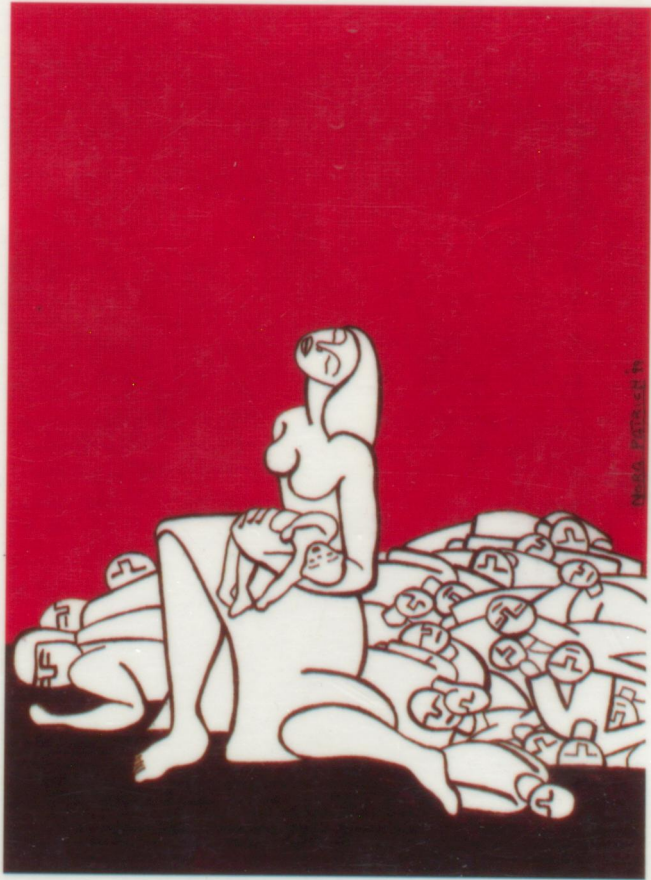


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The Armenian Genocide:
Resisting the Inertia of Indifference

Lorne Shirinian and Alan Whitehorn



Blue Heron Press

**The Armenian Genocide:
Resisting the Inertia of Indifference**

Lorne Shirinian and Alan Whitehorn

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An earlier version of “The Armenian Genocide: A Canadian Perspective” was presented at the Conference on Human Rights Issues in the Eastern Mediterranean and Asia Minor held in Toronto, May 19-21, 2000, sponsored by the Hellenic-Canadian Federation of Ontario.

**Lorne Shirinian dedicates this work
to the Shirinian and the Mazmanian families.**

Alan Whitehorn dedicates this work to Siroun Hamamjian

**This book is for all those who have suffered
and still suffer from genocide.**

Introduction

As relatives of survivors of the Armenian Genocide, we grew up with the terrible stories of slaughter and the miraculous tales of survival of our family members and their friends—fellow orphans and exiles who had also survived the Genocide and had come to Canada to begin new lives in the Armenian diaspora. As we passed through the various stages of our lives, we would share our past, the rich history and culture, and the awful stories of destruction of a people whose nation lay at the crossroads of East and West and thus were the constant victims of conquerors: Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arab, Mongols, and finally the Turks. Each put its mark on Armenians throughout the ages, but none more violently and more definitively than the Ottoman Turks. On April 24, 1915, the Ottoman Turkish government headed by Talaat Pasha, Enver Pasha, and Djemal Pasha, unleashed a premeditated plot to rid the Ottoman Empire of its Armenian citizens.¹ Throughout the Empire except in Constantinople and in Smyrna, where there was a considerable foreign presence of the diplomatic core and commercial interests, Armenians were expelled from their homes and homeland and forced upon the dusty roads without adequate food or shelter, where they were subject to murderers, marauders, soldiers, and the hostile population of Turks and Kurds.² Those who survived the death marches ended up in camps in the desert of Der-Zor in what today is Syria, where starvation and disease awaited them. After the war, those who had survived were gathered in refugee camps run by the Red Cross and Near East Relief, whose workers tried desperately to reunite families. It was in these circumstances that our grandparents and parents survived. When Kemal Atatürk began his nationalist war to rid Turkey of foreigners, the Armenian survivors were moved once more to other orphanages in the Middle East and in Greece.

Lorne's father—Mampre Shirinian—was in the Armenian orphanage in Corfu, Greece, when he was randomly chosen to come to Canada by the Armenian Relief Society of Canada in conjunction with the Lord Mayor's Fund of London, England. He, along with 108 other orphans, came to Canada in

two groups in 1922 and 1924. They were brought to a Farm Home in Georgetown, Ontario, where they were taught skills in order to become farmers in Southern Ontario. It was at this orphanage that his father met his uncle, who would arrange for his younger sister Mariam Mazmanian, who was in an orphanage in Greece, to come to the farm home. My father and mother, two orphan survivors met and married in 1932. They went to Toronto where they began a business and new lives in Canada. They had two sons, Lorne and George, who are both very active in the field of Armenian studies.

Alan's grandmother—metzmama—was another of the many orphans of the 1915 genocide. As a young homeless child, she was found wandering the streets, not knowing her name or age. Somehow amidst the death and destruction she survived. Those who found her named her Sirhoun (Armenian for beautiful). As a child, Sirhoun spent many long and lonely years in various refugee camps in one country after another. Eventually she was to be shipped with other refugees to America, but en route disembarked in Egypt and was adopted by an Armenian family in the diaspora. Later she married another survivor and soon a child was born—Vartouie (Armenian for Rose). Alan's grandfather, however, could not cope with the horrific memory of the genocide, and committed suicide while his young bride was bearing her second child. Sirhoun was now a young, impoverished widow, but somehow she survived another tragedy. Amidst the devastating conflict of World War II, a Canadian-born Englishman and Armenian woman met in Alexandria, Egypt. It was West meets East. When the war ended, Malcolm and Vartouie went to England. Soon Alan was born, but given the housing shortages and post-war rationing, the family soon emigrated to Canada in the early 1950s, where they have lived ever since.

We both grew up as the inheritors of our families' personal and our nation's collective histories. With this comes the responsibility to try to right the immense wrong that was done to the Armenian nation in 1915. Histories, eye-witness testimonies, government documents, and survivor accounts clearly identify the perpetrator and the victims of genocide. Diplomatic accounts from many European countries and the

United States indicate without doubt that all knew the terrible extent of the human and material destruction. Nevertheless, many governments today—including the Canadian government—have chosen not to acknowledge officially that a genocide took place. Sadly, it seems that commercial interests are a greater priority than any moral imperative. The objective of this book is to sensitize Canadians that a community of their fellow citizens still suffers a great wrong and that it is in the power of our government to help partly heal the terrible wrong by acknowledging the Armenian Genocide, as the government of France has recently done.

The essays we have chosen to include are versions of papers presented at a conference on Human Rights abuses in the Eastern Mediterranean and Asia Minor, held in Toronto on May 19-21, 2000. Our approach and perspective to the Armenian Genocide are distinctly Canadian. In our interdependent and interconnected world, we are increasingly responsible for the way we act towards each other. It is our hope that these essays will bring a greater understanding of human rights issues as they pertain to the Armenian Genocide.

Lorne Shirinian and Alan Whitehorn,
Kingston, Ontario,
April 24, 2001.