

# Genocide

*Khatchatur I. Pilikian*

*Born in Mosul in 1939, Khatchatur Pilikian, the distinguished musician and scholar, lived and studied in Iraq, Lebanon and Italy, before settling in London.*

In a masterpiece poem entitled *Akşam Gesintisi (An Evening Promenade)*, written soon after he was released from prison in 1950, Nazim Hikmet remembered his Armenian friend whose father was butchered ‘in the Kurdish mountains’. Hikmet versified his rage against such crimes, calling them ‘this black shame brought on the Turkish people’ (*bu karayy sürenleri Türk halkýnýn alnina*).

Kemalist Turkey had kept its greatest poet, Hikmet, incarcerated for 13 years. The original inhabitants in their ancestral lands having been wiped away, Western or ‘Turkish’ Armenia, and parts of Eastern or ‘Russian’ Armenia, eventually became parts of the Kemalist Republic of Turkey in 1923. The eminent British member of both *The Balkan* and *The British Armenian Committee*, Bishop Harold Buxton, assessed the human cost of the Genocide of the Armenians:

‘In the First World War, the Armenians lost as many lives as did the whole British Empire.’

Let me confess, both my parents, who dared outlive the Genocide of 1915, never entertained hatred towards the Turkish people. I feel serenely proud of that ethical heritage. That magnum crime was, my parents believed, the essence of the rabid nationalist politics nurtured among the late-Ottoman hierarchy, eventually sanctioned by the proto-Nazi Young Turks.

Deep in my heart I wish Armenians had no such experience to talk about. I would have been happier if people all over the world also had no such terrorising experience. But most importantly, I truly believe that our precious and only world will be a much better place to live, and die

for that matter, if that ultimate state terrorism is banished from existence for all times to come. No wonder this plea, mentioned in an Armenian dictum:

‘I pray God not to let this evil befall my worst enemy.’

Whenever and wherever it happened, and alas it still happens, genocide is always premeditated, conceptualised, and its execution meticulously organised at the highest governmental levels. Significantly, implementing genocide always demanded world turbulence characterising each such epoch. During centuries of colonial expansion and endemic wars, genocide and slavery were the necessary masts of the pirating strategy for the conquest of land and raw material. All colonial powers were engaged in it. World opinion, still in its infancy, was no more than a feeble gesture.

The imperialism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century made a world war somehow the ‘prerequisite’ for any attempt to implement the execution of genocide as a ‘final solution’. World opinion was starting to bite. The UN was founded and ‘man’s inhumanity to man’ had finally a name – *Genocide*, and an international tribunal (Nuremberg) was set to condemn and punish its perpetrators.

But, even after the Second World War, another epochal turbulence – the Cold War – ‘acted’ as a ‘shock absorber’ for horrendous genocides. Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>, the Cold War finally melted away in the heat of the arrogance of globalisation, while genocide persists on the threshold of rampant conflicts in many corners of the world.

The new world turbulence is now labelled the Long War, the latest neo-con synonym for the war on terror. Wars were not and are not causes but excuses for Genocides.

In the case of the Genocide of the Armenians, the crucial vicious acts were already initiated and were being executed before Ottoman Turkey’s declaration of War on 5 November 1914. In a nutshell, the Armenian tragedy did not start in 1915 because of World War One – as the Ottoman Young Turk government and subsequent Turkish governments were, and remain, keen to link this magnum historical criminal act with the First World War; hence their claim of ‘betrayal’ of the Armenians. Even, alas, our In Memoriam, 24 April 1915, took the date of rounding up of Armenian intellectuals as the ‘starting’ point of our great tragedy, unwittingly ‘yielding’ to the criminal excuse. Here are the stages of man’s inhumanity to man before 1915.

### **A. Preliminary Implementation**

Kâmil Pasha (1838-1912), Grand Vizier or the Prime Minister of the

Ottoman Empire and four times Sultan Abdul Hamid's prime minister, declared in the late 1870s:

'If we nurtured snakes in our midst in Europe, we should not repeat the same folly in Asiatic Tajkistan [Turkey] ... Thus, we must eliminate, leave behind no traces of that Armenian nation. And to accomplish this task, we are lacking in nothing; ... We can declare a religious war – waged against a nation that has no arms, no army, and no defender, whereas, in contrast, we have one of the greatest and richest states of the world as our comrade-in-arms and the guardian of our Asian world.' (*Quoted in the Armenian literary monthly, Ports=Trials. Tiflis, 1879.*)

From 1894-1896 in Sassun, Van, Zeitun and Diarbekir, Turkish attacks resulted in the massacre of 300,000 Armenians. Some 3,000 villages were burned. Professor Em. Dillon (1854-1933), the Irish linguist and journalist, sketched the tragedy and concluded:

'It is already proven that the pillage and the massacres of Sassun is the deliberately organized act of the Sublime Porte, an act planned meticulously and executed mercilessly.'

### **B. Preparatory/tactical executions**

The massacres in Adana (Cilicia) of April 1909 resulted in 30,000 Armenian deaths.

'This massacre was more terrible than those in the days of Abdul Hamid ... Those Armenians who had succeeded in escaping the first carnage are now destroyed. Adana has become a veritable inferno.'

*Helen Davenport Gibbons, eyewitness to the Adana massacres*

On 27 July 1914, the government of the Young Turks started conscripting Armenians, before the First World War broke out. The move was intended to deplete the Armenian nation of its able-bodied male population, who were herded into *amele tabourou* (labour battalions), eventually to order them to dig their own mass graves ...

On 2 August 1914, the Young Turks decided to create out of its *Teshkilati Makhsusa* (special formation), a new structure to deal with 'interior matters', so as to start and implement their proto-Nazi Party conference decisions.

On 6 August 1914, a secret agreement between Turkey and Germany promised Caucasus (including Eastern/Russian Armenia) to Turkey.

Before Ottoman Turkey's declaration of war on the Entente powers (5 November) and until December 1914, 200,000 Armenian civilians, mostly

women, the elderly and children were uprooted and decimated, not counting the imminent tragedy, as mentioned above, prepared for the 300,000 conscripted Armenian male population. A few thousand Armenians had managed to flee and reach Russian-occupied Eastern Armenia. Many of them served in the volunteer regiments of the Tsar, fighting in Western, so-called ‘Turkish’ Armenia. An estimated 300,000 Armenians fought alongside the Entente powers in Europe and the Middle East, including Palestine – a classic example of cannon fodder of 600,000 Armenians sacrificing their lives, country and all for the imperialist appetites of both the Entente and the Central Powers.

The First World War set the stage for the Final Solution.

### **C. Strategic Executions / Final Solution**

Thus declared Nazim Bey Selanikly (1870-1926), the executive secretary of the Young Turks Central Board, early in 1915, during a Central Board meeting presided over by his comrade-brother Talaat:

‘It is imperative that the Armenian people be completely exterminated; that not even one single Armenian be left on our soil; that the name ‘Armenian’ be obliterated. We are now at war; there is no more auspicious occasion than this; this country must be purged of all non-Turk elements.’

Starting on 24 April 1915, until mid-May, the Armenian civic population was practically depleted of its intellectuals; 196 writers, 575 musicians, 336 doctors, 176 teachers and college professors, 160 lawyers, 62 architects, 64 actors ... were arrested, deported, disappeared for good.

On 15 June 1915, twenty prominent members of the Armenian Social Democratic Hnchakian Party were hanged in Bayazit Square, Istanbul. The Hnchakians stood in opposition to the Ittihadists. That was a mortal sin.

The culminating act of the genocidal scheme was thus set in motion. The elderly, women and children, nearly the entire Armenian population of Asia Minor, was ordered out, southwards towards the deserts of Northern Syria. Vandalism, rape, extortion, torture, starvation, murder raids ... *ad infinitum*. The rest is the scream of humanity at its most infernal. The basic question remains: what kind of world are we living in?