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## 'Massacres', 'Tragedies, 'Genocide:' a Critical Analysis of Differing Perspectives on the Armenian Genocide

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*'Massacres,' 'Tragedies' 'Genocide:'* a Critical Analysis of  
Differing Perspectives on the Armenian Genocide

Samuel Hugo Willner

Submitted in Partial Requirement for the Bard College Master of Arts in Teaching in History

May, 2020

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***‘MASSACRES’ ‘TRAGEDIES’ ‘GENOCIDE:’***

a

Critical Analysis of Differing Perspectives

*on the*

**Armenian Genocide**

*an*

Investigation

*of the*

Historiography and Study

*of the*

***Destruction***

*of*

**Armenia** by the **Ottomans**,

*with special attention to*

those events during

the **Great War**

*and its*

Aftermath,

1914-1923.

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL REQUIREMENT FOR THE BARD COLLEGE MASTER OF ARTS IN TEACHING IN HISTORY

Samuel Hugo Willner

2020

# Foreword

My motivation to write this paper came from a desire to look at a section of scholarship on the Armenian Genocide wherein credible academics construct narratives sympathetic to the position of the denialist Turkish government. This position is presently untenable in modern context. In the course of doing otherwise admirable historical investigation, these historians distance their conclusions from a certain moral truth by means of their arguments regarding contemporary definitions of genocide. In the course of my work, these sorts of texts are then compared to those with a better understanding of the moral criminality of the treatment of the Armenians by the Ottomans, and the policy of suppression and obfuscation undertaken by the Turkish government up to the time of writing. I have attempted to enrich this topic with the further help from the pages and advice of those more travelled than I: thanks to the MAT staff and my parents. Much work remains to be done in studying the historiography of this particular field. It is also my hope, while understanding the limited nature of this work, that the reader finds my language appropriate, my sentiments agreeable, and perhaps themselves enriched.

### *Moderate Denialism, 1983-2014*

The historical relationship between the Anatolian Turks and the Armenians began with the arrival of the Seljuks in the 11th century, who seized the central region of the peninsula from the Byzantine Empire, and completely conquered it by the early 14th century. In this time period, Armenia could refer to either the contemporarily understood territory along the Black Sea, or to the territory hugging the Mediterranean from Alanya in the West, to Alexandretta in the East. This territory would be taken by the Mamluks in 1375, leaving only the northern portion of the Armenian state, though communities were dispersed throughout Anatolia and the Levant. It was during this time of Seljuk expansion that a warlord named Osman led his faction of recently migrated asiatic Turks to subdue their neighbors and take a great deal of Byzantine land. Osman's name would be taken for the new empire that governed the land that he and his descendants would conquer in the coming centuries: the Ottomans. In the course of this expansion, the Armenian heartland along the Black Sea, North Western Persia and Central Eastern Anatolia, would be mostly enveloped and incorporated into the Ottoman empire. At the same time many Armenians lived in Central Anatolia, Istanbul and even then in Safavid Persia and Russia. Even within the Armenian people there was a variety of subgroups, with the common traits of practicing Christianity and speaking some form of the thirty Armenian dialects that existed before the Genocide.<sup>1</sup>

In reviewing the history of the Turks and Armenians, one would clearly see that the Armenians had established a culture in the region long before the first asiatic Turk thought to go West. Relatedly, the Armenians were among the first adopters of Christianity, and the Kingdom

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, 'genocide' refers to the general concept, while 'Genocide' refers to the Armenian Genocide.

of Armenia was one of its first confessional states. This is in contrast with a majority of the Anatolian and Ottoman subjects, who practiced various forms of Islam, as well as other syncretic and non-Islamic religions. It should be noted that Ottoman Europe's population was a majority Christian, but Greece and the Balkans are less relevant to the story of the Armenians than their mostly Muslim neighbors. This historical identity of the Armenians would prove resilient, engender resistance to Ottoman rule and provide the reference for Armenian nationalist movements in the 19th and 20th Century.

Accordingly, the 19th century saw violent conflicts between Armenians and the Ottoman government, as well as between Armenians and Kurdish bandits. Some of these conflicts took a particularly revolutionary character, where Armenians conducted a guerilla terroristic fight for independence against the Ottomans throughout the 1890s. In this period there were many anti-Armenian massacres as well. As the 20th century advanced, the Ottomans attempted to enact a demographic policy that expelled around 300,000 Greeks from the Anatolian peninsula from 1913-1914. It is in these contexts of prior incidents of anti-irredentism and ethnic cleansing that the expulsions, detentions and massacres that comprise the events of the Armenian Genocide would occur. Up to 1.5 million Armenians died between 1915 and 1923. These figures do not include the massacres in the years leading up to World War I, which possibly claimed over 400,000 Armenian lives.

A great number of sources were produced during the war. Aside from the standard diplomatic documents there are a large number of eyewitness accounts, independent humanitarian reports and novels. Arguably, the first historical treatment of the Genocide occurred during a series of Ottoman tribunals wherein the Ottoman government investigated the

Committee of Union and Progress (CUP,) the party that organized the deportations and a majority of the massacres.

The West lost interest in Turkish Armenia in the aftermath of the Great War; rather, they were preoccupied with the establishment of the new Turkish Republic. World War II similarly overshadowed the events of previous decades. Yet it was the Holocaust that brought the Armenian Genocide into public discourse. By the 1960s, a field of so called ‘Genocide Studies’ developed, as to understand these tremendously destructive events. In 1978 *The Armenian Holocaust*, the first bibliography of legitimate sources on the Genocide, was compiled by Richard G. Hovannisian. Since then, the Genocide has been discussed in academic circles, tribunals, the halls of Washington and numerous other spaces. The division of the public discourse corresponds with the two main fields of study that have arisen. Being written mostly by Turkish scholars, there is the ‘Turkish Nationalist’ or ‘Denialist’ position, which are histories that support the Turkish government’s position that what happened was not a genocide, but a wartime necessity. Within this field is the ‘provocation thesis’ which places a great deal of blame on the Armenians for the Genocide. The other section of the field, written notably by Armenian scholars, but also many others, are histories that demonstrate that the events of 1915-1923 were indeed genocide. From these arguments, three main types of literature have been made: bibliographies, essay and article compendiums, and direct studies of the Genocide itself.

“Denialist” refers broadly to an academic or public figure who takes a position similar to that of the Turkish government on the events of 1915-1923. Like all schools of thought, there is a spectrum of belief. One end of the spectrum has the most extreme denialists. Turkish Historian



and politician Yusuf Halaçoğlu, for instance, posits the absurdly low figure of 56,612 for the number of deaths in the Genocide.<sup>2</sup> Historians like Halaçoğlu cannot be considered credible academics. Contemporary eye witnesses and reports consistently record the deaths in the hundreds of thousands. Even the Ottoman Ministry of the Interior estimated 800,000 dead in their 1919 tribunal.<sup>3</sup> A review of the field shows that there are a number of historians who may be considered ‘denialist,’ but still do somewhat credible historical work and in turn contribute to the field from the periphery. I call these historians ‘Moderate Denialists.’ These academics are the counterpoint to the Armenian position, and the targets of scholarly debate, even if only to dispel older academic canards. Before 1989, denialist historians have had greater access to Turkish archives, controlled by the sympathetic Turkish government. After the fall of the Soviet Union, and the further openings of archives in 2005, historians of the Turkish and Armenian positions have had access to much of the same source material. Below is a review of three authors I consider Moderate Denialists, whose works were published in 1983, 2005, and 2014.

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<sup>2</sup> Guenter Lewy, *Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey A Disputed Genocide* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2014), p. 240.

<sup>3</sup> Lewy, *Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey*, p. 240.

## Muslims and Minorities: The Population of Ottoman Anatolia at the End of the Empire

*Muslims and Minorities: The Population of Ottoman Anatolia at the End of the Empire*, was published by Justin McCarthy in 1983, two years prior to the publishing of the 'Whitaker Report' in which the UN officially recognized the events of 1915-1923 as genocide. McCarthy, an American historian with honorary degrees from Turkey, was later characterized as a 'Denialist' historian by groups like the International Association of Genocide Scholars, and the Armenian Assembly of America for propagating a variety of claims that characterized the events of 1915-1923 as something other than genocide. However in 1983, McCarthy had yet to develop this reputation, as he had only published one monograph before *Muslims and Minorities*, which was similar to the following text in its statistical focus. From the text, we see that the Genocide has been written about as a statistical event comparable to conventional war, without sensitivity to the moral wrongs that characterize genocide.

McCarthy's text is most basically a compilation of Ottoman 'yearbooks' (demographic reports) of 1878-1923. McCarthy analyzes the compiled data first to understand previous issues with demographic studies of the Ottomans, an example being that women were undercounted in the censuses. McCarthy also attempts to bring meaning to the data, and concludes that the demographics of the Ottoman Empire changed significantly from 1878-1923, in large part due to the five wars fought by the Ottomans from 1911-1923. McCarthy uses his data to evocatively argue that 20% of the Anatolian population died between 1914 and 1923.<sup>4</sup> It is in the discussion

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<sup>4</sup> Justin McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities: the Population of Ottoman Anatolia at the End of the Empire*. (New York: New York University Press, 1983), p. 118.

of these events that we see the seemingly impartial analysis suggest the arguably Denialist character of McCarthy's understanding of the Genocide.

Like all texts on the subject with even the slightest credibility, McCarthy recognizes that something did in fact happen in Eastern Anatolia. From his apparently thorough investigation of historical demographic records, McCarthy concludes that about 600,000, or 40%, of the Armenian population were killed in the course of the war.<sup>5</sup> This number certainly figures on the low end of death estimates, a 2015 hearing before the U.S. Senate concluded that as many as 1.5 million, or 90%, of the Armenian population, perished in the course of the Genocide. Nonetheless the 600,000 figure itself does not suggest that McCarthy is attempting to wholly disguise the events. Rather, it is the language that McCarthy uses, or doesn't use, to describe the Genocide that portray an arguably Denialist position.

Prior to his section called 'The Armenians,' McCarthy makes the claim that "intercommunal war" was the cause of most deaths in Anatolia from 1912-1922.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, McCarthy implies that most of the intentional deaths of the war were caused by conventional warfare. Accordingly, in the course of the presentation of the fate of the Armenians, there is no direct discussion of the specific events of their deaths, much less their moral nature.<sup>7</sup> This seeming oversight cannot be attributed to total misunderstanding of the Genocide within the field. While a review of the titles of scholarly articles from 1923 to 1983 on the topic show that language like "Armenian Massacre" were used, articles as early as 1969 use "Armenian Genocide" in the title nearly a decade before the first major scholarly forays into the

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<sup>5</sup> McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities*, p. 130.

<sup>6</sup> McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities*, p. 121.

<sup>7</sup> McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities*, pp. 118-130.

Genocide's study. The UN's definition of the moral crimes that underly genocide were introduced in 1948. Essentially, McCarthy's characterization of the Genocide as 'war' rather than genocide is a conscious decision to negate the demonstrable moral crimes of the Genocide, and in doing so McCarthy essentially affects an argument *ex silentio* against the contemporarily understood definition of genocide.

In terms of the historiography of the study of the Genocide, McCarthy can be understood as something of a moderate Denialist; that is, a credible historian who interprets or omits data, to skew understanding towards the Denialist position. McCarthy does not outright deny the murder of the Armenians, and his figures, while significantly lower than most modern estimates, still fall close to what at the time could have been considered reasonable estimates. Nonetheless, this underestimation, combined with obfuscatory language makes the text an early example of a Denialist monograph, though the subject had been the subject of discussion in scholarly journals in the previous decade and a half.<sup>8</sup>

The general historiography of the text also helps one understand McCarthy's place in the historical discussion of the Genocide. By the criteria outlined in *The Houses of History*, we see that *Muslim's and Minorities* is a classic example of a quantitative history, specifically historical demography, as shown by its singular reliance on demographic data to make its various arguments, many of which are meta-commentary on the nature of the data itself in historical context.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Gwynne Dyer, "Turkish 'Falsifiers' and Armenian 'Deceivers': Historiography and the Armenian Massacres, " *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1976, pp. 99–107.

<sup>9</sup> Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, *The Houses of History : A Critical Reader in Twentieth-Century History and Theory* (New York:New York University Press 1999), pp.167-169.

Arguably, the central point of contention within the study of the Genocide is not if hundreds of thousands of Armenians died, but whether or not it was a genocide. As discussed, a genocide is essentially defined by the presence of the moral crimes underlying a conflict. Regardless of if a given historian can be considered a Denialist, intuitively one can understand that numbers alone cannot accurately assess the moral nature of a given event. The critical assessment of data in light of moral criteria is contingent on the author's sensitivity to the subjective, that is moral, meaning of historical data. McCarthy does not practice this sensitivity in understanding the deaths of the Armenians. Rather, he erroneously presents the casualties as comparable to those of a conventional war. By his singular focus on studying demographic change over time, McCarthy presents Turkish and Armenian war deaths in the same category. Thus, if one believes that McCarthy did not purposefully underestimate Armenian casualties, one can say that McCarthy's history is Denialist in the sense that his methodology ignores the moral crimes that underlay the Armenian deaths of 1915-1923, while at the same time contributing to the field a book-long analysis of sources that were characterized by their difficulty to find this aspect, at least, is commendable.

*Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A Disputed Genocide*

Guenter Lewy's *Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A Disputed Genocide* was published in 2005, the same year Turkish Leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan invited a variety of historians from around the world to use Turkish and Armenian archives in an "initiative to

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resolve Armenian Allegation Regarding 1915.”<sup>10</sup> The Turkish Embassy to the US’s website characterized this opportunity as a “landmark proposal,” and provided a list of related materials. Notably, this list included an article by Justin McCarthy titled “Let Historians Decide On So-Called Genocide,” a link to a website called Tall Armenian Tales: the Other Side of a Falsified Genocide, a link to a page published by the Turkish Embassy called ‘Myths and Facts of the Armenain Allegations,’ and most relevantly a link to the University of Utah Press page on *Armenian Massacres*.<sup>11</sup>

From this 2005 webpage alone we can assume that Lewy’s treatment of the Genocide fall into the Denialist camp. However, before discussing this it is worth reviewing treatment of Lewy’s work some years later by two major scholars of the field, Taner Akçam, and Ronald Grigor Suny. In 2012, Akçam noted that the Arvasya Strategic Research Center (ASAM,) the Turkish government’s propaganda arm awarded Lewy its highest prize in 2005 while the Turkish Parliament gave Lewy a similarly prestigious prize.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, the Turkish interior ministry made Lewy’s work their “official position.”<sup>13</sup> As for the University of Utah Press, Suny characterized it as a “...neo-denialist press.”<sup>14</sup> Looking at the content of *Armenian Massacres* in

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<sup>10</sup>Turkish Embassy. “Turkey’s Initiative to Resolve Armenian Allegations Regarding 1915,” Embassy of the Republic of Turkey, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> University of Utah Press. “Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey A Disputed Genocide,” University of Utah Press, 2007.;

Holdwater, “Tall Armenian Tales: the Other Side of A Falsified Genocide.” Armenian Tall Tales, 2007.;

Justin McCarthy. “Let Historians Decide on So-Called Genocide.” Assembly of Turkish American Associations, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks’ Crime against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire. Human Rights and Crimes against Humanity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 323.

<sup>13</sup> Akçam, *The Young Turks’ Crime against Humanity*, p. 323.

<sup>14</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, *“They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else”: A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 375.

light of this context demonstrates a new aspect of denialist writing. Unlike McCarthy, at least in the case of *Muslims and Minorities*, Lewy does analyze the sources in light of definitions of genocide. However, through his treatment of sources, and discussion of the field, we see that Lewy still wrote a Denialist history, as he denies the involvement of the Turkish state, and the veracity of witness accounts and memoirs. In other words, Lewy views the massacres as a bad thing, and like McCarthy, Lewy accepts that hundreds of thousands of Armenians died, but denies that what happened was truly a Genocide.

Throughout the text, Lewy discusses scholarship in the field and spends a great deal of time reviewing other scholars. Lewy dedicates three chapters to discussing the ‘Armenian case’ and the ‘Turkish position.’ In constructing this dichotomy, Lewy differentiates himself from the Turkish position, and indicates that he is, in a sense, a mediating presence in the scholarship. This identity accords with the mission of his alleged Turkish benefactors who sought to inspire a balanced reassessment of the field through inviting historians to their archives. Relatedly, notably Lewy is critical of both the ‘Armenian case’ and ‘Turkish position’, and interestingly, discredits most previous Turkish historians for their “[e]xtreme partisanship and uncritical self reflection.”

<sup>15</sup> However, in the course of a seemingly critical discussion of the Turkish position, Lewy characterizes the conflict more as a guerilla war, rather than a systematic targeting of Armenian civilians.<sup>16</sup>

In discussing eyewitness accounts, Lewy argues that a “Levantine tendency to exaggerate” explains the tremendous amount of extreme and disturbing testimonies related to the

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<sup>15</sup> Guenter Lewy, *Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey A Disputed Genocide*. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2014), p. 90.

<sup>16</sup> Lewy, *Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey*, pp. 90-128.

events of the Genocide.<sup>17</sup> Lewy similarly applies this Orientalist characterization to memoirs written after the events.<sup>18</sup> In further discussing what he calls “Armenian propaganda” Lewy also argues that the ‘Turkish Side’ of the event was “suppressed or distorted.”<sup>19</sup> Lewy generally argues that survivor testimony cannot be used to reconstruct history, and relates that “a few” Holocaust testimonies were found to be untrue.<sup>20</sup>

In this work, Lewy engages with the material differently than McCarthy in *Muslims and Minorities*. Lewy addresses the questions of the moral nature of these crimes, accepts the death of Armenians, but argues that there was no government coordination, so it could not be a genocide. Rather, Lewy blames Kurds, bandits and irregular bands for the attacks.<sup>21</sup> Lewy accepts certain moral culpability, calling the events a ‘tragedy’ but in doing this, like McCarthy, Lewy characterizes this tragedy as a product of famine, disease and war, and does not connect the moral issues with the events to reach the definition of genocide.<sup>22</sup> Further, citing McCarthy, Lewy argues that the Muslims of Anatolia saw an equal, even greater tragedy.<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, Lewy accepts deaths, accepts moral tragedy, but sidesteps the definition of genocide.

As for the general historiography, *Armenian Massacres* has no specific definition. It utilizes sources that are typical of diplomatic, demographic and oral histories. In its attempt to analyze the interactions between government and peoples, without a critical economic angle, the text is most similar to a diplomatic history. In regard to its central argument pattern, the text

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<sup>17</sup> Lewy, *Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey*, pp. 144-145.

<sup>18</sup> Lewy, *Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey*, p. 147.

<sup>19</sup> Lewy, *Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey*, p. 146.

<sup>20</sup> Lewy, *Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey*, p. 148.

<sup>21</sup> Lewy, *Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey*, p. 238.

<sup>22</sup> Lewy, *Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey*, p. 247.

<sup>23</sup> Lewy, *Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey*, p. 241.



focused on assessing the reliability of sources and validity of previous arguments and is generally critical of sources and epistemology in a manner characteristic of histories published after the 1990s.

Ultimately, we see with Lewy that the Armenian genocide has been written about as a moral tragedy, a demographic disaster and a brutal protracted war. But in the context of the Denialist position, these aspects are not connected to reach the definition of genocide. By his sensitivity to the moral aspects of the events of 1915-1923, Lewy is certainly different from McCarthy, a fact which helps us understand the accusation of Lewy as a ‘neo-denialist.’ It would appear that so called ‘neo-denialism’ is called that because it appears closer to acceptable scholarly methods than the previous uncritical, incomplete or misinformed attempts.

*The Ottoman Endgame: War, Revolution and the Making of the Modern Middle East 1908-1923*

*The Ottoman Endgame: War, Revolution and the Making of the Modern Middle East 1908-1923* was written by American historian Sean McMeekin and published by Penguin Press in 2015, the same year that the American Presidency avoided using the word genocide in a statement that otherwise characterized the events of 1915 as such. *Ottoman Endgame* itself is not strictly on the Armenian Genocide, but contains an interesting chapter titled “Massacre in Turkish Armenia.” The use of ‘massacre’ recalls titles earlier in the historiographical chain

which referred to the events of 1915 as ‘Massacres,’ ‘Persecutions’ and so on.<sup>24</sup> Further, if one can interpret the motivation behind the word’s use, one may see similarities to the likes of McCarthy and Lewy, whose language framed the events as akin to war. Accordingly, an *Al-Jazeera* article that categorically denies allegations of genocide in a manner similar to the aforementioned article on the Turkish embassy’s website, list McMeekin alongside McCarthy and Lewy as historians whose findings contradict those of “Genocide lobbyists.”<sup>25</sup> The article was written by Ibrahim Kalin, the spokesperson for the Turkish presidency. McMeekin is also listed by Suny as a Turkish-aligned historian in the neo-denialist camp.

McMeekin characterizes the events of the Genocide in the context of war. This approach is like that seen in Lewy, and to the extent that he discusses it, McCarthy.<sup>26</sup> McMeekin notes, “... this critical ethno-religious frontier cauldron, long simmering, would boil over under the strain of world war.”<sup>27</sup> Here, McMeekin attributes the conflict to ethnic and religious strife aggravated by war, not to government involvement. Using the memoirs of Venezuelan mercenary Rafael Nogales, and Russian operatives, to describe the events, McMeekin thoroughly depicts the destruction of Eastern Anatolia as a bloody rebellion.<sup>28</sup> Throughout, McMeekin highlights the reported number of Armenian insurgents, the presence of their various weapons caches, and their communication with the Russians.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> For a historiographical review of writing on the Genocide up until 1976, refer to Gwynne Dyer’s article “Turkish ‘Falsifiers’ and Armenian ‘Deceivers.’”

<sup>25</sup> Ibrahim Kalin, “Turks, Armenians and the Two Memories of April 24” *Al-Jazeera*, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Green and Troup, *The Houses of History*, pp . 13-22.

<sup>27</sup> Sean McMeekin, *The Ottoman Endgame: War, Revolution and the Making of the Modern Middle East 1908-1923* (London: Penguin Books, 2015), p. 225.

<sup>28</sup> McMeekin, *The Ottoman Endgame*, pp. 223-245.

<sup>29</sup> McMeekin, *The Ottoman Endgame*, pp. 223-245.

McMeekin also includes photos from the genocide, descriptions of deportations, and property confiscation with commentary asserting the immorality of the treatment of the Armenians.<sup>30</sup> McMeekin also discusses the number of dead, and agrees with the 6-700,000 figure, like McCarthy and Lewy, but notes that “... some historians go as high as a million deaths.”<sup>31</sup> This is strangely inaccurate as Lewy cites historian Sarkis Karajian’s figure of 2,070,037 dead, and McMeekin has certainly read Lewy.<sup>32</sup>

Ultimately we see that, like Lewy, McMeekin includes a variety of estimates, but shows a preference for the lower 600,000 figure, which seems like an agreed-upon figure by credible historians in the Denialist camp. Unlike Lewy, McMeekin doesn’t attempt to disprove other historians on the topic of genocide. McMeekin also does not ignore the moral wrongness of the events, whereas McCarthy does not even discuss them. From the perspective of the Armenian position, McMeekin mostly just fails to call it genocide. McMeekin represents the most moderate of Denialist positions, and would fit in with writers in the Armenian position with more exposition on the targeting of civilian populations and a more developed discussion of the involvement of the Turkish government.

### **The Armenian Position 2005-2015**

At the time of writing in 2020, the ‘Armenian position’ is synonymous with relevant, acceptable scholarship. The general opinion is that those who oppose applying the definition of genocide to the events of 1915-1923 have ulterior motives, namely supporting the Turkish

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<sup>30</sup> McMeekin, *The Ottoman Endgame*, pp. 236-247.

<sup>31</sup> McMeekin, *The Ottoman Endgame*, p. 239.

<sup>32</sup> McMeekin recommended that I read him.

governmental line. As noted, a good amount of scholarship was done prior to the opening of many archives, especially in the 1980s, and much of the debate centered around the number of dead, authenticity of documents and validity of arguments from the opposite position. By the 2000s many of these questions were put to rest for most scholars. Around 1,000,000 became an established figure for the number of dead. Thus, while some historians continued to write histories focused on arguing against the Denialists and discussing the broader experience of the Armenians of the period, as has been done decades prior, others wrote on the Genocide from other perspectives. The following three texts represent three different kinds of scholarship from the Armenian position, which again is more or less synonymous with conventional, accepted scholarship. These three texts demonstrate a progression in the understanding of the field that resulted in a historiographical shift away from debating fundamental questions, to attempting to understand them in broader geopolitical and psychosocial contexts.

*United States Policy Toward the Armenian Question and the Armenian Genocide*

*United States Policy Toward the Armenian Question and the Armenian Genocide* by Simon Payaslian, an Armenian-American historian, was published in 2005 by Palgrave-Macmillan. From the title alone, we can tell that the book is not written by a Denialist, as Payaslian uses the word 'genocide.' This text generally deals with American economic and geopolitical involvement in the Ottoman Empire and the Armenian question. Payslian argues that economic interests dissuaded the American government from becoming involved in humanitarian issues. In arguing this, Payaslian expresses a negative critique of the effects of

capitalism that would be similar to a Marxist historian. However, he is not actually theoretically rigorous in the manner that a true Marxist historian would be. For example, there is no mention of class struggle. That being said, Payaslian is at the very least writing alongside class-critical historians. Though he is writing in the 2000s, Payaslian expresses no interest in source or epistemic critique, or even really arguing with other historians. Payaslian does not actually weigh-in to the standard arguments surrounding the Genocide, like death estimates, but instead keeps his focus on trade figures, and legal history. Ultimately, Payaslian's history is a mixture of diplomatic and quantitative history.

As noted before, 2005 was the year of the 'archive opening controversy' that brought attention to Denialist academics like Lewy. 2005 also saw a First Amendment case brought before the Massachusetts Supreme court by the Turkish American Cultural Society that attempted to include the Denialist perspective in the Massachusetts state curriculum.<sup>33</sup> It is worth noting that Massachusetts has the second highest population of Armenians in the United States. In 2005 Congress also had a hearing on the contemporary situation of Christian Armenians in Turkey.<sup>34</sup>

However, 2002 - 2005 saw the publication of some six monographs on America's involvement in the Armenian genocide, including a volume on the topic edited by the illustrious Jay Winter.<sup>35</sup> By contrast, five monographs on the topic were published between 1985 and 1994,

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<sup>33</sup>United States Congress. *A Century of Denial: The Armenian Genocide and the Ongoing Question for Justice. Commissioned Security and Cooperation in Europe*, Washington: US Government Publishing Office, 2015.

<sup>34</sup>United States Congress. *A Century of Denial: The Armenian Genocide and the Ongoing Question for Justice. Commissioned Security and Cooperation in Europe*, Washington: US Government Publishing Office, 2015.

<sup>35</sup> Armenian National Institute. "Armenian Genocide and America." Armenian National Institute, 2020.

a time span three times as long. In this context we see that Payaslian's text is written in the context of an uptick of scholarship on the topic. This uptick may be explained not just by the archive controversy, but by the advent of the Darfur Genocide in 2003, which may have re-drawn attention to genocide studies and international involvement. Though it is not explicitly discussed in the literature, 2003 saw the invasion of Iraq. This invasion was not only characterized by U.S. international involvement, but arguably had ties to the oil trade, which is talked about extensively in Payaslian's text. The circumstances of writing the text, though not necessarily the text itself, can be considered a historical event. Like any historical event's impact on a historian's work, unless they explicitly make the connection, we as readers cannot know specifically what confluence of events inspired Payaslian, which gives validity to the broader view of the sources outside of the immediately apparent relevance in the text. It is thus arguable that this event, along with the others, can be considered the relevant context in which the monograph was written.

Historians have made ample use of the accounts of American missionaries and diplomats; however, the focus of which scholarship would indicate an increased interest in the geopolitics of the time period. This could be explained by the fact that the firsthand accounts and memoirs of figures like Henry Morgenthau had long been supported, and as a result academics are looking to understand the sources in more diverse contexts. Accordingly, Payaslian writes about the entanglement of economics in the U.S.'s relationship with the Ottoman Empire. Payaslian spends the first chapter describing the economic ties that began with the Ottoman ties in the 19th century, and characterizes the Ottoman Empire as a benefactor of 'Dollar Diplomacy'

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in a manner similar to Latin America.<sup>36</sup> Payaslian then uses this context on the economic ties to explain the U.S.'s ambivalent position towards the plight of the Armenians (Payaslian 5.) During the Hamidian Massacres of the 1890s, the American Senate requested a report from the State Department on these "...oppressions of cruelties practiced upon the Armenian subjects of the Turkish government."<sup>37</sup> Ultimately, the American government decided not to intervene on account of their economic involvement with the Ottoman Empire, which only strengthened with increased dependence on Middle Eastern oil.<sup>38</sup> American interests were similarly tied up with the large amount of missionary work being done in Armenia.<sup>39</sup>

The relevance of Payaslian's work is evident. His exploration of the American policy towards the Ottomans and their Armenian subjects from the McKinley to Wilson administration depicts a general hesitation by Americans to become involved in humanitarian politics on account of economic and political interests. Recalling the amount of activity regarding the Genocide in 2005, whether in the halls of Congress or Turkish archives, one sees that the situation in Payaslian's work is almost identical to his contemporary situation. In writing *United States Policy Toward the Armenian Question and the Armenian Genocide*, Payaslian made a contribution to the field outside of the standard studies on the events of the Genocide itself. In doing this, Payaslian arguably expanded the relevant context in which the Genocide could be understood, and brought greater awareness to the historical trends of state intrigue that continue to affect Armenians to this day.

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<sup>36</sup> Simon Payaslian, *United States Policy Toward the Armenian Question and the Armenian Genocide* (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2003), pp. 1-4.

<sup>37</sup> Payaslian, *United States Policy Toward the Armenian Question*, pp. 5-6

<sup>38</sup> Payaslian, *United States Policy Toward the Armenian Question*, p. 34.

<sup>39</sup> Payaslian, *United States Policy Toward the Armenian Question*, pp. 105-122.

*The Young Turks' Crime Against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire*

*The Young Turks' Crime Against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* by Turkish Historian Taner Akçam was published in 2012 by Princeton University Press. Akçam is an interesting figure in that he is both Turkish, and an outspoken activist for recognition of the Genocide as such, a cause usually taken by Armenian or American historians. Akçam's monographs deal directly with the issue of Turkish responsibility and clearly position the events of 1915-1923 as genocide, as one can see from the title. *The Young Turks' Crime* is comparable to Lewy's text in that it is directly a study of the events of the Genocide. This is in contrast with authors like Payaslian who look at the effects of the Genocide in an international context. Akçam's works fall into the center of the discourse, making him an important public figure as well. A 2015 hearing before the Senate saw Akçam as a key presenter speaking out against Denialism.

A great deal happened in events relevant to the Genocide since the previously reviewed year of 2005. In 2006, Turkish Nobel Prize winner and Ottomanist Orhan Pamuk and Armenian journalist Hrant Dink were prosecuted under a Turkish law that illegalized invoking the Genocide.<sup>40</sup> Taner Akçam also published a book in 2006 called *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility*, which relevantly argues for the Turkish government's involvement in the massacres, thus warranting the events to be labeled a Genocide.

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<sup>40</sup> United States Congress. *A Century of Denial: The Armenian Genocide and the Ongoing Question for Justice. Commissioned Security and Cooperation in Europe*, (Washington: US Government Publishing Office, 2015).



<sup>41</sup> In 2007 Armenian Journalist Hrant Dink was assassinated, a hit list of the perpetrating organization found in 2009 included Orhan Pamuk and Taner Akçam.<sup>42</sup> In 2010, the groundwork for ensuring education on the Genocide was established with the dismissal of the previously mentioned First Amendment case.<sup>43</sup> Thus, along with Denialist scholarship, *The Young Turks' Crime* was written in a rich geopolitical context. As for the general historiography, the text is clearly a diplomatic history, though its inclusion of a number of first hand accounts from 'the bottom' gives it characteristics of a social history. Nonetheless, the argument is primarily concerned with investigating the relationship of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) to the events of 1915.

In this text, Akçam introduces hundreds of previously unused documents to further explore the role of the Turkish government in the Genocide, as Akçam puts it, "... the Prime Ministerial Ottoman Archive clearly points in the direction of a deliberate Ottoman government policy to annihilate its Armenian population."<sup>44</sup> It is interesting to note that while some authors concern themselves with the loss of human life, Akçam spends his first chapter discussing the tremendous number of sources relating to the Genocide that were likely destroyed during and after the war.<sup>45</sup> As one may recall from earlier, Denialist writers like Lewy relied on the argument that the Turkish government had no involvement in orchestrating the events of 1915,

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<sup>41</sup> I am particularly enamored with this unusually long denouncement of 'A Shameful Act' written in the style of an academic book review on a Turkish Government website.

[http://www.mfa.gov.tr/data/DISPOLITIKA/2016/16\\_-yucel-guclu\\_-a-shameful-act.pdf](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/data/DISPOLITIKA/2016/16_-yucel-guclu_-a-shameful-act.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire. Human Rights and Crimes against Humanity*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> United States Congress. *A Century of Denial: The Armenian Genocide and the Ongoing Question for Justice*. 2015.

<sup>44</sup> Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime against Humanity*, p. 39.

<sup>45</sup> Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime against Humanity*, pp. 34-49.

and therefore these events could not be labelled genocide. In *The Young Turks' Crime*, Akçam is both responding to this Denialist argument, and strengthening his own. Where other texts may only focus on the narrative of Armenians, Akçam also looks at the expulsion of nearly 300,000 Anatolian Greeks that occurred only two years prior to the Genocide.<sup>46</sup> This portion of the narrative is contextualized in a discussion of the CUP's demographic policy, which sought to create an Anatolia populated primarily by Turks.<sup>47</sup>

Most of the rest of Akcam's book, with the exception of the final two chapters, uses archival sources, old and new, to investigate the events of Armenia and demonstrate the CUP's connection. The penultimate chapter focuses on reviewing and categorically refuting Denialist arguments. The final chapter discusses paths to reconciliation, in which Akçam states "I believe that regardless of how one describes it, a moral admission must be made."<sup>48</sup>

Akcam's *The Young Turks' Crime Against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* was written in a context of widespread discussion on the Armenian Genocide in the scholarly and political worlds. Accordingly, Akçam uses the book to address issues relating to the Genocide in the historical and political worlds. Akçam answers the relevant historical question of the level of the CUP's involvement by revisiting old sources, and introducing new ones. In considering the highly political context in which Denialist opinions are crafted and protected, dedicating a section entirely to refuting them is a political action. Certainly writing a chapter on ways forward is taking a political stance. The depth and breadth of the text is all the more remarkable in context as Akçam was literally on a hit list by a nationalist

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<sup>46</sup> Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime against Humanity*, pp. 104-123.

<sup>47</sup> Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime against Humanity*, pp. 54-72.

<sup>48</sup> Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime against Humanity*, p. 356.

terrorist organization, with possible government ties, for his public discussions of the Armenian Genocide. Ultimately, Akçam's work represents a consolidation of ambitions of the Armenian position, and a sort of maturation in which fundamental questions, like the culpability of the CUP, are seemingly resolved.

*"They Can Live in the Desert But Nowhere Else:" A History of the Armenian Genocide.*

*"They Can Live in the Desert But Nowhere Else:" A History of the Armenian Genocide* was published by American academic Ronald Grigor Suny in 2015. The book is a history of Armenia going back to the classical period, with a focus on the Genocide and the events leading up to it. Though Suny begins by discussing Classical Armenia, he transitions into a discussion of the relationship between the Armenians, and Anatolian Turks, who would make the nucleus of the ruling class of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>49</sup> There is also some discussion of the Muslim Kurds, which is relevant, as they figure into the partisan conflicts they would result in some portion of the deaths counted within the Genocide.<sup>50</sup>

Suny moves the narrative to the late 19th century, where the "Armenian question" became increasingly relevant with the increased intensity of the Armenian Nationalist/irredentist movement, the weakening of the Sultanate and other important events like the Hamidian Massacres.<sup>51</sup> Suny then discusses the rise of the CUP, and the counterrevolution that led to the

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<sup>49</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, *"They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else": A History of the Armenian Genocide*. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), pp. 1-63.

<sup>50</sup> Suny, *They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else*, pp. 31-63.

<sup>51</sup> Suny, *They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else*, pp. 64-140.

Adana massacres.<sup>52</sup> The second half of the book reviews the events of the Genocide, and analyzes the internal documents to demonstrate that the CUP both felt that the state was insecure and that the Armenians were a threat. Suny essentially argues that the desire to destroy the Armenians came from these feelings. The text is comparable to Hannah Arendt's invocation of the phrase 'the Banality of Evil' in that it is both a history and a psychosocial analysis of controversial political actors, though Suny's scope is a party level interrogation to explain understand the behavior of individuals whereas Arendt interrogates the singular figure of Eichmann to understand the behavior of the party.<sup>53</sup>

Reviewing the progression of Suny's argument is important because it relates to two pertinent questions in the field: whether the Genocide was a wartime necessity, or did the CUP just hate the Armenians. Suny's methodology of psychosocial analysis of CUP communications in historical context appropriates these questions as to craft a conclusion; the CUP did feel the massacre of the Armenians was a wartime necessity, because they hated the Armenians. This argument then relates to the question of the CUP's culpability. This is because in a sense, an acceptance of Suny's argument would indicate that any act done in the CUP's 'mental condition' would constitute Genocide, as actions against the Armenians done in the name of the state came from a place of 'moral criminality' described in the major criteria for genocide proposed in 1948. At the same time, Suny uses interdisciplinary methodology to refute Denialist arguments indicating an acceptance of the scholarship of the Armenian position. In other words, *They Can Live in the Desert* represents a historiographic shift away from addressing central questions of

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<sup>52</sup> Suny, *They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else*, pp. 141-173.

<sup>53</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994).

culpability in the genocide through standard historical investigation, to using theoretical and interdisciplinary methods to understand the nature of genocide, indicating a kind of resolution of key questions, should we trust Suny's scholarly credibility.

Suny's *They Can Live in the Desert* was written in the same context as McMeekin's *Ottoman Endgame*, which was published the year before. However, it is worth restating that Suny's particular historiographic significance is shown in the application of cross-disciplinary methods to the existing narrative, derived from secondary sources rather than primary research. While understanding that progress is not linear, this development is comparable to the progression of diplomatic and social histories into post-structuralist, emotional, sociological and source-critical histories. This development saw the introduction of knowledge and methods from other disciplines, outside of the already utilized calculations and statistical modelling, and an empirical increase in the potential complexity of historical practice. Accordingly, while the text does have some characteristics of standard diplomatic and social histories by its focus on political events and with lived experiences, the text also has the character of an 'Emotional History' by its search for the underlying sentiments of the CUP in their internal documents.<sup>54</sup>

Similarly, Suny's text has the characteristics of a sociological history. According to criteria created by Harvard Sociologist Theda Skocpol, sociological history seeks to understand the "... interplay of meaningful actions and structural contexts, in order to make sense of the unfolding of unintended as well as intended outcomes in individual lives and social transformations." Suny certainly investigates 'meaningful actions in structural contexts.'<sup>55</sup> The meaningful actions are both the individual events that together made genocide, as well as the

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<sup>54</sup> Green and Troup, *The Houses of History*, p. 403

<sup>55</sup> Green and Troup, *The Houses of History*, p. 131.

individual acts of scrutiny against the Armenians, and the structural context is the CUP being the hierarchic decision maker of a chaotic state, combined with the social expectations of the political party as the protector of the ideology that composes the political identity of the state. Suny uses the contexts to ‘make sense of [consequences] and [the effects on individuals]’ in his investigation of the personal, political and social effects of the ‘meaningful actions,’ that is, the manifest genocide. Ultimately we see that in the context of general historiography, *They Can Live in the Desert But Nowhere Else:*” *A History of the Armenian Genocide* is an interesting combination of diplomatic, emotional and sociological history. Accordingly, Suny’s faculty page for University of Michigan notes his commitment to “bridging the often-unbridgeable gap between the traditional concerns of historians and the methods and models of other social scientists.”<sup>56</sup>

From the Hamidian Massacres of 1895 to the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, it is likely that over 1,000,000 Armenians died. In this period of time, many eyewitnesses reported the particular nature of each massacre and deportation. Internal communications from the Ottoman government provide another perspective as well. The motivations behind certain massacres may have differed from others, but in their totality, these events constitute a genocide. Up until the late 20th century, scholarship on the Genocide was limited in part due to Turkey’s status as a strategic ally of the United States, but also because the Turkish government kept their archives closed to academics that may oppose their position. Initially, academics sought to understand what happened in Eastern Anatolia and why, specifically between 1915-1923, the

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<sup>56</sup> Suny, Ronald G. “Ronald G. Suny.” University of Michigan, 2020.  
<https://lsa.umich.edu/history/people/faculty/rgsuny.html>

years by which the Genocide is usually dated. Soon, this question was answered, and the events became categorically accepted as Genocide by almost all academics. Those academics, mainly sociologists and historians, aligned with the Turkish government to the extreme were one exception. These extreme Denialists pushed unrealistically low casualty figures, and denied the moral criminality of the events. The other group that pushed back against the definition of genocide were those academics who presented a narrative essentially from the perspective of the Turkish government with a more moderate understanding of the events. These moderate Denialists presented more reasonable casualty figures and accepted the moral wrongness of the events but still failed to characterize the events as a genocide. The opposition to these arguments has deceptively been called the 'Armenian position.' This title is inaccurate because the acceptance of the Genocide isn't particular to Armenian historians, but most of the academic world. In other words, there are no 'Armenian apologists,' or 'Armenian supporters,' there are only academics who share the nearly universal understanding of the events as genocide by the colloquial and official understandings, the latter outlined by the United Nations in 1948 in light of the Holocaust. Thus, there is no 'argument' on the Genocide, as discussions on the validity of that title are now academically irrelevant. These discussions are instead of a political nature, and are intertwined with lobbying, government suppression and even nationalist terrorism, as seen in the case of Akçam and Pamuk. All the while, the scholarship on the Genocide has increased in complexity, as related to the applied methods and available sources. Through the years, more and more countries have accepted the definition of genocide publicly, though there are hold outs, notably the United States. In a sense, it is the job of scholarship to influence popular

understanding; hopefully the prevailing academic characterization of the Genocide as genocide will become universally accepted.

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## Headnotes

### **Internal Memo from Talat Pasha, August 29, 1915**

For a variety of reasons, the power of the Ottoman Empire steadily declined throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, leading up to the period of World War I. The consequences of this process of state failure can be seen most clearly by looking at the Empire's shrinking borders. In the case of the Ottomans, these territorial forfeitures were caused by unfavorable treaties supported by the great European powers. The 1878 Congress of Berlin, for example, saw Russia, Great Britain, France, Austro-Hungary, Italy and Germany decide how the Balkans were to be divided following the defeat of the Ottomans in the Russo-Turkish War that had just begun the previous year. In 1913, the Ottomans again faced a similar problem as the Great Powers sought to divide Anatolia into zones of influence. At the same time, the Armenians had been seeking international assistance following decades of oppression and violence. This search was successful, and resulted in France, England, Germany and Russia planning the division of Anatolia into small states that appropriately represented regional ethnic groups, with a special focus on securing Armenian independence from Ottoman governance. In essence, the existence of the Armenians was the Great Powers' *casus belli* for a final and ostensibly fatal division of Ottoman Anatolia.

While the so called 'Armenian Reforms' were annulled by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), synonymous with the Young Turks, in 1914, the advance of the Russian army in 1915 presented the possibility that their promises would be fulfilled, this time by force. Should the Russians occupy a province previously mandated for independence, an independent Armenia could arise justified by legal precedent, with any potential Turkish protest nullified as a result of its war with the Entente, composed of three of the four executors of the Armenian policy. Reportedly, according to German Diplomat Hans von Wangenheim, Ottoman interior minister Talat Pasha reportedly sought to "use the World War as a pretext for cleansing the country of its internal enemies - namely its christian population (Akcam 133.) An internal memo from the Interior Ministry, written by Talat August 29 1915, commented on the ongoing deportations of Armenians and saw the expulsion of the Armenians as the means to disrupting Armenian claims to independence that had been in motion before the war had even begun.

The objective that the government expects to achieve by the expelling of the Armenians from the areas in which they live and their transportation to other appointed areas is to ensure that this community will no longer be able to undertake initiatives and actions against the government, and that they will be brought to a state in which they will be unable to pursue their national aspirations related to the advocating for a[n independent] government of Armenia.

*As cited in: Taner Akçam, The Young Turks' Crime against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire. Human Rights and Crimes against Humanity (Princeton University Press, 2012), 134-135*

### **Letter from Bahaeddin Şakir, 1915**

At the time of the Genocide the Ottoman Empire was controlled by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP,) which was led by three ‘Pashas’ or Minister. Talat Pasha had arguably the greatest part in the Genocide. Internal memos from Talat Pasha characterize the CUP’s deportations of Armenians as a method of preventing territorial loss that would result from the creation of an Armenian state, which itself would be the fulfilment of years of agitation. However a letter from CUP founding member Bahaeddin Şakir, as reported by journalist Ahmet Emin Yalman, demonstrates that the Ottoman policy towards the Armenians was one of ethnic cleansing. These aspirations recall the violent expulsion of around 300,000 Ottoman Greek subjects in 1913-1914.

It was clearly understood that the presence of Armenians living in the area of the Russian border constituted a great danger for the continued viability of the country. National well-being demands that everything possible be done to remove this danger the [it is understood by some that the] elimination of the Armenian minority [is] for the purpose of creating racial homogeneity in Anatolia.

*As cited in: Taner Akçam, The Young Turks’ Crime against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire. Human Rights and Crimes against Humanity (Princeton University Press, 2012), 63-96.*

### **Ethnographic Map of Eastern Ottoman Empire, 1910.**

This image is a portion of a 1910 Ethnographic map of 'Eastern Turkey,' which encompassed modern Turkey, Armenia, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine and Israel. In dark green, we see the regions with significant Armenian presence prior to the genocide, dark brown indicates Turkish speaking peoples. Certain regions, such as Lake Van or the Northern Frontier, which bordered Russia, are solidly Armenian, while others in the west, such as at Zeitun have mixed Armenian/Turkish populations. If one goes further west, one sees insular Armenian settlements going into central Anatolia. One should note that Armenian settlement goes further west than the map shows. A contemporary map tracking sites of the genocide provides a useful reference to understand that the genocide targeted Armenian communities far outside of the Armenian heartland and far away from the Russian frontier, supporting the claim that the treatment of Armenians was not a wartime necessity but an ethnic cleansing.



(1910 Map) "Map of Eastern Turkey in Asia and Western Persia (Ethnographical)" From Library of Congress, 1910.

<https://www.loc.gov/resource/g7431e.ct002182/?r=-0.085,0.104,1.096,0.551,0>

(2001 Map of sites of Genocide)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western\\_Armenia#/media/File:Armenian\\_Genocide\\_Map-en.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Armenia#/media/File:Armenian_Genocide_Map-en.svg)

### **An account from mercenary Rafael de Nogales**

Rafael de Nogales was a Venezuelan soldier of fortune and an eyewitness to the Siege of Van, where an Ottoman Army, assisted by Kurdish irregulars, attempted to take the city of Van, the cultural capital of Armenia. The defenders were miraculously able to defend the walled section of the city using outdated weapons, and some machine guns that were smuggled in during the run up to the siege. The cities other districts, and the countryside, were left to be ravaged by Ottoman forces. 55,000 Armenian civilians, and an unknown number of combatants would be killed. Here, Nogales recounts his experiences in one of the villages.

At dawn I was awakened by the noise of shots and volleys. ... Judge of my amazement to discover that the aggressors had not been the Armenians, after all, but the civil authorities themselves! Supported by the Kurds and the rabble of the vicinity, they were attacking and sacking the Armenian quarter, I succeeded at last, without serious accident, in approaching the [Mayor] of the town, who was directing the orgy; whereupon I ordered him to stop the massacre. He astounded me by replying that he was doing nothing more than carry out an unequivocal order emanating from the Governor-General of the province to exterminate all Armenian males of twelve years of age and over.

*From Rafael de Nogales, *Four Years Beneath the Crescent*, trans. Muna Lee, (London: Charles Scribner, 1926.)*

## Letter from Armenian Patriarch Zaven to Bishop Ghevont of Bulgaria June 30th/July 13th, 1915

There were many witnesses to the massacres and deportations of the Armenians over the course of the war. Some, like American Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau Sr. were disgusted with what they saw, but remained discrete. Others, like German clergyman Dr. Johannes Lepsius attempted to cause a public outcry against the Ottomans. Despite being a citizen of Ottoman allied Germany, Lepsius distributed a book recounting the genocide, before being censored by the German government. One particularly interesting figure is Armenian Patriarch Zaven, an Armenian Christian patriarch of Istanbul. While petitioning the Ottoman government to halt the genocide, Zaven wrote secret letters to Bishop Ghevont of Bulgaria, in hopes that it would reach the Armenian National Delegation in Paris, essentially reporting the events to the Entente. In one of these letters, written on either June 30th or July 13th, Zaven, in understanding the scale of events across the Ottoman Empire, Zaven sees the actions of the government as a clear attempt to Genocide the Armenians and predicts numerous deaths.

*\*Confusion about dates is due to the differences between the standard Western calendar and the Orthodox calendar.*



The Ottoman government's plan is 'Armenia without Armenians' and it has already started to settle Muslims on Armenian lands and in their houses. [I have heard that the waters of the Euphrates were full of corpses and that those that marched on were condemned to die in the desert] ... This is a plan to completely exterminate the Armenians ... If Armenians abroad are unable to move the conscience of the neutral states, very few of the one and a half million Armenians will be left within a few months. It is inevitable that they will perish.

*As cited in: Ronald Grigor Suny, "They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else": A History of the Armenian Genocide. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015, p. 307.*

### **Column of Armenian deportees guarded by Ottoman soldiers, 1915**

In 1915, hundreds of thousands of Armenians were deported from Armenian population centers by Turkish soldiers. Many others were arrested and murdered. As a testament to the extent of these activities, by the end of August 1915, Talat Pasha informed German Ambassador Wangenheim that the “Armenian Question no longer exists.” As Armenians were driven from their homes, some Muslim neighbors took the opportunity to seize Armenians property, or buy it at extremely cheap prices from their desperate Christian neighbors. In the image below, we see a column of Armenians guarded by Ottoman soldiers. To the left we see ostensibly Turks walking freely through the town.



*As cited in: Ronald Grigor Suny, "They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else": A History of the Armenian Genocide. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015, p. 310.*

## **Harput Massacre**

Armenian communities throughout the Empire were subject to massacres, dispossessions and deportations. In the city of Harput, a center of Armenian culture, Ottoman soldiers seized 800 men and boys. One survivor, Melcon Lulejian, recounted the massacre that followed, along with his miraculous escape.

Just before evening an order was given to the soldiers to shoot—and this was followed by a hail of bullets. But they ran out of ammunition before everyone was killed, so they began slashing with the small axes they carry in their belts, and with bayonets. I felt the rope bindings loose and ran off into the night.

*As cited in: Ronald Grigor Suny, "They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else": A History of the Armenian Genocide. (Princeton: Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 312.*



### **The Burning of 40,000 Armenians**

The official goal of the deportations was to bring the Armenians to cities in Syria, at the time a province of the Ottoman Empire. Many Armenians were murdered on their march through the desert. Years after the war, Armenian Martiros Ashegian interviewed a Syrian Bedouin about the story behind a cave called “Armenian Cave.” The Bedouin recounted how he witnessed the Ottomans burn 40,000 Armenians in the cave.

The Turks brought here about 40 thousand Armenian survivors miraculously saved from Der-Zor, tormenting them on the road, making them go on foot for 70 miles on the scorching sands of the desert without giving them a drop of water. They brought these poor Armenians, who were emaciated, and all skin and bones, and packed them all alive in this cave or threw them in this pit. Then they brought thorny bushes and tree-branches and covered the mouth of the pit and the entrance to the cave and set everything on fire. I am now 65 years old and I remember very well; I saw everything with my own eyes. The poor Armenians were about ‘Arbayin alf nafar’ (Forty thousand people – Arabic.)

Verjine Svazlian. *The Armenian Genocide: Testimonies of the Eyewitness Survivors*. Yerevan: “Gitoutyoun” Publishing House of NAS RA, 2011, pp. 544-545.

### **Dead Armenian Woman and Child**

This photo was originally published in the Russian journal “Iskra” (Sparks), October 1915. The original caption reports that the woman and child were tortured to death, though it is worth noting that the Russians were at war with the Ottomans and would have reason to embellish or invent a cause of death. It is nonetheless clear that the woman and her child died, having either been murdered, starved to death, or perhaps, in the case of the naked woman, raped during their march through the Syrian desert. Tens of thousands of others are known to have met these fates as well.



Collection of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute From “100 Photographic Stories about the Armenian Genocide” <http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/08.04.2015-100photos.php>

## **The Architects of the Genocide are Tried and Convicted**

In 1919, after the end of the war, the Turkish government held tribunals looking to determine responsibility for the Genocide, which by this point was known all throughout the world. Many actors, from Kurdish militia leaders, to the heads of the Committee of Union and Progress faced trial. Though on the run, Grand Vizier and internal minister Talaat Pasha (called Paşa in this excerpt) were in fact convicted by the tribunal. He would evade justice until being assassinated by Armenian Avengers in Berlin in 1921.

Therefore, it has been decided unanimously that: former Grand Vizier Talaat Paşa, and former Minister of War Enver Efendi and former Minister of the Navy Cemal Efendi... and former minister of Education Dr. Nazim Efendi, all of whom are currently fugitives and are members of the [CUP] General Assembly, who represent the moral personality of the CUP, are found guilty of having been principal perpetrators of the previously discussed crimes... are found guilty of having been accessories in the aforementioned crimes.

Translated by Vahakn N. Dadrian in *Judgement at Istanbul: The Armenian Genocide Trials*.

Vahakn N. Dadrian and Taner Akçam, *Judgment at Istanbul : The Armenian Genocide Trials* New York, NY: Berghahn Books, Incorporated, 2011, pp. 328-329.

### **Textbook Critique**

The textbook I chose was the McDougal Littell Global History & Geography 10th Grade Regents Prep workbook created by Kingston High School. There are large content gaps, as one might expect from a book on the modern world designed specifically to prep for the Regents. Despite covering 1450 and onwards, there is little mention of the Ottoman Empire, despite the fact that they were at the height of their power and extremely relevant at the early end of the time period covered. The Ottomans are mentioned in the context of the creation of the Turkish Republic. This section heavily notes secularization, calls Mustafa Kemal Atatürk “brilliant,” and notes his nickname of “Father of the Turks.” There is no mention of Armenia, even though they talk about the Greek invasion immediately after the war, an event which also saw war between Armenia and Turkey. This section seems conspicuously quiet on Turkey and the Armenians.

The World War I section is also quiet on the Ottomans and Armenians, only discussing the Ottomans in the context of the Ottoman’s alliance with Germany. This chapter on World War I has a section called “Crisis in the Balkans” at the beginning, which would have been a great place to include Armenia, as both are significant nationalist rebellions. Even though they are discussing the Balkans in terms of the characterization of the Balkans as the “Powder Keg” of Europe, it would make sense to discuss other small contentious territories.

The book covers other topics like Imperialism and Nationalism, all of which could use a discussion of the Armenians. As noted in the following chapter, Imperialism figures heavily into the Armenian story, as interference from Russia, Great Britain, France, Austro-Hungary, Italy and Germany led both to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and the vilification of the Armenian people within its government. The question of Nationalism is interesting in the context

of Armenia because a fully realized historical state of Armenia would be extremely threatening to the Ottomans. At the same time, Armenia had existed at some level of autonomy throughout their rule by the Ottoman Empire.

I wrote my chapter with the fact in mind that even when there is a discussion of the Ottomans at any educational level, groups like the Armenians are left out. The Armenian story is necessary to understand the Ottoman's system of governance, the nature of their imperial ambitions, their religious and cultural relevance in their sphere of influence, their collapse and the rise of the Republic. These are all key topics. Of course, the Genocide itself also warrants discussion. It is irresponsible to only teach the Holocaust, as students will be unable to recognize the imperial shape of the pattern of destruction throughout the 19th and 20th century. Without implying further comparison between the Turkish Republic and Reich, one can observe the relationship between the attempt to build a militaristic, ethnocentric state and the systematic destruction of prominent minorities. In other words, an incomplete teaching of genocide leaves nationalist ambition uncritiqued.

In the context of the New York States Regents requirements, the Rise of the Turkish Republic is seen as an exemplar of nation building and secularization. From a purely structural perspective this claim rings true. However this understanding is incomplete, as it overlooks the ideological and active violence that is synonymous with the Republic's rise seen in a more comprehensive perspective on the history. The categorically immoral violence inherent to the political structures, ideology, and actions of Nazi Germany are apparent, popularly understood, and thus readily, and deservedly, critiqued. In contrast, the ideology and activities that supported the political structure of the early Turkish Republic are less popularly understood, and more

importantly, have been historically obscured by means of political interference. The scholarship of the field is uniquely intertwined with politics, and on the level of Government, the events of 1915-1923, seem to be one of the few 'debatable' genocides. The purpose of a textbook should be to present a clear and total version of the truth for the purpose of helping new learners understand a topic. Having been folded under the narrative of the Rise of the Turkish Republic, the Armenian Genocide deserves this treatment.

The story of the Armenians also deserves to be told and known. The history of the Armenians and their governments is old and rich. Armenia was a strategic partner of Rome, the first Christian Confessional State, one of the last states in Anatolia and the Levant to be led and mainly populated by native Christians. The modern story of Armenians and Armenia, and the questions relating to both captivated both the Church and the Press in the 19th and 20th centuries. Armenian irredentism also complicates the narrative of genocide in contrast with groups like the Jews. It is true that many Armenians desired a state that could have potentially bisected the Ottoman Empire. However, the evidence and actions of the Ottomans were not exclusively acting against a perceived rebellion, but were waging war on Armenian people and their culture. A map of the sites of massacre shows murders all over Anatolia and the Levant, far from the Armenian heartland and Russian frontier where rebellion would be a catastrophic strategic threat. Thus, in studying this complexity in light of the events of 1915 and on, we can understand the true nature of genocide as a sort of mass violence distinct from conventional war.

Rather than addressing a specific part of the textbook, I have introduced a series of sections that could stand alone as a subchapter case study on the Armenian Genocide in the larger context of genocide. I should note that I am imagining this chapter would not be

specifically for Regents prep. In this section I cover the identity of the Turks and Armenians in an in-depth way so that a student might better understand the nature of their relations. I also cover issues of imperialism, nationalism along with cases of ethnic violence, arguably genocide, so that students can understand the greater pattern of persecution and escalation. I finally move into a discussion of the Genocide with details taken from modern scholarship. I finish with a short discussion of Denialism. Throughout the text, I give cues to the reader, and give them opportunities to draw comparisons to groups like the Balkans and their own conclusions in context.

### **Textbook Section**

#### ***Who are the Armenians?***

Today, ‘Armenia’ refers to a small country below the Caucasus (the strip of land bordered by the Black and Caspian Seas that connects Russia to the Middle East,) and to the East of Turkey. Here, they speak Armenian, which belongs to the Indo-European Language Family, a diverse group that includes languages like Hindi (spoken in India), Spanish, and even English. Prior to the Armenian Genocide, which we will discuss later, the Armenian language had nearly 30 dialects. Today there are two still in use: Western Armenian and Eastern Armenian. ‘Bari’ or ‘Pari’ means ‘hello!’ There are around 3 million Armenians in Armenia and many more living around the world. Around 250,000 live in the United States.

Armenia and Armenians have been around for thousands of years, long before the borders of their modern state were decided after the end of World War I. The “first” Armenia was formed around 500 BCE, around the same time as the formation of the Roman Republic. This state was called the “Satrapy of Armenia.” A ‘Satrapy’ was a territory in the Persian

Empire, which at the time was the largest and most powerful Empire the World had ever seen. It would remain so until the Persian Empire was destroyed in the 330s BCE by the Macedonians and their Greek Allies, led by the famous Alexander the Great. Alexander the Great, widely considered one of the best military leaders and strategists in all of history, was actually unable to conquer Armenia. Still, the Satrapy of Armenia, by the late 3rd century BCE onwards called the Kingdom of Armenia, joined the Greek World, also called the *Hellenistic World*, as a powerful and independent Kingdom. The Kingdom of Armenia reached its height around 100 BCE. By then, the Greek world was weakening and the Roman Empire was expanding. By 70 BCE, most of the Kingdom of Armenia was absorbed by the Roman Empire, and later the Eastern sections of Armenia were absorbed by the Parthian Empire, which was the new powerful state in Persia.



Ancient Armenia



Both the Satrapy and Kingdom of Armenia were powerful, and at times independent states who were considered very important in their regional contexts. These states were also far larger than modern Armenia. The Kingdom of Armenia at its height, when it was led by a King named 'Tigranes the Great,' was approximately 1,000,000 square kilometers, or 390,000 square miles. That's the size of nearly eight New York States! Modern Armenia is around 30,000 square kilometers, or 11,500 square miles, slightly larger than Massachusetts.

What is remarkable about Armenia is that despite its history of being conquered, Armenia always retained its culture. Armenia was arguably the first Christian country, and to this day has its own church. Armenia also has its own art style, music and cuisine. After being conquered by the Romans and Parthians, control of Armenia would be passed between the currently most powerful Eastern and Western Empires for centuries. This back and forth would end with the rise of the Turks in Anatolia, which is the region of modern Turkey.

### ***The Turks and the Ottomans.***

West of the Armenian heartland is a large thumb shaped peninsula stretching all the way to the Eastern Edge of Europe; this is Anatolia. Anatolia is where the Ottomans would establish their empire, and from there eventually conquer the Armenians.

Before the arrival of the Turks in the 11th century CE, and after Persian rule in the 3rd century BCE, Anatolia was inhabited mostly by Greek speaking peoples, though there were many local languages in use, Armenian being one. These peoples were ruled first by the Greeks from approximately 330-100 BCE, and then the Romans from 100 BCE - 330 CE. In 330 CE the Roman Empire split into the Eastern and Western Empire, which were at most times allies, but

were separate states with different Emperors and different Religions. The Byzantines were the Eastern Romans, who spoke Greek and practiced a kind of Christianity very similar to the kind practiced in Armenia. The Byzantines would totally control Anatolia until the Arrival of the Seljuk Turks around 1000 AD.

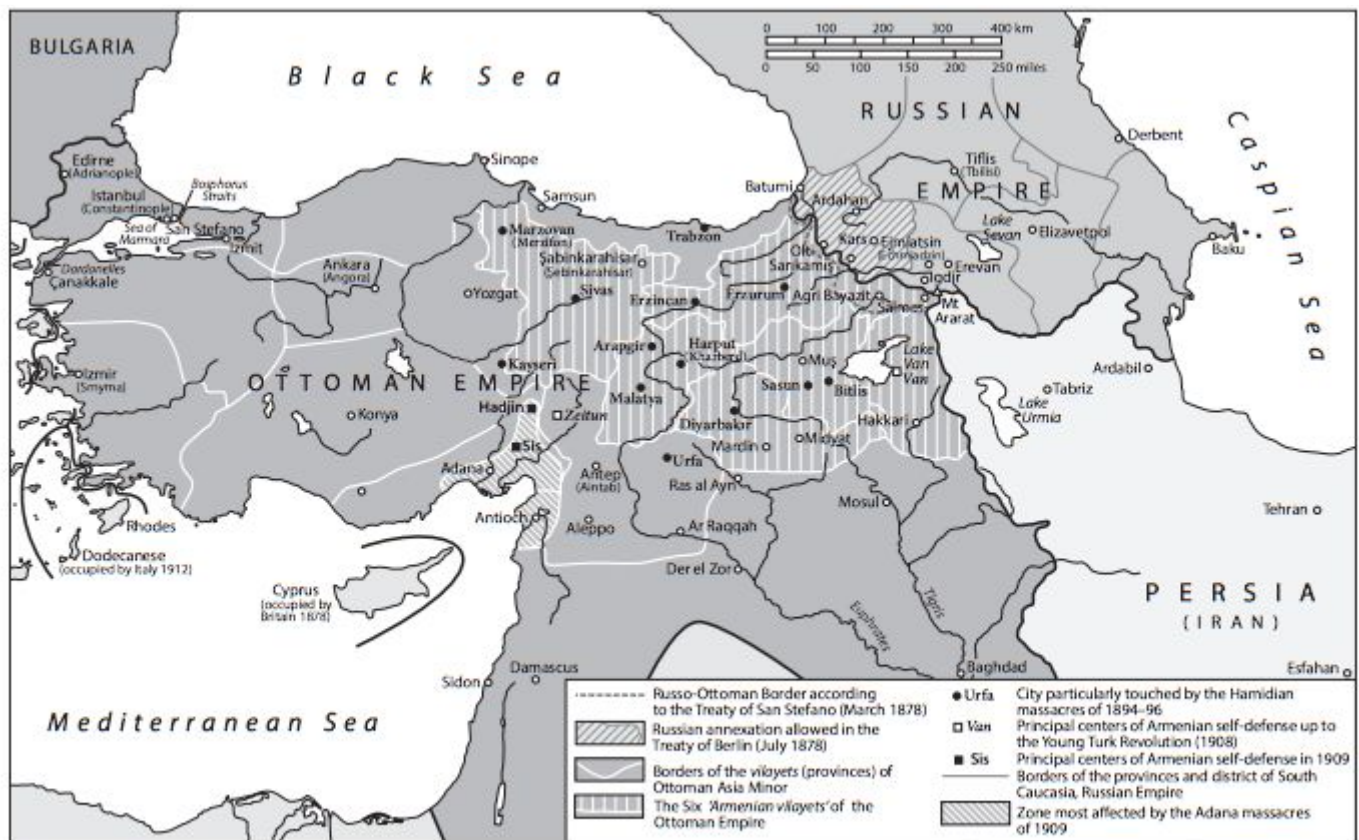
The Seljuk Turks were a Muslim nomadic group from Central Asia who spoke ‘Oghuz Turkish,’ which refers to a branch of the Turkic Language Group, spoken throughout Central and Western Asia. The Seljuks were motivated conquerors, and were fantastic warriors who fought from horseback. Within a century of their arrival the Seljuks had several decisive victories over the Byzantines, that allowed them to conquer most of Central and Western Anatolia in the 11th and 12th centuries. The Byzantines still controlled western Anatolia on the Aegean coast, but were extremely weak. In the 13th century, a subgroup of the Seljuks, led by a warlord called ‘Osman’ rose to power. Osman’s Turks would raid the remaining Byzantine land on Anatolia and conquer a great deal of it. This conquered land would become the seed of the Ottoman Empire that would control Anatolia and beyond for almost a 1,000 years.<sup>57</sup> The Ottomans would completely conquer the Byzantine Empire in 1453. At its height, the territory of the Ottoman Empire would be about 5,200,000 square kilometers, or 2,000,000 square miles, nearly 800,000 square miles larger than India.

Going forward, when the Ottomans are mentioned, this is not referring only to the descendents of the Seljuks, who were the direct descendents of Central Asian nomads. Rather the Ottomans refer to the mixture of the Asiatic Turks with the people of Anatolia who spoke a version of Oghuz Turkish, influenced by the Persian Language. This is the language that today

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<sup>57</sup> The name ‘Ottoman’ comes from the name ‘Osman,’ which can also be pronounced ‘Othman’ Say it out loud ten times fast!

we call Turkish. However, in the context of the Ottoman Empire, ‘Turks’ refers to the Turkish-speaking Muslims that made up a large portion of the Empire’s population, most of its political class, and all of its Sultans. Other non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire spoke many languages and practiced mostly Christianity and Judaism. Even though these groups were Ottoman ‘citizens,’ they are often referred to by their ethnic group and not as ‘Ottomans’ or ‘Turks’.



Ottoman Empire.

### *Ottoman Political Change, the Great Powers and Armenia 1878-1914*

After reaching its height in the 1500s and 1600s, the Ottoman Empire began to weaken. This happened for a variety of reasons. One reason is that it was just too big to effectively rule. Another reason is that the peoples of the Ottoman Empires were culturally different and had

many different ideas about how it should be ruled and how they should be treated. Another reason is that the politics of the Empire were extremely chaotic. Over the centuries many Sultans (which is the name of the Turkish Emperor) were murdered, often by their own soldiers. One extremely important reason this trend is sometimes forgotten is not the fault of the Ottomans at all. This reason was interference by European powers in Ottoman politics. Even though the Ottomans were often at war, and even invading Europe, the Ottomans still had diplomatic ties to countries like France as early as the 1600s. The Ottoman Empire modernized between 1839 and 1876 with the 'Tanzimat Reforms.' While this helped the Ottomans survive longer, it gave Europeans more influence over Ottoman politics.

By the late 1800s the "Great Powers" --Russia, Great Britain, France, Austro-Hungary, Italy and Germany -- had a lot of influence in Ottoman politics. In 1878 Russia, Great Britain, France, Austro-Hungary, Italy and Germany met in the Congress of Berlin. In the Congress of Berlin, the Great Powers tried to decide how the Balkans were to be divided following the defeat of the Ottomans in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. As a result, the Ottomans lost control of most of its Balkan territories as they were. This process is comparable to the Berlin Conference of 1885 when the Great Powers met to plan out African Colonization.

The Ottoman Empire continued to lose a great deal of land throughout the 19th century, and began to have trouble in Armenia. Remember that during all of this expansion and change the Armenians remained, and were surrounded by their Muslim Turkish, Kurdish and Arab neighbors. The Ottoman government had divided Armenia into six provinces. Armenians were able to keep their culture and religion in part due to the Ottoman *Millet* System. The Millet was a system of indirect rule that started as early as the 1500s, which allowed for a certain amount of

self determination and religious independence among minority groups like the Armenians.

Though the Armenians were able to maintain and develop their culture, the system separated them from their neighbors of other ethnicities. Some Armenians even felt that they needed their own country. If one has learned about the Balkans, one can think of the kind of nationalist feelings felt by ethnic groups like the Serbians for comparison. In the 1890s there was a great deal of conflict in Armenia, as the Ottomans were concerned that the Armenians might try to break from Ottoman rule through revolution. In 1894 Sultan Abdul Hamid began to persecute the Armenians further. A small dispute over taxes was interpreted as a revolution by the Sultanate who sent in regular Army troops. Turks and Kurds would also organize against Armenians and over the next two years, 1894-1896, murder 200,000-400,000 Armenian men, women and children, and steal their property. These events, called the 'Hamidian Massacres,' are sometimes considered the first part of the Armenian Genocide.

As anti-Armenian attacks continued, Turkey went through a revolution in 1908, which resulted in the rise of a political party called the Committee of Union and Progress, or CUP. They are also referred to as 'the Young Turks.' The CUP sought to strengthen Turkey, but faced many problems and caused a great deal of destruction in the next ten years. In 1909, an attempted counter-revolution led by soldiers who felt the CUP was too secular, would result in the murder of a further 30,000 Armenians in Adana. Then in 1912, the Balkans revolted and the Ottomans lost almost all of their European territory. Ottoman territory in Europe became the new country was absorbed into the Austro Hungarian empire.

In 1913, the Ottomans again faced a problem similar to the one they had in 1878 as the Great Powers sought to divide Anatolia into zones of influence. The Ottomans deeply resented

this. At the same time, the Armenians had been seeking international assistance following decades of oppression and violence. The Armenians' search for outside support was successful, and resulted in France, England, Germany and Russia planning the division of Anatolia into small states that appropriately represented regional ethnic groups. In this plan was a special focus on securing Armenian independence from Ottoman governance. Basically, the Great Powers used Armenians to further control and harm the Ottomans. This same year saw the deportation of nearly 300,000 Greeks from Anatolia. The CUP was trying to form a Turkish state that had no room for groups like the Armenians who were viewed as different and troublesome. The planned division was stopped suddenly by the outbreak of the largest and bloodiest war ever seen, World War I.

**SUMMARY:** After their peak in the 1600s, the Ottomans became weak for a variety of reasons, which made them vulnerable to interference by Russia, Great Britain, France, Austro-Hungary, Italy and Germany, many of whom were already trying to take over large parts of the world through colonialism. Meanwhile, Armenia remained culturally independent and some Armenians wanted to become a separate country, like groups in the Balkans were doing. The Armenians wanted help from outside powers, and the Great Powers wanted to use the Armenian cause as an excuse to control the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans, already distrusting the Armenians, became increasingly violent against the Armenians, and amongst themselves. This resulted in the death of up to 400,000 Armenians over two years and a revolution that empowered an ambitious political party, the CUP, that wanted to remove groups like the Greeks and Armenians. At the same time, the Great Powers antagonized this already hostile political

party by again taking the side of the Armenians, making them a target just in time for the chaos of World War I.

### ***War and Genocide 1915-1923***

World War One began in 1914, with the Ottoman Empire joining the “Central Powers,” and alliance of Germany and Austria-Hungary against France, Britain and Russia. 1915 began with the removal of Armenians from combat roles in the Ottoman army. Instead Armenians were made to do jobs like digging trenches and other menial tasks. This was justified as a security precaution because the Ottoman government was supposedly afraid of an Armenian uprising as they fought in World War I. Armenians became targets for exploitation and violence in these labor groups. Many of Armenia’s able bodied men with military training were murdered or in captivity. Many murders were done with knives to conserve ammunition.

The CUP supposedly feared that the Armenians would rise up, but rather than try and mediate potential problems, they instead appointed CUP politician Jevdet Bey as governor of Armenia who had a reputation for murdering Armenians wherever he went. On April 19th Jevdet demanded 4,000 new soldiers from the Armenians. Not wanting to send more young men to the labor squads, which by then were extremely dangerous, the Armenian community provided 400 men and cash compensation for the remaining 3,600. Jevdet chose to perceive this act as an expression of disloyalty, and reportedly swore that he would kill every Armenian higher than his knee. A day later, on April 21, 1915, Van, the largest city in Armenia and its cultural capital was besieged. The defenders, using out of date rifles and pistols, as well as a small amount of machine guns smuggled in, battled the Ottoman regular army, who were armed with modern weaponry and artillery. The Armenians miraculously held off the Ottomans until the

Russians arrived. Van had been spared, but the countryside had been destroyed by the Ottomans. The Russians disposed of the Armenian dead, counting as they went. Some 55,000 Armenian men, women and children had been murdered. Four days later, Armenian cultural figures and clergy men living in the Ottoman capital city of Istanbul were arrested. Many were eventually murdered. In the first four months of 1915, the Armenians were struck a terrible blow against their people and culture.

These horrible events were immediately followed by massive deportations as a response to the Siege of Van, which the CUP blamed on the Armenians. These deportations, and the massacres to follow were largely orchestrated by Mehmed Talaat Pasha, one of the three rulers of the CUP. Talaat and his collaborators used a system of public and private telegrams to direct the Genocide. The public telegrams appeared to request somewhat legal actions, while the private telegrams called for mass murder. Certain orders were given verbally. A group called the 'Special Organization' was used to murder and dislodge Armenians throughout Anatolia.

Hundreds of thousands of Armenians from throughout Anatolia were marched towards cities in Syria, at the time an Ottoman province. The Ottomans murdered many thousands of Armenians along the way, with guns, knives and axes. Others still faced mass burnings, drowning, human experimentation, rape and starvation. Many more simply were marched to death. Those who reached Syria still faced potential murder, while others were reportedly sold into slavery. All the while, abandoned Armenian property was sold or stolen. Armenian children were forcibly assimilated into Turkish households.

It is difficult to say how many Armenians were killed in 1915. Most modern estimates say around 1,000,000 Armenians were killed, some go as high as 1,500,000. With the Hamidian



Massacres and Adana Massacres, that figure can be close to 2,000,000. In 1919, the Ottoman government held a tribunal trying to find fault for the Genocide, and found the ‘Three Pashas,’ the rulers of the CUP, guilty. The Ottoman tribunal sentenced them to death but none of them ever died at Ottoman hands. Rather, two were assassinated by vengeful Armenians. The killings and attacks on Armenian culture would continue. In 1920, for instance, up to 98,000 more Armenians would be killed. Armenia briefly enjoyed statehood before being again absorbed - this time, by the Soviet Union and Turkish Republic, formed in 1923. After 1991, an independent Armenia emerged for the first time since 1375.

### ***Denial 1923-Present***

Officially the Turkish government denies that what occurred from 1915-1923 was a genocide, though they do recognize that there was a conflict. Despite hundreds of eyewitnesses, testimonies and records, certain groups and public figures like historians take the position of the Turkish government. Turkey has laws preventing public discussion of the events of 1915 under threat of imprisonment, which have been used to silence historians and activists. In America there are lobbyist groups that fight recognition of the events of 1915 as Genocide. There have even been court cases that attempt to require teaching that there was no genocide.

**For your consideration:** Below is the definition of Genocide provided by the United Nations following the end of World War II. Using what you have learned in the chapter only, try and see how many parts of the definition can be used to describe what you know about the events of 1915-1923.

***Article II of the 1948 United Nations Definition of Genocide.***

*[genocide is characterized by ...]*

1. A mental element: the "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such"; and
2. A physical element, which includes the following five acts, enumerated exhaustively:
  - a. Killing members of the group
  - b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
  - c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
  - d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
  - e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group