Remembering and Understanding the Armenian Genocide

Through Literature and the Arts

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Short Abstract:

The mass deportations and killings of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire occurred before the concepts of 'crimes against humanity' and 'genocide' had emerged. Mass atrocities crimes denial can be confronted in a variety of ways that can include academic writings and the arts.

Long Abstract:

The mass deportations and killings of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire during WW I and in the immediate years after occurred before the emergence of the concepts of 'crimes against humanity' and 'genocide' and when the concept of 'war crimes' was still unfolding. Today, these three terms constitute key conceptual and legal terms in international law for the United Nations, the International Criminal Court and member states. Yet, as in 1915, contemporary times reveal the continued presence of mass atrocities denial, both state-sponsored and by individuals. It remains an important and pressing challenge to confront such denial in a variety of ways. This can include academic historical writings, memoirs, museums, memorials and the arts. Detached analytical accounts are important to foster understanding on causality, phases and consequences. More engaged personal artistic styles can be profoundly influential in promoting empathy and sympathy towards the victims. Together the two approaches can perhaps help to bridge the vast chasm.

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Introduction

The mass deportations and killings of the Armenians throughout the Ottoman Empire during WW I and in the immediate years after occurred before the emergence of the concepts of 'crimes against humanity' and 'genocide' and when the concept of 'war crimes' was still unfolding. Today, these three terms constitute key conceptual and legal terms in international law for the United Nations, the International Criminal Court and member states. Yet, as in 1915, contemporary times reveal the continued presence of mass atrocities denial, both state-sponsored and by individuals. It remains an important and pressing challenge to confront such denial in a variety of ways. This can include academic historical writings, memoirs, museums, memorials and the arts. Detached analytical scholarly accounts are important to foster understanding on causality, phases and consequences. More engaged personal artistic styles can also be profoundly influential in promoting empathy and sympathy towards the victims. Together the two approaches can perhaps help to bridge the vast chasm.

The outline of this paper will proceed in the following sequence:

Describing the Indescribable[1]

How does one 'think about the unthinkable?' How does one 'describe the indescribable?' These are among the analytical and moral challenges in trying to understand genocide. As Raphael Lemkin, the originator of the concept of genocide, noted: genocide occurred in history before the word 'genocide' was created. The history of humans is marked by episodes of great cruelty and mass killings where groups that were different were targeted for persecution and slaughter.

The mass deportations and killings of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire peaked during WW I, but occurred before the term genocide emerged in 1944. In fact, the Young Turk regime's slaughter of the Armenians would be a catalyst for Lemkin to develop such a legal concept, in a preliminary way in the 1930s and in final phrasing in the 1940s.

When trying to understand the events of 1915 onwards, it is useful to ask: What words and phrases were used by the Armenian survivors, domestic and foreign witnesses, and newspaper writers to describe what happened? The challenge was how to describe the indescribable, or what Churchill would later in 1941 call "the crime without a name".

Richard Kloian's *The Armenian Genocide: News Accounts From the American Press (1915-1922)* (1985) documents that the influential international newspaper *The New York Times* reported extensively on the massacres of the Armenians under the Young Turk dictatorship. Drawing upon Vahan Ohanian & Ara Ketibian, eds., *The Armenian Genocide: Prelude and Aftermath: As Reported in the US Press: The New York Times* (2017), my content analysis overview of *The New York Times* for the year 1915 (the peak year of the deportations and killings) reveals that a variety of words and phrases were used to try to describe the horrific scenes and deeds. Reviewing the range of the words employed can assist in conveying the magnitude of the man-made catastrophe that befell the Armenians.

Among the terms and phrases offered in the articles in *The New York Times* in 1915 were the following: "pillage", "great exodus", "great deportation", "completely depopulated", "wholesale deportations", "systematically uprooted", "wholesale uprooting of the native population", "young women and girls appropriated by the Turks, thrown into harems, attacked or else sold to the highest bidder", "children are being kidnapped by the wholesale", "kidnapping of attractive young girls", "rape", "unparalleled savagery", "acts of horror", "murder, rape, and other savageries", "endure terrible tortures", "revolting tortures", "their breasts cut off, their nails pulled out, their feet cut off, or they hammer nails into them just as they do to horses", "burned to death", "helpless women and children were roasted to death", "massacres", "slaughter", "atrocities", "unbelievable atrocities", "systematically murdered men and turned women and children out into the desert, where thousands perished of starvation", "million Armenians killed or in exile", "1,500,000 Armenians starve", "dying in prison camps", "wholesale massacres", "slaughtered wholesale", "fiendish massacres", "massacre was planned", "most thoroughly organized and effective massacres this country has ever known", "extirpating the million and a half Armenians in the Ottoman Empire", "policy of extermination", "plan for extirpating Christianity by killing off Christians of the Armenian race", "plan to exterminate the whole

Armenian people", "deliberately exterminated", "virtually the whole nation had been wiped out", "annihilation of a whole people", "organized system of pillage, deportations, wholesale executions, and massacres", "pillage, rape, murder, wholesale expulsion and deportation, and massacre", "systematic, authorized and desperate effort on the part of the rulers of Turkey to wipe out the Armenians", "deliberate murder of a nation", "war of extermination", "race extermination", "intention was to exterminate the Armenian race", "Armenia without Armenians", "extinction menaces Armenia", "death of Armenia", "deportation order and the resulting war of extinction", and "aim at the complete elimination of all non-Moslem races from Asiatic Turkey", and "crimes against civilization and morality".

There are at least ten examples (five in the decades before 1915 and five in the years after) where the biblical word "holocaust" in the generic sense is used to describe either the mass burning of Armenians alive, massacres of Christians or attempt at annihilation of the Armenian people. The *New York Times'* references in the 1915-1922 era to the Armenians' fate include the phrasing "holocaust", "war's holocaust of horror", "great holocaust" and "final holocaust".

Clearly authors strained for the words that could explain the magnitude of such horrific scenes and deeds. Witnesses were often overwhelmed, particularly at the time of the deadly deeds, but also in the retelling of the painful accounts. For many who witnessed such atrocities, it was a life-altering experience.

Within a month of the Ottoman Empire's April 24, 1915 arrest, deportation and later killing of key Armenian leaders in Constantinople and increasing reports of mass deportations and massacres, the allied Entente countries of Britain, France and Russia used the ominous phrase "crimes against civilization and humanity". This description officially issued on May 24, 1915 (printed in *The New York Times* on the same day) was part of a semi-judicial warning to the Young Turk regime about its crimes and would become a key term in international law. It was an important step in the development of the legal concept of genocide.

However, no single word or combination of words or phrases could adequately convey the magnitude of suffering and horror of what transpired. Even today, we search for ways to "describe the indescribable". One of the ways we now do is with the introduction of three new important legal terms.

The Crime with No Name: Searching for New Concepts for Old Crimes

Overview

While initially formulated at different times historically, the three legal terms -- war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide – are significantly interrelated and overlap. Collectively, they constitute key foundational pillars in international law relating to mass atrocity crimes. War crimes, the first of these concepts to emerge, arose out of the Hague conferences in the late 19C and early 20th centuries. These deliberations sought to regulate the conduct of war in modern times. The concept of crimes against humanity emerged in 1915 during WW I when the Russian, French and British governments, which shared a military alliance, issued a formal

international declaration warning the Young Turk government about its mass deportations and massacres of Armenians within the Ottoman Empire. The concept of genocide emerged in a book of Raphael Lemkin's during WW II relating to the Nazi deportations and mass murder of Jews during the Holocaust. War was the common feature in the emergence of all three concepts. Together they form key components of international law and the International Criminal Court.

War Crimes

With the increase in destructiveness of weapons in modern warfare, international conferences were held in the latter half of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th to regulate the conduct of warfare. For example, the Hague convention of 1907 recognized the principle of "laws of humanity" and the "laws and customs of war" that had been "established among civilized peoples". Accordingly, it sought to ban the violation of these customs and laws of war. Specifically prohibited were the deliberate harming of unarmed civilians, inhumane treatment, torture, compulsory slave labour, and wilful killing of civilians. All of these conditions occurred when the Young Turk military dictatorship targeted the Ottoman Armenian civilian population for harmful treatment. It included confiscation of homes, property and money, forced marches, starvation, slave labour, torture and massacres of unarmed infants, children, women, men and the elderly. Post-WW I Turkish military courts (Dadrian & Akcam, 2011) did prosecute and sentence a number of the Young Turk leaders for such war crimes.

Crimes Against Humanity and the British, French & Russian Declaration of May 24, 1915[2]

Earlier massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire had occurred, with an estimated 200,000 killed during the 1894–1896 Hamidian Massacres and another 20,000 in 1909 in Adana and Cilicia. The Turkish perpetrators of these earlier massacres of Armenians had been largely unpunished, despite the protests by European states.

During WW I, the Ottoman Empire was in a military alliance with Germany against Britain, France and Tsarist Russia. On April 24, 1915, several hundred leading Armenian public figures (including clergy, educators, politicians, intellectuals and businesspersons) were arrested in Constantinople. They were deported inland and shortly thereafter most were killed. In addition, hundreds more Armenian leaders from across the Ottoman Empire were also murdered. The forcible removal of the Armenian leadership marked one of the opening stages of the mass deportations and massacres of vast numbers of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. In 1915, key wartime political leaders from Russia, Britain and France sought to stop the massacres and hold the Turkish government officials responsible for their violent deeds against Ottoman civilians.

Within a month of the mass arrests of the Armenians in Constantinople, Britain, France and Tsarist Russia issued a formal joint declaration on May 24, 1915. The Entente powers noted the ongoing "massacring" of Armenians and argued that these deeds constituted "new crimes of Turkey against humanity and civilization'. The three allied governments warned they "will hold personally responsible [for] these crimes all members of the Ottoman government."

This declaration was an historic landmark document in the development of international human rights law. Along with "war crimes" and "genocide", these legal terms would constitute

key founding pillars of the international legal system. The pioneering May 24 declaration about "crimes against humanity" (CAH) would also significantly contribute in the long run to the emergence of the concept of genocide and the idea of post-war international criminal tribunals.

With the subsequent emergence of the concept of genocide, CAH had had less prominence in the public eye, but is extremely important at international tribunals and International Criminal Court (ICC). The concept of 'crimes against humanity" starts at a lower threshold, covers more groups and individuals, and is easier to prosecute than genocide. In many ways, it is a lower profile category, particularly in the public eye, but is probably a more effective net in which to capture and convict those responsible for mass murder. Accordingly, it is important to remember and draw attention to when and why the birth of this term occurred and to the crucial historic linkage of this key concept to the mass deportations and massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.

Genocide

As Samantha Power noted so effectively in her book *'A Problem From Hell': America and the Age of Genocide* (2002), Lemkin had read about the Armenian deportations and massacres in the Ottoman Empire during WW I and explored the complex issues that emerged from the 1921 Berlin trial of the Armenian Soghomon Tehlirian. Tehlirian had assassinated Mehmet Talaat, one of the three main Young Turk perpetrators of the genocide, who had fled Istanbul and was hiding in Germany. Was the killing of one man who had been responsible for the deaths of over a million persons justifiable homicide? Was this an example of tyrannicide? Why were there domestic laws for the punishment of the murder of one person, but not international laws against mass murder by political leaders of a repressive state? A decade later, Raphael Lemkin proposed the precursor twin concepts of "barbarism" and "vandalism". Amidst WW II, Lemkin formulated a synthesis of the two concepts with the creation of the new term 'genocide'. In 1948, the United Nations passed the "International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide" which included the following features:

1) killing members of a group;

2) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of a group;

3) deliberately inflicting on a group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;

4) imposing measures intended to prevent births within a group;

5) forcibly transferring children of one group to another.

A group focus was central to the definition and four groups were specifically listed for protection: national, ethnic, religious and racial. The Armenians in the Ottoman Empire fit at least three of these group categories. The Yong Turk dictatorship had targetted individuals and families for mass deportations and slaughter in as much as they were members of the Armenian ethnic/religious group.

These three terms were formulated over the last two centuries. In recent prosecutions at international tribunals and the ICC, the three terms have tended to cluster together. Collectively, they are important tools for punishing those guilty and potentially deterring future genocidaires. New analytical terms alone, however, are not enough.

Denial of the Armenian Genocide[3]

Since 1915, Ottoman and Turkish governments have engaged in denial of the Armenian Genocide (Hovannisian, 1999). This occurs despite overwhelming evidence from a multitude of sources about the mass deportations and massacres of Armenians and other Christians by the Young Turk regime. The denial has created a serious gap in modern Turkish history. Denial even attempts to eradicate the very memory about the dead Ottoman Armenians and their culture. In the words of Elie Wiesel, it is a form of 'double killing'.

Genocide denial is a means for Turkish political leaders and the public to avoid dealing with a dark period of history when ethnic and religious mass murder prevailed. If successful, such denial allows the perpetrators to get away with their crimes, fosters a sense of impunity, and increases the likelihood of future killings. It makes the healing process for the survivors and their descendants far more difficult.

There are a number of recurring themes in the Turkish government's denial of the Armenian Genocide (Dadrian, 1999). The list spans almost a century. The claims vs. historical evidence include:

1) *Claim*: The number of dead is less than the one and a half million usually cited and most died of hunger, exposure, and disease, not massacres. *Evidence:* Foreign missionary and consul witnesses documented widespread massacres and noted a very low survival rate amongst the deported who were deliberately deprived of adequate supplies.

2) *Claim:* It was a civil war between two armed ethnic groups (Muslim Turks and Christian Armenians). *Evidence:* There were distinct government-directed phases involving forced state conscription of Armenian men, their abrupt mandatory transfer into unarmed labor battalions under harsh conditions, and finally coordinated mass killing of these now unarmed laborers by the Turkish military.

3) *Claim:* Armenians rebelled when the empire was in peril during World War I. *Evidence:* Most of the dead were overwhelmingly unarmed civilians, women, children, and elderly.

4) *Claim*: The Ottoman government had no malevolent intent and the dead were merely civilian war casualties, not genocide victims. *Evidence:* The verdicts of the Ottoman courts-martial ruled the Young Turk leaders were criminally guilty of the massacres. The large volume of confidential telegrams sent from the capital of Constantinople reveals that the genocide was planned and coordinated by senior Young Turk officials.

5) *Claim:* Given the difficult conditions in the wartime Ottoman Empire, the planned

deportations were merely relocations from dangerous border areas and not intentional death marches. *Evidence:* Armenians were deported from the breadth and width of the Empire and were deliberately denied access to adequate food, water and shelter.

6) *Claim*: Other rogue, "out of control" local elements and groups such as ethnic Kurds were responsible for the deaths. *Evidence:* The government telegram decrees and the consistent pattern of deportations and killings across the Empire clearly show central direction and coordination.

7) *Claim:* There is insufficient historical evidence and further study is needed. [This constitutes an indirect form of denial by repeatedly postponing genocide acknowledgement and compensation.] *Evidence:* The *New York Times*'s almost daily coverage in 1915 of the one-sided killings and the inclusion of the Armenian case in all genocide encyclopedias and in most comparative books on genocide indicate that the historical record is already convncing.

8) *Claim*: The Turkish position is not being adequately heard in a two-sided debate. *Evidence:* Turkish laws (such as article #301) greatly restrict free speech and scholarship on the Armenian Genocide in that country; while overseas the Turkish government calls for Turkish and Armenian views to be heard equally, irrespective of the direction of international evidence. The independent voice of the International Association of Genocide Scholars was unanimous in its recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

9) *Claim*: Publicity regarding the genocide is mostly rooted in the Armenian diaspora engaged in anti-Turkish propaganda. *Evidence:* Foreign press coverage in 1915 was clear and consistent in its portrayal of the Young Turk government's brutal mass killings of Armenian civilians.

10) *Claim*: Countries freely chose not to recognize the Armenian Genocide. *Evidence:* In recent times, when foreign governments (including the U.S. Congress) have shown an interest in offering declarations of recognition of the Armenian Genocide, they are met with swift Turkish government protests, threats of economic retaliation and cessation of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military cooperation, and warnings that the Near East peace process will be harmed. Turkish government threats continue to be a key component of aggressive denial.

Turkish genocide denial occurred before, during, and after 1915. It began when the Young Turks denied any secret plans to deport and kill the Armenians en masse. A deceptive system of double telegrams helped mask the mass murders. The first telegram, usually a government one, was more public and less sinister; while the second, often a party document, was far more confidential and contained the malevolent orders. The government employed widespread secrecy and censorship during the killings and afterwards swiftly destroyed much documentary evidence. Blaming the Armenian victims for alleged disloyalty and misdeeds was part of the Young Turk nationalist misdirection. Restricting foreign observers' access to the killing zones and eradicating evidence of the slaughter were other forms of hiding the truth. A state ban on taking of photos sought to keep the outside world in the dark. It was a prohibition ignored by German army medic Armin T. Wegner whose historic photos provide important visual evidence.

After the genocide, historical revisionism was pursued. Place names were changed, churches and monasteries destroyed, and euphemisms employed to mask the killings. Other factors, such as famine and disease, were suggested as causes for the deaths. Historical obliteration occurred with removal of references to the victim group from school history texts. Turkish authors and academics who dared use the term "genocide" faced criminal prosecution under article #301. Turkish-Armenian author and publisher Hrant Dink, previously charged under the law, was later assassinated by a young Turkish nationalist.

Overseas, the Turkish government funded academics and Institutes that denied the genocide, while leading foreign scholars who wrote frankly on the Armenian Genocide were condemned by Turkish officials (Whitehorn, 2009). The Turkish state even blocked major American filmmakers' attempts to portray the genocide.

Several high profile academic cases of genocide denial arose in the United States and raised questions about academic accountability. Historian Richard Hovannisian challenged fellow UCLA academic Stanford Shaw for his writings on Turkish history that either ignored or greatly downplayed key evidence on the genocide. Political scientist Roger Smith and his colleagues documented Heath Lowry's planning and drafting of genocide denial comments for the Turkish ambassador to the United States.

The question arises "Why deny past genocide by a previous regime, when confronted by extensive documentary evidence, survivor testimonies and foreign witnesses?" There are several possible reasons for Turkey's stance. People often cannot believe that their ancestors could commit terrible deeds. For many Turks, raised on incomplete or skewed histories, a gap in their knowledge of the actual events is a factor. Turks also fear their country might lose lands, money, and prestige, if they acknowledge the crimes. They don't wish to have the state's power and legitimacy weakened. Quite significantly, Turkish intolerance and animosity towards some ethnic and religious minorities continue.

The duration and volume of state-sponsored denial publications certainly make it vastly more difficult to achieve closure on a painful period of history. It is particularly so for the victim community, most of whom live in a scattered diaspora far from their ancestral homeland. Turkish genocide denial significantly adds to the suffering of Armenians worldwide. It adds to a new cycle of nationalist tensions between the two peoples.

Genocide denial by a state is often a symptom that the government in question still embraces an authoritarian culture, continues to scapegoat its former victims, and is willing to use intimidation and force to silence others. It seems fertile ground for additional ethnic mass killings. For the cycle to be broken, education and "facing history" are key.

While academic publications with their analytical models and scientific methods of evidence collection are central to confronting genocide denial, another important approach is to reach beyond the detached scholarly format and employ the more personal and engaged literary writing tradition that can tap the emotions of the heart and motivate the readers into action.

Survivor Memoirs and Historical Novels[4]

The Armenian Genocide and earlier massacres are defining aspects of the contemporary Armenian heritage and identity. By far the dominant literary mode of expression about the Armenian Genocide are those of survivor memoirs and historical novels, with the latter often greatly influenced by extended family histories. It is the literature of bearing witness and a key goal is to remember the Great Crime/Catastrophe. Lorne Shirinian's *Survivor Memoirs of the Armenian Genocide* (1999) was an early overview summary booklet of some of these works in English. More recently, pioneering academic volumes by Rubina Peroomian *The Armenian Genocide in Literature: Perceptions of Those Who Lived Through the Years of Calamity* (2012) and *The Armenian Genocide in Literature: The Second Generation Responds* (2015), with a forthcoming volume on the third generation in progress, provide a comprehensive account of Armenian writings on the massacres and 1915 genocide

The first generation of genocide survivor authors had endured traumatic events and struggled to describe their horrific experiences. Many had little or no previous experience at literary writing, but given the terrible magnitude of what they had endured and witnessed, they felt an historic duty to pen personal accounts of what happened. Their primary audiences were immediate family members and later generations of Armenians. The authors not only sought to tell the family history to the next generation and the outside public, but also to combat ongoing Turkish denial and injustice. Many of these books were self-published. Sometimes the manuscripts remained in draft form, often untranslated into English, until significantly later. Even now, we do not have a full compendium list of these works in English, let alone Armenian and other languages. Nevertheless, these early accounts provided an important foundation and inspiration for later generations growing up in the diaspora. They also ensured that the mass deportations and massacres did not become a "forgotten genocide".

Amongst the memoirs printed in English, two of the most famous were penned early on within several years of each other in the United States. Genocide survivor Arshaluys Martikian/Aurora Mardiganian's autobiography *Ravished Armenia* (1918) was serialized in newspapers, then was turned into a popular book, and shortly thereafter became, what was probably, Hollywood's first genocide film. Sadly, the film only exists in fragments and in script form. American Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau's witness memoir *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story* (1918), also drawing upon consular reports, provided detailed accounts of the Turkish government's mass deportations and killings of the Armenians. It also noted American efforts to stop the Young Turk perpetrators and provide urgent assistance to the victims. Grigoris Balakian's *Armenian Golgotha: A Memoir of the Armenian Genocide* (2009) is an epic 500-page account by a distinguished Armenian clergyman. While it was first published in Armenian in two volumes in 1922 and 1959, it was not available in English for almost nine decades. The lack of early translation into English was and remains a major challenge, preventing many memoirs from achieving wider readership sooner.

Amongst the memoirs available in English (listed by year of publication) are the following: clergyman Abraham H. Hartunian's *Neither To Laugh Nor to Weep: A Memoir of the Armenian Genocide* (1968). Other memoirs include Kerop Bedoukian's *The Urchin: An Armenian Escape* (1978) reprinted as *Some of Us Survived* (1979), Alice Muggerditchian Shipley's *We Walked, Then We Ran* (1983), John (Hovhannes) Minassian's *Many Hills to Climb* (1986), Hovhannes Mugrditchian's *To Armenians with Love* (1986), Bertha Nakshian Ketchian's *In the Shadow of the Fortress: The Genocide Remembered* (1988), John Yervant's (Yervant Kouyoumjian) *Needles, Thread and Button* (1988), Ramela Martin's Our of Darkness (1989), Ephraim K. Jernazian's *Judgment Unto Truth: Witnessing the Armenian Genocide* (1990), Armen Anush's *Passage Through Hell: A Memoir* (2007), Shahen Derderian's *Death March* (2008), Yervant Odian's *Accursed Years: My Exile and Return From Der Zor, 1914-1919* (2009), and Karnig Panian's *Goodbye, Antoura: A Memoir of the Armenian Genocide* (2015).

The next generations' writings were influenced by not only the 1915 genocide, but also their lives and experiences with their dual identities of emigre/immigrant family members in the global Diaspora. Their writings reveal that the wounds of genocide are deep and span several generations. The Diaspora writers described their alienation and profound separation from their ancestral homeland and from the many dead and displaced kin. Existential angst was a frequent and important theme.

From the 1960s onwards, particularly following the 50th anniversary in 1965 of the Armenian Genocide, awareness and writing on the subject increased. A growing number of Diaspora writers sought to explore their roots and tell of their fellow Armenians' tragic fate. The Greek-American Elia Kazan's *America America* (1961) was a novel, screenplay, and then acclaimed epic film that describes the terrible plight of the Christian Armenian and Greek minorities in the Ottoman Empire. Peter Sourian's novel *The Gate* (1965) also focuses on the Armenian Genocide. Michael Arlen's *Passage to Ararat* (1975) addresses the challenges of assimilation, the quest for identity and tells of an odyssey of ethnic self-discovery. Peter Najarian's *Voyages* (1971) and *Daughters of Memory* (1986) also recounts the Armenian story and the quest for identity in the Diaspora. David Kherdian outlines his mother's life in *The Road from Home: The Story of an Armenian Girl* (1979). Carol Edgarian's *Rise the Euphrates* (1994) shows that later generations of American-born Armenians continue to suffer from the lasting effects of genocide. In *Vergeen: A Survivor of the Armenian Genocide* (1996), Mae Derdarian confronts Turkish revisionist denial of the genocide. Dora Sakayan's edited and translated her grandfather's journal in *An Armenian Doctor in Turkey: Garadabed Hatcherian: My Smyrna Ordeal of 1922* (1997). Peter Balakian's award-winning and highly influential *Black Dog of Fate* (1998) outlines a complex existential journey that commences in the comfortable suburbs of America, but gradually reveals a past history of increasing layers of violence and suffering of the Ottoman Armenian extended family. It resembles the descent into deeper levels of hell.

The dawn of the 21st century saw a continuatom in literary writings on the Armenian Genocide. The potential list is substantial. Amongst the volumes are the following: Agop Hacikyan's *A Summer without Dawn* (2000) recounts his growing awareness of the magnitude of the genocide. The novel *Lines in the Sand: Love, Tragedy, and the Armenian Genocide* (2001) is

by the genocide documentary film-maker Thomas Ohanian. Vickie Smith Foston's *Victoria's Secret: A Conspiracy of Silence* (2001) describes how her Armenian ancestors fled the Hamidian massacres of the 1890s. *Three Apples Fell from Heaven* (2001) is inspired by Micheline Aharonian Marcom's discovery of her grandmother's life story. Theodore Kharpertian's *Hagop: An Armenian Genocide Survivor's Journey to Freedom* (2003) is an account of his father's ordeals. Sara Chitjian transcribed, translated and published her father's drafts of his memoirs in *A Hair's Breath From Death: The Memoirs of Hampartzoum Mardiros Chitjian* (2003). Antonia Arslan's *Skylark Farm (*2004) is a historical novel about her family's suffering during the genocide and was later turned into the film "The Lark Farm". Henri Verneuil's (Ashod Malikian) *Mayrig* (2006) is a historical novel about an Armenian family's difficult conditions living in forced exile. The book was later turned into a film. Margaret Adjemian Ahmert's *The Knock at the Door* (2007) is the story of the survival of Margaret's mother amidst the mass deportations and massacres. Marcella Polain's *The Edge of the World* (2007) is a "fictionalized autobiography" that describes the fragmentation of an Armenian family by the genocide and forced exile.

In the lead up to 2015, the 100th memorial year of the genocide, an increased number of volumes appeared from another generation of Diaspora writers. Chris Bohjalian's *The Sandcastle Girls* (2012) is a romantic novel set amidst the genocide. Dana Walrath's *Like Water on a Stone* (2014), echoing a Greek tragedy's epic poem, tells a harrowing literary tale of two children surviving the ordeals of the genocide. Drawing upon his relatives' earlier attempts, Armen T. Marsoobian pens a family history in *Fragments of a Lost Homeland: Remembering Armenia* (2015). Maral Boyadjian's *As the Poppies Bloomed* (2015) is a romantic novel set amidst the genocide. Dawn Anahid MacKeen's *The Hundred Year Walk: An Armenian Odyssey* (2016) involves the intertwined autobiographies of a genocide survivor and that of his granddaughter, who retraces his perilous journey a century later.

The different generations of memoirs and historical novels on the Armenian Genocide reveal the ongoing suffering of Armenians throughout the world. The genocide has become a key defining part of the Armenian identity. As such, Armenian authors, even a century later, feel compelled to write accounts of the Armenian Genocide and, in so doing, ensure that it does not become a "forgotten genocide".

Feature Films[5]

A number of feature films have been attempted or made that deal with the Armenian Genocide. Amongst the more notable are: *Ravished Armenia/Auction of Souls* (1919), *America, America* (1963), *Nahapet* (1977), *Forty Days of Musa Dagh* (1982), *Mayrig* (1991), *Ararat* (2002), *The Cut* (2014), *1915* (2015), *The Promise* (2016). Often the films are based on survivor memoirs or historical novels.

What is little known today is that a pioneering Hollywood film from the silent era dealt with the Armenian Genocide. *Ravished Armenia/Auction of Souls* is the biographical account of

a young orphan girl, Arshaluys Mardigian (later renamed Aurora Mardiganian, who having witnessed most of her family being killed, managed to flee the massacres and later immigrated as a teenager to the United States (Matiossian & Whitehorn, 2014; Slide, 1997). Her biography entitled *Ravished Armenia: The Story of Aurora Mardiganian: The Christian Girl Who Lived Through the Great Massacres,* was first serialized in the Hearst newspapers and later published as a book in 1918. The memoir was then turned into a film. The history-based 85 minute movie was a silent film (with sub-titles). It portrayed the mass deportations, rapes and massacres of Armenians. It had Aurora Mardiganian herself as the lead character. Remarkably, the movie also featured in actual person Henry Morgenthau, the former US Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. The film was shot in California in 1918 with a cast of thousands of extras. Initially titled "Ravished Armenia," the movie was renamed "Auction of Souls." It was, in all likelihood, the first major Hollywood picture to portray genocide. In a number of ways, it was a pioneering film. To cast a genocide survivor as the lead actress is rare. As a post-WW I film, it certainly challenged conventional mores regarding violence, rape, and nudity. It also raised the censorship issue, both morally and politically. Turkish opposition in later years reinforced the latter.

The US film premieres took place in Los Angeles and New York in 1919. While film screenings were initially numerous and well-attended, the frequency of airings diminished. Over time, copies of the film were lost, destroyed or deteriorated. No known remaining full copy exists today. The history books on the early silent film era have mostly ignored the movie "Ravished Armenia/Auction of Souls." What had been an often seen and cited movie that helped to raise crucial humanitarian relief funds (e.g. Near East Relief) was now mostly ignored either by accident, bias, or malevolent design. The Armenian Genocide Museum in Yerevan, Armenia has an important section of its exhibition devoted to Aurora Mardiganian, her memoirs and the film. For some, Aurora Mardiganian is the 'Anne Frank of the Armenian Genocide.'

Franz Viktor Werfel wrote the novel *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* which dealt with the siege of the town of Musa Dagh during the Armenian Genocide. The novel tells the story of one of the few examples of armed resistance by the Armenians to the deportations and killings by the Young Turk regime. The episode is also one of the few historical examples of foreign power humanitarian assistance arriving in timely fashion. French naval ships in the Mediterranean saw the besieged civilians and escorted them to safety in British-controlled Egypt. Efforts by the major Hollywood studio MGM to make a film version of the novel between the 1930s and 1970s were all unsuccessful. This was largely due to significant foreign pressure and interference by the Turkish government, supported by the US State Department. Decades later, a lower budget version directed by Sarky Mouradian was filmed in 1982, but achieved very little distribution.

The Greek-American Elia Kazan penned an autobiographical book about the suffering of his extended family and fellow Greeks and Armenians under Turkish rule. In 1963, he turned the book into the epic film *America, America.*

Nahapet (1977) (Patriarch) is a Soviet era film based on a novel by Hrachya Kochar and describes how a genocide survivor (Nahapet) attempts to rebuild his life amidst the rugged mountains of Soviet Armenia. One of the recurring scenes involves scores of red apples falling from a tree, rolling into a river and floating en masse downstream. The scene is a painful

symbolic reminder of the multitude of Armenian bodies thrown into the Euphrates by the Young Turk regime during the genocide.

Mayrig ("Mother" in Armenian) is the title of a 1985 semi-autobiographical French-language novel by Henri Verneuil (born Ashod Malakian,) a French-Armenian author and filmmaker. The story is about a multi-generational family's efforts to survive post-genocide exile and is a powerful account of the lingering inter-generational effects of genocide, even decades later.

Ararat (2002) by Atom Egoyan is a multi-layered and a complex drama. Egoyan's actual film portrays a fictional director making an historical drama about the heroic Armenian people's resistance to the Turkish military siege of the city of Van in 1915. A young Armenian boy and his beloved mother endured dreadful conditions during the bombardment and siege. She later dies as a refugee, while the young boy eventually emigrates to the United States, change his name, and become the prominent artist Arshile Gorky. His melancholy twin paintings "The Artist and His Mother" are iconic and play a key role in the film. *Ararat* dwells upon these works of art to convey the anguish and grieving for a deceased mother and a fractured family life. Amongst the re-occurring threads woven into film are the enormous impact of genocide, intergenerational transmission of trauma and the continuing pain of ongoing Turkish denial. The closing hymn "Oor es mayr eem/Mother, where are you?" sung by international soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian is heart-breaking.

The Cut (2014) by Fatim Akin follows the painful odyssey of a young Armenian man who conscripted, along with fellow Armenians, to do forced road labour, barely survives the Turkish cutting of the throats of the unarmed Armenian workers. Now mute from the cut, this lonely survivor endures further hardship and danger and gives up hope that any in his family is still alive. He travels from one place of exile after another, eventually ending up in the United States, where to his surprise, he reunites with part of his surviving family.

Garin Hovannisian and Alex Mouhibian's film *1915* was released on the 100th memorial year of 2015 and is based on a director and his actress wife's staging a play in Los Angeles about the Armenian Genocide. The historical play draws protest demonstrations outside and mysterious incidents and apparitions inside. The ghosts of the genocide from the past press powerfully onto the present in this hauntingly powerful film.

Terry George's *The Promise* (2016) tells the story of an American reporter who befriends two young Armenians and the three form a love triangle. Before long, with the arrival of WW I, the foreign journalist bears witness to the mass deportations and massacres of Armenians. Amongst the scenes portrayed is the self-defence resistance at Musa Dagh. Unlike the fate of most of their fellow Armenians, many of these inhabitants survive with the help and rescue of nearby French naval ships.

Feature films continue to be an effective means to convey to the public at large the deep and enduring impact of genocide. In most cases, the focus is on the victims and their enormous suffering, both during the deportations and killings and even decades after.

Poetry[6]

Poetry has had a long and powerful tradition in Armenian culture. With the persecutions and massacres of Armenians in the 19th and early 20th centuries, it is not surprising to find themes in the poetry about the deaths, mourning the loss, and anger at the perpetrators' impunity.

The Ottoman regime's mass arrest on April 24, 1915 of over 250 Armenian religious, political and community leaders, and intellectuals (including poets) was a key opening phase of the Armenian Genocide. Amongst those poets arrested on that date and later killed were Siamanto (Atom Yarjanian), Daniel Varoujan and Rouben Sevak. Their deaths and the abrupt cessation of their writings constitute cultural genocide. Despite their deaths, their voices still can be heard as Siamanto had penned a collection of poems that depicted the 1909 Adana Massacre and were published in *Bloody News From My Friend*.

Surviving poets like Vahan Tekeyan who had been living in Egypt in 1915 or others like Yeghishe Charents who lived in the Armenian region of the Russian Empire and would later die in the Stalinist purges in the Soviet Union, wrote about genocide. Tekeyan's collection of poems can be found in *Sacred Wrath*.

One of the major challenges of the poetry by Armenians on the genocide is that most of the survivors wrote in Armenian and not in English. Thus, there was often a considerable delay, if at all, of publication in English. As a result, many of the writers from the first generation of the genocide were not as well-known outside of the Armenian community and even in parts of the assimilated Diaspora. This global challenge continues even to this day since a significant number of poets, both in Armenia and the Diaspora, continue to write in Armenian.

As time passed, however, second and third generations of poets, including those in the Diaspora who were fluent in English, came onto the scene. These included Diana Der Hovanessian, Peter Balakian, David Kherdian, Nancy Kricorian, Lorne Shirinian and others (many of their poems appearing either in anthologies or on the Armenian Poetry Project website (armenianpoetry.blogspot.ca) founded and co-ordinated by Lola Koundakjian. Sometimes academic analysis and poetry converge, as seen in Alan Whitehorn's poem "The Verbs of Genocide" (Whitehorn, 2012) which explores the phases of genocide:

Categorized/stereotyped/stigmatized/marginalized/disenfranchised./

Deprived/victimized/robbed/ghettoized/deported./

Stripped/raped/tortured/murdered./

Mutilated/dismembered/discarded/denied./

Forgotten?

With the 100th memorial year of the Armenian Genocide, younger poets in Armenia and the Diaspora continue to pen accounts of the inter-generational effects of genocide. The extended

family memories and the memorial services serve as catalysts for additional poems about the genocidal suffering, sorrow and anger. All are given greater impetus by ongoing official Turkish state denial. The perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide had sought to kill the leading Armenian intellectuals and to eradicate the culture of their Armenian victims, but ironically the genocidal deeds have, in the long run, actually acted as a catalyst for a phoenix-like rebirth of the Armenian poetic tradition. Despite so much death, both life and literature can still prevail. We can continue to remember and give hope.

Art[7]

Before the widespread use of photographs, films and videos, the dominant forms of visual presentation of catastrophic events were the paintings and sketches of artists. The Armenian massacres of the 1890s and 1909 and the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923 became the focus of powerful works of art. By far the most comprehensive volume on this topic is the bilingual (English and Armenian) book *The Color of Pain: The Reflections of the Armenian Genocide in Armenian Painting.* A number of the paintings are located in either the National Gallery of Armenia or the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute in Yerevan where a large selection of Jansem's paintings has been on display. Other paintings can be found listed in the Legacy Project website about art and cataclysmic events.

Among the more famous or powerful paintings on the Armenian Genocide and its precursor massacres are the works of Hovhannes Aivazovsky's "Night: Tragedy at the Sea of Marmara"; Vartges Sureniants' "Massacre of Virgins", "Sanctity: Trampled On"; Hmayak Ardzatbanian's "Turkish Atrocity"; Arshile Gorky's (Vostanik Adoyan) "The Artist and His Mother"; Jansem's (Hovhannes Semerdjian) "Blue Massacre" and "Decapitated 'Flowers'"; Grigor Khandjian's "Unsilenceable Belfry"; Hagop Hagopian's "The Gaolbird". Particularly iconic is Gorky's "The Artist and His Mother" which has been used in a number of Armenian Genocide books and was a central focus in Atom Egoyan's Armenian Genocide film "Ararat". Variations of Nora Patrich's paintings entitled "Why?" have appeared on the covers of two Armenian Genocide books. In both, Patrich shows a mournful mother cradling a dead infant amidst a backdrop of a mass of piled up bodies. The dominant colors of the painting are red for blood and black reflecting bleak, agonizing memories. This is a powerful piece of art that in a single painting vividly conveys the essence of genocide.

Since the fateful year of 1915 is a defining event for the Armenian people, artistic images of genocide continue to be painted one generation after another.

Music[8]

Music inspired by the Armenian Genocide exists in a number of forms and waves. The first wave is that composed and performed by the first generation of survivors. Verjine Svazlian, in her monumental 848 page volume *The Armenian Genocide: Testimonies of the Eyewitness*

Survivors (2011) includes "historical song-testimonies" from that era. For many survivors, the songs were personal and emotional ways of coping with their suffering and grief. Svazlian spent more than a half century collecting, transcribing and translating the "song testimonies" and collated them around several phases/themes of genocide: songs of the imprisoned; songs of deportation and massacre; songs of child-deprived mothers, orphans, and orphanages; and songs of the occupied homeland and of the rightful claim.

The renowned priest and composer Komitas (Soghomon Soghomonian) only barely physically survived the genocide, but, like so many others, struggled enormously trying to deal with the trauma. His composition "Andouni" (Song of the Homeless) was performed by soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian as a tribute to the genocide victims in her documentary film "A Long Journey Home".

In 1975, the illustrious Armenian-French singer Charles Aznavour (Chahnour Aznavourian) co-wrote with George Garvarentz and performed the somber song in French "Ils sont tombes" [They have fallen] (Der-Sarkissian, 2007). Its lyrics capture the essence of genocide. Amongst the more memorable lines: They fell without knowing why/Men, women, and children whose only wish was to live./…./They were mutilated, massacred, while their eyes were full of fear./…./They fell silently,/By thousands, and the millions, while the world remained silent./In the desert, their bodies looked like miniscule red flowers,/Covered by a sandstorm, which also concealed their existence./…/Only to die anywhere, without leaving any trace/Ignored, forgotten as they were going into eternal sleep./…./I, myself, am of this race which now sleeps without a resting place/Who chose to die rather than relinquish the faith,/…/Death struck them, regardless of their age,/Their only crime being childen of Armenia.

In the 1990s contemporary rock and video era, Armenian-Americans Serj Tankian and other members of the heavy metal rock band "System of a Down" recorded the discordant song "P.L.U.C.K." an acronym for "Politically Lying Unholy Cowardly Killers". The lyrics of the song include the lines: Elimination/….Die!/Why?/…./We've taken all your shit, now it's time for restitution./ Recognition, Restoration, Reparation/…./The plan was mastered and called Genocide……/Took all the children and then we died,…./The few that remained were never found,…./All in a system of Down. In 2006, the BBC co-produced the documentary feature *Screamers*, directed by Carla Garapedian, about the band members, their genocide education activism cause, and performance tour. Armenian music expresses the experience of the genocide in a variety of ways.

Conclusion

'How do you describe the indescribable?' was a challenge for journalists, diplomats and missionaries witnessing the Armenian Genocide first-hand. Reports in the *New York Times* and other newspapers in 1915 attempted to find the words. Legal scholars and academics created new analytical concepts to try to comprehend the incomprehensible. As a result, we saw the emergence of the terms war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. Political historians

offered increasing, even overwhelming, archival evidence to confront ongoing genocide denial by some. All of these documentary approaches sought to describe, analyze and explain.

However, to simply know information rationally does not necessarily overcome indifference and inertia by the multitude of bystanders. The Arts, by mobilizing the emotions of the heart through empathy, sympathy, compassion and even outrage at injustice, can complement other means of communication and thereby assist in fostering greater insight and engagement. This has been the case for the Armenian Genocide and the Arts, as it has been also for the Holocaust and the Arts. The autobiography of Aurora Mardiganian, like the diary of Anne Frank, resonates profoundly and in enduring ways. The number 1,500,000 is exceedingly difficult for most of us to comprehend, but the personal story of a young teenage orphan girl and the enormous suffering she endured are perhaps within our grasp. Her hopes and fears, we can relate to. We can remember her life and that of her family and in so doing, resist genocide denial.

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[1] Portions of this section draw upon Alan Whitehorn "Describing the Indescribable" in Alan Whitehorn, ed., *The Armenian Genocide: The Essential Reference Guide* (2015) and in *The Armenian Weekly*, March 14, 2015 and other Diaspora newspapers.

[2] Portions of this section draw upon Alan Whitehorn "Entente Declaration on Crimes Against Humanity" in Alan Whitehorn, ed., *The Armenian Genocide: The Essential Reference Guide* (2015).

[3] Portions of this section draw upon Alan Whitehorn "Denial of the Armenian Genocide" in Alan Whitehorn, ed., *The Armenian Genocide: The Essential Reference Guide* (2015).

[4] I am grateful to Rubina Peroomian for her pioneering books and entry on "Literature" in Alan Whitehorn, ed., *The Armenian Genocide: The Essential Reference Guide* (2015).

[5] Portions of this section draw upon Alan Whitehorn "Feature Films" in Alan Whitehorn, ed., *The Armenian Genocide: The Essential Reference Guide* (2015).

[6] Portions of this section draw upon Alan Whitehorn "Poetry" in Alan Whitehorn, ed., *The Armenian Genocide: The Essential Reference Guide* (2015).

[7] Portions of this section draw upon Alan Whitehorn "Art" in Alan Whitehorn, ed., *The Armenian Genocide: The Essential Reference Guide* (2015).

[8] Portions of this section draw upon Alan Whitehorn "Music" in Alan Whitehorn, ed., *The Armenian Genocide: The Essential Reference Guide* (2015).