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# THE ROOTS OF THE RACIAL NATIONALISM OF THE COMMITTEE OF UNION AND PROGRESS: IDEAS, INDIVIDUALS, INFLUENCES

*Regina Galustyan*

*Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute, Armenia*

The Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocides perpetrated within the Ottoman Empire by the Turkish government at the beginning of the 20th century were not only the direct implementations of ideological convictions or a result of a single decision. Those were, rather, the amalgam of certain theories adjusted to political and economic developments in the country and the desire to turn the multi-ethnic and multi-religious empire into a Turkish nation-state. Stressing the importance of ideas and ideologies in the process of historical development, this article attempts to show certain strains of CUP members' worldview by deliberately singling out foreign thinkers and ideas that had a role on the formation of their worldview and on their political actions. This article refrains from discussing Turkism as a whole, but rather examines certain paths of the introduction of European thought to the mindset of CUP high ranking officials and ideologists, hoping to illuminate the background of their subsequent decisions and actions which had a tragic impact on the fate of millions of non-Muslim people in the Ottoman Empire.

**Keywords:** CUP, dictatorship, ideology, Turkism, Turkology, racial kinship, Turan, Central Asia, language, Pan-Turkism, social-Darwinism, Gobineau, Le Bon, Vambery, Cahun, von der Goltz, Parvus, "the nation in arms."

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## Introduction

The ideology behind policy has a crucial importance in genocides and any form of crime against humanity. The Turkish government, formed from the Committee (later Party) of Union and Progress (*İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, *hereafter* Unionists, Ittihadists, CUP), made the decision of using radical solutions to the existing ethnic questions in the multi-ethnic, multi-religious Ottoman Empire, putting the country on the path to war and genocides. The Committee harboured the ideology of Turkish nationalism which was still in the process of being formed. This was a fusion of ideas, as the ideologists and founding fathers of Turkism borrowed specific theories from nineteenth-century philosophers:

ideas about race, positivistic and materialistic thoughts on human society and civilization and accounts of travellers and scholars. This loose cluster of ideas clashed with imperial reality while attempting to bring it to life. Neither the Armenian nor the Assyrian and Greek genocides perpetrated by the Turkish government within the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the 20th century were the direct implementations of ideological convictions or a result of a single decision. Those were rather the amalgam of certain theories adjusted to political and economic developments in the country, and the desire to turn the multi-ethnic and multi-religious empire into a Turkish nation-state. Stressing the importance of ideas and ideologies in the process of historical development, this article attempts to show certain strains of CUP members' mindset by singling out foreign thinkers and ideas that had a role in the formation of their worldview and on their political actions. Referring to *ideology* as a system of ideas, values, or beliefs, which guide or underline a 'concrete' political agenda,<sup>1</sup> I refrain, in the article set out below, from discussing Turkism as a whole, but rather discuss certain paths of the introduction of European thought to the mindset of CUP high ranking officials and ideologists, hoping to illuminate the background of their subsequent decisions and actions, which had a tragic impact on the fate of millions of non-Muslim people in the Ottoman Empire.

The CUP, which emerged as a secret underground committee with a moderate revolutionary stance and aimed at limiting the power of the monarch and retaining the integrity of the empire, was an amalgamation of different groups, branches and clubs of intellectuals somehow concerned with the future of the country. The ethnic and religious background of the members and founding fathers were diverse, as were their ideological convictions. Founded in 1889, it had several internal transformations and reorganisations, (significant years being 1902 and 1905); the Committee that was responsible for the coup d'état of 1908 and won seats in the Ottoman Parliament was, already, a Turkish-Muslim organisation with the vision of a Turkish nation-state. The CUP saw the coup d'état of 1908 as its own achievement and allowed only a limited role to other political actors. CUP leaders declared the CUP "the soul of the state," "the saviour of the fatherland" and "the sacred committee."<sup>2</sup> In 1909, however, the Law on Associations (*Cemiyetler Kanunu*) forced the Committee to separate itself from the parliamentary Union and Progress group, which remained in existence only on paper. The CUP continued to function as a parallel government in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>3</sup> The organisation, as stated in a report by Party Secretary Bahaeddin Şakir, had 360 centres in the country, more than 850,000 members, and a majority in the parliament by the end of 1909. During the same period, the CUP had also succeeded in deposing the sultan. The governments of Ahmed Muhtar Pasha and Kamil Pasha between July 1912 and January 1913 were the only opposition that the

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1 On different explanations of ideology see Michael Freeden, "Ideology and Political Theory," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 11, no. 1 (2006): 3-22.

2 Şükrü M. Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902-1908* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 279.

3 Derya Bayır, *Minorities and Nationalism in Turkish Law* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 51-52.



CUP faced. The answer to the loss of power was the Sublime Porte raid of January 23, 1913, through which the Party of Union and Progress established a dictatorial regime in the Ottoman Empire, only to lose it after the country was defeated in WWI. After the coup of 1913 the ministerial cabinets, minister of the interior, governors, deputy governors, district directors, the minister of justice, judges and even professors and teachers at universities, directors of education in the provinces and inspectors of education were all “self-sacrificing members” of the Committee.<sup>4</sup>

Stepan Sapah-Gulian, a prominent Armenian journalist, political scientist, intellectual and a leader of the Social Democrat Hinchakian Party, correctly states:

Ittihad – Turkish nationalism – was the authorised owner of the situation. It had all the power of the country in its hands, using the machine as it wished. Its policy was to throw bait and crumbs to those who supported and agreed with it who came from any nation or people and to deceive and lull them [into a false sense of security] to gain time. Meanwhile, it vigorously implemented the various parts of its program with the greatest audacity. Cases were not lacking. But who was the investigator, the one to appeal to the court and to which institution? The parliament? The Senate? State Council? Public opinion? Journalism? But aren't the links to all those in its hands? And in all of these, the ruling, presiding voice belonged to it.<sup>5</sup>

Turkish nationalist Halide Edib made a similar remark immediately after the Mudros Armistice, during a meeting with Commander C. H. Heathcote Smith of the British Naval Volunteer Service, who was Admiral Somerset Arthur Gough-Calthorpe's (the British High Commissioner) right-hand man in Constantinople. Concerning the CUP politicians detained in Malta before prosecution as war criminals and the need to form a new representative government, Edib stated: “Every man in this country was once a Unionist in the past.”<sup>6</sup>

Decision-making in the Committee took place through the following chain: the Congress that was convened once a year, the Central Committee, branches located in the vilayets and clubs. Decisive in this chain was the Central Committee, with 12-16 selected members.<sup>7</sup> According to the party statute of 1909, the clubs carried out the social and cultural policies of the party in the regions and obeyed the local branches. They were the main tools of nationalistic propaganda.<sup>8</sup> Two medical doctors, Bahaeddin Şakir and Dr. Nazim, were prominent in the Central Committee. Their power over the organisation

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4 Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 286-288.

5 Stepan Sapah-Gulian, Պատասխանատուները [Those Responsible] (Providence: Yeritasard Hayastan, 1916), 280-281.

6 Halide Edib, *The Turkish Ordeal: Being the Further Memoirs of Halide Edib* (New York and London: The Century Co., 1928), 28.

7 Arsen Avagyan, Геноцид армян: механизмы принятия и исполнения решений [Genocide of Armenians. Mechanism of Decision-making and Implementation] (Yerevan: AGMI, 2013), 25.

8 *Ibid.*, 17.

was fixed since 1905. Although without any visible title or position, they were the main decision makers and the real power behind the government. Turkish sociologist and political scientist Serif Mardin compared the role of Bahaeddin Şakir in the CUP to that played by Joseph Stalin in the Bolshevik party.<sup>9</sup> The father of modern Turkish nationalism and CUP ideologist Mehmed Ziya Gokalp was also the member of the Central Committee.

Many foreign diplomats, missionaries and journalists deployed in the Ottoman Empire testified to the fact that, starting from the successful 1908 coup, the state policy of Turkification of the system of education and the economy was in force.<sup>10</sup> While the constitution was based on the principle of equality for all Ottoman citizens, regardless of ethnicity or religion, the government openly spoke of their plan to Turkify everyone and the rightful dominance of the Turkish race in the country.<sup>11</sup> The CUP, too, faced problems following the coup because of the appeals, usually anti-Western and anti-Christian in nature, issued before 1908 under the motto “Turkey for the Turks.” After several of these appeals were republished in the European press, CUP had to provide explanations.<sup>12</sup> The following episode clearly shows the ideological convictions and political agenda of the Unionists. When the Zionists made an approach to the CUP leaders and stated their interest in the decentralisation of Turkey, Dr. Nazim’s answer was: “*The Committee of Union and Progress wants centralisation and a Turkish monopoly on power. It wants no nationalities in Turkey. It does not want Turkey to become a new Austria-Hungary. It wants a unified Turkish nation-state with Turkish schools, a Turkish administration and a Turkish legal system.*”<sup>13</sup>

Before coming to power in the Ottoman Empire in 1908, the CUP tried to gather all the diverse opposition groups together in the fight against the empire’s despotic monarchy. Pan-Islamism, Ottomanism and Turkism were employed in parallel, using contradictory rhetoric, to attract different groups in the multi-ethnic and multi-religious empire, which was merely a revolutionary tactic.<sup>14</sup> Most prominent members remained true to their beliefs after coup and, in forming those beliefs, European thought, different ideas and theories, or their highly individual interpretations of Western thought did not just have a minor role.

In general, different European philosophical ideas and thought began to penetrate the Ottoman Empire actively from the mid-19th century through wars, concessions, reform programmes, military and economic missions and missionary activities. The structure of

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9 Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 141.

10 George Horton, *The Blight of Asia, an Account of the Systematic Extermination of Christian Populations by Mohammedans and of the Culpability of Certain Great Powers; With the True Story of the Burning of Smyrna* (Indianapolis, Kansas City, New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1953), 28; Harry Stuermer, *Two War Years in Constantinople: Sketches of German and Young Turkish Ethics and Politics* (London, New York, Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917), 183.

11 A. D. Hagopian, “The Situation in Constantinople,” *Armenia* (NY), no. 8, March 1912, 235.

12 Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 188.

13 *Ibid.*, 260.

14 *Ibid.*, 177.

the Committee also contributed to the adoption of European ideas. The organisation was made up of cells and, already in 1895, had two cells, one in Paris and the other in Geneva, whose members kept in touch with European intellectual and political circles. It may be assumed that, after the successful coup of 1908, when members in exile returned to the Ottoman Empire, they brought that influence with them. Significant in the formation of the Unionist worldview were Muslim Tatar intellectual members, who echoed 19th century nationalism earlier<sup>15</sup> and who hoped for the future liberation and union of Tatar subjects of the Russian Empire. The latter were subjected to Pan-Slavism and the pressures of the imperial policy of assimilation.<sup>16</sup> Before coming to the Ottoman Empire for “field work” representatives of the Tatar intellectual elite and a middle-class bourgeoisie participated in the language reforms for Russian Muslims and convened congresses (1905,1906,1909) demanding the union of all Russia’s Muslims and representation in Duma.<sup>17</sup> Based on European ethnological, sociological, and historical data, they considered themselves to be representatives of the same race and marked with the same cultural and psychological characteristics. Arriving in the Ottoman Empire before the 1908 coup, Tatar exiles joined the Committee and started an active propaganda effort in the pages of its periodicals and organised open lectures and discussions. The best known among them were the Caucasian Tatars Ali Hüseyinzâde (Turan), Ahmed Agayef (Ahmet Ağaoğlu) and Crimean Tatars Yusuf Akçura and Ismail Gasprinski (Gaspıralı).<sup>18</sup>

Some leading Turkish nationalist writers recall how they were attracted to the French classics and Enlightenment philosophers. After the 1908 coup the number of intellectuals included in the list increased. This period contains references to 19th century European academicians and scientists, that replaced French literature. Names appeared such as Arthur Schopenhauer, Ernst Haeckel, Ludwig Buchner, Charles Darwin, John Draper, Ernest Renan, Hippolyte Taine, Herbert Spencer, Gustave Le Bon, Theodule-Armand Ribot, John Stuart Mill, Gustave Flaubert and others who introduced rationalism, scientific materialism, evolutionism and naturalism, rejecting everything contrary to reason.<sup>19</sup> Although there were individual members of the Committee who were influenced by European philosophers and whose personal writings reflected such views, they could not affect the majority of the members of the organisation. Among those was a prominent Unionist Ahmed Rıza, who held positivistic views; he was influenced by positivism, not directly from Auguste Comte (who formulated the theory of positivism, 1798-1857), but by his own teacher positivist Pierre Laffitte (1823-1903).<sup>20</sup> Rıza attended meetings of

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15 Zarevand, *Միացեալ, անկախ Թորքանիս կամ ի՞նչ կը ծրագրեն թուրքերը* [United and Independent Turania or What the Turks Plan?] (n.p., 1926), 16.

16 Ibid., 68.

17 Jacob M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism: from Irredentism to Cooperation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 9-10.

18 Zarevand, *United and Independent Turania*, 74.

19 Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (London: Hurst&Company, 1998), 292.

20 Sapah-Gulian, *The Responsibles*, 129.

positivists in Paris and contributed to their journals. In conformity with his philosophical views, Rıza held an anti-revolutionary stand for a long time, claiming that progress could only be achieved through education, not violence. According to Rıza, the Sultan could be inclined to a peaceful change of government and society could be improved only through enlightenment. This was contrary to the CUP's aims, although the positivists' motto "Order and Progress" influenced the name of the Committee which was "Union and Progress."<sup>21</sup> Ziya Gökalp, the founder of modern Turkish nationalism, was heavily influenced by European sociologists' Emile Durkheim's (1858-1917) and Henri-Louis Bergson's (1859-1941) theories on society, culture, civilization, nation, state, and the correlations of the latter. Durkheim's ideas helped Gökalp to arrive at the definitions of the Turkish nation, national identity and what a nation state should be.<sup>22</sup> Abdullah Cevdet, an intellectual and physician of Kurdish origin, one of the founders of the Committee of Union and Progress, credited Ernst Haeckel as a thinker who had influenced him.<sup>23</sup>

Several foreign thinkers and figures had a direct impact on the majority of CUP members, whether by their presence in the empire and personal communications with CUP, or just by imparting certain theories through their writings. Many Unionists fell under the influence of emerging European Turkology, which was a branch of Orientalism.<sup>24</sup> There were many disputes about the origin of the Turks in the 19th century and inconsistency among the writers: some of them, especially the Russian Tatars, who saw them as being the Mongols. It was a fact that as interest in races and peoples in Europe increased, research in Ottoman origins in Central Asia and eventually China, increased too. A number of western orientalist, foremost among them Hungarian orientalist Arminius Vambery (1832-1913), French orientalist Joseph de Guignes (1721-1800), German archaeologist Albert von Le Coq (1860-1930) and a German-born Russian Turkologist Friedrich Wilhelm Radloff (1837-1918), in the latter half of the 19th century, had founded a new science, Turkology. Their studies referred to the racial origin and kinship of the Turkic peoples, the history of their languages, and their "brilliant" civilization.<sup>25</sup> Several key ideas in Ottoman and later republican racial discourses – such as the purity and superiority of the Turkish race, the geographical extent of the Turkish world, the antiquity of the Turkish language, the historical homogeneity of Turkish culture and the contribution of the Turks to world civilization – were to be found outside the empire and within European intellectual discourses.<sup>26</sup>

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21 Ernest Edmondson Ramsaur, *The Young Turks: Prelude to Revolution 1908* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1970), 29.

22 Uriel Heyd, *Foundations of Turkish Nationalism: The Life and Teachings of Ziya Gökalp* (London: Luzac and Company Ltd. and The Harvill Press Ltd, 1950), 66-67.

23 Şükrü M. Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 209.

24 Charles Warren Hostler, *Turkism and the Soviets* (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1957), 140.

25 Zarevand, *United and Independent Turania*, 21.

26 Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 293.

## Gobineau and Le Bon

The idea of racial kinship with the Turkic peoples of Central Asia inherited by Ottoman Turkish intellectuals had an internationally diverse background. French aristocrat and thinker Count Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882) was among the first to reflect on the topic.<sup>27</sup> Eighteenth-century anthropology had already occupied itself with the racial classification of nations because of phrenology, a psychological theory claiming to know a person's mental abilities from the size and shape of his skull. However, "scientific" racism came into its own only in the mid-nineteenth century with the publication of Gobineau's "Essay on the Inequalities of the Human Race." Although in his work, Gobineau was content to offer an objective analysis of the history of civilization from the racial perspective, it is not always clear whether the author was writing about Europeans, white people, or the French. His book kept the tendency of his day to use the terms "English race," "English nation" interchangeably.<sup>28</sup>

The French diplomat and writer divided mankind into races distinguishing them by external features, mainly skin colour: white, black, and yellow. He also stated that those races are inherently unequal and structured hierarchically, with the white race being "higher" and yellow and black "lower." According to Gobineau, only "higher" races possess creative power.<sup>29</sup> Weitz formulated the concept that, ethnic groups were crucial for mankind, nationalities and even social classes began to be "racialised" in different historical moments and places. Gobineau's *Essay* demonstrates how easy the move between race and nation was.<sup>30</sup> In his works, Gobineau mentioned Turks as representatives of the yellow race. Based on "historical data," without specifying them, he also stated that the Oghuz ancestors of the Turanic hordes were from Altai which, in ancient times lived on the Asian steppes.<sup>31</sup> Turkish intellectuals seem to share Gobineau's ideas. His influence was felt in "Genç Kalemler", the Young Turk periodical published in 1911 in Thessaloniki.<sup>32</sup>

Gobineau's 19th century racial views were developed by the French publicist and physician Gustave Le Bon (1841-1931), at the end of the century. Based on the works of his contemporary geographers and travellers, Le Bon argued that every nation, in addition to anthropological type, has a stable mentality, which determined its ideas, institutions, culture and religion.<sup>33</sup> Le Bon believed in the mental and physical inequality of races.

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27 Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (Metropolitan Books: Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2006), 53.

28 Eric Weitz, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 35.

29 Arthur de Gobineau, *The Inequality of the Human Races*, trans. Adrian Collins (London: William Heinemann, 1915), 111-112.

30 Weitz, *A Century of Genocide*, 21.

31 Gobineau, *The Inequality of the Human Races*, 128.

32 Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, 53.

33 Gustave Le Bon, *Психология Народов и Масс* [The Psychology of Peoples and Masses] (Москва: АСТ, 2018), 9.

Using the Japanese as an example, he argued that education could impart knowledge to the “lower” races, but never endow them with critical thinking.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the mindset in race thinking that essential characteristics of each race are seen to be borne “in the blood” by every individual member of the race and that the particular characteristics assigned to the group are immutable and hereditary, became crucial.<sup>35</sup>

Agreeing with Le Bon’s idea that all political and social beliefs become perceptible to the masses only if they have a religious connotation,<sup>36</sup> the Unionists often covered up their actions with quotations from the Quran. A common saying among them was: “Science is the religion of the elite, whereas religion is the science of the masses.”<sup>37</sup> Le Bon’s ideas were regularly cited by Unionists as being by “the greatest living sociologist,” while Tarde and Durkheim, for example, never gained such popularity among them.<sup>38</sup> Abdullah Cevdet translated Le Bon’s works, which became very popular reading among them. Leading Unionists shared Cevdet’s opinion that those who seek to act as “social doctors” of the nation should be familiar with Le Bon’s works. Although in scientific writings or personal correspondence Unionists frequently discussed the importance of race, they did not develop a theory on the “Turkish race.” There is little doubt that this was the result of existing European racial hierarchy, where Turks were always assigned to the lower ranks. Darwin himself had a prejudiced opinion about the Turks.<sup>39</sup> However, Japan’s victory during the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905) questioned the existing racial European hierarchy as a victory of the “yellow” race over the “white,” of which Le Bon was a proponent. In 1905, Cevdet, in a meeting, questioned the philosopher about how the Europeans made a misjudgement when placing the Japanese at the bottom of the racial hierarchy, as the victory had cast serious doubt on the articulated racial structure and stimulated some Unionist periodicals to openly claim that the Turks and the Japanese were from the same race.<sup>40</sup>

## **Vambery and Cahun**

If Gobineau and Le Bon talked about race and the racial kinship of Turkic peoples, the lineage through language between the Ottoman Turks and Turkic peoples of Central Asia was developed by Arminius Vambery (1832-1913). While travelling to Central Asia in

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34 Ibid., 42.

35 Weitz, *A Century of Genocide*, 35.

36 Le Bon, *The Psychology of Peoples*, 242.

37 Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 308.

38 Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, 206.

39 Francis Darwin, *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, vol. I (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1887), 285.

40 Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, 210.



1863, he visited Constantinople where he met Turkish statesmen and Young Ottoman<sup>41</sup> intellectuals. He became acquainted with Young Ottoman writer and editor Ibrahim Şinasi (1826-1871) and contributed to the Young Ottoman periodical “*Hürriyet*” [Liberty] and “*Tasvir-i Efkâr*” [Picture of Ideas].<sup>42</sup> He was deeply concerned with the indifference of Turkish intellectuals towards the kinship of Turkish and Central Asian dialects, considering Turkish as plebeian. So, Vambery’s endeavour to travel to the Khanates of Central Asia for linguistic and cultural purposes seemed to many of them as literary madness. But “absolute lack of higher ideals” did not stop him, as Vambery recalls in his memoirs.<sup>43</sup> From his travels, Vambery noted the following observation: compared with the Ottoman Turks, the people in Central Asia, particularly Kipchaks, stayed true in physiognomy and character as well as language and customs, to their ancestral type. In terms of language, Vambery could not detect any foreign words in their spoken language, which he considered the best transition from Mongolian to the Chagatai language.<sup>44</sup> At the same time, Vambery noted that even under “corrupt Islamism,” western or Ottoman Turks managed to retain some of their character traits.<sup>45</sup> Vambery also talked about the political potential of the union of Ottoman Turks with the peoples of Central Asia. He believed that the Ottoman Empire, by awakening its oriental essence and by uniting Turkomans, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and Tatars could establish an empire stretching from the Adriatic to China that would surpass the heterogeneous Russian Empire in power.<sup>46</sup>

Returning to Constantinople in the 1890s, Vambery saw no change in Turkish society’s nationalistic views.<sup>47</sup> The identification of a Turk with an uneducated peasant or nomad continued and a clear line was drawn in society between Ottoman and ordinary Turks. That is why Vambery was surprised when Sultan Abdul Hamid II used words of Turkic origin in a conversation with him and when he saw a huge collection of samples of Turkic literature in the sultan’s library.<sup>48</sup> There were no ideas of common ethnic origin with other Turkic peoples or any interest in establishing any relationships with them existing. Vambery attributed this to the effects of Abdul Hamid’s despotic regime and to Islam’s denationalising tendency. Vambery sadly mentioned that the Ottoman was a man who only

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41 A secret oppositional society established in 1865 by a group of Ottoman Turkish intellectuals. The Young Ottomans sought for new ways of government and constitution in conformity to Islam. Among the prominent members of this society were writers and publicists such as İbrahim Şinasi, Namık Kemal, Ali Suavi, Ziya Paşa, and Agah Efendi.

42 Arminius Vambéry, *The Story of my Struggles: The Memoirs of Arminius Vambéry*, vol. I (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1905), 143; Ahmed Emin, *The Development of Modern Turkey as Measured by its Press* (New York: Longmans, Green & CO, Agents, 1914), 37.

43 Vambéry, *The Story of my Struggles*, vol. I, 153.

44 Arminius Vambéry, *Travels in Central Asia* (performed in 1863) (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1864), 383.

45 *Ibid.*, 185.

46 *Ibid.*, 436.

47 Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, 52.

48 Arminius Vambéry, *The Story of My Struggles: The Memoirs of Arminius Vambéry*, vol. II (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1905), 353.

had a small amount of Turkish blood flowing in his veins and whose physical features did not even bear the traces of a typical Turk.<sup>49</sup>

The Unionist intellectual organ “*Türk*,” which began being published in Cairo in 1903 and which promoted purely Turkish identity, declared that Turkish was the most advanced and superior Oriental language. Articles encouraging the purification of the Turkish language frequently appeared in the journal. This radical attitude prompted Arminius Vambery to send a letter to the editor hailing his and his friends’ efforts, recalling that when he had written his first articles in “*Ceride-i Havâdis*” [Journal of News] a long time before, those who advocated the purification of the Turkish language had been mocked.<sup>50</sup>

Vambery himself did not indoctrinate racial ideas (common origin, blood), emphasizing that it was impossible to divide people into races due to intermarriage and other factors. In defining a nation, he emphasised language and culture.<sup>51</sup> However, there is the following idea with different formulations in his works:

I was all ablaze with enthusiasm when in my childhood I became acquainted with the life of the national heroes of Hungary. The heroic year of 1848 filled my youthful heart with genuine pride... I was intensely happy and in a rapture of delight. But I had soon to realise that many, nay most of the people questioned the genuineness of my Hungarianism. They criticised and made fun of me, because, they said, people of Jewish origin could not be Hungarians, they could only be Jews and nothing else.<sup>52</sup>

It is very likely that he shared these ideas with Turkish intellectuals and politicians. Vambery was also interested in the constitutional movement and knew the Unionists who were in exile.<sup>53</sup>

French writer and Orientalist Leon Cahun (1841-1900) was another writer who had influenced the Unionist worldview. Cahun, being the author of a number of literary and historical works, undertook the narration of the history of Asia in his “Introduction à l’histoire de l’Asie.” It was translated and edited by Necip Asim (1861-1935).<sup>54</sup> Cahun declared that the Turks are the “backbone” of world history and that new archaeological

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49 Hermann Vambéry, *Das Türkenvolk in seinen ethnologischen und ethnographischen Beziehungen* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1885), 594, 612.

50 Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 68.

51 Arminius Vambéry, *The Story of My Struggles: The Memoirs of Arminius Vambéry*, Vol. II (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1905), 431.

52 Ibid., 436.

53 Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 314. The review “*Türk Yurdu*” published several articles of Vambery, also his obituary in 1913 (see the table of contents of “*Türk Yurdu*” in Masami Arai, *Turkish Nationalism in the Young Turk Era* (Leiden, New York, København, Köln: E.J. Brill, 1992), 127, 130-133).

54 Together with Vambery, Asim (a Turkish MP from 1927) was an honorary member of the Hungarian Turanic organization.



discoveries refute deliberate distortions of Turks' history.<sup>55</sup> Cahun notes that the application of the term "Mongolian, Uighur-Finnish or Turkic" to the diverse, mixed mass of people inhabiting Central Asia and the Ottoman Empire is not scientific, but that they speak the languages of the same language family. Cahun also gives the anthropological description of these people (skin colour, height, bone structure, customs, language and religion), classifying them as of the yellow race. The book's whole narrative has a derogatory tone and is prejudiced towards the Mongolian race.<sup>56</sup> Cahun also argued that the essence of the politically fragmented Turkic community, which has the same origin, is war and that military discipline is the basis of its existence.<sup>57</sup>

Ziya Gokalp, a member of the Committee from the Diyarbekir branch and later the main CUP ideologist and the father of modern Turkish nationalism, wrote that he contacted Ali Hüseyinzade, a Caucasian Tatar emigre and proponent of pan-Turkism and bought Leon Cahun's book when he came to Constantinople for the first time.<sup>58</sup> Gokalp stated that his interest in Turkish history arose after he read Cahun's work.<sup>59</sup> Tekinalp (Moiz Cohen), a Unionist ideologist, also spoke positively about this book.<sup>60</sup> A Crimean Tatar emigre Yusuf Akçura, another CUP ideologue, reflecting on Cahun's attribution of Turkish identity to Lenk Temur and Genghis Khan,<sup>61</sup> was sceptical about the "noble object of uniting all Turks" attributed to Genghis by the author.<sup>62</sup> Nazim, Secretary General of the Committee, was also familiar with Cahun's work.<sup>63</sup>

## Von der Goltz and Parvus

Colmar von der Goltz was one of the individuals that had a direct impact on the Young Turk mindset. He trained several generations of Ottoman officers during a military mission to reconstruct the Ottoman army in 1883-1895, many of whom joined the CUP and organised the 1908 coup. In his book "Das Volk in Waffen" published in 1883, he put forward the idea of "the nation in arms" and argued that an era of total war had begun, in which the state would win only by mobilising the entire nation and resources, amalgamating civic and military life and by exhausting the enemy in a long-lasting struggle. This theory expressed the author's social-Darwinist worldview, according to

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55 Léon Cahun, *Introduction à l'histoire de l'Asie. Turcs et Mongols des origines à 1405* (Paris, Armand Colin et Cie, 1896), 33.

56 Ibid., 37.

57 Ibid., 75.

58 Hostler, *Turkism and the Soviets*, 141; Heyd, *Foundations of Turkish Nationalism*, 105.

59 Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, 52.

60 Tekin Alp, *The Turkish and Pan-Turkish Ideal* (Liberty Press: London, no date), 76.

61 Cahun, *Introduction à l'histoire de l'Asie*, 75.

62 Yusuf Akçura, Ismail Fehmi, "Yusuf Akçura's Üç tarz-ı siyaset [Three Kinds of Policy]" *Oriente Moderno* 61, no. 1 (1981): 9.

63 Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 489, 74.

which war was necessary, desirable, and unavoidable in the process of the development of any nation. In the course of the war and struggle for survival, “strong” nations would rightfully devour “weak” ones.<sup>64</sup> He started to use the term “the nation in arms” or “soldier nation” (asker millet)<sup>65</sup> in reference to Turks, based on emerging European Turkology, according to which the Turks were Turkic tribes from Central Asia, being born soldiers; therefore, war was their profession and they had a better chance of winning the “struggle for existence.”<sup>66</sup>

He sympathized with the Young Turk movement and emphasised the role of his student officers in the coup. He kept in touch with them after the coup, giving advice in his open letters: “Be powerful so you will not be subjected to injustice.”<sup>67</sup> His influence on Ottoman officers was known beyond the Ottoman empire<sup>68</sup> but the idea of a “soldier nation” influenced the Unionist civil wing as well. Ahmed Riza authored a booklet in 1907 titled “Duties and Responsibilities: Soldier” (Vazife ve Mesuliyet’ler: Asker) based on von der Goltz’s teachings. In it, Riza calls on every Turk to fight against external and internal enemies. He classifies “non-Ottomanized Christians” as “internal enemies” or “secret enemies.” He was convinced that Christian secret enemies would limit the army’s combat effectiveness during the war, thus they were dangerous.<sup>69</sup>

Alexander Helphand (also known as Mustafa Parvus, 1867-1924,) was the other individual who called the Unionist for the strive, but this time in the economic sphere and about the significance of war in general.<sup>70</sup> He played an influential role in the political

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64 Handan N. Akmeşe, *The Birth of Modern Turkey: The Ottoman Military and the March to World War I* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 22.

65 Fuat Dündar, *Modern Türkiye'nin Şifresi. İttihat ve Terakki'nin Etnisite Mühendisliği (1913-1918)* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2008), 66-68.

66 Cahun, *Introduction à l'histoire de l'Asie*, 75.

67 Akmeşe, *The Birth of Modern Turkey*, 67.

68 I. I. Goloborod'ko, *Старая и Новая Турция* [Old and New Turkey] (Moscow: Pol'za, 1908), 189.

69 Dündar, *Modern Türkiye'nin Şifresi*, 70-72.

70 Parvus was born into a middle-class Jewish family in Russia in 1867. He was influenced by Russian Marxists. In the 1890s, as a political exile in Switzerland, he received a Ph.D. in political economy from the University of Basel. He joined German Social Democratic circles where he developed close friendships with Karl Kautsky, Clara Zetkin, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Radek (Asim M. Karaömerlioğlu, “Helphand-Parvus and his Impact on Turkish Intellectual life,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 6 (2004): 146). Parvus actively participated in the Revolution of 1905 and, together with his disciple Trotsky, became one of the most important political figures in the St. Petersburg Soviets. Helphand was arrested in 1906 and exiled to Siberia, from where he fled, at about the same time as Trotsky, to Germany. He engaged in an export and import enterprise, continuing social democratic propaganda in parallel with his commercial activities. (George Katkov, “Революция и германское вмешательство,” в *Тайна Октябрьского переворота. Ленин и немецко-большевистский заговор. Документы, статьи, воспоминания* [“Revolution and German Intervention” in *Mystery of the October Revolution. Lenin and the German-Bolshevik conspiracy. Documents, articles, memoirs*], compiler V. I. Kuznetsov (Saint Petersburg: Aleteiia, 2001), 147). Parvus convinced the German authorities to arrange the famous sealed train by which the emigre Russian Bolshevik leaders, including Lenin, entered Russia in April of 1917 just after the February Revolution (Karaömerlioğlu, “Helphand-Parvus...,” 150). Although he financed and led the propaganda war for October revolution, the Bolsheviks did not let Parvus enter Russia afterwards. “The cause of the revolution cannot be taken up with dirty hands,” Lenin replied through Radek to Parvus’ desire to return to his homeland (Karl Radek, “Парвус,” в *Силуэты: политические портреты /А. Лунчарский,*

and intellectual life of Russia, Germany and Turkey. He was one of the leading Marxist theoreticians and revolutionaries in the 1905 Russian Revolution and was a prominent German Social Democrat in Germany, as well as being an economic adviser to Unionists in 1910-1914 in Constantinople.<sup>71</sup> In the words of Karl Radek, a revolutionary comrade: “Parvus is part of the revolutionary past of the working class, that was trampled into the mud.”<sup>72</sup> Turkologist Erik J. Zürcher rightfully defines him as “journalist, German agent, arms dealer and Marxist intellectual.”<sup>73</sup>

During Italo-Turkish (1911-1912) war, he was sent as a war reporter for a German newspaper to Constantinople. Protected by Liman von Sanders,<sup>74</sup> Parvus became the main grain supplier from Germany to the Turkish army (and, for a short period, from Russia). In fact, Parvus was given the opportunity to conclude lucrative contracts for the delivery of bread and to earn money using this combination, a deal which, in his estimation, saved the Unionist regime during the WWI.<sup>75</sup> Parvus offered “strategical information” to the Turkish government about the Balkans before and during the wars (1912-1913) and, in turn, was rewarded. It has been suggested that he smuggled old-fashioned German arms to the Balkans and made a considerable fortune out of these deals.<sup>76</sup>

He criticised European economic penetration of the Ottoman Empire and put forward the need for a national economy, a pre-condition for which he declared to be the abolishment of the capitulations.<sup>77</sup> He harshly attacked the Public Debt Administration (Düyûn-ı Umûmiye) founded in 1881 as a European institution for collecting taxes and revenues on major Ottoman goods.<sup>78</sup> Parvus, for the adherents of Turkism, was a “European” mentor: “*I wrote financial articles and was busy founding banks. Once I made my first commercial gains, I put them aside because they were the lever for further advancement.*”<sup>79</sup> Parvus’s ideas gained influence from the 1913 coup, with the state, now completely dominated by the CUP, engaged with policies concerning the national

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К. Радек, Л. Троцкий [“Parvus” in *Silhouettes: Political Portraits* /A. Lunacharsky, K. Radek, L. Trotsky], eds. V. Zhuravlev, V. Loginov (Moscow: Politizdat, 1991), 253). He died of a heart attack in 1924 in Germany.

71 Karaömerlioğlu, “Helphand-Parvus...,” 145.

72 Radek, “Parvus,” 248.

73 Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey, a Modern History* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 125.

74 Otto Viktor Karl Liman von Sanders (1855 –1929) was a German general who served as an adviser to the Ottoman Empire during WWI. In 1918 he commanded an Ottoman army during the Sinai and Palestine Campaigns.

75 Sergei Aleksandrov, “Немецкий агент Парвус,” в *Тайна Октябрьского переворота. Ленин и немецко-большевистский заговор. Документы, статьи, воспоминания* [“German Agent Parvus” in *Mystery of the October Revolution. Lenin and the German-Bolshevik conspiracy. Documents, articles, memoirs*], compiler V. I. Kuznetsov (Saint Petersburg: Aleteia, 2001), 114; Katkov, “Revolution and German Intervention,” 147.

76 Karaömerlioğlu, “Helphand-Parvus...,” 158-159.

77 Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 337.

78 Karaömerlioğlu, “Helphand-Parvus...,” 152.

79 Hans-Lukas Kieser, “World War and World Revolution: Alexander Helphand-Parvus in Germany and Turkey,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12, no. 2 (2011): 398.

economy (Milli İktisat). Parvus must have been in close contact with Mehmed Javid, the financial expert and minister of economics of the CUP (1909-1911, 1914), and with the Interior Minister Mehmed Talaat.<sup>80</sup> With the outbreak of the First World War, the Ottoman government suspended payment on the national debt and the capitulations were abolished from October 1, 1914.<sup>81</sup>

Parvus' impact on Young Turk thinking in economic matters can be best seen in his writings published between 1912 and 1914. He was made an honorary member of various Turkish organisations and contributed to Turkish journals and newspapers such as "*Bilgi Mecmuası*" [Information Magazine], "*Le Jeune Turc*" [The Young Turk], "*Türk Yurdu*" [The Turkish homeland], "*Tasvir-i Efkar*," etc. The most important among these was the review "*Türk Yurdu*," established in 1911. The editor of this pan-Turkist publication was the Crimean Tatar emigre Yusuf Akçura. The latter invited Parvus to provide economic columns for the periodical. This was a topic, he insisted, that was highly important but for which no Turkish author could be found. Introducing Parvus to the readers, Akçura pointed out that he was a well-known Social Democrat in Europe and, despite the ideological difference concerning nationalism between Parvus and the "*Türk Yurdu*" circle, they shared the same populist concerns.<sup>82</sup> During his further collaboration, Parvus succeeded in confirming "*Türk Yurdu*" readers their feeling that the Turks were the victims of European imperialism and capitalism and equated foreign financial penetration to a military invasion.<sup>83</sup>

He was himself an agitator and could use the mood of the crowd. In an address to the "Turks," during the final phase of the First Balkan War in April 1913, Parvus adopted an apocalyptic tone that contributed to Turkish fears of extermination. He wrote that the Great powers "*...want to annihilate you like the native Indians who perished in America.... They have closed all your roads and besiege you. If you cannot hold your positions and establish an economic force that meets modern demands, your death is certain.... Henceforth the last minute has begun.*"<sup>84</sup>

Parvus changed his revolutionary ideas and became convinced that what was needed for the collapse of the capitalist system was not class struggle, but a war between states: "War carries all capitalist contradictions to extremes. A world war can only end with a world revolution," he wrote in 1910. He promoted his concept of a German–Ottoman war of destruction against Russia.<sup>85</sup> Together with such politically diverse figures as the Turkologist Ernst Jäckh, the Orientalist Max von Oppenheim, the left-liberal politician Friedrich Naumann and officers like Hans Humann, who was a close friend of the Ottoman

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80 Kieser, "World War and World Revolution," 397.

81 Zürcher, *Turkey, a Modern History*, 125.

82 Karaömerlioğlu, "Helphand-Parvus..." 151.

83 Kieser, "World War and World Revolution," 398.

84 *Ibid.*, 400.

85 *Ibid.*, 396.

War Minister Ismail Enver, Parvus was among the German friends of the CUP regime and of supporters of the war in Constantinople.<sup>86</sup>

He did not advocate ethno-religious nationalism, as seen in all his writings and in a letter addressed to Wilhelm Liebknecht: “I’m looking for a state where a person can buy a fatherland on the cheap.”<sup>87</sup> He strongly opposed the Armenian reforms and had clashes with Armenian socialist organisations, in particular with the Hnchaks on this matter.<sup>88</sup> His writings served much greater ends and influenced the nationalist intellectuals considerably in perceiving the Ottoman Empire as being in an internal struggle between the nationalities of the Empire and the imperialistic war over the parts of the Empire. His constant contrasts and examples on Armenian, Greek and Bulgarian peasants on one side and the Turkish one on the other stirred anti-Christian sentiments in the country. He always agitated for strikes against European goods, a strategy used in both the 1905 and 1917 Russian revolutions. But in the end, it was the Ottoman Empire’s Armenian and Greek entrepreneurs that were the main victims of the anti-Christian boycotts of goods and services, a strategy used in Milli İktisat. Most German and Russian socialists preferred to forget Helphand.<sup>89</sup> But Alfred Rosenberg, the leading Nazi ideologist, never tired of using Helphand as an example of the corrupting influence of Eastern Jews on Germany’s national life.<sup>90</sup>

## Consequences

Two main areas in the CUP worldview can be singled out as a result of European influence: racism and social-Darwinism. European racial thought and developing Turkology contributed to the flourishing of the CUP’s racial nationalism. Muslim emigre intellectuals from Russia began to nurture Pan-Turkism as an ideology, expanding its borders from a mere cultural and linguistic definition and marking it with their own political aspirations.<sup>91</sup> Using the impact of harsh economic reality, the Balkan defeats and the frustrations of European economic and political pressure, they attempted to shift Turkism from romantic populism to grandiose schemes of pan-Turkism. They were intellectual-revolutionaries, but Unionist Turks were statesmen with practical insights and had a very good understanding of the geographical and political obstacles. Ali Kemal, the editor of the journal “*Türk*,” was severe in his criticism of Pan-Turkism, considering it to be an unrealistic policy. Not only was its realisation precluded by geographic factors, but there was not even a strong Turkist movement in Central Asia to give it a semblance

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86 Karaömerlioğlu, “Helphand-Parvus...,” 148; Kieser, “World War and World Revolution,” 408.

87 Aleksandrov, “German Agent Parvus,” 110.

88 Sapah-Gulian, *The Responsibles*, 275-280.

89 Zbynek Zeman, Winfried Scharlau, *The Merchant of the Revolution: The Life of Alexander Israel Helphand (Parvus), 1867-1924* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 276.

90 Ibid., 265.

91 Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 427.

of credibility, as Kemal stated: “*We could not defend the Crimea, which is inhabited by Tatars who are a kind of Turk. Should we fight for the unification of Turks all over Asia?*”<sup>92</sup> It is sufficient to bring an article published in the literary supplement of “*Peyam*” [Message] by Ali Kemal. First, Kemal refers to Tamerlane being perceived as the pride of Turkishness, who made his greatness known to the world, then adds that the latter did not even recognize the Ottomans as Turks and referred to Ottoman sultan Bayezid I as the “Greek emperor.” However:

Some among us, subject to the Turkish spirit and similar sentiments consider Tamerlane, like Genghis, ancestors worthy of honour. Unfortunately, those who adhere to Turkishness with such extreme jealousy and ignore Ottomanism are wrong about something. We are not the descendants of Timur, but of Bayazet, we are Ottomans. The Ottomans distanced themselves from other Turks, left and joined non-Turkish tribes, accommodated them in their country, and together with many of them, built a huge empire that exists today. And what happened to the other Turks, what trace has they left?<sup>93</sup>

This was the attitude of the most high-ranking officials. As Edib describes it in her memoirs: “*Pan-Turanism never had a clear boundary, crystallised expression or an explanation. Talaat Pasha pleasantly and humorously remarked at times, that if any one criticised it, ‘It may lead us to the Yellow Sea.’*”<sup>94</sup>

Pan-Turkism stayed as an elitist political ideology, nurturing the racial feelings of ordinary people and serving as a tool for manipulating them with the imaginary ideal of a Turanian empire extending from the Mediterranean Sea to the Great Wall of China. The literary figures of Turkism turned from the discomfoting reality of the Turkish people to pre-Islamic Turkish mythology and epics.<sup>95</sup>

Writers like Cahun and Vambery, Gobineau and Le Bon introduced the concept of *race*, defined Turks as a race, providing linguistic and cultural kinship with the Central Asian Turkic peoples and the Mongolian race in general. Afterwards, they helped to fix the racial characteristics of that race, considering them immutable and hereditary, emphasising the role Turkic peoples played: “*The hoof-print of the Turanian “man on horseback” is stamped deep all over the palimpsest of history.*”<sup>96</sup> The number of key ideas on the Turkish race were developed by CUP ideologists and were passed into republican racial discourses<sup>97</sup> – such as the purity and superiority of the Turkish race, geographical extent

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92 Zarevand, *United and Independent Turania*, 48.

93 «Թիմուրլենկի մասին» [About Tamerlane], *Azatamart* (Constantinople), no. 1420, 21 January 1914, 2.

94 Halide Edib, *Memoirs of Halide Edib* (London, New York: The Century CO, 1926), 315.

95 Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 428.

96 T. Lothrop Stoddard, “Pan-Turanism,” *The American Political Science Review* 11, no. 1 (1917): 16.

97 For more see Nazan Maksudyan, “The Turkish Review of Anthropology and the Racist Face of Turkish Nationalism,” *Cultural Dynamics* 17, no. 3 (2005): 291-322; Illia Xypolia, “Racist Aspects of Modern Turkish



of the Turkish world, antiquity of the Turkish language, historical homogeneity of Turkish culture and the Turks' contributions to world civilization.

Race functions as part of a general category of group formation,<sup>98</sup> and served the Unionists' political agenda of establishing a Turkish nation-state and framing Turkish national identity. Crucial for the then still multi-ethnic and multi-religious empire was that, although in the given period (1908-1918) the ruling party was debating over the definition of the term *Turk*, it could easily define who was not a Turk.<sup>99</sup> In that definition, the role racial affiliation played was not minor. A great deal of research dealt with the cooperation of race with nationalism and genocide, showing that racial discourses have a great mutability in their meaning and operation within different settings.<sup>100</sup> What should also be stated is that modern nationalism and racism are not indigenous thoughts, rather were imported western strains of thought that served as raw material in the Turkish sociological milieu. The reason why racial thought resonated most among the Turkish intellectual elite was the existing belief in the concept of the "ruling nation" (*millet-i hakime*), which prevailed among the Empire's Muslim Turks. According to this, as the conquerors of the land, they were superior to the empire's other peoples and therefore had the inherent right to rule over them.<sup>101</sup> Thus even before Turkish nationalism was fully formed as a political ideology, the Turks viewed themselves as the ruling nation.<sup>102</sup>

Racial definitions and groups are not logical, being merely constructed entities, as Stoddard explains the awakening of Turkish nationalism: "*For his blood-race he will not stir: for his thought-race he will die,*" as race is "*not what men really are, but what they think they are!*"<sup>103</sup> It was only after racial immutability attached itself to Turkishness and constructed it as an identity that belonging and citizenship started to differ: Turkic peoples of Central Asia belong to the Turkish world whereas Ottoman citizens from minority origins were considered to be foreigners. This was a period in which race marked a domain beyond citizenship.<sup>104</sup> For fast and effective political and national consolidation, CUP affiliated propagandists targeted Armenians as a group, which had been marginalised over the entire 500-year history of the Ottoman Empire. They were already suspect in the eyes of many Turks because of their religion and occupations, but the CUP articulated old

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Nationalism," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 18, no. 2 (2016): 111-124; On the emergence of Sun-Language theory see Ben Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 401- 402.

98 Kathryn A. Manzo, *Creating Boundaries: The Politics of Race and Nation* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995), 52.

99 Uğur Ümit Ungör, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 52.

100 Weitz, *A Century of Genocide*, 21-22; Mark Levene, "Why is the Twentieth Century the Century of Genocide?" *Journal of World History* 11, no. 2 (2000): 329-331.

101 Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, 48.

102 *Ibid.*, 50.

103 Stoddard, "Pan-Turanism," 13.

104 Murat Ergin, "Is the Turk a White Man? Towards a Theoretical Framework for Race in the Making of Turkishness," *Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 6 (2008): 830.

racial prejudices,<sup>105</sup> linked them to current anxieties (mainly the defeats in the Balkan Wars and the question of Armenian reforms) and created the “stab-in-the-back” myth, which was intensified with the outbreak of WWI. As Manzo stated: “*Nationalism’s dominant conceptual partners are not simply nation and state. They are also race and aliens, for without the racialised kind of alien there can be no national kin.*”<sup>106</sup> The existence and continuation of a national system of inclusion and exclusion in the Ottoman Empire over centuries nurtured this process.

The theory of social-Darwinism had some manifestations in all the communities of the Ottoman Empire. An example of this is the fact, that in Syrian and Lebanese missionary schools, the works of Darwin and Spencer were included in the curricula and Spencer’s “Synthetic Philosophy” was used as a teaching manual.<sup>107</sup> In the empire’s Armenian reality, we could meet references to Darwin and Spencer as well. In particular, the first issue of the periodical “Lusaber”, published in Cairo, began as follows:

The struggle for life is waged against conflicting elements. Countless species are erased, and the one which has sufficient vitality in it and is in favourable conditions, struggles and remains. In one word, the worthy live, the unworthy die, according to Darwin’s theory (the survival of the fittest). The newspaper asked the Armenian reader for support to win the “struggle for existence” by preserving Armenian culture.<sup>108</sup>

However social-Darwinism was fully absorbed in the mentality of the Unionists’ military and political elite, partly synthesised with their racist and elitist ideas and partly based on the Turkish perception of the ruling nation.<sup>109</sup> The “survival of the fittest” in the eternal struggle for existence is the key idea of social-Darwinism, a philosophical theory that was established by the English sociologist Herbert Spencer in the 1850s.<sup>110</sup> According to Spencer and social-Darwinist thinkers, the formula of social life is the following: the struggle for existence – natural selection – survival of the fittest. Destruction of the maladapted or weaker species is considered natural. Despite their economic and educational backwardness, Turks considered themselves to be the country’s ruling element. Forming the military-bureaucratic class of the empire, they were the title nation of the empire thus, according to some thinkers, proving their “biological fitness for the

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105 For more on this see Stephan H. Astourian, “Modern Turkish Identity and the Armenian Genocide: From Prejudice to Racist Nationalism” in *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide*, ed. Richard Hovhannisian (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 25, 31.

106 Manzo, *Creating Boundaries*, 3.

107 Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), 82-86.

108 «Մամուլը» [The Press], *Loussaper* (Cairo), no. 1, 1 December 1904, 1.

109 Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, 48.

110 Robert G. Perrin, “Herbert Spencer’s Four Theories of Social Evolution,” *American Journal of Sociology* 81, no. 6 (1976): 1356.



living conditions.” Von der Goltz was one of the individuals that contributed heavily to the spread of social-Darwinism, injecting the officers with the need for external and internal war, with the confidence that the Turks would be able to win because of their racial characteristics. Subsequently, in compliance with the social-Darwinist mindset, the Committee saw war as a significant stage in the development of the nation. Many high-ranking CUP officials considered pacifism a threat to the survival of the empire. The racial perceptions of the Committee of Union and Progress, as a ruling party, intertwined with social-Darwinism, were crucial, both in decision-making and the “justification” of the destruction of the empire’s non-Turkish populations.

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# ***MEDZ YEGHERN, THE SILENCED NAME: LANGUAGE, POLITICS, AND THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE***

*Vartan Matiossian*

This study overviews some of the issues surrounding the use, abuse, and misuse of *Medz Yeghern*, the most common proper name for the genocide of the Armenian, tracing the genealogy of the term *yeghern* and the evolution of its primary meaning from “evil” to “(heinous) crime,” “massacre,” and “genocide” over the past century and half. An erudite conflation of the Classical Armenian homophone words *yeghern* (եղեռն, “evil, crime”) and *yegher* (եղիլ, “lamentation”) in the nineteenth century resulted in the secondary meaning “tragedy, calamity, catastrophe.” It also marked the conflation of cause and consequence in a single word, despite the use of *yeghern* accompanied by active verbs only, which indicates cause. The use of *Medz Yeghern*, therefore, point out to the central role of the perpetrator; the word *yeghern* has been used to translate “cultural genocide” and “genocide recognition” as synonym to *tseghasbanutiun* (ցեղասպանություն). This ambiguity was exploited during the first two decades of the current century, especially in Turkey and the United States. Interpretive denial adopted the name *Medz Yeghern* to avoid the use of “genocide,” choosing the meanings “Great Catastrophe” and “Great Calamity” and turning the cause into consequence. The article offers a reconsideration of the semantic and political issues behind the use of *Medz Yeghern* and suggests, on the basis of linguistic evidence, that the literal translation of the proper name, according to context and time of use, should be “Great (Heinous) Crime” or “Great Genocide.”

**Keywords:** *Medz Yeghern*, genocide, Armenian Genocide, denial, semantics, crime, relation of cause and consequence

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## **Introduction**

The annihilation of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire was a searing open wound when Bertha Sullivan Papazian pointed out to its symbolic representation in 1918: “How shall we name the dastardly crime which robbed them of life and homeland? How shall we describe that catastrophe?”<sup>1</sup>

This study will overview some of the issues surrounding the use, abuse, and misuse of *Medz Yeghern* (Մեծ Եղեռն, Great [Heinous] Crime), the most common proper name for the genocide of the Armenians, which also had the variant *Abrilean Yeghern* (Ապրիլեան

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1 Bertha S. Papazian, *The Tragedy of Armenia: A Brief Study and Interpretation* (Boston and Chicago: The Pilgrim Press, 1918), 112.

Եղեռն, April [Heinous] Crime), almost discontinued nowadays. It entails the testimony of an eloquent but neglected survivor, the Armenian language, whose evidence sheds light over the misrepresentation of facts and words in the politics of genocide.

It is noteworthy that in November 1918, the first issue of the newspaper *Artaramard*, organ of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), evoked in Constantinople the editorial board of its predecessor *Azatamart*, arrested and exiled to death on April 24-25, 1915, as victim of “the [Heinous] Crime of Crimes [*Yeghernneru Yeghern*],”<sup>2</sup> thirty years before Raphael Lemkin characterized genocide as “the crime of crimes” that “must be treated as the most heinous of all crimes.”<sup>3</sup>

Armenian instrumentalization for the goal of recognition has subsumed the generic legal denomination “genocide” into the formula “Armenian Genocide,” which discounts the unique characteristics of the annihilation of 1915. “Today, [Armenians] are using a common name as a proper name. They do not respect the identity of the Event that has shaped them for the past 80 years. They do not respect their own memory of the Event,” has observed Marc Nichanian.<sup>4</sup>

Several questions are at the core of the issue:

1. What does the common name *yeghern* mean?
2. Does *Medz Yeghern* explicitly point to the perpetrator’s central role or implicitly leave the executing agent out?
3. Is there a direct relationship between *Medz Yeghern* and genocide?

This study summarizes some of the findings of my recent book,<sup>5</sup> which may be subsumed into the following answers:

1. Languages abound in words that have changed their meaning over time. The primary meaning of *yeghern* (evil > crime > massacre > genocide) indicates cause.
2. Since *yeghern* indicates cause, then *Medz Yeghern* points out to the central role of the perpetrator.
3. *Yeghern* and *tseghasbanutiun/ցեղասպանություն* (“genocide”) have become synonyms. The use of *yeghern* in the phrases “cultural genocide” (մշակութային եղեռն, *mshagutayin yeghern*) and “genocide recognition” (եղեռնի ճանաչում, *yegherni janachum*) for instance, supports their interchangeable nature. The literal translation of

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2 *Artaramard*, 20 November 1918. See the use of *Yeghernneru Yeghern* in the book review by Hagop Oshagan, «Մեր խաչը (Տր. Մ. Սալբի)» [Our Cross, by Dr. M. Salpi], *Djakatamart*, 17 October 1921. It also appeared in the gruesome description of the ordeal of a group of Armenian women in Malatia, where “the heinous crime of crimes [*yeghernneru yeghern*] was committed” (Bedros Bondatsi, «Եղեռնային հարսանիք», in «Երևան»ի տարեգիրք [“Criminal Wedding” in Yerevan Yearly], Constantinople: Yerevan, 1920, 30). Thanks are due to Lerna Ekmekcioğlu for this reference.

3 Raphael Lemkin, “Genocide as a Crime under International Law,” *UN Bulletin*, 15 January 1948, 70.

4 David Kazanjian and Marc Nichanian, “Between Genocide and Catastrophe,” in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, eds. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (California: University of California Press, 2003), 127.

5 Vartan Matiossian, *The Politics of Naming the Armenian Genocide: Language, History, and ‘Medz Yeghern’* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2022). The adjective *medz* may be elided as native speakers frequently do, with *Yeghern* standing alone for the sake of brevity.

*Medz Yeghern*, according to context and time, may be either “Great (Heinous) Crime” or “Great Genocide.”

The historical facts of the Armenian annihilation document exhaustively all five acts enunciated in article 2 of the Genocide Convention that are “committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, any national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such,” from killing members of the group (clause a) to forcibly transferring children to another group (clause e). Its perpetration three decades before Raphael Lemkin’s coinage of genocide shows that the issue belongs more to language than to sociology.<sup>6</sup>

During the first two decades of the current century, *Medz Yeghern* was the subject of extensive interpretive denial, a process that acknowledges the existence of facts, but introduces a different set of views through euphemism, technical jargon, or word change, re-allocating the meaning given to an event to a different type of event.<sup>7</sup> Three key episodes should be mentioned, although they did not resemble each other in their details: Pope John Paul II’s visit to Armenia (2001), the Turkish apology campaign (2008-2009), and the “Armenian Remembrance Day” statements of U.S. presidents George W. Bush (2003, 2005), Barack Obama (2009-2017), and Donald Trump (2017-2020). Except for discourse analysis of the statements by Bush and Obama, the politics surrounding the name has not been addressed by the scholarship.<sup>8</sup> It is hardly accidental that the instrumentalization of *Medz Yeghern* was recorded in Turkey, the country that practices denial as state policy, and the United States, the country where a veneer of self-righteousness fails to cover the preeminence of power politics in American-Turkish relations.

John Paul II prayed in 2001 for God to listen “to the call of the dead from the depths of the *Metz Yeghern*” at the memorial of Tsitsernakaberd in Yerevan. The prayer was contextualized within his own recognition of the genocide, and his successors Benedict XVI and Francis explicitly used the translation “Great Evil,” even though “Great Crime” was also widely recorded. In the wake of the Pope’s visit, however, media reporting gave primacy to translations of *yeghern* like “catastrophe,” “calamity,” “disaster,” or “tragedy” without further elaboration or acknowledgment for their source.

The mentions of “Great Calamity” in George W. Bush’s statements of 2003 and 2005, which their official Armenian translations rendered as *Medz Yeghern*, laid the logical groundwork for the statement of the Turkish apology campaign in late 2008. The latter adopted the major premise *Medz Yeghern* = *Büyük Felâket* = “Great Catastrophe,” which

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6 Irving Louis Horowitz, *Genocide: State Power and Mass Murder* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1977), 183.

7 Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 8.

8 Vicky Tchapanian, “The Armenian Genocide in American Presidency Discourses from George W. Bush to Barack Obama: A Political Discourse Analysis Study,” *Haigazian Armenological Review* 34 (2014): 221–56; Suren Zolyan, *ԱՄՆ նախագահների Հայոց ցեղասպանության մասին (խուսա՛նալիղ դիսկուրսի իմաստա-գործարանական վերլուծություն)* [American Presidents on the Armenian Genocide: The Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis of the Evasionist Discourse] (Yerevan: Limush, 2015), 40–82; idem, “How Not to Do Things with the Word: Barack Obama on the Armenian Genocide,” *Russian Journal of Linguistics* 1 (2019): 62–82.

minimized agency to the point of its elimination.<sup>9</sup> The equation involved the minor premise that catastrophes have no legal standing and the obvious conclusion that *Medz Yeghern* does not have it either. It trivialized *Medz Yeghern* (= *Büyük Felâket* / “Great Catastrophe”) in the public discourse as a name that was claimed to reflect the reality lived by the survivors and would have supposedly advanced Turkish-Armenian reconciliation much further due to its “more human, more dignified” character, as imagined by Thomas de Waal,<sup>10</sup> while “genocide” was said to be a term of legal and political contents lacking humanity.

The statement became a forerunner, from a different ideological standpoint, to the discourse of “just memory” and “shared pain” briefly embraced by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) as a variation on continuing denial.

The Turkish misleading use of *Medz Yeghern* and the absence of an Armenian appropriate response became the driving force behind the follow-up: the mention of “Meds Yeghern,” untranslated, in the statements of Barack Obama and Donald Trump, which reflected the conventional wisdom of “Great Calamity” = *Medz Yeghern* at the White House and the Department of State. This silver line of semantics threaded in the upper echelons of government used *Medz Yeghern* without translation as a compromise between genocide and the preferred Turkish formulas, “events of 1915” or the unofficially used “catastrophe.”<sup>11</sup>

The policy of “no context” adopted by the apology campaign and the presidential statements was matched by the Armenian response of “no contest.” The refusal to consent terms of recognition other than the word “genocide” or the formula “Armenian Genocide” admitted those translations without further question and likened the use of *Medz Yeghern* to plain whitewash without any attempt at owning the name. Remarkably, President Joseph Biden mentioned both “genocide” and *Medz Yeghern* in his statements of 2021 and 2022, and the use of the Armenian name elicited no objections from the Armenian side.

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9 See Ayda Erbal, “Mea Culpas, Negotiations, Apologies: Revisiting the ‘Apology’ of Turkish Intellectuals,” in *Reconciliation, Civil Society, and the Politics of Memory: Transnational Initiatives in the 20th Century*, ed. Birgit Schwelling (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012), 85-86.

10 “Armenian-Turkish Relations by a ‘Historian of the Present,’” *Agos*, 3 February 2017, [www.agos.com.tr/en/article/17632/armenian-turkish-relations-by-a-historian-of-the-present](http://www.agos.com.tr/en/article/17632/armenian-turkish-relations-by-a-historian-of-the-present), accessed 06.05.2022. De Waal appears to have adopted “Great Catastrophe” (Thomas de Waal, *Armenia and Turkey: Bridging the Gap*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Policy Brief 87, October 2010, 7) following the apology campaign of 2008-2009, preceded by “great calamity” (idem, *The Caucasus: An Introduction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 58) following George W. Bush’s statements of 2003 and 2005. Interestingly, he had originally used “great slaughter” (idem, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 103, crediting Nora Dudwick, “Armenia: Paradise Regained or Lost?,” in *New States, New Policies: Building the Post-Soviet Nations*, eds. Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 475).

11 Tessa Hofmann, “Մեծ էղինն: Das ultimate Verbrechen,” *Pogrom* 6 (2014): 46, 51.

## The Dastardly Crime against Humanity

The notion that Ottoman Turkish perpetrators committed a criminal act against Armenian victims has sufficient factual ground to override claims of unsophistication, notwithstanding the demand for a nuanced approach to an extremely complex issue. Incidentally, the concept of “crime against humanity,” which had been previously mentioned since the mid-nineteenth century, was used by three Allied governments for the first time ever in May 1915 to charge another government with its perpetration.

During March-April 1915, the Western Bureau of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) managed to send reports to the Central Committee of the Balkans in Sofia about local massacres and removals of Armenian population before becoming victim of the police roundup of the Armenian political and intellectual elite in Constantinople on April 24-25.<sup>12</sup> On April 18, a summary of those reports was dispatched from Sofia to the Armenian National Bureau in Tiflis (Tbilisi), capital of the viceroyalty of the Caucasus.<sup>13</sup> Two days later, Gevorg V, Catholicos of All Armenians, cabled Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Sazonov upon the suggestion of Viceroy Ilarion Vorontsov-Dashkov to ask Italy and the United States, the neutral powers, to stop the massacres “for the love of Christianity and humanity.” He also cabled their leaders, King Victor Emmanuel III “in the name of Christian faith and humanity” and President Woodrow Wilson “in the name of humanity and our holy Christian faith.” The Catholicos drafted appeals to President Raymond Poincaré of France “in the name of humanity and Christianity” and King George V of England “in the name of Christianity.”<sup>14</sup>

Gevorg V’s cable to Wilson was forwarded by Russian ambassador Georges Bakhmeteff on April 27 and the next day, the Ottoman government tried to mollify American ambassador Henry Morgenthau Sr. and his Italian colleague Eugenio Garroni with claims of having issued orders to protect innocent people and punish disobeying officials.<sup>15</sup> On April 28 and May 5, Sazonov suggested to his French colleague Théophile

12 See Yervant Pambukian (ed.), *Նիւթեր Հ. Յ. Դաշնակցութեան պատմութեան համար* [Materials for the History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation], vol. 11 (Beirut: Armenian Revolutionary Federation, 2015), 228–242.

13 Letter from the Armenian National Bureau vice-president H. Khununts to Gevorg V, 6/19 April 1915, in *Վաներագրեր Հայ Եկեղեցւոյ պատմութեան* [Documents of the History of the Armenian Church], vol. 13, ed. Sandro Behbutian (Yerevan: Mughni, 2005), 355–356. The date of the document has been misread in the publication as September 6 (September 19 in the Gregorian calendar).

14 Mkrtich Nersisian (ed.), *Геноцид армян в Османской империи. Сборник документов и материалов* [The Genocide of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire: Collection of Documents and Materials] (Yerevan: Hayastan, 1983), 278; «Թիւրքական պատերազմը եւ հայերը» [The Turkish War and the Armenians], *Mshak*, 2 [15] May 1915. The appeals to Victor Emmanuel III and Wilson were sent on April 22 (Yves Ternon, *The Armenians: History of a Genocide*, transl. by Rouben C. Cholakian (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1981), 336; *Boghos Nubar’s Papers and the Armenian Question 1915–1918*, ed. and transl. by Vatche Ghazarian (Waltham: Mayreni, 1996, 17). For a less known appeal by Gevorg V to Wilson in June 1915 “in the name of humanity and our holy Christian fate,” see Simon Payaslian, *United States Policy toward the Armenian Question and the Armenian Genocide* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 95.

15 “Appeal to Turkey to Stop Massacres,” *The New York Times*, 28 April 1915; “Morgenthau Intercedes,” *The New York Times*, 29 April 1915. See Sarafian, *United States Official Records*, 18–9, 22; Zaven Messerlian,



Delcassé to release an Allied statement holding Ottoman officials responsible. Probably on Sazonov's cue, Gevorg V sent his appeals to Poincaré and George V on May 6. Sazonov drew upon their language on May 11 in a draft statement denouncing "these fresh crimes of Turkey against Christianity and civilization." Delcassé and Grey, weary of fallout with Muslim subjects, objected to the use of Christianity.<sup>16</sup> The draft was still in limbo on May 23, when the British Press Bureau surprisingly published an English version of the statement using the expression "these fresh crimes committed by Turkey."<sup>17</sup> After Russia consented to drop or replace her formula, the official statement in French condemned "these new crimes of Turkey against humanity and civilization" on May 24, declaring that all government members and others involved would be held responsible.<sup>18</sup>

The orders for regional deportation issued by Interior Minister Mehmet Taleat between May 10 and May 27, 1915, prompted Morgenthau to report to the State Department on May 25 that Ottoman policy was breaking up the Armenians "by wholesale deportation which must deprive them of their ordinary means of livelihood."<sup>19</sup> The news of the Allied statement probably spurred Talat to draft a temporary Law of Deportation (*Tehcir Kanunu*) and send it to Grand Vizier Said Halim on May 26 with a memorandum on the official anxiety aroused by Armenian claims for reforms, which stated that "a radical solution was needed to end and to completely wipe out the problem."<sup>20</sup> The draft was signed off by Said Halim and War Minister Ismail Enver the next day. After the formality of cabinet approval on May 30, it became law with its publication in the official journal *Takvim-i-Vekayi* on June 1.

The English translation of the Allied statement was cabled to the U.S. State Department on May 28 and forwarded the next day to Morgenthau, who delivered it to Said Halim on June 3.<sup>21</sup> The response, on June 4, used a draft provided by the German embassy to deny the existence of massacres; allege Armenian treason, massacres of Muslims, and collusion

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*Before and after the Armenian Genocide*, transl. by Maral O. Sarkissian-Kaloustian (Beirut: Chemaly and Chemaly, 2015), 39.

16 Arthur Beylerian (ed.), *Les Grandes Puissances, l'Empire Ottoman et les Arméniens dans les archives françaises (1914–1918). Recueil de documents* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1983), 18–20, 22, 26–27; Messerlian, *Before and after*, 40–41.

17 "Allies' Stern Warning to Turkey," *The Times*, 24 May 1915; "Allies to Punish Turks Who Murder," *The New York Times*, 24 May 1915. See Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia: The Survival of a Nation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 231.

18 "Les massacres en Arménie. La Triple-Entente tiendra par responsable le gouvernement turque," *Le Matin*, 25 May 1915. See Beylerian, *Les Grandes Puissances*, 29–30.

19 Ara Sarafian (ed.), *United States Official Records on the Armenian Genocide, 1915–1917* (Princeton and London: Gomidas Institute, 2004), 33. See Wolfgang Gust (ed.), *The Armenian Genocide: Evidence from the German Foreign Office Archives, 1915–1916* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2014), 183–193; Kamuran Gürün, *The Armenian File: The Myth of Innocence Exposed* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 209–210.

20 Muammer Demirel, *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Erzurum ve çevresinde Ermeni hareketleri* (Ankara: General Staff, 1996), 52–53, quoted in Vahakn Dadrian, *Warrant for Genocide: Key Elements of Turko-Armenian Conflict* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1999), 124.

21 Beylerian, *Les Grandes Puissances*, 31; Sarafian, *United States Official Records*, 29–30.



with the Entente, and argue matters of internal security and national sovereignty.<sup>22</sup>

Outside Constantinople and Smyrna, where deportations were relatively small in number, the Armenian population from Eastern Thrace to the Ottoman-Russian border was massacred, forced to convert to Islam, or expelled toward Syria and northern Mesopotamia between June and November. Morgenthau first informed the State Department on July 10 that many reports hinted at a “systematic attempt” of destruction through arrests, tortures, wholesale expulsions, and deportations often accompanied by rape, pillage, and massacre,<sup>23</sup> and warned in a cable of July 16 that “a campaign of race extermination is in progress under a pretext of reprisal against rebellion.”<sup>24</sup> The report of the American Committee on Armenian Atrocities, formed in New York under his inspiration, highlighted in October 1915 that “the crimes now being perpetrated upon the Armenian people” surpassed anything recorded during the prior millennium,<sup>25</sup> and the American ambassador stated to Secretary of State Robert Lansing in a confidential letter of November 18: “I am firmly convinced that this is the greatest crime of the ages.”<sup>26</sup> The Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, Archbishop Zaven Der Yeghiayan, wrote to Morgenthau on December 24 that the perpetrators could boast “that not a single Armenian is to be found in the districts under their jurisdiction” more than seven months after “History began to register the most horrible crime ever recorded in the annals of the human race, the carefully planned ignominious project of exterminating a whole nation.”<sup>27</sup>

The Ottoman Army Group East led by Enver’s uncle, Halil Kut, which invaded Eastern Armenia in April 1918, proposed onerous conditions of peace aimed at “the definitive occupation of the Armenian districts and the extermination [*Ausrottung*] of the Armenians,” Major General Otto von Lossow, German delegate, reported on May 23.<sup>28</sup> A last stand allowed the proclamation of the first independence of the Republic of Armenia (1918-1920). In August, during a brief visit to Yerevan, Halil gave a speech from the balcony of his hotel where he offered “an amazingly clear insight into the thinking of a senior Young Turk leader” with an “astonishingly open confession”:<sup>29</sup>

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22 Esat Uras, *The Armenians in History and the Armenian Question*, transl. by Süheyla Artemel (Istanbul: Documentary Publications, 1988), 869–873; Sarafian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 198–201.

23 Payaslian, *United States Policy*, 95.

24 Sarafian, *United States Official Records*, 55.

25 “Tell of Horrors Done in Armenia,” *The New York Times*, 4 October 1915.

26 Sarafian, *United States Official Records*, 373.

27 Ibid. 423.

28 Johannes Lepsius, *Deutschland und Armenien 1914–1918. Sammlung Diplomatischer Aktenstücke* (Potsdam: Tempelverlag, 1919), 388–389.

29 Thomas de Waal, *Great Catastrophe: Armenians and Turks in the Shadow of Genocide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 72. The literal correlation of Halil’s threat with article 2 of the Genocide Convention (“acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part”) has been overlooked by the author’s sophism that the use of crimes against humanity (art. 7 of the Rome Statute) instead of genocide (art. 6 of the same statute, repeating verbatim art. 2 of the Genocide Convention) is applicable to the Armenian case, arguing that “the perpetrators may not have intended to eradicate an entire nation but have still killed an awful lot of innocent people” (idem, “The G-Word: The Armenian Massacre and the Politics of Genocide,” *Foreign Affairs*, January-February 2015, 148).

The Armenian nation that I tried to destroy down to the last individual [*son ferdine kadar yok etmeye çalıştığım Ermeni milleti*] for attempting to erase my homeland from history as slave to the enemy during my homeland's most terrible and painful days (...). Yet if you stand attached to a group of mindless committee members and try to betray the Turks and the Turkish homeland, then I will order my army surrounding your entire country not to leave a single breathing Armenian on the face of the world [*dünya üstünde nefes alacak tek Ermeni bırakmayacağım*].<sup>30</sup>

Eight months after the Ottoman defeat, on 17 June 1919, Grand Vizier Damad Ferid Pasha submitted a memorandum to the Peace Conference. He stated that “almost the entire civilized world was shocked by the account of the crimes that the Turks had reportedly committed” and targeted the CUP leaders with the declaration that his goal was “to show to the world, with supporting proofs, who are truly responsible for these horrific crimes.”<sup>31</sup>

The nationalist movement headed by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) reacted to the Ottoman defeat with strong support and participation of former CUP elements. The proposition that “the Turks are a people who speak Turkish and live in Turkey” cleared the road to start “one of the major revolutions of modern times, involving a radical break with the social, cultural, political traditions of the past,”<sup>32</sup> with blood. After the annihilation, ethnic cleansing, and expulsion of Armenians, Greeks, and Assyrians were finalized, the Treaty of Lausanne marked the burial of the Armenian Question in July 1923. It declared amnesty for all crimes related to political events between 1914 and 1922, concealing the foundational crime that set up the state-nation of Turkey under a cloak of oblivion.

## **Genocide and Literal Denial**

The history and politics of the annihilation, like any murder case where the suspect claims innocence and blames someone else, have been suffused since its very perpetration with denial. Ottoman diplomats argued that the reports about massacres were fabrications,<sup>33</sup> government propaganda books concocted rebellions and conspiracies,<sup>34</sup> and the

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30 *İttihat ve Terakki'den Cumhuriyete Bitmeyen Şavaş: Kutulamare Kahramanı Halil Paşanın Anıları*, ed. Taylan Sorgun (Istanbul: Yedigün, 1972), 241. Halil was imprisoned by the British in 1919 and boasted to a visiting British officer about having killed around 300,000 Armenians by using reserve forces to punish those he claimed as rebels and by asking to deport those likely to rebel (idem, 274).

31 “La Turquie devant la Conférence,” *La Renaissance*, 20 July 1919. See the Armenian translation in «Թիւրքի լուծարումը» [The Death Sentence of the Turk], transl. by G. M. Manavian, *Gochmag Hayastani*, 5 July 1919, 851–852, where “crime” was first translated as *vojir* and then as *yeghern*.

32 Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 1.

33 “Les Arméniens,” *Journal de Geneve*, 28 August 1915; “Turkish Official Denies Atrocities,” *The New York Times*, 14 October 1915.

34 *Verité sur le mouvement révolutionnaire arménienne et les mesures gouvernementales* (Constantinople: n. p., 1916); *Ermeni komitalarının amâl ve harekât-ı ihtilâliyesi: ilân-ı meşrutiyetten evvel ve sonar* (Istanbul: Matbaa-i Amire, 1332 [1916]).

architects of the annihilation managed to set the parameters of an alternative narrative for generations to come.<sup>35</sup> Atatürk completed and canonized that narrative as official history, with silence reigning unopposed as language of denial despite Bernard Lewis' farfetched claim that his healthy and reasonable nationalism neither trampled on the rights of other nations nor rejected responsibility for the past.<sup>36</sup> The ARF English-language weekly in Boston, *Hairenik Weekly*, made the following summary in an editorial of 1951:

On the contrary, they tried to put the blame of their crime on their victims, and completed their abominable action by trying to destroy the very traces of their victims, closed their country against those who had miraculously survived their barbarous slaughter, and even tried to destroy the remnants of the Armenian people in the Caucasian section of their homeland.<sup>37</sup>

The memory of a step by step program has historically coalesced around the intent to destroy symbolized by genocide. The perpetrator is prone to rationalize the deed; his refusal of the evidence and his penchant for blaming the victims eliminate the possibility of mourning and sanction the impossibility of closure, putting the onus on the survivors and their descendants "to prove time and again that they have indeed been wronged, individually and collectively."<sup>38</sup> As part of the denier's agenda to which the victims are bound, the narrative based on the insanity of repetition demands to prove the factuality of the fact and relive the genocide, forcing "to enter into the endless game of proving it, to detach ourselves from ourselves in order to come forward as proofs, as so many living proofs of our own death."<sup>39</sup>

In January 1965, Spyros Kyprianou, Foreign Minister and later President of Cyprus, mentioned the "wholesale massacre" of Armenians for the first time at the United Nations in a rebuttal to a claim of presumed destruction of the Turkish Cypriot community. Turkish representative Orhan Eralp criticized the reference "to certain massacres alleged to have been committed by Turks in the past."<sup>40</sup> In April, Turkish Prime Minister Ali Suat Hayri Ürgüplü regarded the worldwide commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the "Armenian massacres," as they were known then, as an attempt "to revive a series of events which had no connection whatsoever with the Turkish Republic after these 50 long years," while President Cemal Gürsel affirmed that "there is no such thing as Armenian

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35 "Posthumous Memoirs of Talaat Pasha," transl. by M. Zekeria, *The New York Times Current History*, November 1921, 287–295; Djemal Pasha, *Memoirs of a Turkish Statesman 1913–1919* (New York: George H. Doran, 1922).

36 Lewis, *The Emergence*, 386.

37 "Striking Contrast," *Hairenik Weekly*, 25 October 1951.

38 Richard G. Hovannisian, "The Armenian Genocide and Patterns of Denial," in *The Armenian Genocide in Perspective*, ed. Richard Hovhannisian (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1986), 131.

39 Kazanjian and Nichanian, "Between Genocide and Catastrophe," 133.

40 "1915 Armenian Atrocities Cited at UN by Cyprus Foreign Minister," *Hairenik Weekly*, 4 February 1965.

massacres.”<sup>41</sup> An editorial of *The New York Times* rejected the comparison of the Armenian and Jewish cases, equalized Armenian and Turkish deaths, and invited to “let the dead past bury the dead,” insinuating that “Armenians, naturally, cannot forget, but perhaps they can forgive.”<sup>42</sup> Altemur Kiliç, press attaché of the Turkish embassy in the United States, doubled down in a letter to the editor with the suggestion to “forget and to strive together for a better future for all citizens of Turkey in a better world.”<sup>43</sup>

The litigation of the facts has completed the presentation of suffering in the production of history with a war of words. In the March 1974 session of the UN Commission of Human Rights, Turkish representative Osman Olçay criticized the preliminary version of the report on genocide by special rapporteur Nicodème Ruhashyankiko for its mention of the Armenian “genocide myth” derived from the deportation of “those rebel populations (living in minority) (...) toward other regions of the Ottoman Empire where they could not threaten the rearguard of the defensive front.”<sup>44</sup> Journalist Jean-Marie Carzou commented with thinly veiled irony: “Then what? Did we imagine this genocide? No. It is a perfect genocide: it has not happened ...”<sup>45</sup>

In the 1980s, Mustafa Şükrü Elekdag, Turkish ambassador to the United States, pushed forward the “complex tragedy” of a civil war coupled with famine and epidemics claiming 2 million Turkish and a “grossly exaggerated” number of Armenian victims.<sup>46</sup> The CUP-Kemalist narrative blamed the victims, lined up untoward circumstances, and minimized casualties, and Western scholars sympathetic or openly adept to it have added a patina of “tragedy” as a pseudo-humanistic concession: “unrelieved tragedy”;<sup>47</sup> “part of a general tragedy that engulfed *all* peoples of the Empire”;<sup>48</sup> “an appalling human tragedy” derived from the struggle for a single homeland;<sup>49</sup> “a special tragedy” due to famine, epidemics,

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41 “Turkish President, Prime Minister Deny Massacre,” *Hairenik Weekly*, 20 May 1965.

42 “Armenia Remembers,” *The New York Times*, 24 April 1965.

43 “Turkish Citizens All,” *The New York Times*, 3 May 1965.

44 Levon Keshishian, “The Turkish Genocide of Armenians and the U.N. Commission on Human Rights,” *The Armenian Reporter*, 20 June 1974.

45 Jean-Marie Carzou, *Un génocide exemplaire: Arménie 1915* (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), 210.

46 “Turks Protest Inclusion of Armenians in Holocaust Memorial,” *The Armenian Reporter*, 24 July 1980; “Turkish-Armenian Issue: The Complex Tragedy of 1915,” *The New York Times*, 5 May 1983.

47 Lewis V. Thomas and Richard N. Frye, *The United States and Turkey and Iran* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), 60–61.

48 Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), X (emphasis in the original). Similarly, Valerii Soldatenko, former director of the Institute of National Memory of Ukraine, echoed Russian historians in his claim of 2012 that the Holodomor was a “common tragedy shared by all the people of the former Soviet Union” (quoted in Olga Andriewsky, “Towards a Decentred History: The Study of the Holodomor and Ukrainian Historiography,” *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 1 (2015): 29).

49 Bernard Lewis, *Semites and Anti-Semites: An Inquiry into Conflict and Prejudice* (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1986), 21, quoted in Rouben Paul Adalian, “The Ramifications in the United States of the French Court Decision on the Denial of the Armenian Genocide and Princeton University,” *Revue du monde arménien moderne et contemporaine* 3 (1997): 110.

and warfare.<sup>50</sup> The foundations of the past should not be stained by doubt or moral opprobrium, Frank Mankiewicz – vice chairman of Hill and Knowlton, the public relations firm then representing Turkey – railed in 1990: “When you start talking about genocide or extermination or systematic elimination of people – those are terrible words to say.”<sup>51</sup> The exhortation to study the history of Armenians and Turks “as a great human loss” and abandon “propagandistic terms”<sup>52</sup> was echoed by Mankiewicz, who stated that the Turkish government was open to terminological transactions: “Tragic loss of life, brutal loss of life, widespread killings, sure. But on both sides.”<sup>53</sup>

The denialist discourse has continued unabated across the political spectrum of Turkey, embracing “an overdetermined forgetfulness to spare [the] worldly embarrassment of making a full account of what they did and a willingness to assume responsibility for it.”<sup>54</sup> In December 2008, the far-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP) drew upon the decades-old playbook to denounce the campaign of apology for the “Great Catastrophe” launched by a group of leftist intellectuals: “There is no single page in the honorable history of the Turkish nation for which we should be embarrassed, and no crime for which we should apologize.”<sup>55</sup> The AKP went down the same path after the recognition of the genocide by the German Parliament in June 2016. Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım repeated that “there is no shameful incident in our past that would make us bow our heads,”<sup>56</sup> while President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan raised the stakes: “We have nothing in our past to be ashamed of, but those countries that often accuse Turkey of ‘Armenian Genocide’ have the blood of millions of innocent victims.”<sup>57</sup> Historian Mark Mazower’s remark carries the same weight twenty years later:

The question of whether they were victims of genocide now matters intensely to the Armenians, whose lobbying has brought this issue to the fore again and again in the past few years; and it matters equally to the Turkish authorities, who do not seem to blanch at the term ‘massacre’ but are beside themselves when the G-word is mentioned.<sup>58</sup>

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50 Guenter Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A Disputed Genocide* (Salt Lake City: Utah University Press, 2005), 241. See also Lewis, *The Emergence*, 356.

51 Elizabeth Kastor, “The Armenian Tragedy that Has No Name,” *The Washington Post*, 25 April 1990.

52 Justin McCarthy and Carolyn McCarthy, *Turks and Armenians: A Manual on the Armenian Question* (Washington, DC: Assembly of Turkish American Associations, 1989), 66.

53 Kastor, “The Armenian Tragedy.” The same transactional model allowed suggesting that Armenians abandon the use of genocide in exchange for recognition of their suffering (Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey*, 271).

54 Harry D. Harootunian, *The Unspoken as Heritage: The Armenian Genocide and Its Unaccounted Lives* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 142.

55 Esra Özyürek, “A Turkish ‘I Apologize’ Campaign to Armenians,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 January 2009.

56 “German Parliament Recognizes Armenian Genocide, Angering Turkey,” *The New York Times*, 3 June 2016.

57 “Armenian Issue Exploited to Blackmail Turkey, President Erdoğan says,” *Daily Sabah*, 4 June 2016.

58 Mark Mazower, “The G-Word,” *London Review of Books*, 8 February 2001, 21.

## **Medz Yeghern and Interpretive Denial**

The repetition of unproven claims gives further voice to a trend as old as the crime itself to rationalize, refuse, and rewrite what happened more than a century ago. The perversion of the meaning of *Medz Yeghern* brought its own share to the efforts to silence the name of the act and its recognition, maintain it as an ongoing event, and keep its identity in flux, preventing the annihilation from gaining a place in history.<sup>59</sup> The essence of genocide is denial, Marc Nichanian has remarked: “Why? Because those who conceived and carried out the extermination conceived and carried out, by the same token, the elimination of every trace of their act.”<sup>60</sup>

The survivors, immersed in the harsh task of rebuilding their life and deprived of the power to have their voice heard, were forced to speak to themselves in their own language, except for a brief hiatus when claims for restitution of Armenian territories were made after WWII. The words *aksor* (*ւքսոր* “exile; ban; banishment”), *chart* (*չարդ* “massacre; butchery; carnage; slaughter”), and *godoradz* (*կոտորած* “carnage; massacre; slaughter; butchery”)<sup>61</sup> translated what the survivors had experienced and lived through, beyond and above legal issues or epistemological nuances. “When they were children in Armenia terrible things happened to them and hundreds of thousands of others,” a reporter of *The Washington Post* wrote in 1990. “The chart, they call it – the kill. The kodoradz – the genocide [*sic*].” The daughter of a survivor recalled that, unlike other families who told fairy tales to their children, Armenian families would gather at a social event “and at the end of the evening they would start talking about the *chart*.”<sup>62</sup> In a different take, parents and grandparents rarely spoke, and when this happened, it was a private talk in whispers: “Was it a ‘grownups’ secret’? What had happened? What was this ‘Akhzor’ and ‘Chardt’ [*sic*]?”<sup>63</sup>

“Those who avoided the great horror for any reason – say, for being born under a lucky star – probably assess the savagery of the Crime [*Yeghern*] with whatever images imagination may create and the words ‘massacre’ [*chart*] and ‘exile’ [*aksor*],” as one survivor wrote three decades after the annihilation:

It is not perhaps an exaggeration to say that the Crime [*Yeghern*] and its consequences went far and beyond the hopes and the imagination of its savage planners.

They massacred, but not just the Armenian body, but particularly the soul.

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59 Michael Stanford, *The Nature of Historical Knowledge* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 32, quoted in Gregory F. Goekjian, “Diaspora and Denial: The Holocaust and the ‘Question’ of the Armenian Genocide,” *Diaspora* 1 (1998): 14.

60 Kazanjian and Nichanian, “Between Genocide and Catastrophe,” 133.

61 Z. D. S. Papazian, *A Practical Dictionary Armenian-English* (Constantinople: H. Matteosian, 1905), 65, 232, 410.

62 Kastor, “The Armenian Tragedy.”

63 Haig Sarajian, *The Silent Generation* (n.p.: n.p., 2009), IV–V.



They exiled people on the road and into the human-forbidden deserts. The Armenian soul was particularly exiled, and later became a wanderer.

That was the most terrible blow dealt by the Crime [*Yeghern*]: the destruction of the Armenian collectivity, the dissolution of the Armenian national soul.<sup>64</sup>

Despite their use in everyday language, *aksor* and *chart*, along with *godoradz*, reflected a partial side of the events, which explains why neither of them ever became a proper name. Conversely, *yeghern* (*եղեռն*) encapsulated all three words: deportation and massacre were the two essential components of the crime. It became a concept of intergenerational transmission. “I am not a writer, I am a humble worker,” a survivor attested in 1937. “I had barely seen a school when the *medz yeghern* drowned everything in its blood.”<sup>65</sup> It became commonplace to label April 24 as a darkest date in the annals of humanity, “when the criminal Turks gave the first signal of the unprecedented crime [*vojir*] known as the Armenian Great Crime [*Haygagan Medz Yeghern*],” and to refer to Talat, the architect of the genocide, as “the great criminal [*yeghernakordz*].”<sup>66</sup> A sixth grader from the village of Anjar (Lebanon), descendant of survivors from the self-defense of Musa Dagh in 1915, wrote in 2004: “I have heard about the *Yeghern* from my grandfather and grandmother, from my parents, from scouts and youth clubs, from Armenian language and history teachers.”<sup>67</sup>

The current state of the etymology of *yeghern*, the original meaning and evolution of the word, and the grounds to translate it as “crime” have been recently discussed in a few articles.<sup>68</sup> A conceptual history of the word, its origin and usage from the beginning of written literature in the fifth century AD until the end of the nineteenth century, when the end of Classical Armenian as literary language and the early stage of Modern Armenian overlapped, shows that the initial meaning of moral transgression (“evil”) gradually evolved to one of legal transgression (“crime”). This meaning of *yeghern* continued unaltered during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, the massacres of Cilicia (1909), and the annihilation of 1915 and its aftermath, even developing to “heinous crime” (translated

64 Arsen Jamgochian, *Դրուագներ հայկական Եղեռնին և վերածնունդ* [Episodes from the Armenian *Yeghern* and Rebirth] (Paris: H. Turabian, 1947), 4–5.

65 Harutian Kefelian, *Աշխարհադաշտ (Եղեռնի դրուագներ Անդրեասի և շրջաններու)* [World Field: Episodes of the *Yeghern* in Antreas and Surroundings] (Paris: Araz, 1937), 3.

66 «Նահատակներու պատգամը» [The Message of the Martyrs], *Asbarez*, 25 April 1948.

67 Shiraz Tashjian, «Մեծ Եղեռն» [*Medz Yeghern*], in Մուսա լճ տարեգիրք [Musa Dagh Yearbook] (Beirut: Vahe Sethian, 2003–2004), 46–47.

68 Antranik Granian, «Բառերու միւս երեսը (Գ.)» [The Other Side of Words III], *Haigazian Armenological Review* XV (1995): 34–35; idem, «Բառերուն միւս երեսը. ջարդարանութիւն և մասամբ նորին» [The Other Side of the Words: Words Denoting Massacres, Etcetera], *Haigazian Armenological Review* XXXV (2015): 422; Parandzem Meytikhianian, «Եղեռն բառի լեզվական քննություն» [Linguistic Examination of the Word *Yeghern*], *Vem* 1 (2009): 144–147; Seda Gasparian, «Եղեռն բառի համարժեքության դաշտը անգլերենում» [The Field of Equivalence of the Word *Yeghern* in English], *Vem* 1 (2010): 125–135, transl. in idem, *The Armenian Genocide: A Linguocognitive Perspective* (Yerevan: Yerevan State University Press, 2014), 167–186; Vazgen Hambardzumian, «Հայերեն եղեռն բառի ծագումը և տիպարանությունը» [The Origin and Typology of the Armenian Word *Yeghern*], *Lezu yev lezvabanutyun* (2016): 40–49.

into French as *forfait*). This heightened meaning of crime accounts for its preeminence over the more pedestrian word *vojir*.<sup>69</sup>

Among the many examples unrelated to the genocide that are backed by translations from and into Armenian, we can mention one brought by noted Eastern Armenian historian Leo (Arakel Babakhanian, 1870–1932) in the first book of his multivolume history of the Armenian people, published in 1917. There, he referred to the capture of King Artavazd II of Armenia in 34 B.C., scapegoated by Roman general Mark Antony after he had been routed by the Parthians in a humiliating defeat two years before. Artavazd, imprisoned in Egypt, would be beheaded by order of Queen Cleopatra three years later, before her own suicide after her lover Antony took his own life following their devastating defeat against Octavian, the founder of the Roman Empire as Augustus. Leo wrote that Antony had inflicted a terrible blow to Rome’s influence in Armenian with his callous behavior, “which the famous Roman historian Tacitus characterized with the word ‘*yeghern*.’”<sup>70</sup> Tacitus wrote about “the *crime* of Antonius, who had enticed Artavasdes, the king of the Armenians, in a display of friendship, then weighing him down with chains and finally killing him.”<sup>71</sup>

The first use of *yeghern* to name the annihilation may be traced back to *Hayastan*, a biweekly published by the ARF Balkans Central Committee between March and October 1915 in Sofia. The Armenian historical core was being emptied, making impossible “to penetrate the essence of the new Exodus,” an editorial of June 1915 wrote, “because we do not know the name of this horrifying Turkish heinous crime [*yeghern*].”<sup>72</sup> Another editorial about the mourning day held by Armenians of the Balkans in August 1915 used *medz yeghern* for the first time to point out to the responsibility of the civilized world as “accomplice to the great crime [*medz yeghern*].” The survivors would become a monument to it: “Thus, the future will be unable to forget the great crime [*medz yeghern*] ever.”<sup>73</sup>

The meaning “crime” was backed by various sources translated from and to Armenian, although a minority of authors still preferred “tragedy.” The secondary meaning “tragedy, catastrophe, calamity” for *yeghern*, derived from the conflation of the distinct words *yeghern* (*եղիշն* “crime”) and *yegher* (“lamentation”) in the *New Haigazian Dictionary* (*Նոր Հայկազեան Լեզուի Բառարան*), the best dictionary of Classical Armenian published in 1836-1837,<sup>74</sup> was defined as defunct or obsolete in the modern language

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69 Matioossian, *The Politics of Naming the Armenian Genocide*, 19-50.

70 Leo, *Հայոց պատմություն* [History of the Armenians], vol. 1 (Tiflis: Slovo, 1917), 436.

71 Tacitus, *The Annals*, transl. by A. J. Woodman (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 2004), 43.

72 «Հայաստանը կը պարպուի» [Armenia is Being Emptied], *Hayastan*, 3 [16] June 1915. The dates of the newspaper are in the Julian calendar used in Bulgaria until late March 1916.

73 «Պատմութեան եւ ոչ մարդկութեան համար» [For History and Not for Humankind], *Hayastan*, 3 [16] August 1915.

74 Matioossian, *The Politics of Naming the Armenian Genocide*, 22-23.



by the 1940s<sup>75</sup> and excluded by most monolingual and bilingual dictionaries published afterwards. However, it persisted as the outcome of a post-genocidal mindset relying on antiquated sources or received wisdom and oriented toward the idea of mourning.

*Yeghern* was capitalized alone or with the adjective *medz* (*մեծ*), which highlighted the scope of the destruction. *Medz Yeghern* was mentioned in countless speeches and editorials, memoirs and testimonies, political discourse and historiography, inscriptions and advertisements. The semantic pattern continued in the Diaspora and Soviet Armenia and the understanding of *yeghern* as “crime” or “heinous crime” underwent a passage to collective crime in the period 1920–1950. In April 1939, the first issue of the literary monthly *Hay Kir* (Beirut, 1939–1944), edited by Kevork Baghdjian, bore the following dedication: “We dedicate the first issue of *Hay Kir* to the unforgettable memory of the martyr writers of the *Medz Yeghern*.” The dedication was also published in French, with *Medz Yeghern* translated as *Grands Massacres* (“Great Massacres”): *A la mémoire éternelle des Ecrivains martyrs, des Grands Massacres d’Arménie, nous dedions le premier numéro de “Haï Kir.”*<sup>76</sup>

The metaphoric identification of *Medz Yeghern* with genocide led gradually to their semantic identification after 1965, which was paralleled by the normative use of *tseghasbanutiun* (ցեղասպանություն, literally “race murder”) as calque word for “genocide” over competing terms like *azkasbanutiun* (ազգասպանություն, literally “nation murder”) and *zhoghovrtasbanutiun* (ժողովրդասպանություն, literally “people murder”). A sizable number of books, newspapers, memoranda, presidential speeches, and other sources between the 1960s and the 2010s feature *Medz Yeghern* along the translations “genocide,” “Armenian Genocide,” “genocide of the Armenians,” or “Holocaust.” The double meaning “Great [Heinous] Crime” and “Great Genocide” eliminates the artificial opposition of *Medz Yeghern* and genocide by default as it upends and transcends denial.

The evolution of *yeghern* from “massacre” to “genocide” mirrors the Arabic word *ibādah* (“annihilation, extermination, eradication, extirpation”), which was adapted to the generic term “genocide” (*ibādah jama’iyyah* “collective extermination”) and its particular cases (e.g., *al-ibādah al-armaniyah* “the Armenian Genocide”). The identification of the common name *yeghern* and the legal label “genocide,” which became more widespread after the turning point of the Karabagh movement in 1988, goes beyond the generic relationship of signifier (*Medz Yeghern*) and signified (genocide). *Medz Yeghern* became fully dominant as proper name of the annihilation and remains in use to this day, although subordinated to *Hayots* or *Haygagan Tseghasbanutiun* (Հայոց / Հայկական

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75 Two authoritative linguists established the parameters. Hrachia Adjarian’s etymological dictionary stated that the meaning of *yeghern* in the “modern literary language” was “crime” (Hrachia Adjarian, *Հայերէն արմատական բառարան* [Dictionary of Armenian Roots], vol. 2 (Yerevan: Yerevan University Press, 1928), 694. On the other hand, Stepanos Malkhasiants’ dictionary of the Armenian language marked the meaning “evil, catastrophe, calamity” with the sign of “obsolete” (Stepanos Malkhasiants, *Հայերէն բացատրական բառարան* [Armenian Explanatory Dictionary], vol. 1 (Yerevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1945), 558.

76 «Զօւ – In Memoriam» [Dedication – In Memoriam], *Hay Kir*, April 1939, 1.

Յեղասպանութիւն “Armenian Genocide”).<sup>77</sup>

The absence of a conscious decision or intent to injure someone is typical of “acts of God” or *force majeure*, recorded in the case of natural (e.g., earthquakes, floods, pandemics) and human-made disasters (e.g., ship collision, nuclear accident) of unplanned origin and uncontrollable characteristics. The logical relation of cause-effect between a malevolent action and its outcome makes unlikely that *yeghern* may singlehandedly represent both cause (e.g., crime, massacre, genocide) and effect (e.g., tragedy, calamity, catastrophe, disaster) in Modern Armenian. Semantic contradictions and political misrepresentation account for the failure to take this premise into consideration. In fact, the principle of causation reflects a binary relation that connects victimizer, who commits an evil action, and victim, who submits to that action. The victimizer performs the action (e.g., execution, explosion, arson, poisoning, death march) through active verbs (to do, make, cause, perpetrate, commit, execute, inflict) to effect agency (e.g., assassination, crime, plunder, mass murder, genocide). At its turn, the use of passive verbs (befell, fall upon, strike, happen) reflects the victim’s physical (e.g., injury, death, trauma) and mental/spiritual perception (e.g., catastrophe, calamity, disaster, tragedy, cataclysm) of the action. For this reason, the linguistic worldview including but not limited to English and Armenian vocabulary establishes that, for instance, neither a crime can befall a victim nor a catastrophe can be committed.

Indeed, the word *yeghern* has not been used in a contextual vacuum. Its agency was thoroughly enhanced by the roots *kordz* (գործ “work”) and *portz* (փորձ “attempt, try”) in the compound words *yeghernakordz* (եղեռնագործ “criminal, perpetrator of a crime”), *yeghernakordzutiu* (եղեռնագործութիւն “crime, criminal action”), and *yeghernaportz* (եղեռնափորձ “criminal attempt”), and specialized terms like *yeghernatad adean* (եղեռնադատարան “criminal court”) or *yeghernapan* (եղեռնաբան “criminologist”). The active verbs *kordzel* (գործել “to work; commit”) and *kordzatrel* (գործադրել “to put into action, execute, perpetrate, implement”) have strengthened the meaning “crime” in phrases like *yeghern kordzel* (եղեռն գործել “to commit, perpetrate [a] crime”) and *yeghern kordzatrel* (եղեռն գործադրել “to execute, implement [a] crime”).

The Criminal Code of the state of Maine (United States) offers a telling example of the straightforward relation between cause and effect:

1. A person is guilty of causing a catastrophe if the person recklessly causes a catastrophe by explosion, fire, flood, avalanche, collapse of a structure, release or dissemination of poison, toxin, radioactive material, bacteria, virus or other biological agent or vector or other such force or substance that is dangerous to human life and difficult to confine.

(...)

4. Causing a catastrophe is a Class A crime (Title 17-A, §803-A).

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<sup>77</sup> Matioossian, *The Politics of Naming the Armenian Genocide*, 72-85.

The characterization of intentional actions as events without agency contributes to create or affirm a narrative of unspecified calamity. Hundreds of articles in the Armenian press throughout the world have used the word “tragedy” in different languages with mentions always contextualized, explicitly or implicitly within agency. “A tragedy of such monstrous proportions,” a sentence typically stated in 1979, at a time when the genocide of Namibia was barely recalled, “it was indeed the first genocide of the 20th century – a genocide premeditated and perpetrated by the Turkish government.”<sup>78</sup>

The practitioners of interpretive denial, whether they appear on the stage or work behind the scenes, have agency as the last of their worries, however. At a White House reception in May 1978, U.S. President Jimmy Carter left agent, time, and place undefined in his reference to “one of the greatest tragedies,” which was tantamount to the omission of the cause: “But it’s generally not known that in the years preceding 1916, there was a concerted effort made to eliminate all the Armenian people, probably one of the greatest tragedies that ever befell any group. And there weren’t any Nuremberg trials.”<sup>79</sup> Lack of agency was even more obvious in his successor Ronald Reagan’s “Statement about the Armenian Genocide” during his first presidential campaign in 1980. The text referred to “one of the greatest tragedies in the annals of recorded history” with the proviso that the 1980s were going to be “when Americans and its [*sic*] allies throughout the Free World resolve that the tragedy of 1915 never again be repeated,” but without any mention of genocide, agent, or place.<sup>80</sup> All genocides become a tragedy, but since not all tragedies derive from genocide, the U.S. State Department adopted the formula “the Armenian tragedy” while actively opposing genocide resolutions during Reagan’s years,<sup>81</sup> and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres reached the apex of denial in April 2001: “We reject allegations to create a similarity between the Holocaust and the Armenian allegations. Nothing similar to the Holocaust happened. It is a tragedy what the Armenians went through but not a genocide.”<sup>82</sup>

The Armenian Orphan Rug, weaved by genocide survivor girls in Lebanon and presented to President Calvin Coolidge in 1925 as token of appreciation for American humanitarian assistance, had been kept in storage at the White House since 1982. In November 2013, the U.S. National Security Council pretexted potentially inappropriate use of government property and transportation risks to deny its loan to the Smithsonian Museum for the launch of a book on its history. After public outcry, this remarkable rug

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78 Vahan H. Tootikian, “What Does April 24 Means for Us Today?” *The Armenian Weekly*, 28 April 1979.

79 *The Armenian Genocide: Facts and Documents* (New York: St. Vartan’s Press, 1985), 48.

80 “Gov. Reagan Issues Statement on April 24,” *The Armenian Reporter*, 24 April 1980; “Ronald Reagan’s Letter to Hairenik Publications,” *The Armenian Weekly*, 26 April 1980. For the original text, see [www.reaganlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/digitalibrary/smf/cos/cicconi/box-6/40-94-6914308-006-008-2016](http://www.reaganlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/digitalibrary/smf/cos/cicconi/box-6/40-94-6914308-006-008-2016), accessed 06.05.2022. The original title appears in Michael Bobelian, *Children of Armenia: A Forgotten Genocide and the Century-Long Struggle for Justice* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009), 169.

81 John M. Evans, *Truth Held Hostage: America and the Armenian Genocide – What Then? What Now?* (London: Gomidas Institute, 2016), 71.

82 “Israeli Foreign Minister Says No Similarity between Genocide and Holocaust,” *The Armenian Weekly*, 14 April 2001.

was exhibited at the White House Visitor's Center in November 2014, along gifts by France and Japan after American help for homelessness following WWI and the tsunami of 2010. Ironically, the rug was shown without proper identification of the orphans and how and where they had become orphans, blurring the distinction between a criminal act (genocide) and catastrophic events (war, tsunami).<sup>83</sup>

In June 2018, a motion was submitted to the Australian House of Representatives to acknowledge the humanitarian relief efforts of the country after the Armenian annihilation. During the ensuing debate, Rep. Tim Wilson noted that previous speakers had mentioned events like loss of life, desert marches, and people in desperate need, “but did not dare to speak the tragedy's name: genocide.”<sup>84</sup>

*Aghed* (*աղէտ*), one of the denominations referring to 1915, has been cited along *Yeghern* as most used proper name.<sup>85</sup> Literary works used *aghed* most often to name the catastrophic elimination of Western Armenians, which they represented and narrated beyond historical testimonies or documents.<sup>86</sup> Nichanian has borrowed the word from survivor writer and literary critic Hagop Oshagan and expanded it into a metahistorical concept that encompasses the notions of catastrophe of memory and meaning. He has argued that *Aghed* is “the proper word for the Armenian Genocide, one that expresses the complete annihilation of a people” as exact equivalent of *Shoah*,<sup>87</sup> while making a clear distinction between genocide as a historical event and object of historical discourse, and *Aghed* as an event that “does not belong to history as historians conceive it.”<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, some historians have mistakenly cited *Aghed* as proper name for

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83 Richard Simon, “White House Urged to Display Armenian Orphan Rug Commemorating Genocide,” *Los Angeles Times*, 12 November 2013; Rafael Medoff, “With Armenian Orphan Rug, Obama Stumbles Again on Genocide,” *The Jewish Press*, 20 October 2014.

84 “MP to Australia – ‘Speak the Tragedy's Name on Armenian Genocide,’” *Panarmenian*, 26 June 2018, [www.panarmenian.net/eng/news/257213/MP\\_to\\_Australia\\_\\_Speak\\_the\\_tragedys\\_name\\_on\\_Armenian\\_Genocide](http://www.panarmenian.net/eng/news/257213/MP_to_Australia__Speak_the_tragedys_name_on_Armenian_Genocide), accessed 07.05.2022.

85 Boghos Levon Zekian, *L'Armenia e gli armeni. Polis lacerata e patria spirituale: la sfida di una sopravvivenza* (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2000), 35; idem, “Armenian- Turkish Relations in the Framework of Armenian and Turkish Scholarships,” *Iran and the Caucasus* 14 (2010): 371.

86 Krikor Beledian, “L'expérience de la catastrophe dans la littérature arménienne,” *Revue d'histoire arménienne contemporaine* 1 (1995): 131; idem, “From Image to Loss: The Writers of Kharpert and Provincial Literature,” in *Armenian Tsopk/Kharpert*, ed. Richard Hovhannisian (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2002), 271–272; Marc Nichanian, *Writers of Disaster*, vol. 1 (The National Revolution, Princeton and London: Gomidas Institute, 2002), 10.

87 Marc Nichanian, “Sarafian: The Conquest of the Exile,” in *The Bois de Vincennes*, transl. by Christopher Atamian (Dearborn: The Armenian Research Center, University of Michigan-Dearborn, 2011), 9. The French original was published in 1993.

88 Nichanian, *Writers of Disaster*, 247; idem, *The Historiographic Perversion*, transl. by Gil Anidjar (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 9. Despite the claim that Oshagan was the first to use systematically *Aghed* or invent it as proper name in his interview published in 1932 and his posthumously published monograph of 1944 about Aram Andonian (idem, “The Truth of the Facts: About the New Revisionism,” in *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide*, ed. Richard Hovhannisyian (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 269; Kazanjian and Nichanian, “Between Genocide and Catastrophe,” 128; Nichanian, *The Historiographic Perversion*, 15), the word always appears lowercased (Peniamin Tashian, «Մայրիներու շուրին տակ (զբալան զոյց Յ. Օշականի հետ)» [Under the Shade of Cedars: Literary Conversation with H. Oshagan],

the genocide,<sup>89</sup> despite the fact that its absence from newspaper advertisements and memorial inscriptions shows that it was not used either to publicize commemorations or to memorialize the annihilation. It failed to prevail in popular awareness and daily language, and today occupies a marginal place as a literary term.<sup>90</sup>

The survey of a bibliography of Armenian books on the genocide has yielded a total of five volumes published between 1915 and 1965 with *Aghed* in their title, while general bibliographies of Armenian books published in the United States (1915–2011) and Lebanon (1915–2012) show only one use as subtitle for the same book in both countries. In comparison, twenty-three books were published worldwide with the word *Yeghern* in their title from 1915 to 1965, nine in the United States (1915–2011), and twenty-five in Lebanon (1925–2012).<sup>91</sup>

## Conclusion

The power of language frames memory and legitimizes the knowledge of history, which makes possible to understand the past, but may limit the ways to see it.<sup>92</sup> More than just the representation of a certain concept, words may sometimes be an embodiment of collective memory. *Medz Yeghern*, the name born from the vocabulary and the experience of

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*Hairenik* monthly, March 1932, 128–31; Hagop Oshagan, Համապատկեր տրեւնտսիայ գրականութեան [Panorama of Western Armenian Literature], vol. 9 (Antelias: Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia, 1980), 255, 267, 282–3, 286.

89 Donald Bloxham, “Determinants of the Armenian Genocide,” *Looking Backward, Moving Forward: Confronting the Armenian Genocide*, ed. Richard Hovhannisyian (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2003), 24; Mark Levene, *Genocide in the Age of the Nation-State, vol. 1: The Meaning of Genocide* (New York and London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 70; Stefan Troebst, “Europäisierung der Vertreibungserinnerung? Eine deutsch-polnische *Chronique scandaleuse* 2002–2008,” in *Verflochtene Erinnerungen: Polen und seine Nachbarn im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Martin Aust, Krzysztof Ruchniewicz and Stefan Troebst (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2009), 245 (“Aghet or Yeghern [Genocide of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire]”). Stephan Astourian, who used *Aghed* as denomination in the early 1990s (Stephan Astourian, “The Armenian Genocide: An Interpretation,” *The History Teacher* 2 (1990): 113, 145, 147, 159; idem, “Genocidal Process: Reflections on the Armeno-Turkish Polarization,” *The Armenian Genocide: History, Politics, Ethics*, ed. Richard Hovhannisyian (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), 5, most recently has cited *Medz Yeghern* translated as “Great Crime” (idem, “Hybrid Warfare, a Pseudo-Scandal and the Armenian Genocide Museum Institute,” *EVN Report*, 21 June 2020 ([www.evnreport.com/raw-unfiltered/hybrid-warfare-a-pseudo-scandal-and-the-armenian-genocide-museum-institute](http://www.evnreport.com/raw-unfiltered/hybrid-warfare-a-pseudo-scandal-and-the-armenian-genocide-museum-institute)), accessed 06.08.2020).

90 Nichanian, “The Truth of the Facts,” 269; Kazanjian and Nichanian, “Between Genocide and Catastrophe,” 128. Taline Voskeritchian, “Between Massacre and Genocide: On Eric Friedler’s ‘Aghét: Nation Murder,’” *Jadaliyya*, 16 May 2011 ([www.jadaliyya.com/Details/23990/Between-Massacre-and-Genocide-On-Eric-Friedler-s-Aghet-Nation-Murder](http://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/23990/Between-Massacre-and-Genocide-On-Eric-Friedler-s-Aghet-Nation-Murder)), accessed 05.05.2022).

91 Nersisyan, *Armenian Genocide*, 621–38; Hovsep Nalbandian, *Աներիկահայ գիրքի պատմություն 1858–2011* [History of the Armenian-American Book 1858–2011] (Los Angeles: Yerevan, 2011); Antranik Dakessian and Armen Urneshlian (eds.), *Լիբանանահայ գիրքը 1894–2012. մատենագիտական ցանկ* [The Armenian Lebanese Book 1894–2012: Bibliographical List] (Beirut: Haigazian University Press, 2012).

92 Jay Winter, *War beyond Words: Language of Remembrance from the Great War to the Present* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 124–125.



survivors, becomes the most suitable way to liberate the meaning of the annihilation from the shackles of semantic relativism and give a historical explanation of the experience of crime, in the same way that *Aghed*, “the name that will come at the end of history, when history as a series of denials will come to an end,”<sup>93</sup> gives a metahistorical explanation of the experience of catastrophe.

Language has occupied an important place in Armenian identity, becoming a fundamental component when the process of cultural awakening was underway in the nineteenth century. Powerless children witnessed the rape of their mothers and sisters, namely, the victimization of the mother tongue. The popular image of Mother Armenia, created in the early 1860s, was periodically subjected to Ottoman censorship from the 1880s, along with other cultural artifacts.<sup>94</sup> Mother Armenia became Ravished Armenia, to paraphrase the title of survivor Aurora Mardiganian’s (1901–1994) memoir and the silent film she starred in 1919:

Mother Armenia seated among the ruins, weeping – many of us grew up with that picture as children, and you can still see it here and there from Los Angeles to New York to Paris to Buenos Aires to Beirut. Ruins and graves make nations, and we Armenians have also millions of our unburied dead.<sup>95</sup>

Most speakers of Western Armenian and its dialects disappeared with the destruction of the milieu that fostered their sustainable development. The descendants of survivors worldwide are the remainder of the linguistic heritage that included some of the finest names in the letters. However, when outsiders who lacked “either the moral or the scholarly authority to assert what terms should or should not be used”<sup>96</sup> started dictating the terms of engagement with the past, those descendants forfeited their right to speak, namely, they rejected the words of their own language and refused bearing witness to a cornerstone of their identity. In the ultimate stage of genocide, those bound to fight against denial were ensnared in the cruelest of ironies: denying themselves.

The meaning “tragedy, catastrophe, calamity” fostered a misrepresentation of facts when interpretive denial managed to cross the language barrier and turn *Medz Yeghern* into collateral damage of the war of words. The innate ability of native speakers to be the final arbiters of what their own words mean had the potential to thwart the ongoing assault on substance that victimized language once again. Its manipulation by euphemism

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93 Kazanjian and Nichanian, “Between Genocide and Catastrophe,” 128. Nichanian paraphrases a sentence by Hagop Oshagan that prefaced his inquiry into the moral grounds of the perpetrators: “History can prove nothing, since it is a display [*hantes*] of denials” (Oshagan, *Հանսպասելիք*, 276).

94 M. Hakobian, «Մայր Հայաստանի զաղսփարը հայ ազատասիրական մտքի ոլորտներում» (The Idea of Mother Armenia in the Realms of Armenian Freedom-Loving Thought), *Echmiadzin*, April 1985, 73–75.

95 Leon Surmelian, “Wanted: A New Armenian Image,” *The Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, 24 February 1973. Thanks are due to Hagop Gulludjian for bringing the concept of victimization to my attention.

96 Marc Mamigonian, “A Commentary on the Turkish ‘I Apologize’ Campaign,” *The Armenian Weekly*, special issue, 25 April 2009, 21.

and equivocation offered Armenians an unexpected path to achieve the literal recognition that had been studiously avoided. Emphasis on the synonymous character of *yeghern*, *tseghasbanutiun*, and “genocide,” as well as of *Medz Yeghern* and *Hayots Tseghasbanutiun* (“Armenian Genocide”) would have likely countered the logical fallacy behind the translations “Great Catastrophe” and “Great Calamity.”

However, their uncritical acceptance squandered the opportunity for a proactive response and legitimized *Medz Yeghern* as an outdated expression without agency. The connection of “*Abrilean Yeghern*” (Ապրիլեան եղեռն) and “Armenian Genocide” in the memorial of Soghomon Tehlirian in Fresno, California, and “1915 *yeghern*” (1915ի եղեռն) and “1915 genocide” in the April 24 memorial in Niagara Falls, New York, for instance, was lost in the fog of genocide politics amid no less than two dozen memorials featuring similar translations worldwide. Word meanings are not etched in stone, but words etched in stone have a meaning.<sup>97</sup>

Foreign proper names and words are no longer exotic. Hebrew and Ukrainian speakers have thrown their substantial weight behind *Shoah* and *Holodomor*. Official statements, press, and academia have adopted *Shoah* from Europe to the Americas following the impact of Claude Lanzmann’s homonymous film and the polemics over the meaning and trivialization of the name “Holocaust.”<sup>98</sup> *Holodomor* (“killing by hunger”), which appears to have been coined in the Ukrainian community of North America in the 1960s and popularized in Ukraine during the final years of the Soviet Union, has replaced both “Famine” and “Ukrainian Holocaust” as name of choice, since no “single locution in English articulates what Stalin inflicted in 1933 on the people of the Ukrainian countryside.”<sup>99</sup>

The use of *Shoah* and *Holodomor* outside their ethnic realms disproves the claim that *Medz Yeghern* may be meaningless outside the Armenian realm. As a matter of fact, the word “genocide” originally happened to have no meaning for the common reader, given the absence of *genos* in English and French vocabulary.<sup>100</sup> *Medz Yeghern*, which should be translated as “Great Crime” for any context prior to the first published use of “genocide” in 1945, with the option to use “Great Genocide” in contemporary contexts, enjoys a gradual recognition in the media, academia, and even popular publications (Paolo Cossi’s graphic novel *Medz Yeghern: Il Grande Male*, for instance). It has the potential to become a meaningful carrier of memory in English like *Shoah* and *Holodomor*, along other foreign, older proper names like *Reconquista*, *Renaissance*, or *Risorgimento*.

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97 See a catalog of 114 memorial inscriptions containing the words *yeghern* and/or “genocide” and its analysis in Matiossian, *The Politics of Naming the Armenian Genocide*, 147–160.

98 Charles Passy, “New Word to Replace Holocaust Wins Favor,” *Palm Beach Post*, 18 April 2004; Philologos, “Roots of the Holocaust,” *Forward*, 16 September 2005. See also Robert S. C. Gordon, *The Holocaust in Italian Culture, 1944–2010* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 177–178.

99 Michael Naydan, “A Lasting Imprint,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 22 January 1995. See also Andriewsky, “Towards a Decentred History,” 25–26.

100 Perry S. Bechky, “Lemkin’s Situation: Toward a Rhetorical Understanding of Genocide,” *Brooklyn Law Review* 2 (2012): 614.



The heirs of the original perpetrators are prone to uphold the foundational sin embedded into Turkish identity with a replay of hackneyed assumptions and clichés, echoed by toned-down versions from outside purveyors with credentials of dubious objectivity. “Words cannot change or rewrite history,” Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu tweeted on 24 April 2021, in response to Joseph Biden’s statement using “genocide” and *Medz Yeghern*.<sup>101</sup> The irony should not have been lost to a keen observer.

Although words do not change the past, the ultimate goal of their corruption is to rewrite the facts or, in other terms, “to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind” (George Orwell). Context matters even more than words, because “the nameless tell us what happened and that is all the evidence that we need,”<sup>102</sup> including the proper name of the century-old crime that they bequeathed to their descendants and remains under a cone of silence that awaits to be lifted.

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<sup>101</sup> [twitter.com/MevlutCavusoglu/status/1385988990080360448](https://twitter.com/MevlutCavusoglu/status/1385988990080360448), accessed 24.04.2021.

<sup>102</sup> Harootunian, *The Unspoken as Heritage*, 127.



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# TRACES LEADING TO PONTUS AND THE BOSPORUS: THE OTTOMAN GENOCIDE IN GERMAN LANGUAGE (POST) MIGRANT PROSE

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This literary analysis examines the representation of the Ottoman genocide against Armenians and Greeks in contemporary German prose using four examples of family narratives and travel texts, respectively. Two of the authors analyzed – Katerina Poladyan and Laura Cwiertnia – represent fictional prose, while Mirko Heinemann and Michael Asderis represent factual prose. Written three to four generations after the Ottoman genocide, all four authors ask themselves what the events of that time mean for the descendants of survivors: a burden or a legacy obligatory to preserve or remember?

At the same time, genre hybridity as a characteristic of post-genocidal or post-migrant German prose is analyzed.

**Keywords:** Ottoman Genocide, Post-migrant prose, Post-genocidal prose, intergenerational experience, family novel, travel prose.

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## Introduction

The abundance and literary quality of contributions by the third and fourth post-genocidal generations of Armenians and Greeks to the U.S., French, and transnational prose in contemporary literature is remarkable. As I noted in a 2014 essay,<sup>1</sup> these are (semi-)biographical narratives from authors’ family histories, centered on the Ottoman genocide and the loss of ancestral homeland (patricide). A simultaneously developed variant of contemporary Turkish prose can be described as “coming-out”, for this prose touches on social taboos and identity issues that have existed for decades and continue to exist up to the present, because of the Ottoman genocide of approximately three million Christians. The best-known author of such taboo-breaking literature is the Istanbul lawyer Fethiye Çetin, whose work *Anneannem* (“My Grandmother,” 2004) has had an impact far beyond

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1 Tessa Hofmann, “Zwischen Coming-Out, Identitätsstiftung und (An)Klage: Der Völkermord an den Armeniern in der Erinnerungsprosa der US-armenischen Diaspora und in der Türkei,” *Armenological Issues* 1 (2014): 76-91.

Turkey thanks to numerous translations. The fact that the discovery of a grandmother's Armenian ancestry may trigger a social shock even decades after the 1915 genocide has become comprehensible to numerous non-Turkish readers through this book.<sup>2</sup>

With a time-lag, the genre has now found its way into contemporary German-language prose. The "gateway" is so-called (post)migrant prose, which is very pronounced in Germany, not only thanks to the extensive community of people born in Turkey, or people with a so-called Turkish migrant background. In addition, authors from the post-Soviet areas, such as the Georgia-born Nino Haratishvili or the actress Katerina Poladyan, who was born in Moscow in 1971, have likewise introduced the historical experience of their countries or their ethnic groups of origin into German-language literature. The term "post-migrant" reflects the unwillingness of numerous authors to be reduced to their ancestry or "migration history." The Germanist Jara Schmidt formulated the term in 2020 as follows:

In recent anthologies and essayistic prose, attention is increasingly being drawn to intersectional discrimination in Germany, for example in: Fatma Aydemir / Hengameh Yaghoobifarah (eds.): *Your Homeland is Our Nightmare* (2019); Kübra Gümüşay: *Language and Being* (2020); Reyhan Şahin: *Yalla, Feminism!* (2019). What repeatedly comes to the fore in these social critiques is a frustration at having to constantly explain or even justify one's own condition, for example, one's origin or ancestry or one's religion. This state of having to explain oneself and the discrimination that goes along with it result in an almost collective feeling: rage.<sup>3</sup>

The four authors on whom my analysis is based represent a subgenre of migrant or post-migrant prose in the German language; it could also be called post-genocidal literature, because it is based on migration experiences triggered by the Ottoman genocide. However, the experiences of persecution and the trauma of extermination of the Armenian or Greek ancestors of these authors, who come from transnational families, date back to mostly four generations ago. Narrative communities, on the other hand, usually span only three generations: from grandparents to grandchildren. After that, experiential knowledge is no longer transmitted individually and personally, but as a component of collective, usually written knowledge. How do the authors, examined here deal with this fact? How do they and their protagonists approach events that took place more than 100 years ago?

## **Fictional and Factual Prose**

A distinction between fictional and factual prose can already be found in Aristotle's "Poetics" (4th century BC). According to him, historians and poets differ in that "the one communicates what really happened, the other what may have happened."

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2 Ibid., 80-86.

3 Jara Schmidt, "Postmigrantische Literatur und Germanistik," *Multicultural Germany Project*, 3 November 2020, <https://mcp.berkeley.edu/2020/11/03/schmidt-postmigrantische-literatur-german/>, accessed 27.04.2022.

In the prose on the Ottoman genocide, however, this distinction becomes blurred, as it fluctuates strikingly between fact-based narrative forms and varying degrees of fictionality. Moreover, especially for fictional prose, the mixture of two novel genres is characteristic: the family or generational novel and the travel novel. For the generational novel, the conflicts between generations are significant, as is the motif of legacy. Both genres are apparently necessary to enable the authors not only to approach the now very distant time of the Ottoman genocide but, at the same time, serve to introduce the geographically as well as culturally distant Armenia as the presumed country of origin.

### **Fictional prose: two travel novels**

K. Poladyan (Berlin) and L. Cwiertnia (Hamburg; born 1987) are daughters of Armenian fathers and survivors of the genocide of 1915/6. Cwiertnia's Armenian family, as she confided to me, originally derives from Sinope. The Black Sea port city is also the place of origin of the family of her literary protagonist Karla, but the city remains anonymous and vague in Cwiertnia's novel. Karla's grandmother emigrated from Istanbul as a "Turkish guest worker" after the anti-Greek Istanbul pogrom ("Septembriana" 6/7 September 1955).<sup>4</sup>

The family of Poladyan's protagonist Helen Mazavian originates from Kars, but the search for the origins of an Armenian family bible leads Helen to the Black Sea coast and the port town of Kotyora/Ordu. This choice of the place of origin of an Armenian family story lends Poladyan's narrative the character of arbitrariness: although more than half of the population of Kotyora at the beginning of the 20th century were Christians, most were, however, Greeks.

The actress and author Poladyan grew up speaking Russian, while the journalist and author Cwiertnia spoke German in a working-class neighborhood (Bremen-Nord); she now works as an editor for the renowned weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*.

The protagonists of both authors obviously display autobiographical traits. Like her first-person narrator Karla, author L. Cwiertnia went on a trip to Armenia with her father in 2016.<sup>5</sup> In her novel, she uses the legacy motif: with the journey to Armenia, Karla wants to fulfill the last wish of her recently deceased grandmother Maryam, because Karla's journey is dedicated to the search for a certain Lilit Kuyumciyan, who is to receive a golden bracelet. Like Cwiertnia's real Armenian father, Karla's father Avi has never been to Armenia before. K. Poladyan's protagonist Helen, in turn, travels via Istanbul to Yerevan, where she is to complete a three-month internship in manuscript restoration at the Matenadaran Manuscript Museum-Institute. She practices her skills on

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4 The author's Armenian grandmother is still alive. She also came from Istanbul and arrived in Germany in 1968 as a guest worker. L. Cwiertnia tells the fate of her grandmother in her article "The Forgotten," *Zeit-Magazin*, no. 18/2022, 27 April 2022.

5 Laura Cwiertnia, "Zeigst du mir die Heimat, in der du noch nie warst, von der du aber ständig träumst, Papa?" *Die Zeit*, 19 January 2019, <https://www.zeit.de/2017/04/armenien-tuerkei-reise-familie-vater-geschichte>, accessed 02.03.2022.

an Armenian family bible (“healing bible”), whose signs of use and colophons soon raise the question concerning its previous owners. In both novels, then, it is objects that trigger the protagonists’ quest for the past.

### **In the tradition of Russian-language travel texts**

Beginning with Alexander Pushkin’s wartime travelogue (*A Journey to Arzrum* [Erzerum] *during the Campaign of 1829*, “Путешествие в Арзрум во время похода 1829 года”), Armenia assumed an important role in the Russian prose of the 19th and especially the Soviet-dominated 20th centuries. While Pushkin perceived Armenia in the early 19th century, from a Russian perspective, still largely as a curiosity and was ultimately disappointed, Soviet Armenia rose, for Russian writers and their readers, to become the symbol of world culture, because it replaced, for educated citizens of the Soviet Union, the ancient Mediterranean cultural heritage of Greece and Italy, inaccessible to them. The poets Andrey Belyi (1880-1934), Ossip Mandelstam (1891-1938)<sup>6</sup> and the prose writer Andrey Bitov (1937-2018) were equally fascinated by Armenia. Moreover, Mandelstam, a Jew born in Warsaw, recognized the kinship of fate between Jews and Armenians, which is why he called Armenia the “younger sister of the Hebrew soil.”

Belyi and Bitov traveled through Armenia at the invitation and under the expert guidance of prominent Armenian intellectuals; in Belyi’s case it was the classic Armenian modern painter, Martiros Saryan (1880-1972), whom Bely already knew from Moscow<sup>7</sup> and, in Bitov’s case his friend and fellow writer Hrant Matevosyan (1935-2002), the most renowned prose writer in Soviet Armenia after the Second World War. Bitov, a native of St. Petersburg, recorded his travel impressions in his book *Armenianskie uroki* (“Armenian Lessons,” 1969); it did not pass through the censors entirely unscathed. Matevosyan’s remarks on Armenia’s history, culture, and fate are cited anonymously as utterances of “the friend,” perhaps in deference to the censors of the time. The German edition (2002) of the second version of Bitov’s *Uroki* notes, in the blurb, the special significance of Armenia for Russian readers and authors:

Russians have always longed for Armenia, their south, their Italy. For Bitov, as for Mandelstam, it is a country that wants to be read. Here history has ‘no beginning’ – it has always been there. There is no village that was not once the capital of an ancient state in prehistoric times, no hill that was not the site of a decisive battle, no stone that was not covered in blood, and no man who is indifferent to it.<sup>8</sup>

6 Carmen Sippl, *Reisetexte der russischen Moderne: Andrej Belyj und Osip Mandel’stam im Kaukasus* (München: Verlag Otto Sagner, 1997) [https://www.academia.edu/36257239/Reisetexte\\_der\\_russischen\\_Moderne?email\\_work\\_card=reading-history](https://www.academia.edu/36257239/Reisetexte_der_russischen_Moderne?email_work_card=reading-history).

7 Ibid., 117.

8 Andrej Bitov, *Armenische Lektionen: Eine Reise aus Russland* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), quoting the text on the left inside the cover.



Poladyan's travel novel is obviously in the tradition of such Russian-language travelogues about Armenia. These works are about discoveries of the unknown and deliberate confrontation with the hitherto unknown. This is also indicated by the title of Poladyan's novel: "*Here are Lions – Hic Sunt Leones*" (or *Hic Sunt Dracones*) is the usual paraphrase of medieval maps for undiscovered, unknown and therefore uncanny regions, the "terra incognita." Poladyan's narrative style and her narration are similar to Bitov's: a foreigner embarks on a journey to Armenia and presents Armenia, its culture and history from the perspective of a stranger to the country. Bitov and Poladyan do this in a light, miniature, unobtrusive and, for long stretches, pleasingly non-didactic style, with humor, a wink and also unmistakable sympathy for a people afflicted by fate.

Similar to Bitov's and Belyi's, Poladyan's protagonist and first-person narrator Helen Mazavian arrives as a stranger in Armenia, which was unknown to her previously and, just like Bitov and Bely, she meets a local Cicerone there. In Helen's case, it is Evelina, her superior at the Matenadaran, who doesn't just introduce her to the secrets of Armenian book art. In Poladyan's novel, and especially through Evelina, one learns a lot about Armenian book art, healing and family bibles with their history-revealing handwritten marginal and end notes. This emphasis is not accidental, but stems from the conviction that Armenians form an ancient cultural, if not a "book-nation". Evelina explains to Helen the Armenian fixation on the past and book worship or highly developed book art as a result of centuries of persecution experiences:

Why do you think our Bibles are so small and handy compared to the occidental manuscripts? Many of these heavyweight Western manuscripts are too self-conscious, saying, "I want to influence you, I want to intimidate you." Armenian family Bibles had to be small enough for you could tuck them under your arm at any time. That's what people did. Some left their own children behind rather than leave their Bibles. People were always prepared for uncertain times, always ready to flee. People found comfort in family Bibles; they were used, not just looked at and put back in their place. You are German. You know Heinrich Heine; you will know what Heine wrote about books as being a portable home. It was always about protection and defense, hence the sturdy binding, the pages being tightly pressed to provide protection against insects. Pests could not easily penetrate a tightly bound book. This people have always been afraid of disappearing. (...) I am talking about centuries of persecution. We are still living in history, not in the here and not in the now. In books, perhaps in the face of death, eternity revealed itself. (...)<sup>9</sup>

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9 Katerina Poladyan, *Hier sind Löwen; Roman* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2019), 61-62.

## **Unconnected plot threads: the travel novel and historical retrospective**

Beginning with the section “Devotion and Waste”<sup>10</sup> Poladyan’s novel tells the story of an Armenian family from the Black Sea port city of Ordu (Greek Kotyora) in parallel with the present-day travel novel plot: the father owns an inn on the Black Sea beach. He and his eldest son Sarkis are seized one day by gendarmes, then the two girls Sona and Keghuhi were too. Their mother is killed. Only 14-year-old Anahid and her younger brother Hrant manage to escape. Starving, the siblings roam the mountains.

In the main plot of the travel novel, Helen becomes involved with Levon, her superior Evelina’s son. She falls in love with the amateur bass player and professional officer, but abruptly breaks off the relationship when she realizes how strong her feelings for him are. Shortly thereafter, Levon conveniently dies in a military accident, so Helen is no longer forced to choose between him and her boyfriend Danil, who remained in Germany. Helen does not attend Levon’s funeral, but instead goes on a brief visit to Ordu, Kars and Lake Van, accompanied by her Istanbul acquaintance Tarık, before returning to Yerevan, where she is met by Danil for her return to Germany. These passages seem somewhat contrived.

Only once in the novel’s plot, in the Ordu chapter, do the storylines of the present and the past collide, for it is here Helen and Tarık meet sisters Seda and Melek, who live in the former Armenian quarter and whose father was apparently Hrant, the uprooted boy from the retrospective subplot. His life and story of suffering is told in fragmentary form by Seda: Hrant first comes into the “care” of an Ottoman orphanage, then of a Pontus Greek shoemaker, then of a Cretan Muslim who had to leave Crete after the Greek-Turkish population exchange. Hrant is given a new name each time. In the meantime, he has long since lost the family Bible, the symbol of his Armenian identity.

The reader also learns that Greeks and Armenians did not get along well in Ordu; according to Poladyan, the number of Armenians there was 20,000; in fact, it was far lower, only being three thousand. More than half of the population of Ordu in the early 20th century were Christians, mostly Greeks.<sup>11</sup> The number of Armenians, who had emigrated mostly from the area of Giresun and Tamzara to the town of Ordu as late as in the second half of the 19th century, was about 3,000; the Armenian population of the entire *kaza* of Ordu numbered 13,565 in 1914.<sup>12</sup>

Poladyan’s narrative about the fate of the Armenian family that once owned the Bible Helen was to restore is thus atypical and appears peculiarly pale in comparison to the narrative of Helen’s impressions in post-Soviet Armenia set in the present.

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10 Laura Cwiertnia, *Auf der Straßen heißen wir anders* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2022), 37.

11 At the turn of the 20th century, the city was more than half Christian (Greek and Armenian) and was known for its Greek schools. According to a 1911 statistical survey on “Greek villages in Pontus,” 39,800 Greek Orthodox Christians lived in the *kaza* of Ordu in 109 communities, with 100 schools, a monastery and 80 “private chapels.” 103 other churches were Catholic. See Konstantinos Emm. Fotiadis, *The Genocide of the Pontian Greeks* (Monee, IL, 2020) 58.

12 Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 483-484.

Her novel has little action. Where there is action, it appears unmediated, as in Helen's abrupt separation from Levon or Anahid's from her brother Hrant. In Armenia, Helen gets to know her boss Evelina's family: husband Araik, Evelina's son Levon and his little daughter Julia, as well as Ano from Syria, who remains the only diaspora Armenian in the novel, and some younger colleagues.

Thus, her stay in Armenia seems strangely devoid of any consequences and superficial: Helen neither uses it to clarify her own identity, nor gets involved in lasting relationships with people in and from Armenia. Her relationship with her Armenian mother Sara also remains in limbo. Helen goes in search of her mother's relatives in Armenia and does find them, but this too remains an emotionally inconsequential relationship. And even Helen's mother suddenly seems indifferent to the results of the search for relatives; it is also uncertain what Armenia or Armenian ancestry mean to Sara Mazavian. All the protagonists seem to avoid any real contact.

Apart from the encounter between Helen Mazavian and Hrant's daughters Seda and Melek in Ordu, Poladyan's retrospective on the fate of Hrant and Anahid remains almost unconnected with the main plot – Helen Mazavian's travel novel. At the end of the novel, Anahid abruptly separates from her brother, thus leaving him to assimilate because she sees her separation as saving him. Anahid, too, avoids further emotional attachment at the end. Her own fate remains open, like so much in this novel.

Cwiertnia's post-migrant family novel likewise resembles a travel novel from the 7th chapter on. Daughter Karla and her father Avi travel through Armenia like all tourists. The chapter opens with Mount Ararat as an unavoidable cliché of every Armenian trip, then it goes to Khor Virab and Lake Sevan.

## Strange and familiar homelands

Cwiertnia's novel underlines the fact that Armenia has not become a home for the Armenians who have fled from Istanbul and Turkey. The father, Avi, is initially reluctant to travel to Armenia: "... *it is not good to deal with these old things!*"<sup>13</sup> He also refuses to visit the Yerevan Genocide Museum out of the same conviction. His relationship to Armenia and its history remains contradictory until the end of the novel: on the one hand, he calls the foreign country his home, and on the other, he plays the Cicerone for his daughter, pompously trying to explain the country and its inhabitants to her. This is not without stereotypical attributions: "*Armenians are enterprising*";<sup>14</sup> even his daughter Karla does not always successfully avoid ethnic stereotypes: the large Armenian noses appear twice in the novel.<sup>15</sup>

The tensions between father and daughter sharpen in Armenia. There, Karla perceives her father as a foreign person, even a comic figure, because he simply does not fit into the

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13 Cwiertnia, *Straße*, 60.

14 Ibid., 133.

15 Ibid., 112.

surroundings, speaks too loudly, is dressed differently, i.e. conspicuously.<sup>16</sup> This triggers Karla's reflections on the concept of home: *"How are you supposed to find a home in a place you've never been in?"*<sup>17</sup> In Armenia, even the sunflower seeds are unfamiliar to her father, because they are prepared differently than in Turkey; the schnapps ("oghi"), which in Armenia is usually vodka and not aniseed schnapps as in Turkey, also remains strange to him. But it is only in Armenia that father and daughter discover the contrast between a familiar homeland and an unfamiliar foreign country. Armenia is a necessary experience for them both. Only there does Avi realize that "yaya" ('grandmother') is not an Armenian word. That it is a Greek word and indicative of the family's origin from the predominantly Greek town of Sinope is a reality that L. Cwiertnia unfortunately does not elaborate on; perhaps she herself being unaware of the connection. Karla recognizes that Turkey and especially Istanbul as the real homeland of her family: *"In Istanbul I looked, for the first time, for the fragments of history that my father wants to blur."*<sup>18</sup>

Although Avi leaves Istanbul and his parental home at the early age of 17, the city and the treatment of its ethno-religious minorities have left a deep impression on him: he is bothered by nationalism and prejudice, including his own mother's prejudice against a German as the mother of her grandson. Because of his minority affiliation, he has learned to deceive: *"Avi knew better than most how to pretend without blowing his cover. But there was nothing that made him more uncomfortable."*<sup>19</sup> He quickly makes friends among Germans. L. Cwiertnia describes him as unprejudiced, open-minded and cosmopolitan. At the age of eight, Avi occasionally sells newspapers on the street, unbeknown to his father, a cobbler who had to work as a shoeshine boy after the 1955 "Septembriana." Avi has wanderlust, longs for Germany. He skips school and spends the night outside his father's house, in trucks in a parking lot nearby. Later it becomes clear that his skipping out is not only out of boredom, but also because of 'the pledge' that the students have to recite every day: *"Happy the one who calls himself a Turk..."*;<sup>20</sup> however, his history teacher has told Avi that he is exempt from 'the pledge' and consequently is not allowed to recite it.<sup>21</sup> When Avi is caught stealing from a store, the owner recognizes him as the son of the Armenian shoeshine boy. The delinquent is handed over, in a humiliating way, to his father. The father now beats Avi, mainly because he has broken the following rule: *"Don't cause problems. Don't talk back to anyone. Don't mess with a Turk under any circumstances. And, never, never with the police!"*<sup>22</sup>

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16 Ibid., 163.

17 Ibid., 164.

18 Ibid., 160.

19 Ibid., 74.

20 Ne mutlu Türküm diyene (Turkish for "Happy the one who calls himself a Turk") is one of Atatürk's mottoes that is still widely used in Turkey today. The entire wording was used in Turkish schools from 1933 to 2013. This text was recited by a boy or girl every morning before classes began, as a pledge and was repeated by all the other students after the national anthem was sung.

21 Cwiertnia, *Straße*, 174.

22 Ibid., 131.

Armenian life in Turkey after 1915 meant invisibility. Camouflage and at least outward conformity formed the consequences of racist discrimination against Armenian Genocide survivors, the “left-overs of the sword.” The camouflage of Istanbul Armenians begins with their Christian first names: Maryam is called Meryem outside her home, her husband Hagop Hüseyin.<sup>23</sup> The short form of her son Avedis’ name is Armenian Avo, but in Istanbul his family calls him Avi, because it sounds so much like Ali.

The fact that Armenians are still threatened four decades after the genocide is portrayed in the 16th chapter, titled “Maryam.” It deals with the night of the pogrom on 6 September 1955. The small cobbler’s shop, which Maryam’s husband Hagop inherited from his father, is marked with a cross in advance of the pogrom.

Avi’s family is holed up in their apartment on the night of 6 September 1955, awaiting the gangs of killers. At the same time, there are flashbacks to Maryam’s past: she was married off to Hagop by her mother Armine when she was only 14, which is why the date of birth in her identity document was raised to 18 by bribing the registrar. Armine also prevented Maryam from attending school because she is allegedly mentally disturbed. Here, a mother imposes her own fate on her daughter, as Armine was also forcibly married at a very young age. Atrocities repeat themselves, victims become perpetrators.

In her Ordu chapter, Katerina Poladyan manages a very accomplished portrayal of a hybrid situation characteristic of the last Armenians living outside Istanbul; in it, the two daughters of her protagonist Hrant, Seda and Melek, embody, respectively, the Armenian and Turkish legacy of this genocide survivor forced to adopt. Asked about the family and healing bible, the following dialogue unfolds:

*“Did our father have a bible? asked Melek.*

*Yes, our father was Armenian, said Seda.*

*Our father was Turkish, said Melek.*

*Our father was Armenian.*

*Maybe Seda got something mixed up, Master Ibrahim said that could happen when one had lived here for eighty-six years. Then he said goodbye, the business calling him back.*

*He was a Turk, Melek said.*

*What was his name? What did you call him? asked Seda.*

*I called him Baba, like you did.*

*Seda said the neighbours sometimes came over for tea and brought nut cakes drenched in heavy honey. Back home, the neighbours said ‘we were with the infidels’, they didn’t say ‘we were with Seda and Melek’. That’s how it used to be, they said, just like now. Gâvur Mahallesi, neighbourhood of the infidels, they said, not Ermeni Mahallesi.*

But in the end, we are children of the Republic, in the end we are children of Atatürk, *Melek shouted.*<sup>24</sup>

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23 Ibid., 211.

24 Poladyan, *Löwen*, 232.

What Poladyan presents here, in her own concise manner, tempered by humor and light irony, is in line with Raphael Lemkin's definition of genocide in his seminal work *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (1943). According to this definition, the decisive factor in genocide is not so much physical extermination as the complete disappearance of a nationally, ethnically, or religiously defined group.<sup>25</sup> Their members may survive massacres and deportations, but can no longer appear publicly as Armenians. The next step in this forced assimilation is, as in Melek's case, the complete acceptance of the identity of the perpetrator group.

### **(Post)migrant family novel: *On the Street We're Called by a Different Name***

Family or generational novels – the term “family novel” goes back to Sigmund Freud – were considered a “worn-out genre” after WWII, but since the 1990s have experienced a renewed boom and currently constitute perhaps the most popular novel genre in European and North American literature.

The memoir literature within post-migrant prose has been particularly strong in following this trend. Laura Cwiertnia's hybrid travel novel, for example, simultaneously forms a backward-looking Armenian family history. The penultimate chapter, titled ‘Armine’, provides the starting point of the plot, with the genocide of 1915 and the key to understanding the subsequent biographies and fates from more recent times. The narrative style is almost multi-perspective, but only the chapters titled ‘Karla’ are told in first person. The period covered spans four generations: from great-grandmother Armine to her daughter Maryam and her grandson Avedis (Avi) Kunduracı, to great-granddaughter Karla; the flashbacks to Karla's childhood and youth are titled “Karlotta.”

L. Cwiertnia's exposition is reminiscent of that of Fethiye Çetin, whose “Anneannem” also begins with the funeral of an Armenian grandmother, except that here it is not a Muslim but an Armenian Apostolic funeral in a run-down working-class neighborhood of Bremen, where the protagonist Karla/Karlotta hangs out with an international gang of “Asi kids” (asocial children) in a playground or in their apartments, yearning for a higher and socially enhanced status. The third chapter, again titled Karla, continues the main plot: after the grandmother's funeral, a wake is held in her small apartment. Grandmother Maryam left a kind of written testament behind as well as various objects, including a gold bangle with the handwritten note inscribed “Lilit Kuyumciyan.” The clarification of its origin becomes the external trigger for the rest of the novel's plot, especially the journey to Armenia. But it is not until the last chapter (“Armine”) that the mystery of Lilit is cleared up: she is Karla's great-grandmother Armine's youngest sister; the two sisters Armine

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25 Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation; Analysis of Government Proposals for Redress Concord* (Carnegie Endowment for Peace, 1944; new ed.: Clark, New Jersey: The Lawbook Exchange, 2005), 79-80.



and Lilit lose sight of each other during the genocide. Armine's entire family is deported, while Armine delivers goods – the gold bangle – to a Muslim customer for her father, a goldsmith, thus escaping deportation. Only in the penultimate chapter does the reader learn that Armine is later taken by Armenian rescuers to an orphanage in Istanbul, where she is married off at an early age. It remains unclear how the gold bangle came into Armine's possession, as it seems unlikely that she would have taken it back after her errand. Almost at the end of the novel, Avi advises his daughter to get rid of the bangle and, with it, the burden of her Armenian family legacy: "(...) *It's just ballast, much too heavy to carry.*"<sup>26</sup> L. Cwiertnia leaves open what Karla decides.

Poladyan's family novel also is open-ended, but with the author's confession of fundamental human goodness. After her protagonist Anahid makes sure that her little brother can stay with the friendly Turkish goatherd they met on the way in the mountains, she falls asleep, exhausted, on the Black Sea beach and it remains unclear whether she will ever wake up.

But Hrant would do well with this woman. Of course, he would do well. Man is good, only sometimes he forgets to be good. But Hrant will live. The mother is dead. 'Turn around Anahid, turn around at last', she shouts and Anahid does so and sees everything. (...)

The familiar sea is familiarly calm in front of her. Anahid lies down in the sand and lets the last rays of the sun warm her. (...) She closes her eyes and slips into sleep. Whoever wants to wake her, should do so gently.<sup>27</sup>

## Factual prose

### *Ambivalent Constantinople/Istanbul*

As previously mentioned, German-language prose on the Ottoman genocide mixes fictional and factual literature. This can be seen particularly clearly in Michael Asderis' book *The Gateway to Bliss*<sup>28</sup> (2018), which the publisher appropriately classifies as "narrative nonfiction" on its cover.

The legacy motif characteristic of the fictional family or generational novel is likewise echoed in factual family prose. Similar to the healing bible in Poladyan's novel and the gold bangle in Cwiertnia's novel, it is an object that leads Michael Asderis' autobiographical first-person narrator into the past: the small mother-of-pearl cross that Michael Asderis (b. 1950 in Istanbul) takes with him from his mother's apartment in Frankfurt/Main when he has to clear out the apartment after her death at the end of March 2004; it had hung over the door of his family's Istanbul apartment in the Pangaltı district

<sup>26</sup> Cwiertnia, *Straße*, 238.

<sup>27</sup> Poladyan, *Löwen*, 284-285.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Asderis, *Das Tor zur Glückseligkeit: Migration, Heimat, Vertreibung – die Geschichte einer Istanbul-Familie* (Berlin: Binooki, 2018).



for many years. The death of a mother or grandmother as an exposition of a narrative about the fate of a family resembles both Fethiye Çetin's memoir and Cwiertnia's later novel.

Michael Asderis is descended, on his father's side, from Greeks of Ottoman and Greek nationality and, on his mother's side, from Catholic Italians from Trieste, who in turn married Armenians and Greeks of Italian, Greek and especially Ottoman nationality.

“What these people experienced decisively shaped their collective memory across generations. The small mother-of-pearl cross from my parents' apartment represents, for me, a symbol of this society which had been a part of Istanbul since Byzantine times. Those who were Greek-speaking among them referred to themselves as Romyos<sup>29</sup> and not as Ellines, even if they were Greek citizens.”<sup>30</sup>

From a denominational point of view, his maternal family is particularly diverse: in addition to Italian, there are also Greek and Armenian Catholics in it. M. Asderis explains their highly interesting social and migrational peculiarities using the example of his grandparents Andrea Poldrugo and Anastasia Casa:

Many of the young male immigrants from Europe married local Catholic women. They were either Greek-speakers from the Aegean islands<sup>31</sup> or Armenians. The young wives helped the immigrants to integrate quickly into the long-established Catholic society of Constantinople. But they also caused the loss of the attachment to their country of origin that had prevailed in the first generation. National origin slowly faded into the background.<sup>32</sup>

Asderis's hometown had always been “a place of immigrants”<sup>33</sup> and accordingly bore many names.

We, the Romyi, call it simply Polis, the city. The question does not arise for us. For us there is no other name, only this one. It is called, in Greek, Konstantinoupolis, which means City of Constantine; in Russian, Tsarigrad, the imperial city; in Turkish, Istanbul, in Ottoman it was often called ‘Der-i Saadet’, Gateway to Bliss.’<sup>34</sup>

“Most of them did not know what (...) the meaning of this ancient name [*Der-i Saadet*] was; it originated from Persian (...); according to legend, this gate opens to

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29 The Greeks of Asia Minor and the Pontos saw themselves as direct heirs of the Eastern Roman and Byzantine Empires, respectively and therefore proudly called themselves Romans (Greek “Ρωμαίος” – “Romayos”; abbreviated “Romyos”; plural: “Ρωμαίοι” – “Romayi”, abbreviated Romyi; “Ρωμησύνη”, or “Ρωμιοσύνη” – Romiosini; Romiosyni). In Turkish, this self-nomination was adopted as “rum” (“Romans”; plural “rumlar”).

30 Asderis, *Gate*, 12.

31 These are the Cycladic islands of Tinos and Santorini, which lost their previous Venetian Catholic protectorate status after their conquest by the Ottomans in 1580.

32 Asderis, *Gate*, 76.

33 *Ibid.*, 17.

34 *Ibid.*, 16.

some for a state of bliss, while at the same time it closes access to the others. (...) No one was ever happy for a long time.<sup>35</sup>

Asderis's family narrative is divided into four sections of varying length: the first two cover the Ottoman period between 1848 to 1922, the following two the Turkish Republican era until Asderis's father's removal in 1964, as well as his entry into Germany. Asderis tells the story of his family as the story of the city of Istanbul and ultimately of the late Ottoman Empire and the early Republic of Turkey. Different narrative forms – summarizing resumé, dialogues, quotations – enliven the narration, whereby Asderis relies not only on the individual fates as well as his relatives' memories, but also on secondary sources, including Turkish and Greek-language literature.

According to Asderis, society living in Constantinople, the Ottoman capital, was not a “melting pot” but a “salad bowl”:

The components did not mix to form something new; they remained side by side. The state itself neither encouraged nor enforced a mingling between Muslims and non-Muslims. It did not interfere; there were regulations only in matters of marriage. Marriage was forbidden between non-Muslim men and Muslim women, but not vice versa. However, the latter, i.e. the permitted marriages between Muslim men and non-Muslim women were extremely rare. Mixed marriages occurred almost exclusively between the Romyis and Armenians and, in some cases, with Jews.<sup>36</sup>

The family narrative begins with the politically motivated flight made by Antonio Poldrugo (died 1855/1866?) from Trieste, after the Austro-Hungarian Empire subdued and suppressed the Italian independence movement there. A generation later, after 1870, the paternal great-grandfather, Periklis Asderis (b. 1849), who came from the Greek region of Epiros, immigrated to Constantinople to escape compulsory payments to the irregular Greek gangs, the *klephtes* (Greek: thieves).

Drawing on ambassadorial reports and other eyewitness testimony, M. Asderis initially portrays the predominantly Christian Ottoman capital as a refuge for Christians both inside and outside the Ottoman sphere of power. The *Tanzimat* (1839-1876) reform period as well as the overthrow of the authoritarian “Bloody Sultan” Abdül-Hamid II by the Young Turks (1908) and the reintroduction of the Ottoman constitution of 1876 nurtured hopes among the Christian population of the empire for a lasting and fundamental improvement of their position, especially for their equality with the Muslim population. But this hope was deceptive. Nationalism prevailed faster and more effectively than the reforms. Ottoman federalism had no chance. With reactive Turkish nationalism – reactive with regard to the emancipatory, secessionist and irredentist movements among Ottoman Armenians and Greeks – the idea of having to get rid of the Greeks and Armenians took hold permanently.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 23.

## **The 1896 slaughter and the “Bloody Sunday” of 24 April 1915**

Asderis’s narrative of the oppression and extermination of Ottoman Christians includes sections on the 1896 massacre and “Bloody Sunday” (11/24 April 1915):

Where the murdering and looting mob came from and how it was on the scene so quickly has never been clarified. However, foreigners staying in the city at the time were certain that the Sublime Porte had known beforehand of the planned attack [*of 26 August 1896, on the Ottoman Bank*] and had been informed of its details through its informers operating throughout the city. Curiously, the police neither arrested the bombers in advance nor prevented the storming of the bank. On the contrary, they let it happen and turned it into a welcome occasion for the massacre. (...)

The exact number of massacre victims has never been determined. There are some estimates of ten thousand or more dead. The damage to Armenian society was immense. Many took the experience as an opportunity to emigrate. They saw no future in their homeland.

The Armenian population of Constantinople decreased rapidly in the next ten years. It decreased by more than half to about 70,000. Many of those who remained moved to the sixth district. There, among co-religionists, they felt safer than in the other areas of Constantinople.

No sooner had the situation eased than uncertain times began for the Romyis. The city did not become calm (...). At that time, the Romyis of Constantinople lived in permanent fear for their future. Everyone thought of what had happened to the Armenians the previous summer and feared the worst if war broke out. (...) The Asderis family hoped that Greece would now refrain from its expansionist plans. Eurydike and Periklis dreamed of finally living in a country where peace reigned and where they could grow old in peace and without fear.<sup>37</sup>

The deportations during WWI mainly affected the Greek and Armenian intellectual and spiritual elite, as well as officially unreported Armenians who had moved in from the ‘provinces’. Surprisingly, in the section titled “Red Sunday,” Asderis reports only 235 Armenian notables arrested on 24 April 1915 and claims: “*Nothing happened to the remaining Constantinople Armenians.*”<sup>38</sup> It is true that due to the presence of numerous foreigners, including many diplomats in the Ottoman capital, the C.U.P. regime was reluctant to annihilate all the Greek and Armenian inhabitants. Nevertheless, the capital’s police chief announced that 30,000 Armenians had been deported from Constantinople by ship in the summer of 1915 alone; another 4,000 followed in the winter of 1915/16. 30,000 Armenians had already fled the city in the summer of 1915.<sup>39</sup> The German theologian,

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<sup>37</sup> Asderis, *Gate*, 87-88.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>39</sup> Johannes Lepsius (ed.), *Deutschland und Armenien 1914-1918: Sammlung diplomatischer Aktenstücke*

missionary and documentarist of the destruction of the Ottoman Armenians, Johannes Lepsius, reporting to the German Chancellor (head of government) on 29 November 1915, gave the figure of 10,000 Armenians who had been deported from Constantinople, most of whom were probably murdered in the Izmit mountains.<sup>40</sup> Contemporary Greek sources – the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Hellenic Embassy of the city – give detailed accounts of deportations of Greek Orthodox Ottomans from within the city and the province of Constantinople.<sup>41</sup>

## WWII, 6/7 September 1955

The next Turkish attempt at the final disposal of the Istanbul Romyis occurred during the Greek-Turkish peace negotiations of 1923, when the Turkish delegation wanted to “include the Romyis of Constantinople in the exchange and, in connection with this, to see to it that the Patriarchate left Constantinople.” The British Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon, who became involved in the negotiations as their coordinator, expressed opposition to such an intention: [the Romyis] “were crucial to the existence of Constantinople as a great city of commerce and industry, and without them it would be in danger of losing its authority, prosperity, and trade.”<sup>42</sup> Asderis adds:

What he [Curzon] actually meant was the fact that an expulsion of the Romyis would hit the considerable interests of the English and French economies hard. Not only were the executives of the large companies with foreign concessions still Romyis, but their proportion among the other employees of these companies varied between fifty and ninety percent. Not insignificant were also the numerous lawyers and commercial agents on whose assistance the European companies depended. Their help was necessary in order to continue to handle lucrative orders in the new state.<sup>43</sup>

However, the new state, the Republic of Turkey, continued to seize every opportunity to get rid of the last Christian minorities. The experiences of 1941-1944 reminded the Romyis and Armenians of C.U.P. practices: on the basis of an extended conscription law, only members of minorities were drafted from mid-April 1941.

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(Potsdam: Tempelverlag, 1919), 202.

40 Ibid., 200-201.

41 Ecumenical Patriarchate, *Persecution of the Greeks in Turkey 1914-1918* (Constantinople: The Hesperia Press, 1919); Ecumenical Patriarchate, *Black Book: The Expulsion and Martyrdom of the Greeks of Turkey, 1914-1918* (Constantinople 1919); Carroll N. Brown and Theodore P. Ion, *Persecution of the Greeks in Turkey since the beginning of the European War* (Oxford University Press, 1918); Alexander Papadopoulos, *Persecutions of the Greeks in Turkey before the European War: On the Basis of Official Documents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1919).

42 Asderis, *Gate*, 142.

43 Ibid.

Those called up had to report within two weeks. They were taken to assembly points, crammed into cattle wagons and sent toward Anatolia to an unknown destination. Identity checks were carried out on the streets of Istanbul to arrest those who were in hiding. Some were led away from their workplaces like criminals, even if they had just finished their regular military service a few days previously. They were not allowed to notify their relatives.<sup>44</sup>

As an Italian citizen, M. Asderis's grandfather escaped conscription; as a Greek citizen, his father escaped, too. The law on capital tax, introduced in 1942<sup>45</sup> was applied exclusively to non-Muslims. If the amount due from arbitrary tax 'calculations' could not be raised through the proceeds of auctions, the non-Muslim tax debtors – 2,500 people – were deported to Aşkale near Erzurum for forced labor. "*Greek-language newspapers reported on the work assignments, which took six hours of walking to get to, at an altitude of 1,200 metres, in temperatures of minus 15 degrees and in 1.50 meters of snow.*"<sup>46</sup>

Turkey's transition to a multiparty system and the influx of American capital temporarily improved the situation not only for minorities. "*Many bought back the properties that they had lost due to the wealth tax. Soon, half of the stores and many of the properties in Istiklal Caddesi belonged to the Romyis again. This upsurge, however, aroused dismissive feelings among nationalist-minded Turks.*"<sup>47</sup>

Ten years later, on 6 September 1955, pent-up and state-incited social envy led to the 'Septembriana' pogrom. Asderis, who witnessed the anti-Greek riots himself as a five-year-old, dedicated one of his most detailed chapters to them under the telling heading "In Fear of Death" quoting, among other things, the recollections of his relatives. A young Romyos, who was at the cinema at the time and initially did not notice the riots, found himself in the midst of the angry crowd as he was leaving the cinema and saw himself surrounded by "*wildly beating and shouting figures. In order not to attract attention, I took off my glasses and put them in my pocket. People who wore glasses were called dörtgözlü [four-eyes] by such people. For this type of individual, glasses were the sign of a better social position, of the wealthy. Under the gaze of this rabble in ecstasy, I was in real danger.*"<sup>48</sup>

Imposed invisibility as a means of survival also formed a basic experience of the Istanbul family described by Laura Cwiertnia. Asderis expands the traumatizing experience of Septembriana to include the aspect of *damnatio memoriae*, as a special type of punishment against famous personalities was called in the Roman Empire; in a figurative, general sense, this is the suppression of public memory, which continues to shape how the former presence and culture of Greeks and Armenians are dealt with in Turkey today.

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44 Ibid., 185.

45 "The Capital Tax was marked by chauvinist and racist concepts." See Faik Ökte, *The Tragedy of the Turkish Capital Tax* (London, Sydney, Wolfeboro, New Hampshire: Croom Helm, 1987), 94.

46 Asderis, *Gate*, 189.

47 Ibid., 202.

48 Ibid., 223.

To what took place, today people say Σεπτεμβριανά [Septembriana]. The word is difficult to translate, it means roughly September matters. However, I remember somewhat differently. People often spoke of September matters afterwards, when they were among themselves and felt safe, for example at home, when they knew that no stranger could listen. In public, on the street or in cafés, one was afraid that a casual passerby would pick up the word and, even if he did not understand it, phonetically associate it with the month of September. They feared that the mention of this month from the mouth of a Romyos might cause trouble. They preferred to avoid this and instead used another word that was not so easy to understand phonetically. One said simply Γεγονότα [yeyonóta]. This meant events. (...) Later, among the Romyis, when someone spoke of the events, he did not mean an event such as a brawl after a soccer game or riots during a demonstration, but exclusively what had happened that night. (...) Moreover, it became the key word for a collectively suffered pain that was better left silent in public. It became a synonym for our silent, common life.<sup>49</sup>

## From a German perspective

Mirko Heinemann's monograph *The Last Byzantines: The Expulsion of the Greeks from the Black Sea* bears the subtitle "A search for traces." Similar to the protagonists of the authors Poladyan and Cwiertnia, M. Heinemann approaches a region that is foreign to him in terms of tourism: Pontus and, in particular, the city of Ordu (today Altınordu; Greek Kotyora). There he, too, entrusts himself to a local Cicerone, Tansel, who knows the place well; his Muslim grandmother came to Ordu from the Macedonian Drama during the compulsory Turkish-Greek population exchange of 1923. But Tansel has no reservations about Greeks. With him or alone, Heinemann roams the largely uninhabited, former Greek quarter of Taşbaşı, which reminds him atmospherically of his youthful experiences in Kavala, Greece. Significantly, M. Heinemann has titled this chapter 'The old homeland,' for he emphasizes Ordu's commonality with the city of Kavala with which he is familiar:

Where are all the people who once lived here?" the cat seems to ask. Why are the rooms behind the bay windows, half-timbering and facades, lifeless? I think that nobody wants to live in the old town and I know why. If there are no ghosts here, where are they? But how did this place come to be depopulated? And what is my role here? I want to revive these houses, I spontaneously think. Not in the literal sense, but each of these houses holds a story. It is also my story. Everything looks, feels and smells as familiar here as it did in Greece, as if I had spent my vacations here as a child and not in Kavala, as if I had bought the *koulouria*, the sesame curls that are

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49 Asderis, *Gate*, 231.



called simit here, in the Düz Mahalle near the Fidangöris. My parents would have been waiting for me for breakfast on the terrace overlooking the Black Sea.<sup>50</sup>

Already in the second chapter Heinemann narrates what little he knows about the fate of his Pontic Greek grandmother Alexandra Markopoulou (née Tatsou) thanks to family lore: on 9 August 1917 Alexandra embarked on one of the twelve or so Russian warships which, coming from Trabzon, blew up an ammunition depot and destroyed an airfield in Ordu.

When the Greeks realized that the Russians would leave again, panic broke out. Shouts rang out: “The Turks will take revenge on us. Leave your homes!” Among the hundreds who flocked toward the Russian ships was a girl who was 15 years old. (...) From somewhere shouts rang out: “*Women and children first!*” The people pushed the girl along until she was suddenly standing in front on the landing stage. A Russian sailor lifted her down into the boat. Stiff with shock, she let it happen. She only came to her senses when the boat left and the men steered towards the ships with strong strokes of the oars. (...) The girl could not have known that this would be her last view of her home town. She would never again see the house where she had been born and raised.<sup>51</sup>

Alexandra escaped Turkish deportation. With a deadline of eight days after the announcement of the deportation order, the approximately 3,500 Greeks remaining in Ordu were deported in seven convoys via Mesudiye, Bazar Çiflik and Niksar – a total of 200 kilometres on foot – to a camp near Erbaa on the orders of the local authorities as well as the commander of the Ottoman army, Vehib Paşa. 40 percent of the deportees from Ordu died of epidemics and malnutrition there.<sup>52</sup>

Drawing on contemporary accounts, Heinemann recounts the fate of the Pontic Greeks during the last decade of Ottoman rule in four of his 17 chapters. Another chapter, titled ‘The Empty Houses: What Happened to the Armenians?’ describes the extermination of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire and especially in Ordu, where two Armenian families are said to still live today:

Some Armenians in Ordu had been separated from the others. They were made to board two boats. It was said that they were to be taken to the nearby port city of Samsun. The boats’ passengers were drowned in the sea on the way there. The boats returned empty two hours later, eyewitnesses reported. A short time later the bodies washed up on shore.<sup>53</sup>

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50 Mirko Heinemann, *Die letzten Byzantiner: Die Vertreibung der Griechen vom Schwarzen Meer; eine Spurensuche* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2019), 110.

51 Heinemann, *Byzantiner*, 19-20.

52 Ibid., 162.

53 Ibid., 115.



Heinemann strives for a differentiating, factual, and non-partisan narration. In his historical accounts, he repeatedly points out that there were protests against deportations among the Turkish or Muslim population, or people that stood up for their neighbors or took persecuted Christians in. This particular emphasis seems to stem from the German perspective concerning memory politics, which Heinemann emphasized in his introduction as also having shaped his perception. There he writes about his research interests in the history of Turkish-Greek relations:

Greeks and Turks lived in our West German town. They were classmates, neighbors, guest workers and thus my father's colleagues in the steel factory or operators of small restaurants. I had nothing against them. Their way of life was even familiar to me. (...)

"I could not understand the hostility between Greeks and Turks. Language and culture were different, but the culture seemed quite alike to me. Where did this antipathy of my Greek relatives come from, which seemed to be of biblical vigor and reminded me of the story of Cain and Abel? The darkness in which my family's past lay made me uncomfortable. Did my existence possibly have more to do with this enmity than I wanted to admit? And why could I do so little with the attributions that were served up to me in Greece? Was I too much of a German, who reflexively rejected criticism of the foreigner because he was plagued by a guilty conscience instilled in him in countless school lessons about the Holocaust? (...) My search for answers led inevitably into the past.<sup>54</sup>

The vocabulary with which Heinemann treats the historical facts in detail and in a way that is easily comprehensible for uninformed readers probably also originates from this specific "German perspective." This vocabulary is ambivalent: In the subtitle of his chapter titled 'Blutige Erde' (Bloody Earth),<sup>55</sup> the author speaks of the extermination of the Pontic Greeks and thus uses a term that is synonymous with genocide. But in general, Heinemann uses the term "ethnic cleansing," which unfortunately still predominates in secondary literature. This term is not only unqualified or undefined in legal terms or under international law, but also stems from the slang of genocide perpetrators, because it originates from a dehumanizing view of the victims. Instead of making his own statement, Heinemann addresses the question of whether the crimes committed by the Young Turks and Kemalists against the Ottoman Greeks constituted genocide in his concluding chapter under the heading "Genocide – or not?" by citing expert opinions: according to Heinemann, the genocide researcher Tessa Hofmann, the Greek historian Theodosios Kyriakidis, and the *International Association of Genocide Scholars* (IAGS) stand for the inclusive use of the term genocide in the Greek context. On 1 December

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54 Ibid., 14-15.

55 Heinemann uses here the title of the novel "Ματωμένα χώματα" ('Matomena khomata', Blood-soaked or Bloody Earth, 1962) by Dido Sotiriou (1909-2004).

2007, the IAGS issued a resolution classifying the crimes committed against all Christian ethnic groups in the Ottoman Empire as genocide.<sup>56</sup> Heinemann, on the other hand, cites the German genocide researcher Boris Barth as well as the Turkish-born U.S. historian Taner Akçam as examples of an exclusive, hierarchizing assessment; he quotes B. Barth as saying, “*During the war, the Young Turks took a series of anti-Greek measures that can be described as ethnic cleansing, but not as genocide.*”<sup>57</sup>

Barth still held this view in 2006 in his monograph *Völkermord: Genozid im 20. Jahrhundert* (Genocide in the 20th Century). In the meantime, he has altered his view and accepts the crimes committed against Ottoman Greeks in the period 1912 to 1922 as genocide as well. B. Barth told me this in 2016 at a conference in Frankfurt/Main. However, M. Heinemann does not leave the last word in this discussion of the genocide question in connection with the Ottoman Greeks, especially the Pontic Greeks, to a scientist, but to the then German head of state Joachim Gauck. A few days before the official commemoration hour in the German Bundestag on the occasion of the centenary of the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide, the German President said in an address on April 2015:

Without distinction, men, women, children and old people were deported, sent on death marches, abandoned without any protection and without any food in the steppe and desert, burned alive, hounded to death, beaten to death and shot. This planned and calculated criminal act hit the Armenians for one reason only: because they were Armenians. Similar action hit their fellow sufferers, the Assyrians or Arameans and the Pontic Greeks.<sup>58</sup>

The European Parliament and Pope Francis had previously expressed themselves in the same inclusive sense.

## **Conclusion**

The four intergenerational novels of German-speaking authors of Armenian and Greek descent discussed here deal not least with the question of what the Ottoman genocide, the loss of homeland and the post-genocidal experiences of suffering mean for the identity of the authors and their protagonists. Looking for answers, the protagonists or the author Heinemann go in search of traces to Armenia and Pontus, without ultimately committing themselves: Poladyan’s protagonist Helen leaves Armenia and the Pontic city

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56 Heinemann, *Byzantiner*; 248. The resolution passed on 1 December 2007 with the support of fully 83 percent of IAGS members who voted; it was first published in a press release on 15 December 2007. Cf. also <http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/2007-december.php>.

57 Ibid., 243.

58 Ibid., 249.

of Ordu without being recognizably touched by her respective discoveries. L. Cwiertnia's protagonist Karla, or rather the omniscient narrator, succeeds in reconstructing the Kuyumciyan family history, but it remains open at the end whether Karla will carry the burden of her Armenian legacy, symbolized in her ancestor's gold bangle, or, as her father advises, throw it away. Mirko Heinemann takes refuge in an only seemingly neutral German perspective, which allows him to view and judge the suffering of his ancestors from a quasi-uninvolved point of view, without having to commit himself emotionally and judgmentally.

Michael Asderis, on the other hand, succeeds in making this emotional statement as a matter of course, presumably because of his generational affiliation; with his birth year of 1950, he is the oldest of the four authors analyzed here, and the story he tells is also, at least in part, his own. Unlike his three colleagues, Asderis has personally undergone what he writes about. Asderis is a *Romyos*, a 'last Byzantine' and not just an author writing about the *Romyis*. Constantinople/Istanbul – Polis – is his immediate home, the place of his childhood and youth. The fate of the Armenians and Greeks of this city is his own. This fate includes the social invisibility of the Christians, the discrimination they suffer and their constant fear of renewed persecution, which is also impressively reconstructed by Cwiertnia.

At the end of its 150-year history, the Christian Asderis family was expelled from Istanbul. Since 1988, M. Asderis has visited Polis, albeit at long intervals, and describes these travel experiences in his final chapter ("The Visitor"). But again, he distinguishes himself from his three other colleagues even in this formal tourist situation. For he does not travel abroad and discover a *terra incognita* but returns to his painfully familiar homeland.

Asderis was often asked during these trips to Istanbul why he spoke Turkish so well. In the last lines of his book, for example, a cab driver asked him that question:

I tell him that I come from an old Istanbul family and that we were expelled fifty years ago. Surprisingly, he is one of the very few who have heard about it. After we have conversed for a while, he says, 'Then you've been lucky. You are now in Germany. I'm sure you're better off there than many people here and you can come and visit anytime.'

'I'm not a stranger who comes to visit,' I say. 'I belong to this city. It is my home.'  
The cab driver is silent.<sup>59</sup>

The pain of patricide, which for the survivors of the Ottoman genocide was and is inseparable from their deportation from society and life in Turkey, has been portrayed best, and unpretentiously, as well as convincingly comprehensible by Michael Asderis, followed by Laura Cwiertnia.

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<sup>59</sup> Asderis, *Gate*, 323.

## BOOK REVIEW

From Adana to Der Zor. A review of Bedross Der Matossian, *The Horrors of Adana: Revolution and Violence in the Early Twentieth Century*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2022, 343 pp.

Reviewed by Matthias Bjørnlund, historian.

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A review essay, in which we move in time from 1909 to 1918. In space from Adana over Aleppo to Der Zor in the Syrian desert. And, on this journey ever further to the southeast of the Ottoman Empire, we move in scale of destruction, from the massacre of tens of thousands to the finalization of the genocide of 1,5 million Armenians or more. We begin with the 1909 massacres at Adana in the wake of the Young Turk/Unionist revolution of 1908, the event that first brought to power such main perpetrators as Mehmet Talaat and Ahmed Cemal – the latter particularly tying the events in Cilicia and Syria together in person.

Bloodbath in Armenia. 30.000 people killed? It is reported to local papers from Messina that two Turkish regiments were sent ashore on Saturday and immediately dispatched to Adana. The night between Sunday and Monday they have perpetrated a horrible bloodbath on the local Armenians and set the houses on fire. 1.000 Armenians burnt to death, and the fleeing Armenians were shot down by the soldiers. In the province of Adana, it is estimated that 30.000 Armenians are killed. The material losses are enormous.<sup>1</sup>

This, from the front page of the Norwegian daily newspaper *Sandefjords Dagblad*, 30 April 1909, is but one of thousands from around the world dealing almost in real time with a new round of massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, as the papers had done during the 1890s Abdülhamid massacres. Of course, as the question mark and the estimated number of casualties indicate, getting precise information and an accurate overview of seemingly chaotic events most often takes time. In the case of Adana 1909, we basically had to wait until 2022 and Bedross Der Matossian's book to get a proper account of the events.

Der Matossian himself is rather modest about his aims and achievements, but I do not have to be, so here goes: *The Horrors of Adana* is the first broad, deep, and analytical take on the Adana massacres. The introduction alone is a tour de force, giving us an overview of the relevant literature and discussions pertaining to the main question: How do we

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<sup>1</sup> *Sandefjords Dagblad*, 30 April 1909.

explain the massacres and destruction of Armenians in and around Adana in 1909? To answer that question, we begin in the city of Adana, the epicenter of the violence in 1909, with its public space – its rapidly modernizing agora – increasingly filled with emotions, ranging from excitement to anxiety and resentment, and with rumors, manufactured or readily instrumentalized and acted upon, especially during and after the 1908/9 revolution/counter-revolution.

How and why, then, does this “well-organized conspiracy against the hated Armenians,” as a German eyewitness puts it, happen?<sup>2</sup> Der Matossian deals in detail with the longer socioeconomic and political lines, but here we jump right to the immediate context: how the revolution and counter-revolution upsets the existing ethnoreligious balance, enfranchising and emancipating some, at least for a while and on the surface, like the local Armenians and supporters of the new Young Turk regime in general. While many Muslims, especially the supporters of the ancient regime, experiences relative deprivation. And chooses to interpret an Armenian cultural revival, flourishing under a (relatively) democratic constitution, as preparations for an insurrection to bring back the medieval Cilician kingdom.

The flipside of the Janus-faced new freedoms is thus that the indigenous Armenians in the economic powerhouse that is Adana – where much is at stake – are suddenly appearing assertive in the face of the dominant Muslim groups. And inadvertently end up visible and exposed, convenient scapegoats for those groups disengaged from discourses of ethnoreligious equality, and less able to benefit from socioeconomic change and the overall twists and turns of this new, fragile experiment with Ottoman modernity heralded by the Unionist revolution.

The author’s detailed micro level analysis of the actions and reactions of perpetrators, bystander, and victims – who fight back, outnumbered and outgunned – is dispassionate, evenhanded, and yet reads like a thriller: tensions rise, and then begin the killings, the rapes, forced conversions, and the pillaging, burning, and plunder during Easter of 1909. The ignition: a brawl between an Armenian and a Turk. False rumors are spread, including from the center in Constantinople, emotions run high, leading to the first large-scale attacks on the Armenian Quarter in Adana, attacks that are spreading to the whole region and beyond, including to the province of Aleppo. Resentment and anxiety find an outlet. And, I would add, transforms perpetrators by creating joy in the process, since the ugly truth is that very many participants in such transgressions find it uplifting to be part of “righteous” mobs, with a license to get high on abusing and destroying “evil.”

The immediate end-result: at least 20.000 murdered Armenians and other Christians, some 2.000 Muslims killed in self-defense, and a botched attempt at holding accountable the main perpetrators, found among supporters of both the old and the new regime. Order is restored, not least thank to Ahmed Cemal’s stint as governor of the region, and

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<sup>2</sup> *Hejmdal*, 11 May 1909, 1.

humanitarian aid from Armenian, Ottoman Christian, Jewish, and Western organizations pour in, but the Armenian community is devastated and severely decimated, subdued economically and culturally, as was a main motive of the massacres all along.

Drawing a direct causal line from these events to the genocide only a handful of years later is difficult, as Der Matossian states in yet another nuanced and informed discussion in the book's conclusion. But arguably, the Adana massacres continue an Ottoman culture of impunity, radicalize the Young Turks, create even deeper intercommunal mistrust, and show once more that massacre is a handy tool in the toolbox when it comes to "solving" perceived ethnoreligious, socioeconomic, and demographic problems. So, though a new balance is struck in Adana after 1909, this all points towards 1915 and the destruction of the Christian populations in the empire.

Because a balance of terror this fragile is not a balance at all, as we see in the Ottoman and other cases. Anyway, it is not a balance worth preserving since, all virtues of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic aside, there is a massacre here and a genocide there waiting to happen. Chios 1822, Lebanon 1860, Dersim 1937-1938, yet another invasion of Syria coming up, the list goes on. As an Armenian or Assyrian in 1909, the question is to reform or not to reform, to thrive, economically, politically, religiously, or not to thrive. Damned if you do, damned if you do not. Because you are acutely aware that continuing life as a second-class citizen in your own country is unviable, yet it is equally clear that the dominant groups always have massacre to resort to if you stick out your neck.

To sum up: Der Matossian's *The Horrors of Adana* is the book we could have hoped for on the Adana massacres. I have few issues, one of them being the oft-repeated claim of Western indifference to Muslim suffering: "In the European view, it was always the Muslim who killed the Christian." Racism, also in the form of anti-Muslim/Turkish sentiments, is indeed widespread at the time, but very many Westerners during the 1890s massacres, Adana 1909, and the Armenian Genocide are not only decidedly anti-Armenian (and against Jews and "Oriental" Christians in general), but also pro-Turkish/Muslim, defending the empire as well as its excesses. In addition, they are often quite influential, particularly in Germany, ranging in ideological backgrounds from Conservatives supporting the Sultan and the imperial status quo, to Liberal intellectuals despising the empire's non-Muslim "soulless modernizers," and Socialists seeing Ottoman Christians and Jews through a Marxist lens as the "Comprador" oppressor class holding the Muslim peasants and workers down.

Moreover, related to this discussion, there is the criticism, also brought forward by Der Matossian, that Western aid to, and intervention on behalf of, Ottoman Armenians leaves out or discriminates against Muslims. I.e., that we in 2022 should expect all Western humanitarianism in the decades around 1900 to be truly universalistic. In my mind, such criticism is somewhat anachronistic and unfair. It is hardly surprising that European and

American humanitarianism is heavily influenced by Christian solidarity – if it is not too expensive in economic or geopolitical terms. Just like notions of “Muslim solidarity” and pan-Islamism are widespread during those times.<sup>3</sup>

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3 See, e.g., Matthias Bjørnlund, “Virtuous Victims? Imagining Armenians in the West,” *Armenian Weekly*, April 2012, 38-42; idem, “Adana and Beyond: Revolution and massacre in the Ottoman Empire seen through Danish eyes, 1908/9,” *Haigazian Armenological Review* 30 (2010): 125-156; Alp Yenen, “Pan-Islamism (Ottoman Empire),” in *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, April 2020, [https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/pan-islamism\\_ottoman\\_empire](https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/pan-islamism_ottoman_empire); Mehrdad Kia, “Pan-Islamism in Late Nineteenth-Century Iran,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 1 (1996): 30-52.



Khatchig Mouradian, *The Resistance Network: The Armenian Genocide and Humanitarianism in Ottoman Syria, 1915-1918*, East Lansing: Michigan University Press, 2021, 233 pp.

Reviewed by Matthias Bjørnlund, historian.

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We now move to another book on 1915 and beyond. The Armenian Genocide has begun, and a main protagonist from Adana, Ahmed Cemal, is not only at the very top of the Unionist party, but also governor and military commander of the neighboring region, Aleppo. We begin in the middle of things:

The next day we catch up with our battalion again, they have stayed in "Nesebin," here we can rest for a few days. There are lots of prisoners here, they are Englishmen and Indians, they come from "Kut-el-amara," about 300 km south of "Baghdad", they are on route to "Konia." 13-14.000 were taken prisoner down there, they sell all they got to get a few Turkish coins to buy just a little bit to eat, their catering is meager, I sure would not want to be a prisoner of the Turks.

Witnessing such cruelty, well, it is almost indescribably what goes on down here. We sometimes meet large groups of "Armenians" chained together by their wrists, those starving, tormented human beings, "infidel dogs," as the Turks say. Armenians are indeed a Christian people. Seeing their ragged clothing, their pleading looks when they meet us with their arms stretched out, begging for help, and begging for alms, seeing this cut through the heart, we would have liked to mow down the whole of the gendarmerie with machine guns, but, alas, we were not allowed to do so.

We gave all the bread we had to them, but the gendarmerie gave us evil eyes. It is sad that some people are tormented like that. The Turks went to their country, stole all they had, burned their houses, the children were killed, the girls were sold, and the men first had to work for as long as they could, and, when they broke down, they were forced into the desert to become food for the jackals. Later on, an "Armenian camp" was established, Karen Jeppe has done a great deal of work here to ease the suffering of the distressed Armenians.

Sometimes one [Armenian] managed to escape, we, too, had a couple with us, because here the Turks did not dare retrieve them, we could take a servant, and, for as long as it lasted, the Turks would be off his back. The next couple of days we meet many English and Indian prisoners. One morning we also meet the Swedish naturalist Sven Hedin, he is on his way from the East to Constantinople. 24 June we arrive at "Mosul."<sup>4</sup>

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4 Heinrich Jessen, *Krigen 1914-1918 og mine Erindringer derfra*, privattryk u.å., excerpt from <https://denstorkrig1914-1918.dk/24-juni-1916-ulykkelige-armeniere-boernene-slog-de-ihjel-pigerne-solgte-de/>, accessed 02.03.2022. All translations are mine.

Heinrich Jessen, an ethnic Dane conscripted (unwillingly, like most Danes in Germany) into the German army, writes this about encountering Armenians on death marches in the Syrian desert in the summer of 1916. And meeting Sven Hedin, a leading Swedish pro-Turkish and pro-German intellectual, who spends time and energy defending the genocide that he, too, witnesses. Heinrich Jessen serves in a machine gun battalion and reacts frankly (and, I would add on a personal note, refreshingly) with anger to the sight of limitless suffering, in the middle of nowhere, far from any frontline. So angry are he and his comrades that their trigger fingers are itching to gun down the torturers of the defenseless Armenians. Because this is not war, this is genocide. Resentment is Janus-faced too, like so many other emotions, it can be a vice, facilitating mass murder, and a virtue, leading to righteous anger.<sup>5</sup>

How to make just some sense, then, of such horror in the Syrian desert? We have snippets by Jessen and a host of survivors and other eyewitnesses casting rays of light here and there on “what went on down here” during the Armenian Genocide. And we have Raymond Kévorkian’s magisterial treatment of the second phase of the genocide, the extermination of the survivors of the death marches.<sup>6</sup> But many pieces of the puzzle have still been missing. Khatchig Mouradian sets out to fill the voids, and he succeeds. We now have an impressively straightforward, well-researched, and convincing account of how the genocide of the Armenians, and the mostly local and humanitarian, resistance to that state-initiated and state-led campaign of destruction, played out in Syria 1915-1918.

Truth is precision, and Mouradian, like Der Matossian, goes all the way in his extensive use of archives and a myriad of other sources, with a good and creative use of endnotes, to paint a detailed, nuanced, and vivid picture of the project of destruction, and how that project was met with various forms of local Armenian resistance that accompanied the genocide during all stages. Because just as genocide denial is hardly the last stage of genocide, but rather a companion to every stage of the annihilation process, so, fortunately, is resistance. A resistance that continues to this very day from many corners against the denial of fact, reason, and memory by the Turkish state and various fellow travelers.<sup>7</sup>

What is resistance to genocide, then? As Mouradian shows, it has many forms other than taking up arms, as desperate Armenians did at locations such as Musa Dagh and Urfa. In an overview, he points to how resistance has been defined in genocide literature as covering a broad range of actions and refusals to act, from organizing relief and refuge to spreading news about the annihilation, and to simply going on living. Mouradian chooses a rather narrow definition of resistance, i.e., “actions carried out illegally, or against the sanction and will of the authorities, to save Armenian deportees from

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5 Thomas Brudholm, *Resentment’s Virtue: Jean Améry and the Refusal to Forgive* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2008).

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

7 See Gregory H. Stanton’s “Ten Stages of Genocide,” <https://www.genocidewatch.com/tenstages>, accessed 13.02.2022.

annihilation.”<sup>8</sup> I disagree with that definition, as it excludes aiding refugees in Aleppo before the authorities crack down and start implementing the genocide there. It is still not just relief, but resistance to a genocidal scheme and regime – and still dangerous, as one’s actions at some point can lead to persecution.

But that is a minor point. In any event, soon there are ox carts for garbage disposal in the streets of Aleppo picking up dead or dying children to be put in mass graves. Just like in Adana, destruction and resistance begins here in the narrative, within the cityscape, the epicenter of despair, and moves to the periphery. How does it come to this, what to do about it, and how does it end? Mouradian explains this through the lens of the Armenian victims in Ottoman Syria, the destination of most death marches, the location of most concentration camps, and where most massacres during the second phase of the genocide took place. In 1915, the city of Aleppo becomes a hub for Armenians on death marches from the rest of the empire. Due to local circumstances, it is possible for Armenian city dwellers to extend humanitarian aid to their compatriots largely unhindered for a while.

Those circumstances include help from other nondominant groups, Syriacs, Christian Arabs, etc., and some Muslim notables’ resistance or indifference to the genocide. Mouradian convincingly argues that Cemal rather plays all sides expertly, and largely lets the genocide run its course, facilitating it here, ignoring it there. But what is most vital for survival has been quite neglected by scholars (including myself), as the author shows: Armenian agency, such as extensive lobbying, bribing, fundraising, establishing networks of informants, extending all sorts of aid to the persecuted, food, shelter, vaccines, etc. In short, acting like responsible, caring Ottoman citizens, rather than the disloyal terrorists the Young Turks claims them to be in the official propaganda.

Such agency – what has been called “victim agency” in somewhat related settings – saves thousands of lives long before Western aid begins to arrive from the outside, despite the dangerous circumstances and profoundly uneven power structure, where Armenians are pitted against the full power of a state bent on destroying them.<sup>9</sup> But with the arrival during 1915 of hardcore Unionists to enforce the complete destruction of the deportees, humanitarianism moves underground. And moves increasingly from the relative safety of the urban setting and into the open, the desert, where the Armenians end up, in concentration camps, transit camps, and labor camps in their hundreds of thousands. Camps complete with the Ottoman version of *kapos* and other collaborators facing, perhaps, “choiceless choices,” at least in some instances, and with the endless degradation and murder we know from, say, Nazi and Soviet camps.<sup>10</sup>

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8 Mouradian, *The Resistance Network*, xx.

9 See, e.g., Elizabeth M. Schneider, “Feminism and the False Dichotomy of Victimization and Agency,” *New York Law School Law Review* 38 (1993): 387.

10 “Choiceless choice” was originally coined by Lawrence Langer to denote impossible situations faced by Jews during the Holocaust: Lawrence Langer, “The Dilemma of Choice in the Deathcamps,” *Centerpoint: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 4, no. 1 (1980): 53-58.

Armenians are sent to the desert to die, and Mouradian's discussion of these camps, and of the phenomenon of concentration camps in general, should be required reading for all students of mass violence. So should his treatment of how the network of camps are shut down in 1916, usually after no more than a year. Too much disease, annihilation is too slow, Armenians are still too many, so the massacres of hundreds of thousands begin, thereby finally "answering" "The Armenian Question" that ends up being pushed all the way down to the desert. Supplementing Mouradian's account, here are two testimonies from Danish archives and contemporary publications on the short, precarious cycle of life and death for Armenians in 1915-1916.

First there is a doctor from Aintab, Khosrov Krikorian, who witnesses how seasoned perpetrator Zeki Bey arrives at Der Zor in 1916 as the new governor, begins by firing local civil servants "too friendly towards the Armenians," and proceeds to organize massacres with the help of a few hundred gendarmes and groups of local Chechen tribesmen, some of them led by one Suleiman Bey. Krikorian also overhears a massacre of 20,000 Armenian men, women, and children, the rifles, the cries of the victims, and the "deep, expressive 'Allah, Allah, Allah'" of the perpetrators. And then there is this testimony, related to a Danish priest in Greece in 1922:

The first ones to arrive in Der-Sâd [Der Zor] were not worse off there than they were at other places. They received a little land to till, but after some months an order came that all men had to meet ten hours from there to receive tools. They entered the barracks – 'Take off all your clothes and put money and rings on a blanket, fold your clothes neatly in another corner,' and then they were herded, naked, out in the field ten minutes from there and lined up. A detachment of Chechens came from the front, and a detachment of soldiers came from behind. This was the first massacre in the Der-Sâd district in March 1916.<sup>11</sup>

In conclusion, of sorts: why study mass murder, why write these books, why read them? The books themselves provide some rather clear answers, and let us ask new, more informed questions. And then there is the answer by British author D. M. Thomas, when asked why he, as it is put, is obsessed with violence – first a novel about the Holocaust (*The White Hotel*, 1981), then one about the Armenian Genocide (*Ararat*, 1983)? His answer: "But that's the story of the twentieth century."<sup>12</sup> It is, and of the 21st century too, and yet none of this is history, really, as everyone who has been to Der Zor with their eyes open can testify to. The bones are still there, like ghosts of murders past, and since then Islamic State came by, adding new slave markets, new forced conversions, new massacres.

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11 *Danish National Archives* (Rigsarkivet), pk. 15, "Arminier-Missionen. Diverse skildringer vedr. Arminierne [sic], 1906-1927, machine-written testimony in Danish.; H. P. Larsen, *Blodet og Taarernes Land i Europa. En Orienterelse 1922*, Industrimissionen i Armenien 1922, p. 36.

12 Donald Michael Thomas, *Memories and Hallucinations: A Memoir* (New York: Viking Penguin 1988), 56.

## REPRINT

Regina Galustyan, Robert Tatoyan, “Introduction,” in *Memoirs of Survivors of the Armenian Genocide*, 7. Aram Mantashyan, *Aram Could Not be Seito*.<sup>1</sup> Sokrat Mkrtychyan, *Memoirs*, eds. Regina Galustyan and Robert Tatoyan, Yerevan: Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute Foundation, 2022, 163 pp.

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In 2020, the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute Foundation launched the series of books titled *Memoirs of Survivors of the Armenian Genocide*, with the symbolic volume *Ravished Armenia: The Story of Aurora Mardiganian, the Christian Girl who lived through the Great Massacres*, as one of the first memories on the Armenian Genocide. The aim of the series is to publish handwritten memories kept in the archive of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute.

The two memoirs that were combined in one book and presented in volume 7 of this series were first published in Armenian (volume 4 of the series) and then translated into English by Ara Stepan Melkonian and are the second English language memories in the series. Volume 7 represents the two survivors’ eyewitness accounts of the Armenian Genocide. Footnotes were added by the editors to detail and clarify geographical and place names in Western Armenia quoted in the text, as well to clarify dialect and word usage. Use has been made of the appropriate volumes of “Dictionary of Toponymy of Armenia and Adjacent Territories” (in Armenian).<sup>2</sup> The population figures for Armenian settlements have been collated from Raymond Kevorkian and Paul Paboudjian’s book, “The Armenians in the Ottoman Empire on the Eve of the Genocide” (in French).<sup>3</sup>

Aram Mantashyan’s story, which is the first memoirs in the book, is a narrative of a boy who, with his family, was deported from the village of Mshaknots in the district of Shabin-Karahisar. Young Aram shared the fate of the children who, during the genocide, were converted and made into slaves but who later re-established their former Armenian identities. Through this narrative he transfers his and thousands of others’ experiences to future generations.

The memoir *Aram could not be Seito* was written by Aram Misak Mantashyan (1906-1981) who was born in the village of Mshaknots in the Sushehir (Entires or Andreas) sub-district of Shabin-Karahisar district, province of Sebastia of the Ottoman Empire. The

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1 The manuscript is held in the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute’s scientific archives, section 8, collection 69, file 56. The title of the original manuscript is *1915 հայկական կոտորածներից* [From the Massacres of 1915]. The editor, Regina Galustyan, felt it was better titled with a phrase from the author’s text, considering that it suits Aram Mantashyan’s narrative more closely.

2 T. Kh. Hakobyan, St. T. Melik-Bakhshyan, H. Kh. Barsegyan, *Հայաստանի և հարակից շրջանների տեղանունների բառարան* [Dictionary of Toponymy of Armenia and Adjacent Territories], Vol. 1, Ա-Դ [A-D] (Yerevan: Yerevan State University, 1986), Vol. 2, Դ-Կ [D-K] (1988), Vol. 3, Կ-Ն [K-N] (1991), Vol. 4, Ն-Վ [N-V] (1998), Vol. 5, Տ-Ֆ [T-F] (2001).

3 Raymond H. Kevorkian, Paul B. Paboudjian, *Lés Arméniens dans l’Empire Ottoman à la vielle du Génocide* (Paris: ARHIS, 1992).

village was mostly inhabited by Armenians and, in about 1910, had approximately 300 Armenian houses.<sup>4</sup> The population's occupations consisted of farming, animal husbandry and various trades. It had two churches and one school with 55 pupils.

The historian Raymond Kevorkian states that in 1915 the village of Mshaknots had a population of 844, noting that it was one of the most densely-populated villages in the district.<sup>5</sup> According to the report prepared on 28th October 1920 by Sahak Sarkisian, the overseer of the Shabin-Karahisar region who worked for the Armenian National Relief agency under the Constantinople patriarchate's aegis, Mshaknots village was made up of 350 houses, from which only 15-18 houses were stable in 1919.<sup>6</sup>

The population of the Sushehir sub-district was either killed on the spot or deported during the second half of June 1915, the actions being led by the local governor Ahmed Hilmi. The caravan of deported Armenians followed the Akn – Malatya route.<sup>7</sup> Aram was exiled with his mother and sister. Providing valuable insights into village life prior to the genocide and the family's deportation, the main narrative begins with the crossing of the Kirkgyoz bridge over the River Euphrates near Malatya. Aram went ahead of his mother: "I tried to get even a small amount of bread and get it to my mother." He got lost and wasn't able to find any bread. Thus, began the wandering of nine-year old boy, with all its consequences, in the Kurdish-populated villages of Malatya region.

It is important to refer to the Ottoman Turkish government's actions regarding children during the Armenian Genocide and to put Aram Mantashyan's experiences into context.

The forced Islamisation and Turkification of Armenian children (and women) during the Armenian Genocide was one of the methods used to destroy the Armenian nation as such. The forced transfer of Armenian children to the Turkish community was the classic case of the forcible child transfer from a victim's group to a perpetrator's.<sup>8</sup> The act of the "forcibly transferring children of the group to another group" with intent to destroy in whole or in part any national, ethnic, racial or religious group is enshrined in the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Accordingly, the criminal aim of destroying a group by pre-meditated actions, with individual children being forcibly transferred to another environment is seen as a component of the general action which is to destroy the child's previous, in this case Armenian, identity and to Turkify him/her. Therefore, the singular reasoning of "aiding,"

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4 T. Kh. Hakobyan, St. T. Melik-Bakhshyan, H. Kh. Barsegyan, *Հայաստանի և հարակից շրջանների տեղանունների բառարան* [Dictionary of Toponymy of Armenia and Adjacent Territories], Vol. 3, Կ-Ն [K-N], edited by T. Kh. Hakobyan (Yerevan: Yerevan State University, 1991), 847.

5 Kévorkian, Paboudjian, *Les Arméniens dans l'Empire Ottoman*, 249.

6 Matteos Eplighatian, *Ազգային խնամատարություն, Ընդհանուր տեղեկագիր, առաջին վեցամսեայ, 1 մայիս 1919 – 31 հոկտեմբեր 1919* [National Relief Organisation, General Report, first six months, 1 May – 31 October 1919] (Antelias: The Armenian Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia, 1985), 489.

7 Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London-New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 459.

8 Edita Gzoyan, «Երեխաների բռնի տեղափոխումը որպես ցեղասպանական գործողություն. ձևավորումից դեպի քրեականացում» [Forcible Child Transfer as a Genocidal Act: from Conceptualization to Criminalization], *Ts'eghaspanagitakan handes*, no. 1 (2020): 104.



“saving” or “protecting” children are not seen as mitigating circumstances in legal terms, although genocide denialists continue to present them as such.<sup>9</sup>

The forcible transfer and further assimilation of Armenian children into the Turkish environment during the Armenian Genocide was premeditated and organised by the nationalist ideologists and high-ranking politicians, thus becoming one of the methods of genocide. The government enacted orders and laws to ensure that it was organised and ran smoothly. Historian Ara Sarafian determined four methods of child transfer:

1. The “voluntary conversion” at the beginning of the genocide to avoid persecution;
2. The placing of children in special government orphanages having the aim of assimilating them;
3. The distribution of Armenian children to Turkish families by Turkish organisations;
4. The selection of individual children by Muslims.<sup>10</sup>

In the last case, the Muslim population of the Ottoman Empire was permitted to select and take children of deported Armenians. The Muslim masters sometimes treated the children as adoptees, but in most of the cases Armenian children were given to Turkish, Kurdish and Arab households as slaves, forcing them to work for their daily food, subjecting them to rough treatment and sexual violence. They died of hunger and beatings. The forced conversion of Armenian children to Islam was a precondition of their Turkification,<sup>11</sup> being followed by changing names and forbidding the use of spoken Armenian.<sup>12</sup> In the case of boys, this was accompanied by obligatory circumcision. Left without friends and relatives, many, amongst whom was the author of this memoir Aram-Seito, adapted to the conditions of this new way of life and cultural environment.

It should be noted that the transfer of Armenian children was not a general policy. The aim of the government was not to Turkify every child of the Armenian community. Children were eliminated, like all segments of the Armenian population during the genocide. The Armenian orphans’ incineration in the orphanage in Mush, the medical experiments conducted on them in the Trabzon province, their drowning in the Black Sea and their suffocation by smoke by the thousand in caves of Der Zor are the proved

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9 Ibid., 101.

10 Ara Sarafian, “The Absorption of Armenian Women and Children into Muslim Households as a Structural Component of the Armenian Genocide” in *In God’s Name: Genocide and Religion in the 20th Century*, eds. Omer Bartov, Phyllis Mack (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001), 210.

11 Here “Turkification” is used as a commonly known term in academic circles. In a broader sense it is the government’s efforts to Turkify the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Ottoman Empire, in a narrower sense it refers to the forcible change of Armenian children’s identity within the course of the genocide. Although in the memoir itself Aram was taken by different Turkish, but mostly Kurdish masters, this also falls under the “Turkification” category, as the whole process was planned by the Turkish government and implemented by state laws, orders from the Interior Ministry and served to the final aim of the destruction of the Armenian nation and homogenization of the country.

12 Narine Margaryan, «Հայ երեխաների թրքացման գործընթացն Օսմանյան կայսրության պետական որբանոցներում (1915-1918 թթ.)» [Turkification of Armenian Children in the Ottoman Empire’s State Orphanages (1915-1918)], *Ts’eghaspanagitakan handes* 4, no. 1 (2016), 26.



examples of this.<sup>13</sup> The policy of transfer was considered by the Turkish government and ideologists as the means to inject some age and gender-specified groups of Armenians, who were considered as easily transformable, into the Turkish nation. Among the aims of the forcible transfer, the idea of enrichment of the Turkish genetic character, appropriation of children's inheritance and mitigation of human losses suffered by the population during WWI were singled out by contemporary researchers.<sup>14</sup>

Aram Mantashyan was one of the enslaved, converted and renamed Armenian children. Determined to live, the nine-year-old boy struggled to survive each day, led by the hope of returning to his birthplace and finding his relatives.

The memoir describes, in detail, his forced religious conversion, first by flattery and persuasion, then by death threats. It acquaints the reader with how renamed Armenian boys Tribon-Omar, Khachik-Heyto, Hayrapet-Mustafa, Vahan-Khalil, Arakel-Suleiman and others worked for Turkish and Kurdish masters in the Malatya region for their daily bread. Parallel to this, the physical and psychological state of the Armenian children and the moral dilemmas which they faced are also described. The memoir clearly demonstrates the attitude of the Muslim community towards the converted Armenian children, the regular beatings they received accompanied by the derogatory epithet "gavur oğlu" (the son of an infidel) long used in Ottoman society towards Christians, while their lives were worth nothing. If their masters killed them for any mistake they made, they were not brought to justice. Aram also testifies how gendarmes regularly collected converted boys. The aim, perhaps, was to reduce even the numbers of converts in the Ottoman Empire.

There are several specific incidents in this memoir that are worthy of special attention, such as Aram's attitude towards Turkish doctors. The doctors had a special role in destroying Armenians during the genocide, even using Red Crescent hospitals for that purpose.<sup>15</sup> The gendarmes, advised Aram, as he was ill, to go to the hospital in Malatya. He spent his time wandering and returned, recording, in his memoir, "what had I, an Armenian boy, to do with a hospital? They would probably finish me off."

The moral choices that Armenian children were forced to face are worthy of attention as well. Using this memoir as an example it could be proved that even kept in servitude, the converted Armenian children retained their altruism and were psychologically inclined towards helping and saving each other.<sup>16</sup> The typical behaviour for Armenian children living in Muslim households was to escape at the first opportunity in search of relatives

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13 Vahakn Dadrian, "Children as Victims of Genocide: The Armenian Case," *Hayots' ts'eghaspanutyan patmutyan ev patmagrutyan harts'er* 7 (2003): 8-9.

14 Vahakn Dadrian, "The Role of Turkish Physicians in the World War I Genocide of Ottoman Armenians," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 1, no. 2 (1986): 184; Lerna Ekmekcioğlu, "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): 526.

15 Dadrian, "The Role of Turkish Physicians," 177.

16 Donald E. Miller, Lorna Touryan Miller, *Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1993), 186-187.

and other Armenians, even when the house was relatively safe.<sup>17</sup> Aram Mantashyan followed the same behavioural pattern.

The other specific thing was that most of the children, from a very early age, had to earn their living. Survivor children were clever, made decisions easily and took risks that could, in many cases, end in death.<sup>18</sup> This was mostly associated with the struggle with hunger. Aram was not an exception to this: “I felt I wanted to eat everything, but who would give me what I wanted? No one. *But I’d found the way through my cleverness.*”

The many incidents of stealing food recorded in this memoir must be seen in this context and not as the result of the lowering of survivor’s moral standards. Aram did steal at the behest of his Muslim masters for their benefit. It is obvious that masters’ influence concerning such things would, over a long period, have negative effects on the moral perception of converted children.

The memoir clearly, without artistic embellishment, also shows the feelings of a child bereft of care. Describing the visit of his master’s sister and her children, Aram writes: “There were all kinds of dried fruit in the house, such as raisins of mulberries and grapes, walnuts and kernels. She filled her children’s pockets with them every day, *but never gave me even one.*”

Salvation and return to the Armenian identity for Aram Mantashyan and thousands of children like him was a national cause. This was only possible after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War and the Mudros armistice of 30 October 1918, when national and international humanitarian organisations restarted their rescue work within the Ottoman Empire.<sup>19</sup> Hearing that an orphanage had opened in Malatya which was accepting Armenian children, Aram decided to go there. Joining a group of boys from Shabin-Karahisar there, they asked for aid from the orphanage administration so they could return to their home villages. Going to Mshaknots, Aram found his mother’s sister and her daughter both of whom had survived by hiding in the nearby Greek village. Unfortunately, history repeated itself. The solution to stopping intimidation for Aram Mantashyan was to escape to Soviet Armenia. He was arrested several times, but his detention in the port of Giresun forever separated him from the members of his family that had survived – his aunt and cousin. He managed, alone and without a passport, to sneak aboard a ship going from Constantinople to Batumi in 1924, joining a repatriation group. Reaching Batumi, the survivor recorded: “The world is mine now, I’m very happy despite the fact that I’ve nothing – no food, a place to shelter and no money.”

Aram Mantashyan’s memoir could be generalised by the following points:

- It is a written testimony of an Armenian boy’s experience, who was Turkified on a private level. It provides material to compare with the experiences of those

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>19</sup> Edita Gzoyan, «Փրկություն հայ որբերին. Առաքել Չաքրյանի հուշերը» [Saving Armenian Orphans: Memoirs of Arakel Chakirian], *Ts’eghaspanagitakan handes* 4, no. 2 (2016): 193.

Armenian orphans who had passed through the Turkification process in the state orphanages.<sup>20</sup>

- This memoir was written in 1932, when Mantashyan was only 26 years old. Many survivors wrote their memoir at the dawn of their life thanks to the persuasion of their children and due to the age are prone to being self-edited. This is the reason that the Aram’s childhood memories are bright and described clearly.
- The memoir also shows that the policy of the Turkish government of eliminating the Armenians continued in the Republic of Turkey as well.

One of the problems connected with the publication of this memoir in its original language was bringing it to a standard form of Armenian, as it was not written in either eastern or western dialects of the language, because of Mantashyan’s lack of schooling due to the deportations and his subsequent early move to Soviet Armenia. It wasn’t possible to publish it as it was, due to the almost total lack of punctuation and the amount of other people’s direct speech within it. With the aim of being able to present this testimony to a wide readership it has been necessary to add punctuation marks and correct obvious spelling mistakes. The English equivalents of Western Armenian idioms, dialect and Turkish expressions are put in parenthesis.

This testimony by an eyewitness survivor of the Armenian Genocide completes the series of eyewitness accounts, at the same time providing an example of invincible will, the wish to struggle and to live. As Aram Mantashyan himself sums up his memoir, Turkish government efforts to crush his firm will and turn him into Seito failed.

The next is Sokrat Mkrtychyan’s memoir,<sup>21</sup> which presents the story of the destruction of the Armenian people of his home village of Prkhus, in the sub-district of Khlat, in the province of Bitlis (Baghesh) and his and his family’s experiences.

The author presents the story of the trials and tribulations that his family suffered as a result of the massacre and looting of the Armenian community that lived in the village of Prkhus. In that battle for survival, to achieve salvation from the permanent threat of death on a daily basis, Sokrat Mkrtychyan lost his father, mother, baby brother; only he and his little sister Margarit survived.

The author has divided his memoirs into five chapters. The first, titled “Our village, its way of life” provides the descriptions of places in and around his birthplace: the village, its surroundings, “clear and blue” Lake Nazik; “brooding, always sombre” Mount Nemrut, located to the south of the village; his family, schooling in the village school, etc. His notes on the daily lives, occupations and customs and ceremonies of the inhabitants of the village of Prkhus and the district are significant.

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<sup>20</sup> The following memoirs are valuable for comparing the experiences of the Armenian orphans who went through the Turkish state orphanages and which provide testimonies: Karnig Panian, *Goodbye, Antoura: A Memoir of the Armenian Genocide* (California: Stanford University Press, 2015), 216; Harutyun Alboyajian, *Իրազդրոյթյան ճամբաներով: հուշագրոյթյուն* [On Crucifixion Roads: A Memoir] (Yerevan: VMV Print, 2005), 302.

<sup>21</sup> AGMI scientific archives, section 8, collection 24, files 29-30.

In the second chapter, titled “My childhood,” the author continues to present the history of his family until 1914, the year when the First World War broke out. The ten-year-old boy’s memoirs turns the reader into participants of the quiet life of a Western Armenian village on the eve of the Metz Yeghern.<sup>22</sup> A picture is put before us of the difficulties and privation of the daily life of a peasant. The author, from his early days, was involved in farm work, helping his father as a herdsman, as a boy who either sat on the oxen’s yoke or walked in front of them pulling them forward. One of the significant episodes described in one section of these memoirs is little Sokrat’s descriptions of the journeys made to the centre of the province, Bitlis, as well as to Bulanukh.

The First World War broke out and 1915 arrived. The first stage of the Armenian Genocide was the annihilation of Armenian men serving in the labour battalions. Sokrat’s father, with many men of Prkhus and the other villages in the province, were conscripted into the Turkish army to act as porters and never returned.

The third chapter, titled “The war” contains the description of the catastrophe that befell the village of Prkhus. The Russian army, advancing from Bayazet in April 1915, pushed the *Hasnatsi* (Hasananli) Kurdish tribe back; they, retreating, fell upon the village of Prkhus “like a pack of howling, hungry wolves,” put most of the village’s population to the sword, looting the defenceless Armenian villagers’ possessions: grain, animals and assets. The few villagers who survived – among whom was the author and his mother, baby brother and sister – escaped from the destroyed village.

The odyssey of Sokrat and his family’s wanderings is presented in the fourth (“Captivity”) and fifth (“Salvation”) chapters. Every step of their journey threatened them with death. The author’s mother, with the aim of saving her son’s life, gave him to a local Kurd, Binbo, as an apprentice shepherd. The author was forced to follow the Kurds who were retreating westward from the advancing Russians, leaving his mother and sister behind (his baby brother had died by that time). They crossed the Mush plain and it was only then that he was able to escape. After various incidents, the descriptions of which are fascinating reading, Sokrat was able to make his way to a place behind the Russian lines. He found only his sister alive on his return journey; his mother, unable withstand the things she had suffered, had died. Later he and his sister joined the thousands of refugee Armenians from Bitlis and Mush who retreated with the Russian army and went to Eastern Armenia. After reaching Echmiadzin, they initially settled in one of the orphanages there, then moved to the one in Ashtarak sponsored by the Moscow Armenian Committee.<sup>23</sup> This memoir ends with warm words about the teachers and teaching assistants in the orphanage.

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<sup>22</sup> An Armenian term for *Armenian Genocide* that translates as *Great Catastrophe* or *Great Calamity* with a legal connotation. The term used extensively in the memoirs of survivors, also in Sokrat Mkrchyan’s memoir. For more details see Vartan Matiossian, *The Politics of Naming the Armenian Genocide: Language, History, and ‘Medz Yeghern,’* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2022).

<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that the names of 13-year-old Sokrat and his 9-year-old sister Margarit are listed in the register of orphans who were in the Ashtarak orphanage sponsored by the Moscow Armenian Committee dated May 14th 1916, published in the appendix to the Caucasian Benevolent Society’s socio-political weekly journal *Hambavaber* dated December 4th 1916. There were a further 28 orphans from Prkhus village in the same orphanage at that time (*Hambavaber* (Tiflis), no. 49, 4 December 1916, Appendix).

The author's subsequent fate is revealed through the few laconic autobiographical sentences he added at the end of his memoir. He received a basic secondary education in the orphanage and after completing his studies, got married and, with his sister, left the establishment. He served in the Red Army for seven years, leaving it in 1930. He was accepted, in the same year, as a student in the all-union veterinary-animal husbandry institute, graduating in 1934 having received a technical education in animal husbandry. He accepted a position as the leader of political-mass radio broadcasting attached to the Soviet Armenian government in 1935. He moved to become the responsible editor for political broadcasting in 1937. He was appointed chief editor of the *Latest News* broadcasts from June 1940. After the beginning of the Great Patriotic War he was sent to the battlefield in 1941 then demobilized in 1943 due to sickness. He worked in the Social Security ministry from 1943 until 1946 then, from 1947 until 1954 as the local correspondent for the newspaper "Communist" for the Martuni, Kamo and Vardenis regions. In about 1960 he worked as a censor in the Kurdish-language newspaper "Rya Taza." After that he retired due to illness and died in February 1968.

Sokrat Mkrtychyan's memoir is valuable for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is a singular primary source concerning the destruction of one of Western Armenia's settlements – Prkhus – and of other Armenian populated villages in the Khlat sub-district; secondly, the role of the Kurds, the mechanics of the implementation of the Armenian Genocide, in other words the concrete means aimed at killing specific groups of Armenians (men and young women), other violent methods used (rape, torture, forced labour) and testimony concerning the despoiling of the Armenians.

The memoir is also enriched with a certain literary-artistic value, bringing also the customs of local Armenians, several examples of songs from Mush, etc. It also has a firm structure, its narrative style is clear and absorbing, the language is simple but, at the same time, is bright and figurative.

Sokrat Hake Mkrtychyan's memoir was brought together by his eldest daughter, Lena Mkrtychyan. It was she who, in 1998, gave the five notebooks containing the original manuscript to the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute and she prepared the final text that is based on them. When preparing the manuscript for publication, the editor considered her final text as its basis, referring back to the notebooks to make any corrections necessary.

Editing was carried out based on the principle that there should only be minimum intervention. In the main, only grammatical and punctuation corrections have been made, bringing the manuscript up to present-day standards and evening out most obvious grammatical problems.

It is also important to note that the Armenian researcher, ethnographer and folklorist, Verjine Svazlian, used certain excerpts taken from Sokrat Mkrtychyan's memoir manuscript in her book "The Armenian Genocide: Testimonies of the Eyewitness Survivors."<sup>24</sup>

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24 Verjine Svazlian, *Հայոց ցեղասպանություն. Ականատես վերասպրողների վկայություններ* [The Armenian Genocide: Testimonies of the Eyewitness Survivors] (Yerevan: Gitutyun, 2011), 105-108.

The book contains two appendices. The first is the editor, Robert Tatoyan's article titled "Genocide on the Example of one Settlement: The Destruction of the village Prkhus in 1915." The second is the testimony by Sokrat Hake Mkrtychyan, probably on August 9th, 1916, when he was in the Moscow Armenian Committee's orphanage, the original of which is kept in the National Archive of Armenia.<sup>25</sup>

Those two memoirs are very different in style and narrative. Simply told and without embellishment, they are penned enriched with words taken from Turkish and Russian, but the language is clear and they tell their stories almost dispassionately, although with an underlying sense of anger, loathing, horror and loss. Both are vivid, concrete testimonies of genocide and the men's successful efforts to survive and rebuild their individual lives.

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25 Հայոց ցեղասպանությունը օսմանյան Թուրքիայում: Վերասպրածների վկայություններ: Փաստաթղթերի ժողովածու [Armenian Genocide in Ottoman Turkey. Testimonies of Survivors. Collection of Documents], Amatuni Virabyan, Gohar Avagyan (compilers), ed. by Amatuni Virabyan, vol II, Բիթլիսի նահանգ [Bitlis province] (Yerevan: National Archive of Armenia, 2012), 50-51.





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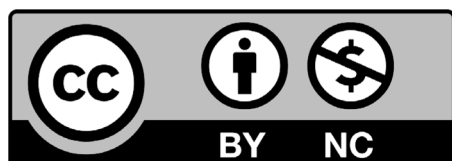
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