

THE SLAUGHTER OF A NATION:
AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE CAUSATION OF GENOCIDE
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Very few people today can grasp the severity of the Armenian Genocide. Peter Balakian's *Black Dog of Fate*, however, gives a vivid first-hand account of one horrific mass murder that took place. "About six Turkish soldiers stood behind [a circle of women]. They had whips and each had a gun. . . The soldiers cracked the whips on the women's backs and faces, and across their breasts...then two soldiers...began to douse the women with the fluid. . . I could smell that it was kerosene...then I could see the fire growing off the women's bodies, and their screaming became unbearable" (Balakian 217). What is more even important than these terrible events, however, are the reasons or motivations the Turkish government had for gathering together the large Armenian minority and systematically exterminating as many as possible. Genocide has occurred frequently and periodically through human history, but exactly why does genocide occur? What could possibly bring a nation to the point where no other solution seems feasible except for mass extermination? These questions and more can only be answered by examining the causes of genocide, its reasons for occurring, and the possibilities of avoiding its inception by focusing on the factors that surround genocide, using the Turkish assault on Armenians as one example of ethnic cleansing.. We must realize that genocide is a greater evil than the mass killings committed by the Turks against the Armenians in 1915: genocide is a disease of mankind that has plagued its people for centuries.

The Armenian Genocide has been explained as the result of an ethnic rivalry or the desire for secession by the Armenians from the Turkish land. A closer look, though, reveals that the causes of the Armenian Genocide run far deeper than just ethno-religious differences between the Turks and the Armenians. Instead, a complex combination of economic inequality, social mobility, wartime stress, militarism, nationalism, political strength, and equalization pressures directly and indirectly posed by the Armenians as the minority, caused Turkish officials as representatives of the majority to implement the Armenian Genocide. Amy Chua's theory of "market-dominant minorities" gives an important, yet partial, explanation of the genocide. Robert Melson's theory focusing on social mobility, wartime stresses, and prepared militarism coupled with Berch Berberoglu's hypothesis of

increased nationalism and political strength within a minority also serve as a means for understanding the genocide. Finally, author Meir Amor's theory of the minority desire for formal equalization of status and the resulting retaliation by the majority can serve to explain the hate and fear that the Turkish people harbored towards their Armenian contemporaries, and the subsequent actions that were taken.

When a minority emerges as an economically powerful subgroup within the larger society, tensions quickly build with the majority. The emergence in Turkey of the Armenian people as economically-empowered citizens, with vital jobs as loan bankers, real estate workers, and government advisors, caused great rifts with their Turkish equals. The Turks, also referred to as Ottomans during that time, considered themselves the true sons of the Balkan lands. Witnessing Armenian predominance in commerce, the Ottomans felt they were being robbed of the jobs and wealth that they felt rightfully belonged to them. This kind of situation is addressed in Yale law professor Amy Chua's book *World On Fire*, which describes how minorities that dominate economic markets in a country are the object of oppression and envy by the majority (47). At the turn of the century, especially in southeast Turkey, Armenians became owners of the most important factories and established lucrative merchant businesses in trade towns and ports. Berch Berberoglu, in "Nationalism and Ethnic Rivalry in the Early Twentieth Century," states that "The bankers. . . played a direct role in the Empire's economy. . . . Another group of Armenian magnates consisted of high government officials in charge of various state institutions or departments and as head of numerous economic enterprises" (284). Armenian businessmen generated great revenue while pushing the Turkish economy forward as their unemployed Ottoman counterparts remained as stagnant onlookers. Envy and distrust for the Armenians built on the Turkish side, and a desire to dismantle powerful Armenian industrialists grew throughout the empire. The flourishing economic presence of the Armenians in Turkish commerce displeased Ottoman business owners as Armenians became a leading market-dominant minority within Turkey.

Market domination, whereby a minority dominates a certain commercial sector of the majority economy, eventually becomes so fruitful for a minority and places so much stress on the majority that the latter often retaliates with nationalization of businesses and even more severe measures. Amy Chua describes three main ways a backlash takes place. Prior to outright genocide, Chua explains, seizures and nationalization of minority-owned businesses go into effect (50). At the beginnings

of the Genocide, the Turks arrested and deported Armenian intellectuals and leaders (Balakian 225). Arrests and seizures of Armenian individuals were followed by nationalization of Armenian businesses in an attempt to create an all-Turkish economic system.. Similar actions were taken by German Nazis in Germany and Poland where Jewish businesses were closed, important scientists and scholars were jailed, and many were killed. These acts that took place thirty years after the Armenian Genocide show that the evils of genocide and the actions which are taken to initiate its execution transcend race or geographic limitations. Genocide is an evil that seems to repeat itself, and thus must be recognized in its inception in order to be successfully prevented.

Coinciding with these persecutions, the Turks announced that Armenians would be relocated to other regions of Anatolia to temporarily quell minute rebellions while World War I was fought. Chua theorizes that the majority next creates a campaign of mass exportation and attempts to hide true motives of elimination and extermination (54). Balakian reports that

The Central Government now announced its intention of gathering the two million or more Armenians. . . and transporting them. . . The government officials would also inform the Armenians that, since their deportation was only “temporary,” they would not be permitted to sell their houses. (163)

Similar examples of Chua’s theory can be seen in the Jewish Holocaust, when German Nazis announced that Jews would not be harmed but would just be temporarily relocated. The initial stages of genocide, then, seem to be consistent, whether dealing with the Armenian Genocide or the Holocaust during World War II, since genocide is spawned from economic, social, and so many more socially-debilitating foundations.

After arrests, nationalization of minority business, and a façade of deportation, the majority finds no other option to control the market-dominant minority but systematic extermination: as Chua explains, “The third [phase] is violence, sometimes genocidal, directed against the market-dominant minority itself” (47). In Turkey, the Armenians were, in fact, brought together and massacred. Balakian tells how “[s]ometimes, when crossing a stream, the Turkish gendarmes would push the women into the water, shooting all who attempted to save themselves by swimming. . . the soldiers kept with the marches, kept on driving them forward with the butt-

ends of their rifles, even sometimes with their bayonets" (173). Like the Germans who set up concentration camps and human incinerators, the Turks, in all of their contempt and distrust for the economically-advanced Armenian minority, saw containment and genocide as the only means for stopping minority market dominance.

The social mobility and the strong social presence of a minority can also cause violent measures to be taken on the part of a majority. In Turkey, the upward mobility of the Armenian community which resulted in increased educational capabilities, better employment opportunities, and newly-created Armenian social clubs, caused envy and distress among the Turkish majority. Since the beginnings of the Ottoman Empire, the Armenian people had been considered second-class citizens within the Turkish "millet system," which Robert Melson, in "Revolutionary Genocide: On the Causes of Armenian Genocide of 1915 and the Holocaust," explains grouped minorities as sub-classes and gave them minimal socio-political rights (10). As the Armenian population began becoming more modern, so did many of their institutions of learning and ways of living, and by the turn of the twentieth century, more Armenians were attending university and gaining greater opportunities. The successful modernization and mobility of the traditionally-despised minority, Melson notes, eventually resulted in panic, and in provocative, genocidal behaviors from the greater majority. "First, progress of low-status minorities may have engendered antagonism in the majority, and second, it may have contributed to the paranoid climate which is characteristic of revolutionary regimes in their radical phases" (170). Such an atmosphere of mistrust, fear, and social contempt that the Turks possessed for the Armenians would eventually, according to Melson's theory, manifest itself in a greater physical oppression. The Ottomans saw their children losing their places at local universities and positions in the government and economic systems to the youth of Armenia, and the tension mounted against the Armenian minority. "[W]ith the spread of capitalism and modernization," Melson explains, Armenians "experienced rapid rates of social mobilization. Both factors tended to generate resentment and even violence on the part of the wider societies" (166). The social advancement of the Armenians in Turkey became so great that their Turkish contemporaries began to experience the bitterness that Melson describes, bitterness that would later foster brutal genocidal violence.

Additionally, the minority, with increased social status but no increased rights also becomes frustrated, and impelled to militarize or ally themselves with opponents of the majority. This alliance with the enemy almost always causes a majority to make quick attempts at mass termination of the insurgent minority. Melson describes how a majority's abhorrence for a minority peaks during times of war, and is further fueled by a minority's willingness to militarize and assist rival nations (163). As World War I continued on through 1915, the Turks became dismayed at the great advancements made by the Russian army on the Middle-Eastern front, with the Turks continually retreating as the Russians moved towards Constantinople. With Russia just over the border, sharing with Armenians a Christian Orthodox religion, the many commercial and cultural connections between Armenians and the nearby Russians allowed Armenians to feel much closer to their Russian neighbors than to their Muslim Turkish ones. The Turks, seeing the bond strengthening between the Armenians and their hated rival Russians, coupled with Russian military progress, began to worry about an alliance between the two peoples:

Once the Russian troops were poised to invade Turkey, the frightening possibility appeared that the Armenians would join the Russian army and Turkey would be destroyed. Hence the Armenian danger had to be eliminated. It was this threatening situation that, while not justifying them, created the conditions for the deportations and the ensuing genocide. (Melson 164).

Turkey's response was to define the Armenians as violent insurgents that made efforts to supply enemy forces with natural resources and manpower, justifying the use of Turkish military force against such a threat.

Supposed attempts at a revolution by the minority also allow the majority an excuse to implement plans of extermination, and Melson theorizes that "wartime provides some of the conditions facilitating the formulation and implementation of the decision to commit genocide" (170). The Turks saw the possibility of Armenians aiding Russian troops as an acceptable reason for the capture, arrest, transportation, and genocide of the Armenian people. Support for Melson's theory can be found in Arnold Toynbee's work, *Armenian Atrocities: The Murder of a Nation*, where an interview with the Turkish minister of war states, "We are at war. . . we are fighting for our existence. The Armenians were hoping for the victory of our enemies; they were traitors at large in a war-zone, and we were compelled to proceed against them

with military severity" (143). Such a policy summarized by the minister of war, which wrongly accused all native Armenians of aiding Russian forces, simply served as an excuse for initiating the Armenian genocide. War provided a similar justification for Saddam Hussein, following the first gulf War; in *The Wall Street Journal*, Roth observed that "The Gulf War fought between the United States of America and Iraq saw the horrors of genocide as then-dictator Saddam Hussein used the war as an excuse to exterminate some 100,000 supposedly 'American-friendly' Kurds in the Iraqi deserts" (Roth). In Turkey, the wartime stresses of an advancing Russian army and confrontation of Turkish officials by the Armenian minority allowed for the Ottoman government to bring together and exterminate over 1.5 million innocent Armenian citizens. Both cases reinforce the ease with which the true evils of genocide can emerge when a majority fears that a minority is aiding rival nations during a time of war.

Possibly one of the most volatile ingredients in a recipe for genocide is an increase in nationalism, which occurred both on the part of the Armenian population and the Turkish citizens, further amplifying the great tension between the two ethnic cultures. As Ottoman Turks began recognizing the strength of the Armenians, a movement emerged to reinforce Pan-Turkism across the nation. For a long time, the Ottoman Empire had spanned such a wide area of Eurasia—from the Balkans all the way to parts of the Sahara—that the Ottoman Turks slowly lost their identity. In "The Coming Anarchy," Robert Kaplan explains how the widespread collapse of nation-states and forms of government ushers in unprecedented amounts of racial hatred within a country (97). As a result of the Ottoman Empire's collapse, not only did Turkey experience ethnic prejudice toward the Armenians, but the Turkish people also experienced a surge of national identity. The formation of the Committee of Union and Progress in 1878 under the Young Turk Party allowed for a sense of Turkish nationalism that grew within the country (Chambers). Nationalist movements on both sides eventually foster aggressive violence toward the minority as a result of the majority's xenophobic nationalism. Berberoglu argues that

When such competition and rivalry become apparent and visible, nationalist movements begin to emerge and attempt to mobilize sectors of the local population with promises of national renewal and salvation. . . which results in a form of nationalist, petty-bourgeoisie

authoritarianism that leads to severe repression and pogroms carried out against the minority population. (273)

Berberoglu's theory of genocide is found in the rise in nationalism within Turkey during the late 1800's, which later progressed into authoritarian tyranny during the early 1900's, a tyranny that would further manifest into mass oppression of the Armenian people.

Berberoglu's theory of nationalism begins with the transformation of a greater majority from a previous identity to a new, refined individuality (155). In other words a nation, which once considered itself a certain ethnicity realizes that it possesses a more distinguished, secular ethnicity than previously conceived. Upon a realization and creation of this new more specific ethnic identity, the greater majority finds a need to purge all minorities that are not of this newly-recognized, superior national race (163). Applying such a theory to the Ottoman Empire, one will find a shift that occurred from an "Ottoman" perception of self to a "Turkish" perception of the Empire's citizens. Previously, the Ottoman Empire spanned a vast region that consisted mostly of non-Turkic peoples. As the Young Turk Party came to rule and the Ottoman Empire began to slowly crumble with the war, its leaders found a need to distinguish the Turkish people of the Mediterranean from their Balkan and Arabian contemporaries, people who were also considered Ottoman at the time and comprised a large part of the Ottoman Empire.

The Young Turks ushered in a nationalist revolution wherein both the Ottomanism and the Pan-Islam of the old regime were swept away by Turkish nationalism. The people who had been formerly Muslim Ottomans living in Turkey came to view themselves as Turks. . . . When Muslim Ottomans had become Turks, they had come to view Armenians not as a millet, the most loyal in the realm, but as a separate nation just like they were. (Berberoglu 167)

As a result of this Pan-Turkish nationalism, its separation from the Ottoman ideology, and consideration of the Armenian people as a separate group entirely, the desire for removal and genocide of the minority were further encouraged (169).

Not only was the rise in Turkish nationalism significant for the cause of the Armenian Genocide, but the rise in Armenian nationalism sparked sentiments of hatred among the Turks. Under Ottoman rule, the Armenians felt poles apart from their Turkish contemporaries; Armenians were Christians while Turks were Muslim,

Armenians placed emphasis on the home while Turks saw work as most important, the Armenian base lay in the southeast near Diyarbakir, while Turks held most sacred the northeastern lands of what would later be Istanbul (Chambers). Realizing their great differences from the Ottomans, many prominent Armenians began spreading the desire for self-determination amongst the Armenian community. Apart from the revival of the majority's identity, Berberoglu explains, the minority also experiences a reformation in its ethnic foundations and finds a swell in nationalistic identity, and the Armenians "got caught up in the nationalism of the period and began to make demands for self-determination. . . whereas the departure of the other nationalities was a blow to the power and prestige of the Ottoman empire, the secession of Armenia would mean the death of Turkey" (170). Here, the author brings to light a very important thought: the mere idea of Armenians seceding from the Turkish nation would be the worst possible blow to Turkish pride and honor. Therefore, instead of having the Armenians secede, the Turks preferred to eliminate the Armenian problem before it had a chance of solving itself, whether by Armenian secession or aid from outside nations. Thus, the application of Berberoglu's theory that a suppressed minority will find a rise in nationalism to the Armenians in 1915 Turkey that furthers the understanding of genocidal foundations and causes.

The political strength of the Armenians within the Ottoman Empire was also perceived as a menace. Upon the emergence of a minority in the political arena of a country, Berberoglu claims, the greater majority will soon take steps to disarm the threatening minority (266). One must look at the Armenian political situation in 1915 Turkey to test this idea. Armenians during this era made great political strides, both securing high-ranking positions in the Ottoman government and fostering political ideas concerning the freedom of the Armenians. These two political stresses caused by Armenian citizens in Turkey intensified the malevolent sentiments of genocide. Just as advancements by Armenians were being made in the social and economic sectors of Turkey, the political jobs were also being filled by the minority populace. Regional magistrates, heads of provinces, and even advisors to the Committee of Progress and Union were of Armenian background, advising the Ottoman Empire, known as the "sick man of Europe," on what important decisions to make regarding the welfare of the nation. Berberoglu emphasizes the danger of this aspect of Armenian dominance in twentieth century Turkey: "Turkish pride did not permit entrusting ministries completely to Armenians, the government placed an Armenian

by each minister as his counselor or assistant, but in reality as the true administrator" (284). Such high positions allowed Armenians to work closely with other European nations on the political level, thus giving the Armenian community the respect and confidence of the many powerful nations of the world. The Turks, seeing the political accomplishments of the Armenians and the strong ties that were being made with other nations, found a need to suppress further Armo-political advancements. Many Turkish officials felt that since the Armenians were woven so closely into the government, there was an even greater chance for an Armenian plot to overthrow the Committee of Progress and Union.

The strategic location of some Armenians close to centers of Ottoman power in the service of the Ottoman government, acknowledged by the state in previous decades as a valuable contribution to the empire. . . may have been seen as political insiders ready to conspire against the Ottoman state together with the possible successful national uprising of Armenians in the eastern provinces. (Melson 173)

The political insecurities that Turkish officials felt towards powerful Armenian contemporaries were far too great for the Ottoman government to handle. Thus, the Ottoman Empire saw the only feasible solution to the problem was the elimination of the Armenian population.

A final step in the causation of genocide, related to nationalism, derives from attempts of the minority to break down societal sub-class rules and become socially level with those in the majority; such attempts at normalizing pre-existing community traditions automatically distresses the majority and prompts a call for action. This step is best articulated by author Meir Amor as the theory of equalization of status; in his essay, "Oppression, Mass Violence, and State Persecution," Amor points out that a majority is pushed even closer to acts of genocide with the desire of a minority group to receive equal and full citizenship rights within a country (359). The author explains that often a great divide of citizenship lies between social groups within a society, a divide which almost always results in a desire by the minority to be considered equal to fellow, yet ethnically different, countrymen. Civic rights, human liberties, and suspension of residency restrictions are ideals which all minorities of different countries seek to attain. As Amor explains,

ethnocentric violence emerged as a concomitant phenomenon to processes of formal equalization of status. . . . In modern times, status

equalization takes place as a part of the institutionalization of citizenship as a civic right. In other words, mass ethnic violence was part of the modern phenomenon of citizenship and nation-state formation. (361).

The requests for citizenship that Amor describes were seen during the Ottoman Empire's collapse and new Turkish revival in 1915. More and more, the Armenian people desired to be removed from the "millet system" and, if they could not rule as a separate nation, at least be considered citizens to the fullest degree of the Turkish nation. Instead of granting the Armenians such rights, the Turks sought a completely different way of dealing with Armenian desires for citizenship: genocide. The Turks preferred to eliminate the Armenian inhabitants rather than certify them as citizens of the Ottoman Empire; recognizing Armenians as equal to Turks would mean the utter downfall of the Ottoman Empire, and thus Armenians would be handled in a separate manner.

The events of the Armenian genocide successfully satisfy theoretical hypotheses of causation: market dominance, social mobility, wartime stress, militarism, nationalism, political strength, and pressures for equalization of the minority. It is crucial to understand that no one single theory can stand alone as an explanation of genocide. On the contrary, each of these theories provides a different perspective—economic, social, nationalistic, political, or civic—on its causation; focusing only on the nationalistic foundations of genocide and neglecting the effects of social mobility will give a limited vision of how genocide emerges. Recognizing the importance of all such theories, Ervin Staub, in "Genocide and Mass Killing: Cultural-Societal and Psychological Origins," asserts that "[t]he antecedents of genocide lie in difficult conditions of life in a society. . . economic difficulties. . . intense political conflict, violence, and terrorism, creating uncertainty and physical vulnerability and the weakening of group ties. . . power, prestige, social change, and importance of a nation"(231). Even papers evaluating the psychological aspects of genocide include the many theories used to explain the causes of genocidal events; all of these theories come together to provide a comprehensive viewpoint on the causation of genocide.

One may question why a minority would not stand up, affirm itself as a people, and speak out during acts of genocide. The answer to this question, like the answer detailing the causation of genocide, is unfortunately not as straightforward as

one would think. Genocide, and the steps taken by a majority to achieve genocide, cause a certain degree of incomprehensible fear in a minority. Not knowing what will happen, who will be taken, when, or if one's family will be harmed are all paralyzing thoughts that run through the mind of a person forced to be socially subordinate. It is this division between dominant and subordinate, this separating social wall, which causes great conflicts within a country's population, conflicts that can grow wide into a crack between the two people, and a crack that can grow even wider into a genocidal gash which wounds a country. Why didn't the Armenians rise up against the Turkish oppressors if they were so nationalistic? Why didn't the Cambodians unite against Pol Pot's Communist Regime? Genocide would not exist if the minority were strong enough to fight back, right? Incorrect: a combination of social, economic, and political reasons explain the inability of a minority to withstand attacks as the majority moves closer to plans of extermination, which shows the true evils of genocide and its ability to go beyond any type of stereotypical limitations. The great advancements made by the Armenians economically and socially, together with wartime pressures and the decline of the Ottoman Empire, inevitably forced their Turkish contemporaries to feel threatened and unstable, and the result was the Armenian Genocide of 1915. It must be realized however, that genocide is a greater evil than the mass killings committed by the Turks against the Armenians: genocide, rather, is a disease of mankind that has plagued its people for centuries on end. A complex combination of pressures combine to bring about the evil of genocide, a malevolence that knows not just one single race, but all races, and has spanned the annals of time.

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