolution to condemn their violation even after the ethnic cleansing had occurred.⁵⁷

50 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Approved and proposed for signature and ratification or accession by General Assembly resolution 260 A (III) of 9 December 1948 Entry into force: 12 January 1951, in accordance with article XIII, United Nations, https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.1_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf, accessed 15.06.2024.

51 Gzoyan et al., “Ethnic Cleansing in Artsakh,” 69.

52 William Schabas, *Genocide in International Law: The Crime of Crimes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 214.

53 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. International Criminal Court. Published by the International Criminal Court ISBN No. 92-9227-386-8 ICC-PIOS-LT-01-003/18_Eng. <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/Publications/Rome-Statute.pdf>, accessed 15.06.2024.

54 Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (Armenia v. Azerbaijan). International Court of Justice, <https://www.icj-cij.org/case/180>, accessed 16.06.2024.

55 Tatikyan, “Can the International Community Reverse the Ethnic Cleansing of Armenians?”

56 “In full: South Africa Legal Team Lawyer Praised for ‘Stunning’ Closing Statement,” *Islam Channel*, 12 January 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zeqB9Mk3UuE>, accessed 15.06.2024.

57 Sossi Tatikyan, “How Azerbaijan Deceives and Harasses the International Community.”

This is why human rights defenders and genocide watchdogs disagree with the term ethnic cleansing, considering it a “euphemism to deny and whitewash the genocide”⁵⁸ and avoid criminal responsibility. They even mention that the term “ethnic cleansing” was invented by Slobodan Milosevic and its propaganda machine to cover up the genocidal crimes of his regime. The supporters of this perspective assert that the choice between the terms “ethnic cleansing” or “genocide” should not depend on the number of killed people. They also suggest that the choice of whether atrocities are called “ethnic cleansing” or “crimes against humanity” instead of “genocide” is determined by willingness to take forceful action to stop it.⁵⁹

Forgotten Historical Aspects of Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Dynamics

It is difficult to determine the nature of the de-Armenization of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) without a reference to the roots of the conflict dating back to the 20th century.

Historically Armenian Artsakh, populated predominantly by Armenians, was integrated into Soviet Azerbaijan as the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast/Region (NKAO) in 1920-1921. Earlier, in March 1920, there had been massacres of Armenians by Azerbaijanis in Shushi, the cultural center of Nagorno-Karabakh, because of which Armenians turned from a majority to a minority in the town.⁶⁰ Throughout the 70 years of the Soviet period, Nagorno-Karabakh had local self-governance institutions. However, the Azerbaijani SSR conducted oppressive policies against the Armenian population in the region, including preventing social-economic development, preventing education in Armenian, changing the demography and misappropriating Armenian culture in the region. Another autonomous entity of the Soviet Azerbaijan – Nakhichevan with significant Armenian population, was subjected to oppression and gradually but entirely depopulated from Armenians throughout the Soviet period, with the last of them being expelled during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War.⁶¹ In the beginning of the 21st century, it was revealed that Azerbaijani authorities had destroyed tens of thousands of UNESCO-protected cross-stones (*khachkars*) at the Armenian cemetery in Julfa, called as an act of cultural genocide not only by Armenian but also international circles.⁶²

58 Gregory H. Stanton, “‘Ethnic Cleansing’ is a Euphemism Used for Genocide Denial,” *Genocide Watch*, 10 September 2023, <https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/ethnic-cleansing-is-a-euphemism-used-for-genocide-denial-1>, accessed 15.16.2024.

59 Rony Blum, Gregory Stanton, Shira Sagi, Elihu Richter, “‘Ethnic cleansing’ Bleaches the Atrocities of Genocide,” *European Journal of Public Health* 18, no. 2 (2008): 204-209.

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

61 Sossi Tatikyan, “What May Happen to Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh? Comparable Conflicts: Nakhichevan, South Ossetia, Northern Cyprus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, East Timor, Kosovo,” *EVN Report*, Part II, 27 April 2022, <https://evnreport.com/politics/part-ii-what-may-happen-to-armenians-in-nagorno-karabakh/>, accessed 16.06.2023.

62 Dale Berning Sawa, “Monumental Loss: Azerbaijan and ‘the Worst Cultural Genocide of the 21st Cen-

When the dissolution of the Soviet Union started in 1991, the NKAO's regional parliament claimed self-determination, declaring the right to break away from Azerbaijan, which it was entitled to in line with the Soviet constitution. In response, Azerbaijani authorities started the massacres⁶³ of Armenians in Azerbaijani cities of Sumgait⁶⁴ and Kirovabad (later renamed Ganja)⁶⁵ in 1988, and in Baku in 1990.⁶⁶ They were followed by Operation "Koltso" (Ring) in 1991,⁶⁷ when Azerbaijani authorities, with the support of Soviet troops, deployed tanks, combat helicopters and artillery to kill and deport Armenians from Getashen and Shahumyan regions in Nagorno-Karabakh and committed Maragha massacre in 1992, allegedly in the presence of the Soviet troops.⁶⁸ This was accompanied with the abolishment of the autonomous status of the Nagorno-Karabakh region by the Soviet Azerbaijan in 1991.⁶⁹ These developments resulted in a war between Armenian armed groups and Azerbaijani armed forces that lasted until 1994, killing thousands of people on both sides and considerable material damage.

The escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which began in the late 1980s, bears resemblance to the initial dynamics of the Kosovo conflict in the same period, in particular the claim for self-determination, the reduction of Kosovo's autonomous status and a series of military operations and massacres by the Milosevic regime against Kosovo Albanians. However, the scenarios diverged significantly after NATO's military intervention against Belgrade and deployment in Kosovo to protect civilians. This was followed by the establishment of a multi-pillar UN-mandated international peacekeeping mission that has transformed in its composition but exists until now without an exit strategy.

Unlike Kosovo, there was no robust intervention by any international actor to protect Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh. As a regional power, Russia was present on the ground; however, its role was ambivalent. While Azerbaijan has promoted the idea that Armenians have won in the first Karabakh war thanks to Russia, the latter did not assist Armenians against Azerbaijan. In contrary, when in 1991 NKAO declared independence from

tury," *The Guardian*, 19 March 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/mar/01/monumental-loss-azerbaijan-cultural-genocide-khachkars>, accessed 15.06.2024.

63 "Ordinary Genocide," Series of Documentaries, https://karabakhrecords.info/english_video.html, accessed 16.06.2024.

64 Samvel Shahmuratyan, *The Sumgait Tragedy: Pogroms against Armenians in Soviet Azerbaijan, Volume I, Eyewitness Accounts* (US & Canada: Aristide D. Caratzas and Zoryan Institute, 1990).

65 Caroline Cox and John Eibner, *Ethnic Cleansing in Progress: War in Nagorno Karabakh* (Switzerland: Institute for Religious Minorities in Islamic World, 1993).

66 Tatul Hakobyan, *Karabakh Diary: Green and Black. Neither War nor Peace* (Antelias-Lebanon, 2010).

67 *Bloodshed in the Caucasus: Escalation of the Armed Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh*, Human Rights Watch (USA, 1992).

68 Lucy Poghosyan, "The Maragha Massacre: The Other Face of the Coin in the Karabakh War," *The Armenian Weekly*, 10 April 2020, <https://armenianweekly.com/2020/04/10/the-maragha-massacre-the-other-face-of-the-coin-in-the-karabakh-war/>, accessed 16.06.2024.

69 Law of the Azerbaijan Republic of November 26, 1991, no. 279-XII. About Abolition of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region of the Azerbaijan Republic, <https://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx?rgn=2890>, accessed 16.06.2024.

Azerbaijan in accordance with the Soviet legislation,⁷⁰ the central Soviet authorities sided with the Soviet Azerbaijani authorities and rejected their aspiration. It has been reported that, during Azerbaijan's massacres of Armenians in Sumgait, Kirovabad, and Baku, as well as the subsequent military operations in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Soviet special purpose militia units (OMON) not only refrained from intervening but also assisted Azerbaijanis in Operation Ring and Maragha massacre. Furthermore, Gorbachev's administration covered up the extent of these massacres.⁷¹ Reportedly, Russia supplied weapons to both parties, and its different factions, including troops, volunteers, and mercenaries, have assisted either Armenia or Azerbaijan during different periods of the war.

The presence of an international multi-lateral operation in Kosovo and its lack in Nagorno-Karabakh resulted in different subsequent dynamics of those two conflicts. While Albania did not have to intervene in the Kosovo conflict and was able to distance itself from it, Armenia had to step in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to prevent the massacres and ethnic cleansing of Armenians. In the heat of the war, when Azerbaijan was blocking the Lachin Road and bombarding Stepanakert from Aghdam, Armenian armed groups took control of not only Nagorno-Karabakh but also the surrounding regions, creating a buffer zone, which resulted in the depopulation of Azerbaijanis from those areas.

Control of the surrounding regions of Nagorno-Karabakh for more than two and half decades as a security zone or bargaining cheap was highly controversial from the conflict resolution and international law perspectives.⁷² However, sources involved in the negotiations suggest that there were attempts by Armenian leaders to return those territories, in exchange for an acceptable status and security guarantees for Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan rejected these offers, pursuing maximalist objectives.⁷³

Those dynamics allowed Armenians to have a military victory but also created problems for the legitimacy of their case and gave an opportunity to Azerbaijan to present themselves as victims and Armenians – as aggressors, although Azerbaijan had started military operations and massacres with an obvious aim of ethnic cleansing of Armenians. During that period, when there was no social media, and even televised media, especially international, did not reach such a remote region for international community, carrying out ethnic cleansing there would be unavoidable if it fell under Azerbaijan's control. It is also probable that it would happen not through relatively softer methods as in 2023, to be

70 Law on Secession from the USSR. Law on Procedure for Resolving Questions Connected with a Union Republic's Secession from the USSR, 3 April 1990, Original Source: Ведомости Съезда народных депутатов СССР и Верховного Совета СССР, 1990, № 15, 252, <https://soviethistory.msu.edu/1991-2/shevarnadze-resigns/shevarnadze-resigns-texts/law-on-secession-from-the-ussr/>, accessed 16.06.2024.

71 Sossi Tatikyan, "What's Next for Armenia's Foreign and Security Policy? How the Balance of Power Failed and Ended Up With "Bandwagoning," Part II, *EVN Report*, 27 December 2023, <https://evnreport.com/politics/whats-next-for-armenias-foreign-and-security-policy-part-ii/>, accessed 16.06.2024.

72 Laurence Broers, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Republic: The Life and Death of an Unrecognized State," *EurasiaNet*, 2 January 2024, <https://eurasianet.org/the-nagorno-karabakh-republic-the-life-and-death-of-an-unrecognized-state>, accessed 16.06.2024.

73 Tatikyan, "How Azerbaijan Deceives and Harasses the International Community."

explored further in this article, but through large-scale massacres of civilians that could reach the threshold of the genocide.

Azerbaijan launched long-planned and large-scale military operations, i.e. a war, against Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2020 in violation of Article 33 of the UN Charter on Peaceful Settlement of Disputes,⁷⁴ as well as the UN's call for Global Ceasefire during pandemic.⁷⁵ The 44-day war resulted in the victory of Azerbaijan, its reestablishment of the control over the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh, as well capturing part of Nagorno-Karabakh itself. The controversial trilateral cease-fire statement mediated by Russia led to the deployment of a Russian "peacekeeping" contingent without an international mandate that did not ensure the maintenance of the cease-fire regime and did not prevent ethnic cleansing of Armenians.

At first glance, Armenians had less than 100 civilian victims during the 2020 war. However, most of over 4000 casualties on the Armenian side were 18-20-year-old conscript soldiers and not professional servicemen from both Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, which means a significant loss of a generation of a small nation with demographic problems.⁷⁶ Reportedly, the population of Armenia was 2,78 million (plus 120,000 in Nagorno-Karabakh) vs. 10,14 million population of Azerbaijan in 2022.⁷⁷ According to the 2022 census, the war was accompanied with various violations of international humanitarian, customary and human rights law. Human Rights Watch reports violations of international law and civilian lives: Azerbaijan shelled residential areas and civilian infrastructure with cluster munitions and bombs, ballistic missiles and rocket launchers,⁷⁸ targeting kindergartens, schools and monasteries, and medical facilities, including a maternity hospital.⁷⁹ There is evidence that civilians, military servicemen, and prisoners of war (PoWs), both civilian and military, were subjected to mutilation and decapitation; some of them were tortured and subjected to extrajudicial execution.⁸⁰

74 Pacific Settlement of Disputes (Chapter VI of UN Charter). United Nations Security Council, <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/pacific-settlement-disputes-chapter-vi-un-charter#:~:text=Article%2033%20of%20the%20Charter,means%20to%20settle%20their%20dispute>, accessed 17.06.2024.

75 Now is the Time for a Collective New Push for Peace and Reconciliation. Global Ceasefire, *United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/en/globalceasefire>, accessed 17.06.2024.

76 Ariel Karlinsky and Orsola Torrisi, "The Casualties of War: An Excess Mortality Estimate of Lives Lost in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *Population Research and Policy Review* 42, no. 41 (2023), <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11113-023-09790-2>, accessed 17.06.2024.

77 UN Population Division Data Portal. Interactive access to global demographic indicators, <https://population.un.org/dataportal/home?df=7e147586-2fb3-40dc-a0bc-cc2d7bb66e57>, accessed 17.06.2024.

78 "Azerbaijan: Unlawful Strikes in Nagorno-Karabakh. Investigate Alleged Indiscriminate Attacks, Use of Explosive Weapons," *Human Rights Watch*, 11 December 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/11/azerbaijan-unlawful-strikes-nagorno-karabakh>, accessed 18.06.2024.

79 "Unlawful Attacks on Medical Facilities and Personnel in Nagorno-Karabakh," *Human Rights Watch*, 26 February 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/26/unlawful-attacks-medical-facilities-and-personnel-nagorno-karabakh>, accessed 18.06.2024.

80 "Survivors of Unlawful Detention in Nagorno-Karabakh Speak out about War Crimes," *Human Rights Watch*, 12 March 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/12/survivors-unlawful-detention-nagorno-karabakh-speak-out-about-war-crimes>, accessed 18.06.2024.

Azerbaijan has been aiming to legitimize its initiation of the war with a false narrative of a legitimate action, which it falsely framed as “self-defense” envisaged under the UN Charter,⁸¹ to restore its territorial integrity and sovereignty, blaming the lack of progress in negotiations. Although neither the Armenian nor Azerbaijani sides were committed to reaching a mutually acceptable peaceful resolution of the conflict during twenty-seven years of negotiations, Azerbaijan obstructed more peace proposals by the OSCE Minsk Group, the formal mediation body, than Armenia.⁸² Starting from 2005, Azerbaijan directed substantial profits from oil and gas exploitation toward strengthening their army, actively arming and preparing for a new war.⁸³

Methods Used by Azerbaijan in 2021-2023 Which Meet the Criteria of Ethnic Cleansing

Azerbaijan started violating the cease-fire statement a month after its conclusion, making further military advances in the remaining part of the Hadrut region, killing elderly civilians left behind, and capturing new Armenia PoWs without being prevented by Russian peacekeepers.⁸⁴ Still in 2021, Azerbaijan surrounded Nagorno-Karabakh with military infrastructure, i.e. military and dual-use airports.⁸⁵ Azerbaijani armed forces started shelling at civilians who were trying to carry out agricultural, construction and other livelihood activities, kidnapping or killing some of them.⁸⁶ This was the beginning of the Azerbaijani campaign aimed at creating impossible living conditions for Armenians in the region.

At the political level, Azerbaijan refused from the mediation of the OSCE Minsk Group, any level of autonomous status to Nagorno-Karabakh, and any discussion of an

81 Charter of the United Nations. Chapter VII- Action with respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression, <https://legal.un.org/repertory/art51.shtml>, accessed 18.06.2024.

82 Karen Harutyunyan, “A Recap of the 7 Plans Proposed for the Settlement of the Karabakh Conflict,” 23 October 2024, *Civilnet*, <https://www.civilnet.am/en/news/637117/a-recap-of-the-7-plans-proposed-for-the-settlement-of-the-karabakh-conflict/>, accessed 18.06.2024.

83 Sossi Tatikyan, “How Do Energy Security and Euro-Atlantic Integration Correlate in the Southern Caucasus?” *Occasional Research Papers*, NATO Defense College, March 2008, https://www.academia.edu/11587177/HOW_DO_ENERGY_SECURITY_AND_EURO_ATLANTIC_INTEGRATION_CORRELATE_IN_THE_SOUTHERN_CAUCASUS, accessed 18.06.2024.

84 “Statement by the Foreign Ministry of Armenia on the Violation of the Ceasefire Regime by Azerbaijan,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia*, 13 December 2020, https://www.mfa.am/en/interviews-articles-and-comments/2020/12/13/v_az/10715, accessed 18.06.2024.

85 Gunay Hajiyeva, “President Aliyev Breaks Ground for New Airport Construction in East Zangazur Region,” *Caspian News*, 19 August 2021, https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/president-aliyev-breaks-ground-for-new-airport-construction-in-east-zangazur-region-2021-8-18-0/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAR1kNwKSDKhLD-2GiU-jAzl0WRFanei9TXpOLXL0lwGyl0ZrbF519a4_roY_aem_AQcivP8_F8FTthK32yejStkYGgKIsBB-f6qvvmVAVXFUCtgainBs3ewfzj0qK0bzPsZWf3hkPKITQ3lkqbpZ8YQE, accessed 19.06.2024.

86 Sossi Tatikyan, “The Fragile Situation in Artsakh in Light of the 2020 War and the Crisis in Ukraine,” *EVN Report*, 11 March 2022, <https://evnreport.com/politics/the-fragile-situation-in-artsakh-in-light-of-the-2020-war-and-the-crisis-in-ukraine/>, accessed 19.06.2024.

international, such as the UN, OSCE or EU-mandated peacekeeping or even humanitarian presence in the territory.⁸⁷

Azerbaijan promised cultural and social rights; however, it continued to destroy, distort, or appropriate Armenian monasteries and other cultural heritage that it had captured in Shushi and Hadrut. It claimed that medieval Armenian monasteries in the region, such as Dadivank, were either Caucasian Albanian, Udi, or Russian.⁸⁸ This was a violation of ICJ provisional measures urging Azerbaijan “take all necessary measures to prevent and punish acts of vandalism and desecration affecting Armenian cultural heritage, including but not limited to churches and other places of worship, monuments, landmarks, cemeteries and artefacts.” It intensified its campaign of ethnic hatred and false narratives, and alleviated historical revisionism to a new level claiming that Armenians are not indigenous to Nagorno-Karabakh.⁸⁹ This was the violation of another provisional measure of ICJ, urging to “take all necessary measures to prevent the incitement and promotion of racial hatred and discrimination, including by its officials and public institutions, targeted at persons of Armenian national or ethnic origin.”⁹⁰

However, the beginning of the systematic ethnic cleansing campaign can be considered the last week of February 2022, turning Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh into the collateral victims of Russia’s war in Ukraine considering its geopolitical and normative implications.⁹¹ Taking advantage of the complex geopolitical realities, Azerbaijan intensified its creeping military advances in March-August 2022,⁹² and in December 2022, imposed blockade on Nagorno-Karabakh.

During the blockade, Azerbaijan diversified and intensified its tools used against Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan tested different scenarios, employing a combination of methods that meet the criteria of ethnic cleansing. This included Balkan-style military offensives and sieges, forced displacement similar to the displacement of Finns from Karelia in 1944 and deliberate starvation.⁹³

87 Tatikyan, “Azerbaijan’s War of Narratives Against Armenians,” Part II.

88 Hayastan A. 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.

89 Tatikyan, “Azerbaijan’s War of Narratives Against Armenians,” Part II.

90 International Court of Justice reports of Judgements, Advisory Opinions and Orders. Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Armenia v. Azerbaijan) Request for the Indication of Provisional Measures. Order of 7 December 2021, <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/180/180-20211207-ORD-01-00-EN.pdf>, accessed 19.06.2024.

91 Sossi Tatikyan, “The Impact of Russia’s War in Ukraine on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and Armenia,” *A World Order in Transformation? A Comparative Study of Consequences of the War and Reactions to these Changes in the Region*. CBEES State of the Region Report, 2024. Collection by Södertörn University, Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES). Country Reports, <https://sh.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1846696/FULLTEXT01.pdf>; ISBN: 978-91-85139-15-6 (print) OAI, accessed 19.06.2024.

92 Sossi Tatikyan, “International Community Must Prevent Azerbaijan’s Creeping Ethnic Cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh,” *EVN Report*, 28 March 2022, <https://evnreport.com/spotlight-karabakh/international-community-must-prevent-azerbaijans-creeping-ethnic-cleansing-in-nagorno-karabakh/>, accessed 19.06.2024.

93 Tatikyan, “Can the International Community Reverse the Ethnic Cleansing of Armenians,” Part I.

Regarding the “confinement of civilian population in ghetto areas,” Azerbaijan, in collaboration with Russian peacekeepers lacking an international mandate, has been increasingly turning Nagorno-Karabakh into a gray zone since February 2021, like South Ossetia. They had progressively prohibited the entry of international NGOs and journalists and later, the access of Armenian officials and public figures, individuals from the Armenian diaspora.⁹⁴ This was followed by a nine and half month blockade starting in December 2022, which initially was partial, depriving Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians from the freedom of movement and allowing only Russian peacekeepers and ICRC to deliver humanitarian convoys but later became total, effectively turning Nagorno-Karabakh into a large concentration camp.⁹⁵

The arbitrary detentions of a number of Armenian men in Nagorno-Karabakh, including its political leadership, and reports of lists containing 300 to 30,000 names of individuals to be detained, along with the construction of a large prison in Aghdam, led to the mass exodus of the population after the offensive.⁹⁶ Several men were kidnapped from ICRC vehicles, which also falls under the criteria of ethnic cleansing. Baku created an atmosphere of fear among Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, making them believe that if they stayed, they would be executed or prosecuted, particularly the male population.⁹⁷ The United Nations Committee against Torture has noted the continued detention of 23 individuals of Armenian ethnic or national origin for terrorism and related offenses.⁹⁸

Cognitive warfare (psychological intimidation of Armenians to make them leave) also played a significant role in the exodus of Armenians. For instance, in February 2022, the Azerbaijani military intensified the intimidation of Armenian civilians in Artsakh, using loudspeakers to demand that the inhabitants of the border villages stop agricultural activity and leave the area, threatening to use force if they refuse to comply.⁹⁹ In January 2023, Azerbaijan’s President Aliyev stated that “whoever does not want to become our citizen, the road is not closed, it is open,” encouraging Armenians to leave.¹⁰⁰

94 Sossi Tatikyan, “Russia’s Complicity in the Failure of Peacebuilding and Peacekeeping in Nagorno-Karabakh,” *OstWest Monitoring*, 12 Dec 2023, <https://ostwest.space/articles/armenia/198-russia-s-complicity-in-the-failure-of-peacebuilding-and-peacekeeping-in-nagorno-karabakh-en>, accessed 19.06.2024.

95 Tatikyan, “Can the International Community Reverse the Ethnic Cleansing of Armenians,” Part I.

96 Simon Maghakyany, Artyom Tonoyan, Siranush Sargsyan and Lori Berberyan, “Investigation: Armenian Fears of a ‘Concentration Camp’ in Nagorno-Karabakh May Have Been Warranted,” *New Lines Magazine*, 11 January 2024, <https://newlinesmag.com/reportage/investigation-armenian-fears-of-a-concentration-camp-in-nagorno-karabakh-may-have-been-warranted/>, accessed 19.06.2024.

97 Sossi Tatikyan, “All Armenian Men in Nagorno-Karabakh are Now Targets for Arbitrary Detention,” *EVN Report*, 31 July 2023, <https://evnreport.com/politics/all-armenian-men-in-nagorno-karabakh-are-now-targets-for-arbitrary-detention/>, accessed 19.06.2024.

98 “UN Committee against Torture Publishes Findings on Austria, Azerbaijan, Finland, Honduras, Liechtenstein, and North Macedonia,” *United Nations Human Rights*, Office of the High Commissioner, 10 May 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/05/un-committee-against-torture-publishes-findings-austria-azerbaijan-finland>, accessed 19.06.2024.

99 Tatikyan, “The Fragile Situation in Artsakh.”

100 “Whoever Does not Want to Become our Citizen, Road is not Closed, it is Open - President Ilham Aliyev,” *Trend.am.*, 10 January 2023, <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/3693367.html>, accessed 19.06.2024.

In relation to “military attacks, targeting civilians,” and “murder, torture, extrajudicial executions, severe physical injury to civilians,” 27 Armenian civilians, including women and children, and more than 200 Armenian military were killed in addition to those Armenians who were killed, injured and tortured in the 2020 war. A further 200 civilians and 400 militaries were injured during the military offensive of September 19-20, 2023. Some civilians, including children, were reportedly tortured and killed deliberately.¹⁰¹ At least 218 more people were killed and around 240 injured in the fuel depot explosion on September 25 in Nagorno-Karabakh.¹⁰² The majority of the victims, all men, were queuing for fuel for their vehicles on their way to Armenia. Sixty-four more people died during the mass exodus in the last week of September 2023, unable to endure the difficult journey after a long-term blockade and starvation.¹⁰³ The United Nations Committee against Torture noted that it was alarmed by alleged extra-judicial killings, torture, and ill-treatment of national and ethnic Armenians during armed conflict and anti-terrorism operations and the perceived lack of investigations and prosecutions of these allegations.¹⁰⁴ In one week, more than 100,000 Armenians fled Nagorno-Karabakh, leaving behind only a dozen Armenians, mostly elderly. It is obvious that this displacement was forced through three years of systematic actions. Azerbaijan transformed Stepanakert into a ghost town akin to Varosha in Northern Cyprus. The Azerbaijani leadership stated that Armenians could return, but its leadership and security forces are conducting actions in Nagorno-Karabakh making their return impossible: changing all Armenian names to Azerbaijani, conducting military parades¹⁰⁵ and central elections, demolishing public buildings, destroying or appropriating cultural monuments, and destroying private residences.

Azerbaijan is trying “greenwashing” ethnic cleansing by constructing smart villages in areas ethnically cleansed from Armenians. It has announced “green energy zones” in the Karabakh region, aiming to legitimize the conquest of Nagorno-Karabakh, amongst other justifications, “under the pretense of helping fight climate change.”¹⁰⁶

Baku is claiming that smart houses are being rebuilt for resettling its citizens who were internally displaced (IDPs) during the conflict. However, Armenians have constituted

101 Preliminary ad hoc report on results of fact-finding missions conducted from Sept 24 to Sept 30, 2023 by the delegations of the Human Rights Defender’s Office to the places where the displaced people were received. *The Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia*, Yerevan, 2023, <https://www.ombuds.am/images/files/e76a3b67b4a56fad3271705e33eccc5.pdf>, accessed 20.06.2024.

102 Artak Khulian, “Confirmed Dead in Karabakh Fuel Depot Blast,” 22 December 2023, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32743695.html>, accessed 20.06.2024.

103 Susan Badalian, “Dozens Reported Dead During Karabakh Exodus,” *EVN Report*, 8 May 2023, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32660106.html>, accessed 20.06.2024.

104 “UN Committee against Torture Publishes Findings on Austria, Azerbaijan, Finland, Honduras, Liechtenstein, and North Macedonia,” *United Nations Human Rights*, Office of the High Commissioner, 10 May 2024.

105 “Military Parade Dedicated to 3rd Anniversary of the Victory in the Patriotic War was Held in City of Khan-kendi,” President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, 8 November 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/62139>, accessed 20.06.2024.

106 Matteo Civillini, “In Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan’s Net Zero Vision Clashes with Legacy of War,” *Climate Home News*, 15 May 2024, <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2024/05/15/in-nagorno-karabakh-azerbaijans-net-zero-vision-clashes-with-legacy-of-war/>, accessed 20.06.2024.

the predominant majority of the population in Nagorno-Karabakh before their full ethnic cleansing in 2023, therefore, Azerbaijan cannot repopulate it only with IDPs – in order not to leave the territory empty, they are now populating it by Azerbaijanis who are not originally from Nagorno-Karabakh.

Tools Used by Azerbaijan During the Blockade and Final Military Offensive

“Imposing living conditions intended to destroy the group” is one of the criteria for a genocide under the Genocide Convention and the most applicable for the methods used by Azerbaijan starting end of February 2022 and during the blockade between December 2022 and September 2023. It included weaponization of energy (gas and, at times, also electricity),¹⁰⁷ food,¹⁰⁸ and humanitarian assistance¹⁰⁹ leading to deliberate starvation. The inability of freedom of movement even within Nagorno-Karabakh due to the lack of fuel also prevented the ability to reach maternal clinics and hospitals for months, which may have “caused serious bodily and mental harm”, thus meeting another criterion for genocide. This is the probable reason of 64 deaths during exodus following the military offensive of 19-20 September.¹¹⁰

The inability of reaching the maternal clinic also caused documented miscarriages.¹¹¹ Besides, according to social media posts of young women from Nagorno-Karabakh, many of them abstained from getting pregnant.¹¹² This falls into third criteria of genocide – “preventing births.”

Genocides are organized at the level of leadership of the country. Reportedly, all actions in Nagorno-Karabakh, even pseudo-protests of environmental pseudo-activists, were organized or sponsored by the high authorities in autocratic Azerbaijan.¹¹³ Azerbaijan’s Ilham Aliyev frequently incited ethnic hatred amongst Azerbaijanis against Armenians.¹¹⁴ As early as April 2015, Aliyev published a statement on the Azerbaijan

107 Ani Avetisyan, “Weaponizing Energy: Nagorno-Karabakh’s Energy Supplies Under Siege,” *EVN Report*, 9 February 2023, <https://evnreport.com/spotlight-karabakh/weaponizing-energy-nagorno-karabakhs-energy-supplies-under-siege/>, accessed 20.06.2024.

108 Tatikyan, “Deliberate Starvation of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians,” Part II.

109 Tatikyan, “Can the International Community Reverse the Ethnic Cleansing of Armenians,” Part I.

110 “At Least 64 Reported Dead during Mass Karabakh Exodus,” *Civilnet*, 31 October 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHLqhzOya-0>, accessed 20.06.2024.

111 “Miscarriages Surge in Karabakh Amid Widespread Food Shortages,” 20 July 2023, <https://www.civilnet.am/en/news/745150/miscarriages-surge-in-karabakh-amid-widespread-food-shortages/#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20early%2Dstage,balanced%20diet%20amid%20Azerbaijan%20blockade>, accessed 20.06.2024.

112 Social media posts by young women from Nagorno-Karabakh.

113 The Planning, Inciting, Ordering, Instigating, and Implementing of Genocide by President Ilham Aliyev and Other High Ranking Officials, *Center for Truth & Justice*, 18 April 2024, <https://www.cftjjustice.org/the-planning-inciting-ordering-instigating-and-implementing-of-genocide-by-president-ilham-aliyev-and-other-high-ranking-officials/>, accessed 20.06.2024.

114 Naira Sahakyan, “The Rhetorical Face of Enmity: The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and the Dehumaniza-

government's official website, warning ethnic Armenians: "If you do not want to die, then get out of Azerbaijani lands." He has also repeatedly dehumanized ethnic Armenians, referring to them as a "virus," "rats," "dogs," "devils," "terrorists," "fascists," "enemies," "usurping interlopers," "barbarians and vandals."¹¹⁵

Although Azerbaijan did not commit mass civilian massacres in September 2023, the rapid mass exodus of Armenians eliminated that necessity. Furthermore, Azerbaijan would likely avoid mass civilian massacres even if Armenians remained, due to from the international community, particularly, the U.S. and EU. Large-scale massacres in 2023 would stigmatize Azerbaijan and result in significant political costs.¹¹⁶ Instead, Azerbaijan would employ a manipulative policy of "integration" severing the links between Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians and Armenia, suppressing their ethnic identity, stripping them of political and civil rights, leading to their complete subjugation and prosecuting many of them, especially males who had served in the self-defence force.¹¹⁷ Eventually, it would result in either resistance and new casualties, displacement or feeling trapped in case of another blockade.

Lastly, the deliberate starvation of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh by Azerbaijan from July to September 2023 mirrors other examples of the "genocide by starvation" tactic. The Ottoman Empire used this during the Armenian genocide, the Nazi regime in concentration camps, and Stalingrad, the Stalin regime during the Holodomor in Ukraine, and the Milosevic regime during the Sarajevo and Srebrenica sieges.¹¹⁸ Ocampo described the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh as a genocide when the blockade reached a critical stage, leading to impossible living conditions, particularly starvation. He noted that people would start dying in significant numbers after a few weeks.¹¹⁹

The Rome Statute stipulates "[i]ntentionally using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare by depriving them of objects indispensable to their survival, including willfully impeding relief supplies as provided for under the Geneva Conventions" constitutes a war crime in international armed conflicts.¹²⁰ The ICJ ruled that "deprivation of food, medical care, shelter or clothing" in Bosnia have constituted Genocide within the meaning of Article II(c) of the Genocide Convention.¹²¹

tion of Armenians in the Speeches of Ilham Aliyev," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 23, no. 4 (2022): 863–882. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2022.2153402>, accessed 20.06.2024.

115 "Azerbaijani Ongoing Hatred Policy towards Armenians: A State Sponsored Motivation for Atrocities," *Tatoyan Foundation. Center for Law & Justice* (Yerevan, 2022), <https://tatoyanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/%D4%B6%D5%A5%D5%AF%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B5%D6%81.pdf>, accessed 20.06.2024.

116 Tatikyan, "Can the International Community Reverse the Ethnic Cleansing of Armenians."

117 Tatikyan, "'Integration'" of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians," Part I.

118 Tatikyan, "Deliberate Starvation of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians."

119 Luis Moreno Ocampo, "Expert Opinion: Genocide against Armenians in 2023," 7 August 2023, https://luismorenoocampo.com/lmo_en/report-armenia/, accessed 20.06.2024.

120 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, *International Criminal Court*, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/Publications/Rome-Statute.pdf>, accessed 20.06.2024.

121 Summary of the Judgment of 3 February 2015, ICJ. <https://www.icj-cij.org/node/103932>, accessed 20.06.2024.

The starvation of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh was met with increasing international criticism, including at the UN Security Council meetings in August 2023. Surprisingly, the primary reason for Baku's decision to initiate a military offensive in September 2023 likely stemmed from a desire to avoid accusations of causing mass civilian deaths and potential charges of genocide. The offensive was launched when the resilience of the people had been worn down as a result of the starvation.

Conclusion

The methods, tools and scenarios used by Baku demonstrate an explicit intent and a complex set of actions aimed at creating impossible conditions for life of Armenians, forcing them to flee their indigenous homeland.

To accomplish its strategic goal, Azerbaijan carried out large- and small-scale military operations, weaponized blockade, energy, food and humanitarian assistance, arbitrary executions, detention and trials of civilians. It stripped them of their right to self-governance and self-defense under the false promise of "integration". To legitimize these methods, it engaged in lawfare, cognitive warfare, and spread false narratives and disinformation.

The process of revising and falsifying history, destroying and appropriating Armenian cultural heritage and material property continues, with the aim to erase any traces of an Armenian presence and prevent their return to Nagorno-Karabakh. Caucasus Heritage Watch has reported that the number of Armenian cultural heritage sites destroyed in Nagorno-Karabakh multiplied since the displacement of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh in October 2023.¹²² According to scholars, according to the Rome Statute and other international norms, the elimination of the cultural heritage of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians may also serve as a basis and evidence for the forced nature of their displacement.¹²³

Azerbaijan's actions against Nagorno-Karabakh actions were a collective punishment for their aspiration of self-determination. However, as the ICJ has concluded in its 2010 Advisory Opinion on Kosovo's Declaration of Independence, the declaration for independence is not a violation of international law.¹²⁴ In general, the notion of territorial integrity has not given a green light to any state to oppress an ethnic group under its

122 Ian Lindsay, Adam T. Smith, Husik Ghulyan, and Lori Khatchadourian, *Caucasus Heritage Watch. Monitoring Report 7* (Cornell University: Cornell Institute of Archaeology and Material Studies, 2024), <https://indd.adobe.com/view/b1b54fc0-dce2-4eb0-ba83-eb728c49dd20>, accessed 30.06. 2024.

123 Armine Tigranyan, "Destruction of Cultural Heritage and Forced Displacement of Artsakh Armenians as Crimes Against Humanity," *Analytical Bulletin (CCCS)* 18 (2023): 107-160. DOI: 10.56673/18294502-24.18-107, accessed 30.06. 2024.

124 International Court of Justice. Reports of Judgements, Advisory Opinions and Orders Accordance with International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Respect of Kosovo. Advisory Opinion of 22 July 2010, <https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/141/141-20100722-ADV-01-00-EN.pdf>, accessed 30.06.2024.

jurisdiction. In accordance with the UN General Assembly Resolution 2625 (XXV) adopted in 1970, “every State has the duty to refrain from any forcible action which deprives peoples [...] of their right to self-determination and freedom and independence [...] The use of force to deprive peoples of their national identity constitutes a violation of their inalienable rights and of the principle of non-intervention.”¹²⁵

There is overwhelming evidence about the forced nature of the displacement of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh proves the occurrence of ethnic cleansing. Azerbaijan refrained from committing mass massacres of civilians, likely to avoid international condemnation. However, its military operations did target civilians. The conditions during the blockade and exodus resulted in significant casualties, affecting demographics, and potentially causing long-term health issues, including reproductive problems, which are also indicators of genocide. It seems Azerbaijan shifted its strategy from deliberate starvation to a brief but intense military offensive to avoid the stigma of having carried out genocide by starvation.

The terms “ethnic cleansing” and “genocide” don’t exclude each other. Nonetheless, the international political, legal, and academic community is conservative and reserved in applying the term “genocide” to prevent its overuse. Armenia has already filed a case v. Azerbaijan under CERD and not under the Genocide Convention, in difference to *The Gambia v. Myanmar* case regarding atrocities against the Rohingya. Given the higher intensity of Russia’s war in Ukraine and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the focus of international legal bodies remains on those cases, making an additional genocide case potentially unwelcome. Although in theory, the number of the killed should not define genocide, in practice, it defines the scope of the tragedy and defines the positions of key international actors. Naming the ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh a genocide may also undermine the cause of the Armenian genocide in the Ottoman Empire, rather than proving to be its continuation.

Armenia’s best strategy is to consistently pursue its interstate case at the ICJ under CERD as ethnic discrimination and hatred have led to the ethnic cleansing of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh and actions that may be considered genocidal. Armenian organizations may also consider a claim to the ICC for holding the masterminds and organizers of ethnic cleansing accountable. The non-use of the term “ethnic cleansing” in legal conventions is not an obstacle because it falls under the category of “crime against humanity” that is criminalized in both the Genocide Convention and the Rome Statute.

Azerbaijan’s pressure on Armenia to withdraw its inter-state lawsuit against Azerbaijan at the ICJ as a precondition for a peace agreement is aimed at ensuring impunity for Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan’s claim that Armenia’s lawsuit is a territorial claim is unjustified, as it is a human rights, criminal and restorative justice issue in the same manner as *The*

125 Resolution adopted by the General Assembly [Adopted on a Report from the Sixth Committee (A/8082)], 2625 (XXV). Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, <http://www.un-documents.net/a25r2625.htm>, accessed 30.06.2024.

Gambia v. Myanmar case in protection of Rohingya or the *South Africa v. Israel* case in protection of Palestinians' rights. As Armenian human rights defenders have asserted, "protection of the rights claimed by lawsuits cannot be subordinated to or replaced by political processes and political documents, peace cannot be positive and sustainable without restoration of justice, and withdrawal of interstate applications will lead to total impunity of Azerbaijan for human rights violations and crimes committed, will serve the confirmation of its false narratives, and will enable new violations and crimes."

First, impunity will embolden Azerbaijan's expansionism towards Armenia itself. However, there are also indications that implications of the failure to prevent ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh will also have implications for other conflicts.

Azerbaijan's conquest of Nagorno-Karabakh is already being manipulated by Serbia's President Vucic, who stated in December 2023 that he would use the precedent of Azerbaijan's takeover of Nagorno-Karabakh as a model for Serbia's aspirations to regain control over Kosovo. Serbia cannot follow suit due to the presence of KFOR and EULEX in Kosovo, but it also means that NATO and the EU cannot have an exit strategy from their peacekeeping presence in Kosovo.¹²⁶

After Aliyev's final conquest of Nagorno-Karabakh, the Former President of Georgia Saakashvili hunted that Georgia should follow Azerbaijan's example, presumably meaning the restoration of its territorial integrity through a military intervention in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which would be problematic for an aspiring EU country aiming to increase its standards of democracy and human rights.

The violation of ICJ provisional measures by Azerbaijan created a precedent for non-implementation of ICJ orders that are considered legally binding, for Israel's actions in Gaza. Israel's prevention of the entry of humanitarian aid to Gaza and its attempt for a forced displacement of Palestinians intensifies those concerns and echo the precedent about the prevention of the ICRC, as well as humanitarian aid to Nagorno-Karabakh by Azerbaijan and its forced displacement of Armenians through a military intervention.

International community's failure to prevent ethnic cleansing of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh has already undermined the global governance system, the decisions made by the ICJ and the role of the UN Security Council by not enforcing them. Failure to accurately label ethnic cleansing and its normalization doesn't save the reputation of key international actors for their inability and failure to prevent this crime against humanity. Instead, it strengthens popular stereotypes and suspicions about the prioritization of geopolitical interests over human rights by key international actors and legitimizes the use of coercion versus international law, leading to impunity and setting dangerous precedents for other conflicts.

126 Sossi Tatikyan, "How Azerbaijan Deceives and Harasses the International Community: Baku's Expansionist Objectives Under the Spotlight."

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“SIEVES OF RESPONSIBILITY” – CONNECTING FAILURES OF GENOCIDE PREVENTION AND GEOPOLITICAL INTERESTS TO ATROCITY IN NAGORNO-KARABAKH

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Abstract

This article aims to contribute to both a legal and practical understanding of how international law dedicated to both genocide prevention and the cessation of genocidal atrocity failed during the 8-month long blockade of the Lachin Corridor – and the ensuing invasion and seizure of Nagorno-Karabakh over a 24-hour period by the Azerbaijani armed forces on 17 September 2024. The invasion led to the forced displacement of nearly the entire territory’s ethnically indigenous Artsakh-Armenian population, amounting to a *de facto* deportation while escaping the threat of atrocity crimes. Through a discussion of (A) the events that preceded and led to the invasion of Nagorno-Karabakh itself, (B) an analysis of international law on genocide prevention through institutional mechanisms (i.e. UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1948) and military intervention (i.e. Responsibility to Protect/R2P doctrine), (C) the difficulties of engaging with these mechanisms at a general level, (D) the international community’s response to the seizure of Nagorno-Karabakh, and (E) the geopolitical conditions surrounding the South Caucasus and Nagorno-Karabakh crisis, this article aims to identify the failures of both legal mechanisms intended to prevent the cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh and external actors (i.e. Russian peacekeeping forces legally stationed in the territory) to intervene and respond to the invasion in geopolitically turbulent conditions characterized by intersecting state interests.

Key Words: Nagorno-Karabakh, invasion, genocide prevention, genocide cessation, international law, peacekeeping, geopolitics.

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Introduction

In spite of strong norms and collective attitudes on “genocide” that have emerged since the birth of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention) of 1948, atrocity crimes of a genocidal nature have continued to proliferate worldwide, circumventing legal mechanisms aimed at preventing them, ceasing atrocities in-progress, and punishing perpetrators. The case study of the enduring, intractable conflict surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh illustrates a disturbing trend of perpetrator impunity regarding a clearly-visible genocidal atrocity: a disputed territory that was *de-facto* self-governing was choked off through a crippling blockade, invaded, and ethnically cleansed by the Azerbaijani military in 2023 without reproach.

Despite the presence of Russian peacekeepers in the region, the presence and attention of international stakeholders dedicated to documenting the grueling impact of the Lachin Corridor’s blockade on its emaciated victims, frantic calls for intervention from watchdog NGOs and practitioners of genocide prevention across disciplines to recognize the “warning signs” of a genocide about to unfold, and a series of disturbingly candid rhetoric from Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev regarding his consistent drive to “retake lost land” in Nagorno-Karabakh following two wars and years of ratcheting tensions, the international community found itself startled at the shock invasion conducted between September 17 and 18 of 2023. Over a span of 24 hours, the *de-facto* Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) was dissolved, the territory was cleansed of its indigenous population through the systemic use of terror to force civilians out, and Nagorno-Karabakh effectively became occupied by Azerbaijan. As if the change had happened overnight, the NKR was ordered to dissolve on 1 January 2024, and political sovereignty over the region was transferred to Azerbaijan. No legal mechanisms designed at preventing such outcomes were implemented, and the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh has since effectively disappeared into obscurity.

The central research question underpinning this study: following a three-year period of increased tensions leading up to the blockade of the Lachin (Berdzor) Corridor and the invasion of Nagorno-Karabakh, how did the seizure and ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023 reflect a failure of the contemporary legal doctrine supported by internationally-upheld norms and values fail to prevent a genocide from coming to pass?

In response to this question, the article aims to present the events of the blockade/invasion and identify instances of genocidal atrocity, legal obligations of states to respond to these crimes, and demonstrate how the international community’s response reflected a failure of this architecture within geopolitically fluid conditions. To address this complex argument, this article will be divided into several sections. It first will provide a brief overview of the historic context surrounding the centuries-long Nagorno-Karabakh conflict that preceded its seizure in September of 2023, as well as discuss the atrocity crimes and genocidal crimes which forced its inhabitants to evacuate. Next, the article will turn to a discussion of the emergence of international law, norms, and mechanisms

developed to both prevent and cease genocide at a global scale, from the Genocide Convention to the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine of the 2000s. The following section discusses the difficulties of enacting these mechanisms at a global level before adapting these findings to the Nagorno-Karabakh case study, subsequently discussing how these legal measures failed to materialize within the context of the invasion itself, reflecting a lack of political will to uphold the legal mechanisms intended to do so – both from stakeholders who accepted legal responsibility to act within this context (i.e. Peacekeeping forces from the Russian Federation) and external stakeholders within the international system before engaging in a discussion of the geopolitical factors that may have complicated efforts to engage with this architecture to prevent atrocity. The article will then conclude with a discussion of what impacts this failure to respond to genocidal atrocity may have on both the Eurasian geopolitical region and the larger international system as a whole.

A Brief Chronology of Nagorno-Karabakh

Nagorno-Karabakh – also referred to as “Artsakh” or “Karabagh” – is located within the South Caucasus region of Eurasia. The region’s history is tumultuous: a historic Armenian land was incorporated into the Russian Empire in 1813,¹ then into the short-lived Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic² and volleyed for control between Armenian and Azerbaijani authorities³ before it was officially established as the *Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast* (NKAO) in 1923 in the Azerbaijani S.S.R. Having a long history of discrimination, during the late 1980s, tensions mounted as residents of the NKAO began to rally for political independence from the Azerbaijani S.S.R. An official request conveyed to transfer the jurisdiction of the NKAO to the Armenian S.S.R. in 1988⁴ would eventually lead to the enactment of a referendum hosted on December 10, 1991 – in which 99.98% of the NKAO’s population voted to secede from Azerbaijan in light of the oncoming collapse of the USSR, leading to the establishment of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) on September 2, 1991.⁵

1 “Nagorno-Karabakh,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica Online* (2024), <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nagorno-Karabakh>, accessed 11.04.2024.

2 Adrian Brisku and Timothy K. Blauvelt, *The Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic of 1918* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021).

3 Heiko Kruger, “Nagorno-Karabakh,” in *Self-Determination and Secession in International Law*, edited by Christian Walter, Antje von Ungern-Sternberg, and Kavus Abushov (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198702375.003.0011>, accessed 30.04.2024; Edita Gzoyan “Nagorno-Karabakh in the Context of Admitting Armenia and Azerbaijan to the League of Nations,” *The Armenian Review* 55 no. 3-4 (2017): 19-39.

4 Council on Foreign Relations, “Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict” in *Global Conflict Tracker* (2024), <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/nagorno-karabakh-conflict>, accessed 10.05.2024.

5 Edita Gzoyan, “The Artsakh Issue in its Historical-Legal Development,” *International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies* 7, no 2(2022): 164.

Shortly following this referendum, tensions would explode into the First Nagorno-Karabakh War (1992-1994),⁶ in which the final two years of the conflict would see an outbreak of active hostilities between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Republic of Armenia. The war would conclude with an Armenian victory and the subsequent securitization of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR).

The interwar years (1994-2020) would be marked by continued practical sovereignty of the NKR over Nagorno-Karabakh and continuing tensions within the region following the ceasefire agreement of the First Nagorno-Karabakh War; skirmishes and incidents continued well into the 2010s, reaching a critical junction in the “Four Day War” of April 2-5 of 2016.⁷ The legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh remained contested during this period: while the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic retained its *de facto* authority to self-govern up until its dissolution, its disputed legal status would render its geopolitical security uncertain. Laced with a “great s[k]epticism and cynicism among both Armenians and Azerbaijanis about a possible end to the conflict,”⁸ repeated negotiations to address Nagorno-Karabakh’s status as a disputed territory would ultimately prove fruitless and lead to a geopolitical shift in the status quo that would favor Azerbaijan’s development as a regional power and poise it with the capacity to engage Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic on geopolitically, economically, and militarily favorable terms. Scholars have noted that Azerbaijan’s investments in its burgeoning energy sector⁹ contributed to an increase in military investments¹⁰ during this period, alongside a reshuffling of the geopolitical conditions surrounding the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process.¹¹ Ibrahimov and Ostarzu (2023) note that Azerbaijani projects for economic integration often excluded Armenia on account of political tensions.¹² Furthermore,

6 The First Nagorno-Karabakh War is commonly dated as having taken place between 1988 and 1994; hostilities are reported to have increased dramatically into a full-scale war in January of 1992, after the nascent Republic of Azerbaijan invaded the territory.

7 Simon Ostrovsky, “Armenia’s Miscalculations in Nagorno-Karabakh,” *Pulitzer Center* (2024), <https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/armenias-miscalculations-nagorno-karabakh>, accessed 11.05.2024.

8 International Crisis Group, “Nagorno-Karabakh: Getting to a Breakthrough,” *International Crisis Group* (2009), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep38243>.

9 Catherine Cavanaugh, “Renewed Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh,” *Council on Foreign Relations* (2017), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05705>.

10 Erik Davtyan, “Lessons that Lead to War: Foreign Policy Learning and Military Escalation in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 71, no. 1 (2023): 26-36, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2023.2183410>.

11 Nona Mikhelidze, “The Azerbaijan-Russia-Turkey Energy Triangle and its Impact on the Future of Nagorno-Karabakh,” *Documenti Istituto Affari Internazionali*, no. 1018 (2010): 1-8.

12 Ibrahimov and Ostarzu discuss several projects pioneered by Baku during the interwar years that often completely circumvented Armenia, such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad, an oil pipeline between Baku, Tbilisi, and Ceyhan, and a gas pipeline between Baku, Tbilisi, and Erzurum. Regarding the two former oil and gas links, the authors argue that “if there was no conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, then most likely in the middle of the names of these pipelines there would be not *Tbilisi*, but *Yerevan*” [emphasis added] on account of the shorter distance between Azerbaijan and Turkey by way of Armenia over Georgia. It is worth further noting that this justification has been used by Azerbaijani and Turkish government authorities to open what is known as the “Zangezur Corridor,” an transportation pathway through Armenia’s Syunik Province aimed at linking Azerbai-

Cheterian (2022) argues that the transitory state of political leadership in Armenia during the Velvet Revolution of 2018 would prove to stifle coordination in the event of a conflict leading into the 2020s, in stark contrast to Azerbaijan's "clear command structure" that developed and solidified during the interwar years.¹³

These tensions would eventually erupt into the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War: lasting 44 days, from September 27 to November 10 of 2020, this war constituted an indisputable Azerbaijani victory, in which approximately 6,500-7,000 people died¹⁴ and 73% of territory within and surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh was occupied by the Azerbaijani military (according to an estimate provided by the Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense),¹⁵ leaving territory controlled by the Republic of Artsakh solely connected to Armenia through the Lachin (Berdzor) Corridor – a narrow road surrounded by territory conquered by Azerbaijan.¹⁶

The war would end in an agreement dubbed the "Tripartite Agreement" on November 9, 2020; signed by Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, and Russian President Vladimir Putin, the text of the peace agreement ensuring the end of hostilities mandated the imposition of Russian peacekeepers "deployed along the line of contact in Nagorno-Karabakh and along the Lachin corridor, including 1,960 servicemen with firearms, 90 armored personnel carriers, 380 units of motor vehicles and special equipment." These peacekeepers would be "deployed in parallel with the withdrawal of the Armenian armed forces"¹⁷ and were mandated to remain along both the Lachin Corridor and line of contact for a five year period following the ceasefire.¹⁸ The agreement further mandated that Azerbaijani forces "guarantee traffic safety for citizens, vehicles and goods in both directions along the Lachin corridor," as well as all forces in the region facilitating the return of internally-displaced persons (IDPs) following the outbreak of hostilities.

jan with its autonomous Nakhichevan enclave and, by extension, a short land border with Turkey.

For more information, see: Rovshan Ibrahimov and Mehmet Fatih Oztarsu, "Causes of the Second Karabakh War: Analysis of the Positions and the Strength and Weakness of Armenia and Azerbaijan," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 24, no. 4 (2022): 595–613, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2022.2037862>.

13 Vicken Cheterian, "Technological Determinism or Strategic Advantage? Comparing the Two Karabakh Wars Between Armenia and Azerbaijan," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 47, no. 2 (2022): 214–237, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2022.2127093>.

14 Ariel Karlinsky and Orsola Torrasi, "The Casualties of War: An Excess Mortality Estimate of Lives Lost in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *Population Research and Policy Review* 42, no. 3 (2023): 41, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11113-023-09790-2>.

15 "İşğaldan Azad Edilmiş Şəhər Və Kəndlərimiz," [Our Towns and Villages Freed from Occupation], *Azertag*, https://archive.ph/20201201185921/https://azertag.az/xeber/lsgaldan_azad_edilmis_seher_ve_kendlerimiz-1622227, accessed 10.05.2024.

16 "Azerbaijan Army Enters District Handed Over by Armenia," *Al Jazeera* (2020), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/20/azerbaijan-army-enters-district-handed-over-by-armenia>, accessed 11.05.2024.

17 "Armistice of Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict (2020)," *Armenpress*, Official Text (English), <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1034480.html>, accessed 13.05.2024.

18 It is worth noting that the Tripartite Agreement included a provision in which Russian peacekeeping forces, upon the termination of the five-year period, would continue to stay in their positions "automatically" if "none of the Parties [of this treaty] declares of its intention to terminate the application of this provision 6 months before the expiration of the preceding period."

Following the end of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, tensions would continue to mount through isolated skirmishes and outbreaks of violence from the fall of 2020 through September of 2023. Notable incidents include an incursion by Azerbaijani forces into Armenia’s Syunik Province in November 2021¹⁹ and the shelling of Jermuk, a spa town located within Armenia, by Azerbaijani forces in September of 2022.²⁰

On December 12, 2022, the surrounding Azerbaijani military enacted a blockade of the Lachin Corridor, severing the territory’s lone connection by road to the Republic of Armenia. This led to the imposition of conditions that scholars²¹ and credible experts, alongside NGOs like the Lemkin Institute,²² recognized as an act of “genocide by attrition” aimed at pushing Artsakh-Armenians out of the territory through systematic blocks on access to food, electricity, gas, and telecommunication services during the coldest months of the year in the Caucasus. With medical services stretched untenably thin and access to resources restricted, the blockade imposed severe consequences on the health of Armenians located within Nagorno-Karabakh.²³ Despite calls from international observers²⁴ for Azerbaijan to respect the human dignity of those under occupation and relax the blockade, the Aliyev regime refused to do so, resisting an order from the International Court of Justice to provide for the “unimpeded movement of persons, vehicles, and cargo along the Lachin Corridor in both directions” between Nagorno-Karabakh and the Republic of Armenia.²⁵

19 Joshua Kucera, “Heavy Fighting Breaks Out Between Armenia and Azerbaijan,” *Eurasianet* (2021), <https://eurasianet.org/heavy-fighting-breaks-out-between-armenia-and-azerbaijan>, accessed 13.05.2024.

20 Suren Badalian and Karine Aslanian, “Armenian Civilians Flee Fighting on Border with Azerbaijan,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (2022), <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenian-civilians-flee-fighting-border-azerbaijan-karabakh/32035072.html>, accessed 13.02.2024.

21 Edita Gzoyan, “Artsakh: Genocide by Attrition,” <http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/1.19.01.23.php>, accessed 23.02.2024; Bedross Der Matossian, “Impunity, Lack of Humanitarian Intervention, and International Apathy: The Blockade of the Lachin Corridor in Historical Perspective,” *Genocide Studies International* 15, no. 1 (2023): 7-20.

22 A key report (disclaimer: having been co-written and edited by the author) which attempted to alert the international community of a fear of genocide was “*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.*” This report was released on September 5, 2023—only two weeks before the invasion, seizure, and cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh by the Azerbaijani Armed Forces. Elisa von Joeden-Forgey, Victoria Massimino, et. al. “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,” *Lemkin Institute of Genocide Prevention* (2023).

23 “The Future of Nagorno-Karabakh,” *United States Agency for International Development* (2023), <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/congressional-testimony/nov-15-2023-future-nagorno-karabakh>, accessed 13.02.2024.

24 Luis Moreno Ocampo, “The Nagorno-Karabakh Genocide is Just Beginning,” *The Washington Post*, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/09/22/nagorno-karabakh-genocide-armenia/>, accessed 13.02.2024.

25 International Court of Justice. 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). <https://www.icj-cij.org/node/202958>, accessed 13.05.2024.

After 280 days of the blockade, on September 17, 2023, the Azerbaijani military invaded the territory and, over the span of a 24 hour military campaign,²⁶ toppled the government of the NKR and seized control of the territory in a “startling[ly] sudden” offensive.²⁷ This invasion was paired with a swift displacement of 105,000 Armenians from the territory – widely acknowledged as the vast indisputable majority of the indigenous population, as well as identified by experts as reflective of genocidal atrocity. The speed of this forced displacement may have extended from the systematic use of terror to frighten civilians into leaving their homes out of fear of the advancing Azerbaijani military. While Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev made claims in a speech on September 20, 2023 that “a strict order [was given] to all our military units that the Armenian population living in the Karabakh region should not be affected by the anti-terrorist measures and that the civilian population be protected”²⁸ during the invasion – and claims by Assistant of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Head of Foreign Policy Affairs Department of the Presidential Administration Hikmet Hajiyev that “there [was] simply no damag[e] to civilians”²⁹ – footage filmed by Azerbaijani soldiers themselves emerged on local Telegram channels³⁰ not only broadcast the corpses of soldiers who were killed or mutilated³¹ in the initial stages of the invasion – but depicted atrocity crimes being committed against civilians by the soldiers themselves. Documented incidents include the decapitation of a civilian in the village of Madashten³² and broadcasts

26 William Landgraf and Nona Seferian, “A Frozen Conflict Boils Over: Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023 and Future Implications,” *Foreign Policy Research Institute* (2024), <https://www.fpri.org/article/2024/01/a-frozen-conflict-boils-over-nagorno-karabakh-in-2023-and-future-implications>, accessed 13.02.2024.

27 Chris Edwards, “Nagorno-Karabakh to Officially Dissolve,” *CNN* (2023) <https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/28/europe/nagorno-karabakh-officially-dissolve-intl/index.html>, accessed 13.4.2024.

28 “President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev Addressed Nation.” *Azertag* (2023), https://azertag.az/en/xeber/president_of_azerbaijan_ilham_aliyev_addressed_nation_video-2756065, accessed 13.04.2024.

29 “Hikmet Hajiyev: No Civilian Facilities Were Harmed during Anti-Terror Measures,” *Azertag* (2023), https://azertag.az/en/xeber/hikmat_hajiyev_no_civilian_facilities_were_harmed_during_anti_terror_measures-2756023, accessed 15.04.2024.

30 The authenticity of these disturbing films has been verified by several watchdog organizations, such as Amnesty International USA, “Azerbaijan,” <https://www.amnestyusa.org/countries/azerbaijan/>; “Nagorno-Karabakh Exodus Amounts to War Crime, Legal Experts Say,” *Reuters* (2023), <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/nagorno-karabakh-exodus-amounts-war-crime-legal-experts-say-2023-09-29/>; Roth Andrew, “Azerbaijan Launches Anti-Terrorist Campaign in Disputed Nagorno-Karabakh Region,” *The Guardian* (2023), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/19/azerbaijan-launches-anti-terrorist-campaign-in-disputed-nagorno-karabakh-region>, accessed 15.03.2024.

31 A particularly harrowing account of violence committed by the Azerbaijani Armed Forces against an Armenian servicewoman is the murder of 36-year-old Anush Apetyan; Apetyan was attacked, raped, and mutilated by soldiers from the “Yashma” brigade of the Azerbaijani Special Service. Alan V. Gent, “Azerbaijani Military Films Torture and Death of Female Soldier,” *Infosperber* (2022), <https://www.infosperber.ch/politik/aserbaid-schanisches-militaer-filmt-folter-und-tod-einer-soldatin>, accessed 15.03.2024.

32 While this source depicts graphic imagery and should be accessed at one’s own risk, evidence for this crime may be found at the following link: <https://azeriwarcrimes.org/2020/12/18/18-armenian-man-beheaded-alive-by-azerbaijani-forces-as-soldiers-cheer-and-clap/>, accessed 16.03.2024.

depicting shelling operations conducted against civilians³³ near Stepanakert, the regional capital. Despite boilerplate claims made by the Aliyev regime that Armenian “civilians felt protected entirely thanks to the professionalism of our Armed Forces [...] [who] showed high professionalism and moral qualities,” the history of Azerbaijani hostility³⁴ depicted towards Armenian civilians within Nagorno-Karabakh – including the use of rhetoric that reflects genocidal ideation – amid the proliferation of this footage seems to suggest the systemic use of localized violence as a vehicle of intimidation aimed to frighten Armenian civilians within Nagorno-Karabakh into departing from their homes as quickly as they could.

In the eyes of critics, this invasion has led to the completion of an act of genocidal atrocity: the complete erasure of the indigenous Armenian presence within Nagorno-Karabakh. Contemporary estimates of surviving Armenians within Nagorno-Karabakh vary, but it is suggested that fewer than 1,000 Armenians³⁵ who choose to self-identify as such have remained in the region following the Azerbaijani invasion and seizure of the territory – constituting less than 99% of the former indigenous population. Institutes like the Caucasus Heritage Watch have, through the use of geospatial mapping techniques, supported claims argued by scholars³⁶ who have warned of the erasure of indigenous heritage from the region by documenting the deliberate destruction of cultural monuments and markers of Armenian presence within Nagorno-Karabakh.³⁷

The effective disappearance of Nagorno-Karabakh through systematic political violence and military seizure, the subsequent displacement and effective deportation of the entirety of the region’s indigenous Armenian population, the complete destruction of cultural heritage that honors the lived experiences and history of the former indigenous community, and the complete annexation of Nagorno-Karabakh into the Republic of Azerbaijan with minimal resistance from the international community both constitutes the dangerous success of genocidal ideation and acts – and represents a profound failure of the mechanisms currently set in place to both prevent genocide from occurring within sensitive political contexts and work to ensure its cessation when hostilities arise.

33 For graphic evidence of the following crime: <https://azeriwarcrimes.org/2023/10/08/18-torturing-pows-atrocities-looting-and-vandalism-committed-by-azerbaijani-troops/>, accessed 15.06.2024.

34 Footage has also been captured during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War of 2020 from villages that were occupied by the Azerbaijani Armed Forces; one such example depicts Azerbaijani soldiers taunting an elderly civilian depicted begging for his life before slitting his throat. See above content warning: <https://ragex.co/art-sakh-war-crime-beheading-elderly-civilian/>, accessed 17.04.2024.

35 Sam Grey, “UN Reports Between 50-1000 Armenians Remain Within Artsakh, 99% of Population Gone,” *The Atlas News* (2023), <https://theatlasnews.co/conflict/2023/10/04/un-reports-between-50-1000-armenians-remain-within-artsakh-99-of-population-gone/>, accessed 15.04.2024.

36 Armen T. Marsoobian, “Genocide by Other Means: Heritage Destruction, National Narratives, and the Azeri Assault on the Indigenous Armenians of Karabakh,” *Genocide Studies International* 15, no. 1 (2021): 21-33, <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/905257>.

37 “Monitoring Report #7: June 2024.” Caucasus Heritage Watch (2024). <https://caucasusheritage.cornell.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Report-2024-07Spread.pdf>, accessed 24.08.2024

Legal Mechanisms of Genocide Prevention

The very phrase “genocide prevention” has roots within the contemporary legal framework of the international system that extend from the postwar international order created in the wake of WWII – whose mythos is often closely linked to the collective sense of shame and horror extending from the Holocaust. Instruments of genocide prevention that emerged from the establishment of the United Nations in 1945 have since continued to shape the international community’s perception of the moral and legal obligations that states and parties to the international system possess in preventing genocide.

The life’s work of Polish-Jewish lawyer Rafael Lemkin – who would develop and coin the term “genocide” – would culminate in an indispensable impact upon the Genocide Convention. While crafted in an environment of politicking and drafted in ambiguous language³⁸ that reflects the postwar context in which the document was drafted, its longevity as a legal document is remarkable: signed and ratified on December 10, 1948, the Genocide Convention defines genocide as “a crime under international law which [signatories] undertake to prevent and to punish”³⁹ through legitimate instruments and vehicles of justice – and criminalizes both the direct perpetration and intent to execute an attack against a “national, ethnic, racial, or religious group” (in whole or in part). It lists five acts deemed prosecutable under international law as genocidal acts identified through both perpetration and intention: massacres and murders en-masse, non-lethal acts of violence, the application of indirect means to starve a group of the necessities to survive (i.e. “genocide by attrition”), acts aimed at preventing the reproduction of the targeted group (i.e. forced sterilizations, abortions, targeted sexual violence), and the forced transfer of children from the target group to the perpetrator group. These crimes, per Karaszia, may be prosecuted within international courts of law under the legal principles of *obligatio erga omnes*, under which these crimes “supersede any individual state’s borders and represent a threat to all humankind,” and *jus cogens*, constituting “crimes that under no circumstances states or their nationals can commit, regardless of exigent circumstances.”⁴⁰ Perpetrators of these atrocities may be prosecuted either within the state in which said atrocities were committed – or an internationally convened tribunal deemed legitimate for this purpose.⁴¹

A notable feature of the Genocide Convention is Article VIII, which charges signatory member states with a responsibility to engage in action aimed at “prevention

38 Allan D. Cooper, *The Geography of Genocide* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2009).

39 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Approved and proposed for signature and ratification or accession by General Assembly resolution 260 A (III) of 9 December 1948, Entry into force 12 January 1951, in accordance with article XIII, at https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.1_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf, accessed 02.05.2024.

40 Zachary Karaszia, “An Unfulfilled Promise: The Genocide Convention and the Obligation of Prevention.” *Journal of Strategic Security 11, no. 4* (2019): 20-31.

41 Josef L. Kunz, “The United Nations Convention on Genocide,” *The American Journal of International Law 43, no. 4* (2017): 738–746.

and suppression of acts of genocide.” This key assumption underpins the very foundation of the architecture that has followed the ratification of the Genocide Convention, Schiffbauer notes that “Article VIII specifically involves the UN in supporting state parties to meet their obligations under the Convention. It provides an additional means of referring a situation to the UN other than Article 35 of the UN Charter.”⁴²

The development of legal mechanisms that compel states to work to prevent genocide is one which is difficult to succinctly chronologize in a “linear” pattern. Scholars like Putnam have argued that a number of key changes have emerged surrounding the interpretation of the Genocide Convention in crafting a legal apparatus to prevent genocide, arguing that context of the Convention’s birth and the ensuing “rapid deterioration in US-Soviet relations... ripen[ing] into a Cold War that severely hobbled Security Council operations from the 1950s to the early 1990s, and also generated deep rifts in the General Assembly,”⁴³ which would ultimately serve to render the implementation of Article VIII as “all but impossible.” However, Putnam further argues that the geopolitical conditions of the international system between the 1950s and 1980s created crises that necessitated the development of a UN-sponsored for “legal and administrative foundation for asserting international ‘executive authority’ in situations of actual or impending violence due to government incapacity to assert effective control” on the ground.⁴⁴

Furthermore, through the 1990s into the 2000s, the failure of the international community to respond to the slaughter that unfolded during the Rwandan Genocide of 1994⁴⁵ and further atrocities in both the Srebrenica genocide and Kosovo led to policy discussions on collective action to intervene in glaring cases of human rights abuses by perpetrating regimes – best defined by the birth, existence, and subsequent mainstream decline of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine. Reaffirming the responsibilities of upholding Article VIII of the Genocide Convention, the 2005 World Summit

42 While the inclusion of Article VIII in the Genocide Convention “suggest[s] that in some small way this provision is capable of remedying the congenital defect that the Convention does not impose any obligations on the UN to prevent or punish genocide. But for the most part, the UN’s role in relation to genocide has developed outside the realm of the Convention.” The Genocide Convention, despite the strength of the norms and values that have emerged surrounding the perpetration of “genocide” itself, does not have the capacity to compel states to adhere to the provisions of the convention through the use of force. See Christian J. Tams, Lars Berster and Bjorn Schiffbauer, *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide: A Commentary* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2014).

43 Tonya Putnam, “Tracing International Legal Change in Genocide Prevention,” in *The Many Paths of Change in International Law*, edited by Nico Krisch and Ezgi Yildiz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198877844.003.0005>.

44 Ibid.

45 The failure of the international community to address the Rwandan Genocide through legal prevention or military intervention is often cited as a catalyst for understanding genocide prevention as a phenomenon. Michael Barnett, and Martha Finnemore. *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019); Scott R. Feil, and Romeo A. Dallaire, *Preventing Genocide: How the Early Use of Force Might Have Succeeded in Rwanda* (New York, 1998).

Outcome Document⁴⁶ asserts that states within the international system have both “the responsibility to protect [their] populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity” (per Article 138) and prevent these crimes abroad; Article 139 subsequently charges the international community – a collective reflected in the UN Security Council⁴⁷ – with “the responsibility to [act]... in accordance with Chapters VI and VIII of the [UN] Charter, to help protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.”⁴⁸

Other key developments include the use of punishment as a form of deterring future violence and holding perpetrators to account: international tribunals, such as the International Criminal Tribunal to the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Criminal Tribunal to Rwanda (ICTR)⁴⁹ have emerged to punish perpetrators of genocidal violence following the Rwandan Genocide and Srebrenica Genocide. These tribunals paved the way for the Rome Statute⁵⁰ of 2002, which would establish the International Criminal Court (ICC) as the central mechanism through which the international community could prosecute individuals and groups who have committed atrocity crimes and crimes against humanity. The ICC has since reviewed 31 individual cases and convicted a number of war criminals of atrocity crimes in a variety of contexts around the world.⁵¹

Furthermore, early warning systems⁵² have emerged that work to alert states, international organizations, committed stakeholders, and the general public to conditions where genocidal atrocities may erupt have proliferated within the contemporary system. NGOs, both public-facing (i.e. the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect) and privately-run (i.e. the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention), operate in capacities that both serve to advise the development of legislature at the domestic level, influence developments of international bodies/institutions aimed at furthering the mission of genocide prevention, and raising public awareness of atrocity crimes.

46 This document is often viewed as a key source within which R2P as an ideology and doctrine formed. United Nations. “About R2P: Responsibility to Protect.” United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect.” (n.d.), accessed 17.04.2024. <https://www.globalr2p.org/what-is-r2p/>.

47 Article 139 further endows the UN Security Council with a mandate “to take collective action, in a timely and decisive manner, through the Security Council, in accordance with the Charter, including Chapter VII, on a case-by-case basis and in cooperation with relevant regional organizations as appropriate, should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities manifestly fail to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.”

48 United Nations. 2005 World Summit Outcome (A/RES/60/1), https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_60_1.pdf.

49 “Evolution of International Criminal Justice,” *International Criminal Court Project*, <https://www.aba-icc.org/about-the-icc/evolution-of-international-criminal-justice/>, accessed 17.04.2024.

50 “The United Nations Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court,” *Library of Congress*, <https://www.loc.gov/item/lcwaN0018822/>, accessed 21.04.2024.

51 “About the Court,” *International Criminal Court*, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/about/the-court>, accessed 13.04.2024.

52 David A. Hamburg, *Preventing Genocide: Practical Steps Toward Early Detection and Effective Action* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015).

Overarching Challenges of Enacting Prevention or Cessation Mechanisms

Despite the development of these institutions and mechanisms extending from the remarkable survival of the Genocide Convention – a document which has remained unchanged since its ratification in 1948 – a key difficulty that remains in ensuring compliance with the legal mechanisms of genocide prevention as reflected in Article VIII. As is the case with all international law, there exists no legal compliance mechanism⁵³ that can make states to comply with laws, regulations, and mechanisms dedicated to genocide prevention; to be effective, there must be political will present from states and stakeholders to engage in early prevention activities, deter perpetrators, and punish those who violate the Genocide Convention and engage in genocidal acts. This conflict of political will centers within the enshrinement of respect for state sovereignty as an element of the international system itself. As a defining feature of the UN’s very architecture present in the UN Charter,⁵⁴ the principle of sovereignty in regards to the institution’s member states is rendered sacrosanct. Thus, a lack of political will to engage may leave perpetrators effectively protected from prosecution.⁵⁵ Some regimes even have legal contingencies in place to prevent officials or soldiers accused of war crimes from being prosecuted by international tribunals.⁵⁶

Given this fundamental aspect of international legislation on the moral goal of genocide prevention, Toope notes that “any ‘failures’ of the UN are largely-though not

53 Ervin Staub, “The Roots and Prevention of Genocide and Related Mass Violence” in *The Slippery Slope to Genocide: Reducing Identity Conflicts and Preventing Mass Murder*, edited by I. William Zartman, Mark Anstey, and Paul Meerts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

54 The UN Charter, in Articles 2.1, cites that “The Organization is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members,” and Article 2.7 cites that “Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter; but this principle shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII.” For full text, see: “United Nations General Assembly,” *Charter of the United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>, accessed 13.04.2024.

55 Chung notes that the effectiveness of arrest warrants from the ICC largely depend on the enforcement and adherence of member states to institutional rules, in which heads of states, who face arrest warrants from the ICC, often enjoy impunity from prosecution from ICC member states because of the lack of an enforcement mechanism when placed against the geopolitical realities, consequences, and immense danger of detaining and prosecuting a great power’s head of state. For more information, see: Christine H. Chung, “The Punishment and Prevention of Genocide: The International Criminal Court as a Benchmark of Progress and Need,” *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 40, no. 1/2 (2007): 227-262.

56 The resistance of certain great powers to ratify the Rome Statute (i.e. the United States, Russia, China) places further strain on the court’s legitimacy and ability to prosecute perpetrators. For example, the American Service Members Protection Act of 2002 – often known informally as the “Hague/Netherlands Invasion Act” – permits the United States government to “secure” any member of the armed forces under the jurisdiction of the ICC and, as critics assert, “intended to intimidate countries that ratify the treaty for the International Criminal Court (ICC)” through the threat of an invasion of the court’s seat of justice in The Hague do so. For more information, see: “U.S. Hague Invasion Act Becomes Law,” *Human Rights Watch*, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2002/08/03/us-hague-invasion-act-becomes-law>, accessed 17.06.2024.

entirely-imputable to a failure of political will on the part of member states” within the international system; without a mechanism that can override compliance in this matter, compliance with international law cannot be ensured without the marshaling of political will to act.⁵⁷ The structure of the Genocide Convention reflects this structural dilemma: despite providing clear legal avenues through which to punish perpetrators of genocidal atrocity, the document is only as effective as the will of powerful states within the international system to see it operationalized. As a consequence, a number of regimes have continued to engage in genocidal acts while justifying them within the normative language of the contemporary international system, often directly relying on arguments of “sovereignty” as a thinly-veiled excuse to evade legal obligations that would criminalize their actions under contemporary international law – effectively allowing both perpetrators and observer regimes to commit, per Stanton, “legal malpractice” when presented with damning evidence of atrocity.⁵⁸

Norms and beliefs surrounding collective action in regards to international atrocity (i.e. R2P) have also encountered roadblocks.⁵⁹ Bellamy asserts that R2P suffered within the international community precisely because of the ambiguous conflict between consensual military intervention and sovereignty, rendering the doctrine both difficult to interpret and enforce within the contemporary architecture of cessation mechanisms.⁶⁰ Bellamy argues further that there is no “optimal” template through which to execute these activities, and only one military intervention has been conducted within this atrocity-prevention framework: the toppling of Muammar Qaddafi’s government in Libya in 2011. While quick to lead to the end of Qaddafi’s reign in Libya, initial perceptions of the operation’s “success” were met with critical evaluations of its failure.⁶¹ Hehir argues that this rare

57 Toope, Stephen J. “Does International Law Impose a Duty upon the United Nations to Prevent Genocide?” 46 McGill L. J. 187, 193 (2000).

58 Within this context, Stanton refers to “legal malpractice” in the context of states evading responsibilities to respond to the brutality of the Rwandan Genocide – which illustrates the challenges of pursuing a clearly-defined legal pathway to ceasing genocidal acts in progress without the political will to respond. When the massacres began in April of 1994 – following weeks of international resistance to acknowledge reports submitted by General Romeo Dallaire and top authorities in Kigali warning the UN Secretariat of an imminent outbreak of atrocity – Stanton asserts that the US Department of State “continued to avoid the G-word” until June 10, 1994, after which “the US Secretary of State finally called it genocide [...] after most of the killing was over,” evading its responsibilities to respond to a genocide in progress. Gregory Stanton, “Could the Rwandan Genocide Have Been Prevented?” *Journal of Genocide Research* 6, no. 2 (2004): 211-228.

59 Nicole Deitelhoff, “Is the R2P Failing? The Controversy about Norm Justification and Norm Application of the Responsibility to Protect,” *Global Responsibility to Protect* 11, no. 2 (2019): 149-171.

60 Alex J. Bellamy, “The Responsibility to Protect and the Problem of Military Intervention,” *International Affairs* 84, no. 4 (2008): 615–639; Catherine Renshaw, “R2P: An Idea Whose Time Never Comes,” *Lowy Institute* (2021), <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/r2p-idea-whose-time-never-comes>, accessed 18.05.2024.

61 Soderlund, Najem and Roberts argue that the increasing severity of the humanitarian crisis within Libya followed the enactment of R2P, with metrics of Libyan political stability, economic performance plummeting while societal violence (amounting to the severity of “crimes against humanity” only six months after military action concluded) sharply rose. Walter C. Soderlund, Thomas P. Najem, and Blake Roberts, “Libya, 2011: Reconstruction of a Failed R2P Intervention,” *Canadian Political Science Association*, <https://cpsa-acsp.ca/documents/conference/2017/Soderlund-Najem-Roberts.pdf>. Bachman further argues that the “ulterior motives”

unanimously-sponsored intervention was only possible due to “the rare confluence of [P5] interests and humanitarian need,” reflecting the power of individual veto power in pursuit of political interest and the darker underlying factors which motivated unanimous action in Libya (i.e. regime change) over humanitarian concern.⁶²

Furthermore, there exist structural difficulties within the current institutional framework of genocide prevention and cessation mechanisms – both bureaucratic⁶³ and structural in nature. Regarding international tribunals: Asuncion notes that the standard of proof required to charge perpetrators of genocide of both intending to execute such crimes and committing crimes that fall under the purview of the Genocide Convention (i.e. *dolus specialis*⁶⁴) is difficult for prosecutors to meet; furthermore, establishing degrees of responsibility may be a further challenge. While attributing responsibility between individuals operating within a state’s bureaucracy and the state highlights links in which “planning and conspiracy, instigating and incitement, ordering and complicity, and aiding and abetting and complicity” become apparent between actors complicit in genocidal crime, prosecuting a state government for such crime may be nearly impossible on account of the subservience of international law to the principle of state sovereignty within the international system.⁶⁵

While this is not a comprehensive overview of all possible contingencies or challenges to international mechanisms that may prevent or confront genocide, a pattern surrounding the execution of these laws clear: the international system’s dependence on collective international political will to enforce mandates of genocide prevention and cessation have challenged efforts to address atrocity crime in systems that ultimately have no legal compliance mechanism. When conflicts arise where a lack of political will exists to address them, laws and norms developed to prevent genocide appear only as strong and effective as the will of international actors to engage with them.

Failures of Legal Mechanisms to Prevent Genocide in Nagorno-Karabakh

Within the context of Nagorno-Karabakh, there were several early warning systems that aimed to highlight the incoming threat of an invasion and subsequent ethnic cleansing,

at play among NATO forces of toppling Qaddafi’s government led to the enabling of atrocity crimes among rebel forces and the “abdication [of] its responsibility to protect Libyans from the human suffering that continued subsequent to Qaddafi’s execution.” Jeffrey Bachman, “R2P’s ‘Ulterior Motive Exemption’ and the Failure to Protect in Libya,” *Politics and Governance* 3, no. 4 (2015): 56-67.

62 Aidan Hehir, “The Permanence of Inconsistency: Libya, the Security Council, and the Responsibility to Protect” *International Security* 38, no. 1 (2013): 137-159.

63 Even when international organizations have the capacity to engage in the work of genocide prevention, scholars like Barnett and Finnemore assert that the structures of bureaucratic international organizations, given their unique nature, often serve to hamper the work that these organizations are mandated to accomplish. Barnett and Finnemore, *Rules for the World*.

64 Amabelle Asuncion, “Pulling the Stops on Genocide: The State or the Individual?” *European Journal of International Law* 20, no. 4 (2009): 1195-1222.

65 *Ibid.*

often taking on a frantic tone in light of potential military action in the summer and early fall months of 2023. For example, former ICC prosecutor and international human rights lawyer Luis Moreno Ocampo released a report titled “Genocide against Armenians in 2023”⁶⁶ that argued for the classification of atrocities that had taken place during the blockade of the Lachin Corridor as constituting an act whose intent and execution was centered within the practice of “genocide by attrition” under the Genocide Convention. Argentinian lawyer Juan Ernesto Mendez (acting Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide between 2004-2007 and a UN Special Rapporteur on Torture from 2010-2016) expressed similar sentiments in a report published on August 23, 2024, in which “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 [UN] Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide).”⁶⁷ The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention (2023) concurred, publishing an intensive report on the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis on September 5, 2023 – only two weeks before the Azerbaijani military invaded the territory – alerting international stakeholders to the genocidal rhetoric employed by the Aliyev regime of Azerbaijan in regards to the territorial acquisition and cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh and the likelihood of atrocities breaking out during the succeeding months. These select citations indicate that there were clear warnings that addressed the atrocities that took place during the blockade of the Lachin Corridor as reflective of the principle of Article II, paragraphs B (“serious bodily or mental harm”) and C (i.e. “genocide by attrition”) presented in the Genocide Convention, as well as warnings of ethnic cleansing and atrocity crime that reflected further genocidal atrocity aimed at the elimination of indigenous Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh.

Despite this clear identification of genocidal atrocity and warnings of future action, this did not compel international actors to engage in de-escalation activities or respond to the seizure of the territory on September 17, 2023; as genocidal atrocities committed by the invading Azerbaijani military forced Armenians to evacuate, there was little response abroad. Many external stakeholders, “struggling to formulate salient objectives”⁶⁸ in response, failed to make any statements of substance at all on the crisis outside of Armenian/Azerbaijani border tensions in a broader scope, treating the invasion as something of a *lost cause*. If one interprets the aforementioned expert opinions as presenting verifiable evidence warning of genocidal atrocities about to unfold – the international system effectively failed

66 Luis Moreno Ocampo, “USP Innovation on Global Order project. Nagorno-Karabakh case,” https://luis-morenoocampo.com/lmo_en/press-release-dec23, accessed 19.04.2024.

67 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,” *Armenian Permanent Mission to the United Nations*, https://un.mfa.am/file_manager/un_mission/Preliminary%20Opinion%20-%202023.08.2023.pdf, accessed 19.06.2024.

68 “Responding to the Humanitarian Catastrophe in Nagorno-Karabakh | Crisis Group,” October 16, 2023. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/nagorno-karabakh-conflict/responding-humanitarian-catastrophe-nagorno>, accessed 19.05.2024.

to seriously address this evidence and, by extension, allowed the invasion of Nagorno-Karabakh to pass without anything more than token calls for “peace” in the region from powerful stakeholders in Moscow, Brussels, and Washington.

Reflecting the broad failure of genocide prevention legislation to address or acknowledge this crisis, Gzoyan, et. al. asserts that the very fabric of genocide prevention legal mechanisms itself played a role in the region’s effective disappearance; despite critics asserting that the invasion of Nagorno-Karabakh constituted a clear act of ethnic cleansing, the authors note that its contested legal status was fundamentally interlinked with legal developments surrounding definitions of the crime of “ethnic cleansing,” which is unclear and lacks “definition and precise qualifications, while serving as a term increasingly utilized by a global community to characterize specific situations worldwide” without clarity or legal precision.⁶⁹ This opacity reflects a microcosmic representation of a core issue of international law – in which unclear definitions of criminal acts may contribute to failed applications in contexts of atrocity crime.

However, perhaps most striking of these failures was the collapse of the Tripartite Agreement of 2020 – under which Russian peacekeeping forces, explicitly tasked with replacing Armenian positions around the former line of contact and Lachin Corridor – failed to act to prevent the outbreak of hostilities during the invasion and uphold the explicit terms of their mandate. Despite the deaths of several Russian peacekeepers during the Azerbaijani invasion of Nagorno-Karabakh,⁷⁰ the invasion was not resisted by Russian peacekeeping forces during the assault. In response to criticism, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov asserted that “people [were] willing to leave” without a clear rationale, citing that it was “not [Russia’s] place” to act given that it was “hardly possible to talk about who is to blame” regarding the crisis. Per Moscow, Nagorno-Karabakh’s disputed status labeled the geopolitical situation as “a new system of coordinates” without acknowledging the blatant break with the Tripartite Agreement that Russian President Vladimir Putin signed.⁷¹

Another compounding factor to this particular failure is Armenia’s membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), an international military alliance led by the Russian Federation – whose membership also includes Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Founded in 1992 amid the signing of the Collective Security Treaty, participation in the CSTO (much akin to NATO⁷²) stipulates that member states,

69 Edita Gzoyan, Svetah Chakhmakhchyan and Edgar Meyroyan, “Ethnic Cleansing in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh): Issues of Definition and Criminal Responsibility,” *International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies* 8, no. 2 (2023): 56-85.

70 “Top Russian Navy Officer Killed in Azerbaijan’s Nagorno-Karabakh,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/top-russia-navy-officer-killed-azerbaijan-nagorno-karabakh/32602846.html>, accessed 19.05.2024.

71 Robyn Dixon, and Ebel Fredrick, “Russia’s Peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh: A Model of Failure,” *The Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/09/30/russia-nagorno-karabakh-peacekeepers-failure/>, accessed 19.05.2024.

72 North Atlantic Treaty Organization. “The North Atlantic Treaty.” (1949). Accessed April 10, 2024. https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/stock_publications/20120822_nato_treaty_en_light_2009.pdf

per Article 4 asserts that if one of the Member States undergoes aggression (armed attack menacing to safety, stability, territorial integrity and sovereignty), it will be considered by the Member States as aggression... to all the Member States of this Treaty,” permitting “all the other Member States at request of this Member State [to] immediately provide the latter with [the] necessary help, including military [help], as well as provide support by the means at their disposal in accordance with the right to collective defen[s]e pursuant to [A]rticle 51 of the UN Charter.”⁷³ Given Armenia’s participation as a member state within the CSTO and the simultaneous Tripartite-mandated placement of peacekeepers within both Armenia’s internationally-recognized territory and the frozen line of contact, this created the conditions for Russian intervention to an attack on the territorial sovereignty of Armenia⁷⁴ or a violation of the status quo within Nagorno-Karabakh. However, the failure of Russian peacekeepers to act – or the CSTO to mobilize – was justified by the Kremlin on account of Nagorno-Karabakh’s legal ambiguity as an unrecognized state, with Russian Presidential Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov arguing that Russian “obligations” to security guarantees extended to Armenia as a member of the organization “do not extend to Karabakh.”⁷⁵ Critics have addressed this failure as a demonstration of a broader Russian failure to meet its obligations as an “absentee security provider.”⁷⁶

In the weeks following the invasion, international responses were muted and often failed to express more than “concern” for the instability that had emerged in the Caucasus. While a UN-sponsored visit was made to the region following its seizure, genocide scholar Elisa von Joeden-Forgey challenges the approach through which international stakeholders approached the seizure of Nagorno-Karabakh following its conquest in October 2023; directly citing “the United Nations mission to a completely depopulated Stepanakert, the “historic capital” of Artsakh and the seat of power of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, on 1 October 2023” to assess the situation on the ground after international stakeholders and Artsakh-tsi-Armenians “had been calling for a UN mission to Artsakh throughout Azerbaijan’s nine-month blockade that preceded the September 19 military attack [...] [as] since 2020[,] Azerbaijan had prevented the United Nations and all other international organizations from entering the territory” and reporting freely on the conflict. In the wake of the invasion, von Joeden-Forgey asserts that the entire UN mission to legally overview the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh “was operating fully within the Azerbaijani propaganda landscape... which was insisting that Armenians “left voluntarily,” the mission reported that

73 “Collective Security Treaty,” Retrieved from https://en.odkb-csto.org/documents/documents/dogovor_o_kollektivnoy_bezopasnosti/#loaded, accessed 19.05.2024.

74 Armenpress. “Armenia Asked CSTO for Military Support to Restore Territorial Integrity amid Azeri Attack – PM.” (2022). <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1092504/>.

75 “Russia’s Security Guarantees for Armenia Don’t Extend to Karabakh, Putin Says,” *The Moscow Times*, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/10/07/russias-security-guarantees-for-armenia-dont-extend-to-karabakh-putin-says-a71687>, accessed 16.05.2024.

76 Thomas Ambrosio, “The Collective Security Treaty Organization: A Lifeless, Shambling Alliance?” *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2024/03/04/the-collective-security-treaty-organization-a-lifeless-shambling-alliance/>, accessed 19.05.2024.

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”⁷⁷ in the wake of perpetrator-documented atrocities that likely compelled the vast majority of Armenian residents to evacuate out of fear of violence.

Despite good intention within the international community to document what occurred, the humanitarian mission in question – as well as subsequent press conferences and events which presented detailed evidence of “reconstruction” efforts in impacted regions and claimed to have seen “no visible damage to public infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, housing, or cultural and religious structures”⁷⁸ within places visited, despite the limited nature of the humanitarian visit to only a select few locations within Nagorno-Karabakh – has had few statements on record which suggest an acknowledgement of atrocity beyond a “concern” for the experience of refugees forced to alight, nor much attention paid to the legal mechanisms or efforts to prevent conflict before the seizure of Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023. This humanitarian mission’s mandate appears solely focused on post-conflict reconstruction and offers little commentary on the experience of survivors within a region and mandate supervised by an authoritarian government⁷⁹ precisely because the territory was effectively depopulated of the targeted population and represents what has been termed by researchers like Hoekman as “the first successful ethnic cleansing of the 21st century.”⁸⁰

Geopolitics of the South Caucasus and the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

In understanding what may have geopolitical conditions of the South Caucasus⁸¹ are marked by its status as an “intersection” of various geopolitical regions, including Eastern Europe/Eurasia, the Middle East/Levant, and Central Asia – and the states which border

77 Elisa von Joeden-Forgey, “Why Prevention Fails: Chronicling the Genocide in Artsakh,” *International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies* 8, no. 2 (2023): 86-107.

78 “United Nations. “UN Karabakh mission told ‘sudden’ exodus means as few as 50 ethnic Armenians may remain.” UN News, 2023. Accessed 20.06.2024. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/10/1141782>.

79 Azerbaijan is governed by a one-party unitary government that effectively derives authority from the hereditary dictatorship of the Aliyev regime. Its metrics for political freedom in relation to the security of the regime are grim; per the Freedom House 2024 report, Azerbaijan currently has a score of zero (0/40) for “Political Freedoms” and 7/60 for “Civil Rights,” marking the state as staunchly “Not Free.” For more information, see: “Azerbaijan,” In *Freedom in the World 2024*, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/azerbaijan/freedom-world/2024>, accessed 20.06.2024.

80 Jacob Hoekman, “Opinion: Nagorno-Karabakh: When Values Are Trampled by Brute Power Politics,” *Caucasus Neighborhood and Europe*, <https://cne.news/article/4069-nagorno-karabakh-when-values-are-trampled-by-brute-power-politics>, accessed 20.04.2024.

81 Mordechai de Haas, “Current Geostrategy in the South Caucasus,” PINR, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Mordechai-De-Haas-2/publication/265147106_Current_Geostrategy_in_the_South_Caucasus/links/544e77680cf26dda0890132e/Current-Geostrategy-in-the-South-Caucasus.pdf; Arne Strand and Siri Neset, “Changing Geopolitics of the South Caucasus after the Second Karabakh War,” *Chr. Michelsen Institute, Caucasus Policy Analysis Center*, <https://www.cmi.no/publications/8911-changing-geopolitics-of-the-south-caucasus-after-the-second-karabakh-war#author-details>, accessed 20.05.2024.

the region's three internationally-recognized republics: Russia, Turkey, and Iran. All three states have played a key role in shaping and molding the geopolitical reality that the three internationally-recognized⁸² republics of the South Caucasus – Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia⁸³ – continue to inhabit, as do its unrecognized republics and territories.

In a report dating from 2022, Ismayil and Yilmaz characterized the relations between the states of the “inner core” of the South Caucasus and the nations who neighbor them as a complex, interconnected web in which the region appears as a battlefield for larger geopolitical conflict: “Azerbaijan and Turkey are perceived as the main threats for Armenia; Armenia, Russia, and Iran constitute varying degrees of threat to Azerbaijan’s security; and Russia poses a serious threat for Georgia, which prefers to seek Western protection, particularly from the United States.”⁸⁴

While this geopolitical landscape has continued to shift, the interwoven nature of international relations within the region has endured – and it has perpetuated an environment of geopolitical fluidity. Analyzing the role and relationship of each neighboring state to the South Caucasus to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, as well as that of external stakeholders within the international system, may highlight the ways in which political will has been expended to pursue individual interest within the region.

5A) RUSSIA: As the successor state to the Soviet Union and dominant great power within the Eurasian geopolitical space, Russia’s relationship with Armenia and Azerbaijan plays a unique role in shaping the context of geopolitical developments within the South

82 The phrase “internationally-recognized republics” excludes territories within the South Caucasus whose provisional government authorities are not widely recognized by the international community. This includes the former Republic of Artsakh, as well as the republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

83 It is worth mentioning that a state whose role is, perhaps, given minimal scholastic attention within this analysis is that of Georgia. This is not an intentional effort to sideline Tbilisi’s perspective on the conflict – on the contrary, Georgia occupies a unique strategic role in the Caucasus: from its lack of diplomatic relations with Russia (due to Russian-backed separatist movements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, viewed by Georgian and international officials as Russian “occupation”) to Tbilisi’s role in linking Turkey and Azerbaijan’s oil and gas connections. Furthermore, Tbilisi has expressed interest in “mediating” a peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the wake of the invasion of Nagorno-Karabakh; while these efforts to mediate during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War of 2020 were effectively declined (Lomsadze, 2020), its efforts to do so appear to have been viewed more receptively in current years following the seizure of Nagorno-Karabakh, particularly amid regional hostility to efforts from other states (i.e. France, whom government officials in Baku perceive as “biased”) (Isayev, 2023) external to the region to mediate. Further scholarly attention to Georgia’s role in relation to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (particularly in relation to the “Peaceful Neighbourhood Initiative” sponsored by Tbilisi) would make for a welcome addition to this subject. For more information, see: Giorgi Lomsadze, “Armenia and Azerbaijan to Georgian Mediation: Thanks, but No Thanks,” *Eurasianet*, <https://eurasianet.org/armenia-and-azerbaijan-to-georgian-mediation-thanks-but-no-thanks>; Samantha Fanger, and Nelson Haley, “Georgias Potential Role in South Caucasus Peacemaking,” *Caspian Policy Center*, <https://www.caspianpolicy.org/research/security/georgias-potential-role-in-south-caucasus-peacemaking>; Heydar Isayev, “Georgia Offers Mediation between Armenia, Azerbaijan,” *Eurasianet*, <https://eurasianet.org/georgia-offers-mediation-between-armenia-azerbaijan>, accessed 20.05.2024.

84 Elchin Ismayil, and Sedat Yilmaz, “Strategic Alignments and Balancing of Threats: Military and Political Alliances in the South Caucasus (1991-2021),” *Central Asian Survey* (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2021.2000940>, accessed 20.05.2024.

Caucasus; a region that has remained largely within its political sphere of influence.⁸⁵ Russia’s continuous geopolitical domination of the South Caucasus and its status as a great power within the “near-abroad” of the former USSR renders external intervention within its nearby post-Soviet geopolitical neighborhood an unacceptable prospect. As Kurth succinctly notes, NATO’s continued expansion east into the post-Soviet space has led to Moscow acting to assert its regional interests, acting in 2008 against US-led efforts to include Georgia into NATO through the occupation and annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as Russian-backed separatist provinces of Georgia.⁸⁶ However, despite this unapologetic mandate from the Kremlin – one which has been only intensified with the invasion of Ukraine and ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War – and the institutional mechanisms in place to cement its role as the central geopolitical actor within the South Caucasus, notably including its efforts to retain Armenia as an ally in the region (i.e. Armenia’s membership within the CSTO, Russian efforts to engage diplomatically with Yerevan, and the placement of peacekeepers on the line of contact following the end of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War), Russian peacekeepers did not resist the invasion.

There may be other reasons as to why Moscow did not respond to the Azerbaijani invasion (i.e. stemming from its entrenched offensive war in Ukraine); however, within the sphere of diplomacy, the rationale for this inaction may lie within the need for the Kremlin to cultivate both good relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan. This creates a dilemma in which MacHaffie notes acutely that “Russia considers Azerbaijan an ally, or at least a friend, despite Baku not being in CSTO. Thus, for the CSTO to take up Armenia’s request to intervene on its behalf, it would antagonize Azerbaijan... [yet] at the same time[,] the alliance cannot alienate Armenia as it too may seek alliance options elsewhere, such as NATO, which would be unacceptable to Russia”⁸⁷ and undermine its role as a power-broker within the Russian “near-abroad.” Ambrosio offers a sharper critique of Russia’s role as an “absentee security guarantor” within a “dying” CSTO, who has used its role as the *de facto* head of the CSTO to retain its member states within its sphere of influence while demonstrating its unwillingness to adhere to legal obligations enshrined within CSTO as “demonstrated to the rest of the CSTO that its interests were the only ones that held water”⁸⁸ within the alliance.

5B) TURKEY: Defined by the mutual antagonism expressed between the Armenian and Turkish governments on behalf of Ankara’s continuous denial of the Armenian Genocide as the successor state of the Ottoman Empire and the close ethnonational ties

85 Karolina Chawrylo, and Bartosiewicz Mateusz, “Russia Seals the Demise of Nagorno-Karabakh,” *OSW Centre for Eastern Studies*, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2023-10-05/russia-seals-demise-nagorno-karabakh>, accessed 20.06.2024.

86 James Kurth, “From the Baltic to the Black Sea: NATO’S Drive to the East Versus Russia’s Sphere of Influence,” *Orbis* 66, no. 4 (2022): 577–596.

87 James MacHaffie, “Overcoming Alliance Dilemmas in the Collective Security Treaty Organization: Signaling for Reputation Amid Strategic Ambiguity,” *Defence Studies* (2024): 1-27.

88 Ambrosio, “The Collective Security Treaty Organization.”

shared by Turkey and Azerbaijan (often defined as “two states, one nation”⁸⁹), Turkey’s relationships with Armenia and Azerbaijan have played out in a markedly dichotomous manner.

Largely originating from tensions surrounding Turkish recognition of the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1917 and successive tensions, interstate relations between Turkey and Armenia have remained frosty up to the present day. No diplomatic relations currently exist between either state. While both the Armenian and Turkish Foreign Ministries have expressed interest in opening the Turkic-Armenian land border for passage by third-country nationals following the passage of an agreement in 2022,⁹⁰ the Armenian-Turkish border has remained closed since 1993, as a Turkish response to the Armenian offensive in the First Nagorno-Karabakh War.⁹¹ The role of the Armenian diaspora in lobbying for Turkey’s recognition of the Armenian Genocide has also, per scholars like Tololyan and Papazian⁹² and Suny,⁹³ complicated efforts from the Armenian and Turkish states to normalize relations. Furthermore, while Turkey is a member of NATO and occupies a role of strategic partnership with states like the United States,⁹⁴ its continued resistance to acknowledging the Armenian Genocide, as well as the tumultuous relationship between the Turkish state and other minority populations within Turkey, has (per scholars such as Ho and McConnell) impacted Turkish efforts to accede to Western and European institutions.⁹⁵

In contrast, Turkey’s relationship with Azerbaijan has often been described as reflecting an approach of “two states, one nation” on account of the close cooperation

89 John Freund, “Strong Azerbaijani-Turkish Relations Reinforced Through Güler’s Visit to Azerbaijan,” *Caspian Policy Center*, <https://www.caspianpolicy.org/research/regional-south-caucasus/strong-azerbaijani-turkish-relations-reinforced-through-gulers-visit-to-azerbaijan>, accessed 20.06.2024.

90 “Turkey – Bilateral Relations,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia*, <https://www.mfa.am/en/bilateral-relations/tr>.

91 “Relations between Türkiye and Armenia,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey*, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkiye-and-armenia.en.mfa>, accessed 20.06.2024.

92 Khachig Tololyan and Tsolin Papazian, “Armenian Diasporas and Armenia: Issues of Identity and Mobilization,” *Études arméniennes contemporaines*, no. 3 (2014): 83–101.

93 Ronald Grigor Suny, “Truth in Telling: Reconciling Realities in the Genocide of the Ottoman Armenians,” *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 4 (2009): 930-946.

94 Niv Goren, “The NATO/US-Turkey-Russia Strategic Triangle: Challenges Ahead,” *Center for International & Security Studies*, University of Maryland, 2018.

95 Turkey’s relationship with Western integration has also been impacted by other ethnonational conflicts to which it has been a party to. Ho and McConnell, in their work on chronicling the phenomena of “diaspora diplomacy”, note that Turkey’s continued bids for EU membership have been challenged by Kurdish interest groups within Turkey and inside the Schengen Area, who have “invoked EU sanctioned democratic and human rights norms, and partnered with international human rights organizations to lobby the European Parliament, the European Commission and standing committees such as the EU–Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee and the Committee of Women’s Rights and Gender Equality” to pressure European institutions to resist integrating Turkey into such institutions. For more information, see: Elaine Lynn-Ee Ho and Fiona McConnell, “Conceptualizing ‘diaspora diplomacy’: Territory and populations betwixt the domestic and foreign,” *Progress in Human Geography*, 43, no. 2 (2017): 235–255, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132517740217>; Goren, “The NATO/US-Turkey-Russia Strategic Triangle.”

and cultural similarities between Baku and Ankara. Framed as by Ismayilov and Graham (2015) as a relationship defined by common political interests, Turkic cultural affinities, and “pipeline politics” that sustained “energy-bolstered contact”⁹⁶ amid a glut of primary resources in Azerbaijan and a “capacity to transit those resources” to markets further afield through Turkey,⁹⁷ the historically-salient Turkic-Azerbaijani relationship strengthened during a period of regional change, harnessing avenues for mutually-beneficial economic cooperation and a shifting geopolitical composition of the South Caucasus following the First Nagorno-Karabakh War.

Within the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: in addition to explicit geopolitical support from Ankara⁹⁸ surrounding Azerbaijan’s seizure of Nagorno-Karabakh, critics assert that Turkish influence in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been rendered evident through close bilateral cooperation surrounding defensive capacities and the sale of materials from Turkey to Azerbaijan,⁹⁹ impacting Azerbaijan’s intensive military development following the First Nagorno-Karabakh War and, by extension, influencing the course of both the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War and the 2023 invasion. Hovsepyan and Tononyan (2024) go as far as arguing that Turkey’s role in the conflict reflects a desire from Ankara to influence Azerbaijani social development within the country in a “pro-Turkic” direction that directly benefits Ankara’s interests, asserting that the use of “Turkic” vocabulary in regards to national and regional identity surrounding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict – and the tangible military contributions made by Turkey to Azerbaijan – reflects a conceited effort to craft stronger cultural and diplomatic ties through the use of diplomacy effectively facilitated through weapons sales.¹⁰⁰

5C) IRAN: While there exists a less robust body of scholarship that directly approaches the unique relationships held between Armenia and Azerbaijan with the Islamic Republic of Iran – a state that borders the Azerbaijani mainland, Armenia’s Syunik Province, and the Autonomous Republic of Nakhichevan (Azerbaijan), the geopolitical conditions surrounding Iran’s stake in the Caucasus is complex, and its relationship to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is no different.

96 Murad Ismayilov and Norman A. Graham (eds.), *Turkish-Azerbaijani Relations. One Nation Two States?* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2016).

97 Rovshan Ibrahimov, “Turkish-Azerbaijani energy relations: Significant leverage in the implementation of the foreign policy interests of both countries,” *Insight Turkey*, 17(2): 83-100.

98 “Turkey Supports Azerbaijan’s Steps to Preserve Its Territorial Integrity, Says Turkish President Erdogan,” *Azertag*, https://azertag.az/en/xeber/turkiye_supports_azerbaijan_039s_steps_to_preserve_its_territorial_integrity_says_turkish_president_erdogan-2754397, accessed 18.06.2024.

99 H. Yalcinnkaya, Turkey’s overlooked role in the second Nagorno-Karabakh war. The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF), Retrieved from <https://www.gmfus.org/news/turkeys-overlooked-role-second-nagorno-karabakh-war>; Anton Atasuntsev, “Long-Standing Ties Between Armenia and Russia Are Fraying Fast,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/90768>, accessed 18.04.2024.

100 Lilit Hovsepyan and Artyom A. Tonoyan. “From Alliance to ‘Soft Conquest’: The Anatomy of the Turkish-Azerbaijani Military Alliance Before and After the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War.” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* (2024): 1-34.

Despite the outward similarities of Iran and Azerbaijan's respective religious affiliations as Shi'a majority Islamic states¹⁰¹ and their geopolitical alignment as oil producers who neighbor one another on the Caspian Sea,¹⁰² Iranian-Azerbaijani relations have experienced a degree of diplomatic tumult in recent years; scholars like Nassibi have understood the tension that has existed between Tehran and Baku as stemming from the complex division between Azeris within the Republic of Azerbaijan and the large ethnonational Azeri minority located within Iran's Azeri minority within its East and West Azerbaijan Provinces in the north of Iran, neighboring one-another across the Azerbaijan-Iran border.¹⁰³ Zasztowt concurs, noting that Turkic-Azeri linguistic and cultural affinity and ideological differentiation between Iran's governing elite and the Azeri minority within Iran has nurtured the prospect of Azeri separatism in Iran's East/West Azerbaijan Provinces – something that has threatened the governing establishment within Tehran.¹⁰⁴

Conversely, Iran's role in the region as a geopolitical counterbalance to the Turkic-Azerbaijani alliance has led to common ground between Tehran and Yerevan on ensuring the security of the international border between Armenia's Syunik Province and Iran's East Azerbaijan Province. Efforts to enact the Zangezur Corridor among Azerbaijan, Turkey, Central Asia and external authorities have been met with concern from Iranian leadership.¹⁰⁵ Yet while its role may inadvertently prove to benefit contemporary Armenia as a hedge against further encroachment, its stance on contemporary geopolitical security in the region amid border change and hostility with Azerbaijan has contributed to the geopolitical fluidity and uncertainty surrounding the region's political alignment.

Given its diplomatic isolation, critics like Nasri¹⁰⁶ note Tehran's distrust of international institutions endemic to the contemporary global order dominated by NATO; its willingness to cooperate with Russia on issues such as engagement in the Syrian Civil War, investment in energy that circumvents Western-imposed sanctions on each state, per Stroul and, per Katzman, agreements on weapons systems that may have contributed to the Russian offensive in Ukraine¹⁰⁷ further underpin the complexity of Iran's relationship

101 As of 2023, Iran and Azerbaijan possess the world's first and second largest Shi'a populations (as a percentage of their respective total populations) in the world.

102 Iran is a founding member of OPEC, while Azerbaijan is not a member of OPEC. See: "Iran Facts and Figures," *Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries*, https://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/163.htm, accessed 18.06.2024.

103 Nasser L. Nassibi, "Azerbaijan-Iran Relations: Challenges and Prospects," *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University* (1999), <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/azerbaijan-iran-relations-challenges-and-prospects>, accessed 28.04.2024.

104 Konrad Zasztowt, "Iran, Turkey and Azerbaijan: Heading Towards a Regional Crisis?" *PISM Policy Paper* 9, no. 35 (2012): 21-36.

105 Elaheh Koolae, Ahmad Rashidi, "The Zangezur Corridor and Threats to the Interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the South Caucasus," *Caucasus Analytical Digest* 136 (2024): 3-6.

106 Jahnadad Memarian, "Iran Doesn't Trust the International Community," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 21 April 2014, <https://fpif.org/iran-doesnt-trust-international-community/>, accessed 28.04.2024.

107 Kenneth Katzman, "Iran's Military Alignment with Russia Increases the West's Distrust," *Gulf International Forum*, <https://gulrif.org/irans-military-alignment-with-russia-increases-the-west-s-distrust/>, accessed 20.04.2024.

to both the South Caucasus and broader institutions dedicated to liberal internationalism and, by extension, genocide prevention and cessation.¹⁰⁸ Iran’s distrust of international institutions and individual interests (i.e. distrust of Azerbaijan, strategic alignment with Armenia, its complex regional alignment alongside Russia) may have further contributed to geopolitical fluidity in the region, further reducing any political will to act to uphold international mechanisms of atrocity prevention anchored in a framework of humanitarian “morality” as defined by the contemporary international system.

5D) COLLECTIVE ANALYSIS: If the Azerbaijani invasion of Nagorno-Karabakh is viewed as a failure of political will to act in preservation of both the Tripartite Agreement of 2020 and the UN Genocide Convention, the indifference of the international community to act may reflect uncertainty held by actors engaging within a region where political developments often shift and sway in directions both dictated by both states and territories of the South Caucasus – and powerful neighbors and external stakeholders alike who have interests in the region that they have proven willing to defend by ignoring both international law and mechanisms of genocide prevention and cessation.

Given these aforementioned factors, any efforts to engage in legal architecture of genocide prevention would have had to navigate several challenges: Russia’s regional dominance and hostility to any form of exclusion within its “near-abroad,” alongside its absentee-yet-legally-enshrined role as a peacekeeper to enforce the status quo from the Tripartite Ceasefire Agreement of 2020; Turkey’s ideological affinity with Azerbaijan and its shared interest in ensuring Azerbaijani sovereignty over the region through military funding and international support; and Iranian hostility to Azerbaijan and mistrust of international legal institutions. None of these three states, I argue, would have had a clear incentive to support an international intervention to respond to the invasion of Nagorno-Karabakh on account of their intersecting interests relative to both the progression of the conflict and regional geopolitical fluidity characterized by animosity among internationally-recognized parties to the conflict (i.e. Armenia and Azerbaijan).

Regarding the role of powerful states beyond the periphery: it could be further argued that these individual interests have been shaped by great powers external to the region. For example: diplomatic relations between the United States and the three nation-states of the South Caucasus reflect a short history following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991; one endemic of “zero sum diplomacy” anchored in the region’s economic resources and its “newness” as a zone of diplomatic engagement, having only established diplomatic relationships with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in 1992, alongside its status as a political issue of concern to 8,000,000 Armenian diasporans.¹⁰⁹ While complex,

108 Dana Stroul, “Russian-Iranian Cooperation and Threats to U.S. Interests,” *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* (2024), <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/russian-iranian-cooperation-and-threats-us-interests>, accessed 20.06.2024.

109 Vahagn Vardanyan, *National Identity, Diaspora, and Space of Belonging: An Armenian Perspective* (London: Komitas Institute, 2021).

US government policy (as reflected in CRS reports¹¹⁰) may reflect an economic incentive to continue engaging with the parties at conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis without attention given to international law and norms of genocide prevention; most notably, Azerbaijan, with its vast reserves of oil and gas and its strategic placement as a non-OPEC producer within a geopolitical region situated at the intersection of several larger geopolitical environments (Eurasia, the Middle East, Central Asia, former Soviet Bloc states).¹¹¹¹² Despite the seizure and cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh constituting a clear case of genocidal atrocity: there is both political and economic incentive for external stakeholders who avoid raising turbulence between the states of the South Caucasus or peripheral powers (i.e. Russia, Turkey, Iran). Any incentive to uphold international law on atrocity prevention simply may not have balanced with the incentives at play for external stakeholders to follow the strategy of engagement embodied by the United States and other OECD states: call for pacification, allow the conflict to effectively take its course, and operate or “do business” in a way that reflects pragmatic self-interest.

Looking to the Future

While this article cannot possibly consider itself a “comprehensive” analysis, this project hopes to contribute to conversations on the failure of genocide prevention mechanisms to operate when faced with acute crisis. The failure of the international community to respond to the blockade, seizure, and cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh (through enforcing conditions of attrition and committing acts of terror to commit a *de facto* deportation) represents a significant reinforcement of both legal and normative failures aimed at preventing, ceasing, and punishing perpetrators of genocide.

The invasion and seizure of Nagorno-Karabakh serves to reinforce both the poor efficacy of current rules and regimes surrounding activities and legislation intended

110 The Congressional Research Service (CRS) frequently publishes reports on a wide variety of topics of relevance to policymakers in Congress in order to inform debate. The work published by the analysts themselves is quite scholastically rigorous and well-researched, if not written with a deliberate consciousness to the sensitivity of the issues at stake in the South Caucasus; yet it provides a unique window through which to view US foreign policy in spaces where individual policymakers may have little to no local knowledge of conflicts). Several articles reflect these positions saliently: Phillip Brown, “No Oil Producing and Exporting Cartels (NOPEC) Act of 2018,” *Congressional Research Services* (CRS Report No. IF11019). <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11019>; Sarah E. Garding & Michael Ratner, Cory Welt, Jim Zanotti, “TurkStream: Russia’s Southern Pipeline to Europe” (2021) *Congressional Research Services* (CRS Report No. IF11177), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11177>; Corey Welt, “Azerbaijan’s Retaking of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Displacement of Karabakh Armenians,” (2023), *Congressional Research Services* (CRS Report No. IN12265). <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN12265/2>, accessed 20.06.2024.

111 Soeren Kern, “How the Demand for Oil Drives American Foreign Policy,” *Real Instituto Elcano*, <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/analyses/how-the-demand-for-oil-drives-american-foreign-policy/>, accessed 20.04.2024.

112 Nona Mikhelidze, “The Azerbaijan-Russia-Turkey Energy Triangle and its Impact on the Future of Nagorno-Karabakh,” *Documenti Istituto Affari Internazionali* 10, 1-8.

to prevent genocide across contexts, which may be applicable to other contemporary genocidal atrocities, atrocity crimes, and violations of human rights; most saliently in Gaza and Ukraine. Accordingly, the failure of Russia’s peacekeeping mission and its promises to adhere to its legal responsibilities within the Caucasus may paint a picture of impunity that reflects its dichotomous role as a “peacekeeper” in the Caucasus and perpetrator amid atrocities committed within the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War.

There will be clear geopolitical consequences for the South Caucasus in light of the failure of the international community to respond to this seizure of territory and the genocidal crimes that have accompanied it: discourse surrounding Azerbaijan’s claims to the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh has led to concerns from scholars and researchers about future ambitions from the Aliyev regime that may be aimed at prying chunks of territory away from the Republic of Armenia, which has begun being referred to in the Aliyev regime as “Western Azerbaijan.” Researchers at the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute (AGMI) have identified a number of practices engaged by the Azerbaijani government to lay the groundwork for discourse and endorsement of future violence wielded against Armenians that may potentially lie within its internationally recognized borders, justifying a future conflict directly between Armenia and Azerbaijan on Armenian territory.¹¹³

This failure to respond has also had consequences for the geopolitical security of the larger Eurasian region as a whole – particularly in relation to Russia’s role as a regional power. As of this article’s publication in 2024, Russo-Armenian relations are continuing to decline sharply¹¹⁴ amid Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s efforts to remove Armenia from the CSTO – something which Moscow has reacted to with hostility.¹¹⁵ The ineffectiveness of the CSTO to address these crises, per critics like Ambrosio, may lead to greater insecurity among states which border Russia and formerly relied on it for security guarantees. It is uncertain where this fluidity may lead as tensions continue to increase; however, it is likely that regional tensions will continue to evolve in relation to the changing geopolitical climate of the South Caucasus.¹¹⁶

113 For example, the Twitter (X) account for the “Western Azerbaijan Community,” labeled the “official [T]witter account of the Western Azerbaijan Community, which deals with the rights of Azerbaijanis expelled from nowadays [contemporary] Armenia,” has made public stances on the legitimization of Azerbaijan’s seizure of Nagorno-Karabakh. Having been established in January of 2023, the account posted continuously until September 15, 2023: two days before the seizure of Nagorno-Karabakh. No new posts have emerged since then.

114 Anton Atasutsev, “Long-Standing Ties Between Armenia and Russia Are Fraying Fast.” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, (2023). <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/90768>.

115 Moscow has reacted to Yerevan’s shift away from the CSTO and Russia’s assurances as a security clarification with a muted “need for clarification”, commenting that “Russian leadership assumes that difficult issues will be resolved in bilateral relations” between Pashinyan and Putin in the coming months. For more information on this deepening rift, see: “Peskov: Russia Intends to Find Out Armenia PM’s Words about Diversification of Security Relations,” *NEWS.am*. (2023), <https://news.am/eng/news/789092.html>, accessed 20.06.2024; “The Russian Federation Assumes that all Difficult Issues with Armenia Will Be Resolved: Peskov,” *Lurer* (2024), <https://www.lurer.am/en/2024/04/10/The-Russian-Federation-assumes-that-all-difficult-issues-with-Armenia-will-be-resolved-Peskov/1106840>, accessed 20.05.2024.

116 Andrew Higgins, “Russia Steps Up Military Moves in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine,” *The New York Times* (2024), <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/03/world/europe/russia-georgia-moldova-ukraine-war.htm>

Despite centuries of conflict surrounding its existential survival, Nagorno-Karabakh remains largely unknown to the general public as an entity, and the self-governing Nagorno-Karabakh Republic was not recognized internationally during the nearly 32 years of *de facto* administration over the territory. The genocidal acts that surrounded the seizure and ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh are likely to remain out of public consciousness and fade from view in a manner that, perhaps, poetically reflects the territory's disappearance. However, despite the invisibility of this bitter conflict from the greater public domain, the consequences of this failure are likely to extend far beyond the deep canyons, snow-capped peaks, and valley ridges of the South Caucasus.

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(Note: links to graphic images from the Azerbaijani invasion of Nagorno-Karabakh may be found in footnotes typed in red font external to this citation list.)

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About the Author

David Hackett is a second-year Ph.D. Student in Political Science at Boston University. He has occupied several academic and policy-related roles within the Republic of Armenia surrounding the Genocide Studies sub-discipline; his primary research interests surround genocide prevention, atrocity crime perpetration, memorialization and spatiality of trauma, and the geopolitics of the Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russian North Caucasus). Having spent six months on-site at the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute as a research assistant and copy editor for the *International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies* starting in January of 2023, he continues to occupy this role both in a dual remote/on-site capacity. He has also worked on-site to support the Foreign Ministry of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) at its Yerevan Representation Office in 2023. Preceding the NKR’s dissolution, David contributed to publishing a report with the Lemkin Institute of Genocide Prevention in early September of 2023 which alerted the international community of impending genocidal atrocity in Nagorno-Karabakh.

BOOK REVIEW

Levon Ashpahyan, *Իմ կյանքի մասին* [About My Life], *Memoirs of Survivors of the Armenian Genocide 6*. Editor, author of the preface and references Narine S. Hakobyan. Yerevan: AGMI, 2022, 248 pages.

Narine S. Hakobyan

Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute, Armenia

“May this book serve as a memorial, reminding my children of me as they read it.”¹ These were the words written by Levon Ashpahyan, a sixty-five-year-old man, on January 29, 1971 on the last page of his notebook. Levon Ashpahyan was one of the many Armenians who survived the horrors of the Armenian Genocide. On that day, he finally completed recording his life story, driven by a simple human desire to be remembered after his death.

After Levon Ashpahyan passed away, his family chose to donate his memoir to the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute (AGMI). In 2021, the AGMI had already prepared the memoir for publication. By publishing this book, the AGMI not only aims to contribute to the preservation and transmission of Ashpahyan’s story but also to help share this survivor’s experience beyond the confines of his family. Although honoring the memory of this survivor remains important to the AGMI, the primary objective of publishing this memoir is to contribute to research on the deportations and massacres of Armenians of Sebastia. Therefore, it is crucial to position this account within the broader context of the destruction of the Armenians of Sebastia, emphasizing its significance for scholars.

Historical Context: Sebastia during the Armenian Genocide

The deportations and massacres of Sebastia Armenians were one of the most important pages of the Armenian Genocide. By 1914, there were 204,472 Armenians living in the Sebastia Province, with 116,817 in Sebastia sanjak and 20,000 in Sebastia town. Well before the genocide, the appointment of Ahmed Muamar Bey as *vali* (governor) in 1913 led to a significant increase in anti-Armenian measures. The main events in 1915 began with several weeks of terrorizing Armenians, after which the Ottoman authorities proceeded with the physical destruction of the Armenians. Specifically, on June 16, 1915, they arrested approximately 3,000-3,500 men either at their workplaces or in their homes. Similarly, on June 23, another 1,000 men were arrested. Overall, around 5,000 Armenian men were arrested during that time.² Levon Ashpahyan writes:

1 Levon Ashpahyan, *Իմ կյանքի մասին* [About My Life], *Memoirs of Survivors of the Armenian Genocide 6*, editor, author of the preface and references Narine S. Hakobyan (Yerevan: AGMI, 2022), 247.

2 Raymond Kevorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London- New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 436.

Yes, I forgot to mention that all Armenian men were imprisoned, a fact unknown to their families at the time... People were desperately searching for their loved ones, making inquiries in hopes of finding them. As the search continued, it became apparent that every single man was imprisoned. This search left people feeling helpless and unsure of what steps to take next. The prison was overcrowded, with barely enough room for the men to stand... Women and children would come and go, bringing food and water to their imprisoned loved ones...³

Ashpahyan notes that nobody was allowed to talk to their family members. Eventually, one day, their families found the prison empty, not knowing where their relatives had been taken.⁴

The deportation of Armenians from Sebastia took place from July 5 to July 18, 2015. In total, 5,850 families were deported in 14 caravans, with an average of 400 families in each caravan. Approximately 4,000 men were placed in labor battalions and later became targets for the perpetrators.⁵ Levon Ashpahyon writes:

I no longer dared to leave the house. We stayed inside, anxiously awaiting the announcement of our departure order. It did not take long for the order to come, and we gathered our belongings and began to make our way to the designated gathering place. We walked sadly... and as we passed through the Turkish neighborhood, we noticed how happy they were, but at the same time they were looking at us with hatred.⁶

The deportation route passed through Sebastia, Tecirhan, Magara, Kangal, Alacahan, Kotu Han, Hasanchelebi, Hekimhan, Hasanbadrig, Aruzi Yazı, the Kirk Goz Bridge, Firincilar, Zeydag, and Gergerdag. It then continued towards Adiyaman and Samsat, crossed the Euphrates river and headed to Suruj, Urfa, Viranşehir, and Ras ul-Ayn, Mosul, Aleppo. Some survivors could reach Hama, Homs, while others reached Raqqa or Deir ez-Zor.⁷

One of the first steps taken by Muammer was to dispatch a special group to Kotu Han. This group consisted of *chetes* (irregular bands), whose objective was to identify the remaining men in caravans and force all deportees to give up their money and valuable belongings. The deportees, who were attempting to salvage some of their possessions to continue their journey, were subjected to threats, blackmail, and violence. In Kotu Han, the Turkish gendarmes were replaced by Kurdish ones. The destruction of the caravans

³ Ashpahyan, *About My Life*, 169.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁵ Kevorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 438.

⁶ Ashpahyan, *About My Life*, 176.

⁷ Kevorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 438. For more information, see Robert Sukiasyan, "Kotu Han: A Station On the Deportation Route of Sebastia," *T'seghaspanagitakan handes* 6, no. 1 (2018), 44-60:

began in Hasanchelebi, located in the northern part of the sanjak of Malatia. All caravans from Sebastia suffered a similar fate.⁸ Levon Ashpahyan's memoir contains important details about the atrocities, looting, robbery, and murder committed against Armenians in Hasanchelebi, Kirk Goz, and Firincilar stations.⁹

Levon Ashpahyan's Odyssey

In this memoir, individual stories coalesce into a national tragedy. Levon Ashpahyan was born in either 1904 or 1905 (the exact month and date are unknown) in Sebastia. He was the eldest of four children in his family, with two sisters and a brother. His father was conscripted into the Ottoman army and placed in labor battalions. In 1915, Levon, along with his mother and siblings, was deported from Sebastia and experienced all the horrors of the death march.

During the march, Levon lost his family. First, Levon's infant sister died when their caravan was close to Firincilar. It was at that point that Levon, following his mother's initiative, joined a few friends and managed to escape. Levon's mother hoped that at least he could survive. And indeed, Levon did survive. However, he was no longer able to find his family afterwards. As a result, he suffered from a constant sense of guilt throughout his remaining life, always plagued by thoughts of his lost family. This excerpt best exemplifies his feelings:

How many times have I regretted and how many tears have I cried, remembering my beloved sick mother whom I left behind. Whenever I think about it, my heart shatters into pieces. Oh, my cherished mother, why did you let me go? Why didn't you stop me? Why did you separate me from you? Why did you leave it to fate, an unknown fate and hope? Wouldn't it be better if we stayed together and died together? Now it has become worse: I am suffering and missing you in a foreign land. In the hands of strangers, my days have turned into years, and I am tormented by my deep thoughts and incurable wounds...¹⁰

Although Levon survived, he had to endure a nightmarish experience. Soon, he found himself in Malatia, where he was renamed "Ahmed." Then, in another place, he became Osman. Over the course of the following years, Levon was passed around various Muslim households, the majority of which exploited him. His days were filled with exhausting tasks such as cleaning houses, tending to livestock, and toiling in the fields. Unfortunately, along with the backbreaking work came relentless mistreatment. Frequently, he found

8 Kevorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 438-441.

9 See, for example, Ashpahyan, *About My Life*, 186.

10 Ashpahyan, *About My Life*, 205-206.

himself homeless and starving, left to fend for himself on the streets. As if the physical and mental agony weren't enough, Levon also carried the burden of memories of his mother and other family members, which only intensified his suffering.

During that entire period, he found himself in different locations, including Albistan and Malatia. After enduring six years of hardship in Muslim households, he finally managed to escape and reappear in Sebastia. It was there that he discovered that his uncle had survived the deportations, only to tragically lose his life just fifteen days prior to Levon's arrival in Sebastia. This news left him utterly devastated, and he expresses his emotions in the following manner:

I am so unfortunate that I cannot find happiness in any way. After wandering for six years, facing numerous hardships and persecution, I was barely able to reach one of my relatives. However, I remained an orphan as I lost him without even getting a chance to meet him. My heart is broken, my joy has turned to mourning, and I am once again destitute and alone.¹¹

In Sebastia, he attempted to enter an orphanage, but his request for admission was denied. As a result, he was compelled to return to laborious physical work.

Eventually, Levon made a surprising discovery - he found out that one of his distant relatives, his paternal granduncle's daughter, was not only alive but also married to the son of a certain Pambukhian. However, he also learned that this Pambukhian had been involved in the assassination of his uncle. Based on the incomplete information from Ashpahyan, it seems that there had been conflicts within their family regarding the division of property. As time went on, it became clear that Levon himself was in danger and could face the same fate as his uncle. This realization prompted Levon to leave Sebastia and seek safety elsewhere. Since the American missionaries were rescuing orphans from the Ottoman Empire, he decided to join them and depart for Greece.

Ashpahyan received support from American relief organizations in Greece and found employment in the tobacco industry. He initially settled in Serres, Drama but primarily resided in Kavala, where he purchased a house. He got married in 1931. In the 1930s, he made several attempts to move to Soviet Armenia, but could only do so in 1946. He settled initially in the Norashen village of the Shamshadin district, and later relocated to Yerevan, where he spent the rest of his life. He passed away in Yerevan on May 1, 1987.

Ashpahyan's Memoir as a Source

In order to evaluate Levon Ashpahyan's memoir as a source for historical research, it is important to consider various factors. These factors include the circumstances surrounding its recording, such as when, why, and how it was done. Additionally, one should consider

¹¹ Ibid., 158-159.

its potential contribution to and significance for the study of the Armenian Genocide.¹²

Ashpahyan wrote his memoirs in 1971, more than fifty years after the described events. His case is not unique; many survivors' testimonies were recorded decades later following the Armenian Genocide. Therefore, it is important to recognize that the process of "restoring" events that took place half a century ago cannot be perfect. One challenge is that survivors may unintentionally omit certain details from their recollections due to fading memory. For example, the reader may lack a comprehensive understanding of the property dispute that arose among Levon's relatives when he returned to Sebastia after six years of deportation. Additionally, sometimes it can be difficult to identify the location of a specific event described in the memoir. Another significant issue is that survivors' recollections of the past are inevitably influenced and shaped by books, movies, and other stories about the same event.

As mentioned before, Ashpahyan has a very personal motive for writing his memories. He explicitly expresses his desire for his relatives to remember him through this memoir. In other words, the memoir is not intended for a broader audience and does not seek justice. This fact, of course, increases its reliability and trustworthiness for researchers.

Ashpahyan's story combines his specific narrative, including his emotional reflections and remembered experiences, with autobiographical elements, particularly in terms of chronological order.¹³ Although the memoir is built around a personal narrative, it also provides factual information about the deportation route and specific historical figures, such as Karapet Gabikian. However, the main advantage of this memoir lies in the "liveness" of the material it contains. This allows readers to look at the tragic historical events from an individual's perspective, providing insights that cannot be found in official documents. As Richard Hovannissian noted, "Eyewitness accounts of decisive historical events may be as valuable as official dispatches and reports. It is in such versions especially that the human element becomes manifest, affording insights not to be found in documents."¹⁴

In order to understand the insights that this memoir can provide for researchers, one should consider the existing primary sources and scholarly literature on the topic. There are numerous primary and secondary sources available on the events in Sebastia.¹⁵ Karapet

12 For more information on the survivors' testimonies, see Narine Hakobyan, "Hamidian Massacres In The Eyewitnesses Testimonies," *Tsëghaspanagitakan handes* 5, no 1 (2017), 7-31.

13 For more information on this issue, see Lorne Shirinian, *Survivor Memoirs of the Armenian Genocide* (Reading, England: Taderon Press, 1999), 19:

14 Richard Hovannissian, "Introduction," in Stanley E. Kerr, *The Lions of Marash: Personal Experiences with American Near East Relief 1919-1922* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1973), xxiii.

15 Most of the works on the Armenian Genocide reflect on the events in Sebastia. See, for example, Mkrtich Nersisyan and Ruben Sahakyan, *Геноцид армян: Сборник документов и материалов* [The Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire: Collection of Documents and Materials] (Yerevan: Hayastan, 1966); Wolfgang Gust, *The Armenian Genocide: Evidence from the German Foreign Office Archives, 1915-1916* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014); Ara Sarafian, *United States Official Documents on the Armenian Genocide / I The Lower Euphrates* (Watertown, MA: Armenian Review, 1994); James Bryce, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-1916 : Documents Presented to Viscount Grey of Fallodon* (London: Authority of

Gabikian's *Yeghernapatum* and Arakel Patrik's *History of the Armenians of Sebastia and Neighboring Villages* contain significant primary source information.¹⁶ Among scholarly works, Richard Hovannisian's *Armenian Sebastia/Sivas and Lesser Armenia* is perhaps the most significant.¹⁷ In *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History*, Raymond Kevorkian devoted a chapter to the events in Sebastia during the Genocide.¹⁸ Robert Sukiasyan's dissertation offers further insight into the deportation process of Sebastia Armenians.¹⁹ Verjine Svazlian's *The Armenian Genocide: Testimonies of the Eyewitness Survivors*, as well as the third volume of the *Armenian Genocide in Ottoman Turkey: The Account of Survivors* published by the Armenian National Archives, include many stories of survivors from Sebastia.²⁰

This extensive, although incomplete, list of primary sources and scholarly literature provides comprehensive information about the tragedy. In this regard, the events and people described in Ashpahyan's memoir are confirmed when compared with the aforementioned sources. However, Ashpahyan's memoir is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, it presents the deportation and massacres of 1.5 million people through the perspective of one individual, without oversimplifying the complex story. Secondly, the memoir reflects the personal and emotional experiences of the victim/survivor, providing a deeper understanding of the events. As a result, researchers studying the Genocide from the perspectives of psychology, literary studies, and sociology will find the memoir particularly interesting. Additionally, given Ashpahyan's age during the Genocide, it may also be relevant to those studying the fate of Armenian orphans.

His Majesty's Stationery Office by Sir Joseph Causton and Sons, Ltd., 1916); Vahakn N. Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1995); Ronald Grigor Suny, *"They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else": A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); Taner Akcam, *The Young Turks' Crime against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

16 Karapet Gabikian, *Եղեռնասպասում. Փոքուն հայոց և նորին մեծի մայրաքաղաքին Արշաստիոյ* [Yeghernapatum (history of genocide) of Armenia Minor and its Great Capital Sebastia] (Boston: Hairenik, 1924); Arakel Patrik, *Պատմագիրք յուշանատեսն Արշաստիոյ և զաւարի հայրյեսնն* [History of the Armenians of Sebastia and Neighboring Villages], vol. 1 (Beirut: Meshag Press, 1974).

17 Richard Hovannisian, *Armenian Sebastia/Sivas and Lesser Armenia* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2004).

18 Raymond Kevorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 429-468.

19 Robert Sukiasyan, "Methods and the Process of Deportations of Armenian Population In the Ottoman Empire (Based On the Case of the Sebastia Province)" (PhD diss., Yerevan: Armenian Genocide Museum Institute, 2019).

20 Verjine Svazlian, *Հայոց ցեղասպանություն. ակնատես վերապրողների վկայություններ* [The Armenian Genocide: Testimonies of the Eyewitness Survivors] (Yerevan: Gitutyun, 2011); Amatuni Virabyan, ed., *Հայոց ցեղասպանությունը օսմանյան Թուրքիայում. Վերապրածների վկայություններ: Փաստաթղթերի ժողովածու, Հատոր 3-րդ.* [Armenian Genocide in Ottoman Turkey: The Testimony of Survivors], vol. 3 (Yerevan: Armenian National Archives, 2012).

Hovhannes Der-Pilibbossian, *Արաբկիրցի վերասարողի յուշեր* [Memoir of a Survivor from Arabkir], *Memoirs of Survivors of the Armenian Genocide*, 12. Editor, author of preface and references Hayastan Martirosyan. Yerevan: AGMI, 2023, 192 pages.

*Hayastan Martirosyan,
Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute Foundation, Armenia*

The memoirs of genocide survivors are extremely valuable to history, given that they serve as a resource for victims' descendants to learn about their past, as well as for researchers to discover new insights.

Each memoir has its own significance; yet when viewed as a collective, they form a clear image of the genocide period and, as a result, play a significant role in the reconstruction of a nation's identity. Of course, a memoir may contain inaccurate information due to an individual's psychological state, age, sensitivity to trauma, and so on. However, as the *Encyclopedia of Genocide* states, "first-person accounts are valuable historical sources in that they provide unique personal insights into the genocidal process, the consistency of information found in various accounts about the same incident(s) provide valuable corroboration of facts, and that there are certain issues and events about which information can only be gleaned from first-person accounts."¹

The life story of Hovhannes Der-Pilibbossian (1898-1996), a survivor of the Armenian Genocide, is one of the many memoirs maintained in the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute's archives; the author wrote these accounts at the age of 93. Hovhannes admits that, given his age, he may have forgotten some incidents and left them out, having written the memoir with his "weak pen", "weak ability", "the events back and forth."² He further notes: "I am sorry I have to explain a little more, I may depart from the theme and either forget or repeat vital things. I am 93 years old, my forgetfulness impairs my memory, and my vision bends up and down the lines, but as a duty, I will continue as much as possible."³

Hovhannes Der-Pilibbossian was born in Arabkir,⁴ in Western Armenia's Kharberd Province. According to Hovhannes' mother, he was born in May of 1898. "My mother was illiterate, she only knew that I was born two years after Talan [loot],⁵ in the month

1 *Encyclopedia of Genocide*, ed. by Israel Charny, Vol. 1 (Santa Barbara, Denver, Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 1999), 242.

2 Hovhannes Der-Pilibbossian, *Արաբկիրցի վերասարողի յուշեր* [Memoir of a Survivor from Arabkir], *Memoirs of Survivors of the Armenian Genocide*, 12, editor, author of preface and references Hayastan Martirosyan (Yerevan: AGMI, 2023), 86.

3 *Ibid.*, 93.

4 Before the Armenian Genocide in 1915, the population of the city reached about 20 thousand, 10 thousand of which were Armenians. See Tadevos Hakobyan, *Պատմական Հայաստանի քաղաքները* [Historical Cities of Armenia] (Yerevan: Hayastan, 1987), 50-51.

5 Arabkir people described the Hamidian Massacres as looting, pogrom, massacre, incident. See *Ոսկեգետակ. Տարեգիրք նուիրում Գրաբկիրի եւ շրջակայքի պատմութեան-ազգագրութեան* [Voskegetak. Yearbook

of reaching the red pear.”⁶ Between 1994 and 1995, Der-Pilibbossian presented a copy of this memoir to Stepan Zoryan School No. 56 in Yerevan (the other copy was given to Henrik Ginosyan in 1996), stating that he was born on May 15, 1900, with this date likely being mentioned in his passport. The memoir did not include a photo, but it did reference a group photo from the Lyon branch of the Arabkir Compatriotic Union taken in 1928, located in Andranik Poladian’s “History of Armenians of Arabkir”, on page 929.⁷ In the photo, Hovhannes can be seen with his wife, daughters, grandmother, and other Lyon branch members. Hovhannes was also the chairman of the Union’s Lyon branch – about which the author of the memoir modestly keeps his silence. The original photograph is stored in the National Archives of Armenia.

The author’s memoir, according to his writing, can be conventionally divided into three parts: 1. Arabkir and the daily life of Arabkir’s residents, the prevailing general atmosphere and, then, the events of the genocide within the Ottoman Empire, 2. Hovhannes’s rescue and transfer to France, alongside his activities in Armenian organizations, 3. Hovhannes’s family life in Soviet Armenia.

The author begins his memoir by describing a scene of how a group of Turks beat his father in front of him, leaving a deep impression on him. Then, the author details the lifestyle, crafts⁸ and trade of the Arabkir people – the main means of their livelihood. He remembers his father, who worked day and night to support the family; following this, he left for the USA in 1908, one of the reasons of which was (per Der-Pilibbossian) the pressure by Turks on the Armenian youth. As the author notes: “[...] the situation of the Armenians is understandable, it is not to blame that the youth was running away from the country.” Historian and geographer Tadevos Hakobyan also mentions this:

As a result of the bad economic conditions and the harsh tax policy of the Turkish authorities, migration was also widespread in Arabkir, in order to earn a piece of bread, many *Arabkirtsis* were forced to leave their homes and look for work in various cities. Moreover, almost only Armenians, Armenian craftsmen and blacksmiths, were leaving.⁹

Der-Pilibbossian recalls the details of his birthplace, describes the preparation of cheese, bread, wine, pasty, etc., the rituals of death, mourning and wedding ceremonies

Dedicated to the History-Ethnography of Arabkir and Its Surroundings], edited by Sargis Bakhtikian, No. 3 (Beirut: Hayk, 1945), 40.

6 Der-Pilibbossian, *Memoir of a Survivor*, 184.

7 *Պատմություն Հայոց Արաբկիրի* [History of Armenians of Arabkir], edited by Andranik Poladian (New York: Arabkir Union of America, 1969).

8 In the 19th - 20th centuries, Arabkir was famous for its canvas production. In the middle of the 19th century, 15 weaving, 9 spinning and 18 tablecloth production enterprises were operating here. The fabrics of Arabkir were of high quality and could compete with the textiles of any city in the Middle East. The enterprise of Poghos Effendi Ter-Petrosyan was particularly famous in Arabkir at that time, whose fabrics were comparable in quality to the fabrics of Aleppo and other famous cities. See Hakobyan, *Cities of Historical Armenia*, 51-52.

9 *Ibid.*, 52.

with vivid and beautiful description. These details introduce the reader to their lifestyle and customs, “transporting them” to Arabkir and metaphorically including the reader as a participant.

Recalling the landscape: the author notes that there were four churches¹⁰ in Old Arabkir. Turkish authorities destroyed them in 1896, leaving only one: the half-destroyed St. Astvatsatsin Church, which was renovated through the tireless efforts of Arabkir’s residents. “Thousands of believers took part in the construction of that church, voluntarily and freely, strong men like my father...”¹¹ The author then describes the interior of the church, the arrangement of items within, and the three priests of Arabkir – reflecting contemptuously about only one, Father Tornik, who became Turkish after escaping the atrocities, dying a year later before being buried in the local “Turkish cemetery.”

The author refers to his interest in the activities of the Armenian *fedayis* from a young age – the subject from which his patriotism was rooted. He recalls taking revolutionary books from the Dashnaks’ Club and reading them at night. Hovhannes was so excited by the story of *hayduk*¹² Arabo¹³ that he was given the code name “Arabo” for being his follower. Apart from the history of Hovhannes’s family, thanks to the memoir, we also get to know the stories of other families in Arabkir. For example: the history of Hovhannes’ aunt’s family is presented, starting back during the pogroms of 1896, from which Hovhannes’ aunt and female cousin survived, finding themselves in a worse situation during the years of the genocide. The episode is presented in which people were called in front of the government building to hear an order, and Armenians, young and old, gathered to be informed about the status of their brothers, fathers, and husbands. After that, the search for the alleged fugitives begins: the Turks entered the houses of the Armenians, robbing, raping, and destroying everything in their path. These attackers especially targeted and tortured the wives of *Hnchakyan* party members, whose lists they had in advance; Hovhannes’ aunt’s husband was one of them.¹⁴

Then, the author goes on to describe the deportation, noting that the Armenians were assured by local authorities of their eventual return – rendering there no need to close

10 The churches of Arabkir in the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century were seven, four of which were Apostolic, two were Protestant, and one was Catholic. See Hakobyan, *Cities of Historical Armenia*, 52-53.

11 Der-Pilibossian, *Memoir of a Survivor*, 103.

12 *Hayduk*, 1. rebel guerrilla in the Balkans and Hungary during the Ottoman rule, 2. an Armenian partisan fighting against the perpetrators during the Armenian massacres.

13 Arabo, a renowned Armenian fedayi in the nineteenth century who fought against the oppression of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.

14 *The Hnchakyan party* was founded in 1887 in Geneva on the initiative of a group of Caucasian Armenian students (Avetis Nazarbekyan, Mariam Vardanyan, Ruben Khanazatyan, Gabriel Kafyan, etc.), the goal of which was the liberation of Armenia from the Turkish rule. The official paper of the party was “Hnchak.” The Arabkir branch of the Hnchak party was active until WWI. The Reformed Hnchakyan party is a wing separated from the Hnchakians, which was against socialism and preferred only the national-patriotic direction. It entered the Ottoman Empire after 1908. Among the leaders of the party were Arpiar Arpiaryan, Mihran Tamatyan, Mihran Swazli, Levon Mkrtychyan, Anton Rshtuni, Suren Surenyan, Apah, Aghasi and others.

the doors of their houses and shops. The people of Arabkir were to join the deportation caravans from Erzerum, Sarighamish, Baiburd, and Yerznka. The path of exile, the death marches, the impoverished conditions of tired and hungry Armenian women and children, the corpses on the banks of the roads and rivers – where the stench of decay lingered – and cases of murder and looting by gangs of opportunists are presented in different episodes. The author’s descriptions document the brutality and diversity of the methods and means used to carry out the genocide.

While studying this memoir, we came across the memoir of another survivor, Hovhannes Alexandryan (1902-1988),¹⁵ which described the route of the death march, corresponding with the directions and the episodes that Hovhannes Der-Pilibbossian also mentioned in his memoirs. Despite the fact that Hovhannes Alexandryan was from Sebastia and Hovhannes Der-Pilibbossian from Arabkir, it is probable that the two of them traveled the same road together, as the Turkish military brought groups of Armenians from different places and joined them together. Let’s present one part of Hovhannes Alexandryan’s memoir and compare it with the notes of Der-Pilibbossian’s memoir. Hovhannes Alexandryan writes:

Kirk Geoz is located 10-15 km from the city of Malatia, on the Tokhmakh River, on the left side of the river, where our caravan was staying, there was a rather large area where the Sebastia-Kharberd highway passes... The next day, they informed us that the carts would return. From there, those who want[ed] to travel in a cart must pay 2 gold coins, and those who do not pay drams w[ould] go on foot.

On the eve of departure from there, it was announced that we should leave the next morning, [and] those who would pay 2 more golds would be taken in a cart. Accordingly, the cart and the oxen were sold to us at double the price, only for 2 days, because when we reached Firinchilar,¹⁶ the carts would be taken from us. The carts that were given to us were confiscated from the Armenian exiled villagers who

15 Hovhannes (Onik) Alexandryan, *Յեղասպանություն վերապրածի հուշեր* [Memoirs of a Genocide Survivor] (Yerevan, 2012). Manuscript of the memoir is kept in the National Archive of Armenia, fund 439, list 3, doc.115.

16 *Firinchilar*; a large caravan stops. According to the Armenians’ annihilation plan, it was defined which routes the caravans should take and which checkpoints they should pass. Three directions were planned, with large milestones. The first stop of the Armenians of Trapizon-Samsun, Endires and the villages and the entire Armenia Minor was Kangal, the second was Firinchilar, where the Armenians would unite and pass from the inaccessible mountains of Zeynal to Samusat-Euphrates and then, Mesopotamia: Suruch, Ras ul Ain, Raqqa, Der Zor... It is mentioned that Firinchilar was a small village, the destitution of the caravan is indescribable: in the field there were pieces of rags, bed wool, everywhere, unburied corpses, which were torn apart by dogs and predatory animals, there was a stench, and the attacks of the Armenians on every new caravan continued, carts and other belongings left by the Armenians were taken by force. things... See Arakel N. Patrick, *Պատմագիրք յուշամատենն Սեբաստիոյ և գաւառի հարկոյնն* [History of the Armenians of Sebastia and Neighboring Villages], Volume A (Beirut: Mshak, 1974), 751-752.

came there the day before. ... The next day... we were not allowed to enter the city of Malatia, to take a midday break. Our caravan stopped in a plot surrounded by trees 1 km from Malatia. The Turks of Malatia had brought various types of food and fruit to sell to us, of course, at double or triple prices. On the one hand, they wanted to buy clothes and jewelry from us at low prices, and if the owner of the product did not agree, they took it by force, free of charge. After resting there for two hours, the caravan left. In the evening, the caravan stopped for the night in a valley called Bay Bunar. [...] Bay Bunar, next to the highway from Malatia to Kharberd, is a valley surrounded by hills on 3 sides, from the center of which flowed a cold water that could power a flour mill. Starting from Hasan Chelepi up to there, in all the huts and roads, we encountered countless dead bodies, there were not few here either, but the sad thing was that two dead bodies were thrown into the water tank so that we could not use that cold water. [L]ater[,] I learned that while using that water by a village [villagers] below, the population got infected with an infectious disease by drinking that poisonous water and the epidemic cleansed the entire population of the village.¹⁷

Hovhannes Der-Pilibbossian writes:

That day too, again in the scorching sun, walking in the dust, we approached the place that was called Ghuruchai. We knew that we would really meet a river, we would see a lot of water. On the contrary, it [was] very wide, the water [was] reticulated, broken, in some places green[,] rotten [...] we saw many dead people, some swollen in those puddles, swollen corpses and stench all the way to Kirk Geoz (a big river with a bridge with forty arches). The condition of Der Hakob, Poghos Agha, my mother, uncle, and grandmother worsened, she could not hold herself on the mule. So that it wouldn't happen, Poghos Agha tied her on the mule, as she was dead, we reached the road leading to Malatia, where we had to cross the bridge of Kirk Geoz. That day, many people were missing from our caravan. When it was evening, we saw the group, the area became smaller... On the highway villagers selling bread and cheese appeared, they gave us a break. At the edge of a field, there was a lot of people buying bread and water. There was little left of gata,¹⁸ we didn't buy bread, saying it wouldn't be a burden [...]we bought buttermilk instead of water, and we also filled two empty bottles.

¹⁷ Alexandryan, *Memoirs of a Genocide Survivor*, 27-28.

¹⁸ *Gata*, an Armenian pastry.

The stop was to buy bread, [and] we continued to cross Kirk Geoz to reach Firinchilar before reaching Malatia. There were people who had relatives in Malatia, whom they hoped for. There were many Turks near the bridge and on it, who were walking along the edge of the bridge. We saw people be thrown into the water from the bridge.¹⁹

We see similarities in both memoirs. In both accounts, the group rested near the Kirk Geoz bridge. First, Hovhannes Alexandryan mentions that their group was going to the village called Firinchilar, and Hovhannes Der-Pilibbossian refers to the settlement of Frun Chular – which we believe is the same settlement, given that the caravans which reached Frnchlar from different settlements were thinned out, resulting in regroupings. The remnants of the caravans from the Black Sea coast, Shapin Garahisar villages, Samson, Amasia, Evdokia, Alis Valley villages, Kharberd and Akin all joined the caravan of Sebastia.²⁰ Then, both accounts refer to the water near Hasan Chelepi being non-potable – and full of dead bodies.

Continuing the journey of exile, after crossing Kirk Geoz, at night, Poghos Agha (Der-Pilibbossian’s mother’s cousin) negotiates with the local villagers, the *ghzlbashes*,²¹ who were offering to buy their security – which would enable them to escape the deportations – in exchange for a hefty sum of gold. Thus, after a four-day exile, Hovhannes’ family stayed in that village by paying gold, handing over their clothes and carpets, and working for the *ghzlbashes*, receiving food and rudimentary lodging in return. Here, it is necessary to highlight Hovhannes’ strategy of “surviving” the genocide, as well as the methods used to do so: speaking diplomatically with the Turkish military, bribing local police, engaging in physical self-defense, hiding his identity, and engaging in hard labor to earn a living for himself and his family. For all the survivors of the genocide, we believe that staying mentally strong and focused on finding salvation in any way, regardless of the cost, had great importance. Despite all these difficulties, Hovhannes held a deep sense of patriotism – which remained with him until the end of his life.

The memoir also enables the readers to learn about the battles of WWI on the Caucasian front. It presents the Russian advance, the effect of the Bolshevik Revolution on the front, as well as Kurds siding with the Russians and saving the Armenians, and then siding with the Turkish and then massacring the Armenians. Through the memoir’s depiction of Hovhannes’ conversation with a friend, we learn about the general political climate within the Ottoman Empire, the lives of Armenian refugees, camps, and the ongoing Russian-Turkish war.

19 Der-Pilibbossian, *Memoir of a Survivor*, 131.

20 Robert Sukiasyan, Օսմանյան կայսրության հայ բնակչության տեղահանության մեթոդները և ընթացքը (Սեբաստիայի նահանգի օրինակով) [Methods and the Process of Deportations of Armenian Population In the Ottoman Empire (Based On the Case of the Sebastia Province)] (PhD diss., Yerevan: Armenian Genocide Museum Institute, 2019), 158.

21 *Ghzbash*, redhead (Persian), Shiite groups, mostly from Turkmen tribes established in the Armenian Highlands and adjacent territories since the late Middle Ages.

Hovhannes, who worked various jobs in different villages and cities to collect money, aimed to travel to the USA to join his father. He was cautious while working, as his compatriots advised him to remain inconspicuous. If they found out that he was an Armenian, the Turks would kill him, like other Armenians – who used to work for free. In Arabkir, Hovhannes starts working as a *manusa* crafter for his friend Papik’s older brother, well-known community-member Grigor Kichchikean.

Hovhannes then reaches Samson, from where he was planning to travel to Constantinople and then to the USA to reunite with his father. At this time, Hovhannes was advised to enter the local orphanage in Samson temporarily, because Armenians were not allowed to go to Constantinople during that period. In the orphanage, Hovhannes works as a clerk, traveling “from the market to the kitchen for vegetables and other supplies.” Hovhannes notes that there were 600 Armenian orphans from different regions in the orphanage, and the orphanage was opened under the auspices of the Near East Relief foundation.²² The author states that there were six orphanages in Samson under which the American flag was flying.

Next, the Greek-Turkish war of 1919-1922 is described. Hovhannes tells how enthusiastically the orphans were following the events of the war, recalling when the Greeks were bombarding Turkish forces with cannons. They expected that soon the Greeks would win and that they would be freed from captivity. There is also a brief note about the burning of Smyrna, which was carried out by the Turks – in which the city’s Armenian and Greek residents were thrown into the sea. The author regretfully informs the reader about the defeat of the Greeks.

Hovhannes writes about arranging his personal life as well. Heeding the advice of the Armenians around him, he recalls meeting and courting Geghanush Abrahamyan,²³ an orphan from the same orphanage, as well as the hastily performed wedding ceremony in the church – conducted without traditional clothing. The couple had planned to leave Constantinople for France before traveling further to the USA.

Then, the second part of the memoir begins. Hovhannes and his wife arrived in Marseille, France on 31 December 1922. It should be noted that Hovhannes’ name is also mentioned by the “Arabkir Reconstruction Union” in the “List of Arabkir Survivors” published in Boston in 1920, among the survivors of Hachinian and Perenke districts (page 33).²⁴

Not being able to find work in Marseille, Hovhannes and Geghanush moved to the city of Grenoble, where Hovhannes began working in a paper factory (despite the low

22 Near East Relief, a major humanitarian project established in the United States, traces its origins back to WWI and had a significant contribution to the salvation of Armenian Genocide survivors. For more information, see James L. Barton, *Story of the Near East Relief (1915-1930)* (New York: Macmillan, 1930).

23 Hovhannes’s wife, Geghanush, was from Trapizon, she lost her family during the Armenian Genocide, her sister was kidnapped by the Turks. Later, as a result of Geghanush’s search, it was found out that Geghanush’s father survived the genocide, but was exiled during the Soviet years, and died in Crimea.

24 Arabkir Reconstruction Union, *Արաբկիրցի վերասարողներու ցանկը* [List of the Survivors from Arabkir] (Boston, 1920).

salary). Having learned from a letter from his father that his mother, sister, brother and grandmother were in Aleppo, Hovhannes was able to honor his father's request and bring them to France. In March 1924, the first daughter of Hovhannes and Geghanush was born, after which the family moved to Lyon. There were many Armenians in Lyon, especially *Arabkirtsis*, so they were able to make acquaintances quickly and profit from higher pay rates for work. In France, Hovhannes would become a member of the "Armenian Relief Committee" and, together with other Armenians, establish the Arabkir Compatriotic Union [hereinafter Union] in Lyon.

The memoir also presents the beginning of the construction of the Nor Arabkir district of Yerevan (sponsored by the Union), as well as donations that were completely directed to the construction of the new district. After the birth of his daughters, Arshaluys and Anahit, the author moved with his family from Lyon to Bordeaux, where he and his wife worked and sold tights with a patterned fabric, given the difficulties of finding a job. In 1927, Hovhannes' mother, sister and brother moved to the USA. Hovhannes had a desire to move to Soviet Armenia, and when immigration²⁵ to the Armenian S.S.R. started, Hovhannes became registered with his family and moved to Armenia – where he lived for 40 years. One of the houses built by the Union was given to the family. A plot of land was allocated to a family of six, and Hovhannes started building a house in his homeland. However, the family's financial situation was difficult, as the author notes: the only hope for financing this endeavor was the money received from the sale of the working machines he brought with him.

In Soviet Armenia, the author describes Stalinist repressions, and lists the names of people who, guilty or innocent, never returned from the exile, including Armenians from the diaspora. Hovhannes, once again, suffers hardships in Soviet Armenia. "I built my house with a 60-year contract, we lived there for 30 years[;] they demolished it, they gave me a governmental house, I was deprived of my freedom, of a big house, and of a huge fruit trees,"²⁶ the author notes. Hovhannes had six children, but only Arshaluys received higher education, the others left their studies incomplete. He urged all children to at least learn any craft. "During my 40 years of living in Armenia, we did not live very well, nor did we live very badly, how I can hide my sin? I too did 'black' work, like many others,"²⁷ writes Hovhannes. Finally, after suffering and losing his home, in 1978, Hovhannes moves to France with his wife, where his daughters settled after getting married; in 1982, Hovhannes would travel to the USA to visit his brother and sister. His son, Martik, stayed with his family in Armenia. As Hovhannes notes, his heart had never been cut off from

25 After the establishment of the Soviet regime, three waves of immigration took place to Soviet Armenia between 1920 and 1990. During the first stage of 1921-1936, more than 40 thousand Armenians arrived in Armenia. In the second phase of 1946-1948, which is known as the Great Repatriation, about 90,000 people from around 12 countries immigrated to Armenia. Finally, during the third phase, from 1962 through 1982, about 32,000 people immigrated to Armenia. See Hovik Meliksetyan, *Հայրենիք-սփյուռք ստեղծությունները և հայրենաստորոնությունը* [Homeland-Diaspora Relations and Repatriation] (Yerevan: YSU, 1985), 24.

26 Der-Pilibossian, *Memoir of a Survivor*, 179-180.

27 *Ibid.*, 180.

Armenia. Hovhannes continued to send aid to Armenia from France: physical gifts sent to Armenia include both a Macintosh computer and books to the National Academy of Sciences. After the December 7, 1988 earthquake in Armenia, he continued his financial support through various organizations, such as “Hope for Armenia,” “French-Armenian Youth Union,” etc. Hovhannes proudly notes, “I laid the first stone of the foundation of the Armenian embassy in France, with only 100 francs.”²⁸

At the end of the memoir, the author referred to his mother’s origins, in the context of which he presents the 1896’s massacres that his mother witnessed before marriage. We are also informed that both maternal and paternal grandfathers, and his uncle were killed during the Hamidian massacres of 1894-1896.

This memoir occupies a unique place among the testimonies of the witnesses of the Armenian Genocide as a resource because it contains important information about the course of the Armenian Genocide, the deportation of Arabkir Armenians, the methods and means of carrying out the genocide, and the subsequent lives of the survivors following the atrocities. The memoir is also an important source in the following aspects:

- It presents the conscription of Armenian men into the army and their disarmament, their hard work, and the massacres that ensued, as well as the deportations of women, children and the elderly, the scenes of death on the roads, attacks by Turkish and Kurdish gangs, and the hard work done by Armenian children in various villages to ensure their survival.
- Episodes are presented of the forced Islamization and Turkification of Armenian women and girls who were forced to marry older/adult men to save their families. Some Armenian men, including priests, voluntarily or were forcibly converted to Islam, saving themselves from physical annihilation. As readers, we witness just how many Armenians hid their identity in order to survive an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty
- From the memoir, we learn what kind of “image” was depicted regarding the Armenian in the Ottoman Empire, as well as the attitudes of ordinary Turkish citizens towards the Armenians.
- Records about orphanages during that period are also important. These records include information about the numbers of Armenian children within, their lifestyles, and foreign countries’ efforts to build and fund orphanages.
- Through personal stories, we learn about the Hamidian massacres, and episodes of violence and robbery between 1894-1896 in the Ottoman Empire.
- The memoir once again highlights the important role of Armenian *fedayis* in shaping patriotic and combative attitudes of Armenian youth.
- The lifestyle, cuisine, and customs of the Arabkir people are described, thanks to which we can get an idea of the life of the ancient Arabkirtsis.

²⁸ Ibid., 182.

- Thanks to the memoir, we also learn about the activities of the “Arabkir Compatriotic Union” and its work within different countries.

Hovhannes died in Paris in 1996. Currently, three of his children are alive: Anahit, Hasmik and Anush, who live in France. The family of Hovhannes’ son Martun lives in the Arabkir district of Yerevan..

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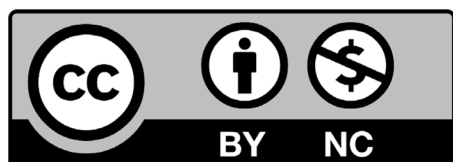
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