

## Introduction

On May 19, Pontian Greeks around the world commemorate the 91st anniversary of the genocide. This was the date in 1919 when Turkish leader Mustafa Kemal landed in the port city of Samsun on the Black Sea. This afternoon, we will have the special opportunity to listen to a distinguished scholar, Dr. Richard Hovannisian, as he addresses a very dark page in the history of the Christian populations of Asia Minor.

In our organization's educational material that we have promoted to schools and in our letters to public officials, we have long promoted the decision taken by the International Association of Genocide Scholars in December 2007 to recognize, in addition to the Armenia genocide, the genocide of the Assyrians, and the Pontian and Anatolian Greeks. The recent decision of the Swedish Parliament to recognize the three genocides of the Christians of Asia Minor in addition to the vote of the U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee to recognize the Armenian genocide should make us all realize the importance of seizing the opportunity to work together.

While the Armenian tragedy is widely documented and better known, it is our organization's conviction that our future goals will be better served by joining as partners to inform our fellow citizens about the similar crimes against humanity suffered by the Greeks and Assyrians at the hands of the Ottoman Turks.

Only through recognition of these crimes will we be able to bring to light the shameful denial of these events by the Turkish government and for once and for all achieve a future free of their reoccurrence around the world.

# Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing: The Fate of the Christian Populations of the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey

Presented by [Dr. Richard Hovannisian](#), May 15, 2010, Chicago, Illinois

**(Note: Dr. Hovannisian spoke extemporaneously without a prepared text)**

In springtime, Christians take joy in Easter and the Resurrection, but they also mourn the Crucifixion. It was in April of 1915 that the annihilation of the Assyrian and Armenian peoples in the Ottoman Empire began, and it was in May of 1919 that the victimization of the Greek Hellenic population of Pontus and Asia Minor entered a new, accelerated phase. When Mustafa Kemal landed in Samsun on 19 May 1919, his Turkish Nationalist movement furthered the destruction process of centuries of Hellenism and Armenianism in that great highland and crossroad of the world.

It is sometimes asked, even by ourselves, “Why dwell on the past when there is so much to be concerned about right today?” Greece is in great financial crisis. Armenia has been in political turmoil and fell into financial and economic decline after the collapse of the Soviet Union. And the Assyrian population is endangered in Iraq and throughout the Middle East. Perhaps it would be better just to let the past remain in the past and forget about it all.

This may afford an attractive escape for some, but memory is part of individual, group, and national identity. Our memory and our history are our identity, our present, and our future. One cannot rightfully bargain with memory for any purpose, even if it is for improved or so-called “normal” relations with a powerful neighboring government. It is essential to commemorate and remember if there are to be real self-respect and clear objectives.

Now, on this May afternoon, we remember three related peoples – each separate, each with its own history and crucifixion – yet all linked. We speak of the Assyrians, the Armenians, and the Hellenes of Asia Minor and Pontos.

## Intensifying Persecution of Christian Minorities

Some have said that Christians in the Ottoman Empire were fortunate to live in a tolerant realm. In some ways, that may be true when compared with Europe and its treatment of non-Christians. Often it is not understood, however, that the price of this so-called tolerance was very heavy. The Ottoman Empire was not based on equal treatment or equal justice. The Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians, and others managed to maintain an identity down through the centuries only by accepting institutionalized, legal, second-class status – always inferior, always the “*giaour*” – the infidel – and the subject of many negative sayings and stereotypes, which have persisted down to the present time. Their inferior status was reinforced by numerous special taxes and obligations.

What is more, not all Armenians, Hellenes, and Assyrians were able to hold on to their identities. Thousands upon thousands were forcibly converted. Speros Vryonis, Jr., formerly of UCLA, who studied Asia Minor from the eleventh to fifteenth centuries, has shown the extreme pressure and coercion to which the Greek-speaking, Orthodox population was subjected by the Turkic overlords. Countless Christians eventually gave way, at first pretending to embrace Islam and secretly maintaining their Christian rituals but in time losing their crypto-Christianity altogether. Today, their descendants are the majority of the Turkish-speaking Muslims of Asia Minor. The same process overtook much of the Armenian population of the Pontic interior where the phenomenon of Armenian-speaking Muslims known as Hamshen or Hemshin evolved.

The servile status of the Greek Christians was well illustrated during the Greek War of Independence (1821-30). The Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople, whose duty it was to ensure the loyalty and subordination of his people, condemned the rebellion of his countrymen, but this made no difference. On the sultan’s orders, he was taken out of the Patriarchy in Phanar and hanged.

Pressure intensified and life became worse for the Christian minorities after the Greek War of Independence and the attainment by other Balkan peoples of a measure of

autonomy or even independence as the Turks were defeated in one war after another in the nineteenth century. At the end of that century and into the twentieth, the extensive loss of territory, the sense of ever-lurking threats, and the mounting paranoia were infused into three succeeding Turkish regimes. Each was different from the others, and each successive one was hostile to the previous one, but all three came to share a common goal – to safeguard Turkish and Islamic dominance. This was to be achieved by ridding the Ottoman Empire and the successor Republic of Turkey of their Christian populations.

### **New Nation State Built on Blood of Christians**

Abdul Hamid II was the last important sultan of the Ottoman Empire. Ruling from 1876 to 1909, he flirted with the idea of pan-Islam – uniting the Islamic world against the Christian West and against his own Christian subjects. After losing much of the Balkans in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, he tried to keep afloat his foundering empire by using state terrorism against the remaining Christian populations. In particular, he targeted the Armenians and Assyrians of Asia Minor in 1895 and 1896, during which as many as 200,000 people died, thousands more were driven beyond the borders, and scores of villages were forcibly converted to Islam.

Sultan Abdul Hamid was overthrown in 1908 by the Committee of Union and Progress (İttihad ve Terakki), widely known as the Young Turks. They were supposed to make up a modern, Western-style party that aspired to create an efficient system of government based on equality and justice in order to save the empire. The Christian subjects, like much of the world, hailed the revolution and placed much hope in its promises, but unfortunately after losing the first Balkan War in 1912-13, the Young Turks, too, descended into paranoia and xenophobia. They chose to pursue the policies of Abdul Hamid, no longer just by flirting with pan-Islam, but also by embracing the romantic and enticing concept of a mythical pan-Turkism or pan-Turan.

The Young Turks sought to create a new identity through a modern nation-state based on one people, one religion, one culture. All those who formerly lived in the multinational,

multiethnic, multireligious empire would have to conform and become Turkish and Muslim in culture, language, and identity. There was no room for those who would not conform. Most of those nonconforming elements were eliminated through genocidal operations under the cover of World War I.

What the Young Turks failed to complete was finished by the third Turkish regime, which again was extremely critical of the previous one. The Nationalists of Mustafa Kemal accused the Young Turks of shameful crimes against the Christian and Muslim populations alike, yet they continued the genocidal strategies and ethnic cleansing in Asia Minor, ridding the area of the last of the Armenians. Kemal also unleashed paramilitary groups to terrorize and expel the Pontic population first, then the Hellenic population of Asia Minor and Smyrna, and later even certain dissident Kurdish groups.

The genocidal regimes were resourceful in that they often tried to disguise their organizational role by relying on paramilitary forces over which, they would declare, they had no control, especially if they were composed of Muslim refugees (*muhajirs*) from the Balkans. Examples of such murderous bandit chiefs were the notorious Simko, who wreaked havoc among the Assyrian population, and Topal Osman, who murdered countless Christians in the Pontos. All of this mayhem, it was claimed, was conducted by lawless elements beyond the control of the state when in fact they operated with the regime's full blessing and support.

Three separate regimes from the 1870s to the 1920s with a single ultimate objective. In the end, the demography of the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey had changed dramatically. Several million Christians had been eliminated by murder, deadly deportation to the desert, or compulsory and merciless exchanges of populations. By the late 1920s and early 1930s, there remained just a small number of Christians in the Asiatic provinces, but even then, the persecutions did not stop. As an example, during World War II, the *Varlık Vergisi* (wealth or capital tax) and various other special taxes were imposed on the minority populations of the Republic of Turkey to bring about their financial

bankruptcy and insolvency. Those who could not pay were exiled into the country's rugged interior.

### **Changing the Entire Face of the Land**

On my first trip to Turkey in the mid-1950s, I was a recent graduate of the University of California, Berkeley. I was an internationalist and thought perhaps the many stories I had heard about the excesses during the Armenian deportations and massacres were somewhat exaggerated. Maybe "The Terrible Turk" was not so terrible after all, and I looked forward with anticipation to seeing the glorious capital of Byzantium – Constantinople/Istanbul.

After being awed by the magnificent historic sites of Athens, I flew to Istanbul in early September of 1955. I arrived less than a week after the anti-Greek riots had erupted in the city. It was there that I saw the damaged and desecrated Greek and Armenian churches, cemeteries, and businesses. The anti-Christian violence thus had continued long after the establishment of the Turkish republic. As claimed previously, the violence was allegedly spontaneous, the result of popular anger over the crisis in Cyprus. It subsequently became clear, however, that, as in the former times of Abdul Hamid and the Young Turks, the "spontaneous" actions had been carefully planned and organized by the regime itself.

It may be worthwhile to consider how these actions and genocide are connected?

Following the Balkan Wars of 1912-13, the Young Turk dictatorship already had plans in place to decrease drastically the economic strength of the Greek and Armenian communities in Constantinople and throughout the Ottoman Empire. The Greeks had been traders for centuries, and, despite the discrimination they faced and their low status as *giaour* infidels, they had achieved enviable economic success. The Young Turks and their shadowy organizations resolved to create an indigenous Muslim bourgeoisie, a Muslim merchant class, at the expense of the Christian commercial elements. This was the purpose of the economic boycott of Christian, especially Greek, goods in 1913 and 1914. Thus, even before World War I, heightened discriminatory measures were put in motion and would intensify as Turkey moved deeper into the conflict.

As it happened, the first deportations during World War I were of the Greek population of the Aegean region. Several Turkish scholars who are presently challenging the state narrative of denial and rationalization have discovered in the memoirs and other documents of those engaged in the genocidal operations that even before the war, the central committee of the Committee of Union and Progress resolved that nowhere in the Asiatic provinces should minorities or ethnic groups be more than 5 percent or 10 percent of the total population. What did this mean for Smyrna? For Van? For areas where the Christians were 30, 40, or 50 percent or a majority of the population? The Young Turks sought opportunities to implement their demographic engineering, and the deportation of the Greek population from the Aegean coast would in many ways set the pattern for what was to befall the Armenians.

### Twentieth-Century Genocide Prototype

I believe that the Armenian Genocide was the prototype for most twentieth-century genocides. Many characteristics of the Armenian case again in subsequent cases. However, there were other precedents as well. One might look at the deportation in 1914 of upward to 200,000 Greeks in Asia Minor and the excesses of the paramilitary *chete* irregulars and so-called *muhajir* refugees from the Balkans, over whom the Turkish government pretended to have no control. The names of the officials involved in those deportations were to turn up again in 1915-16, but now in relation to the destruction of the Armenians and Assyrians in such far-flung places as Sivas, Diyarbekir, and Mardin. These individuals gained experience in the Aegean region and then put their full force behind the destruction of the Assyro-Armenian population in the east.

Henry Morgenthau, U.S. Ambassador to Turkey (1913-16) wrote of the similarities of what happened to these populations. He stated:

The Turks adopted almost identically the same procedure against the Greeks as that which they had adopted against the Armenians. They began by incorporating Greeks into the Ottoman Army and then transferring them into labor battalions, using them to

build roads in the Caucasus and other scenes of action. These Greek soldiers, just like the Armenians, died by the thousands from cold, hunger, and other privations. Everywhere the Greeks were gathered in groups and under the so-called protection of the Turkish gendarmes, they were transported, the larger part on foot, into the interior. If we change the names, we find that the pattern is used in all these situations.

### **Who Knew What – What Did They Do?**

While all this was taking place, what did the world powers know? What did they do? What did the Christian leadership know and do? It should be clear that great powers and all nations are concerned with their perceived self-interests first and foremost, often in contrast with their highly principled declarations. In *The Great Betrayal*, Henry Bierstadt demonstrates that the dramatic pledges of the Allied Powers turned into a trail of broken promises and abandonment in the end. That is not surprising. In the *New York Times* of 1915, more was written about the Armenian Genocide than was written about the early years of the Holocaust in the 1940s. America, after all, was a Christian country; it had long sponsored missionary establishments in the Near East. There was a special relationship with Armenians who, along with Greeks and other Christians, made up most of the student bodies of the American schools in Constantinople, Adabazar, Aintab, Harput (Kharpert), Merzifon (Marsovan), and elsewhere.

The fact is that the United States government knew very soon what was happening to the Armenians in 1915 yet was careful not to proceed beyond moral caveats. Ambassador Morgenthau issued diplomatic notes and tried to use his influence with the Young Turk leaders to get certain people exempted from the deportations, but over all the United States government was unwilling to sever diplomatic relations, exert extraordinary pressure, or declare war for the sake of the Armenians, nor, for that matter, would any other country.

During World War I and the period of the genocide itself, perhaps the only country that might have intervened effectively was Germany because it was Turkey's senior ally. The German Reich supplied critical financial and the military support to the Ottoman Empire and could have used its influence to ameliorate the plight of the Christian population, but

the Kaiser's government allowed its war goals to supersede any moral or religious reasons for intervention. In Cilicia, for example, the Germans were building a railroad through Asia Minor to Aleppo and on to Baghdad. They employed Armenian laborers to construct the railway tunnels through the Taurus Mountains. German contractors and army officers were able to protect most of the Armenian workers for more than a year until they had completed their assignment, but then the Germans let the Turks deport and kill most of the unfortunate men. It is a clear lesson that sadly still applies today – economic, political, military, and other factors trump moral and ethical considerations.

The Americans were not at war with Turkey and were therefore able to assist some Armenian deportees and refugees through the American Committee for Assyrian and Armenian Relief. After the war, the successor Near East Relief organization helped to rescue thousands of Armenian orphans and women from Muslim households. The Western response to the genocide was, and often still is, humanitarian aid after the fact rather than preventive action. No attempt was made to stop what was happening though all the twentieth-century genocides have shown that preventive measures would have been more resource- and cost-effective than the ex-post-facto humanitarian aid.

During the Armenian Genocide, the Vatican had a papal nuncio in Constantinople who tried to help by securing dispensation for some Catholics, but he had only very limited success. The Vatican archives reveal the extensive information that the Roman Catholic Church had about the tribulations of the Ottoman Christian population. Everyone knew, but nobody seemed to have had the will or ability to do anything or else concluded that there was nothing that could be done. The European powers were at war with each other. The Armenian Patriarchate was not only defenseless but was actually abolished in 1916, whereas the Ecumenical Patriarch was entirely helpless, desperately trying to persuade the authorities of the loyalty of his community.

After the war ended in 1918, there was an extraordinary show of solidarity among the Christian churches, as the Greek Orthodox Patriarch, the Armenian Patriarch, and the heads of the Protestant and Catholic communities joined in addressing the Allied and other

powers to honor their pledges to save the Christians from what British Prime Minister David Lloyd George called the “blasting tyranny of the Turk.”

As a note of clarification, when one speaks of the Christian Church, it is necessary to take into account the diversity of the Christian populations in the region. The largest denomination was that of the Orthodox Church under the Ecumenical Patriarchy in Constantinople and included Greeks, Serbs, Montenegrins, Romanians, Bulgarians, and some Albanians and Syrians, and others. The Armenian Apostolic Church, going its separate way since the fifth century, had its own hierarchical order headed by supreme patriarch known as the *catholicos* – universal father. As the Holy See of the Armenian Church lay within the Armenian provinces in the Russian Empire, the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople evolved as the senior religious figure of the Ottoman Armenians. The Armenian Church was accorded a place of seniority by the Syrian Jacobite, Coptic, and other Eastern churches. For convenience and differentiation from the Greek Orthodox Church, the Armenian Church and its sister churches are often referred to collectively as the Oriental Orthodox Church. The Assyrians are divided into several denominations, with most belonging either to the Church of the East (Nestorian) or the Uniate Roman Catholic Chaldean Church, which continues to experience persecution in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East. In addition, all these Christian groups had small Protestant and Catholic minorities. Clearly, the Christian elements in the Ottoman Empire were not uniform or united in their faith and were frequently embroiled in mutual rivalries, facilitating the imperial strategy of “divide and rule.”

### **Components of Modern Genocide**

Mass killings have taken place throughout history, so what is different about the suffering and persecution of the Christians in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries? Modern genocide is driven by ideology, a belief system that makes killing acceptable because there is a higher cause to be served. In the genocide of the Christian population of the Ottoman Empire, killing and expulsion were justified as part of the construction of a new state system and a new national identity.

I grew up on a farm in the San Joaquin Valley of California. I understand the terminology genocidal regimes have used and still use. In a vineyard or olive grove, weeds are the enemy. Weeds are chopped and uprooted so that the good plants and vines may flourish. For a peasant farmer in Anatolia, it was not difficult to understand that killing was a positive deed in pursuit of a greater good, especially when there were immediate material rewards. This happened in Nazi Germany. This happened in Cambodia – in nearly every twentieth-century genocide.

It is said that what occurred in the Ottoman Empire was different from the German case, because the Nazis wanted to kill Jews wherever they were found, whereas the Young Turks were concerned only about Christians within their borders. The Assyrian experience, on the other hand, informs us otherwise. When the Turkish armies occupied northern Iran in 1915 they killed thousands of Assyrian and Armenian Christians in the area around Lake Urmia, just as they would kill thousands of other Armenians in the Caucasus as far as Baku in 1918.

In genocidal regimes, the “other,” the labeled outsider, becomes the scapegoat. In Turkish history, this was the *giaour*, who was the butt of degrading saying and jokes. Calling people names and making perjorative references to them does not cause genocide, but they can create a mindset. The Young Turks exploited a mindset about minorities as reflected in sayings such as “it takes three Greeks to con a Jew; it takes six Jews to con an Armenian,” and so on. Stereotyping may lead to scapegoating and ultimately to casting blame: “These people are the cause of our difficulties and crises; they live on our land; they live better than we do, yet they are disloyal.” Economic jealousy is certainly part of the hostility and a strong motivation for popular participation in genocidal operations.

Implementation of genocidal measures against the targeted group is facilitated by the principle of divide and rule. It is an important strategy of imperialist regimes such as that of the Ottoman Empire. During the deportations and killings of the Armenians, for example, many Greeks were actually relieved, clinging to a hope that may be expressed as follows:

“I’m glad it is not us; the Armenians must have done something wrong, but since we have committed no offence we will be okay.” What they didn’t realize was that once the first group was eliminated, then their own turn would come. This is precisely what French scholar Hervé Georgelin has substantiated in his interviews with Greek survivors from Asia Minor.

In modern genocide, along with ideology goes xenophobic nationalism, hatred and fear of the “other.” And who is the other? It is my neighbor, a person with whom I’ve lived all my life, but who now is shown to be a serious threat. Fear of the other combined with modern technology can create motivation for and the means of mass destruction. But, one might ask what was modern about the Ottoman Empire? It was conspicuously backward. Yet, wait, let us ask, “What was the original profession of Talaat Pasha, Minister of Interior and a chief architect of the genocide?” He was a telegraph operator. Even in the backward Turkish empire, Talaat Pasha was able to send telegrams from border to border. During the day, he sent telegrams from his ministry to Diyarbekir, for example, instructing responsible officials not to kill or deport any more Assyrians or Greeks because the government’s measures were intended only to quell the rebellious Armenians. Talaat sent a copy of his telegram to the German embassy, in response to German protests about the extension of the persecution to other Christian elements. Yet, soon the killings of Assyrians resumed. How can this be explained?

Talaat Pasha’s public telegrams calling for a halt to actions against the Assyrians and Greeks in order to appease the German allies were followed by secret telegrams reversing these instructions. In the Armenian case, the official record that was being formed called for humane treatment of the deportees, including measures to safeguard them, feed them, and tend to their health needs, whereas the actual treatment was the exact opposite. Thus, genocidal regimes are also looking ahead and for the record creating a public ledger of lies and deception.

Lies and deception are common to all genocides. In almost all cases, the victims should not know what is to happen to them because they might resist. In time of war, it is better to say:

“You need to move, but things are going to be okay. Take what you can; we will record what you leave behind and collect rent from the people who occupy your place. When you return, you will receive it all back with interest.” Then the Turkish officials hauled everything to various storage places, mixing them all up with little accounting so that no one knows who owned what, and in the end it did not matter, since the original owners would never recover their stolen goods. Hence, deception was very important in the genocidal process, and the modern telegraph became an essential tool of mass destruction.

In some ways, the annihilation of the Christian elements in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish republic were more the prototypes of modern genocide than the Holocaust. The Holocaust, at least in Central Europe, was relatively antiseptic. The Nazis transported people by train for the most part, and ordinary Germans never witnessed the killings. The Turks, Kurds, and Laz, on the other hand, not only saw what was occurring but often participated in the dirty work. Popular participation was common in Cambodia, Rwanda, and the Balkans as well. Armenian victims frequently were found naked because they had been forced to remove their clothing before they were killed so that the looting murderers could carry away their booty in good condition.

### **Spoils and Practices of Modern Genocide**

In every genocide, there is an enormous transfer of economic wealth from one group to another. The losses of what the Hellenic, Armenian, and other Christian populations owned – collectively as a community and individually – are beyond calculation and adequate description. Turkish multibillionaires such as the Sabanci family amassed their fortune in large measure on confiscated or cheaply bought Armenian properties, in this particular case from the area of Adana in the plain of Cilicia. No compensation was ever given to the victims.

The use of extramilitary and paramilitary forces is common in twentieth-century genocide. I mentioned Simko and Topal Osman, just two names out of dozens of *chetes*, irregulars, who did the dirty work. In the Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek experiences, the Young

Turks formed the *Teshkilat-i Mahsusa*, the Special Organization, to oversee the operations, just as in World War II there were the special groups known as the *Einsatzgruppen* to organize the mass killings of Jews in the Soviet Union. The Young Turk Special Organization recruited criminals, enlisted tribal warriors, and set up the ambushes and killings.

During my first trip to historic western Armenia - now eastern Turkey - four years ago, I traveled along the Euphrates River to the gorge in the river at Kemakh (Kemah). This is the route along which the deported populations from Trebizond, Ordu, Gumushkhane, Bayburt, Erzerum, Alashkert, and places east were driven. At the gorge, the *Teshkilat-i Mahsusa* had positioned Kurdish and other killer squads to destroy the marchers. Thousands and thousands of men, women, and children perished here. Ironically, some Kurdish spokesmen are now apologizing and insist that they were unwittingly used or enticed into the massacres.

Both positive and negative incentives are at work in genocide. Positive incentives include enrichment for common people and administrators alike and promotions to higher positions for both civic and military officials. The prospect of gaining a neighbor's home and garden, animals and fields, and even sons, daughters, and young wives can be highly alluring. A negative incentive is the threatened or real punishment of officials who refuse to follow orders. In tribute to a number of Turkish officials, it should be noted that there were some who risked their jobs and perhaps even their lives by resisting the orders from the central authorities. There were also good and moral common people who did not want this to happen and some who even tried to protect their neighbors by taking them in. In nearly every story I have from some 800 interviews of survivors of the Armenian Genocide, there is at least one episode involving a good Turk— somebody who did something to help the victims.

My mother-in-law is a native of Ordu on the Black Sea. She was saved by a Greek woman when her father was taken away and killed, her mother was forced on a death march, and her twin baby siblings were stolen. But the same Greek woman had to put the six-year old

girl out into the street because she herself was threatened with deportation and being subjected to the fate of the Armenians if she did not do so. The time for dealing with the Greeks of the Pontos had not yet arrived.

### **Phases of Genocide Denial**

There were good individuals in all groups, and denial of genocide prevents us from acknowledging and recognizing them. An iron curtain came down between historic Armenia and the Diaspora, between Pontos and Greece, and for decades no one could or would return. While we heard stories of good Turkish neighbors along with the many bad, we could never go back to see for ourselves, to bring alive the names in the survivor narratives, or to connect with the lost homeland.

Denial is a part of all genocides and begins even while the genocide is taking place. From the very beginning, the Turkish government denied what many knew and reported was occurring. Denial may go through several phases. In the Armenian case, it started with *absolute denial*, which was used in the 1920s and 1930s along with attempts to repress memory. Mustafa Kemal did not want any talk of genocide because if no discussion of the subject was allowed in the Turkish republic and measures were taken to prevent others from talking about it, the memory hole would open wide and as soon as the survivors passed on so, too, would any accusations of culpability. The perpetrator would be free to enjoy the fruit of his crime. In many ways, Kemal was right. Those of us born in the United States and other countries wanted to assimilate quickly. Those born in Greece didn't want to hear these sad and depressing tales. Few survivors told their stories in full, but even if they tried, they were largely ignored because there were too many other things to think about. The Kemalist strategy of denial and repression of memory bore results.

What was left after the Christian populations were killed or expelled? Today, 90 percent of historic Armenia is lost and gone, perhaps forever. It is now the eastern half of Turkey where the Kurds predominate. The 10 percent of historic Armenia that exists was Soviet Armenia where Soviet-Turkish relations dictated that the Armenian Genocide should not

be publicly discussed just as the Greek government, for the sake of Greco-Turkish relations, often seemed reluctant to publicize the genocide or forced displacement of the Hellenic people of Asia Minor and Pontos.

Then in 1965, something unexpected happened. On the 50th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide and without any master plan or coordination, Armenian communities all over the world burst out in anger. The third generation did what those of us in the second generation could never do. We would never demonstrate, take to the streets, carry placards, and shout in front of Turkish embassies and consulates. We wanted to be good neighbors, to be accepted, but our children rose up and engaged a denialist state that uses its resources, geopolitical position, large population and markets, contracts with major foreign firms, and defense considerations (currently including the rights of U.S.-NATO overflight to Iraq and Afghanistan) to blackmail and prevent remembrance of genocide.

As absolute denial was no longer working, the Turkish government and its supporters moved to the next phase, trying to explain away and justify what happened. This is called *rationalization*. It goes something like the following: “The Greeks were bandits; they were agents and lackeys of the Allied imperialists. The Armenians were subversives in a secret cabal with the Russians. We just had to defend ourselves. There was no intent to kill these people. Some died, but it wasn’t our fault. It was the Kurds. It was someone else. It was the weather. It was unintentional mismanagement. According to the United Nations definition of genocide, if there is no intent, it cannot be labeled genocide.”

After rationalization comes *relativization*, which means “let’s count the numbers” and compare the suffering of the alleged victims with the losses of the so-called perpetrators. How many Assyrians died? The Assyrians say 200,00 or 300,000. Big deal, probably a fraction of that.. The Greeks say that they lost a million. The Armenians claim a million and a half; okay, we’ll give them 200,000. But let’s look at how many Muslims died. Some 2 million Turks and other Muslims perished during World War I. Even if one were to accept that number, what isn’t said is how they died and who they were. Were they Muslims soldiers killed in the fighting or the casualties of fantastic military initiatives such as

that on the Caucasus front led by Minister of War Enver Pasha in 1914-15 or else were they the hundreds of thousands of Kurdish villagers whom the Turkish authorities forcibly removed from the eastern provinces and allowed to die of exposure and starvation, perhaps to further their social engineering schemes?

Sooner or later, when Turkey acknowledges the genocidal crimes against the Christian inhabitants, can a value be placed on what was lost? Obviously, not. What price can be placed on the loss of a civilization, on the loss of a homeland? What financial reparation could possibly bring all this back? Whatever may be done in the future will be symbolic, an acknowledgment of wrongdoing and the affording of some relief and comfort to the descendents of the victims. Should there be some course of action if Turkey acknowledges the genocide? Certainly, and intelligent, capable people need to make plans regarding what might be done to honor and in some ways rehabilitate the victims. Could it be, for example, the restoration of the shell of a Greek church in Gumushkhane? Might it, along with hundreds of other religious remnants, be returned to the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarchy in Constantinople?

Denial isn't only about the cost of reparations. There is also a psychological aspect to denial. It is very difficult for any people, any government, any nation to admit that its parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents were murderers. It is hard for the Turkish state and for the Turkish people themselves to admit they are living in homes or properties that once belonged to a Greek, an Armenian, or someone else.

The Turkish state narrative has brainwashed generations of students into believing that the reason that the country was on the brink of destruction was that the minorities were consorting with the enemy. Hence, the state's firm countermeasures were merely a matter of self-defense. There is always a grain of truth in mythology. Some Armenians did join the Russian army. Some Greeks did join with or assist the Allies. But even if this is the case, can it be accepted as an excuse for genocide? Some Georgians and many Muslims who were subjects of the Russian Empire joined the Turkish army as partisans in World War I. Does that mean the Russian government would have been justified in eliminating all

Georgians and Azeris or in driving them out of their lands? Was the Turkish response the crisis of World War I an act of lunacy or was it rather the product of a lethal mix of a xenophobic ideology and sufficient modernization to facilitate mass destruction?

### **Remembering Against Forgetting**

Division among victims is a serious impediment to remembrance. Armenians are frequently critical and envious of the Jews, asking why the Jews don't include the Armenians when speaking of genocide? The Greeks and Assyrians blame the Armenians for taking the spotlight. Everyone wants to be remembered, to be included. That issue is gradually being addressed. In the last volume I published on the Armenian Genocide, Anahit Khosroeva was invited to write a chapter on the Assyrians. In it, she shows that though the raw numbers of Assyrian victims doesn't approach the numbers of Armenian victims, when comparing percentages, the losses of this population were as great as the other. Speros Vryonis, Jr., contributed a chapter on the Greeks deported by the Kemalists from the Aydin region in 1922 during the Greco-Turkish war and the terrible suffering and death marches to which this population was subjected. It is important to find means of collaboration and to reject the divide and rule mindset of the perpetrator.

Before we point fingers at others, let us point at ourselves. We need to do our own homework. We must acknowledge our own suffering and pain, and we need to learn to use a megaphone – a good Greek word. The Assyrians and the Greeks have not had a megaphone. The Armenians were unable to fashion one until the third generation began to make their voices heard. The descendants of the victims are learning to use the political processes in many countries. The challenge is to persuade the world powers that support for the acknowledgement and recognition of the Armenian Genocide and related genocidal actions against the Assyrian and Greek populations is in their own best interest and that they should also be encouraging the Turkish government to come face to face with its history.

I do not consider myself a genocide scholar. I knew little about genocide as an American-trained historian. I was pushed into this field by denial. Although I grew up amid survivors, I didn't listen closely. My generation wanted to acculturate. We heard what I call "background music" relating to the genocide, but these were not our own stories or our own concern. And when we began to pay attention, it was too late, for most of the survivors had disappeared, taking with them their untold stories of life before the calamity, the horrors of the massacres and death marches, the miracle of survival, and the pride of striking new roots. By the time I got around to formulating my questions, there were few left to give me satisfactory answers.

Denial drove me to face the Armenian Genocide. In the first book I edited on the subject, most of the authors were Armenian and almost all wrote descriptive chapters. They cited what Morgenthau or the *New York Times* had said but didn't dig deeper into analysis and interpretation. There was the need to draw upon the foreign sources to validate the reality of the genocide. It is now a quarter century since that first book, and I am pleased that the authors in my more-recent fourth and fifth volumes have come from diverse backgrounds, including progressive Turkish scholars. Non-Armenians have made the Armenian Genocide an important object lesson in trying to understand and prevent the phenomenon of genocide. That is the direction in which the Greeks, Assyrians, and others who feel left out also need to be moving.

The first and most important step is to know yourself. It has been said that people which have suffered genocide can get over it if it knows the truth of its suffering and if others, especially the perpetrator side, recognize the depth of that pain. When I traveled to erstwhile Armenian centers in Turkey, I remember the elation of finding a few large stones standing on top of each other. What was once a great monastic complex covering more than a square kilometer has been reduced to almost nothingness. And yet ironically the son of a survivor stood there rejoicing, like an archeologist, at the discovery of a few stones connecting him with a no-longer existing civilization. One comes face to face with the truth of one's suffering.

The destruction didn't stop in 1918 or even 1923 after the Treaty of Lausanne and the forced exchange of populations. It went on until the 1950s and 1960s when Armenian churches were dynamited in the eastern provinces as a way of eliminating the memory of a people with a history of several millennia on that very land. The Greek Orthodox population of Constantinople virtually disappeared between 1923 and the end of the century and with the loss of these inhabitants came the resultant sad state of the churches, schools, and cultural establishments left behind. The world should be openly critical about this, yet there is a deafening silence. One remembers the world outcry when the Taliban in Afghanistan dynamited two great statues of Buddha. On the other hand, only a couple of years ago, the Azerbaijani army in Nakhichevan, on government orders, destroyed a thousand finely-engraved Armenian cross-stones dating back several centuries. Yet once again, there was no response from the world community or from UNESCO or its parent United Nations Organization, where politically-motivated double standards seem to prevail.

The introduction to my first volume, *The Armenian Genocide in Perspective*, was written by Terrence Des Pres, a member of the U.S. Holocaust Council. He was an American Cajon who had written on the Holocaust. In that introductory essay, he recalled the caveat of Milan Kundera, then an exiled Czech intellectual, who declared that “the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.” Des Pres continues:

When modern states make way for geopolitical power plays, they are not above removing everything—nations, cultures, homelands — in their path. Great powers regularly demolish other peoples' claims to dignity and place, and sometimes, as we know, the outcome is genocide. In a very real sense, therefore, Kundera is right: against historical crimes we fight best we can, and a cardinal part of this engagement is “the struggle of memory against forgetting.”

This is the reason that you have given up your Saturday afternoon and come some distance to listen to a speaker who may not offer much more than you already know. but your presence is a necessary reaffirmation of the continuing “struggle of memory against forgetting” and all that this implies — memory awakens commitment and action.

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Dr. Hovannisian is a Guggenheim fellow and six-time president of the Society for Armenian Studies. He has received many honors for scholarship, civic activities, and advancement of Armenian studies, including election to membership in the Armenian National Academy of Sciences in 1990, two honorary doctoral degrees, and medals and encyclicals from Supreme Patriarchs of the Armenian Church.