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The Controversy Between Turks and Armenians in the Late Ottoman Period

Armand SAĞ

Senior researcher at the Institute for Turkish Studies, Utrecht, the Netherlands

When speaking of the Armenian-Turkish relations, one cannot ignore the burning question of the events in the late Ottoman period. Along with the controversy, it also has a long background of literature that has tried to describe the events from 1895 to 1917. To understand these events, one must first look at the literature and categorize it accordingly.

INTRO

There are more than 26.000 publications concerning the events in the First World War between Armenians and Ottoman Turks, almost all are seen as “pro-Armenian” or “pro-Turk” by critics.¹ This article is no way written to take a stance on this highly disputed subject. It is only meant to give a historical overview of what happened in those years, according to variously primary sources as well as literature written by internationally renowned scholars. Next to historical overview and analyses, the subject also needs an overview of the Armenian issue in a context of international law.²

The context of international law is of immense importance since scholars that try to describe the events of 1895-1917 are mostly with a background in History, Political Science, International Relations and Sociology. This is peculiar since the question of genocide is a pure juridical debate and should be answered in the context of international law. However, not annotating the question of genocide should not be interpreted as a reason for scholars to avoid research in these fields.

Scholars, like historians, are extremely useful at describing and researching the events but without making comments in the juridical arena. This can only place them in the wrong arena, namely outside the academic world and inside the disturbing world of propaganda and lobby.

FOUR CATEGORIES

With this in mind, it is possible to set up categories in which the scholars that have occupied themselves with the events in the late Ottoman period (and published their research findings as books, essays and/or papers), can be incorporated. The first two categories are the basic points of view that are in fact outmoded:

Scholars that affirm the Armenian claims that the events in 1915-1917 were in fact genocide.

Scholars that affirm the Turkish claims that the events in 1915-1917 were in fact a byproduct of war and that both sides suffered, but add to this that there was no systematic, organized scheme by the Turkish government to annihilate the Ottoman-Armenian population in Anatolia.

While these two categories are still present in some minor groups, most modern academics are better categorized in the following:

Scholars that are reluctant to use the term 'genocide' due to the political meaning that has been added to the, from origin juridical, term. However, these scholars do believe that ethnic cleansing (which is close to the term 'genocide') by the Turks, dominated the events. In the views of these scholars, the relocations of the Armenians were used as a cloak to 'solve' the problem of the "un-loyal Armenians in the Ottoman Empire." Some of these scholars are debating to which extent the Ottoman officers, high-ranking and sub officers, were involved in the massacres that occurred.

Scholars that are unwilling to use the term 'genocide' because:

The term 'genocide' is not applicable to the events in the late Ottoman period, because of the fact that the Ottoman archives show that most middle- and high-ranking Ottoman statesmen and/or officers were critical of the execution of the relocations. Most scholars in this category see a bigger role for the Hamidiye irregulars that were

recruited from Kurdish horsemen, which adds a new trans-ethnic problem to the events.

The same scholars also exclude the term 'genocide' because the term was not in effect until the UN Genocide Convention of 1948, so it is legally not accurate to imply the term to the period prior to the Second World War. But none the less; according to these scholars, even if it was possible to implement the term, the term would not be correct due the fact that there are no documents in the archives that imply that it was an act of state driven, systematic, organized extermination of an ethnicity whatsoever.

SCHOLARS ANALYZED

Now, if the literature is analyzed using quotes from the most common (and most used) sources in the field, it is possible to give a picture of the debates in the literature.

FIRST CATEGORY

The problem with the first category is that the majority consists of scholars with a motive that needs to be questioned. As it is with Vahakn N. Dadrian (1926) from the Armenian Zoryan Institute, who seems to collect arguments that validate his opinion that the Armenian claims of genocide are in fact true. Dadrian's 2004 book 'Warrant for Genocide' (New Jersey) was heavily criticized by Mary Schaeffer Conroy³. Conroy stated in her 'Review of Vahakn N. Dadrian, Warrant for Genocide: Key Elements of Turko-Armenian Conflict', that "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."⁴

Dadrian (along with Peter Balakian, Arman J. Kirakossian and Richard G. Hovannisian) all seem to fit perfectly in the first category. All have endured some serious critic; for example from Guenter Lewy in his renowned 'The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A Disputed Genocide'. This book has been received very positively, among others by the Dutch historian Eelko Y. Hooijmaaijers⁵, who seems to agree with his colleague Lewy⁶. Lewy states that the Andonian Papers have

“raised enough questions about their genuineness as to make any of them in a serious scholarly work unacceptable.”⁷ The Andonian Papers were said to have been given or sold to the Armenian Andonian, who then took them to Europe. The papers are only used by scholars in the first category, especially Dadrian. According to these scholars the papers are the ‘indefinite prove’ that the Ottoman Empire was planning a systematic elimination of the Armenians.

SECOND CATEGORY

However, the second category seems more diverse with findings that contest figures and other data provided by scholars from the first category. The most important data that is being contested are the population tables. Maybe one of the first scholars that decided to verify the Ottoman population figures in the French archives, was Stanford J. Shaw. It were in fact French diplomats that conducted the last pre-war population census within the Ottoman Empire in the year 1914, and due to the dragoman⁸ culture of Ottoman Armenians, the French were assisted by this Christian minority. Being called the ‘Sadık Millet’, or ‘the most loyal people’, the Ottoman Armenians also gained high positions within the Ottoman government. This had everything to do with the Janissary⁹-history of the Ottoman Turks. So it shouldn’t raise eyebrows to the fact that in 1912 the Ottoman Minister of Interior was in fact an Ottoman of Armenian descent called Gabriel Noradungyan (or Noradungian).¹⁰

What Shaw (1930-2006)¹¹ stated after his intensive research in the French archives is still of importance today. In his two-volume book ‘History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey’, he stated that:

“The Entente propaganda mills and Armenian nationalists claimed that over a million Armenians were massacred during the war. But this was based on the assumption that the prewar Armenian population numbered about 2.5 million. The total number of Armenians in the empire before the war in fact came to at most 1.300.000 according to the Ottoman census. About half of these were resident in the affected areas, but, with the city dwellers allowed to remain, the number actually transported came to no more than 400.000, including some terrorists and agitators from the cities rounded up soon after the war began. In addition, approximately one-half million Armenians subsequently fled

into the Caucasus and elsewhere during the remainder of the war. Since about 100.000 Armenians lived in the empire afterward, and about 150.000 to 200.000 immigrated to western Europe and the United States, one can assume that about 200.000 perished as a result not only of the transportation but also of the same conditions famine, disease and war action that carried away some 2 million Muslims at the same time.”¹²

These figures are backed by scholars like the French scholars Youssef Courbage and Robert Mantran (1917-1999). Mantran of the Aix-Marseille University of France explains the events in the lines of Shaw; he states the following:

“On the Eastern front, an expedition led by Enver finished as a serious defeat (December 1914); the Russian offensive which follows is supported by the local Armenian population; during the Winter and the Spring, exactions are committed against the Turkish inhabitants, and an Armenian State is even proclaimed (May 1915); because the threat of extension of the Armenian secession, the Ottoman government orders in May 1915 the evacuation of the Armenian populations from Van, Bitlis, Erzurum to Irak, and from Cilicia and Northern Syria to central Syria. Legal guarantees are given to Armenians about the right to return to their homes, and about their goods, but these guarantees have not been respected by some military; in July 1915, the reconquest of the lost lands by Ottoman Army is accompanied by revenge violence: the evacuation and the regaining control provoked the death of several thousands of Armenians.”¹³

Just like Shaw, Mantran speaks of “several thousands of deaths” which is in contrary to the work of Dadrian. The scholars of the second category seem to have serious criticism on the scholars of the first category, but Dadrian in particular. This is not just limited to scholars from the second category. Edward J. Erickson from the University of Birmingham, thinks Dadrian “has made high-profile claims that Major Stange and the Special Organization were the instruments of ethnic cleansing and genocide. Documents not utilized by Dadrian, though, discount such an allegation.”, adding to it: “Clearly, many Armenians died during World War I. But accusations of genocide demand authentic proof of an official policy of ethnic extermination.”¹⁴

THIRD CATEGORY

Some of the scholars that tried to break free of the first two categories, have done so in the recent years. One of these scholars is Erik Jan Zürcher of the International Institute of Social History in the Netherlands, probably the most known scholar of the third category. Zürcher states that “we have to conclude that even if the Ottoman government as such was not involved in genocide, an inner circle within the Committee of Union and Progress under the direction of Talat wanted to ‘solve’ the Eastern Question by the extermination of the Armenians and that it used the relocation as a cloak for this policy.”¹⁵

Zürcher is contested by scholars (like Yunus Özger and Bernard Lewis) from the fourth and last category, which think the events are not compatible to the term ‘genocide’ due to the facts that:

The Ottoman government reacted to the Armenian Rebellion at Van in 1915; and the Armenian uprisings which took place as early as 1895 in Bayburt.¹⁶

The Ottoman Turks had no racial theory like the Nazi’s had, nor did they had an intent to ‘wipe out’ the Ottoman Armenians.¹⁷

Probably more Ottoman Turks were killed in that period, than Ottoman Armenians. This point is almost indisputable since scholars from the third and even first category, like Sachar, agree.¹⁸

Some scholars from the fourth category, add to these arguments, thus expanding (and complicating the matter even more) the problem by showing documents from the Ottoman archives in which there are inconsistencies in the relocation of the Armenians. This shows there was no central plan or any single policy to which the officers should comply.¹⁹ The inconsistencies were that in some places the families were given 24 hours notice, in others several days before the relocations began. In some places they were allowed to sell their possessions, in others these were taken into custody by the local authorities. In some places carts and donkeys were allowed, in others everyone had to go on foot. Most Armenians were free to travel by train or ship, but only if they could afford it; so “the wealthy Armenians were allowed to travel south to Syria by train or ship, but for the impoverished masses, it was columns marching over the mountains in the dead of winter.”²⁰ The documents also dispute that there were given direct orders to these high-ranking officers.

Most scholars from the third category, including Dutchmen Zürcher and Boekestijn, do not dispute these findings in the Ottoman archives but see them as inconclusive. Zürcher for example agrees with the argument that the Ottoman Turks had no racial theory like the Nazi's²¹, as well as Arend Jan Boekestijn. Boekestijn even adds that "the Armenian side claims that the Ottoman government at the highest level had the intention to kill Armenians. So far, there is no such proof in the Ottoman Archives."²²

The other big controversy are the number of casualties on both sides; like Paul Dumont of the Marc-Bloch University in Strasbourg said in his 1989 article 'The Death of an Empire (1908-1923)':

"However, it is important to underline that the Armenian communities are not the only ones to have been ground down by the plague of the war. In the spring of 1915, the tsarist army moved to the region of the lake of Van, dragging behind it battalions of volunteers composed of Caucasus and Turkish Armenians. [...] For each of the provinces which suffered from the Russian occupation and from the Armenian militias' acts of vengeance, an important demographic deficit appears in the statistics of the post-war years — adding up to several hundred thousands of souls."²³

The high rate of casualties on both sides is also recorded in Malcolm Yapp's findings, according to Yapp the "Armenians were deported en masse from the eastern provinces and many (probably between a quarter and a half million) died, either from starvation and hardship or from massacre mainly at the hands of Kurdish tribesmen. No direct documentary evidence has ever come to light to show that the Armenian massacres of 1915 were the deliberate policy of the Ottoman government [...]"²⁴

The quarter and a half million of Armenians that are put forward by Yapp, are a lot lower than the estimated number of Zürcher (600.000 – 800.000) but near to what other scholars, like Veinstein²⁵, say. Veinstein also points out that "there were also very many victims among the Moslems throughout the war, because of combat but also of actions conducted against them by Armenians, in a context of ethnic and national rivalry. If there are forgotten victims, it is they, and the Turks of today have the right to- denounce the partiality of the Western opinion in this respect. Were they forgotten about because they were only Moslems?"²⁶

FOURTH CATEGORY

The last category probably has the most scholars in its mid, along with Yapp, Veinstein and McCarthy there are others (like Paul Henze and Jeremy Salt) who try to point out the following:

So far; no proof that the government was involved in an organized system of annihilation of a particular ethnic group, be it Armenian, Assyrian or Pontic Greek, has been found. The relocations were also not designed to 'get rid' of the Christian minority in the Ottoman Empire, since Catholic and Protestant Armenians were not subdued to the relocations.²⁷ Nor were they an attempt to destroy the ethnic Armenian population, since not all Armenians were relocated. Along with Protestants and Catholics; Armenians living in Western Anatolia, were also exempted from relocation. On the other hand; Assyrians, Arabs, Kurds and even Turks (both Christian and Muslim) were relocated as well, if they caused any skirmish or stirrups.²⁸

In the events surrounding the Armenian relocations, more Muslim (probably ethnic Turkish and Kurdish) Ottomans died. According to American demographer Justin McCarthy, this had everything to do with the fact that in 1915 (prior to the relocations) the Armenians had revolted in Van, the biggest Ottoman city in Eastern Anatolia at that time, located in the province of Van. Together with the invading Russian army, the Armenians had driven the Muslims from the city as well as the province. The Armenians in turn had been driven out after the reconquest of Van by Ottoman forces in the same year. The city of Van then changed hands rapidly between the fighting armies of the Ottomans at one side and the Russian-Armenian combined army at the other, with massacres that accompanied every sides victory. At the end, the Ottomans took Van on April 6th 1918²⁹, causing the final exodus of fleeing Armenians as well as the return of the surviving Muslims. McCarthy: "Neither side, however, can truly be said to have won the war. More than half of Van's Armenians had died, as had almost two-thirds of its Muslims."³⁰

The events were actually a struggle for power in the region of Eastern Anatolia between the ethnic groups of Armenians (with the aid of Armenians from Iran and Russia) and Kurds (with the aid of Kurds from the Ottoman province of Iraq and Syria as well as the Kurds from the Qajar Empire of Iran). This started at the end of the 19th

century, with the formation of the Hamidiye irregulars (drafted from Kurdish horsemen, and developed to a new trans-ethnic problem when the Kurds used their Hamidiye forces to muscle the large Armenian minority out of Eastern Anatolia in order for them to establish a large minority of their own. The Hamidiye were formed to suppress the Armenian aspirations for an independent homeland in Anatolia, which was being strived by the National-Socialist movement of the Armenian Revolutionary Party of Dashnakzutyun.³¹

DISPUTES ON THE ISSUE

The first point, which is the statement that – so far – there is no proof that the Ottoman government was in any way involved in an organized system of annihilation of a particular ethnic group, is not only cited by the American scholars McCarthy and Michael M. Gunter³²; but also by the British historian Yapp, French historian Veinstein, Dutch historian René Bakker³³ and Canadian military historian Gwynne Dyer. Most scholars seem to agree on this one, except for category-one-scholars. Dyer pointed out that “if genocide just means killing a lot of people, then this certainly was one. If genocide means a policy that aims to exterminate a particular ethnic or religious group, then it wasn’t.”³⁴ He is backed by the Romanian-American scholar Michael S. Radu, who made a good point by stating that “whether the Ottoman authorities were guilty of “genocide” in a legal sense is doubtful, since the term itself did not exist in international law until after World War II; in a moral sense, doubts could also be raised, since if “genocide” means intentional destruction of a specific group because of its nationality, religion, race, etc., the survival of the Armenian community of Istanbul, outside the conflict area, is hard to explain.”³⁵

Like most international scholars, the German historian Eberhard Jäckel also points out that “an explicit order for mass murder has so far not been found. [...] More importantly, in and around Constantinople Armenian residents were not deported, and those from the area of Aleppo were allowed to use rail transportation during the deportation. This is strong evidence against an intended comprehensive genocide.”³⁶ He in turn is backed up by the Swedish scholar Bertil Dunér, who sees political motives in the actions of some international organizations as well as in the actions of some scholars from category one:

“[...] what happened at the Sub-commission meeting in 1985 was not (UN) recognition of the Armenian genocide, although it is frequently portrayed that way – far from it. The special rapporteur does not seem to stick to the definition study. The special rapporteur’s study also lacks weight for a different, perhaps even more important, reason. It should be emphasized that neither was there any recommendation to the superior Commission on Human Rights to adopt a resolution.”³⁷

The second point is the number of deaths. The scholars from category four conclude that the number of 1.500.000 Armenian victims is exaggerated, and think only one third of that amount actually perished. Scottish scholar Norman Stone stated this before:

“In 1916 -- and this surely tells against ‘genocide’ -- the Ottomans tried 1,300 of these men and even executed a governor. About half a million Armenians arrived in the south-east and a very great number then died of the disease and starvation that were so prevalent at the time. Muslims also died in droves. In addition, the figure given for overall losses by the Armenian representative at the Paris peace treaties was 700,000 -- not 1.5 million as has been widely claimed.”³⁸

Although most capable scholars (also from the third category) agree that the number of one-and-half million Armenian deaths is indeed exaggerated; there are scholars from the first (and in some cases third) category, who dispute this. The demographic research of McCarthy, as stated above, not only showed the death tolls in the city of Van (which changed hands numerously in the years 1915-1918³⁹), but also in Erzurum (which fell in Russian-Armenian hands on February 16, 1916) and Bitlis (March 3, 1916).⁴⁰ In these areas it seems more likely that the non-Armenian population (since they were seen as ‘the enemy’ by the Russian and Armenian forces) suffered a higher mortality rate. Most Russian documents, like the newly discovered diary of the Russian Lieutenant-Colonel Tverdohlebov⁴¹, seem to confirm these findings. Especially when one looks at ‘The Armenian Report’ of the Russian General L.M. Bolhovitinov which is dated December 11th, 1915.⁴² The period described by these Russian archives, which are only recently searched due to the strict policy within the Soviet Union that the archives should remain closed at all times, are from 1890 to 1918. The newly opened Russian documents, reporting on the Armenian activities within the Ottoman Empire, seem to correspond with data taken from other archives. Which is something the French scholar

Thierry Zarcone did: "After the capture of Erzurum by the Russians in 1916, the Armenian militias committed massacres against the Muslim populations."⁴³

THE TRANS - ETHNIC ASPECT

The reason why the Russian archives are so rich and full of data, is explained by the trans-ethnic aspect of the problem. For example; all three major Armenian parties (Armenakan/Ramgavar, Huncakian and Dashnakzutyun) that fought for independence in the name of the Ottoman Armenians were supported by tsarist Russia. Russia, the arch-enemy of the Ottomans in those days, wanted access to the Mediterranean Sea and needed to find a way past the Ottoman Empire, since they stood in the way of Russia and the Mediterranean Sea. Since the allied forces did not want Russia to access the Mediterranean, which would effectively create more power for Russia, the Russian tried other methods. One of these methods was to stir up the Christian minorities within the Ottoman Empire; due to Russia the Ottoman Armenians began a revolt against the Ottomans from 1890 onwards. Both thinkable outcomes would benefit the Russian agenda:

The Armenians would succeed and create a independent Armenian state, which would not forget the Russian support and behave as a sort of Russian puppet state;

The Armenians would be defeated and Russia, having gained the title of 'protector of all Christians in the Ottoman Empire' after the Russo-Turkish Wars of 1877-1878, would have to intervene on behalf of the Armenians.

Historian Paul Henze, from the Smithsonian Institute in America, wrote that "[w]hen war broke out in 1914, the Russians again encouraged Armenian expectations and exploited the eastern Anatolian Armenians as a fifth column. In the end they did not intervene to protect Armenians when Ottoman authorities, in a life-and-death wartime situation, moved to deport them, nor were the Russian able to protect their collaborators against the vengeance of local Muslims when Ottoman authority collapsed. As had happened so often before during the preceding 150 years, Russia was willing to exploit Armenians for her own purposes but unprepared to make sacrifices on their behalf."⁴⁴

This is why the three major Armenian parties, striving for independence, were basically under the influence of Russia. With the exception of Armenakan/Ramgavar, which was founded by an Ottoman Armenian in France in 1885, the parties were in fact founded by Russian Armenians for 'their suppressed Armenian brethren in the Ottoman Empire'.⁴⁵

Both Dashnakzutyun (Georgia, 1890) and Huncakian (Switzerland, 1887) were founded by Russian Armenians but aimed to create a leftwing Marxist, socialist-nationalist Armenian state in Eastern Anatolia. Especially the formation of the Armenian Revolutionary Party 'Dashnakzutyun' in 1890, created an increase in Armenian state-undermining activities⁴⁶ in the East Anatolian provinces of the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁷ Most were in fact orchestrated by the Armenian leadership of Huncakian and Dashnakzutyun, and this prompted the founding of the Hamidiye by the Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamit II in 1891. The Hamidiye were irregular troops, drafted out of Kurdish horsemen in Eastern Anatolia in an attempt to suppress the Armenian aspirations for an independent state in the region of Eastern Anatolia.

For the Armenian militants, there were also a view possibly outcomes that encouraged them to rebel against the Ottoman Empire:

Success, which meant the creating of a homogeny left-wing nationalistic Armenian state in Anatolia where the overwhelming majority would be Gregorian-Christian Armenians.

Defeat against the Ottoman Empire, but only after the Dashnakzutyun and Huncakian would commit bloody massacres against the local population. This would evoke the rage of the local Ottomans and they would retaliate by massacring Armenians left and right. At this stage, or so they thought, the Europeans (or at least the Russians) would intervene and attack the Ottoman Empire on behalf of the Armenians. William L. Langer⁴⁸ said it best when he stated:

"Europeans in Turkey were agreed that the immediate aim of the agitators was to incite disorder, bring about inhuman reprisals, and so provoke the intervention of the powers. For that reason, it was said, they operated by preference in areas where the Armenians were in a hopeless minority, so that reprisals would be certain. One of the revolutionaries told Dr. Hamlin, the founder of Robert College, that the Henchak bands would "watch their opportunity to kill Turks and Kurds, set fire to their

villages, and then make their escape into the mountains. The enraged Moslems will then rise, and fall upon the defenseless Armenians and slaughter them with such barbarity that Russia will enter in the name of humanity and Christian civilization and take possession.”⁴⁹

The revolutionary Armenians soon realized they misjudged their outcomes, but it was too late. “The Catholicos [supreme chief of Armenian church] was clearly asking for a Russian attack upon Turkey. [...] Russia was not really interested in the Armenians; she was prepared to use them as a tool of her expansionist policy and no more. Blinded by the hatred of Turkey, the Armenians did not realize what a sorry part was prepared for them in the coming war.”⁵⁰

A SHORT OVERVIEW OF 1885-1916

The most important events that played a major role in the Ottoman-Armenian conflict, some are previously described in the text above, took place in the years 1890-1915. One must however keep in mind that most Armenian revolutionary parties were founded in the years 1885-1890, and that their activities started in the subsequent years. The Tehcir (or ‘relocation’) started in 1915 and ended in 1916. Another important aspect is that these years were known as the days of nationalism and imperialism, which would explain the readiness of the Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire to participate in a Russian imperialism-based strategy. Both the Russians and the Armenians were heavily influenced by the two ideologies of nationalism and imperialism. In the Ottoman Empire, the primarily political ideology was Islamism (especially under the reign of Sultan Abdülhamit II from 1876 to 1909), but changed with the Young Turk Movement from 1909 onwards. It, meaning the primarily political ideology within the Ottoman Empire, then became nationalism or patriotism.

Important events

What follows is a list of events that have importance for everyone who wishes to study the Turkish-Armenian relations during the First World War. All events are put in chronological order:

- In 1885, Armenakan (also called ‘Ramgavar’) was founded;
- The Armenian Party of Huncakian was created in 1887;

- The formation of the Armenian Revolutionary Party ‘Dashnakzutyun’ in 1890;
- The founding of the Hamidiye in 1891;
- The First Sasun Rebellion of 1894 (in present day Batman);
- In 1895 the region of Zeytun (present day Süleymanlı in Kahramanmaraş) was the stage of a fierce battle between the Armenian Huncakian organization and Ottoman forces (including Hamidiye);
- Dashnakzutyun attacked and occupied the Ottoman Bank on August 26th, 1896;
- The Khanasor Punishment on July 25th, 1897;
- The Second Sasun Rebellion on March 30th, 1904;
- The 1905 Yıldız Mosque Assassination;
- The Dashnakzutyun – Young Turks alliance of 1907;
- The İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti constitution of 1908;
- The countercoup on April 13th, 1909 by Sultan Abdülhamit II;
- The Adana Rebellion and subsequent massacre of 1909;
- The assassination of the Ottoman-Armenian governor of Van, Bedros Kapamacıyan, on December 10th, 1912 by the Dashnakzutyun;
- And the eventual arrest and trial of the Huncakian and Dashnakzutyun leaders in 1915.

SASUN (1894)

The First Sasun Rebellion of 1894 (in present day Batman), when Ottoman Armenians organized an uprising in an attempt to create an independent state of Armenia, was oppressed by the Hamidiye. Dashnakzutyun took part in the uprising by supplying arms to the local Armenian population in Sasun, which then started to attack non-Armenian villages in the region (ethnically these were prominently Turkish or Kurdish Muslims). In the fighting that followed, the Dashnakzutyun was defeated by the Hamidiye. Some Hamidiye retaliated by massacring Armenians at random. Israeli scholar Yitzchak Kerem stated: “My point is, and this is what the Armenians don’t like,

is that more Kurds killed Armenians than Turks”. Adding that “[...] it wasn’t an organized act by the regime. It was a byproduct of hate.”⁵¹

ZEYTUN (1895)

In 1895 the region of Zeytun (present day Süleymanlı in Kahramanmaraş) was the stage of a fierce battle between the Armenian Huncakian organization and Ottoman forces (including Hamidiye). Zeytun, being a region that is more located in Central or South Anatolia (officially ‘Mediterranean Part of Anatolia’), was not among the regions where the Hamidiye was active. In fact, Zeytun was not one of the regions where the Hamidiye could have been strongly active, since there were not so many Kurds in the region to begin with. This is a big difference with Sasun, which is located in the far Eastern part of Anatolia and where the Hamidiye (or Kurdish tribes) were an overwhelming entity and a relatively big minority. This is one of the reasons why the Ottoman regular forces were called to end the rebellion in Zeytun instead of the Hamidiye. This is not to say, no Hamidiye were present; just less and only as a small part within the much bigger Ottoman army. This is again interesting because the Zeytun Rebellion did not end with large-scale massacres, like the Sasun Rebellion of 1894. It ended with a peace treaty in which the Armenians were giving a form of semi-autonomous self-government.⁵²

THE OTTOMAN BANK (1896)

To raise awareness in Western Europe about the Armenian struggle for independence; members of the Dashnakzutyun, attacked and occupied the Ottoman Bank on August 26th, 1896. The purpose of the raid was to dictate the Dashnakzutyun demands of reform in the Armenian populated areas of the Ottoman Empire and to attract European attention to their cause since the Europeans had many assets in the bank. The operation caught European attention but at the cost of a ‘divide-and-rule’-strategy in Eastern Anatolia by Sultan Abdülhamit II. The Hamidiye-forces were giving more options and weapons to suppress the Armenians. Because the Hamidiye-forces were ethnically Kurdish, but resigned in the same region (of Eastern Anatolia), they saw the Armenian struggle for independence as a risk to their own ‘homeland’. Both ethnic groups basically claimed the same territory

as their own, this situation was used by the Ottomans to gain more control in Eastern Anatolia. The Kurds were merely an instrument in this strategic plan.

KHANASOR (1897)

What followed were fierce retaliations between the two ethnically groups of Armenians and Kurds. One of the most bloody was the Khanasor Punishment, which was performed by the Armenians against the Kurdish Mazrik tribe (mostly Hamidiye) on July 25, 1897. During earlier fighting's, the Mazrik tribe had ambushed a squad of Armenian Dashnakzutyun's and massacred them. Khanasor was the retaliation of the Dashnakzutyun, in which the Mazrik tribe was caught off guard and massacred.⁵³ Some Armenians consider this their first victory over the Ottoman Empire and celebrate each year in its remembrance.⁵⁴

SASUN (1904)

With the annihilated Mazrik tribe and a couple of other Kurdish tribes, Dashnakzutyun had a boost in moral while the Hamidiye was losing territory heavily. Eventually the Dashnakzutyun felt they were strong enough to engage in other big battle, again to conquer the region of Sasun. On March 30th, 1904, Dashnakzutyun played a major role in the Second Sasun Rebellion in which they sent arms and militants to the region for the second time in an attempt to muscle the non-Armenian population out of the region. This was intended to create a majority of Armenians in the Ottoman region. Afraid of a similar outcome as Zeytun (where estimates show at least 20.000 Muslim casualties; which were either civilian, Hamidiye or Ottoman soldier⁵⁵), the Ottoman governors reacted by sending even more Hamidiye irregulars. The last thing the Ottomans wanted was another Armenian region that could act as an semi-autonomous region, which was the case with Zeytun in 1895. With the Zeytun defeat and Mazrik Massacre in mind, the Hamidiye used this pretext to retaliate fiercely. Without regular Ottoman forces to control them, which was the case in Zeytun, the Hamidiye were free to retaliate by massacring at random.

THE YILDIZ ASSASSINATION (1905)

The quick and constant shift of power between Armenian militants under command of Dashnakzutyun and Huncakian on one side, and the Kurdish Hamidiye irregulars together with the Ottoman forces at the other, caused irritation and hate at both sides. These feelings of hate were rapidly implemented in massacres left and right by all parties involved. By 1905, creating European awareness once again became key in the attacks organized by Dashnakzutyun; just like the attack on the Ottoman Bank in 1894. In 1905, members of Dashnakzutyun organized an assassination attempt on Sultan Abdülhamit II in the Ottoman capital of İstanbul. The Yıldız Mosque Assassination, as it was called, was intended to kill the Ottoman sultan when he was on his most vulnerable: on his way to the Mosque to pray, hence the name 'Yıldız Mosque' which was the name of the mosque Abdülhamit II frequently visited. The attempt failed because the timed bomb missed its target, Sultan Abdülhamit II, by a few minutes; but nonetheless killed three guards.

THE YOUNG TURKS (1907-1908)

In 1907 the İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti (also called Young Turks because of the relatively young ages of the founders), tried to overthrow Sultan Abdülhamit II. Because the İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti (translated as 'The Committee of Union and Progress') consisted of a group of young mostly European-educated, ethnically Turkish army-officers of the Ottoman Empire, most of the Ottoman soldiers supported them. United by their hate against Sultan Abdülhamit II (who acted as a dictator in some ways; although he brought a constitution to the Ottoman Empire in 1876, he also prorogued the constitution as well as suspended some rights and freedoms only two years later in 1878), Dashnakzutyun and the İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti declared an official alliance. What the İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti did not know was that Dashnakzutyun still hoped to gain autonomy to govern Armenian populated areas of the Ottoman Empire as a 'state within a state', and that Sabahattin agreed with it in the year 1907. Sabahattin, being of royalty by blood, was the son of reigning sultan Abdülhamit II's half brother. He joined the İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti, maybe due to a personal feud against his uncle, and developed his own group within

the Cemiyet. Sabahattin argued for the use of violence against his uncle and intervention by all means; even if this meant supporting the rebelling minorities within the Ottoman Empire or asking foreign powers to intervene. Although the mainstream of the İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti saw Dashnakzutyun as a political entity that would at most take place in the Ottoman parliament, a small group within the İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti (under leadership of Sabahattin) was talking with Dashnakzutyun representative Khaçatur Maloumian about an independent state of Armenia in Anatolia. In the end Sabahattin resigned from the İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti and created his own opposition party Teşebbüs-ü Şahsi ve Adem-i Merkeziyet Cemiyeti, which would not play any role hereafter.

Eventually Sultan Abdülhamit II was forced to reinstate the constitution in 1908, when the İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti took control of the European army division of the Ottoman Empire and marched to İstanbul. The Armenians gained more seats in the parliament but also gained the mistrust (and even hate) of the supporters of Sultan Abdülhamit II. While Abdülhamit II in fact had an Armenian mother, he was portrayed as an ‘anti-Armenian tyrant’ by Dashnakzutyun. This was mostly due to the Hamidiye troops, which carried his name (Abdülhamit, Abdül Hamid, Hamidiye).

ADANA (1909)

When on April 13th, 1909 Sultan Abdülhamit II rallied his supporters, in order to organize a countercoup against the İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti, all hell broke loose in the Ottoman capital of İstanbul. Some soldiers muted and were joined by religious leaders demanding Sharia instead of a parliamentary constitution. The Dashnakzutyun saw this as an opportunity and remembered the words of Sabahattin. In the turmoil, the Armenian Dashnakzutyun started an uprising in the city of Adana.⁵⁶ The relatively wealthy Armenians⁵⁷ were already the envy of the town and when it came out that some Armenian religious leaders were in fact part of the organized uprising, all hell broke loose in Adana; just like it did in İstanbul, 939 km to the west.

An official document, send to Great-Britain by the British Embassy in Anatolia, describes (again) what role the Russians played in the Adana Uprising: “Certain Armenian leaders, delegates from Constantinople,

and priests (an Armenian priest is in his way an autocrat) urged their congregations to buy arms. It was done openly, indiscreetly, and, in some cases, it might be said wickedly. What can be thought of a preacher, a Russian Armenian, who in a church in this city where there had never been a massacre, preached revenge for the martyrs of 1895? Constitution or none, it was all the same to him. 'Revenge', he said, 'murder for murder. Buy arms. A Turk for every Armenian of 1895.' An American missionary who was present got up and left the church. Bishop Mushech, of Adana, toured his province preaching that he who had a coat should sell it and buy a gun.⁵⁸

This wasn't the first document from the British archives that insinuated that the Russians, along with some Armenian committees, tried to evoke a massacre by the Ottomans so the European powers could intervene. The following was stated in a report, that was dated July 18th, 1895 and sent to the British Foreign Office by the British Embassy in Istanbul: "The Armenian Committees are determined to provoke another massacre and it is rumored that they are preparing rebellions in various areas."⁵⁹

The Armenian Uprising of 1909 was fierce for both sides, when the initial Armenian attacks wore off; the local population retaliated. During the massacres that followed hundreds of thousands of Armenians were killed. This created even more antipathy between Armenians and Turks, and Dashnakzutyun cut all relations with the İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti in 1912. The fact that the İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti had nothing to do with the Adana events, it were mostly local inhabitants, and even had courts where Armenian and Muslim ringleaders were held for trial, was ignored. Dashnakzutyun immediately showed the new Ottoman government (now governed by the sultan, the parliament and some İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti ministers) what they thought of the new Ottoman leadership by assassinating the Ottoman-Armenian governor of Van, Bedros Kapamacıyan, on December 10th 1912. The killing of Kapamacıyan, and the ongoing Armenian uprisings in Van, eventually caused all Huncakian and Dashnakzutyun leaders (almost all residing in İstanbul) to be tracked down, arrested and tried in 1915.

TEHCİR (1915-1916)

What followed was a seemingly impossible plan of the İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti, to relocate all Armenians from Eastern Anatolia so they would not compose a problem anymore. The fact that the First World War just began in 1914 and the Russians (with Armenian help) were advancing, taking the city of Van just a few days earlier on April 20th 1915 made Talat Paşa, Minister of Interior and member of the İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti, issue two important orders:

The first order was issued on April 24th 1915 and called for the arrest of several Armenians in İstanbul. All were suspected to be involved with Dashnakzutyun, Huncakian and/or Armenakan/Ramgavar; along with the closure of a view Armenian organizations that were suspected of ties with the three revolutionary parties.

On May 27th, 1915 Talat Paşa issued an order to reinstate the temporary 'Tehcir Law' (meaning 'Relocation Law') until early 1916. The order was published in the official state-newspaper of the Ottoman Empire in June, 1915.

THE RELOCATION (1915)

The reason for Talat Paşa's drastic measure had to be searched in the drastic events of the years 1914 and 1915. Salt sees its origin "at this critical juncture, [when] between April 13 and 20, thousands of Armenians inside the walled city of Van rose up against the governor and the small number of regular and irregular forces garrisoned in the city. The extent to which the rebellion was coordinated with the Russians remains an open question, to which the answer must lie buried somewhere in the Russian state archives, but the effect was to weaken the Ottoman campaign in eastern Anatolia and Persia."⁶⁰

Salt even accurately described the extent of the Armenian activities:

"What was happening could no longer be described as disparate uprisings; it was rather a general rebellion, orchestrated principally by the Dashnaks and encouraged by Russia. The victims included not just soldiers or jandarma or officials but the Muslim and Christian villagers who were the victims of massacre and counter-massacre."⁶¹

According to Brian G. Williams⁶², himself in category four, most historians from the first category make the same mistake: "I am equally

dismayed when I encounter Armenians who provide a historically context-less version of history which overlooks the fact that their people were engaged in an armed uprising which aimed to ‘cleanse’ (i.e. slaughter) the Turks of eastern Anatolia from a planned ‘Greater Armenia’.⁶³ This would apply in both Adana (1909) and Van (1915), which eventually led to the Tehcir. Almost all scholars (be it from category three or four) are on the same page concerning the Russian-Armenian events:

“Armenian volunteer units served in the Russian army, and there was agitation for a homeland in and around the Anatolian city of Van.”⁶⁴

“Moreover, throughout Eastern Anatolia the Turks were threatened by the insurrection of their embittered Armenian subjects, who disrupted communications and formed volunteer groups to help the Russians. Others joined the Russian Armenian forces.”⁶⁵

“A few thousand Armenians joined the Russian army; there were Armenian desertions from the Ottoman army and guerrilla activity behind the Ottoman lines.”⁶⁶

“The Armenians were drawn to the Russians as fellow-Christians and likely protectors. Armenians from Russian Transcaucasia fought in the Russian Army, where they were joined among their kinsmen in Turkey. There were also Armenian risings behind Ottoman lines.”⁶⁷

Which should in no way be interpreted as an argument that Armenians did not die en masse:

“A few key facts are clear. One is that many hundreds of thousands (over a million, according to the Armenian lobby) Armenians in Eastern Anatolia died at that time, of exhaustion and famine as well as killed by Kurdish villagers and Ottoman soldiers. It is also a fact that the Armenian community and its leadership in Anatolia at the time took arms against the Ottomans, in open alliance with the latter’s traditional enemy, Russia. Invading Russian troops and Armenian irregulars, whose occupation of the city of Van was the immediate cause of the deportation of Armenians, also engaged in indiscriminate violence, albeit on a smaller scale, against the mostly Kurdish population of the area; and all that during a war in which the very fate of the Ottoman Empire was being decided.”⁶⁸

But it also should not be used in discarding the deaths on the Ottoman side (be it Turkish, Turkic, Kurdish or Ottoman-loyal Armenian):

“Worse yet, Armenian scholars have consistently dwelled on Turkish massacres of their compatriots in all their grisly details without so much as a word on the equally savage measures taken by the Armenians of the Transcaucasus and eastern Anatolia against local Turkic populace from 1905 to 1920. Indeed, when questioned on such episodes, they even dismiss them as Turkish propaganda. Yet the evidence for accepting this fact is overwhelming. This not to excuse the massacre of Armenians as mere *quid pro quo* but to point up such violence as an evil endemic to Middle Eastern society in general.”⁶⁹

The scholars stating that rebellious Armenians killed Ottoman Muslims as well, like Radu and Zeidner, are imminently present in the fourth category but even scholars from the third category do agree with these facts. The discussing is more about if the Armenian uprisings were as compromising to the Ottoman war effort as Talat Paşa makes it seem. An interesting source is found in the British archives; where Talat Paşa's is witnessed to have cried (or at least put his hands in front of his face) during an interview concerning the relocation.⁷⁰ One can say that it at least shows that it wasn't premeditated by Talat Paşa or that even he himself did not expect so much victims. According to Oxford professor Hew Strachan, in the fourth category himself, “the initial violence was not centrally orchestrated, although it was indirectly sanctioned by the pan-Turkish flourishes of Enver and others.”⁷¹ This is reinforced by three, national and international, decisions of the then still functioning as the Ottoman government *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*. 1. In 1919 the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Spain (all neutral states during the First World War) were officially asked to research the events of 1915, in order to rule out any sentence for an international crime. All four countries declined the invite.⁷²

2. The Military Courts of 1919-1920 in İstanbul, which were called ‘*Divan-i Harb-i Örfi*’, were used to research the events. During these trials the *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti* put 1673 Ottoman officers on trial for ‘inhumane treatment of the Armenians during the *Tehcir*’ and sentenced 1397 of whom 67 were put to death.⁷³

3. The Ottoman leaders decided to cooperate with the Malta Tribunals (1919-1921) in which the allied forces, united under the leadership of the British Lord Curzon, held 141 Ottomans for ‘war crimes’ but eventually were forced to let them go.⁷⁴ This had two reasons. For one the British wanted to rescue their prisoners of war

(POW's) from Turkish hands by exchanging prisoners. And two; they couldn't find any evidence against the 141 Ottomans, as stated by Sir A. Gedes on July 13th, 1921:

"I regret to inform Your Lordship that there was nothing therein which could be used as evidence against the Turks who are being 'detained for trial at Malta'."⁷⁵

In the end, the Ottoman officials were set free and exchanged for British POW's in Ottoman-Turkish hands.

PRIMARY SOURCES

As mentioned before, the primary sources are diverse and present in more than one national archive. So far; we have seen the mention of Russian, British and French documents. The French archives show that the Ottoman Armenians were probably numbered at 1,2 or 1,3 million, while the British archives show that there simply isn't any evidence linking either Talat Paşa, nor the İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti, nor the Ottoman government, to a centralized organization of annihilating the Armenians. The fact that even the Malta Tribunals were aborted says it all. The Russian archives, however, depict a totally different picture; namely that of the Russians-Armenian relations which, under influence of imperialism and nationalism, started the Armenian aspirations for an independent homeland in Anatolia. In order for this to realize, Eastern Anatolia had to have a majority Armenians, something Dashnakzutyun and Huncakian tried to accomplish in the years 1890-1915.

OTTOMAN ARCHIVES

The Ottoman archives are even more clear about it; according to Lewis and Pope the 1915-1916 events were not designed to 'get rid' of the Christian minority in the Ottoman Empire, be it Armenian, Assyrian or Pontic Greek. Lewis is cited saying that "Catholic and Protestant Armenians as well as Armenian railway workers and members of the armed forces were not subdued to the relocations".⁷⁶ This while Stephen Pope insists that "exemptions spared Greeks and the Catholic Armenian business community in Constantinople, effectively restricting the order to Orthodox and Protestant Armenians, who were subject to a military enforcement operation until late 1916."⁷⁷ This would mean that some

Armenians were in fact saved because of their participation in Ottoman military operations. This would mean the relocations were aimed at the Gregorian-Armenian Christians (an orthodox and nationalistic form of Christianity, exclusively present among the Armenians). Because of the aggressive nature of the Armenian Revolutionary Party Dashnakzutyun, which had a wide support under Gregorian Armenians, a lot of Ottoman-loyal Armenians were attacked, massacred and assassinated as well. One example could be Bedros Kapamacıyan.

However; two new studies, performed by Turkish scholars Taner Akçam and Uğur Ümit Üngör, tried to show that the Ottoman archives also had another side to them. According to Akçam and Üngör, both in category two, there is enough circumstantial evidence to conclude that the Ottomans had the intention to eliminate the Armenians. For Üngör, who stated in his book review about Akçam's book that it "is in fact largely outdated, despite recent updates", adding "it is also strange that Akçam uses no Ottoman archives".⁷⁸ This is interesting since Akçam "uses more than 1800 sources which add up to over one hundred pages in his book 'A Shameful Act' (translated to Dutch as 'De Armeense genocide: een reconstructie'⁷⁹), according to Belgian professor Detrez.⁸⁰ The same Detrez concluded that "Uğur and Akçam have more or less the same conclusion".⁸¹ Just like Akçam, Uğur does not seem to use the Ottoman archives but is more concentrated at the time period in which the Armenian deaths occurred. He even sees this as the foremost reason to see the relocations as means to a systematically organized annihilation: "The astonishing pace in which the Armenians died, proved that 'relocation' was a euphemism for 'destruction'."⁸²

Akçam's book also received much criticism from Erman Şahin in his 2008-article 'A Scrutiny of Akçam's Version of History'. In Şahin's article there are many points of criticism, of whom only two examples will be given: "For an author claiming to have mastered the subject, Akçam makes too many factual errors, which diminish the text's reliability as a point of reference: The Ottoman Empire was not considered the "Sick Man of Europe" since the 1830s; the term was coined by the Russian Tsar in 1844 (p. 27). Sasun was not a Cilician village; it was in Bitlis province (p. 41). [sic]"⁸³

GERMAN ARCHIVES

One of the most known sources concerning the Armenian events of 1915, is a document that is supposed to be in the German archives. Although most scholars from the first category use the quote, that is said to belong to Adolf Hitler himself, it is in fact highly controversial. It is believed to have been used by Hitler when he said to his generals on the eve of sending his Death's Heads units into Poland in 1939: "Go, kill without mercy! Who today remembers the annihilation of the Armenians!"⁸⁴ Israeli historian Tom Segev, himself from category three, had this to say about the quote:

"[...] the quote attributed to Hitler is of dubious provenance. [...] It turned out that on that day, Hitler gave two speeches. The Americans managed to locate the official version of both; the line about the slaughter of the Armenians does not appear in either."⁸⁵

The dubiousness of the Hitler quote is also been the topic of publications of Leon Picon and Heath W. Lowry, who are both from the fourth category. Lowry stated, in his article 'The U.S. Congress and Adolf Hitler on the Armenians', that "there is no proof that Adolf Hitler ever made such a statement."⁸⁶ Picon made a similar remark in his article 'Armenian "Hitler Quote" Proven To Be Fabrication'.⁸⁷

Apart from the controversy concerning the Hitler quote, there are also sources in the German archives that speak of the following events; as witnessed by German army officers, who were allies of the Ottomans during the First World War:

- The suffering of Armenians;
- The suffering of the Ottoman Muslims, Turks and Kurds.

This is the case in the book of the Belgian scholars Antoon Gailly and Luc Vervloet.⁸⁸ In which one German doctor is stated to have said: "What I saw in aspects of sorrow and misery among the Armenians on their journey through the wilderness, cannot be described. [...] Not only Europeans but many Turks and Arabs whom I spoke were angry about the atrocities against the Armenians. Cholera, typhoid and other infectious diseases were endemic among the deportees. It was the fault of the incompetence of the local officials, their laziness and disinterest, their dishonesty and fanatical hatred, failing all efforts by the military head of state to improve the conditions of the Armenians."

Vervloet and Gailly also found a source in which one German medical army officer is stating that “[t]he Muslims were also not spared from such horrors [as the Armenians went through]. As they were refugees as well, they knew the horrors of war at first hand. I estimate that one million Muslims died as well during the typhus epidemic that broke out during the relocations of the Armenians.”⁸⁹

These German documents at least show that:

a. The military leaders of the Ottoman Empire tried to take measures, ensuring the lives of the Armenians during the relocation, but this failed due to the incompetence of local officers;

b. Not only Armenians, but Muslim Ottomans suffered as well before, during and after the events of 1915. Possibly in a much larger extent.

AMERICAN ARCHIVES

Just like the Ottoman archives, much of the documents out the American archives are in fact disputed. Although most scholars from the first category relied on the book of former ambassador Morgenthau, recent research showed it to be an untrustworthy report. Morgenthau’s report was believed to be an eyewitness report, but turned out to be a report written by others and then assigned to Morgenthau. It was used “as proof of the fact that the Young Turk Government planned and carried out a ‘genocide’ against its Armenian minority” for more than 72 years until Heath Lowry, professor at Princeton University, examined it.⁹⁰

Other primary sources of the American archives tell us the exact journey of some Christian Ottomans; one example is the testimony of Edward Tashji (or Taşcı). Tashji was the son of an Armenian mother, Zabel Tashjian, residing in the Ottoman province of Balıkesir in Western Anatolia at the start of the First World War; and a Syrian Orthodox father, Circi ‘George’ Tashji, who resided in the Eastern Anatolian city of Urfa at the start of the First World War. The education his father received (seemingly fluent in Arabic, French, Armenian, Ottoman Turkish and English) and the fact that he remained an Ottoman army officer during the entire First World War, are interesting findings. Another conversation between Zabel and Edward is stated as following:

Edward: “Were the fights between the Armenians and the Turks?”

Zabel: “No!”

Edward: “Then between whom did the confrontations take place?”

Zabel: “It was always among one Armenian political group against another group. I remember conversations in our home; the Dashnak would attack the Huncaks, the Huncaks would beat up the Ramgavar, the mutual hate and fighting would never stop!”⁹¹

According to this testimony Zabel was “the sole survivor of a family of ten”⁹², lived in Balıkesir until 1915 and made the journey to the Eastern Anatolian city of Kilis during the First World War. She had to make this journey of 1134 km on foot and it took her approximately six months.

Asked about the massacre of her family in Balıkesir, she replied as following:

Zabel: “I don’t remember the location or the date, but one day I witnessed a man on horse, attack a defenseless man on the ground.”

Edward: “[...] please think carefully about the person on the horse: Was he a soldier, did he wear a uniform?” [sic]

Zabel: “No, it was not a soldier.”

Edward: “Do you remember words spoken in Turkish or Arabic?”

Zabel: “No, I remember it was neither of these languages, nor was it either Greek or Armenian; but it was a language that I could not recognize.”

Edward: “Could it have been Kurdish?”

Zabel: “It could have been. I wish we had never seen those days.”⁹³

Arriving in Kilis during 1915, Zabel does not mention any hardship during her long journey and even speaks of “an Armenian family in the town of Kilis, living in their own home”⁹⁴. The same family took her in and she lived there for another three years. Since Kilis is nearby Zeytun, where there were brutal killings committed by various groups and serious fights between Dashnakzutyun, Huncakian, Hamidiye etc., the Tashji-testimony is important. It could imply that the relocations were restricted to areas where there had been fights prior to 1915.

a. Other events Zabel would testify, were that;

b. Her brother Minas went to İzmir to “fight against the Turks.”⁹⁵

In 1916 she met two Ottoman officers, Circi Tashji and Butrus Nakkash (or Nakas), riding a horse (something only high-ranking and

wealthy officers were permitted or could afford to do). Eventually she married Circi Tashji, who took her to New York in 1920 to start a new life.⁹⁶

c. Because the Anatolian Turkish state later known as Turkey⁹⁷ was reluctant to stand by and see how most Anatolians, or at least the educated officers like Circi, emigrated abroad; she, meaning Zabel, and her new husband Circi received French passports from the French forces occupying Eastern Anatolia from 1919 onwards, including Kilis and Urfa. They eventually went to America with falsified French passports, stating they were “George Nordigian and Izabel Nordigian”.⁹⁸

All these events, as recorded in the various archives and documents, seem to reaffirm what most scholars agree upon. Namely the fierce fighting between Dashnakzutyun, Huncakian and Hamidiye in the late Ottoman period, starting in the late nineteenth century and ending only with the end of the First World War.

HIGHLY DISPUTED SOURCES

Along with the sources that are mentioned before in this article, like Morgenthau and the Andonian Papers, there are other sources that are highly disputed among scholars. Most of them are recognized as unacceptable in an academic scholarly work. Some of the most known are the following:

1. Donald Bloxham’s ‘The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians (Oxford University Press, 2005)’, which had a falsified photograph of what was said to be “an Ottoman official taunting starving Armenians with bread.”⁹⁹ It was however proven to be composed of two completely different photographs. All existing stock of Bloxham’s book was destroyed in 2010, according to Christopher Wheeler, Oxford University Press’ history publisher. The forgery in the book of Bloxham, professor of modern history at the University of Edinburgh, was uncovered by Jeremy Salt, professor of social and political sciences at the University of Melbourne.

2. The documents of German Protestant missionary Johannes Lepsius (1858-1926), which were banned from Germany in 1916. The work was reviewed by German-Turkish scholar Cem Özgönül in his book ‘Der Mythos eines Völkermordes: eine kritische Betrachtung

der Lepsiusdokumente sowie der deutschen Rolle in Geschichte und Gegenwart der armenischen Frage (Köln 2006)', which showed Lepsius to have manipulated most of his sources.¹⁰⁰

3. Maybe the most important source is that of Arnold Toynbee and James Bryce, which were the first persons to write about the Armenian relocations in the Ottoman Empire. All of their work, including 'The Armenian Atrocities: The Murder of a Nation (Hodder & Stoughton 1915)' and 'The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-1916 (Hodder & Stoughton and His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1916)', were stated to be "war propaganda" by Arnold Toynbee himself. The works of Toynbee concerning the Armenians were also known as 'The Blue Book', about which Toynbee remarked "I was being employed by His Majesty's Government to compile all available documents on the recent treatment of the Armenians by the Turkish Government in a 'Blue Book,' which was duly published and distributed as war-propaganda!"¹⁰¹

He also added the following:

"The French Government made use of the Armenians in a different way. They promised to erect an autonomous Armenian state, under their aegis, in the Cilician part of the Anatolian Zone, and the promise brought them several thousand Armenian volunteers, most of whom were enrolled in the Légion d'Orient and served for the rest of the War."¹⁰²

To which Dutch-Turkish scholar Timur Eroğlu, historian at Utrecht University in the Netherlands, replied during a debate that "you cannot use Toynbee's work if you want to be taken seriously in the academic world."¹⁰³

AFTERMATH

After the end of the Tehcir Law in 1916, and the subsequent end of the First World War shortly thereafter, the Ottoman Empire collapsed. The Ottoman forces were not able to withstand the allied forces and Anatolia became occupied by foreign armies. It was subsequently divided in eight zones, of which the Greek, Italians, French and British areas were the most important zones. The Armistice of Mudros (October 30th, 1918) and the Treaty of Sèvres (August 10th, 1920) ensured that some of the eight zones in Anatolia would eventually become small

states (like Armenia and Kurdistan), while others would be transferred to the Allied Powers. Although the Ottoman sultan accepted the terms, in exchange for retaining his wealth and titles, most Turks did not.

It was at this stage that a young Turkish officer, seemingly the only one who was able to remain undefeated during the First World War, took matters into his own hands. This officer, Mustafa Kemal (better known as Atatürk), was especially famous for his defense of the Dardanelles. At the Battle of Gallipoli in 1915, in which the British forces were defeated, almost 250.000 allied soldiers (mostly British, including Australian and New Zealand) perished. The same Mustafa Kemal declined the terms of a truce and decided to start the War of Independence (1919-1922); in doing so Mustafa Kemal even had to fight against some of the Sultans forces. Nonetheless most of the former Ottoman soldiers switched sides and denounced their loyalty to the Ottoman sultan in favor of Mustafa Kemal.

In the meanwhile, most of the Anatolian Armenians were migrating left and right:

a. Some were just now returned to Anatolia from their relocation to Syria;

b. Other Armenians decided to flee to the Caucasus, where they expected a Russian welcome-committee¹⁰⁴;

c. Another group decided to stay in (or return to) Syria or nearby regions like Lebanon;

d. Quite a few emigrated to the United States, France or other western countries;

e. And another group of Armenians assimilated in the Turkish-Kurdish communities of Eastern Anatolia. For example; the Armenian Sergey Vardanyan thinks that almost “half a million Armenians assimilated”¹⁰⁵, while the Turkish-Armenian Etyen Mahçupyan thinks “there are more than one million Armenians in Turkey today, for all but 60.000 they think they are and always were Turkish and Muslim.”¹⁰⁶ There are Turkish historians, who support these conclusions; like Yusuf Halaçoğlu in his 2002-book ‘Facts On The Relocation of Armenians: 1914-1918’.¹⁰⁷

Against the framework of this great migration of Armenians, which is the direct cause that there are seven million Armenians living abroad and only three million in Armenia itself today, the Armenians in the

Caucasus had declared themselves independent in 1918; in accordance with the treaties of Mudros and Sèvres. This subsequently started a war with the neighboring Azerbaijan Turks, who are culturally and linguistically related to the Turks of Anatolia, for reasons that are not difficult to guess:

Most Armenians were scarred the Azerbaijan Turks would try to retaliate for what the Armenian Dashnakzutyun did in Anatolia and took pre-emptive measures;

Some Armenians wanted to retaliate against Turks in general for the relocations in 1915 and 1916;

Dashnakzutyun was still very active among the Armenians and even helped declare the Republic of Armenia, of which Dashnakzutyun-member Hovhannes Katchaznoui became the first Prime Minister.¹⁰⁸ The nationalistic ideology of the Dashnakzutyun prompted them to try to capture some provinces of Azerbaijan (like Nakhchivan and Karabakh), which were historically Armenian according to Dashnakzutyun.

In the war that followed, the Armenians effectively captured most of Azerbaijan until Mustafa Kemal ordered his general Kazim Karabekir to engage battle with Armenia in 1920. Within months the Armenians were driven out of Eastern Anatolia, which was given to them according to the Treaty of Sèvres. Subsequently Armenia was forced to renounce all the territories granted to the Armenians in the Treaty of Sèvres and sign the Treaty of Gümrü (or Alexandropol) in 1920, in which the full occupation of the Armenian republic in the Caucasus by the Turks was foreseen.

Before the Turks could advance to the Armenian capital of Yerevan, to ratify the treaty by the Armenian government, the Soviet troops of Russia invaded and occupied Yerevan. As a result the Turks decided not to wage war against the Russians and be content with re-conquering the pre-Sèvres lands of Anatolia. The Armenians quickly foiled their annexation by the Turks, by signing an agreement with Soviet Russia and by doing so establishing the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. The Treaty of Gümrü was eventually replaced by the Treaty of Kars on October 13th, 1921, which established the borders between Soviet Armenia, Soviet Georgia, Soviet Azerbaijan (all conquered and annexed by Soviet Russia in the years prior to 1921) and Turkey.

The Soviet annexation of Armenia and Azerbaijan in 1920, caused that all conflicts between Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan were frozen for more than 70 years. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan (which originated in 1918-1920 during the First Armenian-Azerbaijani War) concerning the disputed provinces of Nakhchivan and Karabakh, started again.