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Wolfgang Gust

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*„Was hat der Mensch
dem Menschen Größeres zu geben
als Wahrheit?“*

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*The Symbiotic Relationship between Turks and Armenians
A Macabre Outcome
Obstructing Healing and Reconciliation**

The Armenian-Turkish relationship spans over a long period since the eleventh-century incursions of Seljuk, Mongol, and other Turko-Mongol tribes toward the west, the final encroachment of the Armenian plateau, and the eventual establishment of the Ottoman rule over Armenia.¹ The basic principles for this relationship, therefore, were established at the outset with the initial contact on the battlefield and the terror spread within the civil society, thus, that of the conqueror and the conquered and consequently the ruler and the ruled. It was also developed through time by governmental policies on minorities, especially during the Ottoman era down to the societal perceptions and behavior. The outcome was a sort of a *modus vivendi* between these two people quite dissimilar in ethnicity, religion, culture, tradition, and history.

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1 Because of these invasions that were coupled with looting, murder, and destruction, during this period, Armenia came out devastated. The ruling class of *Nakharars* (nobles or lords) had vanished except for in pockets of mountainous and remote areas. The settlements of the newcomers, mostly nomadic, in the Armenian plateau and the exodus of groups of Armenians fleeing the horrors of the invaders changed the demography of the region. Armenians were almost nowhere a majority in the previously predominantly Armenian populated Armenia. Gradually, Asia Minor from east to west with its Armenian and Greek Christian population had become Turkish and Muslim.

During centuries of coexistence, intermingling through marriage and conversion to the religion of the ruler majority was inevitable. Beginning from the Seljuk invasions, kidnapping thousands of Armenian women to keep them as wives or concubines or sell them in the slave markets was a common practice. So was the capturing of Armenian youth to serve in military forces. These captives were all forced to convert to Islam. Voluntary conversions for social, economic, and/or social gain were also abundant. In fact Muslim Armenian men reached high positions in ruling circles and in the army, and Muslim Armenian women mothered heirs of the thrones. In the process of this long coexistence, besides ethnic co-mingling, Muslim rulers of Turkic origin adopted many traits from Armenian culture and lifestyle.²

After going through the series of devastating incursions and being thrust into dark ages in terms of political and cultural life, Armenia and Armenians were incorporated into the huge Ottoman Empire. During this period of time, as Dickran Kouymjian attests,

[D]espite devastating invasions, accompanied by pillaging and enslavement, despite taxes on a level never before imposed, despite the recurring famines, occasional plagues, locusts Armenians tried to maintain Armenian life as they understood it. ... At times the struggle must have seemed unsurmountable, the nation condemned.³

In addition to the official policy of absolute subjugation, the unbridled Turkish and Kurdish assaults on Armenian rural communities, confiscation of a large part of the harvest and personal belong-

2 For a brief survey of the situation in Armenia, Armenian life during the Seljuk and Mongol dominations, the 14th century most brutal invasions of the Timurids, as well as the emergence of Crypto-Christianity, those who were converted to Islam but secretly practiced Christianity, see Robert Bedrosian, "Armenia during the Seljuk and Mongol Period," pp. 241-71, in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, volume I, Richard G. Hovannisian, (ed.), New York: St. Martin's Press 1997.

3 See Dickran Kouymjian, "Armenia from the Fall of Cilician Kingdom (1375) to the Forced Emigration under Shah Abbas (1604)" in *Ibid.*, volume II, p. 22.

ings and most dreadfully the kidnapping of young women had created an atmosphere of fear among Armenians and a state of social death. While *Devshirme*, the gathering of Christian youth, and Armenians among them, was many times beneficial for the youth who did not remember their origin, it was another brutal practice to spread terror and break the Christian, in this case the Armenian family. The gathered male children were Islamized and given the best education to serve in high ranking positions in the system.⁴

Armenian culture and civilization suffered significant setbacks, and Armenians, the brave mountaineers of the Armenian highlands, with a long history of struggle for national freedom, were turned into subservient slaves, under constant harassment and persecution. The Turkish-Armenian relationship was more like that of a lord and a serf. In this overall relationship, it was only a natural consequence for Armenians to see the Turks and the Kurds (who at that time were not considered a separate ethnic group but only mountain Turks) as frightful evil doers. Likewise, Turks perceived Armenians as infidels, unbelievers or *giavours*, slaves of the Muslims, *rayas*, and *fallahs*.

To avoid simplification of the equation in this relationship, the gradual rise of the Armenian traders, the *khojas* in the rural areas, beginning in the mid-15th century, and later the *chelebies*, the industrialists in the urban areas giving way to *amiras*, the financial and industrial magnets of the 19th century in the Ottoman Empire should also be taken into consideration. They were wealthy and influential and supported Armenian religious and cultural undertakings. Their role in this equation, based on their prominence in the empire's economy, added a sentiment of jealousy on the part of the Turkish officials and the society at large. This sentiment was often translated into hate and malevolence as an added ingredient in the Turkish-Armenian relationship. In this long period of symbiotic relationship before WWI, stereotyping and name-calling were thus expected phenomena.

4 Examples of famous men of Armenian origin, gathered through the *Devshirme* as young children and brought up as Muslims, are architect Sinan, mid18th century and Grand Vizier Khalil of Kayseri, early 17th century. See *Ibid.*, p. 47.

In the Muslim dominated Ottoman Empire, Armenians were segregated, like Greeks and Jews, in a religious-ethnic community with a legal status of a *millet*, second class citizens subjected to discriminatory laws and taxation. They had to wear distinctive signs or clothing to indicate their being non-Muslims. They were not allowed to bear arms or to ride horses. Apparently, Armenians were the most obedient *millet* and made less trouble for the Ottoman sultans, so over the time they were viewed as good and honest people and were called *millet-i-sadika* (the loyal *millet*).

The Armenian-Turkish *modus vivendi* lost its livable balance in the late 18th and 19th centuries with, on the one hand, the economic, political, and social decay of the Empire which meant more pressure on Armenians to pay additional taxes and more frequent assaults in rural areas for financial gains. On the other hand, on the Armenian side, liberal ideas infiltrating from Europe had brought about cultural and political revival which also resulted in attempts to call on the Sublime Porte, to demand reforms and amelioration of the Armenian plight. There was also desperate resort to armed self-defense against the assailants.

As a result of this development, the Turkish iron fist pressed heavier and the Turkish-Armenian relationship was studded with sporadic massacres, forced Islamization of groups of Armenians, persecution of Armenian revolutionaries – the filthy prisons, the torture, the hangings. The Armenian popular culture of the period, songs, sayings, and anecdotes, are manifestations of a complex collective psyche structured by fear, hatred, helplessness, frustration, and even vengefulness.

The period immediately preceding the Young Turk Revolution,⁵ beginning in April 1908, was one of yearning and anticipation for both Armenian and Turkish intellectuals. Promises of equality, freedom, brotherhood, and justice could efface the centuries of acrimony and the bitter memory of maltreatments to bring about a peaceful co-

⁵ For a brief discussion of the Revolution by the Young Turks (the Ittihad ve Terraki Party) that reached Constantinople on July 23, 1908, see Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia, The Survival of a Nation*, New York: St. Martin's Press 1980, pp. 181-82.

existence among the two peoples who were destined or rather condemned to live side by side, even intermingled with each other. There was hope of a better future in the air.

In a letter dated October 16, 1908, written to her husband in Paris, Zabel Esayan (1878-1942),⁶ a prominent female writer and an eyewitness to the events in Constantinople, optimistically stated: "The two nations have now begun to understand each other's mentality, and they had time to penetrate each other's inner feelings. Now no administration can set one against the other."⁷ But it does not seem that an absolute trust existed vis-à-vis the leadership, as to how the implementation of the great change would go, and how the masses would perceive the ideology of the Revolution. Further down in that same letter, she writes, "This race has something incorrigible ... We have daily proof of this."

In any event, the artificial honeymoon between the oppressors and the oppressed in the Empire was short-lived. The massacre of Armenians in Cilicia, only a few months after the Revolution, was a shocking manifestation of the continuing policy of Turkification or rather Ottomanization as the ideology of the time suggested. In April, 1909, concurrently with the counter-revolutionary movement in Constantinople, the same anti-revolution, reactionary elements instigated the Muslim masses to attack Armenian quarters in Adana. Pillage and murder followed in this city with a significant Armenian population. Armenians were being punished for their outspoken support of the Revolution and for claiming equality and justice they did not deserve. Soon the massacres spread across other Armenian towns and villages in Cilicia. It is believed that the Turkish army regiment deployed to

6 For a detailed analysis of Zabel Esayan's response to the massacres of Cilician Armenians, see Rubina Peroomian, *Literary Responses to Catastrophe, A Comparison of the Armenian and Jewish Experiences*, Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1993, pp. 89-116.

7 Zapel Esayan, *Namakner* (Letters), Arpik Avetisian (ed.), Yerevan: Yerevan University Press 1977, pp. 76-77.

stop the carnage arrived late deliberately. It is also believed that these soldiers entering in Adana actually participated in the carnage.⁸

As a member of the second delegation sent by the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople, Esayan visited the disaster stricken area to assess the loss and provide means of assistance. In a letter to her husband, dated June 18, 1909 from Mersin, she writes, "Cilicia is destroyed. ... The Armenian people have fallen victim to a premeditated plan.... The conspiracy of the present government is evident.... For centuries our hard working people have nourished our enemy. Today, they receive their reward.... Even cannibals are better than these monsters; at least they eat each other to satiate their hunger."⁹ Her reference is not to this or that Turk, the criminal, the culprit, or the conspirator, but the entire nation, the Turkish race (if there is such a thing after so much mingling of Turkic tribes with the locals). In an effort to explain the Turkish behavioral pattern, in that same letter, she compares the "national characteristics" of the two peoples to conclude that one is civilized, builds, and creates; the other nurtures bloody aspirations and destroys.

In *Averaknerun mej* (Amid the ruins), a collection of stories depicting her devastating encounter with the agonizing situation, Esayan views the victimizers through the eyes of Armenian orphans left behind after the carnage, and these eyes reflect unspeakable horror, the slaughter of their parents they have witnessed. They see the Turk as the cold-blooded murderer whose eyes burn with evil passion to destroy and kill.¹⁰ To their victims' last prayers these killers responded laughing, "You don't have a God. Just as your Christ died by torture, so will each one of you die by torture."¹¹

In this detailed eyewitness account, she portrays the hatred that Turks bore against Armenians, and shows that even Turkish women were not immune to this destructive sentiment. She describes a Turk-

8 See Christopher J. Walker, Op. cit., pp. 182-88.

9 Esayan, *Letters*, pp. 93-94

10 Zapel Esayan, *Averaknerun mej* (Amid the ruins), multiple editions since 1909, Beirut: Ervan Press 1957), p. 40.

11 Ibid., p. 169.

ish woman crushing the head of an Armenian child kneeling over his mother's dead body. Another Turkish woman loaded wounded Armenians onto a carriage as if to save their lives, only to push them into the river.¹² The thrill of bloodshed and plunder intoxicated them so much so that they forgot the friendship and the salt and bread they shared for long years with their Armenian neighbors.

Suren Partevian (1876-1921),¹³ a member of the first delegation to visit Cilicia, has a similar take on the 1909 Cilician massacres. His hopes are shattered. He believes that "the Armenian-Turkish brotherhood is being strangled, murdered, and buried in the ashes and blood in Cilicia," and doubts if Armenians could ever have a future in the new society ruled by the Ittihad (Young Turk) party.¹⁴ In one of the essays in his collection of eyewitness accounts, he quotes a wounded and dying Armenian priest, "If my God is also the God of these unbelievers, these ferocious beasts, I don't believe in God...I don't believe in God."¹⁵

So, even before the massacres and deportations of the war years, Armenian trust in Turkish goodwill was already shattered. A wound was slashed open that would not heal. As Partevian put it "there is something broken, something sunken in our souls; there is a ravage of faith, a pain of frustration that will remain unhealed."¹⁶

The Turkish-Armenian relationship was increasingly deteriorating. Worsening the situation and adding to the whetted sentiments was the government initiated anti-Armenian or rather anti-Christian propaganda just before and during the war years, the November 21, 1914 calling of Jihad, the holy war against Christians with undercurrent emphasis on Armenians. Turks were being instigated to see Armenians as vermin, microbes, infidel *giavours or kafirs*, enemies of

12 Ibid., pp. 126-27.

13 For a detailed analysis of Suren Partevian's response to the massacres of Cilician Armenians, see Peroomian, Op. cit., pp. 117-150.

14 Suren Partevian, *Kilikian arhavirke* (The Cilician catastrophe), Constantinople: Neshan Papikian Bookstore 1909, p. 34.

15 Ibid., p. 169.

16 Ibid., p. 200.

Islam unworthy of living, in other words, deserving to be killed. Degradation and dehumanization of the victim facilitated their extermination, and the perpetrators were instinctively aware of that.

Hatred for Armenians had been transmitted from generation to generation, manipulated from time to time according to the governmental policies and being ground sharper if necessary. The testimonial stories of Hagop Oshagan (1883-1948)¹⁷ are manifestations of this phenomenon. “A fifteen year old hero [Turkish of course] had nailed the head of a slaughtered man [Armenian of course] to the end of a long wooden stick. The eyes were gouged out, and the eyebrows were plucked. The stick on his shoulder and a rifle on his chest, he walked up and down the streets of the Armenian village to experience the pleasure of the terror he spread among women and children around him.”¹⁸ And the year was 1915.

This is not only an appalling childish game, but also an act of religious gratification. God’s name is ultimately sanctified through the shedding of the blood of the infidel, burning and looting their belongings, and meanwhile praying to that same God to give strength to their arms and peace to their conscience to continue their holy work. The old religious leader of the Turkish village, dressed in white, the embodiment of God himself, gives the first example to start the carnage. His victim is the priest of the Armenian village down below. The God of Islam observes the carnage and accepts the sacrifices the Turkish villagers offer to him. The slaughter of the entire Armenian village is completed, and “the old man’s soul found a rare satisfaction that only a sacrifice of such a grand scale could offer. His conscience was stilled and cleared with that sacred offering.”¹⁹ Sultan Abdul Hamid’s political message corroborated with what the holy Jihad was propagating. He

17 For a detailed analysis of Hagop Oshagan’s response to the Armenian Genocide, see Peroomian, Op. cit., pp. 173-215.

18 Hagop Oshagan, *Kayseragan haghtergutun* (Imperial song of triumph), Boghos Snapiian (ed.), Beirut: Altapress 1983, p. 27. This collection of five stories about the massacres of 1915 was first published in *Chakatamart* Armenian periodical in 1920 in Constantinople.

19 Ibid., p. 31.

too had promulgated, “Whoever oppresses the Christians is a true son of the Turkish homeland.”²⁰

The Turkish-Armenian relationship had reached the rock-bottom. With a sarcastic tone, Oshagan cites the biblical analogy of wolves and lambs grazing together. By presenting this metaphor for the Turkish-Armenian sinister relationship, he derides the naïveté of the world to believe that such a thing could ever be possible. Like Esayan, Oshagan too examines racial attributes as well as cultural, religious, and traditional factors that shape the victimizer’s behavior. “From the vizier to the peasant shepherd, they all calmly and peacefully accepted the decree of the annihilation. That was an invitation to their centuries old instincts, and a pleasant one.”²¹

Comparing his own artistic literature to those of others entertaining the theme of the Turkish-Armenian relationship, he argues that he has given the executioner a face and a character, “In the Armenian novels,” he notes, “the Turk is a cliché scarecrow, the ogre of the legend. Oshagan has not retouched the picture, of course, but he has retained the original.”²² He analyses the Turkish character, the genetic elements arousing the drive to loot and kill, the religious determinants conditioning patterns of behavior, and all of this at work in the making of the criminal. The conclusion: “There exist not only criminal people but also criminal races.”²³

Throughout the almost 3000 pages of *Mnatsortats* (Remnants), Oshagan uses the words Turk, Turkish, and Turkishness as qualifiers and adjectives synonymous with corruption, criminality, hatred, pitilessness. “Turkishness translates into Turkishness without explanation,” he writes. “The Turk is the animal outlined by our historians of a thousand years ago, but they gave no explanation either. He kills for

20 Hagop Oshagan, *Mnatsortats* (Remnants), volume II, Cairo: Husaber Press 1933, p. 192.

21 Hagop Oshagan, *Hamapatker arevmtahay grakanutian* (Panorama of Western Armenian literature), volume 9, Antilias, Lebanon: The Cilician Catholicosate Press 1980, p. 278.

22 Hagop Oshagan, *Ibid.*, volume 10, Oshagan about himself, Antilias, Lebanon: The Cilician Catholicosate Press 1982, pp. 8-9.

23 Oshagan, *Ibid.*, volume 9, p. 279.

want of being able to do something else.” Nothing has changed since the first hostile encounter and subjugation of Armenians by the Turkic hordes, the barbarians raiding from Central Asia centuries before WWI. “It was not the outbreak of war [WWI] that made the Turks so much Turk. Before or after the war, it has been the same. The soldier, the volunteer, the layman, the clergy, with an inexplicable smile on their face, would twist the tortured half-dead Armenian prisoner’s head and shamelessly ask, ‘is your wife pretty?....’”²⁴

Then Oshagan describes two unspeakable, outrageous scenes with the Turk killing or raping, to show “the deep, inexplicable ugliness of all this.” “I stress these,” he continues, “because the world confuses the massacres with the passion of violence.”²⁵ Oshagan describes a Turkish wet-nurse who had found an unusual way to express her hatred for Armenians. In a Turkish orphanage, where Armenian orphans, remnants of the Genocide were being brought up as Turks, she wetted her nipple in poison when nursing an Armenian baby. She was poisoned herself.²⁶

Despite all the strategic planning and preparations, the leaders of the CUP were not able to achieve the total annihilation of the Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, whereas the prior stages of the Genocide of Armenians, as delineated by Gregory Stanton – Classification, Symbolization, Dehumanization, Organization, Polarization, Preparation – had been effectively implemented throughout the years or even centuries, the stage of Extermination was not entirely successful.²⁷ There remained a mass of survivors some of whom found refuge in different countries of the world forming new Diaspo-

24 *Remnants*, volume II, p. 381.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., p. 417.

27 “The 8 stages of Genocide,” Classification, Symbolization, Dehumanization, Organization, Polarization, Preparation, Extermination, Denial, originally presented as a briefing paper at the US State Department in 1996, by Gregory H. Stanton, President, Genocide Watch. Stanton has since expanded the stages into ten to read, Classification, Symbolization, discrimination, Dehumanization, Organization, Polarization, Preparation, Persecution, Extermination, Denial. See <http://genocidewatch.org/genocide/tenstagesofgenocide.html>

ran communities or joining the existing ones. Others continued living in Turkey either Islamized (genuinely or pretending), some thoroughly absorbed into Turkish society, or within small communities mainly in Istanbul, segregated, under constant fear and pressure, discriminated against and persecuted, with no voice to tell their wrenching stories, or speak up against personal and collective ongoing injustices. The post-WWI Turkish governments and the Turkish society, thus, faced three fronts of unavoidable encounter and relationship with Armenians in the Diaspora, within their own country, and finally, as a new development, in the Republic of Armenia.

The most problematic of all these relationships is the one in their own backyard. The Turk who had been given assurances that there would be no Armenians left after the final solution, viewed these Armenian survivors as unjustified “leftovers of the sword,” a new moniker added to the old ones. They deserved to die, and if they still existed in Turkey, these *gavours and gavouroghlu gavours* were “rejects of the sword” (kýlýc artýðý). And this is the basis of the Turkish perception of Armenians in post WWI Turkey.

The generations born to the Armenian survivors in the Diaspora, on the other hand, learned from their parents to fear the Turks, even in some cases hate them for what they had done to their families and their homeland. It is a known and unchallenged reality that the new Armenian Diaspora is the product of the Genocide. The history of the contemporary Armenian Diaspora begins with the Genocide. Naturally and consequently, the Genocide, with the whole array of complex influences – psychological, physical, social, economic, and geopolitical – becomes the core of the Diasporan Armenian’s identity. It is thus undeniable that the history of the Turkish-Armenian relationship has a heavy bearing on both the Turkish and the Armenian identity.

The symbiotic relationship between the descendants of the Armenian survivors and Turkish perpetrators continues. But the basis of this symbiosis has shifted drastically. It is built not on the necessity of coexistence as before, but on the way Turks and Armenians perceive themselves in relation to the other, based on past experience and the perception of the past experience, the Genocide and the memory of

the Genocide on both sides. The relationship continues as symbiotic because of the crucial role it plays in the shaping of identity on both sides.

Whereas the Armenian perception of the other – the Turk, the perpetrator of the calamity – is based on the survivors’ narratives and the transgenerational transmission of the psychological effects of the traumatic experience of the past – fear of the Turk, hatred, and a desire for revenge, which by the way triggered the “terrorist” acts in the 70’s and 80’s²⁸ – the Turkish perception of Armenians, to use James Wertsch’s terminology, is “textually mediated,” that is, it is shaped by the Turkish state official narrative.

For the majority of new generation Diasporan Armenians Turkey, Turk, and Turkish have negative connotations. They have learned from their grandparents that there is no such thing as good Turk. In the case of the generations of Turks growing up after the 70’s and 80’s, the absolute silence on the existence of an Armenian issue was replaced by the rationalization of the event, by using new terminology, “relocation” or “demographic engineering,” and the reversal of the blame by portraying the Armenians as the villain, the traitor, the secessionist, and the collaborator with the enemy to destroy Turkey. This is according to an educational policy to strictly follow the official narrative which after a period of total silence about the existence of an Armenian issue shifted direction.

28 Frustrated and angered by the continuing Turkish denial of the Armenian Genocide and disappointed from the world’s silence, and still, seeing the predicament of the diasporan Armenians on the verge of total assimilation and extinction, some groups of young Armenians unleashed a series of attacks on Turkish diplomats and institutions. These acts of assassination and destruction sought revenge for the murder of their forefathers from the indifferent and denying descendants of the murderers and to draw world attention to the Armenian Question, urging the recognition of the Armenian Genocide. These acts gave rise to various interpretations in international news services. Some considered them as acts of Armenian freedom fighters demanding justice. Others labeled them as terrorism. The Turkish government, on the other hand, uses these incidents to teach the world about yet another showdown of Armenian brutality and treachery against the Turks.

The denial of the Armenian Genocide, as the 8th and last stage of the act of genocide, is intensified and corroborated with rationalization, trivialization, the blaming of the victims themselves, by euphemistic explanations such as “relocation,” *tehchir*, or “demographic engineering” for the murder and deportations that occurred. Denial of the Armenian Genocide is manifested in all the 12 forms suggested by Israel Charny for any genocide to occur in the world.²⁹ The denial of the Armenian Genocide is at the core of the Turkish identity.

The Turkish governments have followed an unchanging policy of constantly instigating in different ways the Muslim society against Christians. A most recent example is “Fatih 1453,” a film about the conquest of Constantinople and the fall of the Christian empire, a film which is entirely anti-Christian, as well as the film “Seri Gelin” before that. Then, a few years ago, the Ministry of National Education of Turkey had organized a writing contest among high school students. The topic was rebutting the Armenian lies about the events during WWI, and the best would win.

The annual report of the US Commission on Religious Freedom lists Turkey among countries with the least tolerance towards religious minorities. The increasing number of killings of Catholic and Protestant priests is a result of the formally disseminated and harbored anti-Christian ideas. Such manifestations of the prevailing attitude are many. The recent killings and harassment of elderly Armenian women is one, and the ongoing TV interviews and shows about Armenians killing innocent Turks during the war years and Turks suffering

29 Israel Charny, “Templates for Gross Denial of a Known Genocide: A Manual,” in *The Encyclopedia of Genocide*, volume 1, Santa Barbara CA: ABC-CLIO 1999, p.168. The twelve ways to deny a genocide are the following, 1. Question and minimize the statistics. 2. Attack the motivations of the truth-tellers. 3. Claim that the deaths were inadvertent. 4. Emphasize the strangeness of the victims. 5. Rationalize the deaths as the result of tribal conflict. 6. Blame “out of control” forces for committing the killings. 7. Avoid antagonizing the genocidists, who might walk out of “the peace process.” 8. Justify denial in favor of current economic interests. 9. Claim that the victims are receiving good treatment. 10. Claim that what is going on doesn’t fit the definition of genocide. 11. Blame the victims. 12. Say that peace and reconciliation are more important than blaming people for genocide.

as much as Armenians did is another. Turkey is preparing with much vigor for the centennial of the 1915 Genocide with a diametrically opposed discourse, a contra-genocide narrative.

With its control stretching over Turkish organizations outside Turkey, the Turkish government ensures the continuation of anti-Armenian sentiments. This effort stems from the fear that Turks traveling abroad for business, education or emigration may come face to face with the truth and no longer ascribe to the official narrative and the prescribed behavior. One example is the utterly distorted position paper disseminated in April 2013 by the ATAA (Assembly of Turkish-American Associations) which describes the “revolt of Van” and “the slaughter of innocent Turkish population” as justification for the arrest and imprisonment of Armenian notables in Constantinople in 1915. So was the letter writing campaign by the same Assembly. Turkish-Americans were encouraged to send the form-letter to the US President Barack Obama, asking him not to use the word “Genocide” in his annual April 24 proclamation, reminding him that it was actually Armenians who killed the Turks, 523,000 of them between the years 1910-1922.

Unfortunately, there are racist Turks and racist groups, organizations, and individuals who are susceptible to embracing the prescribed and propagated anti-Armenian sentiments. There are also Armenians with psychological hang-ups or strong political determinations never ready to accept rapprochement with Turkey and the Turks. And this stance has also spread to Armenians in the Republic of Armenia who were considered by Turkey as softer Armenians with whom it would be easier to deal.

In this state of the affairs, as long as this grim symbiosis exists between the Turks and Armenians, artificial interventions, directly supported or advocated by foreign entities in the form of opulently financed meetings, joint events, etc., will remain as scratches on the surface with no effect on the disposition of the masses. The continued Turkish denial and inflammatory statements by government officials fuels the conflict. Is healing ever possible after an inflicted catastrophe of that magnitude?

Hope is a virtue and despair is a vice. So, I want to end this presentation with an optimistic note.

Human biology tells us that the human species operates on a primitive brain, reptilian brain, in which violence is a dominant behavioral pattern. It is only culture that can counteract and suppress that part of the human brain. Turkey has made big strides in terms of culture and civilization. There is hope that this change predominant in intellectual levels will affect both the lower echelon of the society, the mass of the Turkish population, and the political exigencies of the ruling circle. Then, it is plausible that both sides might engage in the process of healing with genuine resolve to remedy the historical scar inflicted on the souls of both Armenians and Turks.

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