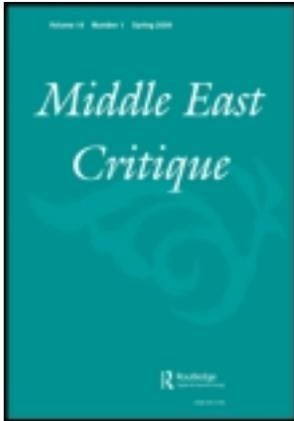


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### Contours of Scholarship on Armenian-Turkish Relations

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# Contours of Scholarship on Armenian-Turkish Relations

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The situation in Turkey with respect to Turks, Armenians and Greeks alike meets all the terms of the classic definition of tragedy, the tragedy of fate. A curse has been laid upon all populations and all have moved forward blindly to suffer their doom. It is a tragedy with only victims, not heroes, no matter how heroic individuals may have been. ... [T]he fate of the Greeks and Armenians, the tools of nationalistic and imperialistic ambitions of foreign powers, makes one realize how accursed has been the minority population that had the protection of a Christian foreign power.<sup>1</sup>

The debate over how to describe the events of 1915 raises some of the most emotionally charged and politically explosive questions in late Ottoman historiography, as well as among the Turkish and Armenian communities whose history and sensibilities are closely entangled. The debate is closely linked to the national historiography, collective memory, identity and destiny of two nations that are geographically intertwined. In this introductory article to the special issue on the debate, I focus on how the Turks and Armenians have framed, selected, silenced and labeled events to shape their contemporary identities and politics.

Research on late Ottoman Anatolia and the deportation of the Armenian population has been very limited due to restricted access to archives and also silence and accusation on both sides.<sup>2</sup> For instance, the archives of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) in Boston provide limited access to certain scholars.<sup>3</sup> In the case of Turkey, the Ottoman archives, except for the military archives, only became totally accessible in the

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<sup>1</sup> John Dewey, "The Turkish Tragedy," *The New Republic*, 12 November 1928.

<sup>2</sup> Gwynne Dyer (1967) Turkish 'Falsifiers' and Armenian 'Deceivers': Historiography and the Armenian Massacres, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 12(1), pp. 99–107.

<sup>3</sup> In addition to the ARF archives, which are kept in the Hairenik Association building, Watertown, MA, the Zoryan Institute, which was established to promote the genocide thesis, has been collecting Armenians' private papers related to the events of 1915.

1990s. What has been available in terms of historiography by Ottoman scholars and some Armenian genocide scholarship is very problematic. The works on both sides created a rigid set of political slogans either to dehumanize one another or to create a set of myths from which to draw new boundaries. In this special issue, several scholars seek to address the Armenian issue from legal, historical and political science perspectives. In order to locate these articles in the larger context of scholarship on the Turkish and Armenian controversy over the nature of the events of 1915, I first will raise several key questions and then provide my reasons why the concept of genocide is a problematic issue in the efforts to explain the events of 1915. Secondly, I will map out the existing scholarship between the diametrically opposing frameworks, before situating the articles within the discourse.

### **Is the Term ‘Genocide’ Useful for the Study of Late Ottoman History?**

The questions in this special issue concentrate on three areas:

- (1) *The Nature of the Debate*: Is it scholarly, political or legal? What exactly is the problem we have been debating for the last 45 years? Whose debate is it? Why do foreign parliaments pass resolutions that call for Turkey to recognize the events of 1915 as genocide? How do terms such as Islamophobia and Orientalism enter into the debate? Do these external interventions hinder or facilitate the debate?
- (2) *Framing the Debate*: Why do the Armenian communities insist that the events constitute the first ‘genocide’ rather than ethnic cleansing, relocation and massacres, or civil war? How useful is it to analyze and understand Armenian-Ottoman relations within the context of genocide? To what extent is the term genocide useful to build bridges for a shared understanding between these two nations?
- (3) *The Event Itself*: What did happen before and during the First World War between the Armenians and the Ottoman state? How did the Armenian revolutionary organizations and insurgency shape the thinking of the Ottoman bureaucrats about the final aim of the Armenians? Did the Ottoman state exaggerate the threat and overreact? How and why did the most loyal nation get framed as the enemy? Why do genocide theses totally ignore the Armenian revolutionary organizations’ violent tactics, ideology and close collaborations with Russia? What is the connection between intention and outcome when we want to understand the painful history of the Armenians and Ottomans? Moreover, what type of evidence (i.e., archival, oral history, memories, collective remembering, missionary reports or court indictments) is important to the argument?

### **Genocide Scholarship vs. Historiography**

Genocide is a legal term. In order to conclude whether there is genocide, two aspects of the definition must be established: (a) actual physical killing of members of an ethnic, religious, racial and national group; and (b) an intention to destroy, in whole or in part,

such a group. It is up to the court to determine whether the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) government had intent to destroy Armenians ‘as such’ or whether the loss of life, regardless of how great the number, was an unanticipated result of the government’s aim to remove a perceived security threat or to create more homogenous country.<sup>4</sup> Even though there is no smoking gun, that is, an official order to destroy the Armenians, there is a powerful accumulation of archival and personal testimonies that indicate an *ad hoc* ethnic cleansing of the Armenian population.

A clear and immediate difficulty with the concept of genocide is that it is a legal term and not conducive to historical inquiry. Donald Bloxham, a leading scholar with a nuanced argument on the Armenian case, aptly argues that genocide ‘is more a legal term than a historical one, designed for the *ex post facto* judgments of the courtroom rather than the historian’s attempt to understand events as they develop.’<sup>5</sup> In fact, the term genocide seeks to moralize a conflict, constantly searching for a victim and a victimizer; it is always in search of intent and functions as a prosecutor; it ignores internal diversity of these communities or movements; and it ignores the casual connections and the role of contingency and human agency. This debate between victim and victimizer is a moral debate, not a historical one. In order to understand the chains of events and the role of human agency, we need to de-moralize the issue and seek to understand what happened and why. In other words, the events, actors, context of the past, all to be examined teleologically—a retrospective projection<sup>6</sup> to prove the criminality of perpetrators.

The main task of the historian is to explain and understand what took place in past events on the basis of available historical material, while the task of a genocide scholar is to establish, like a lawyer or prosecutor using evidence, whether what took place can or can not be categorized as genocide. The goal of understanding and explaining the past by analyzing the body of evidence is thus a completely different task from the task of proving. Unfortunately, many genocide scholars work as prosecutors to establish the case by proving that what took place was the mega crime of all crimes: genocide. In recent years, the International Association of Genocide Scholars began to determine cases of genocide on the basis of ‘voting.’<sup>7</sup> The scholars of genocide and historians have very different missions and methodologies and they should not confuse their tasks. How a historian thinks and writes is different from a legal scholar who seeks to prove a case to be genocide. A legal scholar is expected to apply the law to the case. Those who operate within a legal frame tend to *judge*, whereas the task of historians is to *understand* without taking sides.

<sup>4</sup> For more on the CUP, see Feroz Ahmad (2010) *The Young Turks: The Committee of Union and Progress in Turkish Politics, 1908–1914* (New York: Columbia University).

<sup>5</sup> Donald Bloxham (2011) *The First World War and the Development of the Armenian Genocide*, in: Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma M. Göcek & M. Naimark (eds.) *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 275, pp. 260–75.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> In 1997, the International Association of Genocide Scholars passed a resolution that the events of 1915 constitute a genocide. In almost every scholarly debate over the events of 1915, a group of Armenian scholars or members of the community would distribute this resolution. In other words, this attempt to end the scholarly inquiry through voting is very unscholarly. In effect, the official journal of the IAGS, *Genocide and Prevention: An International Journal*, is funded by the Zoryan Institute. For more on the IAGS, see <http://www.genocidescholars.org/>, accessed 23 August 2011.

The latter seeks to explore the causal connections without the burden of having to find out who was a victim and who was a perpetrator.

Frequently, those who question the application of the term genocide to the events of 1915 are labeled as deniers, and they are silenced or delegitimized as a result of this weighty stigma, rendering the framework of genocide a conversation-stopper. Baskin Oran, a political activist who criticizes the official Turkish historiography, argues that the reason for the rigid Turkish position is the term genocide, and he calls on Armenians not to catalogue the events of 1915 as genocide. In fact, in recent years it has been increasingly difficult to find intellectual space to discuss the two versions of the past. For instance, a series of conferences organized by the Workshop on Armenian and Turkish Scholarships (WATS), refused to invite any scholars who were unwilling to examine the events within the framework of genocide. Thus, the edited book that emerged from a series of conferences has no single paper that challenges the Armenian version of the history.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the events that shape the relations between the Armenians and the Ottoman state are catalogued as genocide and removed from historical inquiry and transformed into a moral and legal one.<sup>9</sup>

Insisting the events of 1915 should be tagged the Armenian Genocide, rather than massacres and deportations or religious civil war, not only leads to dichotomous historiography but also removes any possibility of shared space in which to understand what happened. At the heart of the current debate between the two competing historiographies is the labeling of the events of 1915. The politics of labeling or framing have been the major obstacle in the way of understanding what happened and how it happened. This debate also hinders the establishment of diplomatic relations between the republics of Turkey and Armenia. The concept of genocide does not help to build bridges, but rather derails such efforts by moralizing the 97-year-old events, and ignores the internal diversity of the Ottoman Muslim and Armenian communities. It creates victims and victimizers and assigns all agency to the Ottoman victimizers and constructs a blameless victim, removing agency from the Armenians.

The concept of genocide, by definition, focuses on the specific intent of genocide and the Armenian historiography tries to derive intent from the consequence: removal of the Armenian communities from Anatolia. It blames the Turks for the outcome and labels it as genocide. This labeling removes the possibility of explaining why and how these series of events took place. Armenian historiography seeks to prove that the massacres and deportations were organized and planned by the Turks. In recent years, this highly politicized historiography also has prevented many Turkish scholars from examining these events in their work.

Today, the prominent historians of the Ottoman Empire ignore the term genocide and ask the following questions: Why do deportations and large-scale massacres happen? And how have they happened? Neither Armenian nor Turkish scholars avoid nationalist ideology to reimagine what took place between the two communities. The Armenian

<sup>8</sup> Suny, Göcek & Naimark, *A Question of Genocide*.

<sup>9</sup> Fatma M. Göcek argues that 'the term genocide has become an increasingly politicized term; it is so politicized at this point that I think it does not foster research and analysis but instead hinders it.' However, she still insists that 'what happened in 1915 certainly fits the definition of genocide as defined by the 1948 United Nations convention.' See interview with Göcek. Available at: <http://gibrahayer.blogspot.com/2006/01/interview-with-dr-fatma-muge-gocek.html>, accessed 23 August 2011.

struggle to get the Turks and the world to recognize their suffering as genocide is the main mission of the genocide scholars. Due to this unyielding interest to insist on the label of genocide, scholars of genocide and most Armenian historians read the entire history between the Ottoman state and its diverse Armenian communities to show that *all* interactions led to genocide. This teleological reading dominates Armenian historiography. Thus, the attempt to prove the existence of genocide determines all relations before and after the events 1915. This special issue seeks, in contrast, to bring the study of Ottoman-Armenian relations back into the historical domain by stressing that the term genocide is a legal one and its application to the Armenian case requires more study of the case itself by historians.

### **Frameworks of Study: Competing Epistemic Communities**

There are several competing attempts to explain the tragic events and deportation of the Armenian communities. There are two different epistemic communities on how to decipher the events of 1915. The first group of scholars agrees that the consequences of the events constitute genocide, the Turks are perpetrators and the Armenians are blameless victims. After agreeing that the events of 1915 were indeed genocide and the Turks were the perpetrators, they seek to build intent on the basis of their own conclusion. However, within the same epistemic community, they provide diverse, even contradictory causal explanations. Their causes vary from Islam to the structure of the Ottoman state to Turkish nationalism to the leadership of the CUP. They all deposit agency at the feet of the Ottoman Turks and treat the Armenians as the receivers of the consequences of Ottoman action, while hardly questioning the activities of the Armenian revolutionary organization and their close alliance with the occupying foreign forces. In other words, this group of scholars explains the events from the experiences of the Armenians. They also agree that the Republic of Turkey should recognize the events as genocide and respond to its legal implications. In conclusion, the initial question (i.e., why did the Turks intend to destroy the Armenians as such?) of this group of scholars is very problematic. They focus on the Ottoman leaders as perpetrators and never seek to understand the actions of the Armenians which led to the shift of perception on the part of the Ottomans who started viewing the Armenians as the enemy.

The second epistemic community also has certain common assumptions: Armenians were actors on their own behalf, just as the CUP leadership was, and the events of 1915 must be understood within an interactive framework between the Armenian political activities and the Ottoman state. They also insist that the term genocide does not encourage objective inquiry and seek to divide the study between the victims and perpetrators, and they disagree over the causes and motives of the events. Some treat the events as communal massacres (*kital*), some treat them as unintended consequences of the inability of the state to restore security, while still other scholars read the events as killings by the enraged CUP leaders. They offer different cause-and-effect patterns. They focus on the Ottoman bureaucracy and the Armenian organizations and the way in which they constituted each other's perceptions and the process of othering.

### **Epistemic Community I: Genocide Framework**

Even among scholars who regularly issue the verdict of genocide against the Turks, there is a major debate over the actual date of the killings, the role of hatred-based ideology

(either Islamism or Turkish nationalism) against Armenians and whether it was planned or evolved in response to failed Ottoman strategies on the war fronts, and the role of major European powers. This group of scholars offers four competing causes to explain the outcome of the deportation. These causes are: religion (the Islamic conception of *dhimmi*); nationalism (the claim that racist ideology governs Turkish nationalism and the logic of creating a homogenous homeland for the Turks and creating a larger Turkic empire by rooting out the Armenians who were blocking the union); the authoritarian and theocratic Ottoman state structure; and the CUP leadership's vengeance-oriented policies.

Those who insist on religion and nationalism defend *the premeditation thesis*, which states that the massacres were planned and organized by the state. Those scholars argue that the destruction of the Ottoman Armenian communities was the implementation of a long and secret plan of the Ottoman state that had started either in the 1890s, well before 1908, or in 1912. There is major confusion about the starting date of the Armenian massacres and the literature provides several competing dates. One argument rejects contingency or the war as accounting for genocide; instead it assesses (a) the Islamic conception of *dhimmi*, (b) Turkish nationalism and the goal of creating pan-Turkic unity, and (c) the very tradition of the Ottoman state as the primary cause of the destruction of the Anatolian Armenian community. This thesis argues that the Great War provided the expected opportunity or pretext to create a homogenized Turkish-only or Muslim homeland by rooting out the Christian communities. The premeditation thesis claims that the CUP displayed the intent to destroy the Armenian community according to secret plans. These scholars either emphasize the second-class status of Armenians within the context of the Islamic concept of *dhimmi* or Turkish nationalism as carrying the seeds of destruction.<sup>10</sup>

The leading scholars of this thesis are Vahakn Dadrian, Taner Akcam and Peter Balakian. Dadrian, the doyen of Armenian genocide scholarship, was educated in Germany and the United States and taught for many years until he was removed from his university professorship; he identifies Islam (in recent years he also stresses Turkish nationalism) as a primary cause of the genocide.<sup>11</sup> Malcolm Yapp, who reviewed *The History of the Armenian Genocide*, argues that:

[Dadrian's] approach is not that of an historian trying to find out what happened and why but of a lawyer assembling the case for the prosecution in an adversarial system. What he wants are admissions of guilt from the defendants, first Germany as the easier target and then Turkey. What is missing is any adequate recognition of the circumstances in which these events took place: the surge of Armenian nationalism, the ambitions of Russia, the fears of the Ottomans, and the panic and indiscipline of war. The 1915 massacres took place when the Ottomans were being driven back by the Russians (supported by many Armenians) in the east and were being threatened

<sup>10</sup> The main figures of this thesis have been Vahakn Dadrian and his student Taner Akcam. This camp also includes Richard Hovannisian and Fuat Dundar, who insist that the CUP had an articulate policy of demographic engineering.

<sup>11</sup> Vahakn N. Dadrian (1995) *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus* (Providence and Oxford: Berghahn Books). See also V. Dadrian (1999) *Warrant for Genocide: Key Elements of Turko-Armenian Conflict* (New Brunswick NJ and London: Transaction Publishers).

by the operations in the Dardanelles in the west. Dadrian is so obsessed by his theory of the long plan that he too often overlooks the elements of the contingent.<sup>12</sup>

In his *Warrant for Genocide*, Dadrian essentializes the conflict as ancient hatred between the Turks and Armenians, arguing that the Ottoman state was an Islamic state and that Islam by nature does not tolerate political equality of the followers of different religions, which was required by the pressure of the Great Powers after the Tanzimat of 1839. Furthermore, the late nineteenth century reforms were incompatible with Islam and this incompatibility led to the genocide. Islam, as Dadrian understands it, denies political equality for Christians and Muslims.<sup>13</sup> In her review, Mary Schaeffer Conroy argues that:

this book, while including thoughtful analysis on the possibility of the massacres and some interesting insights, relies too much on theory and educated guesses and too little on facts or Turkish archival sources. It thus does not allow satisfactory conclusions about the extent of the massacres or the motivation and culpability of the Turks with regard to them . . . However, the most egregious flaws in this book are its polemical tone, its sketchiness, and its failure to use Turkish archival sources. Therefore, while the book delivers intriguing insights into Ottoman-Kurdish relations and the views of individual Turkish statesmen regarding Armenians, and while it suggests convincing theories for Turkish massacres of Armenians, it does not convincingly document these theories. It is thus unsatisfying as a whole. This book is more a work of journalism than solid history and is not recommended.<sup>14</sup>

From Dadrian's perspective, the history of Armenians under the Muslim Ottoman rule is a story of captivity, repression and a series of genocidal massacres in the nineteenth century. He explains this shift from suppression to genocidal massacres in terms of the Armenian demand for political equality and the Islamic state's reaction to these demands. He treats the massacre during the Sultan Abdulhamid II period as 'a prelude to, if not a rehearsal for, the World War I genocide.'<sup>15</sup> His analysis is based more on ideational factors such as Islamism or Turkish nationalism and hardly takes structural factors into account to understand why and how the state bureaucracy reacted.

By stressing the shifting power relations among different religious communities in Anatolia, Dadrian ignores the internal power struggle and transformation within the Armenian community. Since he defines himself as a genocide scholar, he believes that his task is to prove the genocidal intent of the Turks on the basis of the result. In this process, he construes a purely dichotomous Muslim versus Armenian community locked in an endless conflict. In short, a closer analysis indicates that Dadrian's ideational argument misread the secular nature of the Ottoman polity. The Ottoman Empire was a Muslim empire but it was not a theocracy. Moreover, Islam is not fixed and it is open to different

<sup>12</sup> Malcolm Yapp, review of *The History of the Armenian Genocide* (1996), *Middle Eastern Studies*, 32(4), pp. 395–397.

<sup>13</sup> The genocide here discussed is *purported* and *not affirmed* as such by all sides; alternatively, I prefer not to use genocide, but rather deportation, forced evacuation, eviction, massacre, or catastrophe.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Schaeffer Conroy (2000) Review of Dadrian, *Warrant for Genocide*, *The Social Science Journal*, 37(3), pp. 481–483.

<sup>15</sup> Dadrian, *Warrant for Genocide*, p. 156.

interpretations. To reduce the 600-year-long history between the Armenian communities and the Ottoman state to captivity, repression and genocide is a political attempt to dehumanize Islam in general, and the Turks in particular. This anachronistic reading of the past to prove the genocidal intent is very problematic. From Dadrian's perspective, genocide was inevitable since Islam was rigid and did not accept political equality for religious minorities. To argue that Islamic theology does not allow diversity misreads the nature of the Ottoman Empire: It was always ethnically and religiously heterogeneous, and it institutionalized this diversity via the millet system. Indeed, Dadrian's presentation of the deportation of Armenian Christian communities from eastern Anatolia by dehumanizing Islam might be a powerful argument to the public imagination, but it is an essentialist, rude form of Orientalism.

### *Turkish Nationalism Framework*

Another dominant approach seeks to explain the deportation of these communities as a planned project of the Young Turks who acted in accordance with their nationalistic ideas. According to this group of scholars, Turkish nationalism was racist, fascist, militaristic and braided with Islamic ideas of *jihad*. Richard G. Hovannisian, the leading figure in Armenian nationalist historiography, argues that it was Turkish nationalism that dehumanized the Armenians as disloyal and treacherous, and that this dehumanization, in turn, caused the destruction of Armenian communities.<sup>16</sup> In his second edited volume, he and other contributors stress the militaristic nature of Turkish nationalist ideology.<sup>17</sup> Hovannisian's third edited volume also tries to deal with the causes of genocide and comes up with a set of diverse reasons to explain the Armenian genocide.<sup>18</sup> In this volume, again Turkish nationalism and the despotic nature of the Ottoman state become the primary causes of genocide. This ideational explanation is flawed. It seeks to explain conduct on the basis of ideological commitment. It ignores the sociopolitical context. The better explanation requires the integration of agency and structural argument.

When considering the series of events as genocide, one needs to find the genocidal intent, and by doing so the historian then becomes a prosecutor who indicts the perpetrator. Considering the events only from the perspective of the victim leads to a limited reading. There are a number of problems with this perspective.<sup>19</sup> It does not take the role of Western imperialism or the insurgency tactics of Armenian revolutionary committees into account, and it ignores the demographic pressure of the deportation of Muslims from the Balkans and the Caucasus. These new refugees and the settled

<sup>16</sup> Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.) (1986) *The Armenian Genocide in Perspective* (New Brunswick and Oxford: Transaction Books).

<sup>17</sup> Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.) (1992) *The Armenian Genocide: History, Politics, Ethics* (New York: St. Martin's Press).

<sup>18</sup> Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.) (1999) *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press).

<sup>19</sup> Some Armenian scholars offer much more sophisticated arguments on how to understand the events of 1915; see, for example, Ronald Grigor Suny (1998) *Empire and Nation: Armenians, Turks, and the End of the Ottoman Empire*, *Armenian Forum*, 1(2), pp. 17–51; and Ronald Grigor Suny (2001) *Religion, Ethnicity, and Nationalism: Armenians, Turks, and the End of the Ottoman Empire*, in: Omer Bartov & Phyllis Mack (eds.) *In God's Name: Genocide and Religion in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 23–61 (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books).

population worked, adhering to local government policies, to deter or contain Armenian insurgency. Moreover, it ignores the impact of new taxation policies and the penetration of European goods into Ottoman regions at the expense of local crafts. In short, the 1838 trade agreement turned the Christian Armenian merchant into a middleman and helped him to dominate the local and regional trade. This, in turn, created a rich and visible Armenian business class in contrast to the progressively worsening economic condition of Muslim communities. These economic conditions helped to heighten religio-ethnic consciousness against Armenian Christians. The European intervention on the side of Armenian Christians and their extrajudicial protection by European embassies did not help domestic relations between the two religious groups, and many Muslims started to see Christian neighbors as disloyal and the fifth column of Western imperialism. Finally, in order to understand why these political and cultural-structural factors did not lead to the extermination of Greeks or other similar minorities but only Armenians, we need to analyze the content, demands, and actions of the Armenian revolutionary organizations.

There was no developed and popularized Turkish nationalism before or during the First World War. The primary purpose of the CUP was not to create a new nation, but rather to maintain the Ottoman state. In other words, rather than claiming that the CUP's policies and actions were informed and guided by Turkish nationalist ideology, it would be more convincing to treat the conflicting policies of the CUP as *ad hoc* and pragmatic decisions to cope with emerging problems.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Turkism evolved along with Islamism and Ottomanism. They were mutually inclusive identities to save the state and contain territorial loss. Since the main purpose was the protection of the state, and since the CUP leaders only paid lip service to the nationalist rhetoric, it would be difficult to see genocide as the result of Turkish nationalist ideology. The CUP remained very loyal to the idea of an empire and acted not according to nationalism, but rather in light of the imperial state tradition.

Scholars like Akcam and Balakian typically recycle Dadrian's arguments. Akcam, for example, presents a number of facilitating factors such as: (a) the defeat in the Balkan Wars; (b) the suffering and mass deportation of Muslim refugees; and (c) the First World War.<sup>21</sup> Dadrian, Akcam and Balakian treat their field of study as no different from a courtroom where they deliver the guilty verdict against genocide perpetrators, setting out to prove that the Ottoman government and the Turks are guilty of committing genocide. This group utilizes the framework of genocide not to understand, but rather to issue judgment by imposing the term genocide on complex events. This courtroom-centric type of academic activity solely seeks to display the guilt of perpetrators. However, the research on the causes, process and consequences of the events of 1915 has not been conclusive yet. It is important to expand intellectual space to question existing narratives without dehumanizing any side.

<sup>20</sup> See further Michael Reynolds (2011) *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empire, 1908–1918* (New York: Cambridge University Press), pp. 140–166.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Balakian (2003) *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response* (New York: HarperCollins); Taner Akçam (2006) *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (New York: Metropolitan Books). For an excellent review on Akcam's book, see Erman Sahin (2008) A Scrutiny of Akcam's Version of History and Armenian Genocide, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 28(2), pp. 303–319.

*Political and Cultural Functionalist Thesis*

There are other scholars who treat the destruction of the Armenian communities as genocide by outcome, but tend to disagree with this essentialist thesis.<sup>22</sup> They reject the premeditation argument and develop their own functionalist argument. This more nuanced thesis is based on three claims: First, it was an incremental genocide without a single order or plan; second, the logic of total war converted the war's foreseeable excesses into unintended genocide; and third, the defeats in the Balkans and the anxiety around the collapse of the Ottoman state accelerated Turkish-Armenian conflict beyond control. The structural explanation focuses on the state actors, the international system, the nature of total war, regime types, revolution, and modernity. The key argument of this group is the ethnicization of the state by the CUP and its decision to create a homogenous nation. This second group offers a more structural-functionalist interpretation that redefines the events of 1915 as an act without lengthy premeditation. Rather than relying on traditional conceptions of *dhimmi* or Turkish ethnicity, they identify the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the worsening war conditions, the Western imperialist project of taking over the last remaining territories of the Turks, and the Armenian alliance with invading Russian troops as the primary causes of the destruction of these communities. These scholars, who reject the premeditation thesis, argue that the genocide was the outcome of total war and that there was *no prior* plan or intent to destroy Armenians. They still insist on the genocide claim on the basis of the consequences, i.e., what happened to the Armenians is a genocide or genocidal in terms of the result. They argue that there may not be an ideology of genocide or a clearly articulated plan to destroy the Armenians but rather an evolved policy of genocide due to pragmatic and contingent reasons.'

Robert Melson, who also insists on structural-political factors as the cause of the genocide, believes that there are three major conditions for genocide: the existence of a revolutionary and radical ideology, a revolutionary political organization and the radicalizing effects of war.<sup>23</sup> The successful radical revolutionary system leads to political disequilibrium by creating radicalized and enraged minorities. He argues that after the 1908 Young Turk revolution, those who came to power and their ideology were radicalized further by the effect of the Balkan and other wars. This radicalized ideology, in turn, did not conceive Anatolia as the shared homeland of Turks and Armenians. The war conditions created major anxiety about the future of their dictatorial power and the future of their state. Under these conditions the revolutionary vanguard (the CUP) chose to exterminate the Armenian communities. Michael Mann examines the ideological, economic, military and political conditions under which communal killing takes place. Rather than focusing on a single factor, he examines the toxic mix of these factors to explain mass killing. In his analysis of the Armenian case, Mann rejects the premeditation

<sup>22</sup> Donald Bloxham (2008) *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press); Robert Melson (1982) A Theoretical Inquiry into the Armenian Massacres of 1894–1896, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 24(3), pp. 481–509; and Robert Melson (1980) Provocation or Nationalism: A Critical Inquiry into the Armenian Genocide of 1915, in: Richard Hovannisian (ed.) *The Armenian Genocide in Perspective*, pp. 61–84 (New Brunswick NJ and Oxford: Transaction Books).

<sup>23</sup> Robert Melson (1992) *Revolution and Genocide: On the Origins of the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press); see also, Michael Mann (2004) *Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (New York: Cambridge University Press).

thesis that the CUP government had a long-term genocidal intent. He examines the process and causes of the radicalization of the Ottoman policies from Abdulhamid II to the CUP. He argues that the toxic mix of economic competition between Muslims and Christians, the emergence of Turkish nationalism, and the capture of the power by the CUP led to the genocide of Armenians. Mann never examines the role of Armenian nationalism, the revolutionary organizations and their violence, or the impact of these activities on the Ottoman bureaucracy. As long as we fall short of understanding the ‘securitization of the Armenian community’ by the Ottoman state, we cannot fully understand the motives of the Ottoman officials. Although Mann discusses the psychological impact of humiliation and victimization on the CUP leaders as a result of the defeat in the Balkan wars (1912–1913), along with the forced reform project by the major European powers to appoint two foreign inspectors to eastern Anatolia in 1914, he never examines their political consequences. Moreover, he does not examine the connections between the Russian threat and the Armenian insurgency in eastern Anatolia. However, Mann aptly summarizes the evolving CUP policies from ‘alliance with the Armenians’ to ‘strategically confined deportations’ to ‘violent deportation’ to ‘slid into a genocidal Plan.’ He concludes that ‘this was not as coherent, organized and premeditated a genocide as is usually argued . . . murderous cleaning is rarely the initial intent of the perpetrators.’<sup>24</sup> On the basis of Mann’s work one could argue that there was no intent to destroy the Armenians as such and the changing policies of the state indicates the lack of organized plan to kill Armenians.

Donald Bloxham offers a more balanced and historicized narrative of the events.<sup>25</sup> He argues that the war was the most important factor in the annihilation of the Armenians. Yet, he also identifies the CUP ideology as instrumental in the exaggeration of the Armenian insurrection and the threat to the state. Furthermore, he takes the view that the nationalist leaders of the Armenian community made poor decisions by paying too much attention to the major European powers and using violence against the Ottoman state. In short, the combination of ideologies, the European intervention and the war led to the destruction of Armenians. The most intriguing argument made by Bloxham is that there was no well-articulated plan of genocide, but rather a gradual radicalization of the Ottoman policies. The CUP policies evolved in response to the challenges they faced: from localized relocation, to massacres and to genocide in the late spring of 1915.<sup>26</sup> In fact, the Turkish military archives have published multi-volume books about the insurrection activities and regular attacks by the Armenian revolutionaries against the logistic lines and Muslim population during the First World War. In other words, according to the Ottoman military and civilian authorities, based on their intelligence reports a genuine security threat stemmed from the Armenian revolutionary activities and their close cooperation with Russia, Britain and France. The Armenian rebellion at Van and the capture of the city by Russian troops affirmed the Ottoman fears of coordinated operation against the Ottoman army. The Allies landed at the Dardanelles on April 25, 1915, and in May the Russian army along with Armenian volunteers started to move toward Erzurum, and several Armenian militias were caught on Mediterranean shores in the act of gathering anti-Ottoman intelligence. The Ministry of Defense and the Ottoman general staff acted on

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<sup>24</sup> Mann, *Dark Side*, p. 26.

<sup>25</sup> Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide*.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 69–95.

the basis of the evidence and decided to relocate the Armenians to protect their logistics and the lines of communication in late April.<sup>27</sup>

### *Agency- (Elite-) Based Thesis*

In recent years, the core argument of the premeditation thesis has been challenged by prominent scholars such as R. G. Suny, Fuat Dündar, Halil Berktaş,<sup>28</sup> Selim Deringil<sup>29</sup> and Yektan Türkyılmaz.<sup>30</sup> Their agency-based approaches focus on the role of the decision-making elite and those bureaucrats who carry out orders to eliminate a group of people. One of the leading scholars of the Caucasus, Ronald Suny, an Armenian political scientist, argues that the most plausible argument to explain the genocide is the role of state elites and emerging modernity. He argues that the genocide was not caused by bottom-up pressure, but rather engineered by the elite. He identifies the role of the CUP elite as critical in the process of killing. He does not reject the thesis on the difficulty of transformation of the imperial-colonial state into a citizen-based polity, the polarization of the ethno-religious boundaries between the Muslim and Christian Armenian communities due to the enrichment of and growing separatist movements of the Armenian community, and the anxiety caused by the First World War to partition the last territory of the Muslim Turks. However, there are a number of questions that this approach fails to explain: How did Talat Pasha move from being a man who was known as a close friend of Armenians to being the key person to remove the Armenian communities? In other words, how did he and other CUP leaders become *génocidaire* as Armenian version claims? What factors, if any, explain this transformation? Were there frontline killers of the Armenian deportees? Could mass killing succeed if there is no societal support? This approach disregards the role of society and only focuses on the leaders. Scholars who stress the role of the elite argue that the genocide was an outcome of the fear and anxiety that evolved during the war. In other words, deportation was a deliberate elite decision to protect the state and also prevent the Armenian actors from collaborating with Russia.

Dündar offers an original yet very problematic thesis.<sup>31</sup> He claims that the CUP's main goal was to create a Muslim-Turkish homeland through assimilation and deportation.

<sup>27</sup> Edward Erickson (2008) *The Armenians and Ottoman Military Policy, 1915*, *War in History*, 15(2), p. 166.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Halil Berktaş (2005) *Ermenilere etnik temizlik yapıldı*, *Milliyet*, March 7, 2005. Berktaş, an activist historian with a slim publication record, never wrote any scholarly work on the Armenian issue and hardly worked in the Ottoman archives. He airs his views in his column in the *Taraf* newspaper. Berktaş became famous due to his activism in Turkey's Maoist *Aydınlik* movement.

<sup>29</sup> Deringil, unlike Berktaş, is a well-respected scholar of late nineteenth century Ottoman Turkey; see his 2011 book, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimizing of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876–1909* (London: I. B. Tauris). However, his recent interviews in several Turkish daily newspapers are polemical and do not reflect his distinguished career.

<sup>30</sup> Türkyılmaz delivered a lecture at the University of Utah on November 6, 2008, on *Nation of Victims: The Case of Ethno-Religious Conflict In and Over Eastern Anatolia*. Türkyılmaz is a PhD candidate at Duke University and he is the only scholar from Turkey who speaks and reads Armenian, Kurdish and several other languages.

<sup>31</sup> Fuat Dündar (2001) *İttihat ve Terakki'nin Müslümanları İskân Politikası (1913–1918)* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları); and Fuat Dündar (2008) *Modern Türkiye'nin Sifresi: İttihat ve Terakki'nin Etnisite Mühendisliği, 1913–1918* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2008). For a review of the latter book, see Ayhan Aktar & Abdulhamid Kırmızı (2009) 'Bon pour L'Orient': Fuat Dündar'ın kitabını deşifre ederken, *Tarih ve Toplum*, 8, pp. 157–186.

The CUP's demographic engineering involved, first, removal of non-Muslims from Anatolia, and then the assimilation of non-Turks into the imagined Turkish nation. This policy was implemented against Bulgarians, Greek Orthodox (Rums), and then in May 1915, against the Armenians. Dündar argues that the idea of homogenization and the tactics the CUP were using were part of the larger nation-building project that the CUP borrowed from the Balkans. Dündar and Türkyılmaz expand on the role of political entrepreneurs in terms of understanding the deportation decision and killings during the First World War. Deringil also claims that the Young Turks planned to annihilate the entire Armenian population. Moreover, they tend to differentiate the Abdulhamid II-period massacres from the CUP policies of ethnic cleansing.

As evidenced above, there is an increasing diversity of opinion within the 'genocide camp' over the causes and the contingency of the events of 1915. There is no consensus on what caused the destruction of Armenian communities, even among scholars who promote the notion that genocide did take place. They all agree that what took place was genocide, but they all offer different explanations. The Armenian scholars assign all agency to the Turks and accept the Armenians as passive and blameless victims. This approach seeks to assign a high degree of agency to diverse Ottoman actors.

### Epistemic Community II: Non-Genocide Narratives

One of the critical factors in the evolution of non-genocide narratives is the attempts by some political bodies (such as parliaments and the IAGS (International Association of Genocide Scholars)) to rewrite the history of events of 1915 as genocide. Some scholars of genocide, and many in the Armenian diaspora, want the Turkish Republic and the rest of the world to recognize what happened to Armenians during the war as the first genocide in history; while the majority of Anatolian Muslims *remember* the events within their own collective memory as ethnic cleansing and genocidal massacres at the hands of Orthodox Christian nations and as self-defense to protect the homeland. The controversy over the tragic events of 1915 in Anatolia has surfaced at the international level, some European powers along with Armenian lobbies pressing the European Union to keep Turkey out or the US Congress to discipline Turkey and domesticate its foreign policy. These political bodies fail to see that even though history is made by politicians, it is the task of historians to research, analyze and write a coherent narrative. The EU has used the controversy to pressure Turkey into accepting historical responsibility for genocide. In the United States, a powerful Armenian lobby has been bringing ever-greater pressure to bear in getting the US Congress to take a similar stance.<sup>32</sup> The Turkish Republic for its part has refused to accept such charges or historical guilt and in turn has accused its challengers of ignoring the mass killing of Ottoman Muslims during the same period, pointing to the hypocrisy of refusing to acknowledge their own role in genocidal killings in places like Algeria, Bosnia and Indo-China.

The pressure also targeted a number of scholars who disagreed with the genocide thesis. For example, Gilles Veinstein, historian of Salonica and the Ottoman Empire, reviewed the evidence in a famous article of 1993 in *L'Histoire* and concluded that what took place

<sup>32</sup> Brendon Cannon (2009) Politicizing History and Legislating Reality: History, Memory, and Identity as Explanations for Armenian Claims of Genocide, PhD thesis, The University of Utah.

in 1915 does not constitute genocide. When Professor Veinstein became a candidate for the College de France, he was confronted by a campaign of vilification by members of the Armenian diaspora in France, because of his scholarly work, and despite of its support by many historians.

### *Nationalist Thesis*

In Turkey, there is a spectrum of interpretation of the events of 1915. On the right side of the spectrum, there is the nationalist Turkish perspective, which views the actions of 1915 as necessary for stopping Armenian treachery and protecting the homeland. This group includes politicians from secular nationalist parties—the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) of Devlet Bahçeli, the Labor Party (İP) of Doğu Perinçek and the Republican Peoples' Party (CHP) of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. Some scholars, just like those Armenians who take the essentialist view tend to view the Armenians as a treacherous people who were waiting to seize an opportunity to rebel and stab the beleaguered Ottoman state in the back.<sup>33</sup> This perspective, which is dominant, also stresses the role of major European powers in the partition of Anatolia. In short, Armenians are viewed as the agent of European imperialist powers to end the Turkish and Muslim presence in Anatolia.<sup>34</sup> This perspective homogenizes the Armenians and treats them as an opportunistic people who rebelled against the state with the help of imperialist powers, especially Russia.<sup>35</sup> This account of events ignores the historically relatively good relations existing between the Ottoman state and the Armenians. Moreover, it fails to consider the oppression of Armenians and the constant land-grab of Armenian farmers' lands by the Kurds and some Circassians. In other words, the Armenians, just like most of Anatolian peasants, were repressed by heavy taxation and lawlessness. Finally, this perspective also ignores the close cooperation between the CUP and the ARF from 1908 to 1913 and the intra-ideological diversity within the Armenian political parties.

<sup>33</sup> There are several prominent advocates of this perspective such as Türkkaya Ataöv, Yusuf Halaçoğlu, Kemal H. Karpat and Hikmet Özdemir. See, e.g., Hikmet Özdemir (ed.) (2002) *The Armenians in the Late Ottoman Period* (Ankara: The Turkish Historical Society for the Council of Culture, Arts and Publications of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey); and interviews with Yusuf Halaçoğlu & Kemal Karpat, 'Bir milyon Ermeni 1917'de kuzeye göç etti', *Milliyet*, June 1, 2009. Karpat's simple analysis is based on imagined numbers and he also puts the total blame on the Armenians. Moreover, there is an attempt to justify the suffering of Armenians because of the deportation and killings of Muslims in the Balkans. This is a very simplistic way of reading the events. Karpat claims that Armenians were not killed, but moved to the Caucasus with withdrawing Russian armies.

<sup>34</sup> Doğu Perinçek, a nationalist Marxist, said: 'The Armenian "genocide" is an imperialist plot.' (Perinçek: Sözde Ermeni soykırımı emperyalist bir yalan. *Hürriyet*, 5 March 2007. Available at: <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/ShowNew.aspx?id=6067051>, accessed 11 October 2011). In Switzerland, Perinçek was interrogated by the police. Switzerland passed a law threatening prison for anyone 'denying' that there had been a genocide of the Ottoman Armenians in 1915.

<sup>35</sup> Mehmet Perinçek, who carried out extensive research in Russian archives, concludes that the communal massacres between the Armenians and Muslims were the outcome of the manipulation of 'imperialist powers.' The Ottoman army and Muslim communities, according to Perinçek, used their right to self-defense to protect their life and properties; see Mehmet Perinçek (2011) *Armıyanskiy Vopros v 120 Dokumentah İz Rossiyskiyh Gosudarstvennih Arhivov* (Moskva: Laboratoriya Knigi); Mehmet Perinçek (2007) *Rus Devlet Arşivlerinden 100 Belgede Ermeni Meselesi* (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap); and Mehmet Perinçek (2006) *Boryan'ın Gözüyle Türk-Ermeni Çatışması* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları).

*National Security/Necessity Thesis*

Many Ottoman historians treat the decision to relocate the Armenian population as a security measure to stop them from collaborating with the Russian enemy and also as a means for protecting the civilian population.<sup>36</sup> They include Bernard Lewis, Justin McCarthy, Stanford Shaw, Edward J. Erickson, Andrew Mango, İlber Ortaylı, Norman Stone, Jeremy Salt, Kemal Çiçek, Murat Bardakçı and Yücel Güçlü, who all conclude that it was not a genocide, but rather a deportation that was necessitated by pressing national security needs to contain an Armenian insurgency which in alliance with invading Russian troops threatened to destroy the state.<sup>37</sup> They all agree that the deportation orders were not fully implemented, and that they indeed took a horribly wrong turn.

This group of scholars offers several reasons for the decision to relocate: The Armenian militias were collaborating with the occupying Russian troops; Armenian nationalism was secessionist and the Ottoman bureaucracy came to the conclusion that the 1914 reform decision was an attempt to create an independent Armenia; and the Armenian militias were provoking the Ottoman troops to attack the Armenians so that they could solicit external European support.<sup>38</sup> These scholars argue that the relocation was a temporary security solution to the problem and many innocent Armenians died because of a failed state, the lack of necessary healthcare or transportation, and Kurdish tribal revenge. Edward Erickson carried out extensive research to examine the nature of the Armenian insurrection and its impact on the security of the Ottoman state. He is the first scholar to examine how these insurrections shaped the perception of the security of the state and also helped to securitize the Armenian community. Gunther Lewy, a leading scholar of comparative genocide, argues that the Armenian insurgency, upon its rebellion and collaboration on the side of the Russians, provoked the CUP to take extreme measures and that these measures resulted in the deportations and major loss of life among the Armenian community.<sup>39</sup> Some scholars claim that the CUP leadership gradually was radicalized in response to Armenian maximalist demands as early as 1914

<sup>36</sup> Edward J. Erickson (2010) Captain Larkin and the Turks: The Strategic Impact of the Operations of *HMS Doris* in Early 1915, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 46(1), pp. 151–162; Erickson, *The Armenians and Ottoman Military Policy*, 1915; Edward J. Erickson (2006) *Armenian Massacres: New Records Undercut Old Blame*, *Insight Turkey*, 8(3), pp. 44–53.

<sup>37</sup> Kemal Cicek (2005) *Ermenilerin Zorunlu Göçü, 1915–1917* (Ankara: Turk Tarih Kurumu); Bulent Bakar (2009) *Ermeni Tehciri* (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi); Yücel Güçlü (2009) *Armenians and the Allies in Cilicia, 1914–1923* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press); Justin McCarthy et al. (2006) *The Armenian Rebellion at Van* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press). Murat Bardakçı, who has the private papers of Talat Pasha, argues that the state ‘had to defend itself. Every state has the right to protect itself.’ On the basis of these private papers, Bardakçı concludes that the purpose of the relocation was ‘to protect the army’s logistic and communication lines and protect the civilians who lived in the region. The purpose of Talat Pasha was a temporary relocation of the population.’ Interview with Bardakçı, in *Radikal*, June 6, 2005. Also see George W. Gawrych (1986) *The Culture and Politics of Violence in Turkish Society, 1903–1914*, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 22(3), pp. 307–330; Carter Vaughn Findley (2010) *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity: A History, 1789–2007* (New Haven: Yale University Press), pp. 142–144, 209–211.

<sup>38</sup> Louise Nalbandian (1963) *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press).

<sup>39</sup> Guenter Lewy (2005) *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A Disputed Genocide*. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press).

when the major European powers imposed a reform project on eastern Anatolia under two European inspectors.<sup>40</sup>

### *Kıyım (Massacres) Thesis*

A group of Turkish scholars, including Murat Belge, Fikret Adanır and Baskın Oran, relies on the agency and contingency approach by stressing the role of the CUP leadership and their dictatorial ideology. Belge argues that the diaspora should give up the term genocide.<sup>41</sup> He considers the events of 1915 to be a series of massacres (*kıyım*) by the nationalistic CUP, and although they resulted in major loss of life for the Armenians, they cannot be described as genocide. This group of intellectuals, who have major problems with the nationalist discourse in Turkey, are very anti-statist, and use the Armenian issue to criticize the dominant nationalist discourse by calling the events of the 1915 as genocidal, if not genocide.

For instance, Fikret Adanır, a leading historian of Ottoman Macedonia, calls the events genocide, but also argues that the Turkish state should never recognize the events of 1915 as genocide since they were not genocide in legal terms.<sup>42</sup> He occasionally uses the term, but also argues that there was neither intent nor an ideology to destroy the Armenians communities. After arguing that ‘I use genocide in terms of punishing a collective group’ and also ‘in terms of historical responsibility,’ he rejects using the legal meaning of genocide because, ‘I do not think one can prove the intent’ (*kasıt*) since there is no such document which calls for the killing of Armenians.’ The most critical part of the interview is where Adanır claims that ‘the establishment of the Turkish Republic became a possibility with the elimination of the possibility of creating an independent Armenia in Anatolia. We established the current Republic by eliminating this alternative.’ Adanır argues that the Ottoman state made a big mistake and is fully responsible for innocent Armenians who had nothing to do with the events but were all punished and suffered the consequences of the Ottoman decision.

We should openly apologize for what happened to these people. Then, we should tell the Armenians that there was the context in which these events took place. Why did the Ottomans not do this 100 years ago but did it in 1915? Thus, there are reasons such as the Armenian desire to establish a state and also Armenian terrorism that resulted in the suffering of Muslims.<sup>43</sup>

Adanır accepts the security threat and the provocation by the Armenian organizations intended to bring the intervention of the major European powers. He also argues that the mentalities of the CUP and the Armenian nationalists were very similar, since ‘both groups believed in social Darwinism, i.e., that might will win and might is also right and if

<sup>40</sup> Zekeriya Turkmen (2006) *Vilayat-ı Sarkiye (Doğu Anadolu Vilayetleri) Islahat Müfettişliği, 1913–1914* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu).

<sup>41</sup> Nuriye Akman’s interview with Belge, October 2, 2005. Available at: see <http://www.nuriyeakman.net/node/1582>, accessed July 10, 2011.

<sup>42</sup> For Fikret Adanır’s interview, see 1915 hukuki anlamda bir soykırım değildir, *Milliyet*, June 22, 2009.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

I do not kill you, you will kill me.’ Adanır also asserts that the Armenian nationalists, just like the CUP, also defended homogenization.<sup>44</sup>

Baskın Oran, a maverick political activist, argues that the reason for the nationalist and rigid position of many Turks is the outcome of ‘nationalism, illiteracy, the fear that the Armenians would demand territory or compensation. Moreover, this rigid position is a reaction to the killings of Turkish diplomats and the attempts of Armenian diaspora to compare Turkey with Nazi Germany.’<sup>45</sup> Oran, who is not a historian and offers more opinion than information about the period, claims that the ‘Kurds agreed to support the government of Ankara during the war of independence because the Kurds did not want Armenians to return.’ Oran prefers the term ethnic cleansing and argues that the CUP carried this out. However, he vehemently rejects the use of genocide, because ‘this term is the main reason why Turkey refuses to confront what took place in 1915.’<sup>46</sup>

### *Islamist Thesis: Not Genocide but Kital*

The interpretation in Islamist historiography has been shaped by poet Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, popular historian Kadir Mısırlıoğlu<sup>47</sup> and self-made historian Mustafa Armağan, who regularly writes in *Zaman*, a daily newspaper, on historical issues. Their framework of understanding is informed by their sympathy with Sultan Abdulhamid II, their admiration for the Ottoman state, and their dislike of the Young Turks and their positivist secularist ideology.<sup>48</sup> They all adore Abdulhamid II and his pan-Islamist foreign policy and Islamism inside the Empire. Thus, the contemporary Islamist understanding of the Armenian issue, including among the leadership of the Justice and Development Party, is filtered through Abdulhamid II’s perspective on the Armenian challenges:

Since some time, there are attempts to draw the boundaries of Armenia. However, they ignore the fact that where Armenians reside are majority Muslim regions. There are no signs and symbols to call these regions Armenia. What they want under the guise of reform is to establish an Armenian state. This is absolutely not possible.<sup>49</sup>

Most Turks believe that the Armenian revolutionary organizations were seeking to establish an independent state just as the Balkan nations did. They also agree that the Armenian leadership allied itself with the enemy (Russia, and also with France) against the Turkish forces. Yet, the Islamists do not see much difference between the CUP and Tasnaks. They regard both as *cete* (irregular fighters for a cause) and their politics as

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Baskın Oran, *Radikal*, August 14, 2006.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> In 2011, Kadir Mısırlıoğlu stated on TV that the claims of genocide are nothing but lies. His book, published in 2007, is *Sultan II. Abdulhamid Han Bir Mazlum Padişah* (Istanbul: Sebil).

<sup>48</sup> Samiha Ayverdi (1976) *Türkiye'nin Ermeni Meselesi* (Istanbul: Kubbealti). This booklet provides the best summary of the Turkish Muslim conservative understanding of the Armenian issue. Ayverdi, a most influential woman thinker of the conservative Muslim intellectuals, wrote this book in response to the killing of Turkish diplomat Bahadır Demir in 1973 in Los Angeles. In the introduction, Ayverdi details her sorrow and emotional reaction to the killing and her meeting with Demir’s mother.

<sup>49</sup> BOA, Yıldız Esas E. 31.1727/2, Z 158, K 86.

*cetecilik* (politics through irregular means). They argue that two committees sought to kill Abdulhamid II and both attempted, occasionally by collaboration, to destroy the Empire.<sup>50</sup> Thus, Islamists' dislike for the CUP does not necessarily translate into sympathy for the Armenians. On the contrary, they regard the Armenians as the tool of European Christian powers to destroy the Muslim empire and destroy the Muslim presence in Anatolia. One of the most populist Islamist historians is Mustafa Armağan, who argues that:

as far as the issue of Armenian relocation (*Ermeni tehciri*) is concerned, due to the war both sides died and there was no intent of genocide . . . There is no such order to carry out genocide. However, it is a fact that during the relocation, some irregulars attacked the convoys and massacred the people. This has nothing to do with the Ottoman government.<sup>51</sup>

Islamists look at the collaboration between the CUP and the Armenian revolutionary organizations and argue that they were both inspired by the same European ideological roots of revolutionary nationalism and social Darwinism. Moreover, both the CUP and the Armenian political parties aimed to create a homogenous nation state and the Armenians lost the conflict. In short, this perspective views the removal of the Armenian communities as being the result of two conflicting secular nationalistic ideologies, with the Armenians supported by the European Christians.

These scholars insist that the events of 1915 cannot be regarded as genocide, but rather a nationalist struggle of self-defense and large scale communal violence (*kital*): there was no intent to destroy the Armenians because of their nationality or religion, but rather to remove an apparent security threat against the Muslim presence; some non-Muslim communities relocated just before and during the war due to the security concerns of the state; and what took place during the war was an inter-communal violence between the two indigenous populations of the regions: Kurds and Armenians.

There were a series of ethno-religious and nationalist movements within the Ottoman Empire, yet none turned out as bloody as the Armenian case. Historians of this era face the daunting task of explaining why this was the bloodiest interaction between the collapsing empire and the secessionist Armenian nationalist groups. One of the critical factors that separated the Armenians from other ethnic groups was that they were not the majority in any Ottoman province; they had no overlap between the population and territory. This minority status turned them outside, reaching for support from the Great Powers, and the Armenian nationalist movement grew especially dependent on Russia. Moreover, it wasn't an Istanbul-based Armenian Church or cultural elite, but rather the local middle class in Anatolia that took charge of the movement. Finally, the timing of the Armenian nationalist movement was different from other movements as it overlapped with the Great War and emerged during the collapse of the Ottoman state. These factors—no clear majority dominated territory, an aggressive leadership, and timing—worsened the situation. We still need a balanced historiography that does not focus on the year 1915, but rather one that analyzes the long-term sociopolitical interactions and radicalization of the Armenian and Ottoman revolutionary organizations.

<sup>50</sup> Mustafa Armağan (2010) 'Kızıl Sultan' ve Ermeniler, *Zaman*, May 8.

<sup>51</sup> Mustafa Armağan (2000) *Ermeni Tehciri*, *Zaman*, October 3.

## Conclusion

In recent years, the scholars in each epistemic community have crossed the historiographic boundaries to start a conversation over the causes, processes and the consequences of the events. This ongoing conversation within and across the epistemic communities already has developed a shared concern of understanding the multifaceted relationship between the Armenian communities and the different layers of the Ottoman state and society. The key questions are: What is the role of a historian versus a genocide scholar in understanding and explaining the events of 1915? Does the contextualization lead to the rationalization of the massacres of the Armenians? Was the outcome of the events an inevitable result of the imperial rivalry? What was the role of human agency (political choices of the CUP leadership) in the outcome of the events? The conversation over this set of questions may not create a common understanding over the causes and the outcome of the events, but it would humanize the discussion.

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