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# THE "DEFINITIVENESS" OF GENOCIDE AND *A QUESTION OF GENOCIDE: A REVIEW ESSAY*

Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Göçek, Norman M. Naimark, eds. *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. xxii + 434 pp. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-539374-3.

Over the course of the past two decades, the historiography of the Armenian Genocide has evolved through the introduction of new methodologies, approaches, and more complex analyses of the Genocide that venture beyond rudimentary and essentialist arguments and representations. Concomitantly, denialist literature has also developed, reinvigorated in the U.S. by the presentation of alternative ways of viewing the event in order to counter "Armenian allegations."[1] The latest such endeavor, disguised under the cloak of "scholarship," has been the introduction of the concept of "crimes against humanity" as an alternative designation to genocide or as a new "compromise" when dealing with the annihilation of the indigenous Armenian population of Anatolia.[2]

In the light of such obfuscations, the book edited by Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Göçek, and Norman N. Naimark entitled *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and the Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire* should be considered an important contribution to the historiography of the Armenian Genocide. The volume encompasses a collection of essays written by scholars who were involved for more than a decade in the Workshop of the Armenian and Turkish Scholars (WATS) established at the University of Michigan/Ann Arbor. The workshop's aim was to investigate "the causes, circumstances, and consequences of the Armenian Genocide of 1915," while "overcoming the politics of recognition and denial,"[3] by bringing Armenian, Turkish, and other scholars of genocide together into dialogue. Organized by Fatma Müge Göçek

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[1] See Yücel Güçlü, *Armenians and the Allies in Cilicia, 1914–1923* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2010); Justin McCarthy et al., *The Armenian Rebellion at Van* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2006); Guenter Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A Disputed Genocide* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2005).

[2] See for example the Special Issue of *Middle East Critique* entitled "New Scholarship on the Relocation of Ottoman Armenians from Eastern Anatolia in 1915-16," Guest Editor: M. Hakan Yavuz, Volume 20, Number 3, Fall 2011.

[3] http://www.ii.umich.edu/asp/academicopportunities/initiatives/specialprojects/theworkshopforarmenianturkishscholarshipwats_ci (accessed on February 14, 2012).

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(Sociology), Gerard Libaridian and Ronald Grigor Suny (History), WATS has initiated a total of eight meetings since its inception, the last of which took place in October 2011 at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, with the stated goal to "meet, discuss, present papers, and establish a shared historical record and rough consensus on interpretation of the tragedies of the last years of the Ottoman Empire."[4] The volume under review represents a selection of papers from the first seven workshops.

The collection is thematically organized according to the following five subjects: historiographies of the Genocide; ethnic relations in the immediate pre-genocide era; the international context of the genocide; local perspectives of the genocide; and finally continuities of the Genocide from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. In opening new perspectives on the Armenian Genocide, the volume significantly enhances our understanding of the topic. Nonetheless, while many of the essays live up to their description as "'state of the art' in the field" (p. xviii), they are uneven in that profound and innovative approaches to the Genocide are accompanied by more prosaic and introductory ones. In addition, some of the contributions seem to lack the necessary linguistic tools and literary evidence required to fully treat their subjects. These shortcomings, however, do not detract from the overall impact of the volume that indeed will stimulate fruitful discussion for many years to come. In my comments below, I have tried to provide a summary analysis of all the essays in the volume as well as to draw attention to those areas in which new ground has been broken and which are deserving of further research.

**Genocide: a Question or an Answer?**

One of the more problematic aspects of the volume lies in the introduction. Rather than address the volume's direction and specific contributions to the field, Göçek and Suny rehearse the conditions under which WATS functioned, its general atmosphere, and the different challenges participating scholars faced. The authors categorize the participants into Armenian and Turkish scholars and attempt to elucidate the intellectual hesitations of both sides. According to them, while Armenian scholars were very cautious and conservative regarding "arguments about causes of the genocide [that] might be interpreted as rationalization or justification for mass murder," (p.4) Turkish scholars expressed their reservations to the usage of the term genocide with reference to the events of 1915.[5] In order to overcome these barriers, WATS sought a re-evaluation of the events because, despite the

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[4] Ibid.

[5] For more information on this issue of denial see, Richard G. Hovannisian, "Denial of the Armenian Genocide in Comparison with Holocaust Denial" in *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (Detroit: Wayne State University Press.1998), pp. 201-236.

fact that the matter of the Armenian Genocide is as politicized as it is, "scholars could at least establish the documentary evidence, review the various interpretations, and make judgments about the most convincing arguments."(p. 5). Their presentation, however, has several serious unfortunate outcomes. One is that it gives the impression that a scholarly and historical approach to the Genocide should be conditioned upon reaching a 'consensus' or 'compromise' between Armenian and Turkish scholars, thereby admitting not only the fact of the politicization of genocide historiography, but also its validity. The authors seem at cross-purposes with themselves here: is the point of WATS (and the volume based upon it) to bring historians together to discuss evidentiary and methodological advances in an academic field; or is it to bring Armenians and Turks together to overcome cultural barriers (p. 4) and negotiate some sort of agreement? They may think both, but they do not in their introduction clearly lay out for the reader what this volume represents—an effort in scholarship or in diplomacy.

A second, related and more disturbing, result is that the introduction appears to grant equal weight to the concerns of both sides, that assertions of 'genocide' and their denial should be given equivalency. The process of intellectual discourse described in the introduction resembles a negotiation in which both sides moved from their starting positions. Thus, although WATS was able to determine that "there was no civil war"(p. 5), the authors find themselves unable to "express a clear unanimity on whether or not the events of 1915 constitute a genocide" (p. 10). The lack of a definitive answer to this question testifies to the problem manifested in the title of the volume itself that keeps the reader as the final arbitrator, or rather confused participant, in how to approach the event. The authors justify this conscious choice by arguing that the title reflects "both the certainty of some and the ambiguity of others, not so much on the nature of the killings, but how they might most convincingly be described"(p. 9). Hence, they try to come up with a "less problematic" concept; one that does not have a question mark after it: 'ethnic cleansing'. They argue that WATS has "achieved a closer consensus" by determining that "ethnic cleansing, like genocide, is almost always an activity organized by state authorities"[6] (p. 10).

Similarly, Suny and Göçek do not resolve the question of the premeditated nature of the Genocide. They remark that there was a general recognition among most of the participants at WATS that the Young Turks had "had no 'blueprint' for genocide, that is, no carefully drawn out, long-established plans for exterminating the Armenians, but that sometime in March 1915 a decision was made to deport them systematically and, by issuing oral orders and sending out secret emissaries, to massacre them in the process" (p.10).

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[6] On the differences of these concepts see Norman M. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 2-5.

Although any sound scholar would doubt that there was a linear progression in the intent to annihilate the Armenians, the authors seemingly skirt the issue of the degree of sophisticated bureaucratic organization required to carry out massacres on this large scale. Whether a 'blueprint' was drawn up only after the entry of the Ottoman Empire into World War I does not negate the fact that the Armenian Genocide reflects a premeditated plan to exterminate a people. Again, it appears that the authors are hedging their comments for diplomatic rather than scholarly reasons.

My criticism is not meant to assert that the motives, processes, and factors that led to the genocide cannot be the subject of an honest academic discussion by all historians, regardless of their ethnic background; nor does it mean that tools such as contingency, conjuncture, and contextualization are not useful in the historical reconstruction and interpretation of the genocide. However, it is important not to shy away from the sound evidence and conclusions established by prior scholarship; nor does it seem fruitful, nearly a century later, to put the validity of 'genocide' on trial.

**The Historiography of the Armenian Genocide and Western Scholarship**

A critical historiographic analysis of the Armenian Genocide has not yet been written.[7] Such an analysis would take into consideration all the books that were published by the "victim group" and the "perpetrator group" as well as by all third parties. More specifically, a critical overview of Armenian historiography remains a *desideratum*. The articles by Suny and Göçek in the first section of the volume address the question of the historiography of the genocide within a Western and Turkish context respectively. One wonders why a contribution on the Armenian historiography of the Genocide was omitted. Again this leaves an impression that such documentation is either negligible or minimal, despite the fact that there is a plethora of unexamined information in the language of the "victim group."[8] A critical examination of these materials will not only reaffirm the veracity of the historical event; it will also provide historians new ways of understanding, analyzing, and researching the Genocide. The available Armenian sources may be divided into private archives, ecclesiastic archives, diaries, and eyewitness accounts, Armenian press articles, and original historical works written by the survivors themselves or prepared by the Pan-Armenian Unions founded by the dispersed Armenian communities. Unfortunately, this vast amount of material is not broached in the first section of the volume dedicated to the historiography of

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[7] For an excellent recent survey of the historiography of the Armenian Genocide see Uğur Ümit Üngör, "Fresh Understandings of the Armenian Genocide: Mapping New Terrain with Old Questions" in Adam Jones (ed.), *New Directions in Genocide Research* (London: Routledge, 2011) pp. 198-213.

[8] See Bedross Der Matossian, "The Genocide Archives of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem," *Armenian Review*, Volume 53. Number 1-2 (Fall-Winter 2012), pp. 15-37.

the genocide and its value remains underappreciated. This is particularly problematic as some historians, in the name of academic objectivity, have downplayed the importance of these sources in the reconstruction of the history of the Armenian Genocide; while others have argued that due to the fact that these materials were written by the victim group, they cannot constitute valuable or reliable historical documents. Following this line of reasoning, some Armenian historians have systematically avoided the use of Armenian sources so that their scholarship would not be labeled as biased by international historians or Turkish scholars. This raises major questions regarding the attitudes of historians in general to Armenian sources. Why should an Ottoman document be more valuable or more authentic than an Armenian one? What makes a document from the Ottoman Archives more authentic than a document from the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem? Why is the story told by the victim group less credible than the one told by the "perpetrator group?" Challenging the dominant narrative regarding these sources would seem to be essential for establishing a proper evaluation of the historiographical evidence available to scholars in the field.

Although the essays by Suny and Goçek do not add much that is new to the arguments that they have made over the past years,[9] both articles are extremely useful for the general reader as they help frame the basic historiographical debates that exist within the field of the Armenian Genocide historiography. Suny discusses the development of Western scholarship on the Armenian Genocide beginning with the figure and writings of Henry Morgenthau, the American Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. Suny quotes from Morgenthau's diaries at length (pp. 15-21) in order to demonstrate his Orientalist depiction of the Turks as "primitive" and asserts that Morgenthau's views "became foundational for Western and Armenian historiography of the genocide" (p. 18) and "among the most powerful elements constituting both the narrative of the genocide and its explanation up to the present time" (pp.

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[9] For the work of Göçek see "Turkish Historiography and the Unbearable Weight of 1915," *in Cultural and Ethical Legacies of the Armenian Genocide*, Richard Hovannisian, ed. (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers. 2007), pp. 337-68; idem, "Defining the Parameters of a Post-Nationalist Turkish Historiography the Case of the Anatolian Armenians." in *Turkey beyond Nationalism: Towards Post-Nationalist Identities*, Hans-Lukas Kieser, ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), pp. 86-103; idem, "Reading Genocide: Turkish Historiography on the Armenian Deportations and Massacres of 1915." in *Middle East Historiographies: Narrating the Twentieth Century*, Israel Gershoni, Amy Singer, Hakan Erdem, eds. (Seattle: University of Washington Press. 2006), pp. 101-127; idem, "Reconstructing the Turkish Historiography on the Armenian Deaths and Massacres of 1915," in *Looking Backward, Moving Forward*, Richard Hovannisian, ed. (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers. 2004), pp.209-30. By Suny see "Truth in Telling: Reconciling Realities in the Genocide of the Ottoman Armenians," *American Historical Review*, 114, no. 4. (Oct. 2009): pp. 930-46; idem. "The Holocaust before the Holocaust: Reflections on the Armenian Genocide," in Hans-Lukas Kieser, Dominik J. Schaller, eds. *Der Voelkermord an den Armeniern und die Shoah* (Zurich: Chronos Verlag, 2002).

20-21). Suny rightly associates this paradigm with one of the major methodological biases that existed at the inception of western scholarship about the Armenian Genocide and that persists in some literature to this day; namely, the essentialization of Ottoman Turkish society as a harbinger of violence. Suny further observes the hesitation of Armenian scholars to rationalize/contextualize the event of the Genocide or to use such tools as historical contingency or conjuncture in their explanations out of fear that they might lead to a "denialist position of justification"[10] (p. 24).

In turning to interpretations of the causes of the Genocide, Suny analyzes the development of the denialist position that has been labeled by Robert Melson as the 'provocation thesis'.[11] He criticizes it for its inability to provide sound answers regarding why a minority group among Armenians turned into resistance. Among scholars who reject the denialist causes of the genocide, Suny notes that two poles have emerged for providing an interpretation of the major factor that led to the implementation of the Armenian Genocide. These poles are nationalism (Richard Hovannisian) and religion (Vahakn Dadrian) and/or a combination of both. Yet, in the 1990's, Suny argues, one may detect a shift in the approach to the Armenian Genocide as a result of intimate acquaintance with Holocaust literature. This new methodology, represented by Donald Bloxham and Michael Mann in particular, concentrated on situation the Armenian Genocide within an international and comparative context.[12] In his conclusion, Suny presents his own nuanced understanding of the causes of the Genocide that bear further reflection. He argues that the genocide was neither religiously motivated nor the result of contending nationalisms, but rather the "pathological response of desperate leaders who sought security against a people they had both constructed as enemies and driven into radical opposition to the regime under which they lived for centuries."(p. 41). While this is an arguably accurate perception from the perspective of the CUP organizers and the state administration, it is more difficult to come to the same conclusion about the masses who participated in the Armenian Genocide. In the final analysis, one questions whether the masses—whether they were native peasants, Muslim refugees from the Balkans, or Kurds—were that

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[10] See Hovannisian, "Denial of the Armenian Genocide in Comparison with the Holocaust Denial"; see by the same author also "The Armenian Genocide and Patterns of Denial," in *The Armenian Genocide in Perspective*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1986) pp. 111-133.

[11] Robert Melson, "A Theoretical Enquiry into the Armenian Massacres of 1894–1986," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 24 (1982), pp. 481–509.

[12] See Donald Bloxham, "The Armenian Genocide of 1915-16: Cumulative Radicalization and the Development of a Destruction Policy," *Past and Present* (Nov. 2003): 141-91; idem, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). See also Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

much concerned with the 'rationale' of the CUP; rather a mixture of religion, nationalism, hatred, and economic gain remains the most convincing incentive for their brutal annihilation of the Armenians.

The second section on the historiography deals with the Turkish historiography on the Armenian Genocide. Göçek demonstrates how a specific historiography that "valorized the Turkish achievements, whitewashed the crimes, blamed especially the minorities and the West for all past defeats, and silenced the violence committed against others" evolved from the earlier days of the Republic until 1975 when the proliferation of Armenian terrorist activities began (p. 42). During the course of this historiographic development that most of Anatolia's ethnic groups were excised from the foundation myth of the Turkish republic. Within Turkish historiography, Göçek identifies three dominant narratives: an Ottoman Investigative Narrative, a Republican Defensive Narrative, and a Post-Nationalist Critical Narrative. After analyzing the first two narratives, Göçek devotes most of her investigation to an examination of the "post-nationalist critical narrative," which I have elsewhere labeled Turkish liberal historiography.[13] According to Göçek, the post-nationalist critical narrative, constructed as an intellectual counterpoint to official Turkish historiography, is the byproduct of "the burgeoning civil society of contemporary Turkey" (p. 50) and does not contain within it any hidden agenda. Despite some drawbacks to the approached adopted within liberal Turkish historiography,[14] it nonetheless provides an alternative and provocative interpretation of the Ottoman/Republican past. Most significantly, it views Turkish society not as a monolithic entity, but as "a cultural mosaic that at present includes many diverse social groups such as Kurds and Alevis, as well as the much atrophied former minority groups such as Armenians, Assyrians, Greeks, and Jews" (p. 50). Göçek's essay constitutes an important demonstration of the fallacies of Turkish official history that is still defended and propagated by the Turkish Historical Society (*Turk Tarih Kurumu*).[15]

## Historical Background of the Deterioration of the Armeno-Turkish Conflict

The second section of the book discusses the situation of the Armenians prior to the Armenian Genocide. Stepan Astourian's "Silence of the Land: Agrarian Relations, Ethnicity, and Power" provides a penetrating analysis of the condition of the Armenians in Anatolia in the 19th century. In his essay,

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[13] See Bedross Der Matossian "Venturing into the Minefield: Turkish Liberal Historiography and the Armenian Genocide" in Richard G. Hovannisian, ed., *The Armenian Genocide: Cultural and Ethical Legacies* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2007), pp. 269-388.

[14] For these drawbacks see ibid.

[15] Taner Akçam, "Anatomy of a Crime: The Turkish Historical Society's Manipulation of Archival Documents," *Journal of Genocide Research* 7, no. 2 (2005), pp. 255-77.

Astourian applies the theory of "niche overlap" (competition over the same resources) to two regions of the Ottoman Empire: Eastern Anatolia and Cilicia.[16] In the former area, a niche overlap coincided with the emergence of Kurdish sheikhly families and resulted in large-scale land usurpation, oppression, and violence against the Armenians. In the case of the latter region, a niche overlap occurred as a result of the rise of the Armenians as landowners in Cilicia. By 1875-76, many Armenians and Greeks had already established themselves as "rich landed proprietors" in the environs of Adana. The overlap was accelerated by the arrival and the resettlement of the Muslim refugees (*muhacirs*). According to Astourian, agrarian relations, the Kurdish question, the demographic Islamization of Anatolia beginning in the second half of the 19th century, and finally centralization and modernization all played an important role in the aggravation of the interethnic conflict in Anatolia and culminated in the violence against the Armenians in the end of the 19th century.

The role of external forces in creating the context of the genocide does not imply that Armenians were passive, non-determinants waiting to be massacred. The revolutionary activities of an Armenian minority provided a powerful excuse to the Ottoman state for its collective punishment against the Armenian peasantry who constituted the majority of the Armenian population of Anatolia. Thus, Gerard Libardian's essay attempts to provide some answers for the behavior of the Armenian revolutionary groups that jeopardized the fragile political situation of Armenians in general. A critical discussion of the activities of these various organization is missing in official Armenian historiography and is to a certain extent taboo. Donald Bloxham, in this same volume, rightfully argues that elements in the leadership of different Armenian political parties were "partly culpable for not heeding voices of caution from within their communities, subordinating the interests of the Ottoman Armenian masses, ignoring their fears, and by default inveigling them in a nationalist scheme with which many did not identify." (p. 273). Libaridian, however, somewhat exaggerates his case regarding the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (A.R.F, Dashnaktsut'iwn) and the political parties which, he asserts, by 1908 "were widely considered as having replaced the church as the main intermediary between the Ottoman authorities and their Armenian subjects."(p. 82). While it is indisputable that the Young Turk revolution shifted the dynamics of power inside the Armenian community, the church and the Armenian National Assembly remained the most important

[16] In the former, Armenians were dispossessed from the 1850s to 1914; in the latter, they bought land from the 1870s to World War I.

political bodies for the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, notwithstanding the reluctance of Dashnak official historiography to accept this evaluation.[17]

Libardian's analysis of the tensions that existed in the Armenian *millet* of the Ottoman Empire between the *azgaser* (nation or community lover) and *hayrenaser* (fatherland lover or patriot) (p. 94), however, constitutes a real contribution to the field. In Libaridian's estimation, the former represented the Armenian *millet* National Assembly in Istanbul and may be loosely characterized as comprising the conservative Armenian urban elite. They viewed the use of the *millet* structure as a tool for advancing the grievances of the Armenians as subversive and their activities were generally limited to community institutions. The *hayrenaser* on the other hand were preoccupied with the condition and plight of the Armenians in the eastern provinces and considered the *millet* structures as an essential tool for asserting the rights of the oppressed Armenian population of Anatolia (pp. 94-95). Libaridian argues that the ideologies of both the Hnchak and Dashnak parties—which on a basic level were "far from revolutionary," but which evolved out of the tension between these two factions—were complicated "by the social, economic, and political dimensions of the struggle for liberation" (p. 107).

The third essay in this section pertains to the participation of non-Muslims in the Ottoman army during the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913; an important topic that has been marginalized in the historiography. But while Fikret Adanır attempts to uncover the conditions under which Armenians served in the Ottoman Army (p. 114), he leaves the reader disappointed as he is able to reveal only a glimpse of the role of the Armenians in the Ottoman army. This rather meager discussion might stem from an inability to read Armenian as a vast amount of the material on this particular subject survives in Armenian.

The final article by Hans-Lukas Kieser presents an intellectual portrait of Dr. Mehmed Reşid (1873–1919) who was implicated not only in the extermination of the Armenians and the Assyrians between 1914-1916, particularly in the region of Diyarbekir, but also in the expulsion of the Greeks from Anatolia (p. 126). Hans-Lukas Kieser deconstructs the psyche of this Ottoman patriot who became a mass murder.[18] His conviction to biological materialism, Social Darwinism, hygienic discourse, a cult of *raison d'état*, combined with his political resentments to a dehumanized picture of

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[17] See Bedross Der Matossian, "Ethnic Politics in Post-Revolutionary Ottoman Empire: Armenians, Arabs, and Jews during the Second Constitutional Period (1908-1909)," (unpublished PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 2008).

[18] See also, idem, "Dr. Mehmed Reşid (1873–1919): A Political Doctor" in *Der Volkermord an den Armeniern und die Shoah/ The Armenian Genocide and the Shoah*, ed. Hans L. Kieser and Dominik J. Schaller (Zurich: Chronos, 2002), pp. 245–280. For more information on Reşid's governorship, see Uğur Ümit Üngör, "Center and Periphery in the Armenian Genocide: The Case of Diyarbekir Province," in *Der Genozid an den Armeniern, die Turkei und Europa/ The Armenian Genocide, Turkey and Europa*, ed. Hans-Lukas Kieser and Elmar Plozza (Zurich: Chronos, 2006), pp. 71–88.

Armenians as "bandits," "microbes," and "tumors" within the "organism of the fatherland"(p. 137, 145). In addition to the light Kieser's treatment of Dr. Reşid sheds on this individual perpetrator, his approach raises the more general question of the connection between scientific racism, modernity, and the destruction of indigenous populations in the 19th and the 20th centuries, a neglected aspect of research on Armenian Genocide.

**Russia, Germany, and the Armenian Genocide**

The third part of the volume devotes three essays to situating the genocide in an international context. Peter Holoquist's extremely important study reconsiders the Russian Occupation of Armenia between 1915 and February of 1917; another understudied dimension in the historiography of World War War I and the Armenian Genocide. By pointing out the misperceptions that exist in the traditional historiography about the Russian occupation of Armenia, Holoquist demonstrates how Russia like Germany pursued a policy that was "complicated and riddled with contradiction," "internally fractious and uncoordinated" (p. 152). According to him this policy followed its own dynamics and produced "policies that were callous and frequently brutal, yet they rarely had the purposefulness that is so often ascribed to them" (p. 153). He contends that the policies in Russian Armenia "were not the expression of some unified program by the Russian government. Rather, policy changed over time." (p. 174).

The final two essays in this section by Eric Weitz and Margaret Lavinia Anderson discuss the German attitudes towards the Ottoman Empire and the Armenian Genocide. Weitz rightly demystifies the claim that the Germans actively pursued a policy designed to eliminate the Armenians (p. 177). He illustrates how Germany in the end was primarily concerned about the Ottoman Empire for its own purposes. Nevertheless, an important point that Weitz raises is Germany's commitment to the Ottoman army and the principle of military necessity (*prinzip der militarischen notwendigkeit*), later used to justify the deportations and the killings of the Armenians. Weitz argues that by their support of the Young Turk government, German military officials became complicit in the Armenian Genocide through their "inaction, willful self-deception, and the perception of military necessity in the age of total war" (p. 196).

While Weitz focuses on German military assistance to the Ottoman Empire, Anderson gauges contemporary German society's reaction to the Armenian Genocide. She discusses in depth how the discourse of the Armenians was championed by Johannes Lepsius and some Armenian individuals from the Armenian colony of Berlin and assumed a dominant position amongst the German intellectual and the military elite.[19] The

[19] See for example, *Deutschland und Armenien 1914-1918. Sammlung diplomatischer Aktenstücke* . Herausgegeben von Dr. Johannes Lepsius [Germany and Armenia 1914-1918.

Armenian cause was supported by such *glitterati* as the painter Max Liebermann painter; the social theorist, George Simmel; and the Nobel Prize laureates Rudolf Eucken and Thomas Mann (pp. 202-203). Anderson concludes her article by surveying the contradictory stances within Germany on the Armenian Genocide ranging from altruism to silent participation.

**Microhistory and the Armenian Genocide**

Part IV, in my opinion, constitutes one of the more innovative sections of the volume as it presents microhistories of specific case studies in the history of the genocide. It is by initiating these types of micro-histories that we will be able to understand more the complexities of the process of genocide. In his essay, Aram Arkun successfully tackles the unfolding of events in Zeytun, one of the most volatile regions in Anatolia. Arkun here has accomplished what Ted Swedenburg did in his excellent article about the role of the Palestinian Peasantry in the Great Revolt (1936-9).[20] By delving into the primary sources, Arkun portrays a very complex picture of the Armenians of Zeytun at the commencement of the Armenian Genocide. He discusses how some Armenians and the Entente powers were interested in mobilizing the Armenians of the region for the sake of internal uprising. The popularity of this option, however, proved to be extremely limited and created a rupture within the Armenian community of Zeytun, some of whom openly criticized the rebels (p. 223). Arkun underscores the ambiguous nature of the resistance movement through the varying terminology he applies to its leaders; at one point referring to them as bandits (p. 226), at other as rebels (p. 231), and revolutionaries (p. 23). He further demonstrates how most of the Zeytun establishment, wealthy landowners and merchants who had large clan-based and patronage followings, were upset with the army deserters and bandits for making the area unsafe for travelers and bringing the unwanted attention of the government on the city (p. 239). Countering the allegations of Turkish official history that all of Zeytun revolted during the war, Arkun's evidence clearly indicates that only a minority of Zeytun Armenians attempted to oppose the Ottoman government by force, against the wishes of the majority (p. 241).

The second contribution of the section deals with the Ottoman Treatment of the Assyrians.[21] Concentrating on the region of the Iranian-Turkish border strip especially in the regions of Hakkari Mountains and on the village of

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A Collection of Diplomatic Documents] Published by Dr. Johannes Lepsius (Berlin: Tempel Publishing House, 1919). Reprinted by Donat & Temmen Publishing House, Bremen, 1986.

[20] Ted Swedenburg, "The Role of the Palestinian Peasantry in the Great Revolt 1936–1939," in *Islam, Politics, and Social Movements*, edited by Edmund Burke III and Ira Lapidus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

[21] See David Gaunt, *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors: Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia During World War I* (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2006).

Haftevan in particular, David Gaunt is able to illustrate the ways in which both Armenians and Assyrians suffered similar fates at the hands of the Ottomans during World War I. However, it is also clear that the Assyrians did not pose the same threat in the mind of the Sublime Porte as the Armenians. Thus, he observes that the Assyrians were subject to "much less central government propaganda identifying the Assyrians as traitors," rather it was "provincial and local politicians" who "spread such accusations in their jurisdictions" (p. 246).

Following Gaunt, Donald Bloxham discusses the evolution of the plan for the Armenian Genocide during World War I. He contends that "there was no a priori blueprint for genocide, but rather that it emerged from a series of more limited regional measures in a process of cumulative policy radicalization"(p. 260). He argues that the genocide emerged from an "Ottoman policy of 'ethnic reprisal'…informed by experience and knowledge of links between Armenian nationalists and Entente sponsors, but more generally by ethnic stereotypes of Armenian disloyalty and support of Allied war aims" (p. 263). It was this policy of ethnic reprisal that was later fused with the practice of ethnic cleansing by deportation "providing the constituent element of genocide."

The final essay of the section by Fuat Dündar reexamines the deportation of the Armenians to the desert region of the south. Dündar establishes that the decision to deport the Armenians was intentionally fatal and analyzes the steps that the government took in order to organize the deportations. Dündar, based on material from the Ottoman archives, provides a fresh interpretation of the deportation not as "a single event in terms of their organization and procedures" but as a process that consisted of five different waves with "disparate targets, destinations, durations and levels of violence" (p. 282). The series of deportations began in February 1915 and ended with the promulgation of the Deportation Law (*tehcir kanunu*) that became effective on June 1, 1915 and included all the remaining Armenians from the ten provinces of the eastern regions of the Empire. One critical point where Dündar errs, however, is in the issue of the concentration camps which he calls a "region of concentration" (p. 283). His inability to read Armenian prevents him from conducting a thorough examination of the thousands of documents that were collected on the subject by Aram Andonian and partially analyzed by Raymond H. Kévorkian. The Aram Andonian collection is preserved in the AGBU Nubarian Library in Paris under the supervision of Kévorkian and consists of sixty-two cases mounting to about five thousand documents. These documents, which were collected by Andonian himself between the years 1918–1920, describe the events and the status of the Armenian refugees. Kévorkian has published major studies based on the fifteen files pertaining to the Armenian refugees in Syria and Mesopotamia who were deported during the period spanning from February to December 1916, which he labeled the

second phase of the Genocide (*La Deuxième Phase du Génocide*).[22] In this work, Kévorkian laid out the "documentary foundations of this period of the genocide, hitherto virtually unknown to historians, trying among other things to reconstruct the network of concentration camps set up locally by the sub-directorate of the deportees in Aleppo."[23] These documents indicate that these camps were nothing else but concentration camps in which disease, epidemics, starvation, and killing were used as tools to exterminate the Armenians.[24]

**Historical Continuity and Ethnic Homogenization in the Empire and the Republic**

The final section of the book addresses the historical continuity of the Armenian Genocide and the transition from Empire to Republic. Uğur Ümit Üngör's contribution provides one of the most convincing analyses to date about the structural continuities that were maintained from the Imperial to the Republican periods by developing the thesis that "from 1913 to 1950 a clear continuity can be observed in the Young Turk dictatorship's policies of ethnic homogenization." (p. 288). He supports his argument by demonstrating how demographic engineering was employed by the Young Turk regime and the subsequent Republican regimes for the homogenization of Anatolia.[25] According to Üngör, this demographic engineering consisted of a variety of policies that aimed at marginalization, isolation, deportation, forced assimilation, and, in extreme cases, full-fledged genocidal destruction as was evident in the case of the Armenians of Anatolia (p. 290). Üngör reveals the sophisticated bureaucratic machinery that played a dominant role in the "demographic dilution," and demonstrates how this policy was not only endemic to the Armenians; but also encompassed the Kurdish population of Anatolia, exemplified by their westward deportation and the resettlement of

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[22] See Raymond H. Kévorkian, ed., *L'extermination des déportés Arméniens Ottomans dans les camps de concentration de Syrie-Mésopotamite (1915-1916): La deuxième phase du genocide* (Paris: Bibliothe`que Nubar de l'UGAP, 1998).

[23] See Raymond H. Kévorkian, "The Status of Materials on the Armenian Genocide," papers presented at the conference The State of the Art of Armenian Genocide Research: Historiography, Sources and Future Directions, Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts, April 8–10, 2010.

[24] Andonian's book entitled *Ayn Sev Orerun* (In those Black Days) (Boston, 1919) is the best testimony of the condition of the Armenians in the concentration camps.

[25] See Uğur Ümit Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); idem, "Seeing like a Nation-State: Young Turk Social Engineering in Eastern Turkey, 1913-1950", in: *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol.10, no.1 (2008), pp. 15-39; idem, "Geographies of Nationalism and Violence: Towards a New Understanding of Young Turk Social Engineering", in: *European Journal of Turkish Studies* (2008), at: http://www.ejts.org/document2583.html, p. 30. See also Nesim Şeker, "Demographic Engineering in the Late Ottoman Empire and the Armenians," *Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 2 (May 2007), p. 468.

Balkan Muslim refugees in Kurdish areas. The second phase of the ethnic transformation of Anatolia occurred with the 1925 Reform Plan of Mustafa Kemal that envisioned "deportation as a legitimate measure to subdue (and assimilate) many Kurds as a 'solution' to a 'problem'"(p. 302). For Üngör this constitutes "the quintessential example of early twentieth-century social engineering, reflecting a staunch belief in the feasibility of crafting a society through large-scale, top-down authoritarian modernization, coupled with an ethnonationalist vision of 'landscaping the human garden' at a distance." (p. 301).

The final article of the volume by Erik-Jan Zürcher deals with the postwar Unionist and Kemalist rhetoric on the destruction of the Armenians. Zürcher argues that even though most of the top leadership of the CUP were smuggled abroad by the Germans or were tried in Malta, the cadre of the national resistance movement consisted of former Unionsits[26] (p. 308). The prominent role of Unionists in the national resistance movement points to the continuity not only of structures, but also of leadership between the Imperial and Republican period. Zürcher further addresses the impact of the Armenian massacres on the postwar attitudes of the Unionists through examining "their public statements in order to establish to what extent an effort was made either to distance themselves from, or conversely to justify, the ethnic policies of the war years."(p. 308). He finds that a silence about the Armenian massacres permeates postwar documents. He does not attribute the lack of discussion of the fate of the Armenians to a "conspiracy of silence", but to more practical concerns, particularly to garnering political support among the Ottoman Muslim population. According to Zürcher, any mention of the Armenian massacres would have been counterproductive to their political objectives and have weakened their popularity. In addition, Zürcher concludes, during the early Republican period there was little legal, financial, or social need for the political and intellectual elite to distance themselves from the genocide and its perpetrators. The continued presence of former Unionists among the ruling Turkish Republican elite represents the most significant testimony to the historical continuity between the Empire and the Republic that has to a certain extent been marginalized in the historiography of late Ottoman/Turkish Republican history.

## Conclusion

Notwithstanding its shortcomings that range from a problematic introduction to the uneven nature of the collection of essays, *A Question of Genocide* should be regarded as an important contribution to the historiography of the Armenian Genocide and as the worthy continuation of a

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[26] Erik-Jan Zürcher, *The Unionist Factor: The Role of the Committee of Union and Progress in the Turkish National Movement, 1905-1926* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1984).

collaborative effort to address the different dimensions and approaches to the history of the Armenian Genocide. The book is a must for every graduate student, scholar, or historian who is interested in exploring different dimensions of not only the Armenian Genocide but also of late Ottoman history, the transition from Empire to Nation State, ethnic violence, and the history of World War I. It is this reviewer's hope that some of the volume's lacunae noted above will be addressed by these and other scholars in the near future, while the essays in this volume that have charted new ground inspire continued progress down these avenues of research. This volume will provide the basis for many further discussions and disagreements on the Armenian Genocide because, as Suny argued nearly two decades ago, "no monograph or anthology can be 'definitive' on the Genocide, for it is by its nature and its position in the field of knowledge contentious."[27]

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[27] See Ronald Suny's review of Richard Hovannisian, ed., *The Armenian Genocide: History, Politics, Ethics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992) in *Armenian Review*, Volume 46, Number 1-4, Spring 1993, pp. 217-220.