

CASE STUDY 1

THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

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INTRODUCTION

The Armenian Genocide of 1915 completely altered the course of Armenian history as well as the geopolitical, economic, and ethnographic complexion of the Middle East. The lessons from these crimes remain compelling and need to be passed on to current and future generations. In many ways, the case of the Armenian Genocide has become the prototype of modern premeditated mass killings and their far-reaching consequences.

Civilian populations have often fallen victim to the brutality of invading armies, bombing raids, and other forms of indiscriminate killings. In the Armenian case, however, the government of the Ottoman Empire, dominated by the Committee of Union and Progress or Young Turk Party, turned against a segment of its own population. In international law, there were certain accepted rules and customs of war that were aimed in some measure at protecting civilian populations, but these did not cover domestic situations or a government's treatment of its own people. Only after World War II and the Holocaust was that aspect included in the United Nations Genocide Convention (UNCG). Nonetheless, at the time of the Armenian deportations and massacres beginning in 1915, many governments and statesmen termed the atrocities "a crime against humanity."

OVERVIEW OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

The Armenians are an ancient people. They inhabited the highland region between the Black, Caspian, and Mediterranean seas for nearly 3,000 years until 1915. Emerging as an organized state in the early centuries of the first millennium B.C.E., Armenia lay on a strategic crossroad between East and West. It was sometimes independent and formidable under national dynasties, sometimes autonomous under native princes who paid tribute to foreign powers, and sometimes subjected to direct foreign rule.

At the turn of the fourth century C.E., after more than a thousand years of polytheism, Armenia adopted Christianity, becoming the first nation in the world to proclaim that faith as the religion of state. Christianity cost the Armenian people dearly, for the tenacity with which they held to the faith exacted from them, down through the centuries and before the genocide itself, virtually millions of lives. Their existence was also made difficult by invasion, draining and devastating the land and compelling many Armenians to seek safety in distant realms. But always,

List of Essential Antecedents That Need to Be Addressed When Teaching About This Genocide

- Institutionalized Second Class Citizenship: The Ottoman Empire (14th to 20th century) was a theocratic state in which religious minorities, such as the Armenian Christians, had special taxes and restrictions imposed upon them in exchange for being allowed to practice their "imperfect" religion. (Note: If one refers to the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 as the point at which the empire becomes centralized, then it was the 15th century. However, that came after the Turks had already conquered most of the Balkan lands in the 14th century.)
- Decline of the Ottoman Empire: The Ottoman Empire entered a period of accelerated decline in the 18th and 19th centuries, with extensive territorial losses accompanied by growing domestic corruption and exploitation.
- Unrest among the Subject Nationalities: Parallel with the repressive policies in the empire, the concepts of the Enlight-

enment and French Revolution stirred unrest among the Balkan Christians. Intellectual revival was followed by political agitation for separation. Most Balkan subject peoples gained independence in the 19th century with external assistance.

- Involvement of the European Powers: The European Powers became increasingly involved in Ottoman affairs. Rivalry among those powers saved the empire from total collapse but still left it susceptible to external political and economic pressures.
- The Plight of the Ottoman Armenians: Most Ottoman Armenians lived in their historic homelands in the eastern Asiatic provinces of the empire. The Armenian peasantry was exposed to intensified exploitation and persecution in the 19th century. The Armenians sought reforms and the safety of life and property by appealing both to the Ottoman sultan and to the European Powers.
- Armenian Resistance Movements: The failure to bring about peaceful reforms prompted some Armenian intellectuals

most Armenians stayed firmly planted on the Armenian Plateau, maintaining their separate ethno-religious identity and culture.

The Turkic incursions into Armenia began in the eleventh century C.E., and the last Armenian kingdom fell three centuries later. Most of the territories that had once formed the ancient and medieval Armenian kingdoms were incorporated into the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century. That empire was a theocratic state based on Islamic precepts. The Turkish ruling classes controlled a multinational, multiconfessional realm in which—and this may be a clue to potential genocide—there was a plural, not pluralistic, society in which various groups lived side-by-side yet separate and distinct. They belonged to a common state, but the theocracy was founded on the institutionalized separation of the population into true believers and nonbelievers. The nonbelievers were the *gavurs*, a pejorative term meaning "infidel."

According to the precepts of Islam, tolerance of Christians and Jews, that is, of other monotheists, was to be accorded on condition that they submit to an inferior status of second-class citizenship with certain financial, political, and social disabilities. The testimony of a nonbeliever, for

to organize underground political groups for self-defense. The Armenian political parties date to the 1880s, following the failure of Sultan Abdul-Hamid to fulfill his pledge to the European powers in 1878 to implement reforms.

- The Armenians Viewed as a Threat: Armenian strivings for equality were viewed as a dangerous threat by the dominant traditionalist elements in the Ottoman Empire. When forced to promulgate reforms by the European Powers in 1895, Abdul-Hamid reacted by unleashing a series of massacres, causing the death and economic ruin of countless thousands of Armenians.
- The Young Turk Revolution: Some Turkish intellectuals, students, and officers believed that the only way to save the Ottoman Empire was through radical change. In 1908 they succeeded in a near bloodless coup to seize power on the platform of liberty, equality, and justice, and forced the sultan to become a constitutional monarch.

- The 1909 Cilician Massacre: Armenian optimism was soon dashed when traditionalist elements tried to regain power and organized massacres throughout the region of Cilicia, resulting in the deaths of more than 20,000 Armenians and a new chill in Armenian-Turkish relations.
- The Balkan Wars, 1912-1913: The former Christian subject peoples, assisted by Russia, defeated the Ottoman Empire and left it in Europe only with Constantinople/Istanbul and its hinterland. The crisis allowed the radical wing of the Young Turks to seize power and prepare plans to cleanse the Asiatic provinces of the Armenian Christian population as a way of guaranteeing a safe Turkish homeland.
- Turkish nationalism replaced Ottoman multinationalism: The Young Turk dictators adopted the ideology of "Turkism," with the goal of creating a homogeneous Turkic state based on one people and one religion. This became the "warrant for genocide."

example, could not be admitted as evidence against a true believer in an Islamic court. In lieu of military service, because religious minorities were not allowed to bear arms as part of the system of keeping subject groups submissive, a poll tax was imposed on every male child. This was one of the reasons that heads of a household often concealed the true number of family members. There were various other disadvantages, such as special extraordinary taxes, uncompensated labor, and sometimes the need to wear special garb, all in exchange for permission to practice a pre-Islamic "imperfect" religion.

Despite these burdens, most Armenians lived in relative peace so long as the Ottoman Empire was strong and expanding. But as the empire's administrative, fiscal, and military structure crumbled under the weight of

internal corruption and external challenges in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, oppression and intolerance increased. The breakdown of order was accelerated by Ottoman inability to modernize and compete with the West.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was in rapid decline, losing much of its territory in Europe. The concepts emanating from the Enlightenment and the French Revolution were having an impact on the subject nationalities of the empire, whether Greek, Serbian, Montenegrin, Romanian, or Bulgarian, and, very belatedly, Armenian. Perhaps this, too, was one of the contributors to the Armenian tragedy, in that the Armenians may have stirred too late. Those peoples who sought emancipation relatively early were able to find European support and ultimately to seize independence, whereas the Armenians throughout the nineteenth century aspired, not to independence, but rather to civil rights, equality before the law, security of life and property, and local self-government, quite some distance from independence.

As Turkish rule weakened and the European powers, for their own selfish reasons, interfered increasingly in the affairs of the Ottoman Empire, tensions intensified between the various ethno-religious communities, majorities and minorities, and between the minorities themselves—Greeks and Armenians, Armenians and Jews, and so forth. More than one sultan gave in to external pressures and domestic reformers in the nineteenth century to proclaim, against custom and tradition, that all his subjects were equal in his eyes and henceforth would be treated as such. This was done in an effort to hold the empire together. Unfortunately, most sultans were not sincere when they issued these decrees under duress. Moreover, one of the effects of the reform edicts was to anger and arouse traditional society. For example, if previously a *gavur* came into contact with a true believer, a first-class citizen, even if poor, humble, and less educated, a certain demeanor was expected and required. To try to change that kind of mentality, that type of society, and suddenly to announce that all were to be equal, when there was no strong, true, sincere governmental support of the declaration, could only lead to trouble.

Armenians came to be portrayed and perceived as an arrogant, scheming element that was conspiring to achieve dominance through the ruse of equality. And it was not difficult for traditionalist leaders to bring the masses to regard the specter of equality as being tantamount to exploitation by the *gavur*. It was unfair; it was wrong; it was an attempt ultimately to usurp the rights and privileges of the true believers. That the European powers involved themselves in these matters only made things worse. European pressure for reform was repeatedly applied on the Ottoman government, but this action was not sustained by effective measures of

Key Events: Armenian Genocide

- World War I erupts in the summer of 1914.
- The Turkish dictators enter into a secret alliance with Germany against the Allied or Entente Powers in August 1914 and then take the Ottoman Empire into the war in October.
- Most able-bodied Armenians are conscripted in a general mobilization and then separated into disarmed labor battalions and massacred during the course of the following months.
- The Turkish Minister of War, Enver Pasha, fails in his attempt to invade and capture the Caucasus region at the end of 1914. This setback, along with the Gallipoli landing of the Allied expedition in 1915, is regarded by some scholars as the trigger for activating the plan to eliminate the Armenian population under the cover of war.
- The genocide begins with the arrest of Armenian leaders in Constantinople on the night of April 23/24, 1915, and is followed by the deportations and massacres of nearly the entire Armenian population of Asia Minor and the historic Armenian provinces. In general, the adult male population is killed outright, whereas most women and children die in the forced march toward the Syrian desert.
- Many comparisons can be made with other genocides, including the relationship between government and political party; previous demonstrated vulnerability of the targeted group; role of military and special organizations; secrecy and deception; use of technological advances for destruction; denial from the outset.
- The Allied Powers condemn the genocide and pledge punishment for the perpetrators and rehabilitation for the survivors. The defeated Ottoman Empire in 1918 has to face the consequences of Young Turk genocidal policies by initiating courts-martial and condemning chief perpetrators.
- Rise of Turkish resistance movement led by Mustafa Kemal nullifies the process to try the perpetrators of the genocide and opens the way to state denial and suppression of memory, especially after Allied Powers make their peace with the regime and do not want to be reminded of their broken promises.
- The fiftieth anniversary of the genocide in 1965 is a watershed of Armenian activism. Attempts to gain worldwide reaffirmation of the crime are paralleled by intensified denial by the Turkish state and its agencies.
- The Armenian Genocide remains a live issue even after the passage of nearly nine decades and the beginning of a new century and millennium.

enforcement. The result was an even greater suspicion of the subject people.

The Armenian striving to achieve equality through reforms in the Turkish empire was ultimately an utter and dismal failure. Equality through edicts about being the children of a common homeland and of a paternalistic ruler proved to be stillborn. Some Armenian youth gave up hope that reforms could be achieved peaceably. They began to organize underground political parties and encouraged the population to learn to defend itself, but their strength and means were very limited.

When in 1895 the last important sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Abdul-Hamid II (1876-1909), was coerced into signing another reform edict, his real answer to the Westerners who imposed this act on him—and to the Armenians who were seeking assistance and relief from the terrible conditions caused by the breakdown of law and order in the interior provinces—was to unleash a rampage of death and destruction. In October 1895, starting in the port city of Trebizond on the Black Sea and spreading in the winter months to every province of historic Armenia and into Cilicia along the Mediterranean Sea, there erupted mayhem lasting for up to a week during which hapless Armenians were cut down wherever they were found. Armenian shops were looted; Armenian homes were burned; Armenian villages were pillaged. Thousands of terrified people fled to the mountains or abroad, and still other thousands were forcibly converted to Islam. The number who died was placed minimally at about 100,000, although most sources report the number at 200,000, and some as many as 300,000.

Here is a key question to be considered: How are the massacres of 1895-1896 that claimed so many Armenian lives to be interpreted? Was it, in fact, the beginning of the end for the Armenian people? Should the Armenian Genocide be regarded as starting in 1915 or rather as being a continuous process from 1895 to the end of World War I in 1918 and even beyond? This issue requires further thought and analysis.

Whatever the answer, in the Armenian case there was a very important qualitative and quantitative difference between 1895 and 1915. The sultan, however oppressive, however sinister, however paranoid, probably did not conceive realistically of an empire without Armenians. The Armenians had a place and a function in his realm. They simply had to be taught a lesson; they needed to be intimidated back into complete submission. The Armenians should be impoverished somewhat, and their concentrations in their historic provinces should be diluted. Certain demographic changes were in order. What better response to Western meddling?

While Abdul-Hamid's actions in 1895 may be classified as genocide according to the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Pun-

ishment of the Crime of Genocide, in the narrower sense in which many Holocaust and Armenian Genocide scholars interpret the term as implying the attempted total annihilation of a people, it may be more proper to define the massacres of 1895-1896 as pogroms, albeit the term was not then used for the Armenians. Even though there was much bloodshed and certainly the intent was to kill an ethnic or religious group, at least in part (the U.N. definition reads "in whole or in part"), there was a beginning and an end to the violence. After several days, when the mobs had done their work, regular army units appeared to establish a degree of order.

The sultan could not allow the entire country to get out of hand. The intended message had been given, and it was time for the government to bring a halt to the pillage and plunder. For the Armenians, it seemed that they had sustained but survived yet another in a long series of calamities. Thus, once more the challenge was to reconstruct and go forward.

Abdul-Hamid was not trying to bring about drastic changes in society. Rather, he was desperately attempting to preserve a system that was unsalvageable, a foundering ship of state that was being sunk by external volleys and internal disintegration. Pogroms—massacres—were his misguided and vain response to the critical problems besetting the empire.

If this interpretation is accepted, then it is obvious that there was a fundamental difference between 1895 and 1915. In 1908, Abdul-Hamid, the old sultan, was overthrown and sent into exile the next year by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) or, as they were commonly referred to, the Young Turks, a political movement that held forth the vision of a new Ottoman Empire based on constitutional government and the principles of equality, fraternity, and justice. It is beyond the scope of this overview to explain in detail where that experiment went wrong. That said, it is worth noting that in his comparative study of the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust, genocide scholar Robert Melson maintains that the Turkish genocide of the Armenians stemmed from a revolution that went sour; that failed to achieve its anticipated objectives (see Melson, 1992).

In the Ottoman Empire, the hopes placed on constitutional government in 1908 soon dimmed, partly because of European exploitation and self-interest and partly because of internal discord. By 1913, that which had started as a democratic revolution culminated in a dictatorship of the ultra-rightwing faction of the Young Turk Party. It was that extremist element that took Turkey—the Ottoman Empire—into World War I as an ally of the German Empire. A fundamental calculation was that the anticipated triumph of the Central Powers against Great Britain, France, and the Turk's old nemesis, Russia, would allow for Turkish annexation of territories that had been lost to the tsars in one war after another. Moreover,

there was the scheme of creating a new Turkish realm, no longer based in Europe, but rather extending eastward toward the original Turkic homelands in central Asia.

Various pan-Islamic and pan-Turkic concepts were at work, but an overriding theme of Young Turk ideologues was the unification of the Turkic-speaking peoples within a common framework. Ideology in the case of the Armenian Genocide was very important, perhaps not a singular explanation, yet nonetheless a critical justification of radical measures against the targeted group.

If Adolf Hitler, whose ideology or objective was to establish a new world order based on a racial formula in which there was no room for Jews, the Young Turk ideology to create a new regional order without Armenians was similarly at work. Armenians were regarded as being an alien element unwilling to assimilate. The tenacious Armenians had existed as a subject people for centuries and had clung to their ethno-religious identity.

The Armenian Question relating to the need for measures to safeguard the lives and properties of the Armenians in the provinces had become an international issue since 1878 and had allowed for intermittent European intervention. It was feared that sooner or later the Armenians would try to follow the example of the former subject European Christian nationalities to establish a separate state, thereby becoming a major barrier to any and all pan-Turkic objectives. Thus, the time had come to supplant the old, tired concept of Ottomanism—that is, a society with Turks, Kurds, Greeks, Armenians, Arabs, Jews, and others all living side-by-side—with that of a modern state or empire anchored in a single ethnicity and a single religion.

Although many Young Turk leaders were agnostics or atheists, they exploited religion and the traditional precepts of Islam to spread fear and suspicion of the Armenian people. Previously, under the sultans, the loyalty of the masses was directed toward the person of the sultan—to God and Suzerain—but now with the sultan discredited, the Young Turks made the state the new focus of allegiance. This is clearly reminiscent of Nazi ideology. Among the new Turkish intellectuals and ideologues, such as Zia Gokalp, are heard poetic lines of exaltation of the state:

I am a soldier, it is my commander.
I obey without question all its orders.
With closed eyes I carry out my duty.
(Quoted in Heyd, 1950, p. 124)

So the state is above all else, and for its sake anything is possible.

Genocide scholar Helen Fein (1979) has rightly observed: "The victims of twentieth century premeditated genocide—the Jews, the Gypsies,

the Armenians—were murdered in order to fulfill the state's design for a new order... War was used in both cases ... to transform the nation to correspond to the ruling elite's formula by eliminating the groups conceived as alien, enemies by definition" (pp. 29-30).

The Genocide

When was it determined that the solution to the Armenian Question was to be found in the elimination of the Armenian people? The mass arrests, the segregation of Armenians in the Turkish army into labor battalions before they were killed, and then the decrees of deportation came after the Turkish armies had suffered major setbacks on the battlefield.

The Young Turk leader and Minister of War, Enver Pasha, seized the first opportunity to strike against Russia on the Caucasus front to break through to Baku and the Caspian Sea. He ordered the campaign against the advice of his general staff and military commanders, who warned that the Armenian Plateau was impassable during the winter blizzard conditions and that the Turkish army would sustain terrible casualties as much from exposure as from combat. But driven by his ideology and so fixated on achieving his objective, Enver dismissed this counsel and took personal command. The misadventure led to the loss of an entire army corps.

Some would say there is a definite connection between Enver's frustration and embarrassment and the decision to implement a genocidal campaign against the Armenians. Without the active and sincere cooperation of today's Turkish scholars and the Turkish government, however, the answer to such questions will remain circumstantial and cannot be known with indisputable certainty. Even then, the precise decision-making processes may never be established unless the secret records of the Young Turk inner circle are revealed and made accessible.

Although the genocide of the Armenian people and the destruction of millions of persons in Central and Eastern Europe during the Nazi regime a quarter of a century later each had particular and unique features, there were some striking parallels. The similarities include the perpetration of genocide under the cover of a major international conflict (World War I and World War II, respectively), thus minimizing the possibility of external intervention; conception of the plan by a monolithic and xenophobic clique; espousal of an ideology giving purpose and justification to racism, exclusivism, and intolerance toward elements resisting or deemed unworthy of assimilation; imposition of strict party discipline and secrecy during the period of preparation; formation of extralegal special armed forces to ensure the rigorous execution of the operation; provoca-

tion of public hostility toward the victim group and ascribing to it the very excesses to which it would be subjected; certainty of the vulnerability of the targeted groups; exploitation of advances in mechanization and communication to achieve unprecedented means for control, coordination, and thoroughness; and the use of sanctions such as promotions and incentive to loot or, conversely, the dismissal and punishment of reluctant officials and the intimidation of persons who might consider harboring members of the victim group.

It is especially important to note that the perpetrators were confident of the vulnerability of their intended victims. After Kristallnacht in 1938, had anyone intervened on behalf of the Jews? After the massacres of 1895-1896 and once again in 1909, when more than 20,000 Armenians were massacred in the region of Cilicia, had anyone intervened? The inaction of the world community provided the obvious answer.

The involvement of the armed forces and the creation of special organizations to oversee the genocidal operations are another important parallel. During the Holocaust there were the SS and the *Einsatzgruppen*, whereas during the Armenian Genocide there was the *Teshkilati Mahsusa*—the Special Organization. It was an organization whose ostensive purpose was to further the war effort but whose secret mandate was to supervise the destruction of the Armenian people and to make certain that recalcitrant officials would be forced to cooperate or removed from office and punished. The Special Organization recruited hardened criminals and tribesmen into killer battalions. These fell on the deportee caravans, usually in places of no escape, such as mountain passes and river crossings.

There were, of course, many Turks and other Muslims who felt that what was happening was an affront to God and to humanity. A significant number tried to protect their friends and neighbors at some risk to themselves. Unfortunately, denial of the genocide for more than eight decades has not allowed the Armenians to honor those who attempted to help, yet nearly every survivor story entails some kind of intervention that made possible escape from certain death. Intervention was not necessarily altruistic. It often entailed the desire to acquire a maid, a servant, field hands, or even girls to provide personal pleasures. Nonetheless, someone intervened to pluck these people from the death caravans. It is also true that many Armenians survived only by forfeiting their identity. They were registered as Muslims and given Turkish names. They forgot or dared not use their native language, and little children even lost the memory of parents as they were absorbed into the larger new society that was being created.

One must ask: If the intent of genocide is to destroy the targeted group, why then does the perpetrator differentiate in the process of annihilation? Why was it that the Armenian men, in city after city, town after

town, and village after village, were roped up, usually by fours, and taken to the nearest killing field, to the nearest river crossing, to the nearest mountain gorge, and killed outright—shot, axed, stabbed, hacked to death? In that crude form of killing, there would be two, three, or four men who emerged from the bloody heaps as living witnesses of what had occurred. If the intent was to destroy the Armenians, then why the belabored process of taking hundreds and thousands of women and children and forcing them to march to death, rather than killing them in the same way as the men? And yet in most areas this is just what happened. Women, children, and the elderly were driven toward the Syrian desert with little food or water and tormented all along the way. Perhaps, it was thought that any potential resistance could be obviated by wiping out the male population, who were also viewed as the primary perpetrators of the race. Moreover, since antiquity there was a twisted code of conduct that often spared women from direct killing but in fact subjected them to even greater misery and agony. This was fully manifest in the case of the Armenian Genocide.

There were many choiceless choices that had to be made during the Armenian Genocide, as in all genocides. Women who were interviewed when they were in their eighties, who presumably should have sublimated or at least reconciled themselves to a distant past, still sobbed in anguish as they spoke of having two children on the deportation route when they were prodded on by bayonets to ford a fast-flowing river. They could carry only one child without being swept away. Which one to take and which to leave? And how to leave? Hence, the choiceless choice, as one child was placed under a tree or near a boulder. The last sound to haunt the mother for the rest of her life was the child's cry not to be abandoned. And what of the abducted teenage girls, who gave birth to one or two babies during their years of captivity? Following the defeat of both Germany and Turkey in World War I, relief agencies and relatives came to rescue the girls, who now were faced with the choiceless choice of either abandoning their bastard children who were their flesh and blood or else renouncing their faith, family, and nationality to live out their years with an imposed and completely different identity.

As for the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide, the trauma is especially enduring because of the refusal of the perpetrator regime or its successors to acknowledge the crime and engage in acts of contrition and redemption. On the contrary, the Turkish government has engaged for decades in an unrelenting campaign of denial and suppression of memory. Denial has taken on the new and sinister forms of rationalization, relativization, and trivialization. Soon, the last Armenian survivor will pass from the scene. Then the perpetrator side can say: "Were you there? Did you see it? Is your testimony allowable in court as first-hand evidence?"

You weren't there. You're not an eyewitness. You are imagining and fabricating."

This challenge makes it all the more important that the Armenian Genocide, its effects and implications, be integrated into collective historical memory and made a part of the permanent record of humankind.

ISSUES AND QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN TEACHING ABOUT THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

The Armenian Genocide eliminated a people from its homeland and wiped away most of the tangible evidence of its 3,000 years of material and spiritual culture. The calamity, which was unprecedented in scope and effect, may be seen as the culmination of the ongoing persecutions and massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, especially since the 1890s. Or it may be placed in the specific context of modern nationalism and the great upheavals that brought about the dissolution of a multiethnic and multireligious empire and the emergence in its place of a Turkish nation-state based on a monoethnic and monoreligious society. The approaches are not mutually exclusive and should be examined in the context of the plight of the Armenians in the nineteenth century and their ultimate elimination from the Ottoman Empire in the first part of the twentieth century.

A critical issue in the Armenian case that has general application is the way traditional-bound societies react to change or attempted change. If the Armenian quest for equality and security in the Ottoman Empire was viewed by the dominant element as a serious threat to its accustomed way of life, one need look no further than the reactions in the United States to the civil rights movement in the second half of the twentieth century to see certain comparisons in the strong, sometimes violent, response to impending change. There are, of course, fundamental differences that must be noted as well. If in the U.S. case the government intervened to enforce legislation and change, in the Armenian experience, the sultan's government was directly complicit in obstructing the very reforms to which it had acceded, at least on paper.

One might consider whether there was anything that the Armenian people or their leaders could have done to escape their fate in face of an emerging militant nationalism espoused by the Turkish rulers. Was there any real way for the Armenians to have kept their identity, their religion and culture, and still survived in the changing geopolitical, ethnic, and economic environment? Could they or should they have avoided intellectual and political currents that emanated in Europe and gradually made their way eastward? In what ways did their own cultural, educational, and

economic progress affect their relations with the dominant group and impact on the course of their history?

It is important also to consider the role of foreign governments that intervened from time to time in the Armenian Question. What circumstances could have made the results of external intercession more favorable? And what was the role of bystander governments during the period from the 1890s to the 1920s? How did the demonstrated vulnerability of the Armenian people make the perpetrators all the more audacious?

A common feature of most genocides is denial by the perpetrator side. In the Armenian case, the question should be raised as to why, long after the Ottoman Empire has been succeeded by the Republic of Turkey, does there continue to be such adamant rejection and denial of the truth. Were there conditions that made the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide radically different from the post-Holocaust period? And why do powerful countries such as the United States participate in trying to cover up or obscure the magnitude and significance of the Armenian Genocide while fully recognizing the crimes of Nazi Germany and the genocidal policies of that regime?

Students should also consider the effects of the trauma and of post-traumatic stress, the ways in which survivors live with painful memory and react to denial, and how the trauma manifests itself in subsequent generations. As for legal recourse, one may ask how victim groups, especially those that are also dispossessed of their goods, properties, and even homeland, can place their case before national and international bodies that tend to be made up of mutually-protective nation-states? Might the outcome for the Armenian victims and survivors have been different if the international tribunals that now operate in the Hague and elsewhere been empowered at the time? Finally, how is it possible to seek legal recourse and to have truth prevail over perceived national interests? Is it possible to liberate history and human rights from politics?

CONCLUSION

The late Terrence Des Pres (1986), author of *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps*, has captured the importance of remembering:

Milan Kundera ... has written that "the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting."... National catastrophes can be survived if (and perhaps only if) those to whom disaster happens can recover themselves through knowing the truth of their suffering. Great powers, on the other hand, would vanquish not only the peoples they subjugate but also the cultural mechanism that would sustain vital memory of historical crimes.... When modern states make way for geopolitical power plays, they

are not above removing everything—nations, cultures, homelands—in their paths. Great powers regularly demolish other peoples' claims to dignity and place, and sometimes, as we know, the outcome is genocide.

In a very real sense, therefore, Kundera is right: Against historical crimes we fight as best we can, and a cardinal part of this engagement is "the struggle of memory against forgetting" (p. 10-11).

Memory will prevail when crimes against humanity such as the Armenian Genocide become an undisputed integral part of the collective historical record. In that endeavor, the roles of education and the educator are critical.

Recommended Reading on the Armenian Genocide

Balakian, P. (1997). *Black dog of fate*. New York: Basic Books.

This semiautobiographical memoir of an Armenian American on a journey of self-discovery, including the revelation of the "forgotten" or "suppressed" genocide, is effectively written and can have broad classroom application.

Dadrian, V. N. (1999). *Warrant for genocide: Key elements of Turko-Armenian conflict*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books).

The author draws on much of his previous work in the field to synthesize critical factors contributing to the Armenian Genocide.

Hovannisian, R. G. (Ed.). (1986). *The Armenian genocide in perspective*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.

Scholars in the fields of history, political science, sociology, theology and ethics, literature, and psychiatry offer a multidisciplinary perspective on the Armenian Genocide.

Hovannisian, R. G. (Ed.). (1998). *Remembrance and denial: The case of the Armenian genocide*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.

Several contributors to this volume examine the ways in which memory of the Armenian Genocide is maintained and expressed, and others analyze the changing strategies and moral implications of the phenomenon of denial.

Miller, D. E., & Miller, L. T. (1993). *Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

This insightful study is based on oral history interviews with Armenian survivors, relaying first-hand experiences and categorizing and analyzing survivor reactions ranging from resignation to rage.

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