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Orientalism, the ‘Terrible Turk’ and Genocide

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ABSTRACT This article examines the connections between Orientalism and the construction of the stereotypic image, the ‘terrible Turk.’ It focuses on the major politically motivated texts that were produced during the First World War as war propaganda. These texts portrayed Turks as the enemy of civilization at a time when Britain and later the United States were at war with the Ottoman Empire, which unofficially was known as Turkey in the West. In the years after the First World War, the essentially racist characterizations of Turks in these polemical texts made them undiplomatic and they essentially were forgotten. In recent decades, however, diverse international actors have been recycling these texts in a concerted effort to delegitimize the Republic of Turkey and to ‘otherize’ Turks as ‘genocidal’ for deporting the Armenian population out of eastern Anatolia in 1915. By examining the motives behind both the Armenian and Turkish reframing of the 1915 events as a Turkish genocide campaign against Armenians or an Armenian mezalim [atrocity] against Muslims, the article criticizes both approaches and provides a new framework for mutual understanding between Christians and Muslims.

KEY WORDS: Armenian Revolutionary Federation; Armenians; Anatolia; John Bryce; First World War; Genocide; Islamophobia; mezalim; Muslims; Henry Morgenthau, Sr., Orientalism; Ottoman Empire; Arnold Toynbee

As the 100th anniversary of the First World War approaches, it seems appropriate to inquire into how the discourse of Orientalism, so prevalent in Europe and North America a century ago, can continue to inform and restructure the political discourse of the present about ‘the other’? This is an important question because the discourse of Orientalism was embedded in the nineteenth and early twentieth century belief in ‘scientific racism’ (i.e., the anthropological justification of racism and thus colonial rule), an idea that was discredited internationally in the generation following the Second World War. However, some of the ugliest Orientalist notions are being revived in respect to Muslims in the Middle East, and for that reason it is essential to unpack the symbiotic relationship between past Orientalist discourses and their contemporary reconstruction. An instructive case in point is the concerted and deliberate effort during the past decade to redefine what happened to the Armenian community in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War...
as a deliberate policy of genocide by a genetically inferior Turkish race that was obsessed with an anti-Christian ideology.

Readers may ask ‘What is the connection between the events of 1915, the use of the term genocide, and Orientalism?’ During the First World War, the Ottoman Empire was one of the belligerents in this war that divided the major powers of Europe into two hostile alliances: the Central Powers of Austro-Hungary, Germany, and the Ottoman Empire on one side; and the Triple Entente of Britain, France and Russia on the other side. The Triple Entente powers promoted images of the ‘terrible Turk,’ ‘backward Islam,’ and the despotic Ottoman state as part of their propaganda, images that the popular press readily disseminated to mass reading publics. These depictions of Turkey—the de facto term for the Ottoman Empire in most of Europe—and Islam were not new in 1914, but actually had been current since the mid-nineteenth century, and people assumed them to be authoritative because they were used by respected statesmen, such as, for example, Cardinal (John Henry) Newman and William Gladstone (several times Prime Minister) in Britain. However, these old stereotypes were revived with fervor in 1915, following the Ottoman Empire’s decision to deport its civilian Armenian population from the war front of eastern Anatolia to its southern provinces, and the subsequent reports that thousands of deportees were dying during the forced march south from harsh weather and diseases, as well as being killed by armed groups attacking their convoys. Influential statesmen, such as John Bryce in Britain and former US ambassador to Istanbul Henry Morgenthau, organized virtual crusades to alert the public about the Armenian massacres undertaken by the ‘bloodthirsty’ Turks, the same Turks who ruled the Ottoman Empire, which Cardinal Newman earlier had denounced as an ‘infamous power, the enemy of god and man.’

The Ottoman Empire and its allies were on the losing side in the First World War, and within months of the armistice, foreign troops from Britain, France, Greece and Italy began occupying various of its territories, with the aim of carving up the empire among themselves. In the Turkish heartland of Anatolia, the harshness of Greek and French rule, especially, sparked local uprisings during 1919, and by the end of the year, a full-blown national war of liberation was underway. The issue of the Armenian massacres, such a prominent international issue between 1915 and 1918, gradually ceased to be an international concern. The issue began to be revived starting in 1965, with an effort to redefine the Armenian massacres as a genocide. What is curious about this redefinition is not the use of scholarly sources to try to document what actually happened in 1915, but the resorting to discredited Orientalist accounts that were prepared for propaganda purposes, either to get Britain to pay more attention to defeating and dismantling the Ottoman Empire (Bryce) or to persuade a reluctant US President Woodrow Wilson to abandon neutrality and declare war on Germany and its allies (Morgenthau).

Why do some scholars utilize these racist and Orientalist texts to discuss what happened in 1915? There are several reasons why these texts are cited, the most important being this: They provide a simple causal link to explain the events. Complex human relations are reduced to a few ‘essential’ causes and they stress certain defining traits as the key to understanding these past events. By stressing the ethnic characteristics of Turks and Muslims, the authors attempt to explain the entirety of social and political relations in the

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late Ottoman state on the basis of these fixed ethnic and religious traits. These authors attribute agency to ethnic or religious traits and negate the interactive agency of Muslims, while ignoring completely the role of context. They exaggerate the impact of Islamic doctrine or ethnic characteristics on the conduct of individuals and on the patterns of institutions in society as a whole. They insist that there is a fixed ethno-religious practice that is based on static Islamic norms of Muslim Turks and guides their conduct in both public and private domains. After the events of September 11, 2001, in particular, some politicians and policy analysts have emphasized the use of Islamic texts in order to understand Muslim conduct. Indeed, Islamophobia and Turcophobia are fully integrated into the discourses of the genocide thesis. This makes their arguments more emotionally appealing to mass Western audiences who generally have no knowledge of what happened in Europe or Asia during the First World War and would not be aware that the views of such ‘authoritative’ historical personalities as Bryce and Morgenthau have been discredited among serious scholars as racist Orientalism. Thus, their writings are being revived and popularized precisely to provide this ‘authoritative’ arsenal by which to otherize and dehumanize the Turks. And these English texts, which no longer are covered by copyright, have been made readily available online.

By relying on Orientalist works that pioneered the image of the ‘Terrible Turk,’ the Armenian genocide narrative revives the racist rhetoric that justified the forcible resettlement of millions of civilians, both Christians and Muslims, in the Balkans and the Middle East before, during and after World War I. Furthermore, those who write and think in terms of Orientalist categories tend to turn the concept of genocide into a platform for perpetuating the stereotype of the ‘Terrible Turk.’ For instance, Ayhan Aktar, who is critical of both the Armenian and Turkish nationalist interpretations of the 1915 events, argues that the Orientalist image of the ‘Terrible Turk’ is an essential part of Vahan Dadrian’s genocide argument. Aktar criticizes many Armenian scholars for ‘base[ing] their explanations on such crude nationalist analyses and bitterly essentialist premises. Again Dadrian, in his major work, argues that the militaristic weltanschauung of the Turks, combined with the limited tolerance associated with Islam, created a cultural setting favourable to genocide against Christians.’2 Aktar dismiss this essentialist argument and calls upon scholars to focus on the social and political factors of the violence in 1915.

Construction of the ‘Terrible Turk’

With the rising economic and military might of Europe and the influence of nationalism in the nineteenth century, a period of rebellion and invasion began within the centuries-old Ottoman Empire. The starting point was the Greek uprising in 1821, which initiated a period of massacres and ethnic cleansing. The removal of the Ottomans from the Balkans was reminiscent of the reconquista in Spain: A fight to regain former territories, re-establish Christian sovereignty, and to wipe out the infidel Muslims. The most important episodes of the forced deportations of Muslims following the Greek rebellion were the massacres and ethnic cleansing in 1864 after Russia’s conquest of the

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North Caucasus, in Bulgaria in 1877–78, and in what is now Northern Greece and Macedonia in 1912–13. In that period, several million Ottoman Muslims, mostly Turks, were massacred or died as victims of ethnic cleansing. Yet the destruction of Ottoman Muslim communities hardly led to much protest from scholars, politicians or public figures. On the contrary, this destruction was regarded as entirely normal so the new nation-states in the Balkans could be rid of indigenous Muslim populations deemed as ‘outsiders’ within the new societies.

Why did both Christian scholars and Enlightenment thinkers want so badly to see an end to the Ottoman presence in Europe? European powers became less tolerant of ‘Turkey-in-Europe’ in the nineteenth century than in earlier centuries. Ironically, it was in the ‘liberal’ and ‘secular’ era that European leaders asked how was it possible that an Islamic entity could rule Christian populations in Europe’s backyard? This question led them to marshal their resources to expel the Ottoman state from the European continent. It is important to understand that it was not only religiously motivated fanatics, but also enlightened philosophical thinkers who worked with avid determination to expel Muslims from the Balkans. There are two fundamental reasons why this Islamophobic attitude emerged among the European enlightenment thinkers. First, they were generally anti-religious, but rather than attack the Christian Church at home, they preferred to attack religion via attacks on Islam. They portrayed the Islamic religion as fanaticism, and they used Islam as a foil to criticize the role of revelation in the social order. Second, they were in favor of reason, democracy, and enlightenment. Thus, in opposition to the influences of ‘Jerusalem,’ they highlighted the civilizational significance of ‘Athens’ and the Hellenistic cultural foundations of Europe. At the beginning of the 19th century, the Greek nation out of which their imagined Western culture had originated was under the rule of Muslim Turks. This was an unacceptable state of affairs for these philosophers. Thus, most enlightened European thinkers found reasons for despising Turks and Islam. Third, for these thinkers, Turks were representatives of an Asiatic despotism, which was constructed as a straw man in order to praise the wonderful aspects of European identity (which more often than not were idealized). It was treated as the negative ‘other’ of European enlightenment. Thus, in the nineteenth century, there was a debate over ‘Turkey-in-Europe’ as an anomaly, but no similar debate over any other despotic European power. European thinkers thus concluded that Turkey must be expelled from Europe, and therefore Balkan Christians were encouraged to get rid of their Muslim neighbors and particularly fight their Turkish rulers. This dialectic of a European ‘self’ and Turkish ‘other’ played a key role in the formation of public opinion to end the Ottoman presence in Europe regardless of the human cost.

‘Foundational’ Texts

The memoir of US Ambassador to Turkey Henry Morgenthau provides some of the most powerful rhetoric supporting the genocide thesis.\(^5\) Almost all scholars who insist on naming the events of 1915 as genocide refer to this text.\(^6\) *Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story* is presented as *prima facie* evidence to support claims that the Young Turks systematically planned and executed the killings of innocent Armenians. In her famous book, *A Problem from Hell: America in the Age of Genocide*, Samantha Power,\(^7\) the current US Ambassador to the UN, depicted Ambassador Morgenthau as a heroic public servant who worked hard to stop the killings of the Armenians. Moreover, every proposed Armenian Genocide resolution in the US Congress bases its arguments on this book as the *Res ipsa loquitur*, i.e., the facts are so obvious that there is no need for more evidence. Moreover, in every court case that dealt with the killings of 46 Turkish diplomats in the 1980s and 1990s by Armenian terrorists, the defense lawyers regularly invoked Morgenthau’s *Story* as evidence to explain the source of this feeling of collective revenge to kill the Turks since they killed the Armenians.\(^8\) Ronald Grigor Suny, a leading historian of Russia and the Caucasus, identifies Morgenthau’s memoirs as the most important ‘account’ of the 1915 events as genocide and presents Morgenthau’s characterization of the Turks only as ‘essentializing nationality’ rather than pure racism. Suny argues: ‘The ambassador reveals himself as a keen observer, privileged in his access to power, judicious in his evaluations of both the political context and the key players, and highly ethical and fearless in his defense of his government and his own values.’\(^9\)

Morgenthau’s official reports to the Department of State were very different from his controversial memoir, which he wrote after resigning as ambassador in 1916 to devote his efforts to propagandizing on behalf of the cause to get the United States into WWI as an ally of Britain and against Germany and the Ottoman Empire. In the memoir, Morgenthau expressed a racist and dehumanizing characterization of the Turkish people, culture, and history. The problem here is that the conceptual outcome of this thesis is totally built on the Orientalist-essentialist historiography within the text. The depiction of the Turk as the inferior and backward ‘other’ can be read throughout it. For Morgenthau, the Turk is ‘psychologically primitive’ (p. 236), a ‘bully and a coward’ who can be ‘brave as a lion when things are going his way, but cringing, abject, and nerveless when reverses are overwhelming him’ (p. 275). Morgenthau claims that the Turks, ‘like most primitive peoples, wear their emotions on the surface’ (p. 195). He describes the Turks variously as ‘inarticulate, ignorant, and poverty-ridden slaves’ (p. 13), ‘barbarous’ (p. 147), ‘brutal’

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6 H. Morgenthau (1919) *Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company); for a critical reading of Morgenthau’s book, see H. Lowry (1990) *The Story Behind Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story* (Istanbul: ISIS). Lowry shows that the Ambassador’s main goal of writing this book was to convince Americans to support the war.


9 Suny, *Writing Genocide*, p. 16.
(p. 149), ‘ragged and unkempt’ (p. 276), and ‘parasites’ (p. 280). The ambassador’s hatred of the Turks allows him to conclude that: ‘The descendants of Osman hardly resemble any people I have ever known. They do not hate, they do not love; they have no lasting animosities or affections. They only fear’ (p. 99). These opinions presented as ‘facts’ were similar to the European justifications for the colonial conquest of the ‘Orient’ through scientific racism within the then nascent discipline of anthropology. As far as Ottoman history is concerned, Morgenthau asserts, ‘after five hundred years of close contact with European civilization, the Turk remained exactly the same individual as the one who had emerged from the steppes of Asia in the Middle Ages’ (p. 284). Indeed, the Turks are sub-human, as evident in the way they conquered land: if they ‘found it occupied by a certain number of camels, horses, buffaloes, dogs, swine, and human beings. Of all these living things the object that physically most resembled themselves they regarded as the least important’ (p. 279). Morgenthau tried to explain the violence-prone Turkish character in terms of Islam. Violence, for him, is innate and endorsed in Islam. Suny argues that Morgenthau’s text ‘became foundational for Western and Armenian historiography of the genocide.’

Given his deep racism toward the Turks and Islam, and considering that the book was war-propaganda, one must wonder why Suny takes Morgenthau’s alleged conversation with Talat seriously, since he hardly mentions those conversations in his official reports to the State Department. Morgenthau’s descriptions of Armenians are in sharp contrast, as he argues that they ‘are known for their industry, their intelligence, and their decent and orderly lives. They are so superior to the Turks intellectually and morally’ (p. 287). He applauds their rebellion against the Ottoman state and gives his full support to it by arguing that the Armenians ‘would also have welcomed an opportunity to strengthen the hands of the Allies’ (p. 227). On the basis of Morgenthau’s account, Suny claims as ‘fact,’ ‘That the Armenians all over Turkey sympathized with the Entente was no secret.’ Although many people in Europe and the United States likely shared Morgenthau’s opinions during World War I, when Orientalist racism was deeply engrained, such views would be considered blatantly racist by international norms since the late 1960s. However, without questioning the racist and dehumanizing tone of this war-propaganda book, Suny argues, ‘the themes of Morgenthau’s memoir remain among the most powerful elements constituting both narrative of the genocide and its explanation up to the present.’ Thus, one naturally must


12 Lowry, The Story, p. 9. Moreover, an examination of Morgenthau’s papers in the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library reveals that Burton Hendrick (1870–1949), his personal secretary Hagop S. Andonian, and Arshag K. Schmavonian actually helped to write the book. Thus it was not the memoir of one man but rather ‘a memoir by a committee,’ ibid, p. 23. It can be noted further that even a committee authorship of the book is questionable, as Lowry’s detailed research spectacularly exposes the intricate role of Hendrick as the ‘ghost-writer’ of Story: In his personal letter to Hendrick, Morgenthau details the monetary transaction, ‘the definite arrangement is to be made when your work on the book is completed . . . I thereby direct my Executors to arrange that you are to receive two-fifths of any profits that are coming to me from Doubleday, Page & Company [the publisher of the book], until you have received Ten Thousand ($10,000) Dollars.’ In ibid, p. 21.

13 Suny, Writing Genocide, p. 19.

14 Ibid, pp. 20–21.
raise the question of why Suny would cite this controversial text as the main source for documenting the genocide thesis?

The American ambassador’s style of writing is similar to the tone in the World War I ‘reports’ of Viscount Bryce and Arnold J. Toynbee. The proponents of the genocide thesis combine the latters’ claims about the Turks with those of Morgenthau into a one-two punch. For example, in his preface to Toynbee’s *The Murderous Tyranny of the Turks*, Bryce proudly announces the Allies’ determination to ‘deliver the Christian population of what is called the Turkish Empire, whether in Asia or in Europe, from a Government which during those five centuries has done nothing but oppress them.’ The Turk, for Bryce, ‘cannot administer . . . cannot secure justice. As a governing power, he has always shown himself incapable, corrupt and cruel. He has always destroyed.’

Neither Bryce nor Toynbee wrote about early twentieth century massacres in the British colonial empire as they focused on the Ottoman domain and construed a barbaric image of Turks. This is also the case for Morgenthau who ignored racist US policies in the Philippines (which became a US colony in 1898) or the discrimination/segregation policies against African Americans in the southern states, but easily became a moral preacher against the ‘Oriental’ Turk. Today, it would be unthinkable to characterize historical American and British policies as racist or even genocide, so why does racism provide the intellectual arsenal for the ‘bloody’ images of Turks? The genocide label has become a surrogate discourse of Orientalism to portray the Turks as bloody, backward, and despotic. In the past decade, as Turkey has tried tirelessly to join the European Union, many European governments and organizations have reacted by utilizing the old racist discourses of Orientalism to show the ‘otherness’ of the Turks in order to keep Turkey outside the European Union. The anti-Turkish circles have rallied around the 1915 massacres and deportations of Christian Armenians to show the ‘despotic and bloodthirsty’ characteristics of the Turks, stressing real or imagined negative acts in Ottoman history.

The Politics of the Armenian Question

Today, the Armenian genocide discourse is used to perpetuate the image of the ‘Terrible Turk,’ undermine the legitimacy of the Turkish Republic, and to keep Turkey out of the European Union. The genocide narrative is put to use by many who share little else except their dislike of Turks. A coalition of Islamophobic and/or Turkophobic groups is carrying out this ongoing campaign for recognition of the 1915 events as genocide. For instance, after the electoral victory of Turkey’s pro-Islamic Justice and Development Party (2002) and its subsequent critical tone toward Israel’s occupation policies, *Middle East Quarterly*, a pro-Israeli and Orientalist journal, published a special issue on ‘The Armenian genocide.’ Its editor, Efraim Karsh, who is famous for his anti-Arab and anti-Muslim opinions, wrote the lead article to link the 1915 events to the current policies of the Turkish government. Different groups in diverse countries have invoked the politics of genocide as a weapon to carry out Islamophobic discourse against Turkey. Not only in the United

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16 For the special issue on the Armenian genocide, see *Middle East Quarterly* (2013), 20(1). The articles in this issue feature such provocative titles as ‘Islamic Supremacy,’ and ‘Did Armenian Genocide Inspire Hitler.’
States and Europe, but also in Australia, the politics of genocide is a vehicle for dehumanizing Muslims. For example, Fred Nile, the Australian leader of the Christian Democratic Party, is behind politicizing the events of 1915 and getting the New South Wales Legislative Council to recognize it as genocide, and thus is a living example of an Islamophobic politician. He has warned the Australians about Muslim migration, which seeks to ‘transform Australia into an Islamic country,’ and has referred to the events of 1915 as ‘the Muslim genocide against Christian Armenians.’ In other words, Nile leads a tireless crusade against Muslims in Australia. In fact, the recognition of genocide has become the basis for Christian hostility to Muslims, since it shows ‘the nature and intent of Islam.’ Nile is a believing Christian in his own way, who just like Gladstone used to do, delivers emotional speeches on the parliament floor or outside to mobilize people against Muslim perpetrators (Turks) who killed Christian victims (Armenians). He, not surprisingly, wants Australia to rid itself of Muslim immigrants.

Australian Armenians collaborated with Nile to pass the law to recognize the Ottoman genocide against all Christian minorities (Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians). Since the New South Wales politicians were mobilized in the name of Christianity, they recognized all Ottoman Christians as the victims of genocide. However, Nile claims to be an admirer of secular Ataturk and blames the caliphate and the Ottomans (he means Muslims) for the genocide. Nile attacks the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) government for having been overtly Muslim and not tolerant of Christians. In current debates over the description of the events of 1915, genocide accusations and Islamophobic worldviews supplement and reinforce one another. There is a new concerted effort by scholars and politicians to label the experience of all Ottoman Christians as ‘genocide.’ Nile’s activities indicate how Orientalism and genocide discourses reinforce each other in certain aspects by producing a web of images, concepts, strategies and symbols in the further ‘otherization’ and dehumanization of the Turks with certain political consequences. Thus, genocide becomes a discursive tactic that is charged with emotion, dramatization, and morbidity, and it especially seeks to bring differential moral relations between the imagined victim and perpetrator. Gladstone’s ‘terrible Turk’ has been transformed into the ‘genocidal Turk,’ projecting guilt as a moral and political debt upon modern Turks and Muslims.

Genocide and Mezalim as Sites of Victim Identity

Armenians originally termed the events of 1915 as aghed [catastrophe] or yeghern [pogrom], while some scholars also have used darakrutiun [deportation] and aksor [exile]. After 1965, due to a number of reasons, especially the concerted efforts of the

17 H. Davidson (2013) Gallipoli service: O’Farrell attacks Turkish threat to bar NSW MPs, The Guardian, 22 August.
19 Zabel Essayan (1878–1943), an Ottoman Armenian feminist writer, was the first person to use the term aghed (catastrophe) to describe the massacres of Armenians in Adana in 1909. Indeed, her book, Aweraknerun mej [Among the ruins] ignores social and political causes of the massacres but provides brilliantly crafted descriptions of the senseless killings and destruction in Adana. For more on the book, see M. Nichanian (2002), Catastrophic Mourning, in Loss: The Politics of Mourning, D. L. Eng & D. Kazanjian (eds) (Berkeley:
Soviet Union, the Armenian diaspora, under the leadership of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), redefined the events of 1915 as genocide. Some Armenians have insisted on the redefinition of the events as genocide, while some extremists committed high profile terrorist attacks on and assassinations of Turkish diplomats. By their aggressive lobbying for recognition of the 1915 events as genocide, Armenians have narrowed their own options for reconciliation and provided a new arsenal for outside political forces to use as leverage against both Turkey and Armenia. Those countries that want Turkey to concede political and/or economic favors to them now play the ‘genocide card.’ As a consequence, the Armenian issue has become an international bargaining chip. The European Union countries and especially the United States use the ‘recognition issue’ to get concessions on numerous issues.

If the Armenians did not frame the historical issue as genocide but rather as aghed [the catastrophe], there would have been much better prospects for reconciliation between Armenia and Turkey since an independent Armenia emerged out of the Soviet Union in 1991. For instance, it was possible, but not easy, to bring some Turkish intellectuals together in 2008 around the concept of the Great Catastrophe to organize an online apology for the mass killings of Armenians during World War I. Most of these intellectuals would have not have signed on if the event had been framed as genocide. This indicates the power of the word genocide to stop dialogue. In other words, the term genocide leads to a prosecutorial tone of accusation against the Turks, whereas catastrophe opens more room for contemplating what happened. Marc Nichanian, a French Armenian scholar, offers a powerful argument about the negative implications of this shift from ‘the catastrophe’ to ‘genocide:’ ‘We have to prove that it is genocide. But the opposite is true as well, and that is what is terrible. It was genocide, and we need to prove it for that reason. We need to enter into the endless game of proving it ... There is not genocide without denial. More than that: the essence of genocide is denial.’

In fact, this shift did not help reconciliation but rather further radicalized historiographies, and genocide has become the refuge of contemporary Armenian identity. The paradox of the situation is that, as a result of genocide, Armenian identity becomes dependent on the politics of the Turkish side. It constantly requires recognition from its ‘enemy,’ the Turks. When that recognition is not forthcoming, it consumes all the energy and resources of the community. Since the Turkish state and many scholars reject

Footnote 19 continued

University of California Press), pp. 99–132. After the deportation, Essayan wrote Nahanjoc uzer [Forces in retreat] in which she blames the formation of the Armenian volunteer units under the Russian army as the critical provocative act that lead to the deportation. Armenian writers usually have shied away from exploring her second book, focusing instead on the first one to discuss the brutality of the Turks. Indeed, she hardly wrote about the catastrophe of 1915 and remained silent until she was killed during the purges of Stalin. Armenian writer Hagop Oshagan (1883–1948) was the first to use the term Aghed to describe the deportation and its related events in 1915.

20 Bernard Lewis explains this shift in terms of the Soviet campaign to create problems for Turkey and also create a wedge within NATO member countries, see Lewis (2012) ‘Judgement in Paris,’ Notes On A Century, Reflections Of A Middle East Historian (New York: Penguin Group), pp. 286–287.

21 Aydinların Kanpanyası: Ermenilerden Özür Diliyorum [The campaign of intellectuals: I apologize to Armenians], in: Radikal, April 12, 2008. The I Apologize Campaign is an initiative that a group of Turkish intellectuals launched in 2008.

the depiction of the events of 1915 as genocide, it deepens anxiety and leads to a crisis in the definition of being an Armenian. Why do Armenians today insist on the recognition of their sufferings as genocide but nothing else? Why did this shift in terminology take place? Genocide allows scholars to read the causes of the 1915 events from their consequences and turns the historical debate into a moralist narrative that seeks to rewrite the chain of events according to rigidly defined legal concepts and according to the needs of the current political identity debates.

Memory is situated in emotion and solidarity. The Armenian memory of 1915 hinges largely on a trauma that is represented as genocide. Trauma survives, restructures itself, and becomes the core of identity through memory. Armenians seek to express their loyalty, anxiety, and rage in terms of genocide. Thus, genocide captures all of these diverse feelings while providing an essential social glue to establish the borders of Armenian nationalism and unite the Armenian people. Yet, they carefully avoid facing or discussing the decision of the Armenian elite to collaborate with Russia against their own Ottoman state and to establish volunteer units to terrorize the Muslim population and provide logistic support for the Russian army. The Armenian diaspora insists on the use of genocide alone to describe what happened. In a sense, the study of World War I and the entire Armenian history in the Ottoman Empire is reduced to the concept of genocide. Why is this the case? First, genocide keeps emotions in the debate and especially solidifies a genocide-centric Armenian identity. In other words, genocide marshals powerful emotions among Armenians to form powerful political bonds and create a sense of community. Genocide becomes the cement of the Armenian diasporic identity to overcome religious, ideological and class divisions. According to a prominent Armenian scholar, genocide is a new religion for Armenians and there is a competition for the position of high priest in this new faith. It becomes a diasporic homeland, a new space in which imagined victims take refuge in defining who they are by determining whom they are against. It projects a unified victim group (Armenians) under the guise of genocide and prevents Armenians from acknowledging their own history by ignoring internal diversity and intra-power struggles within the Armenian communities, while at the same time reducing hostility among Armenian political parties. For instance, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF, which was established in 1890 in Tbilisi and still dominates the diaspora with its NGO structure), a politico-communal organization that went through several transmutations, has used the genocide discourse for a number of reasons. It hid successfully behind the politics of the genocide debate to avoid facing its own past, especially its close political cooperation with the CUP. The ARF also sought to control the various Armenian communities under the genocide banner and to police the intellectual debate on genocide (the history of the Armenian community in the Ottoman Empire) within the Armenian communities, and has transformed itself into a secular church to protect and perpetuate genocide as a new religion with journals, associations and political action committees. Those who would deviate from the ARF version of history are/were disciplined through excommunication.

Second, it homogenizes the Armenians as victims and the Turks as perpetrators. Genocide also privileges victims’ memory and ignores the memory and suffering of the Muslim Turks and Kurds. It allows Armenians to attract the sympathy of world public opinion by claiming a unique victimhood. This also forces scholars who disagree with the Armenian genocide narrative to become more careful in developing counter arguments so as not to be treated as denialists. In other words, genocide censors and sanitizes the counter-argument and morality rests with the accuser.

Third, genocide allows Armenians to use anti-Islamic and anti-Turkish images and to consolidate the image of the ‘terrible Turk’ or ‘bloody Turk.’ It uses Islamophobia, along with Turcophobia, and helps to dehumanize the Turks as a ‘genocidal people.’ It justifies not only Armenian violence against the Turkish diplomats but also Armenia’s occupation of one-fifth of the territory of Azerbaijan since 1992, and its killing and ethnic cleansing of Azeri Turks from the Nagorno-Karabakh region. In fact, the Republic of Armenia has invested in the cause of genocide in order to mobilize diaspora communities to justify its occupation and ethnic cleansing of Azeri Turks. By insisting on the label of genocide, the debate in fact has radicalized some Armenian youth and morally armed them to use violence. The perception of being a victim inadvertently justifies and provides moral grounds to become a victimizer. For instance, in the 1980s, the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) killed 46 Turkish diplomats, including several high-ranking ambassadors, to force Turkey to recognize the events of 1915 as genocide, to pay reparations, and to cede territory in northeastern Anatolia to Armenia. These organized killings and several shock attacks, like the 1983 one at Orly airport in Paris (which resulted in the killing of eight people) and the 1982 attack on Esenboga airport in Ankara (which resulted in the killing of nine people), brought the Armenian issue to the attention of the Turkish public within the context of terrorism. Indeed, before these attacks, the Turkish public had forgotten the events of 1915 and there was no debate about what happened to the Armenians in eastern Anatolia. In other words, forcing the Turkish state and the public to remember and face the history of 1915 through these high level attacks helped to create a more defensive and dismissive literature about the events of 1915. The key term that was framed to discuss and remember what took place became Ermeni Mezalimi (Armenian atrocities), a term that was used as early as 1916 when the Ottoman state had a clearly defined official view regarding deportations, but ceased being used widely during the 1920s.

24 Recently I had a long conversation with an Armenian scholar in Yerevan, who said ‘genocide is becoming more important in Armenia today due to the Karabakh conflict. It helps us to understand Turkish motives and mobilize the Armenians for the Karabakh cause.’ (October 9, 2012) The conquest of one-fifth of Azeri territory and the ethnic cleansing of 1 million Azeri Turks is justified in the name of victimhood. Indeed, the distance between the victim and victimizer is very narrow. In Baku, an Azeri professor of politics said, ‘the Republic of Armenia, along with the diaspora, in its lobbying and naming the events of 1915 as genocide, seeks to shame the Republic of Turkey and Azerbaijan into accepting its occupation.’ (July 14, 2013; see further on these themes, A. Bagirov (2012) Nagorno-Karabakh: Competing Legal, Historic and Economic Claims in Political, Academic and Media Discourses, Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs 32(2), pp. 139–175.


26 Ermeni Komitelerinin Emelleri ve İhtila Hareketleri: Mesrutiyet’in Hannandan Önce ve Sonra [Goals of the Armenian committees and revolutionary movements: Before and after the constitution] (Istanbul: Kaynak Yayınılar, 2006). This book originally was published in 1916 by the Ministry of Interior to explain the
Today, in Anatolia, the events of 1915 are defined as the *Ermeni Mezalimi*. It describes the ‘state of persecution and dehumanization’ of Ottoman Muslims during the First World War when the Armenian guerrillas, with the help of occupying Russian troops, organized a rebellion in eastern Anatolia, attacked Muslims, and destroyed the logistic lines, along with mosques. Although the term was used during the war to describe the conflict, it now seeks to construct a victim image of the Muslims while covering-up the massive atrocities inflicted on the Armenian communities. This particular ‘stock of historical knowledge’ of insurgency, killing villagers, burning homes and killing soldiers constitutes a collective memory that has been handed down from previous generations, and it constantly is evoked to create a sense of a community that tried to protect itself from European partition plans. In this sense the term *mezalim* is also a critical frame of reference in which the events in the past and present are interpreted. Since its adherents write from the perspective of denying the genocide arguments of Armenians, they stress the supposed disloyal and treasonous activities of Armenians and blame Armenians for the massacres.

*Mezalim*, as an umbrella concept, incorporates a series of demonizing actions that include the attempt by European imperialists to partition and subjugate Muslims in Turkey and the Middle East. The term embodies all forms of persecution of Muslims during WWI that combined to deny their humanity. *Mezalim* also reflects the deeply rooted historical sense of anguish over what the Muslims encountered during the war. No Turkish word explains the Muslim anguish and dehumanization, in all its complexity, more ably than the term *mezalim*. The use of the term *mezalim* in this context raises several problems. First, it reduces complex and multilayered interactions in different parts of Anatolia into a clash of identities. It signifies the totality of Muslim experience in eastern Anatolia in terms of a coordinated Christian attack on Muslims. Second, Mezalim denies the sufferings of Armenian communities and develops a ‘passive aggressive’ tone that the Muslims were victims of the European imperialist attack via Armenians and they had no option but to defend themselves. It typifies the entire Armenian community as either the infamous General Andranik or Armen Garo, who brutalized the local Muslim population, and ignores the internal diversity of Armenian communities. By framing the complex relations as *mezalim*, it denies legitimate rights of Armenians to struggle for their independence. Third, it recreates the image of Muslims into one of ritualized victimization that justifies the massive brutality carried out on Armenians as a defensive measure. It moralizes the past in terms of the conflict between two identity groups and prevents any possible reconciliation between the two groups. In other words, *mezalim* becomes the Turkish representation of the Armenians as treacherous, violent, and a tool of the Western powers to subjugate the Muslims.

Footnote 26 continued

activities of the Armenian nationalist organizations. It provides detailed archival material about the political and military activities of the Armenian revolutionary committees both within and outside the Ottoman Empire. The purpose of this book was to show that the Armenian revolutionary committees were instruments of European imperialist powers in their attempt to destroy the Ottoman state and end Muslim sovereignty in eastern Anatolia. *Ermeni Zulûmü* and *Ermeni Mezalimi* are the two key concepts regularly used in this text. It provides detailed data as evidence to prove the Armenians were guilty of ‘betrayal’ and ‘treachery’ against their state. The major part of the book lists the activities of the Armenian volunteer units during the war.

27 H. C. Güzel (2013) *Hocali katliamı ve Ermeni Mezalimi* [Hocali massacres and Armenian *mezalim*] *Sabah*, February 27.
fact, the discourse of Ermeni Mezalimi, just like the discourse of genocide, totalizes and criminalizes the entire Armenian population and seeks to secure the moral high ground.

In the centennial commemoration of WWI, the Armenians emphasize the ethnic cleansing of the Armenian communities from Anatolia as genocide, while the Turks put all their energy toward the celebration of the Gallipoli Campaign, wherein France and Britain used ground troops and naval attacks to break Ottoman defense lines in order to capture Istanbul and control the straits that provided a sea route to Russia. Turkish collective memory appears to be different from that of the Armenians by glorifying those battles it won and celebrating its triumphs while ignoring darker episodes during the First World War. The Armenians, on the other hand, want to turn the centennial commemoration into a public mourning of what they have lost. Unfortunately, there is very little hope to move beyond these two diametrically opposed narratives and to build bridges between them. The problem within the two historiographies is that both are hostage to the arguments for or against the genocide narrative. Thus, neither of these identity-based narratives provides a satisfactory historical account that attempts to understand what happened and why.

**Beyond the Politics of Identity**

Gerard Libaridian, the most thoughtful historian of the Armenian diaspora, aptly sums up the mutual problems, ‘the entrenched position of each side is now part of their [Armenians’ and Turks’] respective identities, identities that not only define the boundaries of the ethno-cultural self-definitions but also the socio-political context within which they see their present and project the future.’ 28 Indeed, there is very little hope of reconciliation if they do not free themselves from the cages of identities to understand what took place. Consequently, under the influence of identity politics, both approaches stress the predetermined explanatory power of ethnic or religious identities. The attempt to understand the past within the predetermined fixed categories of victim and perpetrator will moralize the past and will not facilitate intellectual inquiry. Because both Turkish and Armenian scholars reduce the complex relations between the CUP and the Armenian revolutionary organizations to a clash of identities, it is crucial to move beyond these ethnocentric readings of the past by prioritizing description over consequence-based argumentation. In other words, the emphasis should be on the causes and the evolution of the events more than the outcome of the war. The scholars who seek to understand the causes of the events on the basis of the outcome ignore contingency and create two fixed camps: victims and perpetrators. However, an emphasis on the context and the causes of the series of events that resulted in the deportation and killings of Armenians would further our knowledge of World War I. In order to do this, debates not only need to rely on selective use of historical records but also need to employ theoretical analyses with comparative perspectives. Otherwise, scholars will continue to think that these events were unique to late Ottoman history.

One must expand the contextual framework much more broadly in light of the novel factors specific to the context of World War I in order to understand the complex web of relations within the larger context of the imperial rivalries of major European powers. This will help us to humanize the past and recognize that both Armenians and Muslims were

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victim and victimizers. Thus, it is necessary first to start with a description of the context and the configuration of political actors and then to offer a theoretical framework. Our task as scholars is to question our contemporary knowledge in light of new information that is made available from the archives, memoirs, and other forms of source materials. In other words, we need to identify the social and political context that radically transformed the patterns of relations between the CUP and the ARF and their respective worldviews that shaped their daily lives. The catastrophic defeat in the Balkan Wars of 1912–13 that shook the deep structure of social and political life of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Ottoman society, along with the weakening of Ottoman state capacity, opened new opportunity spaces for secessionist movements such as the Arabs, the Armenians and the Kurds. The task of scholars is to sift through the structural and conjectural factors of these social transformations and to analyze their affect on the creation of new practices and institutions.

In the broadest terms, scholars need to offer contextual explanation about what transpired in 1915, highlighting internal diversity of power relations in each community, the role of human agency, and especially the effects of external geopolitical power struggles. We should not reject the contribution of genocide studies; however, the subject matter must be examined more creatively using appropriate methodological tools that would produce more objective knowledge about the events of 1915. It is objectionable to accept the genocide framework as the only way to understand the events of 1915. Observers must acknowledge the fact that the genocide framework not only is limiting, but also it is a term invented in 1944 to explain Nazi Germany's premeditated and planned project to annihilate the Jews of Europe. The Ottoman and Armenian conflict case is radically different, and trying to define it as a genocide cannot produce adequate knowledge about the situation. Moreover, scholars need to worry that the use of the genocide label is the result of a racist Orientalist discourse against Muslims and Turks. Indeed, some genocide scholars rather oddly and misleadingly have used the term to declare every major mass suffering as genocide and to defend the protection of the ‘historical truth’ through law, i.e., criminalizing those who challenge their version of ‘historical truth’ voted on by politicians. This, in turn, legally disarms those who disagree with the genocide narratives.

In short, in order to understand the events of 1915 better, we need to develop multiple methodological tools that would enable us to examine the subjective experiences of the CUP and ARF leaders as actors who had a measure of agency in their actions. How did these leaders cope with these complex normative conflicts during their decisions? How did their cooperation turn decisively into a vicious conflict? What triggered the securitization of the Armenian communities? To what extent was the CUP's understanding of Christian minorities different from that of ordinary men and women? These questions would enable us to unpack the larger issue of the political and moral framework (a conception of the right and the good) that provided reason for their action. We must look at the Young Turks, who ordered the deportation, through the eyes of the frightened and humiliated children of the Balkans. They were deported, killed, demonized and forced out of their ancestral

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homes with the support of the major European powers. They survived unspeakable horrors of ethnic cleaning and massacres in the Balkans. These men found themselves in the middle of a struggle of survival and death. However, given the deep sense of insecurity and prevailing military chaos on the war-fronts, did these men have an opportunity to draw their decisions from their shared experiences in the Balkans or were they agents of a soulless state machine geared toward winning the war? These questions lead us to examine their shared human experience in the Balkans in order to understand why and how they reached the conclusions that they did.30

Both Turks and Armenians need to rethink the events of 1915 not to reinforce existing fences but rather to build new bridges. Both sides need to adopt dialogic learning that allows for the possibility of social transformation as a result of constant interaction with, as opposed to attempts at silencing or excluding, the other. The scholars who seek to understand the argument of the other side should develop the capacity to understand the events of 1915 from the other’s point of view. This would help the two groups develop sensitivity toward each other and to humanize both our past and present. The goal of this intellectual exercise is not to build consensus or unanimity but rather to foster the ‘anticipated communication with others whom I know I must finally come to some agreement.’31 In order to enrich our understanding of past events, we must humanize the other and, more importantly, distance ourselves from fixed racist categories of ethnic or religious groups.

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