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the *End* of the
Ottomans

*The Genocide of 1915 and the
Politics of Turkish Nationalism*

*Edited by Hans-Lukas Kieser,
Margaret Lavinia Anderson, Seyhan
Bayraktar and Thomas Schmutz*

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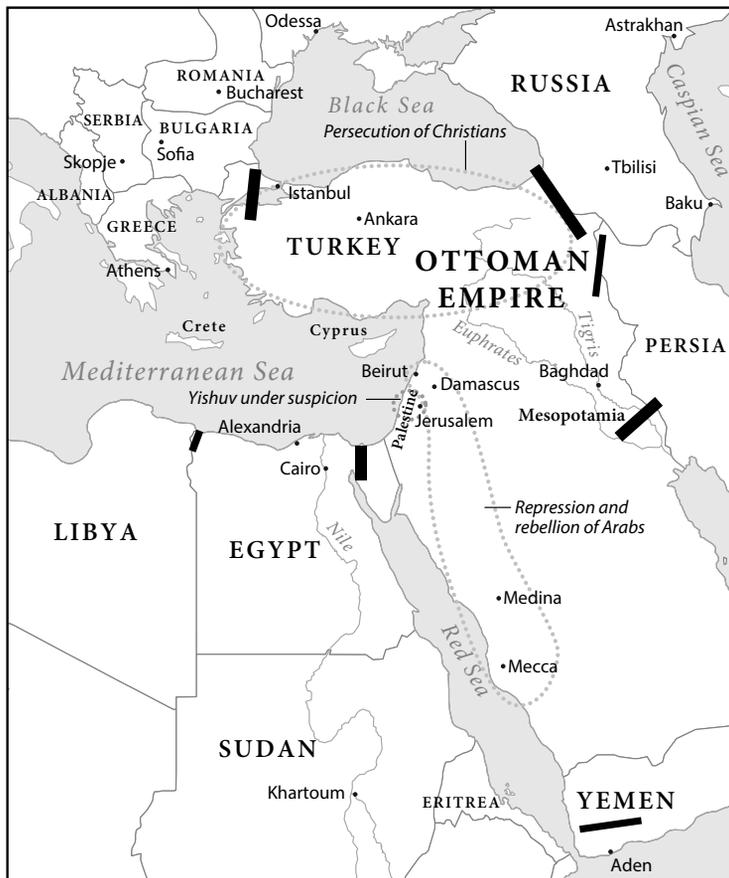
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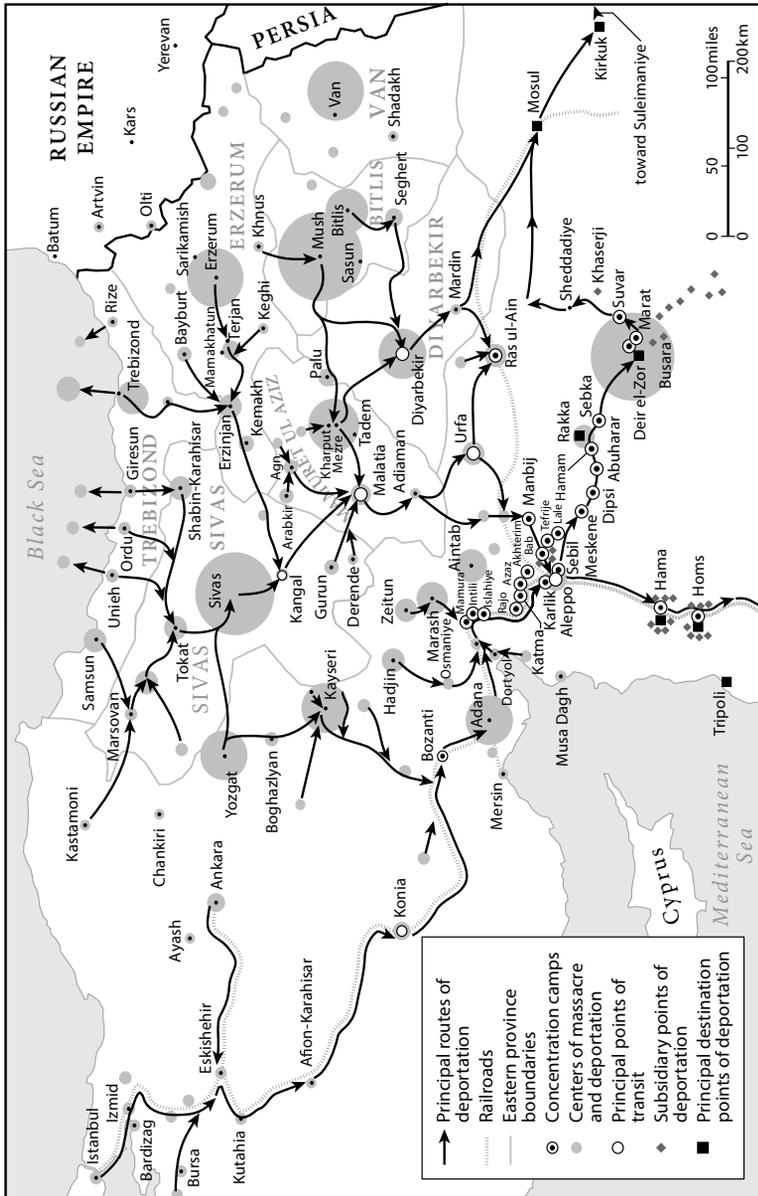
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Map 1 Ottoman total war, as of 1915: domestically and, at several military fronts, toward the exterior. Black bars indicate military fronts, grey dots show main regions where ‘war’ (systematic violence and coercion) targeted domestic groups.



Map 2 Armenian genocide in Ottoman Turkey, 1915–16.

Introduction: Unhealed Wounds, Perpetuated Patterns

Hans-Lukas Kieser and Margaret Lavinia Anderson

The First World War and ‘the decade of violence’, beginning in 1912, to which it belongs are the difficult ground in which today’s post-Ottoman Middle East is rooted. In this, the region presents a striking contrast to its European neighbours, whose modern histories have been framed by the results of the second world conflict, which ended in 1945. Yet perhaps even more striking has been the contrast between the rich historiography that from the very beginning has been devoted to the Great War among historians of Europe, reflecting the event’s still lively presence in popular culture, and the near century of neglect of that same war among scholars of the Ottoman Empire and the modern Middle East, encouraging a kind of enforced amnesia. Happily, the prospect of Turkey’s entry into the European Union and the approach of the Great War’s centenary, coupled with other developments, ended that neglect. In the past decade or so, scholarship on the Great War in the Ottoman Empire, and on its eve and aftermath, has grown greatly. This new work has made important contributions to our understanding of the history of violence, demographic engineering and nationalism in ways that transcend the region.

Even so, the Ottomans’ Great War has not lost its quality of a Pandora’s box, in terms of history as well as politics. For upwards of seven decades, the seminal genocide of Ottoman Armenians in 1915–16 had been a non-topic in scholarship on Turkey, the modern Middle East and greater Europe, and recent work has only begun to supply the detail and depth required to support a comprehensive historical narrative of the Ottoman 1910s and sustained analyses of that decade’s long-term implications. Not only must post-genocide matters, elsewhere a thriving field, be incorporated, but the era itself must be comprehensively rethought – which will not be without political implications. It is time to take stock of this new and solid knowledge and to examine, or re-examine, the persons and events whose long and often dark shadows have had such an impact on today’s Levant.

This decade of violence has established the thematic field of a Swiss-based project entitled ‘Ottoman Cataclysm’ and determined the specific objectives of a conference and follow-up workshop at the University of Zurich in 2015 and 2017, respectively. The present volume is the outcome of those academic meetings. Their subject was ‘Total War, Genocide, and Distant Futures’ (the title of the 2015 conference); that is, Ottoman Turkey’s darkest hours. Two further volumes will concentrate on the repercussions ‘After the Ottomans’, the series’ main title, exploring topics on the post-war Levant. One will deal with historiography and war myths; the other, with the genocide’s long shadow and Armenian resilience. Preceded in 2015 by a volume produced by the founding team of the ‘Ottoman Cataclysm’ project on the run-up to the catastrophe,¹ together these four books make a sustained intellectual and historical effort to bridge a whole century and to make visible the defining lines of conflicts. They will also necessarily illuminate the fundamental ongoing challenges facing hopes for a democratic Turkey based on a comprehensive and inclusive social contract.

The present book on the Armenian genocide focuses on regional realities and agents. The latter include perpetrators and victims, with trajectories extending from the late nineteenth century through the Ottoman cataclysm of the 1910s into the interwar period, the Cold War and beyond. We chose the term *Ottoman cataclysm* to describe the period 1912–22 and to signal a new approach to the empire’s long final decade: one that questions a Eurocentric chronology fixated on 1914–18; that reinstates agency to Ottoman actors, on both sides; and that moves them and this ‘decade of violence’ from the peripheries of greater Europe’s history and closer to its centre.

Since the ascent of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) to Turkey’s leadership in 2002, favourable references to Ottoman glory that would once have seemed outmoded have become increasingly prominent in the public sphere, suggesting that a history of Turkey formerly located within the comfortable coordinates of post-First World War diplomacy and a Kemalist secular narrative may now be consigned to the historiographical graveyard. For while the founding fathers of the Turkish Republic were indeed Kemalists, as supporters of the policies of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) are called, they were also almost all former members of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), the party that ruled Turkey dictatorially from 1913 until October 1918, when the cabinet, including Talaat and Enver Pasha, fled in the face of imminent prosecution for war

¹ See Hans-Lukas Kieser, Kerem Öktem and Maurus Reinkowski (eds), *World War I and the End of the Ottomans* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2015), p. 2.

crimes. Mustafa Kemal, in leading Turkish Muslims to victory in their battle to reconquer Asia Minor (1919–22), succeeded in inscribing a triumphant nationalist narrative on the Great War's aftermath, one that made defeat, along with the war's other dark realities, disappear. Kemalism then repudiated its pre-1923 brothers in arms. One was political Islam. The others were the Kurds, whose hopes for regional autonomies at the time of the Treaty of Paris-Sèvres had been encouraged by Kemalists in order to counter Woodrow Wilson's gestures toward self-determination. Such hopes were dismissed at Lausanne in 1923.

After the Treaty of Lausanne, the Kemalist master narrative of the First World War's victorious aftermath silenced Kurds and political Islam, former crucial allies, and determined for decades diplomacy as well as academic and public history – far beyond the borders of Turkey. Recently, however, Islamist voices, including some from the higher reaches of the AKP now governing Turkey, have begun to bewail Lausanne for its territorial concessions and have sought to rebuild Turkey's political influence in the Middle East. They did this along lines that some rightly call neo-Ottomanism, as references to the Ottoman Empire abound in AKP discourses. Yet while building a myth around the Ottoman past, AKP policies have largely failed in the endeavour to extend Turkey's influence. The exception is the Balkans, especially in Bosnia and Kosovo, where Turkey's engagement had started before the AKP came to power. Otherwise the AKP's emphasis on Sunni Islam and its co-opting of ethno-religious groups and jihadist organizations in Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Palestine have produced only a few payoffs for hopes of a neo-Ottomanist penetration of today's Middle East.

Instead, such clients have contributed to steering today's Republic of Turkey into domestic polarization. A combination of party and personal authoritarian rule has emerged – or better, re-emerged – whose determining political patterns recall Ottoman Turkey's last decades under Sultan Abdulhamid II and the single-party dictatorship of the CUP. These patterns include the repression of oppositional publications, parties and personalities; sweeping stigmatization of large groups of citizens and extensive purges of the civil service; denial of basic rights including, for some, the right to travel; and the sequestration of property on a large scale. During the First World War, such patterns led to historic crimes that were never dealt with appropriately, because the Kemalist heirs of the CUP built on this war's results and achieved military and diplomatic success. Thus, the patterns remained a ready repertoire for the concentration of demagogic power in the decades to come – notwithstanding a new multiparty system in 1950, NATO membership in 1952, some progress toward democracy, a growing civil society and even, in the early twenty-first century, serious steps toward joining the European Union.

To negotiate a social contract on a constitutional base for all its citizens, to implement equality in a plural society, even if within a shrunken territory – such a peaceful valediction from pre-modern imperial hierarchies has been Turkey's main challenge ever since the empire's reform period in the mid-nineteenth century. 'Equality in plurality' had also been the hopeful horizon of the Young Turk revolution in 1908, which represented a real democratic Ottoman Spring, though, like the Arab Spring of 2011, one that was short lived. The Ottoman Spring of 1908 may also be compared to Turkey's belle époque in the 2000s, when a comparatively democratic AKP government seriously sought EU membership. Instead of a democratic development, however, violent and coercive patterns of domestic policy reasserted themselves, going hand in hand in the 1910s with the abandonment of efforts toward an inclusive social contract and rule of law.

By 1913, the Ottoman Spring had been definitively superseded by the pan-Turkist Islamist ideologies of Ziya Gökalp, a member of CUP's Central Committee, and by the dictatorial policies of his close friend, the powerful Mehmed Talaat. This cabinet minister and CUP leader and, as of February 1917, grand-vizier and pasha, was the dominant Ottoman political figure of the decade and the architect of genocide in 1915. As leader of the first single-party government in Europe's twentieth century, Talaat set the faltering multinational empire on its future course as a Turkish Muslim nation state well before his political heir and successor, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, proclaimed Asia Minor the national home of Muslim Turks. Unlike Atatürk, however, Talaat embraced political Islam (in its Gökalpian version; that is, mixed with Turkism); pursued expansionist goals; and strongly believed in a future of imperial Turkey at the side of imperial Germany.

The preconditions and setting for this Ottoman Thermidor – the brutal end of 1908's hopes – are what our volume published in 2015 set out to explore, by elucidating the tricky relationship between imperial viability and systemic violence, beginning on the eve of the First World War and tracking the empire's descent into what would be its own version of two-front warfare: one fought simultaneously on fronts facing inward as well as out, against interior and exterior enemies. In this 2018 book, we examine that war, a truly *total* war, which destroyed the empire's social fabric through genocide and ended Ottoman viability irreversibly. Our contributors examine the motives and magnitude of the violence against Ottoman Christians in 1915–17 and situate that violence within the regional dynamics and biographies of the range of persons involved: an architect of genocide called Mehmed Talaat, proactive collaborators and regional leaders, perpetrators on the ground, victims, a few helpful officials and many persons in between.

Following these biographies beyond the decade of violence, our focus also offers important insights into the Republic of Turkey, the empire's successor state (in diplomacy and constitutional substance), not only through the activity of those elites whose power centre shifted from Istanbul to Ankara, but even more through the actions of their nominal subordinates in the provinces. Local and regional actors in eastern and central Anatolia, in synergy with the centre, shaped the centre's policies, including genocide, more than one might expect if one looked only at decision-making in the CUP's Central Committee and the imperial government. But the volume also shines a spotlight on some of the war's main victims, paying attention to Armenian agency and human resistance, even during the concentration and extermination of these uprooted people in the camps of Syria in 1915–17. Armenian resilience over decades, which will be examined in a later book, was forged during this catastrophe.

New regulations in Turkey's National Assembly in Ankara, passed during the relevant commission in late July 2017, explicitly prohibit the use in parliament of words related to the Armenian genocide. Such a drastic measure is itself testimony to the many and powerful initiatives undertaken during the past fifteen years by scholars and representatives of civil society, aimed at coming to terms with the truth of the First World War, which have demonstrated the precious potential of the Other Turkey.² Yet they have not (yet) transformed the main realities manifest in public history and political culture. That change will require a Turkey based on new foundations, that is, a *Second* Republic, one emancipated from Gökalp's Turkism (as practised by Talaat and Atatürk) and from the current revival, in mass culture and realpolitik, of a kind of post-republican Islamic sultanism. Although there might be hope for such a second republic, given signs that the current revival of sultanism is on shaky ground, the road leading there makes one fear violent turbulence ahead.

The legacy of the Armenian genocide has stamped much of the political culture in the post-Ottoman world, most of all in the Republic of Turkey but also some of the recent patterns of crime committed by the soi-disant Islamic State. Given the contemporary significance of such patterns, the need to illuminate the darkest hours of the Ottomans' Great War acquires special urgency until a time arrives when we can truly consign this chapter to 'history'.

* * *

² One of the best and finest academic outcomes, in history writing, of such initiatives is by Fikret Adanır and Oktay Özel (eds), *1915 Siyaset, Tehir, Soykırım* (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yay, 2015).

The term *genocide*, coined in 1944 by the Polish Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin, owes its origins to the eerie similarities its author perceived in the catastrophes suffered by Ottoman Armenians in the First World War and European Jews in the Second. In both cases, Lemkin recognized a systematic effort by a state to eradicate a nation, one that targeted not only the physical existence of a people, but also its culture and its ability to reproduce that culture ('the essential foundations,' he said, of national life) in the future. But for all the similarities in the *histories* of these two foundational cases of genocide, their historiographies – that is, the scholarly writing on the *Medz Yeghern* and the Shoah – have had opposite trajectories. Because Nazi Germany lost the Second World War, scholars have had unfettered access to the numberless documents produced by that regime. The result from the very first has been a profusion of studies of the agents of the Shoah. Its leading actors – Hitler, Himmler, Goebbels, Goering, Heydrich, the names go on and on; and their lethal institutions – Gestapo, Sturmabteilung (SA), Schutzstaffel (SS), Dachau, Treblinka, Jasenovac, Auschwitz – remain household words. An apt name for this body of historical literature might well be Perpetrator Studies. In contrast, scholarship on their victims, in contrast, with a few notable exceptions, came considerably later; and serious research on the so-called bystanders – the neutral and occupied powers, the churches, the banks and financial institutions, for example – later still.

With the Armenian genocide, the trajectory of scholarship has been reversed. For decades, historians have had to rely almost exclusively upon sources reflecting the perspective and experience of bystanders (let us call them by the more neutral term 'outsiders'). While the war was still raging, the world read about the 'horrors of Aleppo' as seen by four teachers at a German school in that city.³ Distributed illegally in Germany in 1916, their report was republished in a Bern daily, in a New York periodical, in book form in London, and finally in Dutch newspapers.⁴ In August of 1916, the German human rights advocate Johannes Lepsius secretly published more than 20,000

³ [Martin Niepage et al.], *Ein Wort an die berufenen Vertreter des deutschen Volks. Eindrücke eines deutschen Oberlehrers aus der Türkei* (n.d. [October 1915]). It then appeared in the *Allgemeine Missionszeitschrift*, November 1915; in the *Berner Tagwacht* on 10 August 1916; as *The Horrors of Aleppo as Seen by a German Eyewitness . . . Dr. Martin Niepage* (London: T. Fisher-Unwin, 1916); and under the title 'The Armenian Deportation' in two successive issues of the New York periodical *The New Armenia* 9, nos 13 and 14 (1 July and 15 July 1917): 206ff., 221–3.

⁴ The *Telegraaf* (26 January 1917) and the *Nieuws van den Dag* (28 January 1917), which cited other appearances. Friedrich Rosen, German envoy to Den Haag, to Theobald Bethmann Hollweg, 1 February 1917, in Wolfgang Gust (ed.), <http://www.armenocide.net>, 1917-02-01-DE-001 (accessed 17 March 2018).

copies of his 298-page account of what was happening to the Armenians, province by province, also based largely on reports from outsiders living or travelling in the Ottoman Empire. Lepsius sent his report to 'every Protestant parsonage' in Germany as well as to members of the Reichstag. It was soon quoted in the Dutch press, then translated into French, and by 1917 was being praised by Boghos Nubar Pasha.⁵ The most famous of such wartime publications was undoubtedly Arnold Toynbee's huge collection of eyewitness testimonies on Armenian suffering, again mostly as reported by outsiders – businessmen, diplomats, workers in missionary clinics and schools. Like Lepsius's *Report*, it too appeared in 1916 and was immediately translated into French.⁶

The victims themselves, although always present and usually the focus, were rarely seen or heard *except* as victims. As actors in their own right and as tellers of their own story, they were, as was also the case in the historiography of the Shoah, slow to appear.⁷ The first truly substantial account in a Western language by an Armenian who had experienced the genocide was published

⁵ Johannes Lepsius, *Bericht über die Lage des armenischen Volkes in der Türkei* (Potsdam: Tempelverlag, 1916); and *Le rapport secret du Dr. Johannes Lepsius, président de la Deutsche orient-mission et de la Société germano-arménienne* (Paris: Payot & cie, 1918); Boghos Nubar Pasha to Lepsius, 16 February 1917, Lepsius Archive Potsdam, NC 844 (1–3). A postwar edition, *Der Todesgang des Armenischen Volkes* (Potsdam: Templeverlag), appeared in May 1919. In France, the Protestant theologian Emile Doumerge also published a book based on missionary sources: *L'Arménie, les massacres et la question d'Orient; conférence, études, et documents* (Paris: Foi la vie, 1916).

⁶ *The Treatment of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915–1916* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1916); *Le traitement des Arméniens dans l'Empire Ottoman, 1915–1916* (Laval: Imprimerie Moderne, G. Kavanagh & Cie, 1917). This document collection, which continues to be mislabelled 'Bryce' or 'Bryce and Toynbee', after Viscount James Bryce, whose speech to the House of Lords merely constitutes its preface, is often confused, even by historians, with Arnold J. Toynbee's pamphlet, *Armenian Atrocities: The Murder of a Nation* (London and New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915), republished in Dutch (*Armenische gruwelen; het vermoorden van een volk*, 1916), Swedish (*De armeniska grymheterna: Ett mordat folk*, 1916) and Spanish (*Las atrocidades en Armenia: El exterminio de una nación*, 1918).

⁷ A possible exception is Aram Andonian, *Documents officiels concernant les massacres arméniens*, trans. M. S. David-Beg (Paris: H. Turabian, 1920); *The Memoirs of Naim Bey: Turkish Official Documents Relating to the Deportations and Massacres of the Armenians*, compiled by Aram Andonian (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1920); Aram Andonian, *Medz Vojeeru* (Boston, n.p., 1921). French and English editions include a short introduction in which Andonian's first-person singular peeps through. Had he followed an American convention and added (quite plausibly), at least to his English-language title, 'as told to Aram Andonian', we might feel able to hear an Armenian voice amid all the information. Except for Yves Ternon, *Les Arméniens: Histoire d'un génocide* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), Andonian's work was neglected until the 1980s, when Turkish historians began pre-emptive attacks on his documents as forgeries. Vahakn N. Dadrian's rebuttal, 'The Naim-Andonian Documents on the World War I Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 18 (1986): 311–60, remains convincing.

only after mid-century, and it was more than two decades before others followed in any great numbers.⁸

But it is in our knowledge of the perpetrators that the contrast between the historiography of the Armenian genocide and that of the Shoah is most striking. For unlike the Germans, the Turks ‘won’ – if not their war, then at least their peace. Thus, Ottoman archives were closed, mouths were shut and disinformation was spread. This persistent policy meant that historians’ mental maps of the Armenian genocide have until recently been a bit like those late medieval maps of the world: the familiar land that we ourselves inhabit has been carefully drawn up to the shoreline and also includes a few islands, but then come some wavy lines, signifying the wide ocean, with only the warning label ‘Here be dragons’.

Recent research has ameliorated the situation. Still, the articles in this book offer what are in some cases the very first ‘maps’ of what have been true voyages of discovery, requiring many languages and sometimes Herculean feats with ancillary disciplines such as palaeography. The fruit of these efforts has been to limn in unprecedented detail the dark continent of the Armenian genocide and to people it with actors unknown to most readers, or, if known, then largely through the mists of third-party impressions, conjecture, rumour and speculation, rarely through their own words. A few are Armenian victims; some (although still voiceless) are Kurds; but the lion’s share of our chapters goes to those who have until now occupied the largest empty spaces on our mental maps of the *Medz Yeghern*: the perpetrators from that wing of the Young Turk movement known as the Committee of Union and Progress.

In Part One, ‘The Matrix and Politics of Genocide’, we begin with Hans-Lukas Kieser’s ‘Mehmet Talaat: Demolitionist Founder of Post-Ottoman Turkey’. In analysing the architect of the genocide, the man at the centre of a toxic mix of old and new ideas that characterized a ‘decade of violence’, Kieser provides both background and structure for the volume while pointing forward to the republic. His account corrects the familiar picture of the Ottoman power structure, shared by contemporaries and historians alike (including some in this book), that the empire was run by an ongoing triumvirate, the three pashas: Talaat, Enver and Cemal. It was Talaat, not Enver or Cemal, who mainly organized the CUP’s seizure of power in January 1913, only weeks after the party had been ‘near extinction.’ Often

⁸ Jean Naslian, *Les mémoires de Mgr. Jean Naslian évêque de Trebizond*, 2 vols (Vienna: Imprimerie Méchithariste, 1951, 1955). Khatchig Mouradian has kindly pointed out that Naslian’s memoir, which was reviewed by Lemkin in *Hairnik Weekly* in 1959, was preceded by Leon Z. Surmelian’s *I Ask You, Ladies and Gentlemen* (Boston: E. P. Dutton, 1945). Thanks also to Hilmar Kaiser and Stephan Astourian for historiographical help.

taking action without informing his peers or the cabinet, it was Talaat who initiated genocide when, on 24 April 1915, he sent circulars to his provincial governors declaring that ‘a general Armenian insurrection’ was taking place. Talaat’s motives, we learn, were not confined to security anxieties. He also ‘hated and deeply feared’ Armenians for domestic political reasons, as the ‘main obstacle’ to a future that would be unfettered by the requirement of power sharing and by ‘the principles of the Ottoman constitution’.

Though acting in a ‘power cartel’ formed by the main figures of the CUP Central Committee, Talaat, both minister and party boss, was the pioneer of single-party dictatorships, nearly as unchallenged in heading his own regime as Lenin would be in Russia and Hitler in Germany. Unlike Lenin, his authority was not owed to virtuosity in a recondite ideology. Although the Young Turks are often, too one-sidedly, described as scientific materialists, Talaat began his day with prayer. His piety was leavened by a nationalism shared with his peers, which he sought to operationalize within the empire and to extend eastward into an idealized ‘Turan.’ Unlike Hitler, Talaat owed little to charisma. He was popular, but his genius was that of a party boss: someone who knows his men, knows what he wants, knows how to wait and when to decide. He held these cards close to the chest. In 1915, even long-time Armenian associates could not believe that Talaat was behind the new persecutions and so directed their cries for help to the very man ordering their arrest. In Talaat, Kieser shows us the man who destroyed the multinational fabric of the Ottoman Empire and in whose shadow Atatürk’s republic still lives.

Evidence of the CUP regime’s far-reaching goals – territorial and demographic – were revealed as early as December 1914, during its invasion of the Caucasus, as Candan Badem demonstrates in Chapter 2, ‘The War at the Caucasus Front: A Matrix for Genocide.’ Using Russian and Ottoman sources, along with some accounts in Armenian, Badem reveals the existence of a ‘Cold War’ that, by 1914, had already gripped the region for a decade. We are then able to watch as that war becomes hot by following, almost village by village, the assaults against Christian minorities on the Russian side of the border by an invading host of regular and irregular Ottoman forces, joined by local Muslim volunteers responding to the caliph’s call for holy war. While the defending Russian commanders sought to enforce discipline on their troops and to protect civilians of all religions, the Ottoman invaders began massacring right from the start: a difference that may perhaps be explained, at least in part, by the contrast between a military defence, attempting to retain recently acquired territory (*and* population), and a military offensive, seeking to recover its recently lost provinces (preferably *without* their Christian minorities). Here the watchword, however, was not *revanche* but *jihad*. Badem supplements government records with a trove of eyewitness accounts stemming from an ingenious history

project: 100-odd questionnaires with which high school students in Ardanuç in 1985–6 interviewed elders who had lived through these events. The massacres in December 1914 suggest to Badem that ‘the CUP was already acting with genocidal intention’ and lead him to conclude that ‘the [genocide] decision was probably taken even before the Ottoman disaster at Sarıkamış’.

With Chapter 3, Hilmar Kaiser’s ‘Requiem for a Thug: *Aintabli Abdulkadir* and the Special Organization’, we watch some of the same story, but from the other side of the border. Kaiser introduces us to the world of a veteran *fedai* (freedom fighter), a man who, at thirty-three, had already fought insurgents in Macedonia, organized guerrillas in Libya, and carried out assassinations of journalists, government officials, Kurdish leaders and political opponents. In October 1914, Abdulkadir, now prominent in the *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa* (Special Organization; hereafter, SO) and a specialist in ‘black ops’, led a motley crew of adventurers across the Persian border in the unfounded conviction that Azerbaijan’s Kurds only needed a signal to rise up, drive out the Russians and join the Ottoman Empire. The result was a military fiasco and masses of civilian deaths. We learn a lot about the CUP as we see the tasks with which it continued to entrust its man: in Trebizond, in Harput and in Syria. Abdulkadir’s career illuminates, as little else can, an organization that was more network than structure, one whose categories were blurred and shifting, where ambition was a substitute for planning. A stable world had no place for a man successful only at killing. In 1926, Abdulkadir was hanged for his role in an alleged plot to assassinate Mustafa Kemal, a deed of which he was probably innocent but one that would not have been out of character.

In Chapter 4, ‘Tahsin Uzer: The CUP’s Man in the East’, we look at some of the same events but from a higher level of decision-making, as Hilmar Kaiser shows what it means when scholars say that genocide is more process than plan. The story of the CUP official Tahsin Bey begins innocently enough. Sent as provincial governor in 1913 to surveil Van’s suspect Kurdish and Armenian populations for signs of disloyalty, Tahsin refused to be alarmed at reports of Russian activity among Kurds and rejected as counterproductive the anti-Armenian measures urged by his counterparts in Bitlis and Erzurum. Although aware that the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) had honeycombed Van province with a network of armed self-defence cells, Tahsin felt that a little election rigging would soon establish CUP dominance. In August 1914, he reported that Armenians were responding patriotically to the mobilization – better than Muslims. Transferred to Erzurum province to organize what his party hoped would be a massive Muslim rebellion behind Russian and Persian lines, he bade farewell to Van’s Armenian community with every sign of goodwill. But once in Erzurum, now headquarters of the SO, the men he worked with and the jobs they performed coloured Tahsin’s

perceptions. That autumn, amid the uncertainties of waging undeclared war, Tahsin adopted the SO's pre-emptive tactics – coordinating action with Istanbul but sometimes leapfrogging over his instructions. Thus, when Armenians retaliated against Muslim villages for SO raids against theirs, Tahsin escalated. Soon the man who had once dismissed the Armenian threat as 'coffee house gossip' had become convinced that the ARF was planning a Muslim massacre – a clear case of projection but also, given ARF retaliations, a 'self-fulfilling prophecy'. By 30 November, Istanbul had put destruction of the entire ARF infrastructure in the east on the agenda, and by late April 1915, decided on 'truly' solving the 'Armenian problem'.

Part Two, 'Performing Genocide on the Spot', offers studies of two contrasting provinces, allowing us to see the variety of motives and responses to the CUP's genocide policy. In Chapter 5, 'The State, Local Actors and Mass Violence in the Bitlis Province', Mehmet Polatel takes us to the heart of darkness, a province where the slaughter was so fast and furious that most of its large Armenian population were never deported, because they (and Bitlis's Assyrian Christians) were killed in situ. The entire male population of Armenians in Bitlis city, for example, was dispatched in four days. Polatel examines the elements – geography, history and a treaty barely a year old – that help explain why. He shows the World War interrupting and reconfiguring a triangular crisis among the province's Armenians, its powerful Kurdish tribes and the CUP government that was already coming to a head. The internationally sponsored Armenian Reform Accord of 8 February 1914 had put the long-standing controversy over Armenian lands seized by Kurdish tribes during the Hamidian era on the Ottoman agenda – and put the CUP in a double bind. To continue to ignore the issue, so vital to Armenians, risked unknown but unwanted international consequences. To try to redress it, in contrast, risked Kurdish defections at a time when Russia was competing for their favour. A Kurdish rebellion in April, although easily quashed, spurred the CUP to re-evaluate its options. Then the World War led the party, in Istanbul as in Bitlis, to conclude that the Kurds, for all the uncertainty and instability of their loyalties, offered more and threatened more than the Armenians. Predicting that casualty rates among Muslims risked boosting Armenian power in his province, on 18 April 1915, Governor Abdulhalik Bey concluded that 'the extermination of these elements ... was a requirement for the security of the state'.

While Polatel's analysis of Bitlis shows the horrors that are possible when a determined government is supported by equally determined local elites, Chapter 6, Hilmar Kaiser's 'Scenes from Angora,⁹ 1915: The Commander, the

⁹ Angora: pre-1930 name used in European languages for today's Ankara.

Bureaucrats and Muslim Notables during the Armenian Genocide, offers a more mixed picture. Kaiser tells an all-too-familiar story of corruption and power struggle, here between two CUP officials, a provincial governor and his police commissioner, the latter caught squirreling away vast amounts of Armenian property for himself. Although robbing from the state was allegedly a crime in Talaat's Turkey, politics trumped probity. The interior minister quashed the investigation and suppressed the evidence. But the chapter's great theme, bookending this unedifying tale, is the consistent disapproval of the regime's Armenian policy at various levels of Angoran society. We see the local corps commander rescuing Armenian detainees by inducting them into military service and using his authority to prevent anyone of military age and their families from being deported. We see the *mutesarrif* of Yosgad defying his superior by refusing to arrest the prescribed list of Armenians, claiming that their occupations had put them under *military* authority. We see a Muslim cleric insisting that the 250 Armenian households in his village were now Muslim and thus exempt; and we see 'ordinary' Muslims hiding ordinary Armenians. Genocide scholars may debate whether this behaviour was merely *Resistenz* – that is, a sign of an individual's 'immunity' to the reigning political disease – or whether it rises to the level of 'resistance' (*Widerstand*), which (or so it is often said) requires taking steps to eliminate the disease itself, necessarily at great personal risk. Kaiser argues provocatively that 'officers and officials were probably not acting alone' and that their systematic efforts to hold the CUP accountable after the war 'point to a more formally organized resistance'.

Part Three, 'The Empire's Darkest Hour', presents us with a series of portraits. In Chapter 7, Raymond Kévorkian's 'Zohrab and Vartkes: Ottoman Deputies and Armenian Reformers', we leave the world of perpetrators for the milieu of politically active Armenians. Kévorkian enables us to follow Ottoman developments through the eyes of the loyal opposition, whose most distinguished representative was Krikor Zohrab, lawyer and cosmopolitan intellectual, a resident of the capital, where the resolution of political and social differences seemed most plausible. More typical may have been the experience of his younger colleague, Hovhannes Seringulian, popularly known as Vartkes, an ARF organizer in the east, where the conflicting interests of Armenians and Kurds were never far from sight. Both of these politically astute liberals took a gamble on the Young Turks, on the constitution, and on the hope offered by the internationally sanctioned Armenian Reforms that were so repugnant not only to Kurds in Bitlis (as we saw in Chapter 6) but even to the most moderate figures in the CUP, such as Cavid Bey (as we shall see in Chapter 8), although, Kévorkian reveals, Cavid told Zohrab otherwise. Both Zohrab and Vartkes struggled to make the

Ottoman constitution a reality. The betrayal and murder of the two MPs by their former allies is symbolic of the greater betrayal of the promise of Ottoman liberalism. Few Ottoman stories in this terrible decade are so poignant as theirs.

If the CUP leaders we have encountered thus far have seemed relatively one-dimensional, in Chapter 8, Ozan Ozavci's 'Honour and Shame: The Diaries of a Unionist and the "Armenian Question"', we are given an insight that historians are rarely granted – into the *heart* of their subject. Mehmet Cavid Bey, a talented economist of *dönme* background, became Ottoman finance minister in the summer of 1909, an appointment (repeated several times) that would put him constantly on the road in Europe in a thankless quest for foreign loans to keep his country afloat. Cavid became well known in international circles, the respectable face of his party; someone Europeans recognized as a man they could do business with. But his letters, and especially his diaries, reveal a Cavid mortified at the poor figure he and his country were forced to cut. And they cast a glaring light on the Turkish reception of the internationally negotiated Armenian Reforms of 1914 by showing what Cavid *really* thought about them. The record in the diaries of Cavid's reaction makes a revealing contrast to the views that Zohrab (as we saw in Chapter 7) attributed to his friend. When read in conjunction with Kévorkian's chapter they show that at best Cavid and Zohrab were talking past each other. For this man of moderation (as he appeared to many) passionately rejected the negotiation process, burned with resentment at what he saw as a violation of Ottoman sovereignty and was incensed at the great powers that demanded reforms of the empire but were unwilling, when asked, to commit personnel that would make them effective. And he was angry at the Armenians for enlisting them. In Cavid's mind, even the intractable land issue was something the empire would have solved itself, to everyone's satisfaction, had it been left alone. Although he resigned over his cabinet's decision for war, Cavid remained a CUP loyalist, unaware of the radicalization of Armenian policy until summer 1915. His shock, recorded in his diary and sensitively analysed by Ozavci, reveals the man in a way few other documents do – as does his subsequent silence.

In Chapter 9, 'A Rescuer, an Enigma and a Génocidaire: Cemal Pasha', Ümit Kurt presents us with what appears to be another divided personality in the CUP leadership, and one who, unlike Cavid, was not marginal to the party's genocidal agenda. But here the surprising divide is not between speech and thoughts but between deeds and deeds. Arab nationalist historiography and Arab memory have excoriated Cemal Pasha, commander of the Fourth Ottoman Army, naval minister and military governor of (greater) Syria, as *Al Jazzar*, 'The Butcher'. Yet Armenian accounts and Armenian memory have

portrayed him in a more benign light, and some commentators have even suggested that he ‘resisted’ his party’s genocidal policies. All agree that Cemal remained a member in good standing among the inner circles of the CUP. What did he want for Turkey, for the Armenians? For answers, Kurt has exploited little-known Armenian materials, notably the poignant letters of Sahag II Kabayan, Catholicos of Cilicia, in the collection of Krikor Gergeryan (d. 1988). He has also utilized Cemal’s telegrams to the Interior Ministry, including a request to Talaat on 17 May 1915 to exempt the sick, disabled and pregnant temporarily from deportation and to provide legal protection for the Armenians’ ‘abandoned’ property. The same telegram announced his own determination to provision the deportees with the military’s own resources. A man with a code, the pasha proved willing, unlike Talaat, to help his own acquaintances and protégés, but he also accepted brutality – from himself as well as from others – when ‘necessary’ in order to save the empire from a future he otherwise foresaw as a British dependency. Opposed to violence against Armenians but committed to their disappearance, Cemal’s was to be a genocide without pain; indeed, without extermination. It didn’t turn out that way.

In Chapter 10, Khatchig Mouradian’s “‘The Very Limit of Our Endurance’: Unarmed Resistance in Ottoman Syria during the First World War’, we move from individual portraits to a collective one, that of a ‘resisting’ community of Armenians that took shape in wartime Aleppo. What was it about Aleppo that provided the social ‘space’ for such a community to develop? ‘Priorities at the centre and local dynamics generate lags in implementation’, Mouradian notes, with the result that Ottoman authorities sometimes overlooked the city during the early stages of the deportations. This reprieve allowed Armenian refugees just enough respite to be able to join with native Armenians to establish what soon became a virtual hub for overlapping self-help networks: from distributing food and medicines, to supplying financial assistance, to smuggling orphans and, most important of all, information to provinces, countries and all the way to Der Zor. But a city that is ignored one day can be targeted the next, and by autumn 1915, all of these activities had become illegal. To continue was to put oneself in jeopardy – effectively, to join a resistance. Mouradian points out that one of the side-effects of the Turkish Republic’s campaign of denial has been to focus scholarly attention so exclusively on Armenian victimization that historians (consciously or unconsciously) have neglected to notice, indeed, sometimes have even denied, that victims are capable of acting. To limit the term *resistance* to armed efforts aimed at regime change, however, is to deny the agency of those without weapons: women, children and other victims. Yet in Aleppo, Mouradian argues, unarmed Armenian ‘resisters’ risked their lives and saved thousands more.

The chapters in Part Four, 'Unmaking the Empire, Shaping the Turkish Nation', begin in wartime but then take us to post-war Turkey. In Chapter 11, 'Proactive Local Perpetrators: Mehmet Yasin (Sani Kutluğ) and Ahmed Faik (Erner)', Ümit Kurt introduces us to Aintab, a middle-sized city on the Ottoman Empire's south-eastern periphery, halfway between Aleppo and Marash. Aintab was distinguished by the precocity of its citizens in establishing an active branch of the CUP, supported by other nationalist societies. In 1915, they supplemented these organizations with a Deportation Committee. Founded by the leaders of the district and boasting a membership representing every branch of respectable Muslim society, the committee's main task seems to have been to ensure that 'abandoned' Armenian property would find respectable homes. The heart of Kurt's article, however, is his compelling sketches of two representative *génocidaires*, officials of middling and upper-middle rank. In the first, we follow a young military dispatcher, deployed at the railway station near the city. The soldier demonstrated his zeal, as we hear in his own words, by arresting the fourteen-year-old son of a Protestant church dignitary, caught keeping a diary while awaiting his deportation. Found guilty of treason, the child was executed. Kurt links the dispatcher's efforts at criminalizing young Hagop's diary to his post-war campaign, as a deputy for Aintab to the Grand National Assembly, to rid Turkey of non-Turkish place names. Like the incriminating diary, reminders of a non-Turkish past must not be allowed to cast their shadow upon the present or to besmirch the future. But the past did haunt the subject of Kurt's second portrait, Ahmed Faik (Erner), Aintab's district governor in 1915 and a man for whom post-war Turkey never yielded the rewards he had enjoyed in wartime. Initially enriched by the genocide, after the war Ahmed Faik's own business ventures failed. Soon impoverished, the family emigrated to Buenos Aires, only to find that word of his deeds had followed them. Ostracized, they returned to Turkey. There are indications that in the decades that followed, Armenian suffering, which Ahmed Faik's aristocratic wife had witnessed on Aintab's roads in 1915 and had disclosed to their daughter, haunted this family. But all the more – and he lived until 1967 – did Ahmed Faik insist that he was without regrets.

In Chapter 12, 'From Aintab to Gaziantep: The Reconstitution of an Elite on the Ottoman Periphery', Kurt returns to the city, revealing a milieu where the pressure to expel Armenians occurred early and remained constant. It emanated not from Istanbul but from the Aintab minority's own neighbours. Although the state's officers – Aintab's initial provincial and district governors and the district military commander – reported that the Armenian communities posed no threat whatsoever, the drumbeat for deportation sounding from Aintab's best families was insistent. In August 1915, the

Armenians were finally deported and officially expropriated, although improvised ‘expropriations’ by freelancers, along with assaults and murders, had been part of their daily life for months. When, in 1919, survivors were encouraged by Allied occupiers to return and to expect restitution, the same city fathers who had been so tireless in demanding their expulsion were now equally tireless in thwarting restorations. As neither the British nor the French had any stomach for occupation, Aintab’s Armenian remnant was soon left to its own defences. Expropriated again, the Armenians suffered a second, and final, expulsion. The exiles’ remaining property was distributed by the Aintab elite among themselves or given to their municipality. The more architecturally interesting of these buildings are now listed as ‘Turkish cultural assets’ in inventories of such treasures. In 1921 the city was renamed *Gaziantep*; that is, Aintab the Conqueror. *Whom* Aintab conquered, however, its townspeople have done everything possible to forget.

History, E. P. Thompson tells us, is ‘above all, the discipline of context. Each fact can be given meaning only within an ensemble of other meanings.’¹⁰ In his deliberately provocative ‘Afterword: Talaat’s Empire a Backward Country, but a State Well Ahead of Its Time’, Hamit Bozarslan ranges back and forth across space and time, illuminating 1915 and its people in contexts as distant as 1808 and as near as 2018, finding continuities above all in emotional patterns – grievances, ambitions, traumas, identities – ‘pattern[s] susceptible to being reactivated many decades later’ and raising questions not only of the past but of the future. Each age, imperial and republican, is riddled with contradictions and ridden with ghosts, ghosts of a glorious, irrecoverable past as well as the nightmare of recent events. If for a hammer, everything is a nail, for a Turk, it seems, every ethnic dispute is a Macedonia, and every villain (or hero!) is an Abdulhamid. Thus, Bahaeddin Şakir, who overthrew him, proclaimed the Red Sultan an *Übermensch*. Talaat shed tears at his funeral. And President Erdoğan celebrated him as a ‘Great Ruler’. As William Faulkner once wrote, ‘The past is never dead. It isn’t even past.’¹¹ It was not dead for the CUP, nor is it for Turkey’s current governors. Nor, as the essays in this volume demonstrate, is it dead for us historians. But we well know the virtue of historical valediction, that is of seeing off revenant patterns and ghosts.

¹⁰ ‘Anthropology and the Discipline of Context’, *Midland History* 1, no. 3 (Spring 1972): 41–55; quote on 45.

¹¹ William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (New York: Random House, 1951).

Part One

The Matrix and Politics
of Genocide

Mehmed Talaat: Demolitionist Founder of Post-Ottoman Turkey

Hans-Lukas Kieser

It was spring 1915. Let us zoom in on the office of Talaat Bey, the minister of the interior in the building of the so-called Sublime Porte, seat of the imperial government in the historical centre of the European side of the Ottoman capital, Istanbul. Bulky but not fat, Talaat was a tall man with wide shoulders, a broad face, black eyes, bushy eyebrows and black hair (that was to turn gray in 1918). Physically and mentally, he was an imposing figure. His office was a big and relatively light room, particularly notable for the several telephones on his desk. At times, the minister also gave his orders from the telegraph in his home office.¹

Revolutionary, but imperial

Talaat (1874–1921) was married to Hayriye Bafıralı Hanım, but without children (shortly after his marriage in 1909, he had learned from his doctor that he could not father a child).² He lived instead in a symbolic marriage – or passionate concubinage – with his cause: make Turkey strong again! Somewhat puzzlingly, he styled himself a Muslim of Turkish descent, a conservative ‘son of empire’ and a patriotic revolutionist. ‘We must win back our old strength, our old influence’, he told the Germans in late 1915.³ He and

¹ This chapter is taken from the introductory chapter of my biography of Talaat Pasha: *Talaat Pasha: Father of Modern Turkey, Architect of Genocide* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

² Ali Münif, *Ali Münif Bey’in hâtıraları*, ed. Tahat Toros (Istanbul: Isis, 1996), pp. 81–2 and 92.

³ Max Grunwald, ‘Gespräch mit Talaat Bey’, *Vossische Zeitung*, 28 December 1915. These multiple self identifications still appear in Talaat’s memoirs, written after his flight to Germany, finished in late 1919. No original manuscript remains of these memoirs, which are essentially an apology for Talaat’s policies. The partial publication of the manuscript

his friends pursued a 'great national ideal', as they called it, informed by memories of Ottoman imperial glory and a new Turkish ethno-religious nationalism.

Theorists of modern revolutions might identify Talaat as an imperially biased right-wing revolutionary. Psychologists, in turn, might find him addicted to power. Power was 'the dearest thing that he had known,' he confessed in 1921 in Berlin, a few days before being assassinated, adding, however, that 'one could have too much of a good thing.'⁴ He was the only grand vizier who had ascended to power from below, step by step: from subversive opposition to continuous membership in the parliament and ministries in different cabinets. From summer 1913, Mehmed Talaat (both names are forenames; Ottoman Muslims did not have surnames) was the actual head of the government, even if he was promoted to a grand vizier, a kind of prime minister, with the honorific 'Pasha', only in 1917. Before, he was only 'Bey'.

Talaat owed his predominance to his strong position within the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), a largely conspiratorial party organization, directed by a Central Committee. The committee had its headquarters in the Nur-i Osmaniye neighborhood, a few minutes' walk from the Sublime Porte on the one side and Hagia Sophia and Sultanahmed Mosque on the other, and next to the house at Yerebatan Street where Talaat lived with his wife, as a *komiteci* (or *komitacı*), the Turkish name for a member of a conspiratorial committee of revolutionaries.⁵ The CUP was the foremost organization within a broad Young Turk movement that started as an opposition against Sultan Abdulhamid II, the last ruling (as opposed to reigning) sultan in Ottoman history. Talaat's cause was the Central Committee's cause and – as he maintained – the cause of 'the people,' of the Turkish nation and of Islam.

in the newspaper *Yeni Şark* in late 1921 offers insights via the original vocabulary, which later publications largely replaced (reproduced however in Talat Paşa, *Hatıralarım ve Müdafaaım* (Istanbul: Kaynak, 2008), p. 34). The American edition of 1921 is very far from reliable: Talaat Pasha, 'Posthumous Memoirs of Talaat Pasha', *The New York Times Current History* 15, no. 2 (November 1921).

⁴ Aubrey Herbert, *Talaat Pasha*, typescript, Somerset Heritage Centre, DD.DRU 56, pp. 5–6.

⁵ On aspects of the CUP's political history in the 1910s, see Erik J. Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2010). An examination of committee activism (CUP and Armenian committees) in the context of contemporary military practices – insurgency, counterinsurgency – is provided by Edward J. Erickson, *Ottomans and Armenians: A Study in Counterinsurgency* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Geographically limited to the Marmara region, but with more insight on the armed gangs of the CUP and social issues, is Ryan Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores: Violence, Ethnicity, and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1912–1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

After their putsch in January 1913, the CUP Central Committee alone dictated politics and the allocation of ministries. When it had organized the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, it could only partly control politics, and in the aftermath of the autocratic rule of Abdulhamid II, it had been inclined to democracy. Then the CUP had even allied with the largest Armenian party, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF). Publicly, both had pursued the common goal of establishing constitutional rule.⁶ As a longtime Central Committee member and an experienced administrator, Talaat had used his networks to concentrate power, to impose policies and to organize action. It was he who had principally prepared the putsch of 1913. The same was true for the reconquest of Edirne, his hometown, that same year, a victory that won him and the CUP huge prestige among patriots. Only in that year, when the CUP leaders Talaat, Enver and Cemal were all three in the capital, can we rightly speak of a CUP triumvirate at the head of the empire. Yet, even then, politically, Talaat was the leading spirit, having retrieved the party from its nadir of near extinction in late 1912.

Ever since growing up in Edirne, the early Ottoman capital in European Turkey, Talaat had held an emotional attachment to the Selimiye Mosque. The site recalled past glory, although the mosque's sponsor, the late-sixteenth-century sultan Selim II, 'the drunkard', had long been a symbol of imperial decadence. His grandfather and namesake Selim I, however, provided a strong role model for the Young Turks and served as the party's patron saint. In a similar vein, the Young Turks, most of whom hailed from the Balkans, understood themselves as superior sons of conquerors, *Evlad-ı Fatihan*, within a geography that had remained largely Christian.⁷ Tellingly, after his forefathers' conquest of western Asia Minor and the Balkans, Selim I had not only conquered eastern Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt in the early sixteenth century but also raged against interior adversaries called Kızılbaş.

Today better known as Alevis, the Kızılbaş did not (and do not) identify with orthodox Sunni or imperial Islam but did have sympathies with pre-modern Shiite Iran and also had connections to Bektashi heterodoxy, a

⁶ Dikran Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology Under Ottoman Rule 1908–1914* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2012); Bedross Der Matossian, *Shattered Dreams of Revolution: From Liberty to Violence in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014).

⁷ Cf. CUP member Emmanuil Emmanuilidis, in his insightful memoirs *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun son yılları* (Istanbul: Belge, 2014), p. 100. Original: *Τα τελευταία έτη της Οθωμανικής Αυτοκρατορίας*, (Athens: Τυπογραφείον Γ. Ν. Καλλέργη, 1924); İhsan S. Balkaya, *Ali Fethi Okyar (29 Nisan 1880–7 Mayıs 1943)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2005), p. 60.

well-implanted religious network in the early Ottoman world.⁸ Talaat's nation, in contrast, was limited to Turkish-speaking Muslims relying on the Ottoman state. But while his political roots lay in the Ottoman power organization based on Selim I's achievements, Bektashism played a role for Talaat, since its *tekke* (cloisters) had offered a safe niche for dissidents under Abdulhamid and cultivated a more liberal spirit than the Sunni orthodoxy that the sultan demanded. After the rapid ascendance of Turkish nationalism in the early 1910s, a few CUP intellectuals tried to coopt Alevis and Bektashis, theorizing them as the true bearers of Turkishness in language and habits, who had resisted assimilation with surrounding Kurdish tribes and with Arab- and Persian-influenced imperial culture. But this modestly successful CUP flirtation with Alevism scandalized conservative Sunni Muslims.⁹

Embrace of war

War and the patriotic call to fight for the nation pay politically in times of crisis, if enough people are prone to follow the call. Talaat had applied this manoeuvre during a deep crisis of the CUP on the eve of the Balkan Wars in September 1912, again during Edirne's reconquest in 1913 and again in July 1914. Then, a small group around him decided to take Europe's July crisis as a chance to approach Germany and to conclude finally, after several frustrated attempts in the months and years before, an alliance with a European great power. Talaat embraced war as a game-changer, although this was a gamble with high stakes and even higher risks.

The secret treaty of 2 August 1914 demanded active war from Turkey. Henceforth, an ambitious world war agenda dominated politics. Although the German-speaking war minister Enver Pasha, an iconic military hero of the 1908 revolution, appeared as the figurehead during these plots, Talaat pulled the strings. He was also centrally involved in the proposition to the German ally in October 1914 to launch a naval attack on the Black Sea to provoke open war with Russia, as desired by the German military mission in Ottoman Turkey. Only then did the world, which suspected, know for sure of the Ottoman–German alliance. In his memoirs, written in 1919, Talaat

⁸ For more on this topic, see Krisztina Kehl, *Die Kizilbaş/Aleviten: Untersuchungen über eine esoterische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Anatolien* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 1988); Markus Dressler, *Writing Religion: The Making of Turkish Alevi İslam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁹ Baha Said, 'Türkiye'de Alevi zümreleri. Teke Aleviliği-içtimai Alevilik', *Türk Yurdu*, September 1926, transcribed edn (Ankara: Tutibay, 1999), pp. xi, 105; Dressler, *Writing Religion*, pp. 137–40.

misleads the reader to believe that he was not aware of the planned aggression. What he wrote after defeat was an apologetic element in his larger, ongoing struggle to reclaim some dignity in exile and reconcentrate power.¹⁰

Behind the desk at the Ministry of the Interior that spring of 1915 was a forty-one-year-old man who impressed his freshly arrived German visitor with his energy, willpower and the striking aura of a self-made man.¹¹ Talaat was very active and busy, yet at the same time apparently friendly and approachable. He signed documents and made telephone calls while carrying on a conversation with his guest, as from time to time secretaries entered and exited the room. The visitor was the journalist Emil Ludwig, soon to gain renown as biographer of the great men of the century. Meeting Talaat for the first time that mid-April day, he already had a penetrating view of the man: 'At first sight this is a lucid mind. But behind it, within him, there is a subdued daemonic temper chained up.'

Indeed, behind the smile was a brain constructing what would be called one of the most monstrous political acts of the twentieth century. Many others noted Talaat's charm and capacity to humour the people coming to him. He combined this charm at times with melancholy – the melancholy of a man presiding over a crumbling empire – which made him likable, particularly to Germans, and mollified even angry friends in his presence. No less than jokes, sadness served as a weapon. Sly, perhaps, rather than intelligent and farsighted, Talaat possessed the emotional and social qualities of a networker, a strong instinct for power, and an excellent memory that tended toward the vengeful. 'Why did we enter the war?' Talaat asked, rhetorically, to shape Emil Ludwig's flattering report in the *Berliner Tageblatt* (The Berlin Daily), and answered it with a CUP mantra: 'We had to re-establish our independence, and we were sure [in July 1914] that we would achieve this best at Germany's side.' Later, in exile and in his memoirs, Talaat promoted the cliché of Entente-friendly Young Turks who, repudiated by Britain, turned of necessity to Germany.

More than the other powers, Wilhelmine Germany was attracted, politically and culturally, to Turkey.¹² During the war it was ready to adopt a

¹⁰ Talat, *Hatıralarım*, p. 37. Cf. Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 153–82; and Erik J. Zürcher's insightful comparative analysis (though based on secondary literature), 'Young Turk decision making patterns', in *Conseil scientifique pour l'étude du génocide des Arméniens, Le génocide des Arméniens* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2015), pp. 15–32.

¹¹ Emil Ludwig, 'Zwei Audienzen', *Berliner Tageblatt* 201, 21 April 1915.

¹² Contemporaries referred to this at times as *Türkenfieber* (Turk fever). Stefan Ihrig has recently explored this relevant topic in *Atatürk in the Nazi Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

laissez-faire approach vis-à-vis Turkey's men of radical action and their demolitionist domestic policy, even if it did not always approve of them. Moral defeatism was a logical outcome of such an attitude. Germany's interest in re-empowering Ottoman Turkey and its non-interference in its ally's domestic policies were essential for Talaat's designs. This was particularly true for a free hand in what the minister termed 'the national struggle for survival' against Ottoman Armenians, his fellow citizens.¹³ The Social Darwinism implied in that slogan played a seminal role during the First World War in general and for Central Committee members in particular.

24 April 1915

On 24 April 1915, the minister of the interior sent circulars to his provincial governors and a long telegram to Enver, the vice commander of the Ottoman army. (The sultan was the nominal commander.) In them, Talaat defined the current domestic situation as a general Armenian insurrection. He evoked the spectre of a Russian-backed Armenian autonomy in eastern Asia Minor, where Turkey risked losing the war. Neither his circulars nor his memoirs mention that he and his friends had begun this war in the east in August 1914.¹⁴ Their aim? To restore Turkey's strength and unlimited sovereignty, abolish the prospect of internationally monitored reforms for the crisis-ridden Kurdish-Armenian eastern provinces and reconquer territory lost decades ago in the Caucasus and beyond.

In the eastern provinces since the mid-nineteenth century, unrest had accompanied lack of security and justice. Diplomacy called the issue the Armenian Question and considered it an essential part of the modern Eastern Question. What could or should be the future of the Ottoman Empire – that is, the future of the Near East – and what should Europe do about it?¹⁵ A main stumbling block for any easy answers was the non-Muslim

¹³ To his political friend Halil (Menteşe) in June 1915. Halil Menteşe, *Osmanlı Mebusan Meclisi Reisi Halil Menteşe'nin anıları* (Istanbul: Hürriyet Vakfı, 1986), p. 216.

¹⁴ *Arşiv belgeleriyle Ermeni faaliyetleri 1914-1918*, ed. T. C. Genelkurmay Başkanlığı (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basım Evi, 2005), I, pp. 424–5 (a collection of Ottoman sources from the Military Archive, ATASE); Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 186–7. For the war in the east from August 1914, see Candan Badem's chapter 'The War at the Caucasus Front' and Kieser, *Talaat Pasha*, pp. 186–210.

¹⁵ Cf. Matthew S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question 1774–1923* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1966).

Ottomans' demand for equality. It had met with fierce opposition from local lords and Sunni leaders, particularly in provincial parts of Asia Minor, where non-Muslims were regarded as *zimmi*, obliged to respect pre-modern Muslim hegemony in state and society. The Armenians, the most vocal group demanding reforms, were denigrated as agents of Christian powers. Young Armenian activists had spread ideas of social revolutionary change, sought foreign backing and began to organize self-defence. About 100,000 Armenians, mostly men, were massacred in autumn 1895, along with other massacres in 1894–6, and roughly another 20,000 were killed in April 1909, by reactionaries partly supported by state officials. The Islamist discourse of various authorities – as an honest, though solitary, Kurdish historian in the 1970s reminded us – had incited the public to kill the *gavur* (non-Muslim) neighbours *en masse* and made killing a duty to the *ummah* (community of Muslims).¹⁶

To forestall collapsing entirely into several regions, the state had long connived with and coopted violent reactionary forces. It did not prosecute these crimes, which the sultan's own Islamist politics had invited. The Great Powers, in turn, lacked viable common ground and failed to act. They were paralyzed not only by imperialist competition but also by their fear that the collapse of the Ottoman state would seriously affect their economic investments and interests and even lead to a general war over the spoils. Ottoman diplomacy under Sultan Abdulhamid II learned to exploit this constellation.¹⁷ During the First World War, the situation worsened further. Though the government had signed a reform plan backed by Armenians and Russia for eastern Asia Minor in February 1914, war and German acquiescence allowed Talaat to suspend it and, by the end of 1914, to abrogate it completely.

Talaat had convinced himself that the reforms would lead ultimately to the region's autonomy and possibly to territorial loss, as in the recent case of Macedonia. (In that case, however, Talaat's purposeful warmongering of autumn 1912, as well as long-standing Ottoman deficits in the administration, had also played a role, as had the aggression of the Balkan states and Great Powers' passivity.) The loss of almost the whole of European Turkey in 1912–13, bringing hundreds of thousands of *muhacir* (Muslim refugees) into

¹⁶ Kemal M. Ahmed, *Birinci dünya savaşı yıllarında Kürdistan* (Ankara: Berhem, 1992; first Kurdish edn Baghdad, 1975), pp. 62–4, 86.

¹⁷ An up-to-date biography of Abdulhamid is provided by François Georgeon, *Abdulhamid II. Le sultan calife* (Paris: Fayard, 2003), pp. 356–61. Relevant insights into Abdulhamid's reign, based on Ottoman sources, are provided by Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876–1909* (London: I.B.Tauris, 1998).

the empire, had made Talaat and his friends radical partisans of a fresh Turkish nationalism. This new current dismissed any residual belief in Ottoman multinational coexistence, claimed all of Asia Minor as a ‘*Turkish home*’ (*Türk Yurdu*) and let itself become obsessed with Ziya Gökalp’s expansive vision of ‘Turan’, the region in Central Asia from which the Turkish peoples had putatively originated. It assumed the successful assimilation of non-Turkish Muslims, in particular the Kurds, but not of Ottoman Christians. Such ambitious goals of imperial restoration and expansion could be achieved only through war. Dreams of conquest toward Turan via the Caucasus were extremely popular among young élites, with military officers foremost, beginning in August 1914, but saw catastrophic frustration at the end of the year. They were revived, however, when Russia broke down under domestic turbulence in 1917.

On 24 April 1915, Talaat decided to end the Armenian Question once and for all. Although initially quite open to the Armenians after the constitutional revolution of 1908, he now fanatically hated and deeply feared them as the main obstacle to his ambitions for a Turkish future that he no longer saw related to the principles of the Ottoman constitution. In his circular of that day, he ordered the arrest of the Armenian élite. Actually, he was suspicious of all non-Muslim groups with political projects, and of the Zionists as well. During dinner with the US ambassador Henry Morgenthau that evening, he expressed the conviction, as Morgenthau noted, ‘that they [the Zionists] are mischievous and that it is their [the CUP rulers’] duty to get rid of them.’ The German ambassador Hans von Wangenheim told Morgenthau three days later that ‘he would help Zionists but not Armenians.’¹⁸ And in fact, Germany did protect Jews in Palestine but not Armenians, a much larger group whose protection in Asia Minor would have been much more difficult.

With his 24 April orders, Talaat handed over even former political friends for interrogation, torture and, in most cases, murder. Before killing those arrested, the security apparatus, a part of his ministry, extorted confessions to prove that there was a general Armenian conspiracy.¹⁹ There was no general conspiracy; but in Talaat’s purposeful theory, there was.

¹⁸ Henry Morgenthau, *United States Diplomacy on the Bosphorus: The Diaries of Ambassador Morgenthau 1913–1916*, ed. Ara Sarafian (Princeton, NJ: Gomidas Institute, 2004) (henceforth, Morgenthau diary), 24 April 1915, p. 215; 27 April 1915, p. 217. Morgenthau was one of the best informed international observer-actors in 1914–16 Istanbul. His correspondence and diary are sober, lucid and mostly appropriate sources.

¹⁹ *Arşiv belgeleriyle Ermeni faaliyetleri*, I, pp. 235–81. Many Ottoman sources are today available in Latin transliteration of the Arabic original, in print or online. The latter is an eight-volume collection of Ottoman army sources. A selection of Ottoman state sources on the Armenians in the First World War can be accessed at the site of the Başbakanlık

Many former political companions, now victims, could not believe that Talaat had become their persecutor. It was to him that they appealed for help as they were led to trial and death.²⁰ The lawyer and writer Krikor Zohrab, a long-time political partner of Talaat and an internationally renowned cross-bench deputy in the Ottoman parliament, had been exempted from the arrests of Saturday night, 24 April 1915. Together with the Armenian patriarch and two other representatives, he visited Talaat on Sunday morning and urged him to liberate the prisoners. Zohrab found him inflexible: 'All Armenians who verbally, by written word, or by their action have worked, or one day can work, for the construction of an Armenia are considered enemies of the state.'²¹ A day later, Zohrab sent Talaat a memorandum in which he complained that not only had the original statement wrongly indicated that those arrested would be released but that he could obtain no news on those arrested.²²

Communion in crime

Like his Central Committee friend Ziya Gökalp, a spiritual father of Turkish nationalism, Talaat embraced a state-centric Turkism, believed in Muslim supremacy, refused the idea of a social contract and rejected regionally rooted self-government. Instead, both men favoured unitary, authoritarian centralization. Gökalp's modernizing ideology, called 'idealism' (*mefkûrecilik*, from Gökalp's seminal term *mefkûre*, pointing to the 'ideal' of Turan and Turkism) by its adepts, was in fact political messianism. Underestimated and

Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA), <http://www.devletarsivleri.gov.tr/1915-olaylari> (accessed 19 February 2016). The access to the military archives in Ankara (Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt Başkanlığı Arşivi) is restricted, and the selection and release of documents is at the discretion of the archive. BOA is more liberal; it remains, however, uncertain how far particularly sensitive documents are accessible.

²⁰ Grigoris Balakian's first-hand testimony offers several examples: Grigoris Balakian, *Armenian Golgotha: A Memoir of the Armenian Genocide, 1915–1918* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009). Although not comparable to the distortion of Talaat's memoirs in their first American edition, this edition of Balakian's *Armenian Golgotha* is problematic insofar as it adapts a memoir to the supposed expectations of an American public, instead of leaving to emotions and religion their authentic place. Concretely, its scholarly value is diminished by the translator's unmarked cuts, in order, he argues, to spare the reader what he sees as 'editorializing and sermonizing passages.' Cf. Balakian, *Armenian Golgotha*, pp. xxviii–xxix.

²¹ Quoted in Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2011), pp. 252–3. This is the fullest history of the Armenian genocide to date, based largely on Armenian sources but including a multitude of others.

²² Krikor Zohrab, *Collected Works*, ed. Albert Sharurian (Yerevan: n.p., 2003), vi, p. 312 (in Armenian; thanks to Raymond Kévorkian for translating).

almost overlooked by historians of the twentieth century,²³ the synergy of Talaat and Gökalp played a seminal role in the cataclysmic disruption of the late Ottoman Middle East. It deeply impacted Europe, Germany foremost. Here not only did Talaat enjoy esteem in wide circles, but Ziya Gökalp was praised as the ingenious founder of Turkish nationalism, an historic figure and master of a ‘popular philosophy’ that had ‘proved itself so brilliantly during the last war.’²⁴

Radical party politics combined with transformative political thought (Gökalp) and practice (Talaat) during the Ottoman cataclysm. Fragile seeds of a more modest, but consensual and pluralist, state and nation rebuilding, based on Ottoman constitutionalism, were thus destroyed. German Orientalists noted both Gökalp’s involvement in Islamist reform currents and that he was at the same time a Turkish enthusiast who had ‘got drunk . . . on the ideal of the “great eternal country Turan”’ (August Fischer), although they delved in no critical way into the latter’s political implications. After the war, Orientalists-turned-Turkologists greeted nationalism based on Islam and Turkish nationalism positively, thus banishing from their discipline the hitherto most important contributors to Ottoman Turkology in Europe: the Armenians.²⁵

On 27 May 1915, Emil Ludwig visited the minister of the interior for a second time.²⁶ Talaat’s frame of mind was excellent. Two and a half months earlier, quite the contrary had been the case. But the first Ottoman victory, thwarting the attempted naval breakthrough at the Dardanelles on 18 March that would have resulted in an attack on Istanbul, had greatly lifted the mood of a government that, during winter of 1914–15, had suffered heavy defeats in the Caucasus, northern Iran, southern Iraq and at the Suez Canal. The press of the Entente countries and neutrals had then been vocal in their pleas for an internationally protected Armenian autonomy.²⁷ The victory of 18 March

²³ With notable exceptions, mostly among Armenians, e.g., Stephan Astourian, ‘Modern Turkish Identity and the Armenian Genocide: From Prejudice to Racist Nationalism,’ in Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), pp. 23–50.

²⁴ Mustafa Nermi, ‘Türkismus und Kant,’ *Nord und Süd: Eine deutsche Monatsschrift* 173 (1920): 169–72; August Fischer, *Aus der religiösen Reformbewegung in der Türkei: Türkische Stimmen verdeutscht* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1922), pp. 5–7; Richard Hartmann, ‘Ziya Gökalp’s Grundlagen des türkischen Nationalismus,’ *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 28 (1925): 578–610 (quotation is on p. 610).

²⁵ Marie Bossaert, ‘La part arménienne des études turques,’ *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 24 (2017), <http://ejts.revues.org/5525> (accessed 17 March 2018).

²⁶ Emil Ludwig, ‘Unterredung mit Talaat Bei, dem Minister des Inneren,’ *Berliner Tageblatt* 268, 28 May 1915.

²⁷ ‘Glanures,’ *Journal de Genève* of 9 January 1915, front page.

1915 against the Entente inspired Central Committee friends not only with a new self-confidence but also with an arrogant and brutal chauvinism, as the Austrian general Joseph Pomiankowski, a frequent companion of Enver Pasha, noted.²⁸

That chauvinism then merged with daredevilry. Determination crystallized among the committee radicals to seize this opportune moment to end the Armenian Question by terminating Armenian existence. Inspired by radical collaborators on the ground, Talaat produced security arguments regarding the eastern front against Russia. The underlying reason for the action, however, was the will to 'free' Asia Minor from any Armenian claims. In a comprehensive strategy for the war, encompassing perceived interior and exterior fronts, Talaat was confident of achieving a bone-crushing victory against the domestic adversary. He had embraced total war since late July 1914 and understood it to be waged on all sides. He had already achieved a terrific success when, by June 1914, CUP gangs had expelled more than 200,000 Orthodox Christians (so-called Rûm), Ottoman citizens, from Thrace and from the region of Izmir on the Aegean to the near islands, from where they went to Greece. By mid-July 1915, he boasted that he had 'accomplished more in three months about crushing the Armenians than Abdul Hamid could do in 37 years.'²⁹

In May 1915, everybody was busy with the ongoing struggle for the Ottoman capital. Only a few hours after mass arrests had started, on the morning of 25 April 1915, the Entente had begun to invade Gallipoli, and the Ottoman army resisted successfully. The successful resistance against the Entente forces was led by German generals and supported by German experts, submarines and units. During the 27 May interview with Emil Ludwig, Talaat showed himself to be utterly self-confident: 'Nobody will break through the Dardanelles.' He did not fear Italy's possible entry into war or the outbreak of war in the Balkans. He felt sure of winning his domestic war against not only the Rûm but also the Armenians. He had already sent, on 16 May, a letter to the grand vizier that detailed how his Ministry of the Interior had settled a quarter of a million Muslim refugees in places from which Rûm had been expelled. Talaat was becoming a pioneering demographic engineer, as his notebook with its fastidious statistical accounting testifies.³⁰

²⁸ Joseph Pomiankowski, *Der Zusammenbruch des Ottomanischen Reiches. Erinnerungen an die Türkei aus der Zeit des Weltkrieges* (Zürich: Amalthea-Verlag, 1927), pp. 154–62.

²⁹ Morgenthau diary, 18 July 1915, p. 279. Menteşe, *Anıları*, pp. 165–6.

³⁰ Tahrirat of 16 May 1915, BOA BEO, 326465, quoted in Ahmet Efiloğlu, *İttihat ve Terakki azımlıklar politikası* (doctoral diss., University of Istanbul, 2007), p. 106. Talaat's notebook: *Talat Paşa'nın Evrak-ı Metrûkesi*, ed. Murat Bardakçı (Istanbul: Everest, 2008).

The minister manifested utter self-confidence also regarding global history, as is evident in his introduction to the Ottoman translation of Karl Helfferich's analysis of how the world war had broken out. In this piece, dated 14 May 1915, the Ottoman leader entirely identified with the view of contemporary history expressed by this academically trained and sharp-tongued advocate of German *Weltpolitik*, who would, in the early days of the Weimar Republic, become a leader of the far right. Conveniently for Talaat, Treasury Secretary Helfferich, formerly director of the Anatolian Railway, blamed Russia for the war with apodictic certainty and declared France and Britain complicit, while the Central Powers had only defended themselves against the arsonists of the Entente. 'In this way, the responsibilities become fully evident; in my opinion, there is no task even left to later historiography,' Talaat concluded. Two years later, and now grand vizier, Talaat was given a reception in Helfferich's house in Berlin. They had known each other well since the aftermath of 1908, when Helfferich, now chairman of the Deutsche Bank, and the journalist Paul Weitz arranged propaganda and, in Helfferich's words, 'baksheesh', in addition to their 'advances *ad libitum*' to win over the CUP. The Central Committee had initially shown reserve vis-à-vis Germany, because of the latter's courtship of Sultan Abdulhamid II.³¹

After the attack on the Armenian élite, the minister of the interior prepared the main act: to send a whole people into the desert in Syria. The day before Emil Ludwig's second visit, Talaat had delivered a long letter to Grand Vizier Said Halim, himself a CUP member but less influential than Talaat and Enver. This letter of 26 May 1915 presents the evacuation of the Armenians as a comprehensive and definitive solution to a question vital for the Ottoman state. The sentences are tortuous, but the authoritative articulation does not leave any room for doubt about a project that breached the constitution and broke Ottoman laws, even as it feigned a resettlement of the removed people, a promise to protect their rights and property, and a limitation of the removals to those living in the war zones.³²

³¹ Talaat, 'Mukaddime', in Karl Helfferich, *Harb-i Umûmî'nin menseleri* (Istanbul: Fratelli Hayim Matbaası, 1915), p. 8. The translation is by Talaat's, later Atatürk's, collaborator Reşid S. Atabini; its original title is *Die Entstehung des Weltkriegs im Lichte der Veröffentlichungen der Dreiverbandmächte* (Berlin: Georg Stilke, 1915). Reception in Berlin on 27 April 1917, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, K. und k. Ministerium des Äusseren, Departement 5, Zeitungsarchiv, Karton 86, Akte 3; John G. Williamson, *Karl Helfferich 1872-1924: Economist, Financier, Politician* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 89-96.

³² Talaat (from the Interior Ministry's Directorate for Resettlement of Tribes and Migrants) to the grand vizier, 26 May 1915, BOA BEO, 4357-326758.

Urged on by Enver and Talaat, the cabinet decreed a provisional law on 27 May that permitted the army to ‘crush any opposition’ and, in cases of suspicion, to ‘dispatch individually or collectively, and to resettle elsewhere, the inhabitants of villages and towns.’³³ It did not name the Armenian target, in contrast to a much more detailed decree of 30 May. This decree, too, bore Talaat’s mark, repeating whole passages from his letter of 26 May.³⁴ Talaat acted in defiance of the Entente’s declaration of 24 May that warned that the members of the Ottoman government would be held personally responsible for ‘crimes against humanity’. (This is the first time the term was used in high politics.)³⁵ To this international admonition, Talaat reacted by extending responsibility to the whole cabinet, thus producing a fundamental communion in crime.

Talaat often acted before he informed his peers or sought the consent of his formal superiors in the cabinet and party, and before laws were made that sanctioned the deeds. On 18 May he had already instructed the governor of Erzurum, and on 23 May, also the governors of Van and Bitlis – three provinces included in the international reform plan signed on 8 February 1914 – to chase the Armenian population toward the south. At the same time, he had briefed the governors on the resettlement of Muslim refugees from the lost Balkan provinces in the houses the Armenians had ‘abandoned’.³⁶ Hence, over three months, beginning in the east, caravans of Armenian women, children and some men (those not drafted) dragged their way through Asia Minor. They were exposed to privation, spoliation, massacre and repeated rapes of women and children, girls and boys. Most Armenian men in the east were killed before departure. Materially, the comprehensive spoliation of the Armenians profited the state but also notables, occasional robbers and a great number of neighbours. Crime went hand in hand with the corruption fostered by a countrywide miscreant regime.

³³ ‘Deportation Law’ published on 1 June 1915 in the official gazette (*Takvim-i Vekayi*); in French on 2 June in *La Turquie*, reproduced in Arthur Beylerian (ed.), *Les grandes puissances, l’Empire ottoman et les Arméniens dans les archives françaises (1914–1918). Recueil de documents* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1983), pp. 40–1.

³⁴ *Armenians in Ottoman Documents (1915–1920)*, ed. Directorate of Ottoman Archives (Ankara: Directorate of Ottoman Archives, 1995), pp. 34–5.

³⁵ Contemporary English version in *United States Official Records on the Armenian Genocide 1915–1917*, ed. Ara Sarafian (London: Gomidas, 2004), p. 29. On Talaat’s reaction to this declaration, cf. Yusuf H. Bayur, *Türk inkılabı tarihi* (Ankara: TTK, 1991), III, part 3, p. 39. On the juridical term, see Daniel M. Segesser, ‘Die historischen Wurzeln des Begriffs “Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit”’, *Jahrbuch der Juristischen Zeitgeschichte* 8 (2006–7): 75–101.

³⁶ *Armenians in Ottoman Documents*, pp. 36–7.

Talaat, Ziya Gökalp and Germany

That Thursday, 27 May 1915, as Ludwig left Talaat's office, he saw twenty or so employees in the corridor prostrating themselves for prayer. Although Talaat could rarely join due to lack of time, he participated at the public prayers (*namaz*) on Fridays. Every morning he did his personal prayer and read, according to his wife, the Victory Surah 48. There are at times elements of pious rhetoric in his diverse letters, although little elaboration. In discussions with the *sheykhulislam* (the head of the religious administration), Mustafa Hayri, who was also a member of the CUP's Central Committee, he insisted that he was a good Muslim. Talaat had been the first to shake approvingly the hand of the *fetva* commissioner, after the latter had read the legal document (*fetva*) written by Hayri declaring *jihad* on 14 November 1914. He both identified with and used Islam to support his power, even in April 1909, when he had extorted a *fetva* in order to dethrone Abdulhamid.³⁷

Hayri was at odds with Talaat's radicalism and rudeness but, like a small number of other CUP representatives who felt similarly, was neither able nor willing to confront him seriously. In contrast to Hayri, Talaat did not see the salvation of his precarious state first in a reformed Muslim union. He preferred to transform state and society, as suggested by the ideas of Gökalp, his close and influential friend. Hayri accused Gökalp of putting Turkism over Islam in the Central Committee and resented this adversary's enjoying more influence than he.³⁸ According to Gökalp's vision, leaders had to cull bad elements from society and graft on new ones. Once the renewed society acquired Western science and civilization, it would not only realize the superiority of Islam and the Turkish race and culture but become a unitary body: 'A country,' in Gökalp's words, 'in which ... every individual has the same ideal, language, habit, religion ... Its sons ache to give their lives at its frontier!'³⁹

³⁷ Ali F. Türkgeldi, *Görüp işittiklerim* (Ankara: TTK, 2010), pp. 36–7. Entry of 4 February 1917, diary of Mustafa Hayri, *Şeyhülislam Ürgüplü Mustafa Hayri Efendi'nin Mesrutiyet, Büyük Harp ve Mütareke günlükleri (1909–1922)*, ed. Ali Suat Ürgüplü (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası, 2015), p. 394 (henceforth, Hayri diary; this is an important source for insights into the CUP Central Committee and essential conflicts).

³⁸ Hayri diary, p. 372, 29 April 1917; *Tanin* of 15 November 1914, quoted in Emmanuilidis, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun son yılları*, p. 116.

³⁹ Muhittin Birgen, *İttihat ve Terakkide on sene. İttihat ve Terakki neydi?* (Istanbul: Kitapçıyanevi, 2006), p. 370; 'Kızilema', *Türk Yurdu* 2:31 (23 January 1913) (transcribed edn; Ankara: Tutibay, 1999), II, pp. 115–20. For a pertinent interpretation, see Uğur Ü. Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 35; 'İslamiyet ve asri medeniyet', *İslâm Mecmuası* 51–2, 1917 (English in Niyazi Berkes, *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization: Selected essays of Ziya Gökalp* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), pp. 214–23).

Gökalp proclaimed a messiah named ‘Turan’, which stood not for a person but for the compelling myth of an ‘enormous and eternal fatherland’ to be conquered across the Caucasus. In the first months of the First World War, the phantasm of Turan galvanized young, ‘idealist’ (Gökल्पian) CUP officers into pursuing a pan-Turkist conquest of the Caucasus and beyond. They felt it their mission to save Turkic Muslims from Russia’s yoke. In various rhymes, Gökalp proclaimed his shrill prophecy of early August 1914: ‘Russia will collapse and be ruined / Turkey will expand and be Turan!’⁴⁰ War for Turan was *jihad*, and this had started, as he wrote on 9 August 1914, when ‘God’s will / sprang from the people / We proclaimed the jihad, / God is great.’⁴¹ All too quickly, exalted Turan turned into a monster, once it was frustrated in January 1915 after the disaster of Enver’s offensive at Sarikamış. ‘The road to Turan’, however, remained suggestive and present even in telegrams sent to minister Talaat.⁴²

Before ‘culling bad elements from society’, that is, destroying, in summer 1915, a stigmatized people, a critical barrier had to be overcome in late spring: possible German interposition. Potential shocks to the alliance had to be tamped down until the deed became irreversible and, according to the military logic of alliance, Germany had fully invested in denying or downplaying what had happened. On 31 May 1915, Talaat sent Enver to the German ambassador, Hans von Wangenheim. Enver was not only German-speaking and the darling of the German press and court but also the intimate friend of the Turkish-speaking captain Hans Humann, an informal adviser to but also rival and critic of Wangenheim at the German embassy. In the most polite and trivializing terms, Enver demanded understanding for the need and support for the project ‘to evacuate a few subversive families from centers of insurrection’. A few Armenian schools and newspapers would also be closed – but Turkey’s existence, dear to Germany and German ambitions for *Weltgeltung* (global standing), was at risk. Wangenheim acquiesced.⁴³

⁴⁰ Birgen, *İttihat ve Terakki’de on sene*, p. 382.

⁴¹ Quoted in Erol Köroğlu, ‘Propaganda or Culture War: Jihad, Islam, and Nationalism in Turkish Literature during World War I’, in Erik-Jan Zürcher, *Jihad and Islam in World War I: Studies on the Ottoman Jihad on the Centenary of Snouck Hurgronje’s ‘Holy War Made in Germany’* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2016), p. 147.

⁴² For example, Governor of Erzurum to Minister of the Interior, 26 August 1915, BOA DH.ŞFR. 485–76.

⁴³ Wangenheim to Auswärtiges Amt (Foreign Office), Berlin, 31 May 1915, PA-AA, R 14086. Most German documents concerning the Armenians during the First World War are now accessible online, ed. Wolfgang Gust, <http://www.armenocide.de> (accessed 17 March 2018). If not otherwise noted, document references are from this internet edition. On Wangenheim, see H. Kieser, ‘Botschafter Wangenheim und das jungtürkische Komitee’, in Rolf Hosfeld and Christin Pschichholz (eds), *Das Deutsche Reich und der Völkermord an den Armeniern* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2017), pp. 131–48.

On 1 June 1915, Krikor Zohrab, a member of parliament once thought to be on excellent terms with the interior minister, asked a last time for an explanation of the deportations from Talaat and Midhat Şükrü (Bleda), a Central Committee member and the CUP's secretary-general.⁴⁴ Talaat retorted that he need account for nothing to anybody. 'But to me, in the quality of an Armenian deputy,' Zohrab insisted. As a response to a power holder who had detached himself from basic human norms, this answer was testimony to a personality still anchored in an Ottoman constitutional period now to be irrevocably revoked, gone with the wind, together with polyethnic Ottoman society itself. One day later, Zohrab was arrested on orders from Talaat and sent to Diyarbekir, ostensibly for court-martial. From the hotel 'Bagdad' in Konya, on the way to Diyarbekir, Zohrab sent Talaat a long, heartbreaking, but dignified and thoughtful letter. It stands to this day as a monument to a man with spirit – an outstanding Armenian author, arguably the best Ottoman-speaking orator in the parliament – wanting to live facing a brute force eager to kill for power.⁴⁵ Zohrab never arrived in Diyarbekir. He was brutally assassinated on the road by CUP killers.

Ambassador Wangenheim soon regretted his rapid acquiescence, but Talaat had won the time he needed to start up the administrative machine of deportation. The collective targeting of Armenians released and spurred anti-Christian hatred and cupidity in broad parts of society – although not everywhere. Yezidis and Alevis in remote regions and individuals in different places offered asylum. On 10 June 1915, the German vice consul in Mosul reported to Wangenheim the horrible massacres of deportees from the neighbouring province of Diyarbekir. Large numbers of corpses and body parts floated on the Tigris.⁴⁶ Immediately, the German ambassador confronted Talaat, who answered, 'We liberate ourselves from the Armenians to be a better ally for you, freed from weakness induced by a domestic enemy.' Further down on the same page on which Humann reports these words, the naval officer added his own opinion: 'The Armenians are now exterminated *grosso modo* because of their conspiracy with the Russians. This is hard, but useful.'⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Bleda became Midhat Şükrü's family name in the Republic of Turkey, when family names became compulsory in 1934.

⁴⁵ Krikor Zohrap, *Collected Works*, iv, pp. 291–6; Kévorkian, *Armenian Genocide*, pp. 533–4.

⁴⁶ Walter Holstein to Botschaft Konstantinopel, PA-AA BoKon 169, 1915.06.10, <http://www.armenocide.de> (accessed 17 March 2018).

⁴⁷ Humann, marginalia on Holstein's telegram, 15 June 1915, BA-MA Freiburg RM40_4 (Aktenband 456), facsimile and quotation in Jürgen Gottschlich, *Beihilfe zum Völkermord. Deutschlands Rolle bei der Vernichtung der Armenier* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2015), p. 197.

The young officer's laconic comment gives a foretaste of an exterminatory National Socialism that has more to do with the German experience and perception of genocide in Turkey than popular history has acknowledged.⁴⁸ Humann was not only blinded by his friendship with Enver and his identification with the latter's 'idealism'. Wilhelmine élites largely cherished the idea that a systematically re-empowered Turkey would be the key to German hegemony in Europe and Western Asia, and consequently to German global power. Humann used his Turkish relationships and cooperated in producing myths of German and Turkish power to boost his own career. Though from a cultivated and cosmopolitan family, he admired brutal energy and will in the service of national power, during the First World War and afterwards. Wangenheim, now that he understood the dimensions of the extermination, got on Humann's nerves for 'all the time lamenting [about the treatment of the Armenians], much to the disadvantage of our political interest'. The apparent paradox between Humann's high culture and his affirmation of nature in Social Darwinist terms was characteristic of much of the contemporary German élite. The expert on Turkey and friend of the Armenians, Johannes Lepsius, stood for the other side.⁴⁹

Soon thereafter the official representative of the Wilhelmine empire in Istanbul, who had had reason to deem himself superior to Talaat, collapsed. Strokes killed Wangenheim in October, after he had finally tried to convince himself of the inevitability of Talaat's policy and even proposed replacing the deported Armenians with Jews from Poland.⁵⁰ If at first against his will, Wangenheim had made the Turkish-German wartime alliance his own project – a product of haste, emergency and gamble. The CUP's overtures after mid-July 1914 had suddenly offered Germany the prospect of getting Turkey to fight at its side. The wager shaped German war psychology and planning for the future, even while, in late July 1914, war still was only a possibility, not a reality. Hence, both governments had depended on each

⁴⁸ On this topic, see Stefan Ihrig, *Justifying Genocide: Germany and the Armenians from Bismarck to Hitler* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); Hans-Lukas Kieser and Dominik J. Schaller (eds), *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern und die Shoah* (Zürich: Chronos, 2002).

⁴⁹ On this contemporary expert on Turkey, friend of the Armenians, humanitarian activist and historian of the contemporary era, see Rolf Hosfeld (ed.), *Johannes Lepsius – Eine deutsche Ausnahme: Der Völkermord an den Armeniern, Humanitarismus und Menschenrechte* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2013); Hans-Lukas Kieser, 'Johannes Lepsius: Theologian, humanitarian activist and historian of *Völkermord*. An approach to a German biography (1858–1926)', in Anna Briskina-Müller, Armenuhi Drost-Abgajan and Axel Meissner (eds), *Logos im Dialogos. Auf der Suche nach der Orthodoxie. Gedenkschrift für Hermann Goltz (1946–2010)* (Münster: Lit, 2011), pp. 209–29.

⁵⁰ As noted in the Morgenthau diary, 7 October 1915, p. 351.

other in a mutual military gamble. Thereafter Wangenheim courted the CUP men of action more than ever, ignoring for 'higher' strategic reasons the warnings and cries for help coming from the Armenian side since late 1914. The embassy even wrote the draft of the apologetic Ottoman rebuttal to the Entente declaration of 24 May 1915. The joint propaganda efforts at denial intensified in August 1915 and continued, undeterred by Wangenheim's death, until late 1918.

Turkey was slightly advantaged because Germany's aspirations to dominance in Europe and *Weltgeltung* remained diffuse. They interacted with the idea of a German sphere of influence, *Mitteuropa* (Central Europe), a zone that some could imagine stretching into the Ottoman world and beyond. Only after the collapse of czarist Russia did German ambitions refocus on Eastern Europe. In contrast, Talaat possessed right from the eve of the First World War a concrete, minimal goal (alongside his more diffuse maximal goal, imperial restoration and Gökalp's Turan): the preservation of Central Committee power and the establishment of national sovereignty, at least in a secure, Turkish, Muslim home in Asia Minor. Despite its defeat in the First World War, Turkey achieved this goal under Mustafa Kemal Pasha, defying Western diplomacy, a cause for envy by its former senior partner.⁵¹

Talaat became grave when Emil Ludwig asked him, during a third visit on 18 August 1915, if the persecution of the Armenians would not damage the economy. 'Yes, a bit,' he replied. 'But we will rapidly replace the empty spots with Turks.' Then he talked of proof of a general Armenian conspiracy. 'We are not cruel, only energetic.'⁵² In fact, Asia Minor had by this point largely lost its most educated, industrious and agriculturally productive population. 'The people are the garden, we are its gardener,' Gökalp had stated before the war. Armenians, apparently, were its weeds. Midhat Şükrü, in retrospect, justified their extermination by what he called the contagious mental illness of the Armenians. Others, such as military doctor Mehmed Reşid, the governor of Diyarbekir and Talaat's direct subordinate, compared the Armenians to microbes (and bandits) to be eliminated.⁵³

Talaat promoted radicals and opportunists and transferred or demoted those in his administration who dared to help the persecuted people or who refused his orders. Though relying on corrupt subordinates to promote his

⁵¹ On the strong appeal of Atatürk and the Turkish national revolution, see Ihrig, *Atatürk in the Nazi Imagination*.

⁵² 'Eine Unterredung mit Talaat Bey', *Berliner Tageblatt*, 21 August 1915.

⁵³ Quoted and discussed in Hans-Lukas Kieser, 'Dr Mehmed Reshid (1873–1919): A Political Doctor', in Kieser and Schaller, *Völkermord*, pp. 262 and 270. Cf. Zygmunt Bauman's interpretation or metaphor of genocide as the work of the 'gardening state' in *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

policies, he cultivated for himself the image of an incorruptible patriot. In contrast, several governors, notables and Muslim leaders risked acts of humanity, and a few therefore lost their lives. But all in all, they were a small minority.⁵⁴ Within the Central Committee, Talaat allowed the extremist members to have the upper hand, notably the military physicians Nâzım and Bahaeddin Şakir. When Mehmed Cavid, who had been minister of finance during much of 1914 (and would be so again from 1917) and a close companion of Talaat's since the eve of 1908, came back to Istanbul in August 1915 after several months in Europe, he was appalled by the 'monstrous murder and enormous dimension of brutality that Ottoman history had never known before, even in its darkest periods.' He wrote accusingly of the committee in his diary: 'You dared to destroy not only the political existence, but the life itself of a whole [Armenian] people.'⁵⁵ Even after this silent indictment, however, Cavid remained in thrall to his political friend. Cavid, however, did not know all the facts, as Talaat, the soul and architect of the whole scheme, took pains to make his communications discreet.

The reckless act for the benefit of the nation strengthened Talaat's position and prestige. Henceforth, he was deemed the saviour of the fatherland, the 'man of the future', even a prophet. 'You are Noah / You, if you were not, this nation would be orphaned,' Gökalp rhapsodized in the CUP newspaper *Tanin* on 14 September 1915. The political elite in Berlin, the German press and a large segment of the public – from majoritarian socialists to liberals and the military – also took Talaat for respectable, if not admirable, but in any case the most interesting and most important statesman of Turkey. From 1915 onward, panegyrics about Talaat – and certainly no criticism – appeared in the German press. Alfred Nossig, a Zionist and propagandist in the service of the German Foreign Office, portrayed Talaat in autumn 1915 as 'the strongest man of Young Turkey', a 'unique and outstanding talent of statesmanship' who dominates 'the whole state machine.'⁵⁶

But after Emil Ludwig had visited Talaat several times in early 1916, even before returning to Europe, his own faith in beneficial cooperation between the two countries had faded. Although his reports still repeated the standard

⁵⁴ Burçin Gerçek, *Report on Turks Who Reached-Out to Armenians in 1915*, The International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation, published online 2015, http://www.raoulwallenberg.net/wp-content/files_mf/1435335304ReportTurkishrescuerscomplete.pdf (accessed 29 July 2017).

⁵⁵ See Cavid's diary, a very important source: Cavid Bey, *Meşrutiyet Rûznamesi*, vols 1–4 (Ankara: TTK, 2014–15); here vol. 3, pp. 135–6. For a fuller account, see Ozan Ozavci, 'Honour and Shame: The Diaries of a Unionist and the "Armenian Question"', in this volume.

⁵⁶ Alfred Nossig, *Die neue Türkei und ihre Führer* (Halle: Otto Hendel, 1916), pp. 30–5.

phrases of Ottoman–German propaganda, Ludwig appears alienated. He found the foundations of state and society to be ‘totally different’ in their respective countries. He warned readers to ‘beware of unrealizable expectations that would contradict why we are helping a nation [Turkey] to recover power, so that Turkey will become the master in its own house.’⁵⁷ And Ludwig was not alone. In summer 1918, Cavid Bey confided in his diary that the German chancellor (Georg von Hertling) had let him and Talaat know that he was ‘saddened to see that the money that Germany had given us [Turks] had been used to annihilate Christians; [and that] this was part of the real problem’ between our two governments.⁵⁸ The ‘honeymoon’ between imperial Germany and the Ottoman Empire was clearly over. But exposed to Talaat’s charm, many Germans still revealed a schizophrenic attitude toward their Turkish ally, one that went hand in hand with a specific Wilhelmine Orientalism, and led, in consequence, to a form of moral defeatism.

Count Johann Heinrich Bernstorff, German ambassador to Istanbul from 1917 to the end of the war, thereafter a member of parliament in the Weimar Republic for the German Democratic Party, is a case in point. An exile in Switzerland after 1933, he published in 1936 memoirs that offer important insights and edifying remarks but that lack analytical penetration and moral coherence. In this vein, he contended that ‘a dainty blend of skepticism and slight cynicism increased the charm of this [Talaat’s] appealing personality’, a man of ‘complete integrity’ whom Bernstorff had ‘learned to venerate and love.’ Yet in the very same paragraph, he emphasized Talaat’s complicity in ‘the Turkish sin’ (Bernstorff’s term for the crime against the Armenians) and quoted him as saying, when Bernstorff had asked him about the Armenians, ‘What do you want? The question is finished. There are no more Armenians.’ Contemporary correspondence shows that Ambassador Bernstorff did not accurately distinguish between facts and politically convenient lies, thus making it easy to blame victims with easily available stereotypes.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ ‘Die Erstarkung der Türkei’, *Berliner Tageblatt* of 11 February 1916, evening edition. See also Emil Ludwig, ‘Talaat Bey über die deutsch-türkischen Zukunftsbeziehungen’, *Berliner Tageblatt*, 19 January 1916, evening; Emil Ludwig, ‘Unterredung mit Talaat Bey’, *Vossische Zeitung*, 18 February 1916; M. Grunwald, ‘Gespräch mit Talaat Bey’, *Vossische Zeitung*, 28 December 1915. H. Behle, ‘Berlin-Konstantinopel’, *Berner Tagblatt*, n.d., contains a conversation with Talaat of late May 1916 (clipping in Ernst Jäckh Papers, MS 467, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library). Emil Ludwig, born Cohn, left Germany in 1922, after minister Walther Rathenau’s assassination, and emigrated to Switzerland. In 1933, when the Nazis burnt his books, he understood that Germany’s own foundations were not as strong and different as he had thought in 1915–16.

⁵⁸ Cavid diary III, p. 524, 31 July 1918.

⁵⁹ This aspect is largely concealed in his memoirs, written in the 1930s: Johann H. Bernstorff, *Erinnerungen und Briefe* (Zürich: Polygraphischer Verlag, 1936), pp. 126–7. Bernstorff to

‘Revolutionist statesmanship’, imperially biased: a prototype

Talaat must be considered a true pioneer. He pioneered the first single-party regime in the twentieth century and imperial *komitecilik* (politics by a revolutionary committee heading an empire). He spearheaded violent demographic engineering in line with radical ethnic nationalism, knowing how to use *jihad* to effect. He went decidedly farther than the politically ambitious young men of the Balkans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who were haunted and informed by Bulgarian and ‘Serbian ghosts’.⁶⁰ General histories of the First World War remain Eurocentric as long as they do not integrate the dynamics of the Ottoman 1910s, when the international hub of Istanbul was a proactive mix of issues, ideas and political patterns that would dominate in the first half of the twentieth century in greater Europe.

Guided by Talaat, the CUP established a single-party regime in 1913, at the same time starting what it considered a national struggle for the salvation of a Turkey freed from any foreign influence. It thus inaugurated the first founding period of a post-Ottoman Turkey, marked by the sidelining of the sultanate-caliphate and the introduction of modern dictatorial patterns. Yet it carried over much of the old imperial spirit throughout the 1910s in its understanding of sociopolitical hierarchies. The same was true also for its Kemalist successors, after the sultanate-caliphate had been formally abolished in early 1924. We should see the Central Committee’s mentality therefore as ‘imperially biased’ – even as its politics were in fact demolishing the Ottoman social fabric and thus the empire. The same mentality was also a main obstacle to real democracy. In this respect, Talaat became the direct forefather of a post-Ottoman Turkey based on radical nationalism well before Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (‘Ata-türk’ meaning the Turks’ father or progenitor) became so celebrated. Importantly, Talaat, in contrast to his successor, still embraced the power of political Islam – thus suggesting that Turkey’s eventual return to political Islam in a post-Kemalist era might be only a matter of time.

Talaat’s political biography allows us to understand genocide as a highly asymmetrical form of total war, a war at home to ‘compensate’ for international

Chancellor von Hertling, 6 April 1918, PA-AA, N 1097, vol. 14, no. 102: this is a long report reacting to a devastating fact-finding report of German members of the Reichstag. Bernstorff dismisses the genocide in his counter-report, praising Talaat and Enver. I thank Margaret Lavinia Anderson for pointing me to the reference.

⁶⁰ ‘Serbian ghosts’ is the title of the first chapter of Christopher Clark’s *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (London: Penguin, 2012). This innovative history of the First World War gives the Balkans its full due, but stops short of examining the political hub in Istanbul to shed decisive light on German–Ottoman agency in July–August 1914.

weakness.⁶¹ Important as background to Talaat's cataclysmic and demolitionist policy were the losses of Ottoman territory, power and sovereignty which had been almost continuous since the late eighteenth century. The diminution of the empire's reach had resulted in hundreds of thousands of *muhacir* – Muslim refugees and migrants – mostly from the Balkans and the Caucasus, who had experienced persecution or been subjected to non-Muslim, primarily Russian, rule. Defeat and loss in the Balkan Wars, inflicted in 1912–13 by the empire's former Ottoman subjects, had an immediate and toxic impact on Ottoman political circles, who reacted with an aggressive propaganda of victimhood and revenge, blended with conspiracy theories.

Ottoman society since the late medieval era had been polyethnic and multicultural, although the state itself – its officials and leaders – had been Sunni Muslim since the sixteenth century. Christians and Jews had enjoyed, wherever they lived in the empire, autonomy in civil, cultural and educational affairs, including family law, but had little say in the affairs of the state. In the modern era, the hierarchical Ottoman fabric underwent a deep crisis when faced with Western ideas of equality and nationalism. A few Ottoman reformers introduced the principle of equality into Ottoman ethno-religious pluralism in the mid-nineteenth century, at a time when there was still slavery in the United States and Europeans governed very unequally their home countries and their colonies. When faced with nationalist separatism and final loss in the Balkans, however, the constitutional principle of egalitarian pluralism appeared to be utopian even to some of its initial supporters.

In its place, Talaat chose homogenous Turkish Muslim unity without Christians in order to secure Turkish Muslim sovereignty and to save the core of imperial rule. Thus he failed to uphold, or willingly renounced, the ideal of a constitution, the basis of a modern social contract, in order to turn Anatolia (Asia Minor) into a national home of Muslim Turks by means of coercion and mass violence. The CUP's successors could pursue this minimal goal successfully even after defeat in the world war, thanks to the success of the apogee of Talaat's policy – the destruction of Asia Minor's Armenians in 1915–16 – and that policy's posthumous completion for Ottoman Greeks in the mandatory population exchange of the 1923 Lausanne Treaty. International diplomacy thus sanctioned the expulsions of Ottoman Greek

⁶¹ Cf. Hans-Lukas Kieser, 'The Ottoman Road to Total War', in Hans-Lukas Kieser, Kerem Öktem and Maurus Reinkowski (eds), *World War I and the End of the Ottomans: From the Balkan Wars to the Armenian Genocide* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2015), pp. 29–53; Hans-Lukas Kieser, 'The Destruction of Ottoman Armenians: A Narrative of a General History of Violence', *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 14, no. 3 (December 2014): 500–15.

Orthodox Christians (*Rûm*) before and after the First World War and, implicitly, the genocide of 1915–16.⁶²

Against this background, Talaat may be called a radical nationalist and imperially biased revolutionary, and his policy during the First World War a precursor to even more radicalized policies of this type in central Europe in the years to come. It is not the use of force and its partly rational finality that distinguish this type of extreme violence from the violence in European colonizing enterprises since the sixteenth century. What marks a distinction is the inclusion of an elusive imperial mythology of supremacy that its perpetrators pursued through what they considered to be a Darwinian, total war-jihad simultaneously with their state and society's exterior *and* interior enemies. The largely resentful character of their violence stemmed from accumulated feelings of victimhood and compensating myths of ethno-religious superiority. These myths were embedded in the kind of Islamism and the new Turkism (Turkish nationalism), including Muslim pan-Turkism, that Gökâlî spread most seminally.

After Talaat, Lenin, Stalin, Mussolini and Hitler also led empires. All claimed to be backed by domestic majorities, 'the people', 'the working class', and to fight ruthless exploitation by foreign political, economic and military powers that they saw allied to or in sympathy with domestic agents. In this way they justified systematic persecution of ostracized domestic groups. Ostracism happened in concrete, although deep-rooted, contexts: Hitler became an almost total Jew-hater after the First World War, Talaat an Armenian-hater after the First Balkan War, when Armenians raised the reform issue internationally. The exploitation of an industrial proletariat in Russia, the victimhood of Caucasian and formerly Ottoman Muslims in the Russian Empire and the Balkan successor states and the pervasive misery in post-First World War Germany and Italy were not just rhetoric but real. 'Saviors' answered these realities, using stigmatized scapegoats to offer easy explanations and concentrate power rapidly and ruthlessly. They committed injustices in the name of an alleged overwhelming victimhood of their 'people', 'class' or 'nation'. In a global context, they perceived and presented their own 'we'-group as a threatened minority.

Once he became a more visible dictator in 1917, Talaat's appearance, in uniform or not, remained comparatively restrained. A carefully managed public image, presenting a prophet-like, popular, ingenious leader surrounded by other gifted CUP individuals, now joined what had formerly been the

⁶² H. Kieser, 'Minorities (Ottoman Empire/Middle East)', in *1914–1918 online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, Berlin 2014-12-18. DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10512 (accessed 17 March 2018).

dominant institutional cult of the Central Committee. (Traditional scholarship emphasizes generally only this institutional cult of the pre-1912 era.) But there was no personality cult around Talaat comparable to that of the European dictators who came after him. Nevertheless, in the historical area of greater Europe, Talaat opens the age of extremes and the Europe of the dictators.⁶³ That many persons – German officials and others who knew him superficially – described him as an engaging and approachable person, even as an outstanding statesman of his time, is a telling indicator of the *Zeitgeist*.

A post-Ottoman century under Talaat's shadow

Hamid Kapancızâde, a respected and capable high functionary who had worked in the Ministry of the Interior for the entire time it was headed by Talaat, noted:

The affair [i.e., the administration] finally derailed, the grip was lost and the country faced ruin. I witnessed the Pasha [Grand Vizier Talaat, 1917–18] screaming once, in despair and helplessness, but these tears did not touch me, because several times he had preferred the hypocrisy and adulation of the [party] men to my vigorous complaints and warnings. The road that he pursued could not produce another outcome.⁶⁴

The Kemalists averred that Atatürk did away with the shortcomings of Talaat and the CUP. Yet, Kemal Atatürk largely endorsed Talaat as his predecessor, not only de facto but also in his approving correspondence with him in 1919–20, when Talaat led Turkey's anti-Entente agitation in Europe from his political asylum in Berlin.⁶⁵

Atatürk therefore built on the former's legacy and to a considerably extent obeyed its logic. He relied on Talaat's staff – although not on the aforementioned Hamid Kapancızâde, an early dissenter from the Kemalist movement, but on young governors and devoted party members from Talaat's team, men such as Tahsin Bey (Uzer) and Abdülhalik Bey (Renda), whom we shall encounter in the chapters to follow, as well as Celâl Bayar, Şükrü Kaya,

⁶³ The terms allude to Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1995); and Elizabeth Wiskemann, *Europe of the Dictators 1919–1945* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1985).

⁶⁴ *Bir Milli Mücadele valisi ve anıları: Kapancızâde Hamit Bey*, ed. Halit Eken (Istanbul: Yeditepe, 2008), pp. 493–4.

⁶⁵ Selim İlkin and İlhan Tekeli, 'Kurtuluş Savaş'ında Talât Paşa ile Mustafa Kemâl'in Mektuplaşmaları', *Belleten* 44 (April 1980): 301–45.

Atıf Bayındır, Reşid Safvet Atabinen and Muhittin Birgen. 'If Talaat, who died as a Turk, could wake up again today and see Turkey, he would not be so sad that he had died at a young age!' the last of these exulted in the 1930s. Birgen (1885–1959) had been one of Talaat's counsellors and journalistic mouthpieces and now enjoyed a career as a director of Atatürk's Press and Information Office and a seat in the national assembly. For him, Talaat had accomplished the all-decisive conversion of his own identity and that of his country from an Ottoman to a modern Turkish Muslim one, the precondition for a restored Turkish sovereignty.⁶⁶ Close to Talaat, Birgen had also been a disciple of Gökâlp.

To the immediate collaborators with Talaat must be added a whole circle of very young CUP and Turkish Home Society (*Türk Yurdu, Türk Ocağı*) members entirely loyal to the party's rule in the 1910s, who later became Kemalist ministers: for example, Şükrü Saraçoğlu, Mahmut Esat Bozkurt and Cemal Hüsnü Taray. Another case is Gökâlp's cousin and CUP deputy for Diyarbakir, Feyzi Pirinçizâde, twice a minister in the 1920s and an example of a person and a whole regional dynasty, the Pirinçizâde, that had thrown their lot in with the CUP and Talaat's anti-Armenian policy. The dynasty succeeded in preserving its position and influence even beyond the Kemalist single-party rule. Very similar is the case of CUP deputy for Aintab, Ali Cenani, a leader of the city's anti-Armenian policy in 1915 and a deputy and minister in the 1920s.⁶⁷ All these men succeeded in effecting a quite seamless transition of power from Istanbul to Ankara after Talaat's flight to Berlin, thus perpetuating his patterns, practices and principles of governance across the country and the generations.

Although largely suppressing references to the CUP in public discourse, Kemal Atatürk nevertheless conceded that he 'rested on Talaat's shoulders,' according to Ernst Jäckh, a contemporary admirer of both men.⁶⁸ Even if Kemalist breaks in the 1920s (foremost, the adoption of a modern Western civil code, together with the rejection of political Islam) have remained important, the Republic of Turkey has been largely founded on Talaat's groundwork, along with Gökâlp's ideology. Therefore, it did not disable, let alone critically deal with, the main sources and results of Talaat's policy. Instead, deeply partisan, non-egalitarian and polarizing politics similar to

⁶⁶ Birgen, *İttihat ve Terakkî'de on sene*, p. 164.

⁶⁷ See Ümit Kurt's chapters, 'Proactive Local Perpetrators' and 'From Aintab to Gaziantep,' in this book. Cf. Üngör, *Making of Modern Turkey*. This significant study is focused on Diyarbakir throughout the twentieth century.

⁶⁸ Ernst Jäckh, *Rising Crescent: Turkey Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1944), p. 90.

those that had corrupted state institutions and hampered the basic rule of law under Talaat became the foundational flaws of the republic. The challenging gap between a committee-led empire and a functioning democratic state, one that abstains from claiming the supremacy of a single party and/or of a religious or ethnic group, therefore remains dramatically unbridged, and this is true to this day for all countries that were still Ottoman when Talaat ruled.

Talaat's full public rehabilitation and installation as an outstanding positive figure in Turkey was not, as one might assume, an ephemeral moment in the dismal times of Adolf Hitler and the Second World War, when, a few years after Atatürk's death, Talaat's body was pompously brought from Nazi Germany to Istanbul. Rehabilitation took place for good at the beginning of the Cold War, during Turkey's transition to a multiparty regime under the aegis of the United States, and thus during Turkey's ambivalent, shallow and largely geostrategically motivated Western orientation after 1945. The presumed reorientation therefore did not evolve into sustained democratization. But the new liberties of the post-1945 era did allow the completion of what had begun as a joint Turkish–German venture in 1943: the rehabilitation of Talaat, now also in various publications by former CUP members, foremost among them Talaat's own memoirs, published by his former collaborator and mouthpiece, Hüseyin Çahit Yalçın. It was followed by the testimony of many other unrepentant Unionists who now, without fear of Kemalist admonition and repression, published their recollections of Talaat's long-suppressed era. They reminded their contemporaries of the pre-Kemalist preparation for the Turkish nation-state and of a first 'war of salvation' or 'war of independence' starting in 1913. Well before the wars of 1919–22, they argued, *they* had struggled for the unrestricted sovereignty of a Turkish Muslim state in Anatolia.

Talaat's rehabilitation, triggered in 1943, was not seriously challenged in Turkey, from right or left, nor from the Islamic and Islamist circles that publicly re-emerged in the 1950s, although some well-known criticism of the CUP by Kemalists (for example Yusuf Bayur) and from the opposite, Islamic, side of the political spectrum did take place. In the coming decades, many mosques, schools and streets in Turkey were named after Talaat Pasha. The editor Hüseyin Çahit Yalçın, and Enver Bolayır, publisher of Talaat's memoirs in 1946, lastingly re-framed Talaat's public image. 'Talaat was a strong patriot, prepared to sacrifice everything, even his own life, for the salvation and well-being of the fatherland,' Yalçın wrote at the beginning of his edition of Talaat's memoirs. He conceded that, when the former CUP newspaper *Tanin* had earlier considered publishing the memoirs, Talaat's connection with 'one of the most cruel events of that era' had restrained those responsible from doing so. Bolayır wrote in his foreword to the same edition of memoirs that Talaat

... was one of a few rare [outstanding] statesmen whom Turkish history produced. Among the Ottoman grand-viziers this great Turkish leader had reached his high position thanks to his patriotism, honesty, intelligence and assiduity ... By writing this book [memoirs], he defended himself, the party of Union and Progress, and the Turkish nation before global public opinion. Reading this book reveals nakedly how ugly and unfounded were the defamations that our contemporary enemies invented about us. Finishing my lines, I bow respectfully before the great presence of late Talaat Pasha.⁶⁹

Talaat's memoirs have since seen many re-editions in this same spirit. Developments indicate that many, including the Turkish polity itself, still stand considerably under his spell and shadow.

⁶⁹ *Talat Paşa'nın hatıraları*, ed. Yalçın and Bolayır (Istanbul: Güven, 1946), pp. 5–8.

The War at The Caucasus Front: A Matrix for Genocide

Candan Badem

This chapter deals with the almost forgotten massacres of the Russian Armenians of Ardanuç and Ardahan and neighbouring villages at the end of December 1914. I argue, first, that these were the earliest near-genocidal killings of the war, organized by the Special Organization (SO) of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). While the question of when the CUP decided on the ‘final solution’ for the Armenians is still debated, the violence against Russian Armenians in Muslim areas of the Caucasus shows that the decision was probably taken even before the Ottoman disaster at Sarıkamış. Second, I argue that the Russian administration of Batum and Kars *oblasts* (roughly, ‘provinces’) and of the Ottoman-occupied territories during the war was not discriminatory toward Muslims or Armenians, in contrast both to the Ottomans there and to its own brutal policies toward the minorities in occupied Galicia.¹ The Russian army more or less observed the military rules of war, and its actions toward civilians in the Caucasus were dictated by a utilitarian military culture, without an ideological agenda.²

The Caucasus was the classic borderland, disputed between Russians and Ottomans until the collapse of both empires at the end of the First World War. Yet, when the German-Ottoman navy, without a declaration of war,

¹ For a recent study that relies on original research and supports my argument, see Halit Dündar Akarca, ‘Imperial Formations in Occupied Lands: The Russian Occupation of Ottoman Territories during the First World War’ (unpublished PhD diss., Princeton University, June 2014).

² Peter Holquist, ‘The Politics and Practice of the Russian Occupation of Armenia, 1915–February 1917’, in R. G. Suny, F. M. Göçek, and N. M. Naimark (eds), *A Question of Genocide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 151–74. See also Peter Holquist, ‘Forms of Violence during the Russian Occupation of Ottoman Territory and in Northern Persia (Urmia and Astrabad)’, in Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz (eds), *Shatterzone of Empires* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), pp. 334–65.

attacked Russian ports in the Black Sea at the end of October 1914, the Russian government and military had no expansionist plans regarding its Caucasian border. Russia's attention was on the German front, and it assigned its Caucasus army a defensive role. The Ottoman War Command, by contrast, concentrated superior forces around Erzurum, near its north-eastern border. As is well known, Enver's assault on the Russian frontier in December 1914–January 1915, the Sarikamış Operation, was poorly prepared and ended in disaster for the Ottoman Third Army. Less known, however, are the battles, massacres and civilian involvement around Artvin and Ardahan at about the same time.

While Russia set up military administrations along its front regions in wartime, we must bear in mind that the two *oblasts* of Batum and Kars had already been under military (or rather, as the Russian official parlance had it, 'military-customary') administration since 1878, when Russia annexed the three Ottoman provinces (*sanjaks*) of Batum, Ardahan and Kars. Thirty-six years of Russian rule in the area had increased the local Christian population (consisting mainly of Armenians, Greeks, Georgians and Russians), but Muslims still had a slight majority in the Kars *oblast* and an overwhelming majority in the Batum *oblast*. Most of the Georgians in the Batum *oblast* were Muslims, known as Ajarians. The presence of more than 15,000 Ottoman Armenian refugees in the two *oblasts* (especially in Kars) complicated matters for the Russian administration and exacerbated relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.

By 1914, Armenians (including the Ottoman Armenian refugees) constituted about 30 per cent of the population, excluding Russian troops, in the Kars *oblast*.³ Contrary to the claims of many nationalist Turkish historians, Russian authorities in the pre-war period did not favour Armenian immigration into the newly conquered *oblasts* of Kars and Batum, but preferred Russian and Greek immigrants.⁴ Prince Grigory Golitsyn, chief administrator of the Caucasus from 1896 until 1905, pursued policies that were generally anti-Armenian, although his successor, the viceroy (*Namestnik*) of the Russian emperor in the Caucasus, Count Ilarion Ivanovich Vorontsov-Dashkov, was thought to be pro-Armenian to a certain extent. However, there were always countervailing (anti-Armenian) forces in St Petersburg circles,

³ *Kavkazskiy Kalendar na 1915 god* (Tiflis: Tipografiya Kantselyarii Namestnika E.I.V. na Kavkaze, 1914), otdel statisticheskii, pp. 234–5.

⁴ See my book in Turkish: Candan Badem, *Çarlık Yönetiminde Kars, Ardahan, Artvin (1878–1918)* (Istanbul: Aras, 2018), chap. 3. Also see Candan Badem, "Forty Years of Black Days?" The Russian Administration of Kars, Ardahan and Batum, 1878–1918; in Lucien Frary and Mara Kozelsky (eds), *Russian–Ottoman Borderlands: The Eastern Question Reconsidered* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), pp. 221–50.



Map 2.1 The south-western Caucasus, 1914

making Vorontsov-Dashkov's impact limited (and in September 1915 he was replaced by Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich). Even so, by 1914, Kars had become an important region in the Armenian national movement. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF, the Dashnaksutyun) had a special committee in Kars, and it had become 'a gathering point for revolutionary activists as well as a place where Armenian youth were trained, inculcated with Armenian liberation ideology, and dispatched across the border'.⁵

Activities of the *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa* in the south Caucasus

Meanwhile, Ottoman authorities in the early 1900s and later the CUP were sending agents to the Russian Caucasus in order to gather military information and to set up Muslim organizations, aided by Ottoman consulates in Tbilisi, Batum and Kars (Russia had rejected the opening of an Ottoman consulate in Baku). These consulates employed the men under the guise of commercial agents, and they organized a network of informants among the local Muslim population. Russia, in turn, was earmarking huge amounts of

⁵ Rubina Perroomian, 'Kars in the Armenian Liberation Movement', in R. Hovannisian (ed.), *Armenian Kars and Ani* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2011), p. 247.

money, personnel and materials for analogous intelligence in Turkey. In the years 1904–5 alone, the Russian Caucasus military district was receiving 56,890 rubles annually for intelligence activities in the Ottoman Empire.⁶ This sum was more than the budget of all the other Russian frontier military districts combined.

The CUP maintained relations with Caucasus Muslims as early as 1906, when, as a result of the 1905 revolution, censorship in Russia weakened. Some Russian-subject Muslims of the Caucasus had sent a letter to Ahmed Rıza Bey, the CUP's leader in Paris, asking for help for orphans and widows who had been victims of Armenian attacks during the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict in 1905. In his reply, Dr Baha (also Bahaeddin or Bahattin) Şakir urged Caucasian Muslims, among other things, to educate themselves and unite for common goals. Another letter sent from the CUP centre in Paris, dated 23 November 1906, titled 'To Our Muslim Brothers in the Caucasus' and again signed by Baha Şakir, contained a more concrete programme of action. It called on Caucasus Muslims to set up organizations like the CUP in every city, to make contact with Poles and Jews in order to benefit from them, and to raise money. At the same time, they were to avoid open confrontation with the Russian government, assure it of their loyalty and keep their patriotic idea of union with Turkey in their hearts. While Dr Şakir suggested that they attack the wealth of the Armenians, who were 'one of the main obstacles to their [the Muslims'] liberation from the Russian yoke',⁷ in another letter from the CUP centre in Paris, Muslims were called on to unite with the Armenians, who were weak, against their mutual enemy, the Russian government, which was strong. Once Muslims got rid of the Russian enemy, the Armenians could easily be subdued, because Muslims had the majority.⁸

Such caution did not last long. In November 1913, the CUP founded the SO (*Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*, or Special Organization) for the purpose of irregular warfare and espionage. The organization had branches in Trabzon, Van and Erzurum aimed at operations in Iran and Russia. In his report from Erzurum, Baha Şakir wrote:

If weapons, bombs and other things are sent to certain places in Georgia via important bases like Tbilisi and Kutaisi, [if] organizations are set up and strengthened and connections established, we will be ready for action as soon as war is declared. We can thus assure that bands are strong enough to act ... [and] aside from arranging for the activities of

⁶ V. M. Gilensen, "Osinye Gnezda" pod konsulskoi kryshei, *Voenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal* 5 (1997): 49.

⁷ Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi*, I/1 (Ankara: TTK, 1991), p. 343.

⁸ Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi*, p. 344.

strong bands, preparations should be made for local revolts in all the important cities and places in the Caucasus.⁹

In fact, Ottoman military agents had been active in the Caucasus long before the foundation of the SO. By now the SO had its own local agents in Batum as well. As early as February 1912, Russian police authorities there were hunting down the pan-Islamic activities of Ottoman agents.¹⁰ By March 1914, these agents were collecting donations for the Ottoman navy, with posters on the walls of coffee houses in Batum.¹¹ But during the years 1912–13, the struggle between Ottoman intelligence and Russian counter-intelligence was focused especially around Kars. The Ottoman consulate there had become the centre of the cold war in the Caucasus.¹²

Operations of the SO in Artvin, Ardanuç, Şavşat, Oltu and Ardahan

Enver Pasha, the Ottoman minister of war and acting commander-in-chief, is believed by many to have fostered far-reaching goals in the Caucasus, Iran, Turkestan and Afghanistan when he entered the war on the side of Germany and Austria in October 1914. This may be exaggerated, but he must have believed that, given some assistance from the Ottoman Empire, Muslim Georgians around Batum as well as the Muslims of the Caucasus more generally were ready to rise against Russian rule. After the signing of the German–Ottoman alliance on 2 August 1914, both allies entertained hopes of ‘revolutionizing the Caucasus’. On the very same day, the CUP Central Committee decided to employ the SO and its attached paramilitary jihadist forces to organize irregular warfare and espionage within enemy territory in the southern Caucasus and northern Iran, following the pattern they had used in western Thrace in late 1913.¹³

As early as 12 September 1914, Minister of the Interior Talat Bey (later Pasha) sent orders to his governors to identify tribal leaders and other influential persons in Ottoman prisons who might be used in case of war. On

⁹ Arif Cemil, *I. Dünya Savaşında Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa* (Istanbul: Arba, 1997), pp. 39–42.

¹⁰ Sakartvelos Tsentraluri Saistorio Arkivi (Central Historical Archive of Georgia, Tbilisi, hereinafter STsSA), f. 147, op. 1, d. 241.

¹¹ STsSA, f. 157, op. 1, d. 302, l. 21, Batum gendarme chief Colonel Gavrilov to police chief of the 5th section in Batum, March 1914.

¹² Gilensen, “Osinye Gnezda”, p. 55.

¹³ See Hans-Lukas Kieser’s contribution in this volume, ‘Mehmed Talat: Demolitionist Founder of Post-Ottoman Turkey’ (Chapter 1).

1 November 1914 he issued a more specific order to prisons in Trabzon, Erzurum, Van, Bitlis and Diyarbakir to release all prisoners who might be employed in the war effort. On 26 November he sent another telegram to the governors, urging them to recruit – within a week – about 200 men to be employed as band (*çete*) members in the Caucasus, adding that these men might also be chosen from among convicts and bandits.¹⁴

Meanwhile, in September, another Central Committee member, Ömer Naci Bey, had organized 700 men in Van and entered northern Iran, while further north, Baha Şakir's volunteers were engaged in jihadist recruitment, espionage, the murder of Russian 'agents' and cross-border raids into Russia, plundering cattle and sheep around Oltu.¹⁵ These activities had begun before the Ottomans formally declared war on Russia on 10 November 1914, and before the official announcement of jihad four days later.

On 10 December 1914, two battalions under the command of German Lieutenant Colonel Christian August Stange landed at Rize on the Black Sea coast, moved toward the Russo-Ottoman border near Hopa and, on 17 December, reached Borçka.¹⁶ From there, Stange's two battalions were to support the bands of volunteers collected by Yusuf Rıza Bey and Baha Şakir, both members of the CUP's Central Committee – and of the SO. The notorious CUP *fedai* Yakup Cemil was also authorized to recruit criminals from prisons along the Black Sea coast for the cause and released around 2,000 convicts from the prisons of Kastamonu and Sinop.¹⁷

The Russian Caucasus army, considering the area strategically unimportant and, given its geography, unlikely to become a theatre of serious military operations in the case of war, had not stationed any large units around the Chorokhi (Çoruh) river in the direction of Hopa–Artvin–Ardanuç.¹⁸ When the Ottoman Empire finally entered the war, local Muslim bands organized by the SO began shooting at Russian troops on the roads. Colonel Georgiy

¹⁴ Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (Prime Ministerial Ottoman Archive, Istanbul (hereafter BOA)), DH. ŞFR. 44/224, 46/134 and 47/196, quoted by Erdal Aydoğan, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin Doğu Politikası (1908–1918)* (Istanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 2005), pp. 84–9.

¹⁵ Mehmet Bilgin, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'nın Kafkasya Misyonu ve Operasyonları* (Istanbul: Ötüken, 2017), pp. 115–26.

¹⁶ See the Stange detachment's war diary: Hatice Yaşar, 'Harp Ceridesi (I. Dünya Savaşı'nda Kafkas Cephesi)' (unpublished MA thesis, Gaziosmanpaşa Üniversitesi SBE, Tokat, 2008), p. 23.

¹⁷ Refi' Cevat Ulunay, *Eski İstanbul Kabadayıları* (Istanbul: Arma Yayınları, 2003), pp. 199–216.

¹⁸ See the instructions to the Russian Chorokh detachment in case of war, prepared in 1906, revised in 1908 and 1912: Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Voenno-Istoricheskii Arkhiv (Russian State Military-Historical Archive, Moscow, hereafter RGVA), f. 2100, op. 1, d. 727, l. 236. See also David Martirosyan, 'Tragediya Batumskikh arman: Prosto reznya ili predvestnik genotsida?', *Rodina* 4 (April 2010): 68–71.

N. Rastorguev, commanding the Russian forces in Artvin, Ardanuç and Şavşat, reported with some exaggeration that superior Turkish forces were attacking his men and asked leave to withdraw from Artvin and Ardanuç and come to Borçka. General Yelshin, commander of the Batum fortress, allowed him to retreat.¹⁹ Thus, the Russian troops and local administration left Artvin on 18 November and Ardanuç on 20 November. While Russia's troops gathered in Borçka, its officials headed toward Ardahan, arriving on 22 November 1914.²⁰

In Artvin, the local population, consisting largely of Armenians, seeing the hurried retreat of their Russian protectors, ran away at night in great panic on foot and in carts toward Batum. In Batum, however, local men went out to meet them with phaetons. A fight for the carriages broke out, with knives in hand, even while pregnant women gave birth and died on the road. An angry chief of the Batum gendarmes, Lieutenant Colonel Nikolai Martynov, reported that from a military point of view the Russian retreat had been entirely unnecessary, for Turkish troops entered Artvin only after several days, not believing that Russian soldiers had actually left the town. Martynov also reported that the 'majority of the inhabitants of the Batum oblast, the [Muslim] Ajarians, naturally went over to the side of their co-religionists and everywhere, if not explicitly, then secretly, helped the Turks, and they could hardly help doing so, if we take into account the proclamations distributed among them.'²¹ Martynov added indignantly that the Russian military then paid the Muslim population back in the same coin, ruining and robbing all the remaining population who did not leave with the departing Ottoman bands. Without separating right from wrong, all Muslims, he said, were accused of being spies, arrested and sent to Batum. Thus, 'even seventy-year-old men, women and children were categorized under the loud title of prisoners of war'. These people, however, were in fact the very ones who had remained loyal to the Russian government.

Russian forces also initially retreated from Oltu, after the Ottoman entry into the war in November 1914, triggering another wave of refugees – Greek, Kurdish and especially Armenian (all of them Russian subjects) – from nearby villages, here rushing into the Kars *oblast*. They were settled in fifteen

¹⁹ RGVIA, f. 2100, op. 1, d. 724, ll. 43, 94–8. Cipher telegram N75 from Batum military governor to the aide of the Viceroy, 5 (18) November 1914; General Yelshin to the staff of the Caucasus army, 10 (23) November 1914. Also see the report of the chief of the Batum gendarme, 15 (28) December 1914, RGVIA, f. 13138, op. 1, d. 54, ll. 2–4.

²⁰ RGVIA, f. 2100, op. 1, d. 724, l. 80. Cipher telegram from the Batum governor to Chamberlain Peterson, 9 (22) November 1914, N81.

²¹ Batum gendarme chief Lieutenant-Colonel Nikolai Martynov to Chamberlain Peterson, Top Secret, 15 (28) December 1914, RGVIA, f. 13138, op. 1, d. 54, ll. 2–4.

villages in the *oblast's* Horasan subdistrict. According to the report of M. Badalyants, a member of the Kars *oblast* relief committee, 4,699 of these refugees were Armenians; 13 of them, Greeks; and 34, Kurds. The number of actual Kurdish refugees was reportedly higher, but local Kurds concealed their refugees out of fear. Almost all the Armenian refugees had frostbitten hands and feet because Kurds had robbed them of their clothing, leaving them only with underwear. They were in great agony; their moaning was heart-rending.²²

Ottoman forces under the command of Yusuf Rıza Bey occupied Artvin on 24 November and thus threatened Ardanuç, which lay midway on the road from Artvin to Ardahan. That same day, some armed Muslims from nearby villages came to Ardanuç and took control of the town until 3 December, when they were relieved by SO forces who had crossed the Chorokhi river and entered Ardanuç, bringing them closer to Ardahan. A force of some 5,000 regular troops, SO bands and local volunteers thus gathered in Ardanuç for the attack on Ardahan. Yet the SO leaders were now at odds. Yusuf Rıza Bey did not get along with Baha Şakir, as is clear from the latter's telegrams complaining about Rıza Bey's non-cooperation. The two had competing strategies, Yusuf Rıza Bey believing that they should first take the port at Batum before moving toward Ardahan and other directions, while Baha Şakir was intent on the immediate capture of Ardahan.²³

While the two leaders were falling out, the fate of Ardanuç was already being settled locally. On 20 November 1914, only a few hours after the local Russian administration had abandoned the town, about ten soldiers from the Turkish border guards, accompanied by an armed band of local Muslims from the village of Hod, arrived in Ardanuç, whose urban population consisted mainly of Catholic Armenians (1,329 persons).²⁴ The majority of the nearby villages, however, were populated by Muslims. The Turkish bands told the inhabitants of Ardanuç to go on with normal life, but that night the town's two richest shops were broken into and looted. The next day, the bands began to rob the town's inhabitants. Regular Turkish troops took a few weeks to arrive, and during that time various bands (*çete*) from Hod and the nearest

²² M. Badalyants, 'O Bezhtentsakh, Vodvorennykh v Khorosanskom Uchastke, Karsskoi Obl. (Iz dokladnoi zapiski M. A. Badalyantsa, predstavlennoi karsskomu oblastnomu komitetu po okazaniyu pomoshchi postradavshim ot voiny)', *Tiflisskiy Listok* 45 (25 February [10 March] 1915): 3.

²³ See Ahmet Tetik, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Tarihi*, cilt 1 (Istanbul: İş Bankası Yayınları, 2014); and Bilgin, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'nın Kafkasya Misyonu*. Bilgin's book, while giving many new details, does not deviate from Tetik's work in terms of anti-Armenian bias.

²⁴ Archimandrite Sarkis Ter Abrahamyan to Chief of Staff of the Caucasus Army, 8 January 1915, HAA f. 316, op. 1, d. 21, ll. 1–2, cited by Sonya Mirzoyan, 'Batumskaya Oblast. Esche Odná Tragediya Armanyan', *Hayagitutyan Hartser* 3 (2014): 169.

villages held sway. Apart from robbing the population, the bands also robbed each other. The first band's leader called himself a *chavush* (sergeant); however, when a Turkish *kaymakam* (district governor) arrived, he had the fraudulent *chavush* beaten and kicked out. Soon a rivalry developed between the home-grown bands and SO bands, for the latter claimed sole authority to rob the Armenian population and demanded that the locals sign up as voluntary *çete* members if they wanted the right to pillage. The locals were hesitant, disdaining the SO *çete* members, allegedly grumbling among themselves that 'these are just hungry gypsies and not the Sultan's troops' and preferring to see the outcome of the encounters between the Ottoman and Russian armies before they committed themselves. The SO had to resort to trickery to attract volunteers: they fired volleys into the air, started folk music with drums and horns (*zurna*), and announced to the people that Batum had been taken by the Turkish army. Believing the news, the people were delighted to join the festivities. Then they were told that only those who signed up as SO volunteers had the right to dance.²⁵ Ultimately, the SO bands in Ardanuç had to wait a month for the arrival of regular Ottoman troops. According to one of the town's surviving inhabitants, some 5,000 regular troops arrived on a very rainy evening and had difficulty entering in darkness, fearful of falling into the deep precipice called Jennem Dere (hellish valley). Among the *çete* members there were also Kurds, and judging from their costumes, they included even Kurds from Iran. On the morning of 22 December 1914, the regular troops as well as volunteers departed toward Ardahan. Not far from Ardanuç they were divided into two, one group to enter Ardahan through Şavşat and the other through the Yalanuzçam Pass.²⁶

A ciphered telegram sent from Ardanuç via Artvin to Istanbul, dated 23–4 December 1914, and signed by Baha Şakir, leaves no doubt that the SO was involved in military operations in that area, because the signature itself reads 'Baha Şakir, Head of the SO at Ardanuç' (*Ardanuç'ta Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Reisi Baha Şakir*). Baha Şakir reported to Talat Bey, the minister of the interior, that 'Battalions of the *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa* have renewed operations together with Stange Bey. Tomorrow I am moving towards Ardahan with Stange Bey;²⁷ The operation seems to have been a success. By the end of December 1914, most of the Batum *oblast* was in revolt against the Russian government.²⁸

²⁵ I. R., 'Turki v Ardanuche (Pisma korrespondenta "Kavk. SP"). II. Chetniki i Povstantsy', Ardahan, 22 January (4 February), *Kavkazskoe Slovo* 27 (4 [17] February 1915): 2.

²⁶ I. R., 'Turki v Ardanuche (Pisma korrespondenta "Kavk. SP"). III. V Ardagan i obratno', Ardahan, 25 January (7 February), *Kavkazskoe Slovo* 28 (5 [18] February 1915): 2.

²⁷ BOA, DH ŞFR 455/12, 10/11 Kanun-ı Evvel 1330.

²⁸ RGVIA, f. 2100, op. 1, d. 724, ll. 224a–225a; cipher telegram from General Lyakhov, Batum, to the Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasus army, (8 [21] December) 1914, N1040.

On 27 December, SO bands led by Baha Şakir and Yakup Cemil, together with the volunteers with Celal Bek and Ramiz Bek (Hamşioğlu), marched from Şavşat and gathered in the village of Sarzep (Nikolaevka, a Molokan village close to Ardahan) and neighbouring villages. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Colonel Stange's Ottoman regulars were also approaching Ardahan, from the Göle side. On 29 December, first local bands and then Ottoman regular troops attacked Ardahan from two sides and entered it that night or the next day.²⁹ The Russian forces in Ardahan retreated toward Akhalkalaki, and Ottoman troops held Ardahan from 29 December 1914 until 3 January 1915.³⁰

What of Ardahan's civilian population? Already on 24 December, news had reached Ardahan that Ottoman corps had entered Oltu, had come as near as Penek and were moving toward Ardahan through Merdenek. Upon hearing this news, the Armenian population began to flee in panic. According to a Tblisi publication, local authorities hired carts for the civilians and sent them to Akhalkalaki. Others fled to Akhalsikha and Kars. The article reported that fires devastated many shops and the bands pillaged the town, but as Ardahan had presumably been evacuated, no Armenian families remained, except for a few men who did not want to leave their property.³¹

Reassuring news, yet it does not seem possible that local Russian authorities could or would send all the Armenians off in carts, while they themselves quietly waited for the Turks to attack. And as few urban families owned a horse and wagon, once the requisitioned carts ran out, many would have had either to flee on foot – in the dead of winter, when they might succumb to cold, hunger and fatigue – or remain behind. The Ajarian *beks* (notables) Rasim, Jasim and Jelal reportedly gave away two Armenians – perhaps from those who had stayed to guard their property – to the 'Turkish commander', who allegedly tortured them, demanding a ransom of 20,000 rubles. Again according to the *Tiflisskiy Listok*, the bodies of four Armenians shot dead by the Turkish troops for disobedience lay on the streets for many days.

It was not only Armenians who were mistreated. Atrpet, a correspondent for the *Tiflisskiy Listok*, reported that 3,766 Greeks from seven villages of the Oltu district had escaped Ottoman bands only to be robbed along the way by Turkish and Kurdish bands. In addition to suffering from cold and hunger, their material losses were estimated at 260,000 rubles. In the district of

²⁹ *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi. Kafkas Cephesi 3üncü Ordu Harekatı*, cilt I (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1993), p. 603.

³⁰ *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi*, pp. 603–4.

³¹ 'V Ardagane', *Tiflisskiy Listok* 13 (17 [30] January 1915): 2.

Ardahan, 6,209 Greeks from twenty villages ran away in panic, leaving all their property, with an estimated material loss of more than 1 million rubles.³² As for the Russian peasants of Ardahan (mainly Molokans), although most of them escaped before or during 26–8 December, some could not. For example, the Molokans of the neighbouring village of Nikolaevka took their families to Ardahan; when they returned home on 26 December to take care of their goods, it was occupied by Turks and local Kurds, and the Molokans were arrested.³³

According to Mehmet Mermer, a nine-year-old Muslim boy from the peasant village of Degirmanköy, near Ardahan, regular Ottoman troops and bands of the SO, together with the local bands of Celal Bek (Khimshiashvili), pillaged Armenian, Russian and Greek houses during their stay in Ardahan. Then began the rape of women, torture and murder by the *çeteler*. Celal Bey's and Yakup Cemil's men bound the hands of those who would not reveal where they had hidden their gold and other valuables and left them in the street to freeze overnight. Dogs ate the bodies of such victims. The bands of Celal Bek gathered their booty in Mehmet Mermer's village.³⁴

According to the testimony that some Armenian survivors from Ardanuç related to Russian journalists, the news of Ardahan's capture by Turkish forces reached them on 30 December 1914, and that night 150 Armenian inhabitants of the town were killed by *çete* members who went from house to house, calling the men out and killing them in the street. Thus, the massacres of Armenians began on almost the same day in Ardanuç as in Ardahan. A certain notable (*bek*) from the village of Kharau (Haravul?) was reported by local survivors to have been especially cold-blooded and brutal toward those Armenians he knew personally. The victims of the *çeteler* also included around fifty Armenian inmates from the local prison, who were thrown into the dreaded Jennem (also Cehennem) Dere. Until that day, only fifteen Armenians from Ardanuç had been killed outside the town for being caught with arms, and within the town, despite various forms of violence, robbery and abuse, no *çete* members had killed Armenians. On 30 December the restraint ended. The survivors of the massacre were mainly children and young women. The Armenians had feared most for their girls and young women, and during the rule of the *çeteler*, they had hidden them in secret

³² Atrpet, 'Olti', *Tiflissskiy Listok* 39 (18 February [3 March] 1915): 3.

³³ RGVA, f. 2100, op. 1, d. 567, ll. 42–50, testimonies of Molokan witnesses from the indictment of the Caucasus court martial against thirty-seven Muslims from Ardahan.

³⁴ Mehmet Mermer told his story to his fellow villager Kenan Karabağ in 1996. Mermer, b. 1905, died in 2002. See Kenan Karabağ's historical novel *Kura Çözüldü* (Istanbul: Su Yay, 2015).

rooms and places in their stone houses. *Çete* members had been much surprised that there were no young women in the town, survivors said, but did not conduct thorough searches inside the houses in order to find them.³⁵

Violence also overtook the Armenians in the villages. Almost all men in the village of Mamanelis were massacred, as were 109 men and three women in the village of Satlel-Rabat.³⁶ Fuat Bek Atabekov, one of the influential local notables in the Artvin district, was later accused of taking part in the Satlel-Rabat massacre and of personally killing seven people. He was sentenced to death by a Russian court martial, although his sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.³⁷ In the village of Okrobakert, bands robbed the inhabitants, plundered the Armenian church, took away girls, raped women, tortured many and killed at least twenty-two men. The *çete* members, about 300 in number, were armed with German weapons. Muslims from neighbouring villages joined in, serving as local guides.³⁸

In Tanzot, a mixed village, about 150 Armenian men were killed and their women and children taken away. Only five men survived.³⁹ According to the official indictment against thirty-year-old Osman Ahmed-oğlu, son of Tanzot's headman, the massacre of Armenians had taken place already on the night of 28 November 1914. Armenian men were collected from their homes on the pretext of taking a census and were gathered in the house of Nuricanyan. The witness Makrita Makramyan recounted how Osman and his father, the headman Ahmed, had come to her house, bound the hands of her husband, Tumas, and their son Pogos, and taken them away. Makramyan never saw them again. The next day, Zipan Stepanyan and Mariyam Sakoyan saw the corpses of about forty men. When Sakoyan began crying, Osman

³⁵ 'Turetskie zverstva v Ardanuche', *Russkoe Slovo* 30 (7 [20] February 1915): 2. I. R., 'Turki v Ardanuche (Pisma korrespondenta "Kavk. Sl"). V, Ardahan, 28 January (10 February), *Kavkazskoe Slovo* 30 (7 [20] February 1915): 2.

³⁶ Lieutenant Colonel Ivashchenko, military prosecutor of the Mikhailov Fortress Court-Martial, indictment against Aslan Davud-oglu of the village of Mamanelis, March 1916, RGVA, f. 13138, op. 1, d. 482, l. 368. See also 'Vechnyia Telegrammy "Tiflisskago Listka" (ot nashikh korrespondentov). Kars, 27-go marta', *Tiflisskiy Listok* 69 (28 May [10 June] 1915): 3.

³⁷ RGVA, f. 13138, op. 1, d. 596.

³⁸ Reports of Mkrtych Ayyazyan, priest of the village of Okrobakert, March 1915, cited by Mirzoyan, 'Batumskaya Oblast', pp. 170–7.

³⁹ David Martirosyan quotes some witness statements from court-martial proceedings in Batum on the case of Tanzot. These witnesses, peasants of Tanzot, included Muslims such as Suleyman Reşid-oğlu and Veysel Mahmud-oğlu. See Martirosyan, 'Tragediya Batumskikh armanyan', pp. 70–1. For Vardan Mazmanyani's testimony (in Armenian), see Albert Kirimyan, 'Vardan Mazmanyani V kayutyunneri Batumi Marzi Ardvinu Okrugri Ardanuchi Teghamasi Tanzot Gyughi Hay Bnakchutyani Kotoratsneri Masin', *Bamber Hayastani Arkhivneri* 1 (2005): 3–17.

Ahmed-oğlu, who had come with a group to bury the dead, barked, 'Why are you crying for those dogs? I killed 22 people, go away, otherwise you will be the 23rd.'⁴⁰ Later, a group of 550 Armenian women and children from Ardanuç town and region (including Tanzot) were freed from the hands of Kurdish bandits by Russian regular forces near the Yalağuzçam Pass and brought to Akhalkalaki.⁴¹

It seems that the ease of their subjugation of Ardahan emboldened the jihadist volunteers, leading them to expect further Turkish conquests and allaying any fear of reprisals from Armenians and Russians. It is a well-known fact that mobs become brutalized when they feel that their crimes will go unpunished. Only the (Georgian?) Muslim population of the Imerkhevi valley in Şavşat, consisting of eighteen villages, did not betray their Armenian neighbours in the village of Phikur to the Muslim jihadist volunteers and other gangs. Despite efforts by Kadir Ağa and other *çete* members, the Imerkhevi population remained loyal to Russia and, with weapons in hand, defended their villages from the *çeteler*, protecting the Armenians as well.⁴²

Turkish official and nationalist historiography has been absolutely silent about what happened to the Armenians and Greeks of Ardanuç and Ardahan during those days when the bands of Baha Şakir and Yakup Cemil held sway in these towns and nearby villages.⁴³ The question is not even asked. Neither is it possible to find any Western account of those bloody days. Even recent, well-researched monographs about the Caucasian front, which draw amply on Russian and Ottoman sources, omit this matter.⁴⁴

An important confirmation, however, at least of the pillaging committed by the Turkish bands in Ardahan, comes from Tahsin Bey, the Ottoman governor of the *vilayet* of Erzurum. In a ciphered telegram to Talat Bey, minister of the interior, dated 7 January 1915, Tahsin Bey reported that upon

⁴⁰ RGVIA, f. 13138, op. 1, d. 769, l. 2.

⁴¹ N. K., 'Po mestam boev. Uzhasy voiny', *Kavkazskoe Slovo* 26 (1 [14] February 1915): 2. The correspondent N. K. writes that he got the news from Nikolae, the district governor of Ardahan. See also 'Po Kavkazu. Hronika (Akhalkalaki)', *Kavkaz* 26 (3 [16] February 1915): 3.

⁴² Atrpet, 'Vernye sosedi', *Tiflisskiy Listok* 113 (21 May [3 June] 1915): 3; Mirzoyan, 'Batumskaya Oblast', p. 177.

⁴³ For example, see Bayur's ten-volume *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi* (History of the Turkish Revolution) and the history of the First World War by the Turkish General Staff (*Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi*), both cited above.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Michael Reynolds's *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires 1908–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) and Sean McMeekin's *The Russian Origins of the First World War* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).

the attack of superior Russian forces on Ardahan, the regular forces of Stange Bey and the 'bands' (*çeteler*) were forced to retreat to Ardanuç, suffering many casualties, as stated in the telegrams of the two *bey*s; that is, of Baha Şakir and Stange. Tahsin Bey added that Baha Bey's telegram gives detailed information on how disunion among the Ottoman forces gathered in Ardahan, as well as 'pillaging and similar kinds of improper behavior' (*yağmagirlik ve buna mümasil münasebetsizlikler*), caused this regrettable result. 'I do not copy here this depressing [*ruhu sıkacak*] telegram,' he goes on.⁴⁵ It seems very likely that the 'improper behavior' to which Tahsin Bey referred also included massacres of Armenians. Baha Şakir had given over to court martial the *çete* leader in Artvin, Halil Bey, who had seized gold worth 65,000 piastres from local people and sent it by regular mail to his father in Bayramiç.⁴⁶

First-hand narratives by ordinary Muslims about jihadist violence against Armenians and Greeks in their neighbourhoods have also not, in most cases, been recorded, because no professional historian in Turkey dared write down such voices or use them in his work, whereas recording the narratives of Armenian violence against Muslims has been encouraged by Turkish authorities. Nevertheless, we do have some eyewitness Turkish narratives, however brief, that go beyond official discourse – and specifically, about Ardanuç. In the academic year 1986–7, an Ardanuç history teacher, Halit Özdemir, gave an end-of-year homework assignment to his high school (*lise*) students, providing them with a typed questionnaire of twenty questions and requiring them to make a survey of elderly residents, writing down their answers. This produced more than 100 such surveys. Some of the questions read as follows: '4) Did the Armenians oppress Turks during the Russian administration? 5) What kinds of atrocities did the Armenians commit against Turks during the time of escape [*kaçakaçlık*]? Give examples ... 12) How did the Armenians leave Ardanuç?'

While some of the respondents told only of Armenian atrocities against Muslims, without mentioning atrocities against Armenians, still more stated that Muslims and Armenians had good relations before the war and Armenians of Ardanuç and Ardahan were massacred by the Muslim *çeteler* at the beginning of the war. For example, Sadık Aksu from the village of Hamurlu (former name Hof), born in the year 1323 (1905 or 1906), in response to question 12 from the questionnaire answered, 'The bands [*çeteler*]

⁴⁵ BOA, DH ŞFR 456/112, 25 Kanun-ı Evvel 1330 (7 January 1915). Tahsin Bey continued to be an important official of the republican Turkish government in the 1920s and 1930s. He was given the surname of Uzer by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, first president of the Republic of Turkey.

⁴⁶ BOA, DH, ŞFR. 49/91, quoted by Aydoğan, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin Doğu Politikası*, p. 93.

massacred [*kırdılar*] the Armenians. They killed 10–15 persons. The Armenians were forced to leave this place in order to save themselves from the oppression of Turks.’ Another respondent, Süleyman Şimşek from the village of Avcılar, born in 1318 (1900 or 1901), in response to questions 4 and 5 told the questioner that the Armenians committed all kinds of acts of oppression, while Turks responded in the same way. Then Şimşek answered question 12 as follows: ‘Later Turks also oppressed Armenians. They bound 20 Armenians with ropes and took them to the gorge of Cehennem Dere, killing all of them . . . Some of them died here, the rest escaped to Russia.’ Selim Alkan from the village of Karlı (Diyagermiç) answered questions 4, 5 and 12 by saying that ‘Armenians did not oppress Turks. People from Hod attacked and killed all Armenians . . . Muslims killed Armenians.’⁴⁷

Reprisals by Armenian volunteers and Russian troops

Acts of violence and murder against Muslims living in the villages of Kars, Ardahan and Artvin by Cossack troops, Armenian armed bands and Armenian volunteers also increased sharply with the onset of war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire. As early as August 1914, Russian authorities in Tbilisi had already begun to worry about Armenian–Muslim conflicts in the Caucasus. But here officials acted defensively, to contain rather than encourage violence. Chamberlain Peterson instructed Colonel Podgurskiy, military governor of the Kars *oblast*, to order all governors of districts and subdistricts to observe the mood of the local Armenian and Muslim populations very closely and to intervene at the slightest sign of disorder. Police officers should be warned that in case of conflicts between Armenians and Muslims, the officers of that district would be held responsible and dismissed from their posts if they were unable to carry out their duties. The administration should be ‘careful, unhurried and unconditionally just’ with regard to both communities.⁴⁸ We do not know to what extent local administrations followed these instructions.

In his November proclamation published in the *oblast*’s official weekly newspaper, the *Kars*, the provisional general-gubernator of Kars *oblast*, General Zubov, warned local Greeks and Armenians to refrain from violence against local Muslims. The general reminded them that Russia was at war not with the peaceful Turkish population but with the Turkish government and

⁴⁷ My thanks are due to retired high school teacher Halit Özdemir, author of *Artvin Tarihi* (History of Artvin), from Ardanuç, who gave me copies of those homework papers.

⁴⁸ STsSA, f. 13, op. 27, d. 3561, ll. 9–10.

army. The proclamation ended with the warning that all persons involved in robbery or violence would be handed over to courts martial in accordance with wartime laws.⁴⁹

Even so, in December 1914, the Muslim inhabitants of Kars city were forced to leave after attacks and massacres by some local Armenians. On 4 January 1915, General Zubov made yet another appeal to the population of the Kars *oblast*, warning once again that crimes would be punished. He also appealed to the 'virtuous' in the Christian population to exercise influence over 'less civilized' Christians in order to prevent attacks on Muslims.⁵⁰ On 25 January he published Order No. 2 in the *oblast*, expressing regret that despite his repeated appeals, hostilities against Muslims had not ceased. He had received information that in addition to murders, sometimes Christians also perpetrated armed robberies and other forms of violence in Muslims villages, under the pretext of revenge for the Turkish invasion of Russian territory. Even if some Muslims were guilty of collaborating with the enemy, they should be handed over to the lawful authorities; lynching was not acceptable. This time, General Zubov also proposed that Colonel Podgurskiy confirm his orders to the population and warn district governors not to allow any part of the population to use violence against another. That same day, Podgurskiy sent a telegram to the governors of the districts of Ardahan, Oltu and Kağızman, urging them to take the most decisive measures against the robbery of Muslims by the Christians, to arrest the perpetrators and to disarm and hand them over to courts martial.⁵¹ The official *Kars* newspaper, on 2 February 1915, contained General Zubov's Order No. 2 as well as the proclamation of Colonel Podgurskiy to the population of the Kars *oblast*, dated 28 January 1915, to the same effect.⁵² General Zubov's order was also printed in the newspapers of Tbilisi and Batum.⁵³

Zubov's concern may have been directed especially to the north, where Muslims were learning again what it meant to be on the losing side. In

⁴⁹ 'Obyavlenie Vremennogo General-Gubernatora Karsskoi Oblasti' (Declaration of the Temporary General-Governor of the Kars oblast), *Kars* 45 (4 [17] November 1914): 1–2. General Zubov's orders were repeated by Governor Podgurskiy and were published in Armenian in the Armenian newspaper *Mshak* as well. See *Mshak* 295 (28 December 1914): 3.

⁵⁰ 'Vozzvanie k naseleniyu Karsskoi oblasti' (Appeal to the population of the Kars oblast), *Kars* 1 (6 [19] January 1915): 1. Repeated in no. 3 of *Kars* on 20 January (2 February) 1915.

⁵¹ RGVIA, f. 2100, op. 2, d. 460, l. 75, cited in Mehmet Perinçek, *Rus Devlet Arşivlerinden 100 Belgede Ermeni Meselesi* (Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2007), pp. 72–3.

⁵² *Kars* 3 (20 January [2 February] 1915): 1–2.

⁵³ *Batumskiy Den* 461 (16 [29] January 1915): 3; and *Batumskiy Den* 489 (19 February 1915): 3, quoted in the *Kavkaz*, a daily newspaper published in Tbilisi.

Ardahan, on 3 January 1915, the Ottoman occupiers were attacked from two sides by the Russian army, including a Siberian Cossack cavalry brigade. Driven out of Ardahan, Ottoman regular and irregular forces fled in the direction of Şavşat and Oltu. However, their escape route toward Oltu was blocked, and they suffered many casualties. The Cossacks, learning of the cruelties against local Christians from survivors whom they met in Zurzuna escaping toward Akhalkalaki, now took revenge on the Muslims who happened to be in their path and in any of the villages that shot at them.

The fact that some Russian troops and Cossacks were involved in violence against local Muslim populations is confirmed at the highest level in three written orders by Lieutenant General Istomin, commander of the Ardahan detachment. In these orders, Istomin warned his men against extorting money and livestock from civilians accused of robbery, rape or shooting at Russian troops. He ordered unit commanders to find the guilty and hand them over to courts martial.⁵⁴ The deputy commander-in-chief of the Caucasus army also urged firm measures against such violence, not hesitating to hand over the perpetrators to courts martial. While these three orders indisputably indicate that some Russian officers and soldiers were involved in violence against Muslim civilians, and although we do not know the results of their investigation, the orders themselves suggest that Russian military authorities at the highest level did not condone such behaviour.

Fearing reprisals by Cossacks in retaliation for their massacres of Christians and for their collaboration with Turkish forces, many Ardahan Muslims retreated towards Şavşat along with the defeated Ottoman forces and bands. On the way, some of these people held the Sahara Pass, where for a while they continued to resist the Russians.⁵⁵ But again, we must assume that not every Muslim was able to run away in time. As was the case with the Armenians and other Christians who had tried to flee, so now the Muslim population in the Russians' path had to suffer cold, hunger and fatigue in severe winter conditions. Thus, by their inglorious deeds, the jihadist volunteers injured Muslims as well as Christians.

Russia's officers followed up on the atrocities committed by their men. General Viktor Myshlaevskiy, on the staff of the Caucasus army in Tbilisi, asked Governor-General Zubov on 10 February 1915 what had been done in

⁵⁴ RGVIA, f. 5633 (Ardaganskiy otryad), op. 1, d. 1, l. 116, General Istomin's Order Number 4 to the Ardahan detachment, dated 5 (17) January 1915, issued in Ardahan. See also f. 5633, op. 1, d. 2, l. 30, Order Number 7 to the Ardahan detachment, dated 7 (19) January 1915; and f. 5633, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 38–9 (also available at d. 1, ll. 126–7), Order Number 15 to the Ardahan detachment, dated 15 (27) January 1915, given in Ardahan.

⁵⁵ Özder, *Artvin ve Çevresi 1828 – 1921 Savaşları* (Ankara: Artvin Turizm ve Tanıtma Derneği Ankara Merkezi Yayınları, 1971), pp. 122–7.

the case of the murder of twenty-two Muslims killed in Kars on 28 and 29 December 1914, and urged Zubov to accelerate the investigation of the case.⁵⁶ (Thus we may conclude that at least twenty-two civilian Muslims had been killed by Christian mobs in December 1914 in the city of Kars.) There are also many legal files prepared by the prosecutor of the Yerevan District Court and sent to the higher court in Tbilisi regarding the murders and robberies of Muslims in the Kars *oblast* at the end of 1914 and beginning of 1915. For example, Public Prosecutor Girchenko of the Yerevan District Court stated in his report to Tbilisi that, at the end of December 1914, four armed Cossacks had appeared at the Muslim village of Kızılçakçak in the Kars *oblast*. The Cossacks gathered together all men in the village and demanded money. The Muslims could collect only 8 rubles, but the Cossacks were not satisfied. Threatening to kill all inhabitants of the village, they took away twenty-one sheep. After a few days, the same Cossacks returned to the village and again blatantly took away five more sheep. But the perpetrators remained undiscovered, and the file was closed.⁵⁷ There are more than twenty such cases, where the perpetrators always remained unidentified. It seems that the police authorities of the Kars *oblast* were either insufficient in numbers to seize the suspects or indifferent to attacks on Muslims. Some of them may even have been collaborating with the criminals.

Nevertheless, the reports of Prosecutor Girchenko clearly show us that although some soldiers of Russia's Caucasus army acted violently toward local Muslims, and some officials may have tacitly supported them, the public prosecutor continued to report these abuses. In fact, there *were* cases of Armenians who were involved in violence against Muslims in the Kars *oblast* being arrested, tried and sentenced.⁵⁸ On the Ottoman side, however, it is almost impossible to find a public prosecutor who *during the war* reported or took action on abuses by Ottoman soldiers toward local Christians.

Armenians returned to Artvin, Ardanuç, Şavşat and Ardahan in 1915, some time after the area was recaptured by Russian troops. While the Russian authorities tried to maintain order, some Armenians whose relatives had been killed by the Muslim jihadists took revenge on Muslims. For example, Hambartsum Stepan Gevorkyan, an Armenian inhabitant of Artvin, was

⁵⁶ STsSA, f. 13, op. 27, d. 3957, l. 51.

⁵⁷ State Archive of the Russian Federation (Gosudarstvenny Arkhiv Rossiyskoi Federatsii, Moscow; hereafter GARF), f. 124 (*Tiflisskaya Sudebnaya Palata*), op. 61, d. 160, l. 71, 16 (28) March 1915, no. 2274. Also see GARF, f. 124, op. 61, d. 160, l. 72, 14 March 1915, no. 2233.

⁵⁸ Perinçek, *Rus Devlet Arşivlerinden*, pp. 78–80, 98–104. However, Perinçek does not cite any documents related to attacks on the Armenians, thus demonstrating a clearly anti-Armenian bias.

accused of repeatedly raping the twelve-year-old Muslim girl Rehiye Hacı Çakmakçı-kızı in Artvin in March 1915. He was handed over to the court martial on the orders of General Lyakhov.⁵⁹

Conclusion

There are no Armenians, no Greeks, no Yezidis and in general no non-Muslims in the Kars, Ardahan, Artvin and İğdir provinces of Turkey today. All non-Muslims had to leave these areas by 1921, when Turkish nationalist forces defeated Armenian forces and secured today's borders with the Soviet republics of the Caucasus and Soviet Russia.

As we have seen, the SO had been actively engaged in the Kars and Batum *oblasts* even before the war. When war began, the districts of Batum, Artvin and Ardahan were among the few areas where the Ottoman caliph's call for jihad was taken seriously by the Muslim population. The SO organized bands from local Muslims, who actively fought with Ottoman regular forces and bands against Russian troops and who retreated to Turkey when the regular forces did. Widespread Muslim collaboration with the Turkish forces also took other forms in areas where invasion forces reached, for jihad meant pillaging and massacres of Armenians, Greeks and Russians. But as was the case with the bashi-bazouks in the Russo-Turkish wars of the nineteenth century, the SO bands (*çeteler*) in the First World War proved themselves insufficient from a military point of view. Their initial successes in capturing Artvin, Ardanuç and Ardahan were due rather to the unexpectedness of the revolt and to initial blunders by certain Russian commanders. By their pillaging and massacres, the jihadist volunteers actually provoked violence against the Muslim population, especially from the Cossack troops, but also from some civilian Greeks and Armenians, especially Armenian refugees seeking revenge for their own misery.

Many local Muslims were tried by Russian courts martial on charges of collaboration or 'high treason'. For public health reasons, relatively few could be exiled to the inner *gubernias* (governates) of Russia. Few were executed; death sentences were generally commuted to hard labour. After the February revolution in 1917, those Muslims who were serving time in the prisons of Batum and Tbilisi were released.

The Russians were not always so benign. The minorities on Russia's western frontier, especially Galician and Bukovina Jews, suffered expulsions

⁵⁹ RGVIA, f. 13138, op. 1, d. 482, ll. 252–3, Prikaz po Mihaylovskoi kreposti, voiskam Batumskoi oblasti i vremennomu General-Gubernatoru Batumskoi oblasti, N370, 29 December 1915 (11 January 1916).

and near-genocidal violence from the Russian army in 1915, triggered by Russian military setbacks and defeats. This violence did not, however, turn into genocide, unlike the fate of Ottoman Armenians after the Ottoman army's catastrophic defeat at Sarikamış. As for the Armenians who were Russian subjects in the Caucasus, they, too, resided on the 'frontiers of genocide', where intent may not be the most crucial factor but the potential for genocide may become actual.⁶⁰ The Armenians of the Artvin–Ardahan area were subjected to near-genocidal violence in the war zone, not because of military setbacks by Ottoman regulars and irregulars but rather during the Ottomans' temporary moments of triumph in a war of expansion guided by jihad. In the Caucasus theatre, the Russian army's behaviour toward civilians was not governed by ideological motives; the Ottoman army's was. How to explain this difference?

Russia's ministers faced a barrage of protests against their military's behaviour from parliamentarians, writers and other public figures within the country, combined with extensive reporting on the expulsions from the neutral American press, at a moment in the war when American loans were deemed essential for Russia's continued ability to fight.⁶¹ The Duma was also more effective than the Ottoman parliament, where the objections of those liberal Ottomans who disagreed with the radical nature of the CUP's Armenian policy had no chance of being heard publicly. Indeed, the Ottoman equivalent of the Duma, the *Meclis-i Mebusan*, was inactive. The figure most apt for the role of an Ottoman Pavel Miliukov was the Young Turk finance minister Cavid Bey or former chairman of the meclis, Ahmed Rıza Bey, but Cavid stayed away and Ahmed Rıza was removed from decision-making positions during the war. The CUP's ally, Germany, couldn't (or wouldn't) make trouble for the Ottomans the way the neutral Americans, by denying loans, could for the Russians.

Ottoman regular and irregular violence toward Armenians was not the ordinary violence of anger or gain but preparatory to genocidal violence, because it was done not only for spoils or for military advantage but also for ideological motives, declared and pursued by the political centre. The massacres of autumn and winter 1914 that preceded and accompanied the Sarikamış Operation were part of the jihadist violence at the start of an intentional, highly aggressive, ideologically charged war of expansion.

⁶⁰ Mark Levene, 'Frontiers of Genocide: Jews in the Eastern War Zones, 1914–1920 and 1941', in Panikos Panayi (ed.), *Minorities in Wartime: National and Racial Groupings in Europe, North America and Australia during the Two World Wars* (Oxford and Providence: Berg, 1993), p. 86.

⁶¹ Levene, 'Frontiers of Genocide', p. 97.

Requiem for a Thug: *Aintabli* Abdulkadir and the Special Organization

Hilmar Kaiser

Research on the extermination of Ottoman Armenians often highlights the role of the so-called Special Organization (*Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa*; hereafter, SO).¹ Recently, a number of studies have clarified the evolution of its organizational structure and the career of one of its most prominent members, Eshref Bey (Sencer).² This chapter examines the case of another important militant of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), *Aintabli* Abdulkadir Bey, a man who held important positions in various capacities and, as an SO operative, cooperated with other leading CUP and SO members in clandestine and illegal operations, although he was not limited to them. Rather, it appears that the CUP employed a variety of organizational structures to persecute Armenians and carry out its other policies, with the nature of these structures – including state institutions and military bodies as well as the SO – depending to a large extent on the person the CUP put in charge. Deploying trusted operatives to a specific area, the ruling party managed to establish effective criminal networks that on occasion took over both civil and military administrations for the purposes of inciting war and effecting genocide – in which, between 1914 and 1915, Abdulkadir Bey played a significant role.

¹ Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2011), pp. 217–24; Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime Against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Vahakn N. Dadrian, 'The Role of the Special Organisation in the Armenian Genocide during the First World War', in Panikos Panayi (ed.), *Minorities in Wartime* (Oxford and Providence, RI: Berghahn Publishers, 1993), pp. 50–82.

² Ahmet Tetik, *Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa (Umûr-ı Şarkıyye Dairesi) Tarihi*, vol. 1 (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2014); Polat Safi, 'The Ottoman Special Organization–Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa: An Inquiry into Its Operational and Administrative Characteristics' (PhD diss., Bilkent University, 2012); Benjamin C. Fortna, *The Circassian: A Life of Eşref Bey, Late Ottoman Insurgent and Special Agent* (London: Hurst and Company, 2016).

The making of a *fedai*

Hilmi Abdulkadir Bey was born in 1881, one of four brothers, into the prominent Tashdjizade family at Aintab. Apparently, his father was killed during the Armenian massacre at Aintab in 1895, which may have coloured his view of Armenians. His older brother Abdullah taught in a local Islamic school. His youngest brother, Abdurrahman, studied at Constantinople University's law school, where he was closely involved in militant CUP circles. Abdulkadir combined his religious beliefs with Turkish nationalism and pursued a military career. In 1903 he graduated from the War Academy as a general staff officer, and in 1904 he was transferred to the Ottoman army in Macedonia, where he joined elite units targeting insurgents. During this period, he joined the clandestine CUP as member number 187. Abdulkadir became a self-sacrificing officer, or *fedai*, a member of the organization's terrorist wing, already charged with the assassination of political opponents.

In the tense months of June and July 1908, leading up to the Young Turk coup, the CUP embarked on a campaign to neutralize the Ottoman government's intelligence and military command structure. When problems arose with the planned assassination of Nazim Bey, it was with Abdulkadir, along with Halil (Kut), that Enver Bey (later Pasha) consulted on how to proceed. Clearly, Abdulkadir was a most trusted young man. A few weeks later, in July 1909, the CUP activated Abdulkadir – to shoot the military mufti of Manastir, who had been investigating the CUP. This high-risk operation gained him a reputation as a cold-blooded man. Another prominent self-sacrificing officer, the aforementioned Eshref Bey, put him at number seven on his list of the top ten *fedais*.³

Abdulkadir also gained dubious fame, after the 1908 coup, as a suspect in the assassination of a journalist and critic of the CUP. He then went to Germany for further training, an indication that he had been slated to become part of Turkey's future military elite. When, in 1911, Italy occupied the coastal areas of Ottoman Libya, Abdulkadir was among a number of officers that Enver Bey assembled to wage guerrilla warfare against the invaders. The operatives successfully checked the Italian advance into the interior. Their

³ Armenian Assembly of America, Guerguerian Collection, reel (AAA) 19, Dossier of Turks responsible for the Armenian atrocities (Dossier) No. 24; Mithat Şükrü Bleda, *İmparatorluğun Çöküşü* (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1979), p. 39; İsmet İnönü, *Hatıralar*, vol. 2 (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınları, 1987), p. 216; Halil Erdoğan Cengiz (ed.), *Enver Paşa'nın Anıları* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1991), p. 80; Fortna, *Circassian*, pp. 19, 271; M. Necat Özgür, *Bir İthattının Biyografisi. Maslup Abdülkadir Bey* (Istanbul: Liber Kitap, 2016), pp. 27–32.

struggle was cut short, however, by the outbreak of the Balkan Wars. Consequently, most of the officers returned to Constantinople and joined the regular army.

Abdulkadir saw action during the Ottomans' last-ditch defence of Constantinople at Tchataldja. Although younger than Talaat and Djemal Bey (but the same age as Enver and Mustafa Kemal), politically he had already solidified his place among the CUP's inner circle. Thus, in January 1913, when the party leadership deliberated a new coup plan against the cabinet of the elderly Kâmil Pasha, Talaat turned to him. Abdulkadir did not, however, personally participate in the assault on the government at the Sublime Porte that would return the CUP to power. His brother Abdurrahman, however, was among CUP loyalists who had gathered in the area when Enver Bey and his assassins stormed the government.⁴

Spymaster in Van

On 29 May 1913, Van's governor, Tahsin Bey (Uzer), requested that Captain Abdulkadir be dispatched to Van. Without providing details, Tahsin credited the captain with considerable influence in Kurdish circles and hoped that he could counter Kurdish opposition and especially the activities of Abdurrezzak Bedirhan. The Ministry of War, however, was reluctant. Only a year later, on 2 April 1914, did the Interior Ministry appoint Abdulkadir as first-class civil inspector to Van. Officially, he had resigned from military duty and was replacing Civil Inspector Haradjian, who had been dismissed. Probably the timing of his appointment was owed to a local emergency. With the attempted putsch by some Kurdish nationalists in Bitlis, the young captain's Kurdish connections had become more important than ever.⁵

For a long time, Kurdish dissatisfaction with CUP policies had been on the rise. By 1912, Russia was supporting Kurdish leaders like Abdurrezzak Bedirhan with an eye to undermining Ottoman control over the eastern provinces. Aside from money, a large number of weapons changed hands. Overall, however, Kurdish organization remained weak, and Ottoman countermeasures contained it successfully. The signing of the Armenian Reform Agreement on 8 February 1914, however, by raising at least potentially the prospect of having to return

⁴ Dahiliye (DH).Siyasi (SYS) 23-11, HN to DH, 3 June 1914; AAA, 19, Dossier, No. 24; Erik-Jan Zürcher, 'Jungtürkische Entscheidungsmuster 1913–1915', in Rolf Hosfeld and Christin Pschichholz (eds), *Das Deutsche Reich und der Völkermord an den Armeniern* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2017), p. 92.

⁵ DH.SYS 23-11, HN to DH, 3 June 1913. Bâb-ı Âli Evrak Odası (BEO) 4274-320494, Grand Vizierate to DH, 2 April 1914.

some of their lands to Armenians, gave new impetus to Kurdish concerns. Four weeks later, a revolt broke out in Bitlis. Despite some initial problems, Ottoman authorities were able to put down the rebellion by 2 April, but the incident confirmed Ottoman suspicions of Russian support for Kurdish aspirations. Throughout the crisis, Van's governor, Tahsin Bey, coordinated countermeasures while keeping track of the Kurdish leaders who had fled to Persian Azerbaijan. By 3 May, security forces had hunted down all the fugitives who still remained in Van province. Given the repression, local Kurdish leaders professed their Ottoman loyalty. In reality, they were waiting for any setback the Ottoman government might suffer, which would open new prospects for them. Thus, alongside the installation of modern telephone lines, Van's governor made the reinforcement of border battalions a priority. Moreover, village militias were to complement security arrangements along the border and conduct intelligence gathering in Persia.⁶

The poorly demarcated border provided opportunities for territorial claims. Tahsin's job was to supervise an intelligence network with Ottoman *kaimakams* (subdistrict governors) working as handlers. Their web covered the Ottoman borderlands but also large areas of Persian Azerbaijan, especially the districts that Ottoman troops had invaded in 1905. Thus, at Urmia in Persian Azerbaijan, the Ottoman consulate served as a base for operations among Kurdish tribal groups. The chief operative there was Nedjati Bey (Kurtuluş). Before the 1908 CUP coup, he too had served as an officer in Macedonia with anti-insurgency units. Later he had held a position with military security forces in Constantinople, a most sensitive assignment for securing the CUP's hold on power. In Persia, although officially Nedjati Bey was only a consular secretary who at times served as acting consul, his real task was to gather intelligence on Russian troop movements for his superior, Tahsin Bey. Despite his civilian assignment, he maintained his military rank as captain of the General Staff.⁷

The intelligence he gathered was alarming. By 18 May 1914, Ottoman agents had ascertained that the Russians had declared Abdurrezzak the 'Leader of all Persian [Kurdish] Tribes'. The Russian consul at Khoi had

⁶ DH.Şifre (ŞFR) 422-79, Tahsin to DH, Van, 31 March 1914; 422-112, Tahsin to DH, Van, 2 April 1914; 424-83, Tahsin to DH, Van, 22 April 1914; 425-14, Tahsin to DH, 26 April 1914; 425-95, Tahsin to DH, Van, 3 May 1914; 426-11, Tahsin to DH, Van, 6 May 1914; 427-13, Tahsin to DH, Van, 18/19 May 1914; 427-75, Tahsin to DH, Van, 23 May 1914; United Kingdom, National Archives, Foreign Office (FO) 371/2130/5748/25453, Smith to Mallet, Van, 16 May 1914 enclosure in Mallet to Grey, Constantinople, 1 June 1914; 195/2458/3157, Smith to Mallet, Van, 18 July 1914; Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 60-5, 79-80.

⁷ DH.ŞFR 425-115, Tahsin to DH, Van, 4 May 1914; 427-26, Tahsin to DH, 19 May 1914; 427-27, Tahsin to DH, 19 May 1914; *TBMM Albümü 1920-2010*, vol. 1 (Ankara: TBMM Basın ve Halkla İlişkiler Müdürlüğü, 2010), p. 19.

invited him and several other Kurdish leaders to discuss future projects. Among them were Said Bey of the Haidaranli Tribal Confederation and Simko Agha of the Shekak tribe. The conference lasted from 13 to 16 May 1914. Ottoman informants present learned of substantial funding and arms deliveries from Russia. At the same time, strong Russian reinforcements were arriving in the area. The agents warned that within two weeks a Kurdish alliance might attack Ottoman territory from Azerbaijan. Said Bey would be in charge of the first assault.

Ottoman border forces were critically overstretched. Posts along the border were manned by no more than ten to fifteen men, and in the overwhelmingly Kurdish Hakkari district of the south-east, distances between army posts were thirty to forty kilometres, with no troops in between. Battalion strength was only seventy to eighty men, with the remaining reinforcements in these locales unreliable. The situation was critical, as Ottoman authorities had intercepted a messenger of Said Bey containing a missive from Abdurrezzak Bey for the Haidaranli tribe.⁸

Tahsin demanded that Constantinople keep Nedjati Bey, who was wiring the Van governor twice a day, supplied with ample funds for bribes to counter Russian activities. Nedjati Bey's other job was to organize the kidnapping and assassination of opponents. He had qualified men under his command for this purpose. Tahsin's warnings fell on fertile ground at the Ministry of the Interior, which ordered that 'effective' measures be taken.⁹ Meanwhile, Tahsin Bey had an article published in the local CUP-controlled newspaper, *Tchaldiran*, denouncing the Khoi conference. The article was an open death threat to the participants.¹⁰

Like the governor, Abdulkadir divided his activities between official and clandestine ones. His clandestine activities complemented those of his old comrades, Halil Bey and Kazim Bey (Özalp), also stationed in Van. The three men had pursued similar careers, all getting their start in anti-insurgency warfare in Macedonia before 1908. Halil Bey was also a known *fedai* and had been in Libya.¹¹

⁸ DH.ŞFR 426-113, Tahsin to DH, Van, 16 May 1914; 427-12, Tahsin to DH, Van, 18/19 May 1914; 427-13, Tahsin to DH, Van, 18/19 May 1914; 427-109, Tahsin to DH, 25 May 1914; 429-29, Tahsin to DH, Van, 6 June 1914.

⁹ DH.ŞFR 41-79, Ali Munif to Van prov., 25 May 1914; 427-109, Tahsin to DH, 25 May 1914; 428-78, Tahsin to DH, Van, 31 May 1914; 428-80, Tahsin to DH, Van, 30/31 May 1914; 429-122, Tahsin to DH, 11/12 June 1914; 430-64, Faik to DH, Van, 16 June 1914.

¹⁰ FO 195/2458/2672, Smith to Mallet, Van, 14 June 1914; Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Centre des Archives diplomatiques de Nantes, Constantinople, série E, carton (Nantes) 133, De Sandfort to Bompard, Van, 11 June 1914.

¹¹ Halil Kut, *İttihat ve Terakkî'den Cumhuriyete: Bitmeyen Savaş – Kütülâmare Kahramanı Halil Paşa'nın Anıları* (Istanbul: Yedigün Yayınları, 1972), p. 97.

Officially, Abdulkadir focused on strengthening the local CUP by becoming the president of a local Muslim Benevolent Union. The body's goal was to encourage the growth of a Turkish economic elite, a CUP pet project, and though ostensibly promoting only 'national' aims, the project was in fact directed against Armenians. The organization also provided Abdulkadir with a cover for establishing contact with Muslim elites who could facilitate intelligence-related activities. He also worked with local leaders such as Said Kurdi, a Muslim cleric with close CUP ties. Some time earlier, the authorities had seized a compound at Edremid near Van, which had been built with donations for a preacher's college, and had converted it into barracks. Tahsin had supported the project, as he claimed it would promote Muslim interests. But Muslim elites were upset at the high-handed takeover of the place, and alert to Muslim sensitivities, Abdulkadir indignantly declared that provincial authorities would never have dared touch a non-Muslim institution. Petitioning the Ministry of the Interior, he argued that as the CUP as such had not been involved in the affair, a return of the building would benefit the party's local standing.¹²

In July 1914, Abdulkadir Bey's clandestine activities brought about a major success. A member of the entourage of the Haidaranli leader Said Bey had been secretly passing on the latter's correspondence with his followers and with Russian officials to Kemal, the *kaimakam* of the *kaza* (subdistrict) of Sarai. Tipped off, Abdulkadir arranged Said Bey's assassination – along with his nephew, many members of his household and another leader of the Haidaranli tribe. A Russian detachment investigated the murders in the mountains near the Ottoman border. Soon, the Russians had tracked the assassination to a connection with another Kurdish leader who had also been a participant at the Khoi conference. Following a shoot-out, which the man survived, the leader contacted Ottoman authorities for permission to return from Azerbaijan to Van province. Having already given shelter to another suspect, however, the Ottoman government did not want to provoke the Russians and rejected the request.¹³

¹² Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Centre des archives diplomatiques de la Courneuve, Nouvelle série (NS) Turquie 90, Sandfort to Bompard, Van, 8 May 1914; DH.ŞFR 429-123, Abdulkadir to Talaat, Van, 11 June 1914; Şükran Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), pp. 106–7.

¹³ FO 195/2458/3133, Smith to Mallet, Van, 11 July 1914; Nantes 133, De Sandfort to Bompard, Van, 7 July 1914; DH.ŞFR 429-50, Tahsin to DH, 6 June 1914; 42-228, Talaat to Van prov., 7 July 1914; 433-21, Tahsin to DH, Van, 8 July 1914; 433-51, Tahsin to DH, Van, 11 July 1914; Abdurrezak Bedirhan, *Otobiyografya (1910–1916)* (Istanbul: Pêri Yayınları, 2000), p. 40.

Playing the Kurdish card: special ops on the Persian frontier

Shortly after Said Bey's murder, Tahsin held a conference in Van. Important matters were to be discussed that could not be shared through coded correspondence. Thus, even Nedjati Bey was called in from Urmia. Officially, the meeting was to coordinate efforts to suppress Kurdish banditry. The French consulate ascertained, however, that during the meeting Van's governor had revealed CUP instructions for more assassinations: this time, of the Kurdish leaders Simko Bey and Abdurrezak Bey.¹⁴ One of problems for implementing that agenda was that Abdulkadir could no longer work undercover, as his role in the earlier assassinations had become public. Yet it seems not to have damaged his eligibility for a high-level position in government. Thus, on 9 July 1914, the Interior Ministry announced his appointment as governor of Kerkuk district in the neighbouring province of Mosul.¹⁵

As it turned out, Abdulkadir did not leave Van. Europe's declarations of war found him eager for an Ottoman invasion of Persia. He assumed that after some decisive defeats at the hands of the Germans or Austria-Hungary, Russian troops would evacuate Azerbaijan. That would provide a most suitable moment for an insurgency. Since Kurdish tribes would certainly support Ottoman rule in the region, he could take the province by invading at the head of Ottoman Kurdish tribes. All that was needed were some funding and arms. In view of the ongoing Kurdish-Russian cooperation, Abdulkadir's assumption appears daring at the very least.¹⁶

The CUP, however, had other plans. The Ministry of the Interior advised Abdulkadir that SO operatives were on their way to Van. He should coordinate with them and await further instructions. Meanwhile, his friend Halil Bey left for Constantinople, where he headed the SO's main office for some time. In his place, Kazim Bey took over the command of the gendarmerie regiment.¹⁷

Now favours to Kurds were bestowed generously. Following the mobilization announcement, Van's governor's Tahsin Bey suggested that Kurdish men could serve as irregulars in independent tribal units. This was popular, as the men did not want to serve with regular units far from their homes. The Ministry of the Interior also pardoned Kurdish outlaws who were

¹⁴ Nantes 133, De Sandfort to Bompard, Van, 15 July 1914; De Sandfort to Bompard, Van, 7 July 1914; FO 195/2458/3133, Smith to Mallet, Van, 11 July 1914.

¹⁵ BEO 4298-322286, Grand Vizierate to Ministry of the Interior, 9 July 1914.

¹⁶ DH,ŞFR 435-8, Abdulkadir to Talaat, Van, 1 August 1914.

¹⁷ DH,ŞFR 43-192, Minister to Van prov., 6 August 1915.

willing to join the war effort. The measure was controversial, however, for it might create political and security problems at home. The Third Army appointed Abdulkadir as commander of the Independent Tribal Brigade, a unit with approximately 3,400 men. Another problem was that the tribes themselves were often engaging in blood feuds, raising even greater security concerns – in this case, about their presence in Van.¹⁸

Officially, Abdulkadir served with the rank of a general staff captain while still remaining, at least in theory, governor of Kerkuk. His area of operations became the border region close to Sarai, while Hakkari district governor Djevded Bey (Belbez) covered the more southern border section close to Lake Urmia. One aspect of their assignments was intelligence work, with findings to be forwarded to Tahsin, who coordinated intelligence. The task was essential for preparing incursions into Persia under the incoming SO leader, Omer Nadji Bey. In time, the SO's regional administrative board would be headed by Djevded Bey, Kazim Bey and Police Inspector Muhiddin Bey.¹⁹

In preparation for upcoming operations, Tahsin dispatched Zia Bey as the new *kaimakam* to Sarai, in Abdulkadir's sector, close to the Persian border. The new subgovernor was to conduct intelligence work and report on Russian troop deployments. At first, Zia's and Nedjati Bey's reports indicated that the Russians were withdrawing from the region, at the same time that Nedjati Bey and other agents were negotiating with Kurdish leaders for their return to Van in exchange for supporting the Ottoman government. Yet the results of these particular efforts were limited. More important was their by-product: information, contrary to previous reports, about a massive redeployment of Russian troops to the border region. So far, Ottoman border guards had been successful in repulsing small Kurdish incursions. Now the Russians were instructing Simko Agha and his men to attack Ottoman border positions, posing a grave danger to Abdulkadir's sector.²⁰

¹⁸ DH.ŞFR 436-35, Tahsin to DH, Van, 9 August 1914; 436-55, Tahsin to DH, Van, 10/11 August 1914; 439-86, Tahsin to DH, Van, 3 September 1914; 44-194, Ali Munif to Mosul prov., 6 September 1914; 44-224, Ali Munif to provinces, 12 September 1914; 45-74, Minister to Bitlis and Van prov., 23 September 1914; 441-121, Tahsin to DH, Van, 24/25 September 1914; Arif Cemil (Denker), 'Umumi Harpte Teşkilâtı Mahsusa', *Vakit* (11 December 1933); Haig Gossian, *The Epic Story of the Self Defense of Armenians in the Historic City of Van* ([Detroit, MI]: General Society of Vasbouragan, 1980), p. 5.

¹⁹ DH.ŞFR 437-35, Tahsin to DH, Van, 14/15 August 1914; 439-106, Tahsin to Talaat, Van, 5/6 September 1914; Nantes 339, De Sandfort to Bompard, Van, 26 September 1914; Tetik, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*, p. 295.

²⁰ DH.ŞFR 435-119, Tahsin to DH, Van, 7 August 1914; 436-36, Tahsin to DH, Van, 9 August 1914; 436-85, Tahsin to DH, Van, 11/12 August 1914; 436-133, Tahsin to DH, Van, 13 August 1914; 437-32, Djemal to DH, Erzerum, 15 August 1914; 437-59, Tahsin to DH, Van, 17 August 1914; 437-61, Tahsin to DH, Van, 16/17 August 1914; 438-21, Tahsin to DH, Van, 20 August 1914; 438-22, Tahsin to DH, Van, 21 August 1914; 438-76, Tahsin to DH, Van, 25 August 1914; 439-75, Tahsin to DH, Van, 2/3 September 1914.

By the beginning of September 1914, the province of Van's mobilization was complete. Regular army units alongside those of the gendarmerie, the reserve cavalry division, the independent brigades and border detachments had been organized or brought up to combat strength. The SO leader Omer Nadji Bey and his group had arrived as well. The participation of the Persian revolutionary Hashmet Khan was to provide a semblance of legitimacy to the incursion.²¹

Omer Nadji Bey had some experience in the region. In 1909, he and other CUP agents had conducted covert operations in Persia. Ottoman army officers, however, doubted his qualifications, describing him as an amateur and drunkard. This assessment was not unwarranted, as his SO officers trained local recruits for their task force on an open space right in front of the Russian consulate – a choice that horrified professional soldiers. Moreover, Omer Nadji had engaged in nationalist propaganda, also something that ensured that his presence at Van would become widely known. Not surprisingly, the Russian consul alerted commanders in Persia. Within a week of his arrival, however, Omer Nadji Bey reported that the organization of the SO's Persian region had been completed. Operations could start by the middle of September 1914. He and his fellow SO leader Bahaeddin Shakir Bey at Erzerum (Erzurum) believed that local Kurdish tribes were faithful to the Ottoman government. SO forces lacked only sufficient funding and final instructions. The two men wondered if a covert attack was appropriate and asked Talaat Bey for orders – either an authorization to go ahead or orders to delay action. The response indicated that a date for the attack on Russia had not yet been set.²²

By late September, skirmishes were breaking out with the Russians and their Kurdish allies along the border. Nedjati Bey reported that Russian troops were responding with massive reinforcements. Tahsin did his best to obstruct communications between the Russian consul at Van and his handlers in Persia, while Omer Nadji Bey demanded permission for an outright attack. He had sent two small bands to Urmia to secure the Ottoman consulate there, which had asked for protection. Consul Ragib Bey appeared, however, to be

²¹ DH.ŞFR 439-106, Tahsin to Talaat, Van, 5/6 September 1914.

²² DH.ŞFR 440-50, Tahsin to DH, Van, 10 September 1914; 440-76, Bahaeddin Shakir to Talaat, Erzerum, 13 September 1914; 440-95, Tahsin to DH, Van, 14 September 1914; 440-110, Bahaeddin Shakir to Talaat, Erzerum, 15 September 1914; 441-22, Omer Nadji to DH, Van, 17 September 1914; 441-23, Tahsin to DH, Van, 16/17 September 1914; 45-36, Minister to Van prov., 19 September 1914; 45-46, Minister to Van prov., 21 September 1914; Nantes 339, De Sandfort to Bompard, Van, 15 September 1914; De Sandfort to Bompard, Van, 26 September 1914 ; Aziz Samih (Iltar), *Birinci Dünya Savaşında Kafkas Cephesi Hatıraları*, 2nd edn (Ankara: Genelkurmay Askerî Tarih ve Stratejik Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2007), pp. 1, 53.

the wrong man for the post. Thus, Nedjati Bey, who continued his intelligence work, was told to take over the consul's duties. Despite setbacks, Djevded Bey was expecting a Kurdish rising against the Russians. In other words, the time for an attack had come – all the more so as snow would close the passes through the mountains within a month.²³

By the middle of October 1914, Azerbaijan in north-western Persia had become a battleground for Ottoman and Russian troops, as the Ottomans' covert operations resulted in full-scale armed conflict even before the 'official' Ottoman attack on Russia's Black Sea fleet at the end of the month. At the time, the regional SO's forces for the Persian operations, aside from the original group sent to Van, numbered more than twelve officers, with 100 gendarmes, 200 infantrymen, some Persians and some mostly Kurdish tribesmen. Tcherkes Reshid, Rusheni Bey (Barkin) and Emir Hashmet formed the central committee, but Bahaeddin Shakir thought that higher-ranking men should also be added.²⁴ The attack brought the raiders near Urmia, where they massacred the populations of Christian villages. Russian reinforcements quickly reversed the situation. Now Assyrian Christians and Russian troops took revenge, massacring the populations of Kurdish villages and forcing the flight of thousands into Ottoman territory. At the same time, Ottoman Kurdish irregulars left their units and returned to their villages, fearing an attack on their own people. Governor Tahsin proposed as retaliation the deportation of Assyrian Christians from Hakkari to the western Ottoman provinces. He claimed that Djevded Bey and Kazim Bey would be able to deport the village populations within ten days, which was hardly believable given the mountainous terrain. Nevertheless, Talaat was initially interested, but the Ottoman attack on Russia stopped the plan, as more pressing concerns had to be addressed. As for the SO, while Nadji Bey had to abort his attack on Salmas, Djevded Bey and Kazim Bey attempted to stabilize the Persian front. Support from Persian Muslim leaders had not materialized, as Russians had begun executing *any* tribal leaders who had supported the Ottoman raid.²⁵

²³ DH, ŞFR 441-118, Tahsin to DH, Van, 23/24 September 1914; 441-120, Tahsin to DH, Van, 24 September 1914; 442-75, Tahsin to DH, Van, 29 September 1914; 442-90, Tahsin to DH, Van, 30 September 1914; 442-91, Tahsin to DH, Van, 30 September 1914; 442-99, Tahsin to DH, Van, 30 September 1914; 443-12, Tahsin to DH, Van, 3/4 October 1914; 443-34, Tahsin to DH, Van, 4/5 October 1914; 443-50, Tahsin to DH, Van, 5/6 October 1914; 443-72, Tahsin to DH, Van, 6 October 1914.

²⁴ DH, ŞFR 444-10, Bahaeddin Shakir to Talaat, Erzerum, 11 October 1914; 444-11, Bahaeddin Shakir to Talaat, Erzerum, 11 October 1914; *TBMM Albümü*, p. 220.

²⁵ DH, ŞFR 444-79, Djevded to DH, Van, 15 October 1914; 444-91, Tahsin to DH, Van, 15/16 October 1914; 444-110, Bahaeddin Shakir to Talaat, Erzerum, 17 October 1914;

Djevded Bey complained to Talaat that the raiders *would* have taken Urmia if only Special Organization leader Rusheni Bey had not failed to support the attack with his thirteen officers and 300 men. While reinforcements had certainly been urgently needed, it was more than doubtful that such a small force could have tipped the balance in favour of the Ottomans, given Russian superiority in numbers and weaponry. Minimizing his losses, Djevded denied that the lives of any Ottoman officers had been lost in the raid. Only one army engineer officer and twelve Ottoman irregulars had been killed – with their bodies left behind. Despite the setbacks, Bahaeddin Shakir, too, viewed the operation positively. Only the lack of military supplies and a real leader, not the strategy itself, had prevented a full success. Thus, the Special Organization's leader refused to acknowledge the defeat and still tried to present the whole affair as something like an achievement.

The Third Army Command seemed to think otherwise. It warned the SO not to provoke a premature start of general hostilities. Therefore, Commander Izzet Pasha banned interventions in support of Persian Kurds. Not surprisingly, Tahsin and the SO operatives opposed the Third Army's decision and tried to enlist Minister of the Interior Talaat's support for overturning it. Critically, Russia made public their recognition that Ottoman officers and soldiers had been leading this supposedly 'Kurdish' raid, and they publicly hanged some captured Ottoman raiders.²⁶

In fact, these initial operations proved that the conglomerate of SO, gendarmerie, independent tribal cavalry battalions, army personnel and tribesmen was completely ineffective against Russian troops. A unified command was lacking, and each SO officer did as he pleased. At the same time, the raiders had come to learn that cavalry charges against Russian positions defended by machine guns always failed, even if the attackers outnumbered the defenders by the hundreds. And worse, because it showed the weakness of the entire strategy, SO units were incapable of holding the territory they occupied.

444-122, Tahsin to DH, Van, 17/18 October 1914; 444-128, Bahaeddin Shakir to Talaat, Erzerum, 18 October 1914; 445-9, Djevded to Talaat, Bashkale, 19 October 1914; 445-34, Tahsin to DH, Van, 21/22 October 1914; 445-35, Tahsin to DH, Van, 21 October 1914; 46-78, Talaat to Van prov., 26 October 1914; 445-106, Djevded to DH, Gevar, 29 October 1914; 46-102, Minister to Van prov., 29 October 1914; 46-195, Talaat to Van prov., 6 November 1914; NS Perse 18, De Sandfort to Delcasse, Van, 21 October 1914; David Gaunt, *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors: Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia during World War I* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006), pp. 129–30.

²⁶ DH,ŞFR 445-12, Djevded to Talaat, Bashkale, 19 October 1914; 445-17, Bahaeddin Shakir to Talaat, Erzerum, 19 October 1914; 445-88, Djevded to DH, Badjerje, 27 October 1914.

They did, however, use the opportunities that occurred for plundering and massacring civilians. Soon this lawlessness came back to haunt them, as the nearby homes of their own troops were exposed to Russian counter-attacks, and the Russians replicated the Ottoman strategy of scorched earth on the Ottoman side of the border. The operations had also compromised the Ottoman government, exposing its complicity, as some of the raiders had carried identification papers. Most important for the strategy as a whole, despite SO leaders' expectations and their agents' encouraging reports, a general Muslim rising against the Russians in Azerbaijan had not taken place. In other words, the entire incursion strategy was built on a foundation of false premises. Not least of these was that Kurdish tribes would surely support Ottoman rule in the region, when only recently they had been given evidence that Kurdish support for Ottoman rule in *Ottoman* regions was less than wholehearted.

The Sarai sector: retribution against Armenians

The Ottoman attack on Russia on 28 October 1914 rendered obsolete the calls for Talaat Bey's intervention with the Third Army. Immediately, SO gangs marched on Urmia. It was a foolhardy move. In response, Russian regular forces occupied the Ottoman consulate there and executed several agents and local supporters. Only Nedjati Bey managed to escape and reach Ottoman lines. (The CUP then transferred him to Angora, where he served as the party's responsible secretary.) Problems among the commanding officers continued, and between Abdulkadir and Kazim Bey, tensions reached a breaking point. As a result, Abdulkadir was given an army assignment, while Kazim Bey took charge of Van's provincial units. These were not the only problems with the command of combat units in the area: at about the same time, SO commander Rusheni Bey simply abandoned his unit and left for Baghdad province.²⁷

Clashes along the border intensified throughout November 1914, with Russian forces stalling Ottoman advances. Repeatedly, Kurdish tribesmen abandoned their positions; desertions were common on both sides. Tahsin

²⁷ DH.ŞFR 445-115, Bahaeddin Shakir to Talaat, Erzerum, 30/31 October 1914; 446-122, Djeved to DH, Van, 4/5 November 1914; 447-121, Bahaeddin Shakir to Talaat, Hasankale, 13 November 1914; 451-34, Djeved to DH, Van, 30 November 1914. Apparently, Rusheni Bey's official recall did not take place before 7 January 1915. See Cemil Koçak, 'Ey Tarihiçi, Belgen Kadar Konuş! Belgesel Bir Teşkilâtı Mahsusa Öyküsü', *Tarih ve Toplum Yeni Yaklaşımlar* 3 (2006): 205-6.

²⁸ DH.ŞFR 448-104, Djeved to DH, Van, 17 November 1914; 449-26, Tahsin to DH, Erzerum, 18 November 1914; 450-51, Djeved to DH, Van, 25 November 1914.

demanded the execution of every hundredth Kurdish deserter. Especially worrisome for the Ottomans, however, was that even officers had abandoned their posts.²⁸

All along the SO's Persian sector, Russian forces repulsed Ottoman advances and forced the latter into defensive positions. Attacks on Ottoman regular infantry to the north-east of Bashkale inflicted heavy losses and triggered a retreat. Following that defeat, and as a Russian breakthrough seemed imminent, the SO's central committee at Erzerum issued emergency instructions for Van and Bitlis provinces. It ordered a mobilization of all capable Muslim men – and the disarmament of Armenians. Moreover, the governor of Bitlis, Mustafa Abdulhalik Bey (Renda), was ordered to fortify the mountain passes to the west so as to form a second line of defence. The panicking SO leaders were now anticipating the fall of the entire Van province.²⁹

As a second Russian force advanced into Abdulkadir's area in Van, a part of the Kurdish tribal force went over to the Russians, and Djevded Bey expected the remaining gendarmerie forces to be overwhelmed within a short while. Abdulkadir lost control over his entire remaining tribal force and arrived alone at Ardjak behind the front. From Erzerum, Governor Tahsin could only denounce what he deemed to be Kurdish cowardice, but he had no support to send. On 1 December 1914, Bashkale fell to the Russians just as Sarai had done. Kazim Bey and Djevded Bey tried to put up a defence at Hoshab but lacked men, as Kurdish tribesmen once more did not withstand Russian firepower.³⁰

By 10 December 1914, the Russians had left Bashkale and returned to Persian territory. A few days later, they evacuated Sarai. The reason for the Russian retreat was the Ottoman Third Army's offensive against Russia in the Sarikamish region in the north. The tactical move opened the areas to new advances of SO operatives and their motley combat gangs. When Djevded Bey reached the area, he saw first hand that local Muslims had been massacred. He

²⁹ DH.ŞFR 450-132, Djevded to DH, Van, 26/28 November 1914; 451-18, Djevded to DH, Van, 29 November 1914; 451-43, Djevded to DH, Van, 29 November 1914; 451-62, Tahsin to Talaat, Erzerum, 30 November/1 December 1914.

³⁰ DH.ŞFR 451-65, Djevded to Talaat, Van, 30 November/1 December 1914; 451-66, Djevded to DH, Van, 30 November/1 December 1914; 451-101, Djevded to DH, Van, 1/2 December 1914; 451-102, Tahsin to Ministry of the Interior, Erzerum, 2/3 December 1914; 451-125, Tahsin to Talaat, Erzerum, 3 December 1914; 451-134, Djevded to DH, Hoshab, 4/5 November 1914.

³¹ DH.ŞFR 452-150, Djevded to DH, Keshish, 10/11 December 1914; 453-103, Shefik to DH, Van, 15/16 December 1914; 454-19, Djevded to DH, Keshish, 16 December 1914; 454-67, Shefik to DH, Van, 19/20 December 1914; 455-40, Tahsin to Talaat, Erzerum, 24 December 1914; 455-45, Djevded to Talaat, Van, 23 December 1914; 455-159, [Djevded] to Talaat, Sarai, [25] December 1914; 456-77, Tahsin to DH, Erzerum, 4 January 1915; 456-133, Djevded to Talaat, Sarai, 8 January 1915; 456-137, Djevded to DH, Sarai, 8 January 1915.

attributed the crimes to Armenians fighting alongside the Russians and swore to take revenge. Kurdish defectors had already been dealt with harshly. The Third Army's shattering defeat at Sarikamish, however, rendered futile the SO's advances in Azerbaijan, leaving only a trail of devastation.³¹

At the beginning of January, Abdulkadir made good on Djeveded Bey's promise for revenge. He led a force to the Armenian border village of Akhorik, where he detained all the men, supposedly to rebuild the barracks at Sarai that had been destroyed. Gendarmes and Kurdish irregulars took the detainees away in groups to the neighbouring Avzarik village, where they massacred them. Only fourteen elderly men were spared and sent to Sarai. The families of the dead recovered their bodies for burial, but *kaimakam* Zia Bey insisted that the corpses rot in the open. Next, Kurdish irregulars massacred about 100 Armenians in neighbouring Hassan Tamra village, while ten Assyrian families similarly fell victim at Kharabsorek. Other villages that were destroyed included Azaren, Seidibek and Satmantz. Back at Akhorik, Zia Bey ordered all survivors from their homes and sent them, through deep snow, over the mountains into Persia. Those attempting to return were shot. On the way, Kurdish irregulars raided the caravan, carrying off women and girls. Of the 300 deportees who had set out for Salmas, only seventy or eighty arrived. The atrocities were not random; they targeted systematically those villages closest to the Persian border. Their aim was to eliminate any Armenian presence on the frontier.³²

Massacres at Gumushkhane

The assignment near Sarai was possibly Abdulkadir's last deployment on the Persian front. On 10 March 1915, the Ministry of the Interior appointed him *mutesarraf* (governor) of Gumushkhane district in Trebizond province, where he served under Governor Djemal Azmi Bey. The latter was another veteran of the Macedonian conflict who had joined the CUP before the 1908 coup, becoming at the time a close friend of Tahsin, who had helped with his promotion to Trebizond. At that post, the governor cooperated closely with the SO. In fact, the SO operative Arif Djemil (Denker) claimed that the SO had been instrumental in securing the post for him, as well as the appointments of the new Lazistan district governor and now of Abdulkadir, putting the entire civil administration of all the provinces near the Russian front under

³² Arshag Vramian, 'Memorandum', Van, 1915, in *La défense héroïque de Van (Arménie)* (Geneva: Edition de la Revue Droschak, 1916), pp. 17–19.

close SO supervision. Gumushkhane was located south of Trebizond city, on one of the main supply routes of the Third Army. Thus, maintenance and improvement of roads was important, as was the coordination of transport caravans. Although the provincial governor had initially opposed Abdulkadir's transfer to his province, for months Abdulkadir succeeded in performing his tasks to the governor's satisfaction.³³

On 19 June 1915, the Third Army commander ordered the deportation of Armenians from all eastern provinces, including Trebizond, to Der Zor district – in the Syrian desert. At Erzerum, Governor (and SO leader) Tahsin Bey promised to coordinate with the Third Army. His colleague, SO leader Bahaeddin Shakir Bey, who had left Erzerum by way of Gumushkhane several days earlier, was meeting with Governor Djemal Azmi Bey, discussing how the deportations were to be implemented.³⁴

On 24 June, Djemal Azmi reported that in Trebizond province the deportations had already begun. He had arrested forty-two local Armenian leaders and sent them off by boat. Two days later, the local newspaper *Meshveret* published an announcement that, with few exceptions, all Armenians had to be ready for deportation within five days. Between 1 and 3 July the authorities deported more than 8,300 Armenians from Trebizond city in three large caravans. For weeks, deportee caravans left Trebizond city or passed by it in the direction of Gumushkhane. Almost every deportee had to walk, since all other means of transportation had been assigned to the military, although some Armenians were shipped out to sea.³⁵

The governor rejected applications to convert to Islam in order to escape from deportation and insisted even on the deportation of children. Exemptions were mere short-term palliatives, meant to deflect criticism from foreigners. The caravans were registered, and the authorities kept track of

³³ BEO 4342-325630, Grand Vizierate to DH, 10 March 1915; DH.ŞFR 465-23, Djemal Azmi to Talaat, Trebizond, 15 March 1915; 51-142, Sherif [?] to Trebizond prov., 15 March 1915; 489-5, Djemal Azmi to Talaat, Trebizond, 13 September 1915; Tetik, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*; [Denker], 'Teşkilâtı Mahsusa' *Vakit* (5 November 1933).

³⁴ DH.ŞFR 476-44, Bahaeddin Shakir to Talaat, Trebizond, 19/20 June 1915; 476-100, Tahsin to Talaat, Erzerum, 21 June 1915. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti, Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, *Arşiv Belgeleriyle Ermeni Faaliyetleri 1914–1918*, vol. 1 (Ankara: Genelkurmay Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2005), p. 475.

³⁵ DH.ŞFR 479-3, Djemal Azmi to DH, Trebizond, 6 July 1915; United States, National Archives, Record Group 59, (RG 59/) 867/4016/105, Heizer to Morgenthau, Trebizond, 28 June 1915, copy, enclosure in Morgenthau to Secretary of State, Constantinople, 26 July 1915; Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv (HHStA), PA XXXVIII 368, Kwiatkowski to Burian, Trebizond, 20 July 1915; Auswärtiges Amt, Politisches Archiv, Konstantinopel 169, J. No. 3924, Bergfeld to Embassy, Trebizond, 27 June 1915; Türkeri 183/37, A 22559, Bergfeld to Bethmann Hollweg, Trebizond, 9 July 1915; Kévorkian, *Genocide*, pp. 469–70.

fugitives; Armenians were killed for resisting deportation. Djemal Azmi Bey maintained that his deportations were being conducted in a remarkably orderly manner. Some extortionists had been apprehended. Some attacks on caravans and convoys had occurred as well. The miscreants had been mostly civilians, although some gendarmes and police personnel had been involved. Given the extent of the deportations, he said, the excesses were comparably limited. The governor did not report on abductions, rapes and murders.³⁶

Official data, however, contradicted the governor's positive assessment. In early 1915, about 51,074 Armenians had lived in Trebizond province. By March 1917, Ottoman authorities had only 579 Armenians from Trebizond still on their books. Only fifty-eight of them were to be found in the so-called destination areas, forty in Syria province and eighteen in Mosul province. Officially, Trebizond authorities had killed only 6,500 Armenians. Thus, the Ottoman government could account for the fate of only about 14 per cent of the province's Armenian population. According to the government's own operational data, the death toll exceeded 98.8 per cent.³⁷

In reality, Armenian deportees from Trebizond had been subjected to massacres. Western observers and also Ottoman army personnel recorded that massacres were carried out both near the city and along the deportation route, well before the victims had left the province. Armenians leaving Trebizond by boat were almost all killed at sea. Those walking south entered an area controlled by an exterminatory network. The Armenian leaders arrested on 24 June 1915 were the first victims.³⁸

³⁶ DH.ŞFR 477-18, Djemal Azmi to DH, Trebizond, 24 June 1915; 477-19, Djemal Azmi to DH, Trebizond, 24 June 1915; 477-57, Djemal Azmi to Talaat, Trebizond, 27 June 1915; 477-79, Djemal Azmi to DH, Trebizond, 27 June 1915; 477-84, Djemal Azmi to Talaat, Trebizond, 28 June 1915; 478-2, Fuad to DH, Trebizond, 29 June 1915; 478-4, Djemal Azmi to Talaat, Trebizond, 29 June 1915; 478-5, Djemal Azmi to DH, Trebizond, 29 June 1915; 478-10, Djemal Azmi to Talaat, Trebizond, 30 June 1915; 478-11, Djemal Azmi to Talaat, Trebizond, 30 June 1915; 478-45, Djemal Azmi to Talaat, Trebizond, 1 July 1915; 478-83, Djemal Azmi to Talaat, Trebizond, 3 July 1915; 478-88, Djemal Azmi to Talaat, Trebizond, 4 July 1915; 478-91, Djemal Azmi to Talaat, Trebizond, 4 July 1915; 483-108, Djemal Azmi to DH, Trebizond, 12 August 1915; 491-25, Djemal Azmi to DH, 28 September 1915.

³⁷ Official Ottoman statistics for 1914 need to be adjusted for the population increase and by about 30 per cent for undercounting. DH.ŞFR 481-28, Djemal Azmi to Talaat, Trebizond, 24 July 1915; DH.ŞFR 481-28, Djemal Azmi to Talaat, Trebizond, 24 July 1915; DH.ŞFR 481-28, Djemal Azmi to Talaat, Trebizond, 24 July 1915; Murat Bardakçı, *Talât Paşa'nın Evrak-ı Metrükesi. Sadrazam Talât Paşa'nın özel arşivinde bulunan Ermeni tehçiri konusundaki belgeler ve hususî yazışmalar* (Istanbul: Everest Yayınları, 2008), pp. 108-9; Türkiye Cumhuriyeti, *Faaliyetleri*, pp. 445, 607.

³⁸ RG 59/867.4016/114, Heizer to Morgenthau, Trebizond, 10 July 1915, copy, enclosure in Heizer to Secretary of State, Trebizond, 12 July 1915; HHStA PA XXXVIII 368, Kwiatkowski to Burian, Trebizond, 31 July 1915; Kwiatkowski to Burian, Trebizond, 4 September 1915; Kévorkian, *Genocide*, pp. 472, 475.

Bahaeddin Shakir's mission to Trebizond had been coordinated with Talaat. Within days, SO operatives were working hand in hand with local administrators. And in Gumushkhane district, this meant, most prominently, with its *mutesarrif*, Abdulkadir – himself still a SO operative. Soon the town became the centre of a killing zone. Nearby, SO members and gendarmes, guarding the incoming caravans from Trebizond and the north-east, separated out the men. At that point, comparably few males were left among the deportees in any case, as able-bodied men were serving with the army or working for military supply transports. Thus, of the 5,500 deportees with whom Mrs Nevart, a deportee from Trebizond, had arrived, only about 500 men were taken away. Dirouhi Solakian observed how the men were handcuffed. In a stable she found the bloodied clothes and personal effects of other victims. She followed the group and witnessed their massacre. At times, the men had to walk out of sight to prepared trenches and were killed. Similarly, Armenian men serving in 'labour battalions' along the road from Gumushkhane to Trebizond were summarily shot. Dirouhi identified one of the leaders of the SO's killing squads, in charge of deportee caravans: a man named Mirza Bey.³⁹

The choice of Abdulkadir's district, Gumushkhane, as a major killing field provided the officials at Trebizond, technically responsible for the treatment of the deportees, with a measure of deniability. Thus, in 1919 the provincial secretary Fuad Bey conceded that atrocities had taken place but not under his immediate administration. Nevertheless, Lieutenant Ahmed Mukhtar Bey, serving at the Trebizond military court, was able to implicate *Mutesarrif* Abdulkadir Bey personally in the killings. In July 1915, the lieutenant had accompanied a caravan of 1,220 Armenians. At Gumushkhane, the 120 men in the group were taken away. The lieutenant was told that all were killed. Along the road from Gumushkhane to Erzindjan, he had seen thousands of unburied Armenian corpses. At times, the governor had taken an active part in the atrocities by supervising the selection process on location. Seydi Bey, the nephew of Senator Ahmed Rıza and also a member of the SO, was Abdulkadir's close collaborator.⁴⁰

³⁹ DH.ŞFR 476-44, Bahaeddin Shakir to Talaat, Trebizond, 19/20 June 1915; RG 59/867.4016/128, Heizer to Morgenthau, Trebizond, 28 July 1915, copy, enclosure in Heizer to Secretary of State, Trebizond, 29 July 1915; Philomène Norian, 'Comment Djémal Azmi fit égorger les Arméniens', *Renaissance* (28 January 1919); 'A la Cour martiale', *Renaissance* (27 March 1919); 'Le procès de Trébizonde', *Renaissance* (27 April 1919).

⁴⁰ FO 371/2768/1455/261608, 26 December 1916, Armenian Massacres, report by an eyewitness Lieutenant Sayied Ahmed Moukhtar Baas; AAA, Krieger files, reel 60, Erzincan court martial investigation file; 'Atrocités de Trébizonde', *Renaissance* (4 April 1919); 'Le procès de Trébizonde', *Renaissance* (27 April 1919); Kévorkian, *Genocide*, pp. 482-3.

In 1916, following the Russian occupation of the district, a Russian officer spoke with local Greek and Turkish peasants. The people told him how entire families of Armenian deportees had been massacred. As sometimes there were too many victims, the capacity of prepared ditches was insufficient. Still, the perpetrators tried to cram in as many as possible, although body parts were left sticking out of the ground. Inevitably, some victims were buried alive. For three days, locals heard sounds from the mass graves as the wounded suffered an agonizing death. When Russian troops advanced into the area, Ottoman authorities had Greek peasants exhume the corpses and dispose of them.⁴¹

In 1919, General Vehib Pasha (Kaçı), who had taken over the command of the Third Army in 1916, accused Abdulkadir personally, along with his superior, Djemal Azmi Bey, of the massacre of women, children and old men. Tahsin, in contrast, seems to have escaped Vehib Pasha's denunciation, having once told the general that he had met deportees along the road between Erzindjan and Gumushkhane and that he had been grieved by the sight. The Erzerum governor had indeed visited Gumushkhane around 20 July 1915, at the height of the deportations. In town, he held meetings with Djemal Azmi, ostensibly to coordinate military supplies. But in 1919, he claimed in a statement at a court martial that the deportees had been attacked by SO gangs. These particular gangs, he declared, belonged to another SO, one of which he was no part. About his role in coordinating these events with Bahaeddin Shakir and Talaat, information that would have exposed his statement as a lie, he remained silent.⁴²

Abdulkadir's mission in Harput

For as long as the war went on, the massacres in Gumushkhane district were of no concern to the Ministry of the Interior. On the contrary, Abdulkadir remained a most trusted operative, and as deportations spread, he would soon see action in Harput. As in Trebizond, on 26 June 1915, Harput's provincial authorities had announced that Armenians would be deported, starting on 1 July. Governor Sabit Bey (Sağiroğlu) contacted the Ministry of the Interior, requesting clarification concerning the implementation of the deportation programme. Sabit proposed allowing Armenian widows and orphans who had converted to Islam to stay in Muslim villages. But on 4 July,

⁴¹ Armenian Benevolent Union, Bibliothèque Nubar, Fonds Andonian, 56 Trébizonde, 24. I thank Anna Ohannessian-Charpin for sharing her translation with me.

⁴² AAA, 19, Dossier No. 24; 32, Vehib Pasha to Directorate for Public Security, Constantinople, 5 December 1918; DH.ŞFR 480-105, Djemal Azmi to DH, Trebizond, 21 July 1915; 'Mamuretülaziz Tehciri', *Yeni Gazete* (3 August 1919).

Talaat emphasized that all politically implicated Armenians had to be deported together *with their families*. Useful merchants and artisans, however, might be dispersed within the province.⁴³

With deportations well under way, Harput's governor, Sabit Bey, had then turned his attention to problems in the Dersim district to the north of his province. While he was away, he received a telegram from Army Corps Commander Suleiman Faik Pasha, serving as his substitute (acting governor) at the time. The officer informed the governor that the CUP leader Resneli Nazim Bey was using Sabit Bey's absence to promote his own interests.⁴⁴ He was embezzling large sums, claiming that he was acting on behalf of the party. Members of the CUP's provincial central committee had resigned in protest. Nazim Bey had also begun to extort money from the local Syrian Orthodox community.⁴⁵

Forwarding the complaint to Talaat, Governor Sabit Bey demanded Nazim's recall. The matter was a delicate one, as it involved a top member of the CUP and, at least indirectly, the SO as well. Moreover, Nazim Bey had been privy to

⁴³ DH.ŞFR 478-49, Sabit to DH, Harput, 2 July 1915; 54-287, Talaat to Trebizond, Sivas, Diarbekir, Harput prov., Samsun dist., 4 July 1915; 483-15, Sabit to Talaat, Dersim, 7 August 1915; (RG 59/) 867/4016/392, Report of Leslie A. Davis, American Consul, Formerly at Harput, Turkey, on the Work of the American Consulate at Harput since the Beginning of the Present War, Port Jefferson, NY, 9 February 1918.

⁴⁴ In general, Nazim Bey's role in the Harput deportations appeared to have been significant, although Interior Ministry records offer only little information. Bahaeddin Shakir decided to intervene in Harput and contacted his SO crony, Nazim Bey, by coded telegram. Erzerum's governor, Tahsin Bey, had authorized the transmission, as the coding office used the Ministry of the Interior's code number 5, which stood for provincial communication. Though Bahaeddin Shakir's telegram was officially addressed to Harput's governor, Sabit Bey, it was *directed* 'To the attention of Nazim Bey'. In it, the Special Operations leader inquired of Nazim whether the Armenians deported from Harput were being liquidated or only deported. He also demanded clarification as to whether those considered 'harmful' were also being annihilated or just deported. In reply, Sabit Bey personally informed not the questioner, Bahaeddin Shakir, but Talaat that all 'harmful' Armenians had been exiled. Some had in any case died in attacks by men the governor described as bandits or from some misfortune or other. Overall, very few Armenians remained. Thus, Sabit Bey addressed the issues raised by Bahaeddin Shakir without explicitly mentioning the latter's telegram. The correspondence demonstrates that telegrams from SO leaders and from the Ottoman administration were forwarded by the same officials, using the same code. Thus, in the eastern provinces, the civil administration and members of the Special Organization formed a single command structure, with at times different executive branches. Two weeks later, the SO leader informed Talaat that he had forwarded the latter's instructions, together with the Third Army commander's communication, to Bitlis. He would leave Erzerum by 21 July 1915. DH.ŞFR 479-1, Sabit to Talaat, Harput, 5 July 1915; 480-94, Bahaeddin Shakir to Talaat, Erzerum, 19 July 1915; Vahakn N. Dadrian and Taner Akçam (eds), *Tehcir ve Taktik Divan-ı Harb-i Örfî Zabıtları. İttihad ve Terakki'nin Yargılanması 1919-1922* (Istanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2008), p. 696; Kevorkian, *Genocide*, p. 425.

⁴⁵ DH.ŞFR 483-15, Sabit to Talaat, Dersim, 7 August 1915.

the most sensitive and compromising information. Thus, the Ministry of the Interior did not assign a civil inspector to the investigation, as was usual in cases involving officials. Instead, it ordered Abdulkadir to depart immediately for Harput, where he was to cooperate with Sabit Bey and the corps commander Suleiman Faik Pasha in investigating Nazim Bey's case.⁴⁶

On 7 September 1915, Abdulkadir finished his investigation. He did not share his report with the provincial governor. The governor was also not given access to a letter from the party's Central Committee. The CUP had rejected all claims by civil and military officials, including law enforcement. Even so, Sabit Bey outdid himself in praising Abdulkadir as an honest public servant who had not divulged any of the government's 'secrets.' Abdulkadir enjoyed supreme authority and had overruled both the provincial governor and the military command.⁴⁷

Meanwhile, Djemal Azmi Bey, the provincial governor of Trebizond, had taken over operations at Gumushkhane himself, coordinating the transportation of military supplies that had slowed down after Gumushkhane's *mutessarif*, Abdulkadir, had left town. By 13 September, Djemal Azmi had had enough of Gumushkhane and asked for the return of Abdulkadir, whom he praised highly, or at least for the appointment of an acting district governor. Luckily, Abdulkadir was about to return. He remained at this post until the end of January 1916, when Djemal Azmi secured his appointment as governor of Lazistan district, on the eastern coast of the Black Sea.⁴⁸

The Russian army had been advancing toward the region, leading Djemal Azmi to argue that an experienced officer should be put in charge of the district's administration. As Ottoman irregulars also operated in the area, Abdulkadir seemed the ideal candidate for the task. Talaat accepted the proposal and informed Abdulkadir that since he had performed his duties at Gumushkhane so splendidly, his services were urgently needed east of Trebizond. After the fall of Erzerum on 16 February 1916, again on Djemal Azmi's recommendation, Vehib Pasha appointed Abdulkadir as commander of the Lazistan detachment. The merger of both positions, district governor and military commander, did not, however, prevent the fall of Trebizond in April 1916. Hence, the Ministry of the Interior returned Abdulkadir to his post

⁴⁶ DH.ŞFR 54/A-347, Ali Munif to Sabit, 9 August 1915; 54/A-348, Ali Munif to Abdulkadir, 9 August 1915.

⁴⁷ In 1919, a court martial tried to locate a copy of Abdulkadir Bey's report in Harput. DH.ŞFR 488-6, Sabit to Talaat, Harput, 7 September 1915; 104-309, DH to Trebizond prov., 30 November 1919.

⁴⁸ DH.ŞFR 487-22, Djemal Azmi to DH, Shiran, 3/4 September 1915; 489-5, Djemal Azmi to Talaat, Trebizond, 13 September 1915; 56-5, DH to Trebizond prov., 14 September 1914; Irade.DH 1519-34, Talaat to Grand Vizierate, 27 January 1916.

at Gumushkhane. Following the fall of that town to the Russians in July 1916, Abdulkadir was next transferred to Karak district in Syria province, on 8 August. Along the way, he made an extensive stay in his hometown, Aintab, much to the annoyance of Tahsin, who was now, as governor of Syria, following the Russian occupation of the entire Erzerum province, his new superior.⁴⁹

Deraa

Although Abdulkadir had been assigned to Karak province, Tahsin urgently needed a 'bold and tyrannical' governor for the Hauran district, where the army had just suppressed a local rebellion of Druze. And, in Tahsin's estimation, Abdulkadir was the right man for job. He knew what the man could do, from his actions at Van and Gumushkhane. The Ministry of the Interior agreed, and Abdulkadir took office at Deraa. At his new post as district governor, because of his use of torture and other repressive measures he quickly gained a reputation in military circles as a fanatic.⁵⁰

But he found himself working at cross-purposes with the army. The Hauran district also formed one of the so-called destination areas for Armenian deportees. Since the summer of 1915, Armenians had been taken by train to the district capital, Deraa, south of Damascus, and then had been moved into the arid steppes to the east and south. Lack of provisions, along with disease and the effects of the journey, claimed thousands of lives. Conditions were aggravated even further by a devastating famine. To improve the situation, Fourth Army Commander Djemal Pasha appointed the officer Tcherkes Hasan Bey (Amca) inspector for deportees. The officer established an orphanage for Armenian children at Damascus, run by an Armenian staff. The shelter also operated workshops and offered other facilities to the deportees. On orders from Djemal Pasha, Tcherkes Hasan Bey also worked to evacuate deportees to Damascus and other cities, where their chances of survival were considerably higher.

⁴⁹ DH,ŞFR 504-24, Djemal Azmi to DH, Trebizond, 4 January 1916; 60-246, Talaat to Abdulkadir, 6 February 1916; 465-98, Djemal Azmi to DH, Trebizond, 19 March 191[6]; 465-99, Djemal Azmi to DH, Trebizond, 19 March 191[6]; 527-84, Djemal Azmi to DH, Ordu, 7 August 1916; 68-58, Talaat to Syria prov., 19 September 1916; BEO 4410-330699, Grand Vizierate to DH, 24 April 1916; 4425-331826, Grand Vizierate to DH, 8 August 1916; 68-58, Talaat to Djemal Pasha, 19 September 1916.

⁵⁰ DH,ŞFR 68-168, Talaat to Syria prov., 3 October 1916; 534-81, Tahsin to DH, Deraa, 7 October 1916; 69-21, Ismail to Syria prov., 16 October 1916; Selahattin Günay, *Bizi Kimlere Bırakıp Gidiyorsun Türk? Suriye ve Filistin Anıları* (İstanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2006), pp. 35-47.

However, the CUP's responsible secretary for Damascus, Neshet Bey, supported by Tahsin and Abdulkadir, opposed these efforts. Although during a meeting at Deraa Tahsin had assured Tcherkes Hasan Bey that his new district governor would be helpful, the inspector knew Abdulkadir from their time as classmates at the War College; he was also aware of the man's role in the party after 1908. Thus, while Abdulkadir was involving the Ministry of the Interior in stopping the rescue effort, Tcherkes Hasan Bey conferred with Djemal Pasha. He knew that the party members in the civil administration were doing their utmost to keep Armenians in locations where hunger and disease rendered their survival almost impossible. As the Fourth Army was preventing massacres in its area of control, such 'natural causes' were the only form of annihilation available to people like Tahsin and Abdulkadir. The wholesale evacuation effort of Djemal and his inspector failed, but still many Armenians were able discretely to make their way to Damascus, where limited relief was provided.⁵¹

Der Zor, Bolu and the post-war period

In March 1917, the Ministry of the Interior transferred Abdulkadir to Der Zor district. After the massacres of 1916, only a few Armenians were left in the area. While mass deportations had stopped, the Ottoman government continued to exile specifically targeted individuals to the desert region. One of them was the Armenian author Yervant Odian, whom Abdulkadir interrogated at Der Zor. A few days later, Odian was sent through the desert to a small village, where his chances of survival were much reduced, but he managed to find employment at Der Zor with German soldiers organizing the transport of military supplies along the Euphrates. Odian observed how Abdulkadir continually obstructed the army's efforts on the grounds that Armenian workers might try to flee his district. Once again, Abdulkadir and his superiors who supported him privileged the persecution and death of Armenians over the needs of their military in wartime.⁵²

⁵¹ Tcherkes Hasan Bey, 'Tehcir' in İç Yüzü: Çerkes Hasan Bey'in Hatıratı, *Alemdar* (20, 22, 23, 25, 26, 28 June 1919); Günay, *Anıları*, pp. 35–47; Hilmar Kaiser, 'The Jordanian Lands during the Armenian Genocide: Deportees, Famine and War', in *Proceedings of the International Conference on 'Armenians of Jordan'* (Beirut: Haigazian University Press, forthcoming).

⁵² İrade.Dosya Usulü İradeler Tasnifi 42-51, DH to Grand Vizierate, 15 March 1917; BEO 4460-334455 Grand Vizierate to DH, 19 March 1917; DH.ŞFR 74-197, Talaat to Abdulkadir, 21 March 1917; DH.ŞFR 549-45, Abdulkadir to Ministry of the Interior, Deraa, 24 March 1917; Yervant Odian, *Accursed Years: My Exile and Return from Der Zor, 1914–1919* (London: Gomidas Institute, 2009), pp. 143–5, 200.

In 1918, Abdulkadir was transferred again, this time to Bolu district. After the Ottoman defeat, he was to be tried by court martial, but he evaded arrest. Like many other perpetrators, he then joined the so-called national movement led by Mustafa Kemal Pasha, which was largely a reorganized and renamed CUP. He served the new leadership in several positions, most notably as governor of Angora province from 1922 to 1923. By 1924, however, he had fallen into disgrace as a suspected traitor. Following an alleged coup attempt, he was tried along with other former CUP and SO leaders for his purported involvement and executed on 31 August 1926.⁵³

Conclusion

By 1913 the CUP employed a double strategy in the eastern provinces. While cultivating political relations with both Kurdish and Armenian leaders, it used lethal force against anyone challenging its control in this volatile region. The party deployed its most trusted members, hardened veterans of the struggle in Ottoman Macedonia, to the region. Many had a history of anti-insurgency warfare and were members of the CUP's terrorist *fedai* wing. The administrators in the group combined political loyalty with regional expertise – or the all-important Macedonian track record. Apparently, close ties to the top leaders of the CUP were also important.

The events in Van province demonstrated that the SO was only one organizational formation within the party's terrorist wing. On the ground, it did not matter if operatives commanded SO gangs, gendarmerie or army units, tribal cavalry or other forms of militia. The distinction between irregulars and regular forces became blurred or disappeared altogether. What was decisive was the commander and his integration in the secretive CUP network. The informal nature of this structure gave the operatives a remarkable degree of independence but also led to friction. A unified command did not exist, and commanders were negotiating their operations with one another. Similarly, rules of engagement were absent. As long as it served the ostensible purpose of a strategy that was itself ill defined, anything was acceptable, from assassination to massacre. The default was a scorched-earth strategy. Speculative projections of future exploits took the place of careful planning and setting priorities. The resulting failures never led to reassessment. Instead, blaming Armenians, Assyrians, Kurds or anyone else

⁵³ DH.Kalemi Mahsus Müdüriyeti 49/1-53, Mazhar to DH, 24 December 1918. Özgür's apologetic account lacks analytical qualities but provides a rough summary of the last stages of Abdulkadir Bey's career and life. Özgür, *Biyoğrafisi*, pp. 215, 223–31.

who had not served the CUP's interests served as excuses – and that further radicalized the operatives.

Given his background, Abdulkadir was a perfect fit for the Van assignment. He was ruthless and prepared to do what he was told. But he did not simply execute orders; he developed initiatives on his own for expanding his area of operations and influence. While plotting and political assassination were a familiar field, his experiences from Macedonia, Libya and the Balkan Wars were inadequate preparation for meeting regular Russian troops. His tribal forces regularly failed in combat. Only in cases of Russian tactical retreats did the tribal cavalry advance. The result was the massacre of civilians, first in Persia, then of Ottoman Armenians and Assyrians in his Sarai sector.

Despite being a War College graduate, Abdulkadir was not called up by the Third Army for front-line service in 1915. This itself is remarkable, as that army had just been almost entirely annihilated at Sarikamish, and officers were in high demand. Instead, the failed raider was put in charge of military supply transports behind the lines. He managed, however, to establish a working relationship with Trebizond's governor, Djemal Azmi Bey. Thus, when the extermination of Armenians began in Trebizond province in late 1916, Abdulkadir became an executioner and principal organizer of massacres. Old Macedonian *fedais* and SO members who had left the front line were instrumental in setting up and putting into motion a regional extermination network. Like Tahsin Bey at Erzerum, Djemal Azmi saw to it that most Trebizond killings took place not in the centre of the province but in a district: Erzindjan, for Erzerum; Gumushkhane, for Trebizond. The arrangement provided some deniability to both governors.

Abdulkadir's crimes at Gumushkhane increased his standing within the CUP. Consequently, the Ministry of the Interior sent him to Harput, where a party boss was embezzling the money of Armenian victims. Unlike killing Armenians, privatizing their wealth was unacceptable to the Interior Ministry. To maintain secrecy and thus deniability, Abdulkadir excluded all legally competent authorities from his investigation. Only a member of the inner circle of the CUP's exterminatory network could investigate one of his peers. Thus, Talaat seems to have given him a free hand to proceed as he deemed best.

As with so many other officials and CUP operatives, with the fall of Trebizond and Erzerum provinces, Abdulkadir went to Syria. Its new governor, the ever-powerful Tahsin Bey, had appreciated his lethal services at Van and was familiar with his record at Gumushkhane. Hence, he was the right man for the Hauran district, where oppositional Druze and Armenian deportees needed to be dealt with. Tahsin supported his new district governor and his decisions against opposition from the Fourth Army command; both men were, after all, implementing the genocidal programme of Talaat and the

CUP, their government. The two governors can thus be seen as trying to finish in Syria what they had begun in the eastern provinces. The stages of Abdulkadir's career in the First World War cover the evolution of CUP anti-Armenian policies. Like many perpetrators, he escaped prosecution following the Ottoman defeat in 1918. Many operatives from the wider region, such as Kazim (Özalp), Nedjati (Kurtuluş), Mustafa Abdulhalik (Renda) and Tahsin (Uzer), rose to prominence in the new Republic of Turkey. Abdulkadir Bey did not manage to securely align himself with the new regime, and as happened to some of his old CUP comrades, this failure sealed his ultimate demise.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ *TBMM Albümü 1920–2010*, vol. 1 (Ankara: TBMM Basın ve Halkla İlişkiler Müdürlüğü, 2010), pp. 19, 36, 40, 103.

Tahsin Uzer: The CUP's Man in the East

Hilmar Kaiser

In recent years, a growing consensus has emerged that the Armenian genocide was not the product of a blueprint but the outcome of a process. Ottoman political leaders embarked on a policy that led to the extermination of the empire's Armenian communities. Research on how this process worked out in the eastern provinces has focused on the Special Organization (*Teşkilâtı-Mahsusa*) and one of its leaders, Dr Bahaeddin Shakir Bey. In this context, the role of Hasan Tahsin (Uzer), CUP member no. 129, has so far received only limited attention. This is a serious shortcoming, as this provincial governor played an important role in radicalizing his party's anti-Armenian policies in late 1914 and early 1915. His actions and proposals marked the shift from repression to mass murder and paved the way to genocide.

Presenting himself as a moderate after the end of the First World War, Tahsin testified as a witness in the trial of fellow CUP members for their crimes.¹ He described his role as that of a governor who simply had to follow orders. In reality, he was a key perpetrator.

Tahsin (b. 1878) had joined a forerunner of the CUP organization as a teenager while studying in Constantinople in the 1890s. Soon he became a propagandist and operative for the clandestine organization. The authorities expelled him from the *Mulkiye*, the Ottoman government's academy for future top bureaucrats. Although banished from the Ottoman capital, Tahsin Bey was nevertheless able to become a local official in his native Macedonia region, perhaps because able candidates were scarce in the Ottoman Empire.

With time, Tahsin rose in the ranks of the civil service. As Macedonia was a CUP stronghold, he was also able to continue his political activities. Equally important was the experience in counter-insurgency he gained against the Greek and Bulgarian guerrillas, who had made the region a byword for violence. In view of the unrest, the Ottoman government had

¹ *Yeni Gazete* (3 August 1919).

to accept a reform scheme, and with it the installation of an inspector general and a special gendarmerie. Tahsin Bey appreciated the benefits of administrative reform, although, as a committed nationalist, he rejected the foreign intervention that brought it about.

Following the CUP's July 1908 coup, Tahsin served as a high-ranking administrator in Saloniki and played an important role in the suppression of the abortive counter-coup in April 1909. The CUP promoted him, and he joined the party's Central Committee, where he worked closely with Dr Nazim, one of the organization's racist ideologues. His professional career also experienced a boost, as he was appointed district governor of Drama in eastern Macedonia. Despite political setbacks for the CUP, Tahsin Bey remained a faithful partisan. Thus, when his party regained power with their coup in 1913, the leadership entrusted him with securing control over Pera, Constantinople's banking and embassy district. During this time, Tahsin Bey formed close ties with other key figures in the party, including Talaat Bey, Djemal Bey and Djemal Azmi Bey. In short, he had joined the exclusive circle of trusted CUP leaders.

In April 1913, Tahsin Bey was sent to Van as governor; appointments to Erzerum, Damascus and Smyrna followed. After the Ottoman defeat in 1918, the British occupation authorities deported him to Malta, where he was to face criminal charges for his role during the war. He escaped prosecution, however, and joined the successor to the CUP, controlled by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk). Until his death in 1939, Tahsin remained an important political figure, serving as member of parliament and inspector-general for the eastern provinces. This chapter focuses on a short but important period of his career, when Tahsin served as governor of Van and then of Erzerum in 1914 and 1915.²

Van province, on the Ottoman–Persian border, had gained strategic importance after the 1912–13 Balkan Wars. The Ottomans used it to conduct clandestine operations aimed at seizing Persian territory in Azerbaijan, while Russia's 'forward' policy in Persia was alarming Britain, putting their 1907 convention over spheres of influence – and thus, the Anglo-Russian Entente itself – in jeopardy. Still another player was the Kurds on both sides of the border, whose nationalist circles were vocal in their dissatisfaction with CUP policies. Into this mix came the Armenians' long-standing demands for reform in the east. Armenian success in marshalling Great Power support put such pressure on the Ottoman government that it acceded (very unwillingly)

² Tahsin Uzer, *Makedonya Eşkiyalık Tarihi ve Son Osmanlı Yönetimi* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1979); *TBMM Albümü 1920–2010*, vol. 1, 1920–1950 (Ankara: TBMM Basın ve Halkla İlişkiler Müdürlüğü, 2010), p. 258.

to a reform agreement that it signed in February 1914 with Russia. The accord stipulated the creation of two regions in the east under European inspectors-general; Van city became the centre of one of these regions.³ Yet the prospective reforms could not change the fact that the region's infrastructure, especially transport and communication, was weak, in some places non-existent, while the province itself was practically bankrupt. It lacked resources to maintain prisons or a gendarmerie of sufficient size. Thus, security of life and property remained precarious.⁴

The CUP allowed Tahsin Bey a free hand in recruiting officials to his liking for service in Van. He secured Halil Bey (Kut), Enver Pasha's uncle and a top graduate of the War College, as commander of Van's gendarmerie. Halil Bey had experience commanding anti-insurgency units in Macedonia and guerrillas in Ottoman Libya in 1911. He was also, however, a member of the CUP's terrorist wing, which carried out political assassinations. After the 1908 coup, he had joined a group of CUP agents that conducted clandestine armed operations in Persia. Thus, Halil Bey knew the area and many of its Kurdish leaders. In Van, he led the hunt for Kurdish tribal leaders who opposed the government, and the killing of Shakir Agha and Mir Mehe counted as his most important achievements. In 1914, following the Ottoman mobilization, Halil's deputy, Koprulu Kazim Bey (Özalp), took over the regimental command when the CUP's Central Committee entrusted Halil Bey with the military command of Constantinople. Like Halil Bey, and himself a CUP member, Kazim Bey had been a top graduate of the War College and had served in Macedonia. Like Tahsin, he had also occupied important positions in 1909, during the Balkan Wars, and after the 1913 coup.⁵

At Van, Tahsin Bey improved public security and, by creating new *kazas* (subdistricts) and military outposts for the purposes of closer government control, he also increased taxation. These measures did not spare Kurdish

³ Hans-Lukas Kieser, Mehmet Polatel and Thomas Schmutz, 'Reform or Cataclysm? The Agreement of 8 February 1914 Regarding the Ottoman Eastern Provinces', *Journal of Genocide Research* 17, no. 3 (2015): 285–304.

⁴ For an overview of Tahsin Bey's administrative work at Van, see Mahir Aydın, 'Savaşın Bitirdiği Doğu Açılımı: Tahsin (Uzer) Bey'in Van Valiliği (1913/1914)', in Hedda Reindl-Kiel and Seyfi Kenan (eds), *Deutsch-türkische Begegnungen—Alman Türk Tesadüfleri: Festschrift für Kemal Beydilli – Kemal Beydilli'ye Armağan* (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2013), pp. 538–70.

⁵ United Kingdom, National Archives, Foreign Office (FO) 195/2450/3302, Molyneux-Seel to Lowther, Van, 9 July 1913; Halil Kut, *İttihat ve Terakkî'den Cumhuriyet'e: Bitmeyen Savaş—Kütülamare Kahramanı Halil Paşa'nın Anıları* (Istanbul: Yedigün Yayınları, 1972), pp. 59–60, 97, 131–2, 134; Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Archives diplomatiques (MAE), Nantes, Constantinople, série E, carton 122, Zarzecki to Bompard, Van, 21 October 1913; *TBMM Albümü*, 78.

religious centres, for one of the CUP's aims was to diminish the political influence of Kurdish sheikhs. At the same time, the authorities supplied guns to four to five men in each village, enough to reduce the likelihood of brigandage but insufficient to support an armed Kurdish movement.⁶

The CUP's new village guard system closely resembled an analogous Armenian organization. In recent years, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) had succeeded in establishing itself as the dominant political force in electoral politics in Van, enabling it to send two deputies to parliament. The provincial party's central committee, located in Van city, coordinated the activities of local branches throughout the region and conducted negotiations with the government. But equally important was the ARF's secret, armed self-defence organization. It had come into being during the struggle against autocracy before 1908 but was reactivated in 1912, following the end of its alliance with the CUP and in the wake of mounting Kurdish attacks on Armenian villages. Under the leadership of Ishkhan (Nigol Mikayelian), a member of the Van central committee, villagers formed small armed groups headed by a trusted ARF member and trained to repulse assaults on their village and hold out until reinforcements from neighbouring units arrived. Suitable strongholds within the villages and at elevated points were identified and, as far as possible, fortified. In this way, a network of small units linked Armenian settlements in the region. The system was complemented by mobile groups that covered larger districts and could call up several dozen militants. Ultimate authority rested with the ARF's central committee in Van. Unsurprisingly, given the ARF's importance, the Ministry of the Interior appointed its chief intelligence operative for Armenian organizations, Ahmet Esat Bey (Uras), as *kaimakam* (subdistrict governor) of Gevash, south of Lake Van, whence he followed Armenian developments closely.⁷

⁶ FO 195/2450/3302, Molyneux-Seel to Lowther, Van, 9 July 1913; 2458/2370, Smith to Mallet, Van, 29 May 1914; 371/2130/5748/5748, Smith to Mallet, Van, 10 January 1914, enclosure in Mallet to Grey, Constantinople, 16 March 1914; /25453, Smith to Mallet, Van, 16 May 1914, enclosure in Mallet to Grey, Constantinople, 1 June 1914; Aydin, 'Tahsin', p. 554.

⁷ FO 371/2130/5748/5748, Smith to Mallet, Van, 10 January 1914, enclosure in Mallet to Grey, Constantinople, 16 March 1914; A-Do (Hovhannes Ter Martirosian), *Van 1915. Les grands événements du Vaspourakan* (Paris: Société Bibliophilique Ani, 2015), pp. 131, 136; Hratch Dasnabedian, *History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaksutiun 1890-1924* (Milan: OEMME Edizioni, 1988); Dikran Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule 1908-1914* (New Brunswick, NJ, and London: Transaction Publishers, 2008), pp. 187-90, 216, 234-5; Gaidz F. Minassian, 'Les relations entre le Comité Union et Progrès et la Fédération Révolutionnaire Arménienne à la veille de la première guerre mondiale d'après les sources arméniens', *Revue d'histoire arménienne contemporaine* 1 (1995): 45-99; Hilmar Kaiser, 'Dall'impero alla repubblica: Le continuità del negazionismo turco', in Marcello Flores (ed.), *Storia, verità, giustizia. I crimini del XX secolo* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2001), pp. 108-12.

In early 1914, however, the challenge to CUP rule came from Kurdish circles. Unhappy with increased government taxation and control, including the hunting down of Kurdish outlaws, some leaders planned an uprising. Despite incomplete preparations, a few activists went ahead with the rebellion.⁸ At Bitlis, the authorities were taken by surprise, but overall the movement lacked coordination and support and was quickly suppressed by Ottoman forces. The rising's aftermath showed that the CUP had changed its policies. To the surprise of many Kurds, the authorities executed many leaders and sent others into exile in the Hejaz.⁹ But this was not all: the CUP also arrested or killed members of the Kurdish Bedirkhan clan, who had not been implicated, although some prominent leaders escaped to Persian Azerbaijan, where they regrouped and maintained close relations with the Russian consulate. Any doubts that the CUP meant business vanished when Tahsin replaced Bitlis's governor, Mazhar Bey, with Siirt's district governor, Mustafa Abdulhalik Bey (Renda), a CUP veteran who, like Tahsin, had served in Macedonia.¹⁰

Despite Russian support for the rebels, Tahsin avoided implicating the Czar's government as such, and he downplayed Russian involvement in an article in the local CUP paper, *Tchaldiran*.¹¹ Moreover, the CUP needed Kurdish support in countering Armenian reform demands, so he tried to win over their leaders.¹² He created new mounted units for them, while extending the security infrastructure along the Persian border.¹³ A by-product of his changes was more reliable information on population and production, fuelling his hopes for increased revenue and, even more, the prospect that new census data would enable him to deal a decisive blow to the Armenian opposition. He estimated that the number of deputies from Van province

⁸ The authorities at Van had initiated operations against the Barzan sheikhs. FO 371/2130/5748/11985, Smith to Mallet, Van, 14 February 1914, enclosure in Mallet to Grey, Constantinople, 16 March 1914; 16142, Smith to Mallet, Van, 13 March 1914, enclosure in Mallet to Grey, Pera, 5 April 1914; 16763, Smith to Mallet, Van, 22 March 1914, enclosure in Mallet to Grey, Pera, 9 April 1914; Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 78–80.

⁹ FO 195/2458/1538, Smith to Mallet, Van, 4 April 1914; 2130/5748/21451, Smith to Mallet, Bitlis, 16 April 1914, enclosure in Mallet to Grey, Pera, 9 May 1914; 25453, Smith to Mallet, Van, 16 May 1914, enclosure in Mallet to Grey, Constantinople, 1 June 1914; Aydın, 'Tahsin', p. 556.

¹⁰ Gönül Türkan Demir, *Mustafa Abdülhalik Renda (1881–1957). Bir Devlet Kurulurken Bir Devlet Yıkılırken* (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 2015), pp. 21–2; Aydın, 'Tahsin', p. 556.

¹¹ FO 195/2458/2672, Smith to Mallet, Van, 14 June 1914; MAE, Paris, Nouvelle série (NS) 90, De Sandfort to Bompard, Van, 11 June 1914.

¹² FO 195/2458/3133, Smith to Mallet, Van, 11 July 1914; Reynolds, *Shattering*, p. 81.

¹³ FO 195/2458/3157, Smith to Mallet, Van, 18 July 1914.

could be raised from three to four, with the fourth being a Muslim. Moreover, he trusted that with his control over the election process, he could reduce Armenian representation to one deputy, with the CUP gaining an additional seat. The main beneficiary would be his own party, as he controlled the nomination of Muslim candidates. But the governor's political scheming did not work out. Asaf Bey (Doras), a (Turkish) state prosecutor and CUP member with experience in Macedonia, became the lone Muslim representative of the region's predominantly Kurdish Muslims. Tahsin had to accept the election of two ARF leaders, Vahan Papazian and Arshag Vramian. Political arrangements between the CUP and ARF at the capital had superseded the governor's scheming.¹⁴

Just as he had objected to European involvement in the Macedonian reforms before 1908, Tahsin and other officials opposed the appointment of a European, the Norwegian major Nicholai Hoff, as inspector-general for one of the two East Anatolian regions organized under the (Armenian) reform accord of 8 February 1914. He warned Constantinople that Hoff was entertaining close relations with Armenians and that his presence at Van would damage national interests – and undermine CUP control. The local Armenian elite, for its part, saw in the reform an opportunity for personal as well as communal advancement. With the Ottoman military mobilization on 2 August 1914, Tahsin seized his chance; the governor requested Hoff's immediate recall, and it was done.¹⁵

In September 1914, Tahsin reported that the mobilization had been completed.¹⁶ It had fully occupied the provincial administration and had also drained its financial resources. People were experiencing hardship, as the gendarmerie had confiscated Van's entire harvest. Yet, despite the poor economic conditions in the province, goods worth 50,000 Turkish pounds had been seized as 'war tax', the civil authorities were providing for about 25,000–30,000 troops, and Van's gendarmerie division would join the Third

¹⁴ FO 195/2457, Smith to Mallet, Van, 3 July 1914; MAE, Paris, NS 90, De Sandfort to Bompard, Van, 4 June 1914; De Sandfort to MAE, Van, 18 June 1914; DH. Emniyeti Umumiye Müdüriyeti (EUM) 2 Şube (Şb) 68-40, Police Director to DH, Van, 11 July 1914; *TBMM Albümü*, p. 97.

¹⁵ FO 371/2130/5748/5748, Smith to Mallet, Van, 10 January 1914, enclosure in Mallet to Grey, Constantinople, 16 March 1914; DH.ŞFR 435-64, Tahsin to DH, Van, 4/5 August 1914; 437-84, Tahsin to DH, Van, 17 August 1914; 437-87, Tahsin to DH, Van, 18 August 1914; 438-75, Tahsin to DH, Van, 24/25 August 1914; 438-113, Tahsin to DH, Van, 28 August 1914; MAE, Archives diplomatiques, Nantes, Ambassade Constantinople, série E, carton 122, De Sandfort to Bompard, Van, 29 August 1914; Kaligian, *Armenian Organization*, pp. 205–9.

¹⁶ DH.ŞFR 436-35, Tahsin to DH, Van, 9 August 1914; 439-7, Tahsin to DH, Van, 29 August 1914.

Army near Erzerum. But Tahsin warned that he could provide the military units for only another fifteen days, and the deprivations they would experience might lead to a rebellion. One possible remedy was to temporarily release those soldiers for whom no weapons were available and use them in agricultural work. The central authorities, however, failed to provide any funding, and Tahsin began forcibly collecting money from local businessmen. Armenian circles supported the mobilization and believed that the governor was impartially imposing the burden on all communities.¹⁷

Yet already relations between CUP and ARF had received a decisive setback. In August 1914 the CUP had dispatched Bahaeddin Shakir Bey and Omer Nadji Bey, leaders of the Special Organization (SO), along with other operatives to Erzerum, where they were to make preparations for an Ottoman attack on Russia and organize undercover operations and assassinations inside Russian territory. The ARF had just concluded its congress in the city when the two Special Organization chiefs approached the ARF leadership and requested the party's support for operations in Russian territory, offering in return some sort of Armenian autonomy under CUP tutelage. The ARF declined the request and urged Ottoman neutrality in Europe's war, even while it assured the CUP of its loyalty in case of armed conflict: Ottoman Armenians would perform their civic duties. From Constantinople, Talaat Bey undertook to change the ARF's mind, but the leadership stuck to its guns. Meanwhile, Armenian volunteer units were forming in Russia, with Ottoman Armenians among their recruits, including prominent ARF members.¹⁸

The ARF party was thus dangerously compromised in CUP eyes, not least because the two Special Organization leaders had revealed in Erzerum important elements of the Ottoman war plan. In Erzerum, Bahaeddin Shakir pressed for the removal of a police inspector: the man was, after all, an Armenian and perhaps an ARF member. Shakir's suspicion was symptomatic. The Interior Ministry had already ordered an investigation into Armenian activities and the possibility of a rising soon after the start of mobilization. Now, smelling conspiracy, it ordered the surveillance of Armenian parties and leaders.¹⁹

¹⁷ DH.ŞFR 437-36, Tahsin to DH, Van, 14/15 August 1914; 438-74, Tahsin to DH, Van, 25 August 1914; 439-106, Tahsin to Talaat, Van, 5/6 September 1914; 441-23, Tahsin to DH, Van, 16/17 September 1914; Haig Gossian, *The Epic Story of the Self Defense of Armenians in the Historic City of Van* (Detroit: General Society of Vasbouragan, 1980), p. 2.

¹⁸ DH.ŞFR 438-123, Djemal to DH, 28 August 1914; FO 195-4260, Monahan to Mallet, Erzerum, 14 October 1914; Kaligian, *Armenian Organization*, pp. 220-2; Minassian, 'Les relations', pp. 94-5; A-Do, *Van*, pp. 104-6; Vahan Papazian, *Memoirs*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Hamazkayin, 1952), pp. 275-9. I thank Anna Ohannessian-Charpin for sharing her translation of Papazian's memoirs with me.

¹⁹ DH.ŞFR 44-43, Ali Munif to provinces, 17 August 1914, EUM; 44-200, Talaat to provinces, 6 September 1914.

The evidence it turned up, however, was mixed. In Teheran, the Ottoman embassy suspected that Armenians in Van were in touch with the Russian forces in Persia, while in Bayazid, on the Russian–Persian border, the authorities had intercepted a communication from the headquarters of the ARF’s Russian branch in Tiflis, stating that Ottoman rule was *preferable* to Russian. The letter even contained critical information on Russian troop deployments. By contrast, Bitlis’s governor, Mustafa Abdulhalik Bey, had intelligence that its Armenian soldiers would observe obedience until the start of the war and, in the case of Ottoman victories, continue to do so, but otherwise would desert to the Russian side. Indeed, in the case of Ottoman setbacks, Armenians would form guerrilla bands and attack the Ottoman army’s communications. Acting Erzerum Governor Djemal Bey had already alerted the Third Army. At Van, the situation was entirely different. Tahsin reported that the central committee of Van’s ARF *opposed* the formation of Armenian units for Russia and supported the Ottoman war effort in every possible way. The positive assessment of Van did not change the Interior Ministry’s overall evaluation, however, which privileged the intelligence from Bitlis. By 28 September 1914, Talaat was warning of Armenian espionage, arms smuggling and desertion to the Russian side. The Third Army was ordered to take lethal action against *suspects*. Meanwhile, civil authorities were encouraged to form armed militias, enlisting only Muslims.²⁰

The Ottoman ARF was aware that the involvement of its Russian branch in the formation of Armenian volunteer units in Russia had put them in an impossible situation. Its leaders, among them Papazian, met with their Tiflis counterparts and urged them to alter their plans – in vain. The central committee at Van sent two emissaries to Tiflis to protest against the Russian ARF’s policies, also in vain. For their part, Tahsin and Omer Nadji, now head of the Special Organization’s regional centre at Van, initiated negotiations with the ARF deputies Papazian and Vramian. The latter had arrived in Van on 29 September, doubtless bringing important information. The Special Organization’s chief employed a combination of promises and threats. Tahsin, apparently looking at things practically, proposed that the two deputies mediate between the government and the Armenian population. The ARF should try to stop the Armenian volunteer units, he urged, foreseeing negative consequences should they fail. The central committee of Van’s ARF accepted

²⁰ DH.ŞFR 440-42, Djemal to DH, Erzerum, 8/9 September 1914; 440-49, Djemal to DH, Erzerum, 9 September 1914; 440-121, Djemal to DH, Erzerum, 15 September 1914; 441-33, Mustafa Abdulhalik to DH, Bitlis, 18 September 1914; 442-39, Tahsin to DH, Van, 25 September 1914; 45-115, Talaat to provinces, 28 September 1914; *Askeri Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi* (ATBD) 81 (1982), Doc. 1807, Incoming Message from General HQ Constantinople, 7 September 1914.

the suggestions and contacted their Russian branch. But their mission was compromised, and Ottoman gendarmes killed the emissary.²¹

In his report to the Interior Ministry, Tahsin blamed 'coffeehouse gossip' in Bitlis and Erzerum for spurring anti-Armenian measures that were not conducive to Ottoman goals. In fact, Armenians in Van province were rendering stronger support for the war effort than Muslims, while the repressive measures in Erzerum were causing anxieties that were not helpful. A 'soft' approach was needed. One could always change one's policies toward the Armenians if necessary, but for the moment they were profiting from Armenian cooperation; indeed, the two deputies had expressed their loyalty to the government. As for the local Hnchak Party, Tahsin assured his superiors that they were weak and no threat. As a measure to improve local conditions, he suggested that Armenian and Muslim recruits whose services in the army were not needed could be dismissed in return for paying the military exemption tax. The Interior Ministry accepted his proposal but demanded progress reports on the ongoing negotiations.²²

Unlike Van, however, reports from Erzerum seemed to confirm the existence of Armenian underground organizations. Authorities had uncovered documents and some weapons, while the suspects were now facing trial in military courts. The Interior Ministry advised Bahaeddin Shakir to exercise restraint during searches while maintaining his guard against any uprising. The Special Organization's leader doubted that these instructions were workable. He continued to present Armenians as an imminent threat to the empire, implying that something needed to be done to avert the danger. The CUP's general secretary, Midhat Shukru (Bleda), ordered him to take every precaution that 'our Armenian compatriots' would be happy and well. Shakir's response suggests that he took this cryptic phrase

²¹ DH.EUM.KLU 2-42, DH to Tahsin, 29 September 1914; Gossian, *Epic Story*, p. 3; Papazian, *Memoirs*, pp. 282-3, 289, 295; Minassian, 'Les relations', pp. 95-6; Yektan Türkyılmaz, 'Rethinking Genocide: Violence and Victimhood in Eastern Anatolia, 1913-1915' (PhD diss., Duke University, 2011), pp. 35-6; Dasnabedian, *History*, pp. 108, 117-19; Bertrand Bareilles, *Les turcs ce que fut leur empire* (Paris: Perrin et Cie., 1917), pp. 290-1; Zaven Nalbandian and Vartouhie Nalbandian (Zarevand), *United and Independent Turania: Aims and Designs of the Turks* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), p. 88; Y. K. Rushdouni, 'Narrative, Published Serially in the Armenian Journal "Gotchnag," of New York', in James Bryce and Arnold Toynbee, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-1916: Documents Presented to Viscount Grey of Fallodon by Viscount Bryce* (Princeton, NJ: Gomidas Institute, 2000), p. 94.

²² DH.ŞFR 438-77, Tahsin to DH, Van, 25 August 1914; 441-23, Tahsin to DH, Van, 16/17 September 1914; 442-76, Tahsin to DH, Van, 29 September 1914; 443-11, Tahsin to DH, Van, 3/4 October 1914; 443-30, Tahsin to DH, Van, 4 October 1914; 443-32, Tahsin to DH, 4 October 1914; 45-192, Ali Munif to Van prov., 5 October 1914; 45-197, Minister to Van prov., 5 October 1914; 445-8, Tahsin to DH, Van, 19 October 1915.

as his party's authorization to move against Armenian targets, for he promptly arranged the assassination of ARF leaders. The plots failed, and the ARF's central committee in Van intensified their efforts to improve their self-defence organizations, at the same time observing maximum restraint so as not to alert the authorities or provide them with a pretext for an 'incident'.²³

All this time, Tahsin and Omer Nadji were continuing preparations for the Special Organization's attack on Persian Azerbaijan. The governor's involvement in SO affairs was given a push when, on 17 September 1914, Omer Nadji urged that Tahsin be officially transferred to Erzerum. The city was close to the Third Army's headquarters and thus critical for the supply of the Ottoman eastern front. From this new gubernatorial post, Tahsin would be able not only to direct Erzerum's provincial affairs but also to oversee and coordinate those of Van and Bitlis. As Tahsin believed that he had little left to do at Van, he offered either to accept the position at Erzerum or to join Omer Nadji in the planned occupation of Persian Azerbaijan. The Interior Ministry hesitated, then consulted Bahaeddin Shakir. The latter plumped for the Van governor to join the Special Organization's headquarters at Erzerum. The Interior Ministry consented, putting Tahsin in charge of managing top-secret matters. The British consul in Erzerum applauded the new appointment, hoping that the governor would 'maintain the good reputation which he has won at Van'. Upon leaving his post, Tahsin addressed Van's Armenian community with every sign of goodwill:

I am leaving you with deep regret. I have desired and worked for the reconstruction of this province, for good-neighbourly relations between the races and for their progress. My thoughts will always be with you. My successor, who is here, Jevdet Bey, though young, will I am sure continue my efforts to complete the plans I was unable to finish. Goodbye my countrymen.²⁴

²³ Vahakn N. Dadrian and Taner Akçam (eds), *Tehcir ve Taktik Divan-ı Harb-i Örfi Zabıtları. İttihad ve Terakkî'nin Yargılanması 1919-1922* (Istanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2008), p. 365; DH.ŞFR 443-103, Djemal to DH, Erzerum, 9 October 1915; 45-237, Ali Munif to Erzerum prov., 10 October 1914; 444-46, Djemal to Talaat, Erzerum, 13 October 1914; 445-58, Djemal to Talaat, Erzerum, 23 October 1914; A-Do, Van, p. 131; Arif Cemil (Denker), 'Umumi Harpte Teşkilâtı Mahsusa', *Vakit* (17 November, 27 November and 28 November 1933); Papazian, *Memoirs*, pp. 285-6; Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2011), pp. 175-6.

²⁴ Gossian, *Epic Story*, p. 3; DH.EUM.Kalemi Umumi 2-42, DH to Tahsin, 29 September 1914; DH.ŞFR 441-22, Tahsin to Talaat, Van, 17 September 1914; 441-119, Tahsin to DH, Van, 23/24 September 1914; 443-77, Djemal to Talaat, Erzerum, 7 October 1914; FO 195-4260, Monahan to Mallet, Erzerum, 14 October 1914; [Denker], 'Teşkilâtı Mahsusa', *Vakit* (29 November 1933); Ahmet Tetik, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa (Umûr-ı Şarkıyye Dairesi) Tarihi*, vol. 1 (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2014), p. 293.

Tahsin began work at Erzerum, after some delays, in early November 1914, just after the official start of hostilities. Immediately he had to face an emergency, when about 25,000 Muslim families fled from advancing Russian troops. While SO units withstood heavy fighting, the Kurdish tribal cavalry abandoned its positions and began plundering villages. At the same time, Tahsin assured his superiors, he was taking precautions against an Armenian uprising behind the lines. As planned, the governor served a double function. Aside from his official gubernatorial role, he headed the Special Organization at Erzerum, while Bahaeddin Shakir was at army headquarters in Hasankale, supervising Third Army commanders, then considering a tactical retreat and forcing them to hold the line.

Throughout the first weeks of the campaign, as Ottoman troops were suffering heavy casualties, ominous reports came in that 300 Armenian recruits from Van had deserted. Military police were hunting the deserters, destined for execution. Seventy Armenians and fifteen Kurds had met that fate so far. Moreover, Armenian villagers had fled to Russian lines. The governor did not report on the villagers' motives or make a connection to Kurdish plundering, but he *was* inclined to see the Armenian flight as an advantage, as the army could seize their stored provisions. Nevertheless, he advised that the time had come to make far-reaching decisions concerning the Armenians – and to implement them.²⁵

In accordance with his hardened views on Armenians, Tahsin now asked for the appointment of one of his confidants to the important *kaza* of Gevash, near Van, itself an indicator that anti-Armenian measures were being prepared. Van's acting governor, Djevdet Bey (Cevdet [Belbez]), had reported that desertion was widespread in the region, but apparently he did not ascribe a political meaning to the troops' regrettable behaviour. He understood that many men fled not out of disloyalty or sympathy for Russia but because they simply could not bear the adverse conditions. Forty-seven Muslim and fifty-eight Armenian deserters had now been apprehended and condemned to death. For the remaining deserters, however, Djevdet followed the practice common in armies: exemplary punishment, in which a few are executed – in this case, one Muslim and three Armenians – *pour encourager les autres*, and the rest are pardoned. Moreover, as Armenians were generally

²⁵ DH.ŞFR 446-111, Tahsin to DH, Erzerum, 5 November 1914; 447-73, Tahsin to DH, Erzerum; 447-75, Tahsin to Talaat, Erzerum, 10/11 November 1914; 447-96, Bahaeddin Shakir to Talaat, Hasankale, 11 November 1914; 448-75, Tahsin to DH, Erzerum, 16 November 1914; 449-26, Tahsin to DH, Erzerum, 18 November 1914; 449-105, Tahsin to Talaat, Erzerum, 22 November 1914; 450-62, Tahsin to Talaat, Erzerum, 25 November 1914; 450-65, Bahaeddin Shakir to Talaat, Koprukoi, 26/27 November 1914; Tetik, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*, p. 312.

useless as soldiers, he recommended they be allowed to pay the military exemption tax.²⁶

Such pragmatism was shaken when, several days later, security forces caught two Armenians and a Muslim coming from Persia, carrying messages from ARF leaders at Salmas to the ARF central committee in Van. Allegedly, the Salmas group had announced a Russian attack on Van and had instructed Armenians there to assist the offensive through an armed rebellion. When Omer Nadji informed the ARF at Van about the intercepted messenger, Vramian denied any involvement in the affair. Commander Kazim Bey warned that such a revolt would be a serious problem, and Djevdet, for his part, vowed to take whatever precautions were necessary to prevent a rising, reminding his comrades in Constantinople about the loss of the European provinces during the Balkan Wars and the need for decisive action. The Interior Ministry, however, advised restraint, at least for the moment; definitive orders would be forthcoming. Obviously, local initiatives needed to be harmonized with overall strategy.²⁷

Whatever its views about Van, in principle Constantinople met Tahsin's call for action with approval. On 26 November 1914, Talaat ordered him to summon Bahaeddin Shakir to the city for telegraphic consultations with CUP's Central Committee. Shakir's presence was of utmost importance, and he could not be represented by CUP responsible secretary Hilmi or any other operative, however trusted.²⁸

The telegraphic conference of 30 November made far-reaching decisions. Djevdet and the governor of Bitlis, Mustafa Abdulhalik, would have to coordinate with Tahsin, because the situation impacted on all three provinces. Suspected revolutionaries were to be arrested and immediately deported to Bitlis, where they would be kept under close guard. Offenders known to have attacked Muslims would also be sent to Bitlis – for annihilation. Muslims had to be protected by all means. Thus, regular forces, Special Organization units and the militia had to be strengthened and act as one. All Muslims must, as far as possible, join the militia. Armenian gendarmes, in contrast, must be immediately disarmed and their weapons handed over to the militia. Armenian houses should be searched for arms, and any weapons seized and

²⁶ DH.ŞFR 448-75, Tahsin to DH, Erzerum, 16 November 1914.

²⁷ DH.ŞFR 449-80, Djevdet to DH, Van, 20/21 November 1914; 451-19, Djevdet to DH, 28/29 November 1914; 47-236, Minister to Van prov., 29 November 1914; ATBD 81 (1982) doc. 1812, Kazım to 3rd Army HQ, Sarai, 29 November 1914; A-Do, *Van*, pp. 112–13.

²⁸ DH.ŞFR 47-187, Talaat to Erzerum prov., 26 November 1914; 450-104, Tahsin to Talaat, Erzerum, 26/27 November 1914; 451-12, Tahsin to Talaat, Erzerum, 28/29 November 1914.

given to the militia as well. The road from Van to Bitlis and the telegraph line had to be put under close militia guard, with patrols securing the Gevash–Kartchikan region. Additional reinforcements from the army were requested, although the request had little relevance, given that all available army units were needed at the front. The conference thus dissolved any distinction between regular law enforcement, the army, irregular combat units and local militias by creating a single reservoir of armed Muslims dedicated to combating Armenians. This concentration of forces aimed at securing the Bitlis–Van route meant nothing less than the destruction of the ARF's entrenched self-defence organization in the east. The meeting effectively outlawed Armenian political leaders, sanctioning their arrest and, given the prevailing circumstances, their murder.²⁹

Still, on receipt of these new instructions, Van's acting governor, Djevdet, met with Armenian leaders in Van. The situation in the city was tense, as the expected Russian advance from Azerbaijan had begun and the Special Organization's operations in the area had proven ineffective. Djevdet warned that if there were any incidents between Armenians and Muslims in Van, all Ottoman Armenians would suffer. Already, however, he had begun to evacuate Muslim families to Bitlis. Russians soon occupied Bashkale, the centre of Hakkari district to the south of Van, although they retreated after a few days. When Ottoman forces, among them tribal cavalry, returned to the area, they committed atrocities against the local non-Muslim population in revenge for Russian excesses. The same happened when troops under Djevdet retook Sarai, on the farthest eastern edge of the empire. Significantly, the newly promoted governor blamed Persian Armenians and Ottoman Armenians who had fled the short distance across the border. The Interior Ministry ordered Deputy Vramian removed from Van. The new acting governor, Shefik Bey, impressed on the deputy that the ARF had to follow orders.³⁰

By 7 December, clashes were taking place at Pelli village. The nearby telegraph line from Bitlis to Van had been cut, and the *kaimakam* of Gevash, accompanied by a large militia detachment, investigated. Soon gendarmes, militia and a small local Armenian defence unit were exchanging fire. In line with their training, Armenian militants from neighbouring defence units

²⁹ DH,ŞFR, 451-62, Tahsin to Talaat, Erzerum, 30 November/1 December 1914.

³⁰ DH,ŞFR, 451-65, Djevdet to Talaat, Van, 30 November/1 December 1914; 451-102, Tahsin to DH, Erzerum, 2/3 December 1914; 451-125, Tahsin to DH, Erzerum, 3 December 1914; 451-134, Djevdet to DH, Hoshab, 4/5 December 1914; 48-38, DH to Van prov., 17 December 1914; 454-67, Shefik to DH, 19/20 December 1914; Abdurrezak Bedirhan, *Otobiyografya (1910-1916)* (Istanbul: Pêrî Yayınları, 2000), pp. 51-2.

joined the fight. After three days, the Armenian defenders evacuated the village. Militia and gendarmes burned it down, killing those who had remained behind. In nearby Atanan, young members of their defence unit took revenge, murdering the commander of the local gendarmerie as well as the judge of Gevash, returning from Pelli, where he had participated in what he declared was a 'holy war'. The situation escalated further when both sides brought in reinforcements. In neighbouring Shatak district, self-defence cadres blocked the road to Van, cut the telegraph line and detained gendarmes. Yet Acting Governor Shefik remained calm. He did not think that the ARF was behind the incidents. After all, in the provincial capital, things had remained quiet. So Shefik sent Deputy Vramian and the Hakkari deputy, Munib Efendi, to visit the area and calm things down. The mission succeeded and a truce was proclaimed. The incident made Shefik realize that he needed Vramian. The Interior Ministry's demands for destruction of the Armenians' defensive networks, he thought, were impracticable. The Armenian self-defence system was regionally well organized and reacted quickly. It had proven capable of holding out against local security forces for days.³¹

Others thought differently. In view of the situation in Van, Tahsin and Talaat held a second telegraphic conference, in December 1914. Tahsin dismissed the assessment of Van's acting governor, Shefik Bey. Tahsin was sure that the incidents at Pelli and Shatak constituted a rebellion. After all, Armenians had cut telegraph lines in both places. And since Pelli and its surroundings were closer to Bitlis than to Van, he proposed to transfer authority for security over the area to Bitlis and its governor, Abdulhalik. As for ongoing atrocities against Armenians in and around Sarai, Tahsin blamed them on Armenian 'traitors' who had taken advantage of the situation. However, the problem would be quickly solved, he promised, and asked for secret orders to deal with the matter in a comprehensive manner. He would then share these instructions with Bitlis and Van provinces, as it was urgent to implement the Central Committee's decisions across the board. He had informed Enver Pasha and asked him to dispatch combat units to the area.³²

³¹ Shefik Bey had served earlier as district governor of Mardin before being transferred to Hakkari district as Djevdet Bey's successor. DH,ŞFR, 48-7, Talaat to Van prov., 15 December 1914; 453-120, Shefik to DH, Van, 15/16 December 1914; 454-68, Shefik to DH, Van, 20/21 December 1914; 454-94, Shefik to DH, Van, 20/21 December 1914; 454-105, Shefik to DH, Van, 19/20 December 1914; 455-45, Djevdet to Talaat, Sarai, 23 December 1914; 456-18, Mustafa Abdulhalik to DH, Bitlis, 30 December 1914; A-Do, Van, pp. 132-4; Ali Çankaya, *Yeni Mülkiye Tarihi ve Mülkiyeliler (Mülkiye Seref Kitabı)* (Ankara: Mars Matbaası, 1968-9), p. 807.

³² DH,ŞFR, 454-87, Tahsin to Talaat, Erzerum, 20 December 1914; ATBD 81 (1982) doc. 1814, Tahsin to Enver, Erzerum, 20/21 December 1914; A-Do, Van, pp. 126-8.

Tahsin did everything he could to bring about an escalation. He denounced Bishop Sahag Odabashian, the patriarchate's delegate to the eastern provinces, as a treasonous Armenian whose travel had to be prevented. (Shortly thereafter, in Sivas province, Special Organization operatives killed Odabashian.) Talaat agreed with Tahsin in spurning Shefik Bey's attempt to contain interethnic conflicts and ordered the prompt punishment of Armenian offenders. The Interior Ministry, in line with the CUP's agenda, also removed all Armenian police officials from their positions in Erzerum, Van and Bitlis.³³

In Van, Shefik Bey now assured Talaat that all necessary steps had been taken and that he was coordinating his measures with Tahsin Bey. Complicating his efforts was his difficulty securing reliable information. It seemed to him that Armenian deserters, not local villagers, had been responsible for most of the reported incidents. Talaat concluded that Shefik was incompetent, dismissed his explanations and ordered Djvedet to return to Van. In case Djvedet could not leave the front, he should dispatch a more capable substitute to Van, for the Armenian movement had to be stopped. Tahsin Bey summed up the situation: it would be 'us' who would profit from the opportunity, 'in every possible meaning.' But he wondered if 'our friends' (referring to the CUP leadership in Constantinople) possessed the necessary intelligence and strength to solve the issue.³⁴

For his part, Shefik Bey insisted that all the incidents had been isolated events and had been contained by the ARF deputy Arshag Vramian's cooperation mission. Djvedet Bey responded by alleging that the ARF militants from Mush had been behind the Pelli incident on their way from Mush to Shatak. He suspected that preparations were being made for much wider insurgent activities. Precautions had been taken, however, and in case of a rebellion, troops would slash and burn the villages and their inhabitants in the Shatak and Havasor area. He assured Talaat Bey that, without doubt, accounts with Armenians would be settled immediately following the Ottoman victory in the Caucasus.³⁵

Upon his return to Van in early January 1915, Djvedet Bey did not dismiss Shefik Bey. Evidently, he had no suitable replacement. But Djvedet was still

³³ DH,ŞFR, 48-85, Talaat to Djvedet, 20 December 1914; 454-145, Tahsin to DH, Erzerum, 22/23 December 1914; 48-166, Minister to Erzerum, Van, Bitlis prov., 27 December 1914; Kévorkian, *Genocide*, p. 431.

³⁴ DH,ŞFR, 454-87, Tahsin to Talaat, Erzerum, 20 December 1914; 455-115, Shefik to DH, Van, 28 December 1914; 48-182, Talaat to Van prov., 28 December 1914; 48-188, Talaat to Bitlis prov., 28 December 1914; 48-220, Minister to Djvedet, 30 December 1914.

³⁵ DH,ŞFR 456-2, Shefik to DH, Van, 30/31 December 1914; 456-20, Djvedet to Talaat, Sarai, 31 December 1914.

convinced that the Armenians were considering a general rising and urged the government to prepare for the defence of Muslims. Throughout the Ottoman Empire, Muslim militias were to form wherever Armenians lived. He impressed on local Armenian leaders that the slightest incident would be met with dire consequences for the further existence of their communities. CUP leaders were feeling powerful, anticipating a major Ottoman victory on the Caucasus front.

Instead, the Third Army was practically annihilated there. From their huge initial force of over 100,000 men, a mere 8,000 were left to man the lines near Sarikamish, and Tahsin, with Erzerum threatened, was left pleading with the central authorities to send all available units to the so-called Caucasus front. Suddenly, the CUP leadership seemed in disarray. Van province was sending Kurdish tribesmen, but desertions were rampant. Bahaeddin Shakir confided to Talaat that the defeat at Sarikamish had been Enver Pasha's fault; the military had not followed the Special Organization's (that is, his own) directions. He asked for a meeting at the capital. Yet none of the CUP leaders acknowledged that, contrary to their predictions, no Ottoman Armenian rebellion had taken place – not even during a military catastrophe, when the state's defences against *any* uprising were most vulnerable.³⁶

Meanwhile, at Van, Deputy Vramian submitted a memorandum challenging the official CUP narrative. He avoided acknowledging the role of the ARF's self-defence units and the government's attempt to neutralize them. Nor did he explain why telegraph lines had been cut. Instead, he presented a political reform programme that would address problems such as Armenian desertion and Kurdish brigandage. The document enraged Tahsin Bey, who proposed that the deputy be court-martialed – which, under the circumstances, meant execution. Given recent developments, this would hardly count as an escalation. After all, SO members had just assassinated prominent Armenians at Erzerum, with the authorities taking no action. Along the front, massacres of Armenians and reprisals by Russians and Armenian forces had left whole Ottoman *kazas* – Karakilise, Bayazid, Eleshkird and Tutak – deserted and 500–600 Muslims and about 1,000 Armenians dead.³⁷

³⁶ DH.ŞFR 456-97, Djevdet to DH, Van, 6 January 1915; 457-32, Djevdet to DH, Van, 10/11 January 1915; 458-47, Tahsin to Talaat, Erzerum, 17 January 1915; 459-4, Bahaeddin Shakir to DH, Artvin, 24 January 1915; 461-109, Shefik to DH, Van, 17/18 February 1915.

³⁷ DH.ŞFR 460-93, Tahsin to DH, Erzerum, 10 February 1915; 461-2, Tahsin to DH, Erzerum, 10 February 1915; 461-115, Shefik to DH, Van, 18 February 1915; Hilmar Kaiser, "A Scene from the Inferno": The Armenians of Erzerum and the Genocide, 1915–1916, in Hans-Lukas Kieser and Dominik Schaller (eds), *The Armenian Genocide and the Shoah* (Zürich: Chronos, 2002), p. 131.

The situation along the strategic Bitlis–Van route also took a turn for the worse. Gendarmes had been searching for deserters in Hizan subdistrict. Again, clashes with militants of the self-defence units ensued, leaving several gendarmes dead. The authorities sent strong reinforcements, and fighting spread to other villages, lasting for days. The security forces burned down houses and massacred more than 130 Armenian villagers, including women and children. Self-defence units had been unable to evacuate people and sustained heavy losses themselves. Thus, Abdulhalik Bey, governor of Bitlis, was able to report with satisfaction that local ARF leaders at Hizan had been ‘culled’. Among the documents the authorities had found was a manual containing instructions for operations against government troops.³⁸

Other areas remained quiet, but on the Mush plain some minor incidents took place involving Armenian deserters. Significantly, one implicated the ARF leader Rouben Ter Minassian. He succeeded in evading arrest, but the gendarmes, in addition to killing some militants, rounded up more than thirty deserters. All other villagers had shown their loyalty to the government, but suspecting a plot of wider significance, the governor of Bitlis, Mustafa Abdulhalik Bey, ordered the arrest of Ter Minassian and other ARF members.³⁹

And indeed, in anticipation of a Russian breakthrough, a faction led by Ter Minassian *had* planned a local rising. But a self-defence network like the one in Van province did not exist in Mush, and the majority of the regional party opposed his plan. Van’s central committee dispatched Papazian to Mush, and although relations between the two leaders were poor, Papazian’s authority superseded Ter Minassian’s, who until then had been, in the absence of a governing committee, sole leader. In line with party policy, Papazian then assured authorities that the ARF was opposed to any confrontation.⁴⁰

But the CUP searches continued. Just as the regional ARF was having an emergency meeting at Arak Monastery, gendarmes moved in and fighting started. Some gendarmes were killed, with most Armenians escaping. Abdulhalik Bey responded by ordering the gendarmes to occupy or destroy all three monasteries in the area. He was certain that Armenians, and especially ARF members, would threaten supplies if they found an opportunity, and he assured the Ministry of the Interior that he would defend

³⁸ DH.ŞFR 461-111, Mustafa Abdulhalik to DH, Bitlis, 18 February 1915; 462-16, Mustafa Abdulhalik to DH, Bitlis, 20 February 1915; 462-47, Mustafa Abdulhalik to DH, Bitlis, 21 February 1915; 463-38, Mustafa Abdulhalik to DH, Bitlis, 1 March 1915; DH.EUM 2 Şb 68-29, Mustafa Abdulhalik to DH, Bitlis, 6 March 1915.

³⁹ DH.ŞFR 462-47, Mustafa Abdulhalik to DH, Bitlis, 21 February 1915. Rouben Ter Minassian managed to go into hiding and survived the war.

⁴⁰ Papazian, *Memoirs*, pp. 296–7, 306, 308, 311, 313–14, 320–1.

the army's supply lines by any means necessary. The governor worried about the coming spring, however, when Armenian militants would have more mobility. The Interior Ministry accepted his analysis and appealed to the army for reinforcements. To accelerate communications, Talaat authorized the governors to communicate directly with the Third Army command. With more manpower on its way, Abdulhalik revealed his political programme. The Armenians, he claimed, were using the war as an opportunity to achieve autonomy, if not independence, to the detriment of Muslims.⁴¹ Therefore it was necessary, as he put it, in the interest of national safety to annihilate the Armenian people's physical and moral strength. In short, Abdulhalik, governor of Bitlis, would use that opportunity to destroy Armenians as such.⁴²

From Erzerum, Tahsin Bey saw the reports from Van and Bitlis as proof that Armenians were indeed planning a general uprising. Accepting Djevdet Bey's claims, he suspected an Armenian movement extending from Mush to Van, with Armenians only waiting for the melting of the snow before beginning a general assault. Many deserters were armed. If the rebellion succeeded in spreading to Van, the government's position would be precarious. Many Armenians lived in areas where Ottoman security forces were insufficient. Therefore, the Erzerum governor urged the formation of new provincial gendarmerie units and the strengthening of the militia network. As a precaution, the Ottoman authorities kept track of Armenian leaders' whereabouts. Djevdet Bey decided to return to Van from the Persian front.⁴³

In response to the anticipated uprising, the Third Army command and the governors of Erzerum, Bitlis and Van agreed on a joint strategy. To coordinate with the CUP's Central Committee, Bahaeddin Shakir visited Constantinople, where he presented evidence on the Armenian matter and other problems. These meetings convinced party leaders that harsher measures against Armenians were needed. They gave the eastern governors and the Special

⁴¹ DH.ŞFR 462-16, Mustafa Abdulhalik to DH, Bitlis, 20 February 1915; 462-47, Mustafa Abdulhalik to DH, Bitlis, 21 February 1915; 462-58, Mustafa Abdulhalik to DH, Bitlis, 22 February 1915; 50-119, Talaat to Erzerum prov., 28 February 1915; 463-37, Mustafa Abdulhalik to DH, Bitlis, 1 March 1915; 463-38, Mustafa Abdulhalik to DH, Bitlis, 1 March 1915; 51-15, Minister to Erzerum, Van Bitlis, 14 March 1915; 465-62, Mustafa Abdulhalik to DH, Bitlis, 17/18 March 1915; 467-120, Mustafa Abdulhalik to Talaat, Bitlis, 18 April 1915; DH.EUM 2 Şb 68-27, Mustafa Abdulhalik to DH, 25 February 1915; A-Do, Van, p. 135; Dasnabedian, *History*, pp. 113-14; Aramaïs, *Les massacres et la lutte de Mousch-Sassoun (Arménie) 1915* (Genève: Édition de la revue Droschak, 1916), pp. 10-12.

⁴² DH.ŞFR 467-120, Mustafa Abdulhalik to Talaat, Bitlis, 18 April 1915.

⁴³ DH.ŞFR 462-74, Tahsin to Talaat, Erzerum, 23 February 1915; 462-89, Shefik to DH, Van, 24 February 1915; 463-82, Tahsin to DH, Erzerum, 3 March 1915.

Organization the approval they desired for their plans, and the Third Army assigned newly formed units to public security duty in the east. The formerly reluctant Shefik Bey, acting governor of Van, still lacked, however, the troops necessary to implement a new policy of burning down rebellious villages. For the time being, the authorities allowed Armenian deserters to surrender and join unarmed labour battalions, thereby reducing the number of Armenian men available for a rebellion.⁴⁴

Armenian leaders had also agreed to encourage fugitives to give themselves up. But new clashes were taking place around Adildjevas and in the Timar region to the north-east of Van. Apparently, the government was attempting to cleanse areas close to the Persian border of all their Armenians. As a consequence, and facing off against superior government forces, self-defence units tried in vain to prevent massacres. When Djevdet Bey arrived back in Van, he expressed his readiness to use severe measures against Armenians and ordered the arrest of Arshag Vramian. The deputy's memorandum challenging the official narrative of recent events and suggesting 'solutions' had enraged Talaat Bey, who demanded that Vramian be tried in a military court at Erzerum.⁴⁵

On 15 April 1915, Tahsin Bey informed the authorities at Van that Bahaeddin Shakir Bey would arrive within a week and would implement the party's decisions. In the meantime, Djevdet Bey's plan was to keep things quiet and surreptitiously distribute arms and ammunition, giving the SO leaders and the promised reinforcements time to arrive. Abandoning his earlier view that arresting Vramian would not make much difference in worsening matters when tensions were already so high, Djevdet put the arrest on hold. But Djevdet's strategy of a deceptive quiet failed: already, on 11 April, Ottoman authorities at Shatak had taken the town's ARF leader into custody, whereupon the local self-defence unit moved into resistance mode. For Djevdet, this signalled the start of a general uprising. If the ARF's central committee had not given permission for Shatak's self-defence unit to act, it was only, he claimed, in order to win time until the thaws opened the mountain passes to Persia. Ultimately, he believed, the Armenians were aiming at a general massacre of Muslims.

But the canny governor nonetheless accepted Vramian's offer to send a delegation to Shatak to try to re-establish peace. The mission was a perfect

⁴⁴ DH,ŞFR 465-81, Tahsin to Talaat, Erzerum, 18 March 1915; 465-90, Shefik to DH, Van, 18 March 1915; 51-215, Talaat to Erzerum prov., 5 April 1915; ABTD 81 (1982) doc. 1822, Mahmud Kâmil to GHQ, Hasankale, 24 March 1915; [Denker], 'Teşkilâtı Mahsusa', *Vakit* (12 February 1934).

⁴⁵ DH,ŞFR 51-78, Talaat to Djevdet, 21 March 1915; 465-126, Djevdet to Talaat, Bashkale, 22 March 1915; 51-169, Talaat to Djevdet, 13 April 1915; A-Do, *Van*, pp. 136-41.

cover for him to remove Ishkhan, leader of the ARF's provincial self-defence, from Van and have him murdered – which he did. The assassination triggered resistance throughout the region, but the self-defence was largely uncoordinated, and Ottoman troops quickly displaced or massacred the majority of the Armenian inhabitants. Fighting in and around Shatak, however, continued. The military had wiped out several Armenian villages near Hoshab. Djvedet Bey gave orders to kill any armed Armenian on sight. In Van, he had Arshag Vramian arrested.⁴⁶

On 19 April, Tahsin summarized the incoming information for Talaat. He argued that Shatak signalled the start of the anticipated Armenian rebellion. Thus, he was coordinating with the Third Army and Bitlis's governor, Abdulhalik, and had dispatched a gendarmerie battalion and more arms to Van. Apparently, the rebels were trying to establish contact with Russian forces. The revolt was, in any case, in support of Russia. As Shatak was the centre of the rebellion, Tahsin had dispatched Kurdish tribesmen to finish the job. Additional troops had been deployed, and it was imperative to prevent the Armenians of Van province from establishing contact with those in the Mush region in Bitlis. If necessary, the CUP operative, Hilmi Bey, was to join Bahaeddin Shakir. Armenians, the governor warned, were about to massacre the Muslim civilian population. He concluded that the time had come to 'truly' solve the problem – with severity.⁴⁷

Following Vramian's arrest, Armenians in Van did turn to self-defence. It was a desperate mobilization of the entire community, including women and children. The ARF's central committee sent off coded letters to Mush, Erzerum and Constantinople, explaining that all political means had been exhausted. Being 'surrounded on all sides by Turkish troops and artillery', the community had little hope of prevailing, but they were not going down without a fight. As it turned out, Armenians at Shatak, Van and a few isolated places were able to hold out until Russian troops broke through Ottoman lines and relieved the defenders, starting on 19 May 1915. By then, however, most of the region's outlying Armenian communities had been massacred.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ DH.ŞFR 465-126, Djvedet to Talaat, Bashkale, 22 March 1915; 467-95, Djvedet to Talaat, Van, 16 April 1915; 467-99, Djvedet to Talaat, Van, 15/16 April 1915; 467-113, Djvedet to Talaat, Van, 17 April 1915; 467-116, Djvedet to DH, Van, 18 April 1915; 467-125, Djvedet to Talaat, Van, 18 April 1915; 467-126, Djvedet to DH, Van, 18 April 1915; ABTD 81 (1982) doc. 1821, 3rd army to War Ministry, Hasankale, 19 March 1915; A-Do, *Van*, pp. 287–326.

⁴⁷ DH.ŞFR 468-24, Tahsin to Talaat, 19 April 1915; 468-46, Tahsin to Talaat, Erzerum, 21 April 1915; 468-66, Tahsin to Talaat, Erzerum, 22 April 1915.

⁴⁸ Onnig Mukhitarian, *An Account of the Glorious Struggle of Van–Vasbouragan* (Detroit: General Society of Vasbouragan, 1980), p. 35.

Conclusion

The Kurds saw it first. By 1913, the CUP had begun using lethal force against Kurdish opponents challenging its control over the eastern Ottoman provinces. At the same time, the government strengthened its administrative infrastructure. For both tasks, the party had deployed trusted members, hardened veterans of the struggle in Ottoman Macedonia, to the region. Tahsin Bey was a key figure in this network of operatives. He led and coordinated the CUP's programme, his main task being to increase the government's control. And since this programme weakened Kurdish leaders, his policies initially had a positive impact on CUP–Armenian relations. It was not, however, a policy favouring Armenians, as the latter would soon learn.

Once the Kurdish challenge had been brought under a measure of control, Tahsin Bey turned his attention to the ARF. For the time being, his plans at reducing the party's influence were frustrated by CUP–ARF agreements in Constantinople. These had precedence for the Ottoman government and proved beneficial after the Ottoman mobilization. Ottoman Armenians followed the call to arms and initially supported the Ottoman war effort more strongly than Muslims did. The cooperation suffered a decisive setback, however, when the ARF declined in August to join Bahaeddin Shakir's Special Organization in waging an insurgency on Russian territory. While outwardly both sides maintained a working relationship, the ARF's insufficiently accommodating policies were unable to overcome CUP suspicions. The impression made by the participation of Caucasian, Persian and indeed some Ottoman Armenians in the Russian war effort was too strong. The CUP prepared for a crackdown on the Armenian political infrastructure. Like Kurdish leaders before, Armenians had become targets of the CUP's repressive and deadly strategies.

Once Tahsin Bey had become governor of Erzerum, he led, together with Bahaeddin Shakir Bey, the Special Organization's centre for operations in the eastern theatres of war, thus greatly enhancing his role in intelligence gathering and operational decision-making. He was privy to the CUP's top-secret decisions and began playing an active role in shaping as well as implementing the party's agenda. His reporting and lobbying played an important part in the resolutions adopted during the key telegraphic conference of 30 November 1914. The decisions made then – to move against the ARF's self-defence wing and political infrastructure – marked a point of no return. The Armenians' self-defence organization was now understood to be part of a larger ARF scheme for rebellion, with Armenian volunteers fighting alongside the Russian army simply another part.

Like any irregular force, Van's self-defence units had occasional problems with discipline, as the murder of the judge of Gevash showed. Generally, however, the militants followed orders. Their actions were strictly defensive, and sometimes not even that. Thus, although the CUP had started murdering ARF members by September 1914, the latter had not retaliated. Armenian militants did not assassinate a single CUP leader. Attacks on government offices also did not occur. Tahsin's calculations were not based on facts. An Armenian rebellion was never in the making.

The timing of the crackdown, however, gave every advantage to the CUP. Winter conditions reduced the self-defence units' mobility, making them highly vulnerable when moving in snow. Soon, Ottoman security forces began killing ARF militants along the strategic Van–Bitlis road. Along the Persian border, Ottoman irregulars under the leadership of CUP operatives annihilated Armenian villages, thereby disrupting Armenian communications between Persia and the Ottoman interior.

The move to eliminate the self-defence units, however, produced exactly the outcome the measure had been intended to avert in the first place. Facing imminent death, Armenians chose to resist and fight. These units were hardly a match, however, for the Ottoman security forces. Hopelessly outnumbered and lacking sufficient guns and ammunition, let alone artillery, the defenders either were regularly overwhelmed or had to evacuate – with Armenian civilians left to the mercy of Ottoman forces, also mostly irregulars.

Nevertheless, counter-reprisals by Russian forces and Russian Armenian volunteers demonstrated that the CUP's strategy came at a cost, as Muslim villagers suspected of having massacred Armenians were attacked and often killed. It was first of all Tahsin, and to a lesser extent his colleagues, who had triggered a self-fulfilling prophecy. But the CUP did not view these atrocities to be a result of its own policies. Instead, the party saw the outrages as proof of an imagined Armenian exterminatory campaign, which, in its turn, rationalized any form of CUP violence against Armenians. The governors of Erzerum, Bitlis and Van became prominent proponents of this line of reasoning. Tahsin called for 'truly' solving the Armenian problem. While at first this had meant destruction of the Armenian political infrastructure by lethal violence, Tahsin extended the policy to the Armenian ARF's social basis. The Armenian villagers' resistance had made it clear to the governor that eliminating political leaders and militants alone would not produce the desired results. The ARF was far too well entrenched in urban and rural Armenian society. Together with other Armenian organizations, it had mobilized the Armenian population. Hence, Tahsin began to rationalize genocide. This shift in attitude, formed by 19 April 1915, at the latest, had immediate consequences, as, in his post as coordinator for the administration

of all three eastern provinces and as top Special Organization leader, he was in a position to put his thinking into practice. Thus, even before the start of the Armenian defence of Van on 20 April, Tahsin had decided that any Armenian *potential* for resistance had to be eliminated in as quickly as possible. His more far-reaching genocidal ideas would materialize within a month after the Ottoman defeat at Van. Finally, the case of Tahsin Uzer and his colleagues Djevdet Belbez and Abdulhalik Renda shows that these CUP militants administering key provinces were not simply following orders from CUP headquarters in Constantinople.

Part Two

Performing Genocide
on the Spot

The State, Local Actors and Mass Violence in Bitlis Province*

Mehmet Polatel

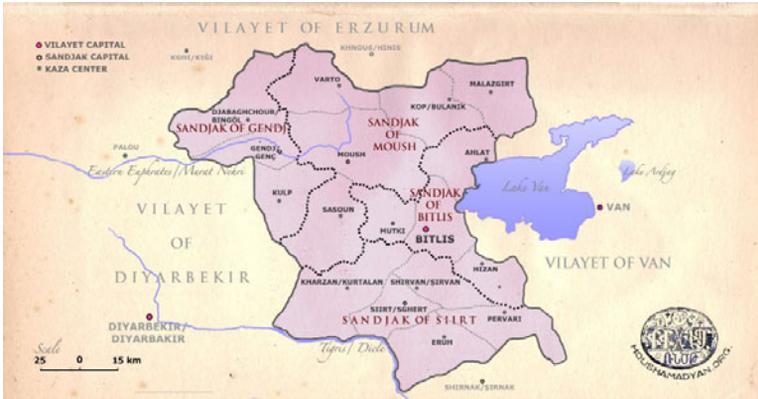
During the First World War, there was tremendous violence in the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire. When the first stage of war on the eastern front ended, the cities of the region, with their lively economic, cultural and political life, had become ghost towns, haunted by this violence. The correspondent of Germany's *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Paul Weitz, who visited the north-east in 1918, was shocked by the scene. There were only 3,000 inhabitants in Erzincan, once a city of 40,000. In several instances, local soldiers and officials would proudly describe the ways they had massacred dozens of Armenians in 1915, on the one hand, and hasten to show him the remains of Muslims massacred during the Russo-Armenian attacks in 1918 and describe the Muslim refugees, on the other.¹ Genocide, but also war, typhus, revenge attacks, pandemics and a harsh climate, claimed the lives of thousands of people in this region.

This chapter examines mass violence against Christians and the processes of looting and robbing that accompanied that violence in the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire, with a particular focus on the case of Bitlis.² Bitlis was a large province that included the districts of Muş, Siirt, Genç and Bitlis. The province was bordered on the south and the west by Diyarbekir, and it was separated from the Russian and Persian borders by the provinces of Erzurum and Van.

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¹ PAAA, R14102. From the correspondent of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in Constantinople, Paul Weitz, covering his journey throughout north-eastern Turkey, 20 June 1918, [http://www.armenocide.net/armenocide/armgende.nsf/\\$\\$AllDocs-en/1918-06-20-DE-001?OpenDocument](http://www.armenocide.net/armenocide/armgende.nsf/$$AllDocs-en/1918-06-20-DE-001?OpenDocument) (accessed 17 March 2018).

² Bitlis was not only the name of the province but also the name of the town that was the administrative centre of the province. The default association of Bitlis in this chapter is the province.



Map 5.1 Province of Bitlis.³

In Bitlis, as in adjacent Diyarbekir, genocide unfolded with a singular intensity within a very short period of time.⁴ Only a tiny minority of Armenians from these places could reach their deportation's official destination targets; the enormous majority were killed on site without being deported. Which factors contributed to the emergence of the especially horrible outcome in Bitlis? How did the Ottoman government, which historically lacked the capacity to introduce and implement its policies in the eastern provinces with ease, succeed in annihilating Bitlis Armenians on such a scale in a couple of months? In what follows, I argue that the attitudes of local administrators and Ottoman officials in the region and the active participation of local notables, tribal leaders and sheikhs in genocidal violence were important factors in shaping the absolute terms on which Bitlis Armenians were exterminated.

Eastern Provinces

The six eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire had peculiarities that distinguished them from the rest of the empire and largely determined the

³ From Houshamadyan, 'Province of Bitlis', printed by permission, <http://www.houshamadyan.org/en/mapottomanempire/vilayet-of-bitlispaghesh.html> (accessed 17 March 2018).

⁴ For detailed information about the case of Diyarbekir, see Hilmar Kaiser, *The Extermination of Armenians in the Diyarbekir Region* (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Press, 2014); Uğur Ü. Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

massacres and plunder that characterized the Armenian genocide. First, along with Kurds, Turks and Assyrian Christians, these provinces had large and significant Armenian populations. Apart from this complex demography, in 1878, after petitions from the Armenians and under pressure from the Great Powers, the Ottoman Empire had agreed in the Treaty of Berlin to reform these provinces. Thus, in the following years, the region became the focus of continuing debates at domestic and international levels – about the nature of these prospective reforms and about the state's capacity and intentions in implementing measures to guarantee the right to life, property and honour for Armenians in the region. Perhaps as a consequence of these debates, in the 1890s these provinces experienced a series of massacres targeting Armenians. Another regional particularity of the eastern provinces was that, unlike western and central Anatolia, eastern Anatolia became a battleground during the First World War, as large swaths of its territory were invaded by foreign troops – Russians. And Russia was the power that had pressed the Ottoman Empire, in the year before the war, to agree to administrative reforms in the six provinces to address the grievances of the Armenian population.

Another characteristic of the eastern provinces was the degree to which the state had to rely on local actors for establishing and maintaining its authority. As the central government did not have substantial direct control over the population in many parts of the region, it was used to ruling and managing through intermediaries, such as local notables, tribal leaders and sheikhs, most of whom were Kurds. Despite centralization efforts begun in the early nineteenth century, these groups still held considerable power locally on the eve of the First World War.

While it is important to note these commonalities, it should also be noted that the topography, demography, power structure and socioeconomic life were not monolithic across the Ottoman East. The proximity of tribes like the Haydaranlı to the Persian border gave them a chance to blackmail the Ottoman government by their ability to join forces with Persia. Dersim tribes, by contrast, while lacking the opportunity to play the border game, had always been sufficiently remote from Istanbul – geographically, historically and politically – to prevent the latter from establishing direct control over their region. While it had been very hard for Armenians of Diyarbekir, another interior province, to flee to Persia or Russia during the massacres of 1894–7, many Armenians from the province of Erzurum, which bordered Russia, had managed to find refuge there. Such examples reveal the very different options available to the people of the eastern provinces that help explain the variation in the fate of their populations.

Sheikhs, aghas and beys in Bitlis

Historically, the central government was not very powerful and capable in the province of Bitlis, where Kurdish sheikhs, aghas and beys still held considerable sway. As in many places in the east, Ottoman rule in Bitlis depended on the participation of local power holders.

The Bedirxan dynasty,⁵ which once ruled the Cizre-Botan region, including Siirt in southern Bitlis province, was one of them. Although it had been taken down during Ottoman centralization efforts in the 1840s, members of the family had returned to the region after 1908. Initially, Ottoman authorities saw their return as a positive development that would improve their own ability to employ divide-and-rule tactics. It soon became clear, however, that the Bedirxans would be very difficult to control. They had significant social capital among the population and claimed ownership rights to vast lands across the region.⁶ In the period after 1908, Abdürrezzak Bedirxan took on the role of prime advocate of Kurdish nationalism – with some covert Russian support. Conducting meetings with several other Kurdish chiefs and sheikhs, he worked to organize a Kurdish nationalist uprising in the eastern provinces in collaboration with Seyyid Taha.⁷

Abdürrezzak Bey was not the only Bedirxan who was politically ambitious. Other members of the family had also returned to their old power base and tried to revive the family's influence around Siirt. Hüseyin Bedirxan was a candidate for the Liberal Entente Party in the 1912 parliamentary elections. The pressure of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) on the Bedirxans increased significantly during the election process. Following Hüseyin Bey's election victory, the army entered Siirt in an attempt to change election results and ensured a win for the CUP. Members of the Bedirxan

⁵ The name of this family is spelled differently in different sources. These variations include Bedirhan and Bedr Khan, which refer to the same family.

⁶ Yener Koç, 'Bedirxan Pashazades, Power Relations and Nationalism (1876–1914)' (master's thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2012). On the rebellion of Bedirxan Bey and the destruction of the *mir* system, which was based on the sharing of power between the central government and emirs, who were largely autonomous, see Ahmet Kardam, *Cizre-Bohtan Beyi Bedirhan (Direniş ve İsyân Yılları)* (Istanbul: Dipnot, 2011). For the power struggle and reactions from the tribes toward the centralization attempts, see Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

⁷ For a detailed examination of Abdürrezzak Bedirxan's political activities and his relations with Russia, see Michael A. Reynolds, 'Abdürrezzak Bedirhan: Ottoman Kurd and Russophile in the Twilight of Empire', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 411–50.

family in the region were coercively pushed aside, step by step, creating a continuing source of discontent.⁸

Another important local group was Musa Bey and his family, in the south-west of Bitlis province. Their power base included Mutki and Muş. Musa Bey was famous for his violence against Christians in general and Armenians in particular during the Hamidian period.⁹ He took part in the Hamidian Regiments with his men and, among his deeds, seized several villages and lands, rendering their peasants near slaves.¹⁰ With the re-establishment of constitutional conditions in 1908, Armenians demanded that the lands seized by Musa Bey and his family be returned to their original owners and that he be prosecuted for his acts of violence. These demands did not have significant consequences, however, and Musa Bey maintained his power, influence and wealth. Although during the first two years of the constitutional period he stopped his attacks on Armenians, in 1910 he resumed them, as well as his demands for *hafır* (illegal protection tax).¹¹ Unlike the Bedirxans, Musa Bey's family took care to maintain good relations with the CUP. His cousin Hacı İlyas Bey, another leading member of this family, was a dedicated member of the party and a parliamentary deputy.

Last but not the least, religious figures were important actors in the province of Bitlis. Nakşibendi and Kadiri Muslim sects were dominant here.¹² Sheikhs were especially influential around Hizan, a district located in the south-east of Bitlis town. Sheikh Selim, Sheikh Said (also known as Said-i Kurdi and Said-i Nursi) and Sheikh Seyyid Ali, who played significant political roles among the Kurdish population in the first quarter of the twentieth century, were all natives of Hizan. It is important to note that there was a significant degree of interaction among sheikhs, aghas and beys, who formed strategic coalitions in line with their interests and aspirations. Thus, while Abdürrezzak Bedirxan was touring the eastern provinces to promote Kurdish nationalism in 1912, he established contacts with prominent beys,

⁸ Kaiser, *Extermination of Armenians*, pp. 86–8.

⁹ The de facto impunity granted to Musa Bey led to severe criticism from Armenians, who demanded the protection of their rights to life, property and honour. It can be said that Musa Bey became one of the symbols of the breaching of these rights by local power holders after abducting an Armenian girl in the late 1880s. See Margaret Lavinia Anderson, 'A Responsibility to Protest? The Public, the Powers and the Armenians in the Era of Abdülhamit II', *Journal of Genocide Research* 17, no. 3 (2015): 259–83.

¹⁰ Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia: The Survival of a Nation* (London: Routledge Publication, 1991).

¹¹ The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA): FO 424/224, Acting Vice Consul Safrastian to Consul McGregor, Bitlis, 12 June 1910.

¹² For the role of these sects in local politics and how they achieved dominance in the region after the abolition of the *mir* system, see Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1992).

aghass and sheikhs. In Bitlis, some local power holders, like Sheikh Selim and Sheik Seyyid Ali, received Abdürrezzak's initiative positively, while others, like Musa Bey, preferred to side with Ottoman authority rather than risk participating in efforts that were also covertly supported by Russia. Such divisions made it difficult for any Ottoman authority to win allies in the east without alienating other power holders. Into this mix, the Armenians and their suspected allies among the Great Powers added yet another element of complexity.

Local power relations and local government on the eve of the First World War

The months before the outbreak of the First World War saw important changes in power relations within the province. The internationalization of debates on reform and a Kurdish rebellion spurred a redesign of local alliances between the central government and powerful provincial families.

The question of reform in the Ottoman Empire's eastern provinces had become an issue of international debate once again in spring 1913, when Russia, supported by Armenian groups in and outside the Ottoman Empire, revived the issue by presenting its own proposal to the Ottoman Empire and the other Great Powers. By autumn, reform debates had been transformed into an argument between two camps. While Russia was pushing for expansive reforms, Germany was exerting itself to minimize the potential threat to Ottoman sovereignty. The tug-of-war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire ended in a compromise agreement on 8 February 1914. The agreement declared that seven provinces in eastern Anatolia were to be grouped into two large 'sectors', each with a European inspector-general appointed by the Sublime Porte. The reform plan addressed several issues, including the recruitment of the gendarmerie and elections to local governing bodies. Most explosive was the conflict over Armenian lands that had been seized by Kurds during the Hamidian period.¹³ According to the final reform agreement, land disputes were to be resolved under the direct supervision of two new inspectors-general, one for each sector.¹⁴ This article particularly

¹³ Roderic H. Davison, 'The Armenian Crisis, 1912–1914', *American Historical Review* 53, no. 3 (1948): 482–9; Hans-Lukas Kieser, Mehmet Polatel and Thomas Schmutz, 'Reform or Cataclysm? The Agreement of 8 February 1914 Regarding the Ottoman Eastern Provinces', *Journal of Genocide Research* 17, no. 3 (2015): 285–304.

¹⁴ Sir L. Mallet to Sir Edward Grey, 28 January 1914, in G. P. Gooch and Harold Temperley (eds), *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898–1914*, vol. 10, pt. 1 (New York: Johnson Reprint, 1967), pp. 542–5.

disturbed notables and Kurdish chiefs in the eastern provinces, as these seizures had brought them considerable wealth. Thus, the Armenian reforms added to the problems of the CUP government, already alarmed by signs of proto-nationalism among the ranks of Kurdish sheikhs and tribe leaders – groups whom they had reason to fear had the support of Russia.

About six weeks later, in March 1914, three prominent Kurds – Sheikh Şahabettin, Seyyid Ali and Sheikh Selim – started a rebellion in Bitlis.¹⁵ Within a couple of days, the rebellion had attracted local support. Two factors contributed to the escalation of tension on the ground. First, there was popular Muslim opposition to the constitutional regime that had been established in 1908. Political and legal developments during the constitutional period were interpreted as a shift away from a religious to a more secular rule. Although religious law, *sharia*, had not been replaced by civil law, popular opinion sensed a shift in this direction.¹⁶ Second, a considerable number of local notables and tribal leaders were angered by the 8 February 1914 accord, which was to introduce civic equality between Muslims and Christians in the Ottoman east and posed a direct threat to Kurdish power by raising the possibility that in some indefinite future they would be required to disgorge the Armenians' lands and properties seized in the Hamidian period. Tahsin Bey, governor of the adjacent province of Van, informed the central government that the Bitlis rebels were demanding the reinstatement of *sharia* law and – even while protesting against the impending Armenian reforms – were weighing an alliance with the reforms' chief sponsor, Russia.¹⁷

While it had religious characteristics, the Bitlis revolt was not overtly anti-Armenian. The rebels in fact reached out to the Armenian community leaders and gave assurances that their cause was not particularly against Armenians.¹⁸

¹⁵ Law Reşid, 'Bir Hikaye-i Tarih', *Jin*, 10 Nisan 1335, and Law Reşid, 'Bir Hikaye-i Tarih-Geçen Nüşhadan Mabad ve Hitam', *Jin*, 26 Nisan 1335, in M. Emin Bozarslan, *Jin 1918–1919* (Uppsala: Deng Yayınevi, 1987), pp. 719–21, 752–7; 'Bitlis Vukuatı', *Tanin*, 5 April 1914; Tibet Abak, 'Rus Arşiv Belgelerinde Bitlis İsyanı (1914)', *Toplumsal Tarih* 208 (April 2011): 2–11; and Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires 1908–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 78–81.

¹⁶ This issue was underlined by Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey, who noted that there was a strong reactionary resistance against the constitutional regime in the province of Bitlis. According to him, religious authorities were fuelling the reactionary sentiments. See the Ottoman Archives of the Prime Ministry (BOA): DH.ŞFR 426/79, Abdülhalik, the governor of Bitlis, to the Ministry of the Interior, 30 Nisan 1330 (13 May 1914).

¹⁷ BOA: DH.KMS 16/30, Tahsin, the governor of Van, to the Ministry of the Interior, 6 Mart 1330 (19 March 1914).

¹⁸ For a letter of Sheikh Selim to the Armenian bishop in Bitlis, see BOA: DH.ŞFR 421/6, Abdülhalik, the governor of Bitlis, to the Ministry of the Interior, 21 Mart 1330 (3 April 1914).

It should be noted, however, that despite these assurances, and while there were no massacres or mass violence, there were some scattered crimes against Armenians. The fact that the revolt did not unfold in a way to trigger mass violence against Armenians can be explained by the tactical decisions of the organizers of the rebellion, who may have refrained from a move that might have transformed the matter into an international crisis.

The central government was able to suppress the rebellion by force in short order. A more complicated matter was what would happen to the culprits who organized the uprising and those who had joined it, as well as what steps the central government should take for improving its control in the region. On 4 April 1914, Tahsin Bey, the governor of Van, and Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey, the governor of Bitlis (who had been appointed upon Tahsin Bey's recommendation), sent a telegram to the Ministry of the Interior. According to the governors, the political and social structure in the region had 'feudal' characteristics, a structure easily manipulated by Russia. The governors underscored the fact that substantial measures would be required to transform this structure. The sidelining of influential families like Bedirxans and Barzans in recent decades had been an effective and significant example. According to them, the regime's action plan for transforming the local power structure and improving the control of the central government should have included such concrete measures as the prosecution and punishment of those 'who were hindering the development of the country'; the capture of murderers and brigands who had fled the country; the distribution of awards to those local power holders who had been loyal to the state; the return of seized Armenian and Kurdish properties; the establishment of smaller, more manageable administrative units; and the appointment of a credible, strong, and capable figure, like earlier reformers Kurt İsmail and Topal Osman Pashas, to promote civic conduct and proper religious activities among the Kurds. According to the governors, 'It was impossible to win in this region otherwise.'¹⁹

The promotion of proper religious activities among the local population was especially stressed by Abdülhalik Bey in several telegrams. Yet one of these telegrams reveals a major difference with the government on what proper religious activity might be. The central government intended to send new sheikhs to the *tekkes* (religious lodges) around Hizan, in order to elevate its control over the region.²⁰ Abdülhalik Bey opposed the idea. From his

¹⁹ BOA: DH.ŞFR 424/15, Tahsin, the governor of Van, and Abdülhalik, the governor of Bitlis, to the Ministry of the Interior, 2 Nisan 1330 (15 April 1915).

²⁰ BOA: DH.ŞFR 426/31, Abdülhalik, the governor of Bitlis, to the Ministry of the Interior, 26 Nisan 1330 (9 May 1914).

perspective, *tekkes* were too independent and difficult to control. Sheikhs in these lodges were not officially trained. In his view, increasing the power of religious authorities who were organized around *tekkes* would actually undermine the standing of the regime. He proposed that, instead of strengthening *tekkes*, the government open *medreses* (theological schools). With these official institutions it would have more control over religious leadership in the region. Another telegram, dated 1 April 1914, shows that material incentives were also part of the governors' efforts to sweeten relations between the state and some of the big families in the wake of the rebellion. Underlining their need for money to form alliances with Kurdish notables and to transfer some unreliable local officials, Tahsin Bey asked the central government for funds to distribute to authorities in the region.²¹ This can be seen as a move directed toward the CUP buying the loyalty of local power holders in the aftermath of the 8 February accord, highlighting the regime's inability to enforce its will in the region without providing positive reinforcements that would ensure the support of local power holders.

At about the same time that Tahsin Bey was making this request – the first weeks of April 1914 – CUP leaders in Istanbul held a meeting about the policies and measures to adopt for the eastern provinces. As Michael A. Reynolds points out, the meeting resulted in a revision of the CUP's approach toward local power holders. Reynolds notes that the leaders 'resolved to win over the Kurds with a combination of methods, including financial subsidies, making leading Kurds senators, [and] pressing the Kurds of Istanbul to use their influence over their brethren in Anatolia.'²² These considerations shaped the approach of the government to local power holders in the post-rebellion period. When it came to dealing with troublesome Kurds, the Ottoman government – at the centre as in the periphery – agreed in preferring the carrot to the stick.

Nevertheless, the stick had not been forgotten. After Ottoman forces regained military and administrative control in Bitlis, Ottoman authorities hanged some local big men who had been influential in organizing the rebellion. Sheikh Seyyid Ali was among those who were executed. This was a surprising development, for the execution of an influential religious dignitary was uncommon in this region. Others, including notables and tribal chiefs who had participated in the rebellion, were exiled. One group of exiles was sent to the Black Sea region. Another was exiled to Taif but later sent to

²¹ BOA: DH,ŞFR 422/107, Tahsin, the governor of Van, to the Ministry of the Interior, 19 Mart 1330 (1 April 1914).

²² Reynolds, *Shattering Empires*, pp. 80–1.

Medina, on the Arabian peninsula.²³ Included among the exiles were many powerful men: for example, Müftüzade Sadullah Bey, who had been elected deputy in the 1912 parliamentary elections. Sheikh Selim, one of the leading figures of the Bitlis rebellion, took refuge in the Russian consulate in Bitlis and stayed there under Russian protection, in spite of the Porte's demands for extradition, until the consulate itself was disbanded when the Ottomans entered the war; then, those who had enjoyed its asylum were executed. The government not only took steps against the organizers of the rebellion, but also rewarded those sheikhs and tribal leaders who gave their support to Ottoman forces in the suppression of the rebels or who at least did not participate in the uprising. Sheikh Ziyaeddin (Hazret), Sheikh Fethullah Alaeddin and Küfrevizade Sheikh Abdülbaki were some of the significant figures who were decorated for their loyalty.²⁴ After a while, however, even those dignitaries who had been exiled were invited back to Bitlis – upon the advice of the aforesaid loyalists, Sheikh Ziyaeddin and Sheikh Alaeddin. They were officially pardoned on 21 November 1914. Significantly, the Ottoman Empire was again at war.²⁵ This pardon can be seen as another step in the process of alliance formation between the CUP and power holders whose local influence and control over manpower at the local level had gained an enhanced value due to the wartime mobilization.

The CUP government had seen in the Bitlis rebellion an opportunity to redesign the power structure in a troublesome region and strengthen its own control through a combination of methods. It replaced many officials in lower levels of the bureaucracy who were not committed to the CUP. But it did not stop there. Higher up, the Bitlis governor himself, Mazhar Bey, was removed, on charges that he had proved an incapable administrator during the rebellion. Mazhar Bey's loss was Abdülhalik Bey's gain, as the district governor of Siirt now became governor of the entire province. The new governor was also a committed member of the CUP, one of the most important criteria in these appointments – as Abdülhalik Bey himself revealed, when he noted that the appointment of Asaf Bey to replace him as Siirt's district governor would be appropriate only on the condition that 'his absolute adherence to the party was certain.'²⁶

²³ BOA: DH.ŞFR 41/46, EUM to the province of Hicaz, 8 Mayıs 1330 (21 May 1914); BOA: DH.ŞFR 43/130, EUM to the province of Hicaz, 17 Temmuz 1330 (30 July 1914).

²⁴ Erdal Aydoğan, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin Doğu Politikası 1908–1918* (İstanbul: Ötüken, 2005), p. 219.

²⁵ BOA: DH.EUM.2.Şb 2/9, EUM to the Grand Vizier, 8 Teşrin-i Sani 1330 (21 November 1914).

²⁶ BOA: DH.ŞFR 426/82, Abdülhalik, the governor of Bitlis, to the Ministry of the Interior, 30 Nisan 1330 (13 May 1914).

A report written by German vice consul of Erzurum, Edgar Anders, in June 1914 indicates that the local developments in Bitlis were carefully followed by Armenian politicians and intellectuals, who were worried that the reform agreement could be followed by massacres, as had happened in 1894–7, when reform became an international issue in the Hamidian period. According to the ARF notable Ruben Ter-Minassian, with whom Anders had an interview, Kurdish power holders were only temporarily intimidated by the court martial in Bitlis and would oppose ‘with the most extreme resistance’ the implementation of the reform project, which would undermine their interests to a great extent.²⁷ Ter-Minassian’s gloomy prediction that the temporary quiet in June 1914 was the calm before the storm turned out to be true, but there was one thing he did not foresee: the outbreak of a world war that would give the CUP the opportunity to solve the ‘Armenian Question’ on its own terms.

Extermination of Armenians in Bitlis

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, genocide unfolded with a singular intensity in the Bitlis province, which became a zone of complete extermination. The majority of Armenians in this province were not deported at all but were killed on site. The formation of an alliance between the CUP and local power holders in the aftermath of the Bitlis rebellion played a crucial role in the extermination of Bitlis Armenians on such a scale.

Atrocities against Armenians in Bitlis began in the winter of 1915, with small-scale attacks on Armenian villages and labour battalions that had been tasked with carrying ammunition and food supplies to troops at the Russian–Ottoman front. After Ottoman forces led by Enver Pasha experienced heavy losses in the Caucasus and thousands more died from exposure in the harsh winter in Sarıkamış, some Kurdish tribesmen who had been conscripted into the army began to flee. While moving to the south-east, the deserters committed atrocities against Armenian villages in their path.²⁸ But it can be said that Armenians had been made to suffer from the start. With the general mobilization that began in August 1914, three months before the Ottomans formally entered the war, food supplies, cattle and tools began to be confiscated by the army. Not explicitly directed against Armenians at this

²⁷ PAAA, R14084, Der Geschäftsträger der Botschaft Konstantinopel (Mutius) an den Reichskanzler (Bethmann Hollweg), 10 July 1914, [http://www.armenocide.net/armenocide/armgende.nsf/\\$\\$AllDocs/1914-07-10-DE-001](http://www.armenocide.net/armenocide/armgende.nsf/$$AllDocs/1914-07-10-DE-001) (accessed 17 March 2018).

²⁸ Mehmet Evsile, ‘Birinci Dünya Savaşı’nda Kafkas Cephesi’nde Aşiret Mensuplarından Oluşturulan Milis Birlikleri’, *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi* 13, no. 36 (1996), 911–26.

stage, these measures, according to several witnesses in the province, were implemented locally in a disproportionate manner; indeed, as an opportunity for individuals to exploit Armenians. Alma Johansson, who headed a Protestant orphanage in Muş, stated, 'Not only those items were taken which might be needed for the war, but everything which was of any value at all. Any Turk could enter a shop or a house and take whatever he wanted.'²⁹

More telling yet is the animus toward Armenians revealed in a telegram that Bitlis's new governor, Abdülhalik Bey, sent to the central government. Dated 18 April 1915, Abdülhalik's situation report gives an important insight into the thinking of CUP members entrusted with implementing their party's goals in the east. Alluding to the agreement of 8 February 1914, which the Ottoman Empire had been pressured into signing with Russia, the governor reminded his superiors that before the war, Armenians had worked for the adoption of an international reform plan, and that they intended to pursue that agenda after the war was over. As Abdülhalik and the rest of the CUP well knew, the 8 February accord required that seats on provincial and local administrative bodies in the east be distributed among Muslims and non-Muslims proportionate to their share of the population. Moreover, since the 1870s, demographics had been an important element of international reform debates concerning Armenians. His report that the Muslim population in his province was now decreasing rapidly as Muslims were sent to the front lines, while the Armenian population was not affected by the war at the same ratio, was therefore intended to set off alarm bells. The demographic trends produced by the war, he warned, would give Armenians in his province a majority. Combined with their existing socioeconomic dominance and cultural influence, these trends would be 'gravely dangerous for the future of the state.'³⁰ The governor did not flinch at deducing the policy implications of his report: 'the extermination of these elements, which had always been a threat to the state in these parts of the homeland . . . was a requirement for the security of the state.'³¹

Abdülhalik Bey's telegram also specified the outline of measures that would achieve this goal. He suggested that 'in dealing with the events that were certain to arise,' the state should not target at the first level the

²⁹ PAAA, R14089, 22 November 1915, statement by Alma Johansson, in Wolfgang Gust (ed.), [http://www.armenocide.net/armenocide/armgende.nsf/\\$\\$AllDocs/1915-11-22-DE-001](http://www.armenocide.net/armenocide/armgende.nsf/$$AllDocs/1915-11-22-DE-001) (accessed 17 March 2018); Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2011), pp. 345–6.

³⁰ BOA: DH.ŞFR 467/120, Abdülhalik, the governor of Bitlis, to the Ministry of the Interior, 5 Nisan 1331 (18 April 1915).

³¹ BOA: DH.ŞFR 467/120, Abdülhalik, the governor of Bitlis, to the Ministry of the Interior, 5 Nisan 1331 (18 April 1915).

mountainous regions like Hizan, Sasun and Talori. He suggested that the first targets of operations be Muş and other open plains, and that the operations in Bitlis also be coordinated with other provinces. This correspondence shows that the genocidal process cannot be understood simply as the implementation by local authorities of a plan of annihilation drafted in Istanbul. As Abdülhalik Bey's telegrams reveal, communication and decision-making worked in both directions.

Another important point regarding this telegram is that the governor of Van, Cevdet Bey, issued an extermination order one day after Abdülhalik Bey sent the aforementioned telegram. As reported by Clarence D. Ussher, the governor had ordered the extermination of Armenians and the execution of those Muslims who might try to help them escape.³² The proximity of the dates of the two events suggests that the governors communicated with each other regarding the planning of the genocidal operation in the eastern provinces. As analysed in detail in Hilmar Kaiser's chapter about Tahsin Bey (Chapter 4) in this volume, in November 1914, a conference was conducted among Talat Bey, Bahattin (Bahaeddin) Şakir (Shakir) and Tahsin Bey via telegram in which the Bitlis and Van governors were ordered to act in coordination. Thus, the overlap between the two events may be seen as a result of such coordination.

Two major developments in May 1915 radically transformed the character and intensity of violence against Armenians. First, Armenians in Van city, fearing that the 4,000 Armenian males that their governor, Cevdet Bey, brother-in-law to Enver Pasha, was demanding for conscription were slated instead for massacre, refused to turn them over, forcing the governor to begin a siege. During the siege, the advance of Russian forces into the province compelled the Ottomans under the command of Halil (Kut) Pasha to retreat from this front, along with thousands of Muslim refugees. Second, on 9 May the central government ordered the deportation of Armenians from southern Erzurum province, some parts of the province of Van and the districts of Muş, Sasun and Talori in Bitlis.³³ On 23 May, an official order was issued for the deportation of *all* Armenians in Van, Erzurum and Bitlis, along with some districts of Adana, Maraş and Aleppo.³⁴

³² Clarence D. Ussher, *An American Physician in Turkey* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917), p. 244.

³³ BOA: DH.ŞFR 52/282, Talaat, the Minister of the Interior, to Cevdet, the governor of Van, and Abdülhalik, the governor of Bitlis, 26 Nisan 1331 (9 May 1915).

³⁴ BOA: DH.ŞFR 53/93, Talaat, the Minister of the Interior, to the provinces of Erzurum, Van and Bitlis, 10 Mayıs 1331 (23 May 1915); BOA: DH.ŞFR 53/94, Talaat, the Minister of the Interior, to the Command of the Fourth Army, 10 Mayıs 1331 (23 May 1915).

But in fact, mass violence against Armenians in Mutki, southern Bulanik and Ahlat, located in the west and north of Bitlis town, had already begun with the partial deportation order. These attacks were carried out by tribesmen under the command of Musa Bey and Sheikh Ziyaeddin, whose units had been waiting for deployment to the front around Muş in January 1915, when the Sarıkamış tragedy led to their dispersal. Musa Bey, who had also been preparing to go to the front line, then announced that his health did not allow him to undertake this journey – an announcement that the Armenian deputy Vahan Papazian, who had also been in Muş during this period, saw as a flimsy excuse.³⁵ And in fact, Musa Bey's health – or his desires – changed in May, and after massacring Armenians around Mutki in mid-May, he sent his men to Bitlis town. Meanwhile, however, some of the Armenians from lower Bulanik fled to Liz (Erentepe) in the west, while thousands from Ahlat arrived in Bitlis town on 16 May in a vain attempt to seek protection from the Ottoman authorities.³⁶

On 23 May, the day the central government officially ordered the general deportation of all Armenians in the provinces of Van, Erzurum and Bitlis, Abdülhalik Bey informed the central government of attacks, murders and looting against civilians in the Tatvan region, carried out, he reported, by tribesmen fleeing from the war zone. He noted that these deserters looted not only the houses and properties of Armenians in Tatvan but also the movable properties of Kurdish refugees fleeing to Bitlis from Van. During the attack, he added, some of the Tatvan Armenians had been eliminated in the district.³⁷

Mass violence against Christians in the province of Bitlis continued to unfold in early June. In Siirt, Armenian and Assyrian men began to be arrested and executed on 9 June. Violence escalated with the arrival of troops retreating from Van, accompanied by Van's governor, Cevdet Bey, just back from heading a campaign in Azerbaijan. Within a couple of days, the Christian men, Armenians and Assyrians alike, were put to death. Only 400 people, women and children who had not been killed or abducted by Muslims, were officially deported from Siirt. Only fifty of these deportees survived long enough to reach their destination in Mosul.³⁸

³⁵ Vahan Papazian, *Im Husherë* (My Memoirs), vol. 2 (Beirut: Hamazkayin Dbaran, 1952), p. 327.

³⁶ Kévorkian, *Armenian Genocide*, pp. 340–1; Grace H. Knapp, *The Tragedy of Bitlis: Being Mainly the Narratives of Grisell M. McLaren and Myrtle O. Shane* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1919), pp. 41–2.

³⁷ BOA: DH.ŞFR 471/57, Abdülhalik, the governor of Bitlis, to the Ministry of the Interior, 10 Mayıs 1331 (23 May 1915).

³⁸ Kévorkian, *Armenian Genocide*, pp. 339–40.

The atmosphere on the ground can be ascertained from the report of Asaf Bey to the central government a couple of days after the start of arrests. According to him, the district's Muslim population was extremely agitated upon reading *Tanin*, a newspaper close to the CUP, and hearing rumours in the city. Because of their loyalty to the state, he said, they were openly declaring that 'if the Armenians were to get involved in a conspiracy against the state, they would not leave a single Armenian alive, from among over 9,000 Armenian inhabitants in the district'.³⁹ Asaf Bey wrote as if the mass violence against Armenians and Assyrians had not already started; but actually, by the time this telegram was sent, the massacres in Siirt were finished, and Cevdet Bey and Halil Pasha had left Siirt for Bitlis town.⁴⁰ What Asaf Bey had described as a prediction had already taken place: the Armenian inhabitants of Siirt had been annihilated.

The violence against Armenians in Bitlis town started in late June upon the arrival of Mutki Kurds, tied to Musa Bey, in the city centre. The American teacher Grace H. Knapp, a native of Bitlis, reported that the tribesmen were given modern arms on their arrival. Influential here was Ömer Naci Bey, a leading member of the CUP and a high-ranking official in its Special Organization (*Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*). On 21 June he appeared in Bitlis town and stayed for more than two weeks, a crucial period in the genocidal operation in this particular region.⁴¹ The next day, the Reverend Khachig Vartanian, a pastor of the Protestant church, was taken into custody. After this, all Armenian men in Bitlis town were arrested on allegations of conspiracy, including the charge that they had communicated with Armenians in Van, who at that moment were resisting their own governor's siege. Ottoman forces also attacked American missionary buildings, and Armenians who took refuge in them were not spared.⁴² Those arrested were massacred in small groups on the outskirts of the town.

Cevdet Bey, the governor of Van, and General Halil (Kut) Pasha, uncle of Enver, having finished up their own massacres in Siirt, reached Bitlis town on 25 June, in time to join the massacres there. According to Major Rafael de Nogales, a mercenary working for the Ottoman army, 15,000 Armenians in Bitlis town and its environs were slain on a single day, the day that Cevdet Bey

³⁹ BOA: DH.ŞFR 476/60, Asaf, the district governor of Siirt, to the Ministry of the Interior, 7 Haziran 1331 (20 June 1915).

⁴⁰ Kévorkian, *Armenian Genocide*, pp. 339–40.

⁴¹ BOA: DH.ŞFR 476/85, Cevdet, the governor of Van, to the Ministry of the Interior, 8 Haziran 1331 (21 June 1915); BOA: DH.ŞFR 478/86, Abdülhalik, the governor of Bitlis, to the Ministry of the Interior, 21 Haziran 1331 (4 July 1915).

⁴² Knapp, *Tragedy of Bitlis*, pp. 49–50. Kévorkian, *Armenian Genocide*, p. 341.

and Halil Pasha arrived.⁴³ While it is not possible to verify the exact number of Armenians killed on this particular day, Ottoman documents, memoirs and testimonies of witnesses and survivors support the claim that the Armenians there were murdered at a hitherto unimaginably fast pace in a series of massacres that started in late June.

We see this pace reflected in official Ottoman correspondence. On 24 June the central government had ordered several provinces to provide information on the names of villages and towns where Armenians had already been liquidated, along with the names of those Armenian communities slated for the same, the number of their inhabitants, and the routes and final destinations of deportation convoys.⁴⁴ Abdülhalik Bey's response to this request, on 26 June, confirms in a clear way the intensity of the violence that had taken place in his province. The governor stated that although some Armenian men had fled to Russian-occupied zones and others had been killed by tribesmen, no Armenian men from Bitlis district had been deported. Deportations from Bitlis *province* had comprised only Armenian women and children – through Hizan and Silvan toward Mosul.⁴⁵ The governor noted that Siirt's Armenian community, which had numbered around 12,000, had been completely liquidated. The process in the Bitlis *district*, with an Armenian population of 37,000, was still ongoing, but only four villages and the centre of town in Bitlis, where they had numbered 18,599, remained to be finished. Those in Muş and Genç, with populations of 51,500 and 9,400 respectively, had yet to be dispatched. Those in Mutki and Hizan, however, the telegram reported, were now completely destroyed.⁴⁶

Thus, Abdülhalik Bey's account indirectly reveals that within a period of just four days, virtually the entire Armenian male population in Bitlis town had been massacred. Those attacks of tribesmen to which he referred had begun only on 22 June – under the administrative and military supervision of Ottoman authorities. There was no way that a significant portion of Armenian men could have escaped to territories controlled by Russia before then, because the district was all but encircled. The south and east of the province were under the control of Ottoman forces led by Halil Pasha, and the northern front was under the control of tribesmen commanded by Sheikh Hazret and Musa Bey.

⁴³ Rafael de Nogales, *Osmanlı Ordusunda Dört Yıl (1915–1919)* (Istanbul: Yaba, 2008), p. 109.

⁴⁴ BOA: DH,ŞFR 54/137, İAMM to the provinces of Adana, Erzurum, Van, Bitlis and Diyarbakir, 11 Haziran 1331 (24 June 1915).

⁴⁵ BOA: DH,ŞFR 477/43, Abdülhalik, the governor of Bitlis, to the Ministry of the Interior, 13 Haziran 1331 (26 June 1915).

⁴⁶ BOA: DH,ŞFR 477/43, Abdülhalik, the governor of Bitlis, to the Ministry of the Interior, 13 Haziran 1331 (26 June 1915).

There are some puzzles. As noted above, it was the Armenians of Muş and Sasun who had been designated the primary targets for liquidation. Istanbul had decided to liquidate those Armenians even before it had made its general deportation decision, and they were among the first regions for which deportation orders from the central government arrived. Yet, despite the regime's original priorities, Muş and Sasun became the last regions in the province to experience genocide, perhaps because it was known that Muş and Sasun Armenians were better organized and had more capacity to resist than the Armenians of Bitlis town. Abdülhalik Bey's 18 April telegram, which we examined above, suggests that local planning of the genocidal operation might have played a decisive role in this matter, because it had recommended that the mountainous regions, which would have included Sasun, be left to the end of operations.

Mass violence in the district (*sanjak*) of Muş began only in early July, upon the arrival of forces under the command of Cevdet Bey. Halil Pasha joined him after a couple of days, and Musa Bey and his tribesmen were also active in the killings there. As elsewhere, first to be targeted were Armenian men who might lead any resistance. On 11 July the deportation decision was announced. Those who came to register for deportation were taken to a nearby village and massacred. After these initial steps, irregular forces under Musa Bey's command as well as regular troops began to kill Armenian men in Muş centre and its environs. The CUP parliamentary deputy Hacı İlyas Bey was among the main organizers of the genocide on the local level, taking an active role in the liquidation of Armenians in the district of Muş, although Servet Bey, the district governor of Muş, also played a role.⁴⁷

Like Bitlis town, the pace and intensity of violence in Muş was tremendous. Despite scattered resistance efforts, Armenians were not able to delay or repel the attacks. Witness and survivor accounts state that the centre was bombarded by cannons, and houses were set on fire with people inside them.⁴⁸ A telegram sent by the governor of Bitlis on 15 July confirms their accounts. The governor informed the Ministry of the Interior that the neighbourhoods in the district had been destroyed and burned by Ottoman forces, and the majority of the 'rebels' were under the ruins.⁴⁹ As in Bitlis town, there were no deportations here, simply massacres, on site. Alma

⁴⁷ Statement by Alma Johansson; Kévorkian, *Armenian Genocide*, pp. 345–6.

⁴⁸ Statement by Alma Johansson; Kévorkian, *Armenian Genocide*, pp. 345–6; eyewitness report of S. Hovhannisian, 1916 in *Kedername: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Ermeni Soykırımı* (Istanbul: Belge, 2014), pp. 268–9; Faiz el-Ghusein, *Martyred Armenia* (New York: G. H. Doran, 1918), p. 27.

⁴⁹ BOA: DH.ŞFR 480/18, Abdülhalik, the governor of Bitlis, to the Ministry of the Interior, 2 Temmuz 1331 (15 July 1915).

Johansson, an eyewitness, stated that 'except for a small number of women who the Kurds or the Turks took for themselves, almost everything in the entire Muş region which could call itself Armenian has been exterminated, and no one got beyond the district'.⁵⁰ When ordered to inform the central government of the number of Armenians who perished due to war, rebellion and diseases, the Bitlis governor reported, on 28 July, that the number of Armenians who had perished in Bitlis was around 50,000.⁵¹ This was the death toll reported by the governor himself after the massacres in Muş.

After the massacres in Muş, Ottoman forces moved toward Sasun, where thousands of Armenians fleeing Muş and its environs had sought refuge. Other Armenians, Vahan Papazian noted in his memoirs, expecting Sasun to be the first target of Ottoman attacks in the region, had already opted to defend Sasun, rather than trying to organize some form of resistance in the Muş valley.⁵² Despite the efforts of Armenians in Sasun's mountainous terrain to resist, regular Ottoman soldiers and irregular troops arriving in the thousands from various tribes managed to massacre a significant portion in a mere three weeks, following their first general assault on 18 July. By this point, Papazian had left Sasun together with a group of significant Armenian leaders, including the Dashnak leader Ruben Ter-Minassian. Only a small number of other Armenians were lucky enough to get through the siege surrounding Sasun. Many in Sasun and Andok Mountain were killed on 5 August. On into the winter, Kurdish tribesmen, including those under the command of Musa Bey, continued to hunt down and kill those survivors who had managed to hide during the general assault.⁵³

The intensity of the violence in the province may have been a surprise even to the CUP leadership in the Ottoman capital. For on 17 August, the governor of Bitlis, Abdülhalik Bey, received a telegram from Istanbul ordering the deportation of the Armenians in Muş and Bitlis. The governor assured the government that there were only 5,000 women and children left to be deported in all the province; that there were no Armenian refugees who had come to Bitlis from other regions; and that there were no Catholic or Protestant Armenians remaining in the city.⁵⁴ Except for a few women

⁵⁰ Statement by Alma Johansson.

⁵¹ BOA: DH.ŞFR 54/112, EUM to the provinces of Trabzon, Erzurum, Sivas, Diyarbakir, Mamuretülaziz, Adana, Bitlis and subgovernors of Maraş and Canik, 13 Temmuz 1331 (26 July 1915); BOA: DH.ŞFR 481/80, Abdülhalik, the governor of Bitlis, to the Ministry of the Interior, 15 Temmuz 1331 (28 July 1915).

⁵² Papazian, *Im Husherë*, pp. 363–5.

⁵³ Eyewitness account of S. Hovhannisian, in *Kedername*, p. 269.

⁵⁴ BOA: DH.ŞFR 55/55, the Ministry of the Interior to the province of Bitlis, 4 Ağustos 1331 (17 August 1915); BOA: DH.ŞFR 485/117, Abdülhalik, the governor of Bitlis, to the Ministry of the Interior, 5 Ağustos 1331 (18 August 1915).

and children, all the Armenians in Bitlis had been liquidated. On 7 November 1915, Memduh Bey, who had been appointed acting governor of Bitlis after Abdülhalik Bey's departure for his new post in Aleppo, informed the central government that while his records listed 5,712 Armenians remaining in Bitlis, this number was not accurate, because those Armenians had previously fled to the mountains. Memduh Bey stated that 360 Armenians had been deported in the previous months, and there was now no one (not a single woman or child) left to be deported in the entire province.⁵⁵

The Assyrian Christian population in the province of Bitlis had also been destroyed on almost absolute terms. In a telegram dated 27 September 1916, Memduh Bey legitimized their extermination by alleging that the Assyrians, whose numbers in Siirt had once exceeded ten thousand, had been claiming that they were the ancient peoples of the region and had taken the side of the Armenians against the government. Although a few Assyrian women had been taken into Muslim families, the great majority of the Assyrians in Bitlis, he informed the Ministry of the Interior, were now liquidated. Memduh Bey also argued in this telegram that the Assyrians in other provinces were still a threat against the state. He claimed that Armenians were disguising themselves as Assyrians in Diyarbekir region and fighting against the government. He also claimed that Assyrians were trying to hide Armenians who had managed to survive. Hence, he proposed that what had been done in Bitlis be done in other *vilayets*: the state should have the Assyrians in neighbouring provinces liquidated.⁵⁶

After 1916, Talat Bey had prepared a list showing the numbers of Armenians resident in and deported from the different Ottoman provinces and districts based on information he received from the local authorities. This list supports the claim that Bitlis Armenians were exterminated in total terms, mostly on site. According to Talat's estimates, there had been 114,704 Armenians in Bitlis before the war. According to his notebooks, there was not a single local Armenian in the province by the time his list was prepared. There was also not a single Armenian who had come into the province during the war from another Ottoman province. The number of Bitlis Armenians who were now in other Ottoman provinces was 1,061.⁵⁷ His report reveals

⁵⁵ BOA: DH.ŞFR 496/59, Memduh, the acting governor of Bitlis, to the Ministry of the Interior, 25 Teşrin-i Evvel 1331 (7 November 1915).

⁵⁶ BOA: DH.ŞFR 533/61, Memduh, the acting governor of Bitlis, to the Ministry of the Interior, 14 Eylül 1332 (27 September 1916).

⁵⁷ Murat Bardakçı, *Talat Paşa'nın Evrak-ı Metrûkesi* (Istanbul: Everest, 2008), p. 109. For an analysis of Talaat Pasha's notebook, see Ara Sarafian, *Talaat Pasha's Report on the Armenian Genocide* (London: Gomidas Institute, 2011).

that, by 1917, less than 1 per cent of Bitlis's Armenians were alive and within the borders of the Ottoman Empire.

Robbing, looting and extortion formed an essential part of the mass violence in Bitlis, widespread both during and after the massacres. Major Nogales reports that Van's governor, Cevdet Bey, upon his arrival in Bitlis, extorted 5,000 gold liras from 200 rich Armenians in return for exempting them from the violence – but later had them hanged in the city centre.⁵⁸ Ahsak Ahet Ahlahatian, an Assyrian Protestant from Bitlis, stated that she paid 541 liras to Abdülhalik Bey to spare her relatives from massacres, but they were all massacred anyway.⁵⁹ Hacı İlyas was another influential figure who extorted money from Armenians with false promises that he would spare them.⁶⁰

If extortion was a sign of political power, looting was open to anyone, and vandalism was a sport. According to the governor of Bitlis, Muslim tribes had 'ransacked Christian villages on absolute terms' in Garzan, Pervari, Ahlat and Mutki regions.⁶¹ Except for a few villages around Bitlis town, by 15 June 1915, all Armenian villages were reported destroyed. The governor informed the Ministry of the Interior that although Muslim tribes had previously been settled by local authorities in these Armenian villages, by letting their animals graze in the fields, the tribes had been destroying the crops. Now, when Muslim refugees fleeing the war zones were settled in Armenian villages, the crops in the fields were being divided equally between the refugees and the Treasury. The introduction of this procedure, the governor assured his superiors, had hindered, at least to a certain extent, the destruction of crops.⁶²

While the central government intended to use Armenian properties and belongings for its own ends, we see that in many cases it lacked the power to realize the confiscation process in a controlled way. Material interest was an important source of motivation for perpetrators of all classes on the spot, and according to Governor Abdülhalik Bey, a great majority of local officials, gendarmerie and ordinary people were involved in robbing and looting the

⁵⁸ 'Record of an Interview with Roupen of Sassoun by Mr. A. S. Safrastian, 6 November 1915', in James Bryce and Arnold Toynbee, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915–16*, uncensored edn, ed. and intro. Ara Sarafian (Princeton, NJ, and London: Gomidas Institute, 2005), p. 120; Nogales, *Osmanlı Ordusunda*, p. 109.

⁵⁹ Vartkes Yeghiayan (ed.), *Malta Belgeleri: İngiltere Dışişleri Bakanlığı 'Türk Savaş Suçluları' Dosyası* (İstanbul: Belge, 2007), p. 267.

⁶⁰ Stepan Mesrikian stated that he managed to escape massacres after paying 500 liras to Hacı İlyas; in Yeghiayan, *Malta Belgeleri*, p. 342.

⁶¹ BOA: DH.ŞFR 475/82, Abdülhalik, the governor of Bitlis, to the Ministry of the Interior, 2 Haziran 1331 (15 June 1915).

⁶² BOA: DH.ŞFR 475/82, Abdülhalik, the governor of Bitlis, to the Ministry of the Interior, 2 Haziran 1331 (15 June 1915).

Armenians' movable property.⁶³ Thus, he confirmed the commander in chief's own intelligence in this regard. Following this intelligence, Ottoman authorities conducted embezzlement investigations of some local officials and ordinary civilians. In Bitlis province, however, the resources for investigating robbery and embezzlement were limited. In the end, only twenty-five people, including some administrative accountants, police officials, gendarmes, two doctors from Siirt hospital and a shopkeeper, faced investigation.⁶⁴ These persons were all dispensable, as far as the CUP government was concerned. If the fortunes amassed from robbing the Armenians were large enough, however, as in the case of men like Musa Bey, the perpetrator need not fear any form of investigation.

Conclusion

During the spring and summer of 1915, there was massive violence in the streets and fields of Bitlis province. As a consequence, the number of Bitlis Armenians deported was strikingly low. While a few nearer to territories controlled by Russian forces managed to survive, most of the Armenian population was exterminated in absolute terms. The Assyrian population of this province was also annihilated. In the year 1915, Bitlis province became a zone of total extermination.

Before mid-May 1915, that is, until the central government began to send out deportation decisions, there had been no massacres in Siirt, Mutki or Bitlis town. The controlled sequence of massacres that followed demonstrates that these occurrences were not spontaneous outbreaks of violence but planned events. The genocidal operation started in the west and north of the province, with the massacres committed by Musa Bey and his men. After a short while, the regular army began the southern operation, with mass killing in Siirt district. These two forces met in Bitlis town at the end of June. After finalizing the genocidal operation in Bitlis town, they headed north again. Armenians in Muş and Sasun were the final targets. The sequence of massacres and movement of regular and irregular troops shows that massacres were carefully organized and coordinated.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from this examination is that local authorities played an important role in the Armenian genocide, even at the level of policymaking. Correspondence between local authorities in Bitlis

⁶³ BOA: DH.ŞFR 482/95, Abdülhalik, the governor of Bitlis, to the Ministry of the Interior, 23 Temmuz 1331 (5 August 1915).

⁶⁴ BOA: HR.SYS 2882/29, Talaat, the Minister of the Interior, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 14 Mart 1332 (27 March 1916).

and the Ministry of the Interior in Istanbul suggest that local governors not only implemented the orders and directives of the central government but also contributed to the shaping of state policies against Armenians and, as we have seen, against Assyrians. Local actors, including sheikhs, aghas and beys, were also active participants in the violence, another important feature of the unfolding of genocide in Bitlis.

As shown in this chapter, there was a triangular relationship between the 8 February accord, the Bitlis revolt and the unfolding of the genocide in Bitlis. Local power holders were extremely irritated by the prospect of the land reforms mentioned in the accord being implemented, which might require them to return the properties they had seized in the days of Abdülhamid II. Their discontent was clearly expressed during the Bitlis rebellion in March 1914, in whose aftermath the relationship between the state and local power holders was reorganized. As can be traced in the 18 April telegram of Abdülhalik Bey, the CUP cadres were also anxious about the consequences of the reform project. With the outbreak of the First World War, the alliance between the CUP and local power holders took a new turn and became crystallized not only in the official suspension of the reform but in the pardon of local power holders who had been charged with participating in the revolt. This alliance shaped the unfolding of the genocide in Bitlis, which became a zone of total extermination in 1915.

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Scenes from Angora, 1915: The Commander, the Bureaucrats and Muslim Notables during the Armenian Genocide

Hilmar Kaiser

The historiography of the Armenian genocide, while not ignoring foreign humanitarians or altruistic Kurds or even Ottoman officials who were transferred (or worse) for their dissent, is only beginning to develop a precise picture of the *range* of actions and reactions to the genocide among Turks in positions of authority, and it is even further from investigating those ‘ordinary Muslims’ who, survivors have testified, saved or slaughtered them.¹

This chapter contributes to such a picture by examining the range of activities among Ottoman officials and notables in a single province: Angora (Ankara). Far from the eastern borderlands, where Armenians might have been perceived as potential allies of the Russians, and where their mortality rates are estimated as high as 95 per cent or more, Angora province, located slightly west of the centre of the Anatolian peninsula, was not an obvious target for invasion either by land or by sea. Moreover, the size of its Armenian population, at somewhat more than 47,000, was less than a third that of adjacent Sivas, only a bit more than a quarter of Armenian numbers in Bitlis and Van, and very much fewer than in Erzerum. Yet, while its Armenians experienced a fate proportionally less lethal than in provinces further east, it still lost about 65 per cent of its Armenian population. The discrepancy in the mortality figures between Angora and the wholesale exterminations in Bitlis, Van and Diyarbakir thus provokes the linked questions ‘Why were so many

¹ *Si può sempre dire un sì o un no: I Giusti contro i Genocidi degli Armeni e degli Ebrei* (Padova: Coop Libreria Editrice Universitaria di Padova, 2001); Hilmar Kaiser, with Luther Eskijian and Nancy Eskijian, *At the Crossroads of Der Zor: Death, Survival, and Humanitarian Resistance in Aleppo, 1915–1917* (Princeton, NJ: Gomidas Institute, 2001); Jacques Sémelin, Claire Andrieu and Sarah Gensburger (eds), *Resisting the Genocide: The Multiple Forms of Rescue* (Paris: n.p., 2008; New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

Angoran Armenians spared?’ and especially – considering the province’s more sheltered location in the interior – ‘Why were so many killed?’²

To the second question, the short answer is that the central government was determined and persistent. But the explanation for the first, the survival of (proportionally) so many Angoran Armenians, can be found only in a complex network of official and personal relations that moulded opposition to the genocide by forcing perpetrators, collaborators and opponents to accommodate one another while struggling to implement agendas of their own. In the mix were Muslim circles that developed their own initiatives, which complemented opposition to the genocide within the administration.

The commander says no

In central and western provinces like Angora, the deportations started later than in the Armenians’ heartland in the east, although superficially the ‘provocations’ were the same. During the winter and spring campaigns, and in the face of unbearable conditions, Muslims and Armenian soldiers from both regions had deserted their military units. While many sought shelter in their hometowns and villages, others took to banditry to survive. But survival may be difficult to distinguish from subversion. In early May 1915, Angora’s authorities learned that Armenian deserters were hiding in Boghaslian, a *kaza* (subdistrict) of Yosgad (today’s Yozgat). Soon, security forces had arrested 105 deserters and handed them over to the military. The round-up also netted twenty-five other men suspected of revolutionary activities, as the authorities said they had seized 140 weapons, 1,350 rounds of ammunition, one hand grenade, twenty-five pieces of dynamite and an explosives expert. Angora’s provincial governor, Mazhar Bey, concluded that that Armenians were engaging in subversive activities and proposed strengthening the gendarmerie. But as no further incidents occurred following the arrests, for the time being the Armenian communities in the province were not deported.³

² Türkiye Cumhuriyeti, Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, *Arşiv Belgeleriyle Ermeni Faaliyetleri 1914–1918*, vol. 1 (Ankara: Genelkurmay Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt ve Denetleme Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2005), p. 445; Murat Bardakçı, *Talât Paşa’nın Evrak-ı Metrûkesi. Sadrazam Talât Paşa’nın özel arşivinde bulunan Ermeni tehciri konusundaki belgeler ve hususî yazışmalar* (İstanbul: Ernest Yayınları, 2008), pp. 109–39.

³ DH [= Interior Ministry], Şifre Kalemi (ŞFR) 470-83, Mazhar to DH, Angora, 9 May 1915; 471-1, Mazhar to DH, Angora, 14 May 1915; 471-19, Mazhar to DH, Angora, 15 May 1915.

Early in July 1915, as deportations north of Angora were emptying those regions of their Armenians, Governor Mazhar Bey was planning to accept some of the deportees into Angora, as he believed they were willing to convert to Islam. His plan stood in direct conflict, however, with government policy, which was to move the Armenians south toward the Syrian desert. Dissatisfied with the lack of energy in Angora, the Interior Ministry dispatched to the province one of its top men, Atif (Bayındır) Bey, allegedly to investigate local conditions, in reality to be the governor's replacement. Atif Bey officially took office on 21 July 1915. Before he left town, however, the ousted governor Mazhar Bey confided to Radi Bey, an Angoran notable, that the 'investigator' Atif Bey had conveyed to him oral instructions to massacre Armenians. He had refused, and so he was sacked.⁴

Atif Bey, now replacing Mazhar Bey, had been an exponent of the ultranationalist and racist wing of the ruling Committee for Union and Progress (CUP) party well before the war. He had also served as a member of parliament for Burdur and played a critical role in organizing Turkey's paramilitary boy scout organization. Although now the new acting governor of Angora, for the time being Atif Bey also kept his position as a department director within the Interior Ministry. To aid his work, the ministry assigned Manastirli Bahaeddin Bey, a high-ranking official in the General Directorate for Public Security (EUM) who, like Atif Bey, had already performed highly sensitive tasks for the government, to join Atif Bey in Ankara as his police director.⁵

⁴ DH.ŞFR 54-94, Talaat to Mazhar, 22 June 1915; 476-117, Mazhar to DH, Angora, 22 June 1915; 480-68, Mazhar to DH, Angora, 17 July 1915; 54/A-62, Ali Munif to Angora prov., 21 July 1915; 489-32, Atif to DH, Angora, 18 September 1915; DH.Kalem-i Mahsus 33-14, DH to Angora prov., 5 July 1915; Meclis-i Vükelâ (MV) 241-12, 30 June 1915; Armenian Assembly of America, Guerguerian Collection (AAA-GC), reel 56, Deposition of Radi Bey [December 1918]; Türkiye Cumhuriyeti, Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, *Faaliyetleri*, vol. 1, p. 16; James Bryce and Arnold Toynbee, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-1916: Documents Presented to Viscount Grey of Faldoon by Viscount Bryce* (Princeton, NJ: Gomidas Institute, 2000), p. 400; Vahakn N. Dadrian and Taner Akçam (eds), *'Tehcir ve Taktil' Divan-ı Harb-i Örfi Zabıtları. İttihad ve Terakki'nin Yargılanması 1919-1922* (Istanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2008), p. 242.

⁵ Bâb-ı Âli Evrak Odası (BEO) 4324-324255, Grand Vizierate (GV) to DH, 2 December 1914; 4365-327340, GV to DH, 24 July 1915; DH.ŞFR 54/A-62, Ali Munif to Angora prov., 21 July 1915; DH.EUM. Muhasebe Kalemi 257-97, Memorandum, 26 July 1915; MV 241-153, 3 October 1915; Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Politisches Archiv (AA-PA), Türkei 183/38, A 27887, Harry Stürmer (to Embassy), Constantinople, 5 September 1915; Ali Çankaya, *Yeni Mülkiye Târîhi ve Mülkiyeliler* (Ankara: Mars Matbaası, 1968-1969), p. 1091; *TBMM Albümü 1920-2010, 1. Cilt 1920-1950* (Ankara: TBMM Basın ve Halkla İlişkiler Müdürlüğü, 2010), pp. 11, 19, 263; Erol Akcan, *İttihat ve Terakki Fırkasının Paramiliter Gençlik Kuruluşları* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2015), pp. 112, 167, 171-4; Hilmar Kaiser, 'The Ottoman Government and the Zionist Movement during the First Months of World War I', in Talha Çiçek (ed.), *Syria in World War I: Politics, Economy and Society* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 107-29.

Meanwhile, trouble was brewing in Boghaslian, the *kaza* in Yosgad *sanjak* near the Sivas border where deserters had been arrested and weapons found that May. Boghaslian's *kaimakam* (subdistrict governor), Kemal Bey, reported that up to 300 Armenian militants were attacking Muslim villages. He had dispatched a security force and asked for reinforcements, warning that approximately 4,000 labour battalion soldiers, many of them Armenians, were working in the region. But while information from Sivas seemed to confirm Kemal Bey's fears, Angora's provincial secretary, Sadiq Vidjdani Bey, offered conflicting information: according to Yosgad's own authorities, he said, it had been Armenian, not Muslim, villagers who were under attack. The assailants had plundered and wounded or killed more than twenty of them.⁶ The new governor preferred Kemal's version. Dismissing his provincial secretary's intelligence, Atif Bey chose to represent Armenians as a security risk and demanded their wholesale deportation. As a result, the Interior Ministry authorized the punishment of Armenians who were resisting their attackers and the deportation of Armenian villagers all along the Angora–Sivas border.⁷

Getting Angora's military officials to enforce the deportation, however, proved difficult. The acting commander of the Fifth Independent Army Corps, Halil Redjai Bey, had a war to fight, and it was not against Armenians. He was certainly aware of some possibly subversive activities and knew that in Boghaslian the authorities had apprehended twenty-six Armenian suspects and deported them. But other areas had remained quiet, even Akdaghmaden, where security forces from Yosgad had arrested – and robbed – Armenian miners, which might have provoked retaliation but had not. Overall, therefore, the commander felt that the domestic situation was under control. But when the Supreme Command warned the acting governor that Armenian soldiers in the area's labour battalion must be prevented from interfering with the deportations, and that deportees had to be protected, Atif Bey used the warning to assume authority over the local military. Halil Redjai duly instructed his men to assist the civil authorities.⁸

⁶ DH.ŞFR 480-128, Muammer to DH, Sivas, 23/24 July 1915; 480-134, Zekai to DH, Caesarea, 23 July 1915; 480-140, Sadik Vidjdani to DH, Angora, 23 July 1915; 481-18, Sadik Vidjdani to DH, Angora, 25 July 1915; Halil Redjai to Supreme High Command, Angora, 23 July 1915, in *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti, Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, Faaliyetleri*, vol. 1, p. 507. See also Raymond Kévorkian, *Le génocide des arméniens* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2006), pp. 629–34.

⁷ DH.ŞFR 481-59, Atif to DH, Angora, 27 July 1915; 54/A-257, Talaat to Angora prov., 3 August 1915.

⁸ AAA-GC 57, Bronsart to AC and Atif, 28 July 1915; Halil Redjai to 13th Division Command, Angora, 28 July 1915; Suleiman to AC, 28 July 1915; Shabaeddin to AC, 28 July 1915; Atif to AC, Angora, 29 July 1915; Halil Redjai to Akdaghmaden Area Command, 29 July 1915; Bronsart to AC, 29 July 1915, in *Askeri Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi* 86 (1987), doc. 2056.

Yet it was clear that the acting corps commander was not at one with the acting provincial governor on their government's radical Armenian policy. The commander put a stop to the assaults on Armenians in the Akdaghmaden *kaza* and ordered the arrest of any military personnel who had been involved in the robbing of Armenian miners there. As for Armenian suspects, they were simply to be arrested and handed over to the judicial authorities for exile. In two meetings with Atif Bey during the last days of July 1915, the corps commander conceded that, in general, he did suspect some Armenians of involvement in militant activities. But he refused to deport Armenian military families and argued that any full-scale deportation of Armenians would deprive the army of recruits. He warned, too, that deportations would have damaging consequences for the economy. Worst of all, the commander questioned the legality of the planned deportations, admonishing Atif Bey that the central government as well as political leaders would be legally responsible for such actions. For all his equivocations, Halil Redjai Bey's personal convictions are clear from the instructions he issued to his own men: refuse any demand they deemed illegal or contrary to their code of honour.⁹

Pressed by Atif Bey, the commander did make some accommodating gestures, but the acting governor was not fooled. He alerted the Interior Ministry that the commander was not cooperating. Halil Redjai Bey was not going to follow the government's strategy, even though Atif had disclosed their real intentions to the man – intentions that had not been put on paper. Atif Bey concluded that the commander was a coward who did not share his and the government's ideology. He pledged 'in the name of all that is sacred' to overcome the army's opposition.¹⁰

Atif Bey's vow was almost impossible to implement legally, however, as, according to the temporary law on deportations of 27 May 1915, military commanders had the authority to order deportations if they deemed these necessary – which suggested conversely, at least to Corps Commander Halil Redjai, that if he deemed they weren't necessary, he also had the authority to stop them. Moreover, by bringing the gendarmerie under its control, the army corps was limiting Atif Bey's ability to act alone. Halil Redjai had already ordered the transfer of five detainees to military service, effectively protecting them from deportation – or worse. This was a public embarrassment for the governor, who had identified two of these men as prominent members of the

⁹ DH,ŞFR 482-11, Atif to Ministry of the Interior, Angora, 1/2 August 1915; AAA-GC 57, Halil Redjai to Caesarea Acting Division Command, 29 July 1915; Halil Redjai to Akdaghmaden Area Command, 29 July 1915.

¹⁰ DH,ŞFR 482-11, Atif to Ministry of the Interior, Angora, 1/2 August 1915.

banned Liberal Entente Party and thus as high-value targets for the CUP. Atif Bey was not slow to point out that the army's opposition was a problem not simply for the provincial authorities but also for Talaat. Describing Halil Redjai as a 'savior' of Armenians, a man who disregarded law and put his personal views above state policy, Atif Bey branded the officer an opponent of the CUP.¹¹

While Talaat was discussing the matter with Enver Pasha, the minister of war, Atif Bey tried to regain control over the gendarmerie – to no avail. The army corps insisted on *its* authority, based on Enver's orders and on the deportation law. In other words, Halil Redjai Bey was using the very stipulations intended to facilitate deportations to prevent the same. Atif fumed. But then he showed that Halil Redjai was not the only one who knew how to turn a national security argument on its head. As Angora province was not in the war zone, and no incidents of military significance had taken place there, Atif insisted that, in the *absence* of a military threat from Armenians, *civil* authorities were to remain in charge of public security. In other words, the *governor* held the authority to deport Angora's Armenians, precisely because the province faced *no* security risk from Armenians. The case of Angora province demonstrates that the official reason given for the Armenian deportations, one repeated over subsequent decades, was false.¹²

Expanding the Programme

On 7 August 1915 the Ministry of the Interior could finally report that it had secured Enver Pasha's support, and Talaat Bey ordered Angora's deportations. Only Catholics were to be exempt.¹³ But Atif had not waited for Talaat's permission. Having now regained control over the gendarmerie, and with a large police force at hand, he was no longer dependent on the army. Bahaeddin Bey, his new police chief, together with the military commander for Angora city, had already compiled the first blacklist of Armenians. Already on 27 July, eleven days before the arrival of Talaat's 'permission', arbitrary arrests began of anyone the authorities wished to detain, with officials seizing the opportunity to rob their victims in prison. A Muslim notable tried to secure the release of the Armenian director of the local branch of the Ottoman Bank,

¹¹ DH.ŞFR 482-11, Atif to DH, Angora, 1/2 August 1915.

¹² DH.ŞFR 54/A-227, Talaat to Atif, 3 August 1915; 482-94, Atif to DH, Angora, 4 August 1915.

¹³ DH.ŞFR 54/A-276, Talaat to Angora prov., 5 August 1915; 54/A-301, Talaat to Atif, 7 August 1915.

Mr Shonorkian, only to be told by Atif Bey that the man was to be killed on higher orders. Although Talaat's 'permission' to arrest had explicitly exempted Catholics, twelve Catholics were among the roughly 160 Armenians rounded up. However, upon representations by Angora's Armenian Catholic Bishop, Grégoire Bahabian, Atif released the men, in line with his orders. Other Armenian notables were not so lucky. Together with Armenian intellectuals from Constantinople, who had been kept imprisoned at Angora, they were massacred near the city. Armenian soldiers in labour battalions had to bury the victims. All told, the authorities had killed about 700 men by 10 August.¹⁴

Survivor accounts provide details of what happened. Although in the countryside armed gangs under the command of known criminals controlled the roads and passes, monitoring travellers, two Armenian deserters disguised as Muslim recruits managed to reach Angora, where they presented themselves at the barracks. The two watched as the Armenian men were rounded up and, later, as soldiers were ordered to escort Armenian prisoners out of town. On one occasion, the two disguised Armenians themselves became the escort, accompanying about 800 Armenian men to a massacre site where they delivered them to a group of policemen and gendarmes for slaughter. Back in the city, they heard some of these law enforcement officers boast of their exploits. The journalist Aram Andonian heard the same kind of stories when, months later, hospitalized perpetrators described to him in detail how they had killed the prisoners or buried them alive. While convoys of detainees were walking off to prearranged mass graves, Atif Bey sent progress reports to his superiors. As he now extended the arrest order to the entire province, he requested further funding from the ministry.¹⁵

¹⁴ DH.ŞFR 482-8, Atif to DH, Angora, 31 July 1915; 482-11, Atif to DH, Angora, 1/2 August 1915; AAA-GC 56, Deposition of Radi Bey [December 1918]; Grégoire Bahabian, *Une page sur mille du témoignage chrétien d'un peuple*, trans. Garabed Amadou (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1976), pp. 47–50; Simon Arakelyan, *Ankara Vukuatı. Menflik Hatıralarım* (Istanbul: Aras Yayınçılık, 2017), p. 257; Tatéos Minassian, *Houcher: Souvenirs. Un récit authentique* (Saint-Just-la-Pendue: BKF Editions, 2010), p. 28.

¹⁵ DH.ŞFR 482-9, Atif to DH, Angora, 1 August 1915; Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Archives diplomatiques, Nantes, Ambassade Ankara, Box 10 (MAÉ, Nantes), Jeanne Valence, 'Rapport d'une française, témoin oculaire des massacres et déportations des chrétiens d'Angora', Constantinople, January 1919; Pierre Merdjimékian, *Les Arméniens d'Angora déportés et massacrés: Pourquoi et comment?* (Cairo: Imprimerie Hindîé, 1920), pp. 16–19; Minassian, *Houcher*, pp. 30–3; Bryce and Toynbee, *Treatment*, pp. 400–1; Vicken Babkenian and Peter Stanley, *Armenia, Australia and the Great War* (Strawberry Hills, NSW: NewSouth, 2016), pp. 109–11; Kévorkian, *Le génocide*, pp. 495–525; Nesim Ovadya Izrail, *24 Nisan 1915: İstanbul, Çankırı, Ankara* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2013), pp. 157–78; Aram Andonian, 'Hampartsoum Hampartsoumian', in *Almanach de Renaissance* (Paris: n.p., 1919) (in Armenian), pp. 71, 73, 75–80. I thank Anna Ohannessian-Charping for sharing her translation with me.

Evidently, the acting governor also used the opportunity to stamp out Muslim opposition to the CUP, as he accused some of his victims of involvement with the Liberal Entente Party, which led to a number of Muslims being arrested. A purge of public servants followed. On 1 August 1915, Atif Bey dismissed all Armenian provincial officials. Several, however, appointed by the central authorities, were not under his authority. Thus, the acting governor had to request special orders for their removal, a demand based solely on their ethnic profile. The Ministry of Justice, aiming to cover up its motives, claimed that its own official, Dikran Bey, had been dismissed because of 'administrative necessity'. In the case of the provincial agricultural director, Atif Bey deported him first and then presented the Ministry of Agriculture with a *fait accompli*. He failed, however, to get rid of his deputy governor, Sadiq Vidjdani Bey. The Interior Ministry refused to allow full control over the provincial administration to its new emissary.¹⁶

On 6 August a group of Greeks and Armenians, some members of the teaching staff and their families at Anatolia College, a US missionary institution at Marsovan, arrived at Angora in time to witness the round-up of Armenians – and to have their own travel permits seized by the police. When professors Hovhannes Arozian and Demirdjian called on Police Chief Bahaeddin Bey, he refused to return their documents and disputed Arozian's US citizenship. Atif Bey informed the Interior Ministry of the case. After some time, Arozian's appeal, based on his American citizenship, was denied by the Directorate of Public Security. Even had the appeal been granted, however, it was by then too late. Atif and Bahaeddin had already taken action. The police had picked up the two academics at night and sent them on the road with the other Armenians. Later, the police director maintained ominously that the two had 'reached their destination safe and sound'. Their 'destination' was revealed when one of the carriage drivers reported that the men had been robbed and 'finished off on the way'. Professor J. Xenidis, a Greek, saw a carriage loaded with shovels and spades in front of the police

¹⁶ DH.ŞFR 482-70, Atif to DH, Angora, 3–4 August 1915; 481-105, Atif to Ministry of Justice, Angora, 29 July 1915; 481-106, Atif to Ministry of Education, Angora, 29 July 1915; 482-12, Atif to Ministry Post, Telegram, and Telephone, Angora, 1 August 1915; 482-12, Atif to Ministry Post, Telegram, and Telephone, Angora, 1 August 1915; 482-47, Atif to Ministry of Justice, Angora, 3 August 1915; 482-76, Atif to DH, Angora, 3–4 August 1915; 55-5, Minister of Justice to Angora prov., 15 August 1915; 55-32, Minister of Justice to Angora prov., 15 August 1915; 484-54, Atif to Ministry of Trade and Agriculture, Angora, 17 August 1915; 55-228, Subhi to Angora prov., 25 August 1915; AA-GC 57, Atif to provincial authorities, Angora, 1 August 1915; *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti, Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, Faaliyetleri*, vol. 5 (Ankara: Genelkurmay Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt ve Denetleme Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2006), p. 469; Babkenian and Stanley, *Armenia, Australia and the Great War*, pp. 109–11.

directorate, another ominous sign. Muslim farmers spoke of massacre sites where the irregulars killed people. One Albanian alone claimed to have killed fifty Armenians.¹⁷

Talaat's deportation order had effectively curtailed the military's ability to oppose Atif Bey's actions. But Halil Redjai Bey did not give up. Again the commander invoked his authority over military personnel to prohibit the deportation of military families and anyone of military age. Moreover, he insisted that the deportation order applied only to men and refused to deport women and children without explicit orders from the Ministry of War. Within days, the Interior Ministry had approved his exemption for military families, as well as one for Armenian railway employees.¹⁸

Waiting for his appeal at the War Ministry to countermand the commander's exemptions, Atif Bey thought up ways to keep his programme on track. On 9 August 1915, he suggested deporting *Protestant* Armenians. The Interior Ministry seemed interested and inquired about their numbers; evidently, demographic considerations were important. For the moment, however, those Protestant Armenians still at their domiciles were exempted. Thus, about 1,900 of approximately 2,500 Protestant Armenians remained in the province. Although the Ministry of the Interior deemed that number acceptable, Atif did not. He demanded full deportation.¹⁹

Diplomacy and deniability

At the moment, however, the Interior Ministry had other worries. It had received news of the massacre of the Armenian prisoners from Constantinople who had

¹⁷ DH.EUM.Ecanib Kalemi 2-7, Atif to DH, Angora, 10 August 1915; EUM to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 17 August 1915; Dept. for Political Affairs to DH, 6 September 1915; EUM to Angora prov., 11 September 1915; Aram Andonian, *Documents officiels concernant les massacres arméniens* (Paris: Imprimerie Turabian, 1920), p. 147; Aram Andonian, 'Hampartsoumian', pp. 70, 73-4, 80; Alice Odian-Kasparian, 'The 1915 Massacres of the Armenians in the State of Angora, Turkey', *Journal of Armenian Studies* 4, no. 1-2 (1992): 124-5; Bryce and Toynbee, *Treatment*, pp. 393-5, 398.

¹⁸ AAA-GC 57, Halil Redjai to Caesarea Acting Division Command, Angora, 10 August 1915; Halil Redjai to HN [Ministry of War], Angora, 12 August 1915; DH.ŞFR 483-101, Zekai to DH, Caesarea, 13 August 1915; 55-18, Minister to Angora prov., 15 August 1915; 55-48, Minister to Angora prov., 17 August 1915; 484-93, Atif to DH, 19 August 1915; AAA-GC 57, Halil Redjai to Caesarea Acting Division Command, Angora, 10 August 1915; Halil Redjai to HN, Angora, 12 August 1915; DH.ŞFR 483-101, Zekai to DH, Caesarea, 13 August 1915; 55-18, Minister to Angora prov., 15 August 1915; 55-48, Minister to Angora prov., 17 August 1915; 484-93, Atif to DH, 19 August 1915.

¹⁹ DH.ŞFR 483-38, Atif to DH, Angora, 9 August 1915; 54/A-350, Minister to Angora prov., 10 August 1915; 55-20, Minister to Angora prov., 15 August 1915; 485-14, Atif to DH, Angora, 23 August 1915; 55-189, Minister to Angora prov., 24 August 1915.

been deported in April to Angora. Many of these men were well-known figures, and since Turkey's treatment of the Armenians had already become an international scandal, the ministry wanted to avoid more publicity. Aware of the delicacy of the situation and knowing that almost all of the men had already been murdered, Atif Bey refused to submit a report on the affair in writing. Instead, he dispatched Bahaeddin Bey to Constantinople for a secret briefing.²⁰

Throughout the deportations from 1915 to 1917, the central authorities had tried to keep track of the programme's progress. In August 1915, the Interior Ministry's Directorate for the Settlement of Tribes and Immigrants (IAMM) requested information on the overall number of deportees. The success of Commander Halil Redjai's foot dragging can be seen in Atif Bey's dismal report that, as late as 21 August 1915, only 9,802 Angoran Armenians had been deported. Three days later, another 4,417 Armenians, mostly from Yosgad, followed. But then things moved rapidly. By early September, only 10,916 Armenians remained in Yosgad district, among them a few Protestants. In the city of Angora, aside from military families, only 1,054 Catholic Armenian women and about 800 other Armenians remained.²¹

By then, the Interior Ministry seems to have shifted in a more pragmatic direction. Starting on 29 August, those Armenians still in their residences would be allowed to remain, and it also exempted artisans and railway personnel, whose skills were needed. Deportations by railway ceased, and deportee caravans were halted at their location to allow Shukru Bey of the Directorate for the Settlement of Tribes and Immigrants to reorganize deportations along the railway. By then, however, the massacre of nineteen Armenian employees close to the station had led the majority of the railway's Armenian staff to flee, causing an interruption of operations. When the railway company sent a representative to Angora to demand the men's return, Atif, who must have known more than he was saying, exclaimed, 'It is impossible to return them. Do you understand: impossible! They will never return.'²²

²⁰ DH.ŞFR 55-99, Minister to Angora prov., 18 August 1915; 484-94, Atif to DH, 19 August 1915.

²¹ DH.ŞFR 484-97, Atif to DH, 19 August 1915; 55-139, Şükrü to Angora prov., 21 August 1915; 485-29, Atif to DH, Angora, 24 August 1915; 486-20, Atif to DH, Angora, 29 August 1915; 55-208, Minister to Angora prov., 25 August 1915; 55-211, Minister to Angora prov., 25 August 1915; 55-256, Talaat to Angora prov., 25 August 1915, EUM Spec. 492; 486-84, Atif to DH, Angora, 31 August 1915; 487-36, Atif to DH, Angora, 4 September 1915.

²² DH.ŞFR 55-287, Minister to Angora prov., 29 August 1915; 55-318, Talaat to Angora prov., 29 August 1915; 55-341, Minister to Angora prov., 31 August 1915; 55/A-16, Talaat to Angora prov., 31 August 1915; 55/A-17, Subhi to Angora prov., 1 September 1915; 493-126, Sadiq Vijdani to DH, Angora, 16 October 1915; AA-PA, Türkei 183/38, A 27887, Stürmer, Constantinople, 5 September 1915; Austria, Haus-, Hof und Staatsarchiv (HHSStA), PA XL 272, Intelligence-Report No. 444, Constantinople, 2 December 1915;

It was obvious that news of the atrocities in the province had reached the foreign community in Constantinople, which may account for Talaat's pragmatic turn. Missionaries informed the US ambassador, Henry Morgenthau, that the Anatolian College professors Arozian and Demirdjian had been murdered. To quiet the diplomatic representatives, Talaat promised that Mrs Arozian and Mrs Gulbenkian – the wife of Dikran G. Gulbenkian, one of the college's graduates – and their children would be allowed to come to Constantinople. Atif responded by claiming that they could not be found. But such was the Ministry of the Interior's pressure that a day later the acting governor reported that he had ordered his police director, Bahaeddin Bey, to allow their departure. Following further diplomatic pressure, the Interior Ministry officially notified provincial and district authorities, on 29 August, that the government had no intention of annihilating the Armenians. The deportations, they were now told, were simply a tool to frustrate Armenian national aspirations. The central authorities reaffirmed earlier exemptions, as well as orders for the protection and provisioning of deportees. Any officials, gendarmes or civilians implicated in atrocities were to be severely punished.²³

In a further communication, the Interior Ministry addressed Atif Bey directly. In blunt terms, it informed the acting governor that the 'Armenian problem' had been solved as far as the eastern provinces were concerned. Thus, there remained no need for large-scale massacres. Moreover, it admonished Atif for the bestial offences that his deportation officials, gendarmes and civilians had committed around Angora. This had caused embarrassment for the government. Fanatics, it insisted, should not be entrusted with deportations, and in any case, for the moment, deportations could be postponed even in areas deemed insecure. As in its previous communication, it emphasized that offenders would be prosecuted without consideration for their position. Given that the ministry had received a personal briefing on the massacres of the Constantinople deportees from Bahaeddin Bey, a key perpetrator, its professed ignorance of what had already

Hilmar Kaiser, 'The Baghdad Railway and the Armenian Genocide, 1915–1916: A Case Study in German Resistance and Complicity', in Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), p. 80; Hilmar Kaiser, 'Shukru Bey and the Armenian Deportations in the Fall of 1915', in Talha Çiçek (ed.), *Syria in World War I: Politics, Economy, and Society* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 169–236.

²³ DH,ŞFR 55-292, Minister to Angora, prov., 29 August 1915; 55-303, Minister to Angora prov., 30 August 1915; 487-93, Atif to DH, Angora, 6 September 1915; 487-122, Atif to DH, Angora, 7 September 1915; A A-PA, Konstantinopel (Kon) 170, J. No., Mechitarist Congregation, Pera, 7 August 1915; Henry Morgenthau, *United States Diplomacy on the Bosphorus: The Diaries of Ambassador Morgenthau 1913–1916* (Princeton, NJ, and London: Gomidas Institute, 2004), pp. 315, 318, 321–2.

occurred could not have fooled Atif Bey. It was clear that the government was establishing a paper trail that would give it, should future events make it necessary, what is nowadays called 'plausible deniability'. The instructions were also a warning to Atif Bey to leave no trace of his deeds that might embarrass the central authorities.²⁴

On 30 August 1915, the acting ambassador of Turkey's German ally, Prince Ernst Wilhelm zu Hohenlohe-Langenburg, again visited Talaat Bey to make personal representations about the Armenian persecutions and was met with reassuring promises. As the very next day the Catholic Armenian bishop Monsignor Jean Naslian appeared at the German embassy to share a deportation order from Adana, an angry Hohenlohe immediately informed Talaat Bey that he was about to pay another visit. Sensing trouble, the latter hurried to the German embassy himself and assured the prince that he had already wired counter-orders to Adana, adding the same explanation he had given to Atif Bey the day before: that anti-Armenian measures had ceased because an Armenian Question no longer existed.

As evidence, on 2 September 1915, Talaat Bey provided Hohenlohe with German translations of three telegrams he had sent assuring the protection and provisioning of Armenian deportees and promising punishment of offenders. Hohenlohe was unimpressed; he had just received information about fresh massacres in Angora and Trebizond. Admitting the undeniable, the General Directorate for Public Security confirmed the embassy's information about outrages in Angora province on 4 September 1915. It did not relent, adding that Catholic and Protestant Armenians who had been deported or registered as deportees would not be allowed to remain in their homes, nor to return once deported, as the government wanted to eliminate large concentrations of both groups. Since, by that time, the deportation programme had targeted almost the entire empire, Talaat Bey's three telegrams and his promises were revealed as meaningless.²⁵

When perpetrators fall out: governor vs. police chief

Atif Bey did not accept the Interior Ministry's rebuke. He boldly maintained that all his instructions had been implemented and that the deportations had

²⁴ DH.ŞFR 55-290, Minister to Angora prov., 29 August 1915.

²⁵ Talaat handed over translations of DH.ŞFR 55-291; 55-292, 55-341. AA-PA, Kon 170, J. No. 5042, Göppert, [Constantinople], 31 August 1915; J. No. 5118, Mordtmann, [Constantinople], 2 September 1915; Hohenlohe to Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg [hereafter, BH], Pera, 4 September 1915; Mordtmann, [Constantinople], 4 September 1915; Nantes, Valence, 'Rapport'.

been conducted in perfect order. He even claimed that he had no information about assaults or rapes and had certainly received no complaints. A few days later, the acting governor reported that Kirshehir city had been cleared without incident. The Interior Ministry insisted, however, on having information about the number of arrested offenders. Atif Bey replied by denying that there was anything important to report. No attacks by gendarmes or other officials on Armenians had taken place in and around Angora city. Only a few thefts by newly enlisted recruits and deported Armenians had occurred, with some Muslims selling the stolen items. And one Muslim had defrauded an Armenian family. Yes, there were isolated cases of robbery and rape, but the authorities had apprehended the perpetrators and prosecution was under way. The only murder case he was prepared to concede concerned a certain Kurd, Ali, who had killed some Armenians. In other words, Atif Bey continued to insist that no large-scale killings had occurred.²⁶

The acting governor's reassuring report was, of course, false. Atif also played down the plundering that was occurring on a massive scale in the province. The numerous thefts were an indication of the dire straits – shortages of goods, of shops remaining open, of artisans and skilled workers – into which the deportations had thrown the economy. Commander Halil Redjai's warning of dire economic consequences had come true.²⁷

The Directorate for the Settlement of Tribes and Immigrants had put down rules governing Armenian assets in two manuals dated 30 May and 10 June 1915. In view of recent abuses, on 11 August the Interior Ministry issued further instructions. Atif claimed that he had been preventing any profiteering, although Angora's provincial authorities had not even formed a commission for the administration of Armenian assets. Until September 1915, these were in the custody of Atif's police director and CUP insider, Bahaeddin Bey, who, as early as the first wave of arrests, had begun robbing Armenians and storing the loot in his office.²⁸

Regional military and civilian officials, among them Provincial Secretary Sadiq Vidjdani, had Armenians register their real estate in the names of other

²⁶ DH,ŞFR 486-44, Atif to DH, 30 August 1915; 486-46, Atif to DH, Angora, 30 August 1915; 55/A-84, Minister to Angora prov., 5 September 1915; 488-5, Atif to DH, Angora, 7 September 1915; 488-100, Atif to DH, Angora, 11 September 1915; AAA-GC 57, w 628-629, Halil Redjai to Angora prov., Angora, 28 August 1915; Halil Redjai to Angora prov., Angora, 28 August 1915.

²⁷ DH,ŞFR 483-128, Atif to DH, Angora, 14 August 1915; 484-121, Atif to DH, Angora, 21 August 1915.

²⁸ DH,ŞFR 483-59, Atif to DH, Angora, 10 August 1915; 54/A-388, Talaat to Angora prov., 11 August 1915; 483-122, Atif to DH, Angora, 13 August 1915; 55/A-187, Subhi to Angora prov., 9 September 1915; 488-79, Atif to DH, Angora, 10 September 1915; Bryce and Toynbee, *Treatment*, p. 400.

officials, such as Emin Bey. Part of Angora's local military command and a man involved in extortion, Emin Bey regarded 'plundering the Armenians' as a service to the fatherland. Atif Bey assisted by deporting Armenians only after the legal paperwork legitimizing the transfer had been finalized. News about such enrichment spread quickly. Naturally, Atif dismissed the reports, but soon he, too, was complaining about corruption. Relations with Bahaeddin Bey deteriorated, and the governor denounced his own police director's actions.²⁹ In Angora, there was no honour among thieves.

The case of a group of Armenian exiles who had arrived at Angora in late August 1915 had brought the simmering conflict into the open. The Constantinople police directorate had sent the 127 Armenians to Angora, where they had permission to move freely. All of them were Russian subjects and under the supervision of the embassy of the United States, still a neutral country. Given the ongoing diplomatic complications, the exiles' wellbeing was of considerable importance for Talaat. Atif Bey, however, wanted the Russians out and inquired whether he could deport them elsewhere. Given the acting governor's record, deportation meant certain death. The Interior Ministry rejected his proposal. Atif Bey insisted, claiming that the new arrivals were posing a security risk. Here he had his police chief's support. According to Bahaeddin Bey, the Russian Armenians had found ways to communicate with their families and had apparently also made contact with Armenian soldiers in a labour battalion. Offering a compromise, the acting governor proposed sending the men to nearby Ayash. Again the central authorities insisted that the Russian subjects remain under supervision in Angora. In fact, when the Interior Ministry learned that the men had been arrested, it ordered their release and demanded a report of the incident. Atif Bey then claimed that it was Bahaeddin Bey who was refusing to set the men free. Apparently, the police director was adamant about keeping the men in detention in order to be able to deport them later. The man's excessive behaviour in following his own convictions was creating problems, said Atif. As relations between the province's two leading officials continued to deteriorate, Atif Bey denounced his own police director's actions and demanded Bahaeddin Bey's recall. The head of the General

²⁹ DH.ŞFR 484-9, Abdulhad Nuri to DH, Mihalitshdjik, 15 August 1915; 502-106, Hulusi to DH, Angora, 27 December 1915; 59-196, Talaat to Eskishehir district, 4 January 1916; 490-12, Atif to DH, Angora, 20 September 1915; 492-75, Atif to DH, Angora, 6 October 1915; DH.Hukuk Müşavirliği 3-1/24, Legal Department to DH, 28 June 1916; M. Emin Sazak, *Emin Bey'in Defteri. Hatıralar* (Ankara: Tolkun, 2007), pp. 100-2; Çankaya, *Yeni Mülkiye*, p. 943.

Directorate for Public Security, Ismail Djanbolad Bey, agreed: Bahaeddin Bey had to go.³⁰

Atif Bey did not wait for permission and had Bahaeddin Bey arrested on 28 or 29 August. The police director was accused of stealing assets from so-called abandoned property. During a search of the police chief's residence, security forces had found suspicious jewellery, although Bahaeddin Bey insisted that the jewellery was his own. After the search, he was allowed to leave for Constantinople, while the authorities kept the contested items as evidence. Atif also suspected that Bahaeddin Bey had transferred money to bank accounts in Constantinople.

In fact, Bahaeddin Bey had also taken over the house and possessions of bank director Shonorkian, not the only Armenian notable he dispossessed. As Shonorkian's house was located far from the city, Bahaeddin's enemies now used his occupation of the place to argue that he was neglecting his duties. He had also arranged private transport at a price that exceeded his wages. Atif Bey wondered how a man who had needed to borrow money when he first arrived in Angora had been able to finance such a lifestyle. There were allegations that the police director had made unauthorized use of public funds and had refused to investigate a report by authorities in Eskişehir that Angora's police officials, his own subordinates, had been extorting money from Armenian women, simply dismissing the information as slander. Although Bahaeddin Bey's excuses were no different from the acting governor's own responses to similar inquiries from the central authorities, Atif Bey deemed the police director's reply cause for action. Nor was he inhibited by the fact that he had been the one responsible for entrusting Bahaeddin Bey with 'administering' Armenian properties in the first place.³¹

But Bahaeddin Bey had a card or two to play himself. In Constantinople, the disgraced police chief lodged a complaint of his own with the Interior

³⁰ DH.ŞFR 489-11, Atif to DH, Angora, 13 September 1915; 56-29, Minister to Angora prov., 15 September 1915; 489-98, Atif to DH, Angora, 19 September 1915; 56-96, Minister to Angora prov., 21 September 1915; 56-146, Talaat to Angora prov., 25 September 1915; 490-134, Atif to DH, Angora, 26 September 1915; 490-136, Atif to DH, Angora, 26 September 1915; 491-22, Atif to DH, Angora, 27 September 1915; 491-51, Atif to DH, 28 September 1915; 491-71, Atif to DH, Angora, 29 September 1915; DH.EUM.MEM 69-18, Ismail Djanbolad, 29 September 1915; 56-250, Ismail Djanbolad to Angora prov., 2 October 1915; Yervant Odian, *Accursed Years: My Exile and Return from Der Zor, 1914-1919* (London: Gomidas Institute, 2009), p. 46.

³¹ Bahaeddin Bey had extorted considerable sums from Garabed Odian. The central authorities had exempted the prominent cloth producer from deportation, despite Bahaeddin Bey's resistance, because Odian was a supplier of the Ottoman court. Odian-Kasparian, 'Massacres', pp. 128-9; DH.ŞFR 491-101, Atif to DH, Angora, 30 September 1915; 492-1, Atif to DH, Angora, 3 October 1915.

Ministry on 5 October. Now Atif Bey was forced to explain his police director's arrest and removal from office without the Interior Ministry's prior authorization. He argued that Bahaeddin hadn't been fired but had resigned when the evidence against him mounted. In other words, the man Atif Bey had had arrested was no longer a police director (a public official, to be protected by the ministry) but simply a member of the general public.³²

Bahaeddin Bey's case against his former boss did, however, bother the central government, and on 3 October 1915 it removed Atif Bey from Angora and reassigned the acting governor of Angora to acting governor of Kastamonu province. The fact that the Interior Ministry did not nominate a successor suggests that its decision had not been planned beforehand.³³

With Atif out of the way, the Interior Ministry entrusted Judge Hulusi Bey with the investigation of Bahaeddin Bey. Hulusi Bey presided over a special commission that the Interior Ministry had formed to prosecute abuses in connection with the deportations. During the interrogation in Angora, the former police director had admitted to taking the personal effects of prisoners, as the prisoners were to be killed in any case, the judge later revealed to Radi Bey (the very notable, the reader may remember, to whom Atif's predecessor, Governor Mahzar Bey, had confided that he had received oral instructions from Atif to massacre Armenians). Judge Hulusi Bey had made it clear that his investigation concerned only the property of the Armenians, not their massacres. Thus, with Bahaeddin Bey insisting that he had passed on the loot to the Abandoned Property Commission, the case for prosecution seemed weak. As for the funds Bahaeddin Bey had taken from Armenians *prior* to the creation of the commission, he claimed that they had been used to provide for needy families and other good causes. Hulusi Bey was not satisfied with these explanations, but handing the matter over to a military court, he resigned from his assignment on 6 January 1916, citing reasons of health.³⁴

³² DH.ŞFR 56-292, Talaat to Angora prov., 5 October 1915; 492-75, Atif to DH, Angora, 6 October 1915; DH.EUM 2nd Department (ŞB) 12-14, Bahaeddin to EUM, Angora, 5 October 1915.

³³ MV 241-153, 3 October 1915.

³⁴ BEO 4377-328229, GV to DH, ML [Finance Ministry], Ministries of War, Justice and Council of State, 30 September 1915; MV 199-35, 29 September 1915; DH.ŞFR 500-93, Hulusi to DH, Angora, 9 December 1915; 504-44, Hulusi to DH, Angora, 6 January 1916; DH.EUM.Evrak Odası 28-1, Hulusi to DH, Angora, 1 December 1915; AAA-GC 18, Armenian Patriarchate, 'Second Report on Turks Responsible for the Armenian Atrocities of the Bureau of Information', 8 September 1921; 56, Deposition of Radi Bey [December 1918].

Judge Hulusi Bey could see which way the wind was blowing. When Talaat asked for the special commission's findings and learned that Bahaeddin Bey was already facing trial, he had the man set free and had the military court surrender its investigation file to his own ministry – whereupon all proceedings against the former police director ceased. By gaining control over the evidence, with the help of the War Ministry, Talaat Bey aborted any further prosecution. The Ottoman High Command, for its part, entrusted Bahaeddin Bey with an assignment abroad. Not everyone was in the loop, for the Ministry of Finance continued to search for the police official as it prepared a second case against him. Given the desire of other departments to prosecute Bahaeddin Bey, Talaat seems to have decided it was easier to move the defendant out of the country than to persuade his colleagues to drop the case. As military personnel were beyond the reach of the civil authorities, he initially tried, unsuccessfully, to place Bahaeddin Bey with the Fourth Army. Although that failed, the Interior Ministry did manage to secure for Bahaeddin an appointment with the Third Army. There its commander, Vehib Pasha, appointed the man who had just escaped court martial himself as judge at a military court at Samsun. The arrangement avoided embarrassment for Talaat, for an investigation could have implicated him and other top officials. And the transfer allowed Bahaeddin to continue his criminal activity.³⁵

Hence, in December 1916, when the army began to deport Ottoman Greeks from the Black Sea coast to the interior, Bahaeddin Bey was a close and active collaborator with Refet Pasha, who had been put in charge of the operations. Despite assurances that 'the Greeks are not the Armenians and we do not treat them like the Armenians,' the German embassy soon received reports of extortions and outright plundering. Even so, the take was apparently not enough for Bahaeddin, for on 6 January 1917, Vehib Pasha asked the Ministry of the Interior to pay 'Judge' Bahaeddin Bey a salary. Although Talaat indicated at first that he would oblige, three months later the *mutesarraf* (district governor), Mushtak Bey, reported that the wages had not been regularly transferred. He also revealed that Bahaeddin Bey had identified himself as a director in the General Directorate for Public Security (EUM), under the Ministry of the Interior. The Interior Ministry replied that Bahaeddin was no longer connected with it and that it was the military who had sent him to Samsun. Apparently, no division of the Ottoman government – military,

³⁵ DH.ŞFR 60-80, Talaat to Angora prov., 22 January 1916; 506-77, Suleiman Nedjmi to DH, Angora, 23 January 1916; 60-108, Talaat to Angora prov., 24 January 1916; 506-113, Suleiman Nedjmi to DH, Angora, 25 January 1916; 64-102, Talaat to Djemal Pasha, 9 May 1916; 2 ŞB 20-14, EUM to ML, 16 March 1916; ML to DH, 8 April 1916; EUM to ML, 13 April 1916; Dadrian and Akçam, *Tehcir*, pp. 240-1.

judicial, provincial or police – wished to claim Bahaeddin, at least not when it came to paying him. Yet when the *mutessarrif* indicated that the man was creating problems, Talaat ordered him to Constantinople. Bahaeddin clearly foresaw disciplinary action and so stalled, demanding travel expenses and claiming he had no money. Twenty liras were wired to him, on condition of his immediate departure. Seeing the writing on the wall, the police director turned military judge escaped to Aleppo, where he died in early May 1917. Authorities took the possessions he had brought with him into safekeeping. Aside from furniture worth 25,000 Turkish pounds (Ltq.), the estate included shares in the Crédit Lyonnais, the Anatolian Railway Company, the Crédit Foncier Égyptien and the Compagnie des Tramways et du Téléphone, as well as a deposit certificate worth over 1,200 Ltq. from the Damascus branch of the Banque Impériale Ottomane and twenty Ottoman bonds. In 1919, his widow tried to claim the estate from a Damascus court but was unsuccessful.³⁶

Catholic Armenians: an anomaly?

Talaat Bey's partial exemption of Catholic Angorans, on 3 August 1915, probably spared a number of notables who had been detained during the first wave of arrests. But Atif Bey worked to undo the directive. He explained that 95 per cent of the province's Armenian Catholics lived in Angora city, where they formed the dominant part of the city's Armenian population. Of the 6,799 Catholics, 3,291 were men. Since Catholics considered themselves French protégés, it was imperative to deport them. Shukru Bey, head of the powerful Directorate for the Settlement of Tribes and Immigrants, considered the community's demographic impact and agreed with the acting governor.

³⁶ DH.ŞFR 542-56, Vehib to DH, Third Army HQ, 6 January 1917; 72-23, Talaat to Samsun dist., 15 January 1917; 551-16, Mushtak to DH, Samsun, 10 April 1917; 76-243/29, Abdulhalik to Samsun dist., 26 May 1917; 556-36, Mushtak to DH, Samsun, 4 June 1917; 77-118, Talaat to Samsun district, 6 June 1917; 77-139, Talaat to Samsun dist., 18 June 1917; 557-60, Mushtak to DH, Samsun, 18 June 1917; 77-183, Mustafa Abdulhalik to Samsun dist., 18 June 1917; AA-PA, Türkei 168/15, A 34108, Richard von Kühlmann to BH, Pera, 11 December 1916; A 34610, Kühlmann to BH, Pera, 15 December 1916; A 1828, Kühlmann to BH, Pera, 13 January 1917; A 5933, Kühlmann to Bethmann, Pera, 16 February 1917; Türkei 181 secr./2, A 6742, Kühlmann to BH, Pera, 24 February 1917; Türkei 168/15, A 16641, Greek Bishop, Samsun, 14, 29 January, 21, 26 February 1917, enclosures in Kühlmann to BH, Pera, 17 May 1917; HHStA, PA XXVIII 370, Kwiatkowski to Czernin, Samsun, 6 August 1917; MAÉ, Nantes, Ankara box 47, Jafar al-Askari to Pichon, Aleppo, 31 March 1919, enclosure in Feer to High Commissioner, Beirut, 17 April 17, 1919; Dadrian and Akçam, *Tehcir*, pp. 240-1.

On 11 August, eight days after his initial exemption, Talaat authorized the Catholics' deportation.³⁷

Atif Bey promptly ordered the military to implement the measure. Given recent massacres, it was clear that the instructions to provide safety for the deportees meant little except Atif's determination to create a paper trail that would give the authorities plausible deniability. The wife of an Ottoman officer, learning of the pending arrests, warned her Armenian neighbours, but little could be done. On 28 August 1915, policemen and gendarmes rounded up Catholic Armenian men, including Catholic notables and Bishop Bahabian, robbed them and locked them in the prison that had just been emptied of Armenians. A subsequent police announcement that deportations would proceed by train, but any stragglers would have to walk, brought more out of hiding. The authorities separated the last men from their families and interned the women and children at the train station. There, security forces raped many and robbed them all, while a number were converted to Islam and given to Muslims. Meanwhile, their church was turned into a detention camp, where appalling conditions reigned.

On 1 September 1915, the authorities ceremoniously circumcised 100 Armenian Apostolic and Catholic boys. At the same time, they registered the military families. After three days in prison, the authorities took away 980 men at night. Police officials and a gendarmerie officer were in charge. The gendarmes shot several who tried to escape. A few clergymen and notables were transported by carriages. When the caravan reached Kara Gedik village in Haimana *kaza*, hundreds of armed men awaited them. The next day, *kaimakam* Mehmed Vehbi Bey declared that Atif Bey had 'pardoned' the deportees – and sent them on to Caesarea.³⁸

It seems possible that stepped-up diplomatic representations prevented the outright massacre of the Catholics. The Austro-Hungarian ambassador, Johann Count von Pallavicini, raised the matter with Talaat, as had Morgenthau. On 4 September, probably referring to the rapes and robberies of 28 August, the Ottoman Interior Ministry actually admitted that an 'incident' had taken place near Angora, which it promised to investigate. On 30 August, Atif Bey

³⁷ DH.ŞFR 54/A-252, Talaat to Angora prov., 3 August 1915; 482-72, Atif to DH, Angora, 4 August 1915; 54/A-276, Talaat to Angora prov., 5 August 1915; 54/A-373, Talaat to Angora prov., 11 August 1915; DH.EUM 2 ŞB 9-110, Şükrü, 11 August 1915.

³⁸ AAA-GC 57, Atif to Army Corps, Angora, 12 August 1915; Atif to Regimental Commander Angora, Division Commander Caesarea, 13 August 1915; Bahaban, *Une page*, pp. 53-78; Pierre Medjimékian, *Les mémoires de ma vie de «déporté» précédés d'une notice biographique* (Aleppo: Imprimerie As-sabatt, 1919), p. 4; Medjimékian, *Les Arméniens*, pp. 21-31, 40-1; Minassian, *Houcher*, pp. 27, 29-30, 34-47; Çankaya, *Mülkiye*, p. 1057, Odian-Kasparian, 'Massacres', p. 126; Arakelyan, *Vukuatı*, pp. 265-87.

reported (perhaps to show that his acts had been within the law) that he had succeeded in deporting 750 Catholic Armenians from the provincial capital *before* the Ministry of the Interior had stopped the expulsions of Catholics. A few days later, he urged the central authorities to restart the railway deportations, alleging that Catholic families wanted to join their deported husbands and fathers. The police directorate was ahead of him, having already sent the families to Eskişehir, after robbing their victims one last time.³⁹

Yosgad says no

The army corps and its commander Halil Redjai Bey had not been alone in opposing Atif. The provincial governor's own subordinate, the *mutessarif* (district governor) of Yosgad, Djemal Bey, invoking national security and (even) higher ideals, had refused to carry out Atif's arrest orders. The men Atif had targeted were the usual suspects – teachers, physicians, pharmacists, priests, merchants and lawyers – and all had been politically active. Nevertheless, Djemal Bey insisted on an order from the *military* authorities before he proceeded. Therefore, Atif Bey was forced to reiterate the government's political agenda, accused Armenians of undermining the Ottoman war effort and demanded the dismissal of Armenian government officials.

Djemal retorted by inquiring whether these instructions also applied to Armenian judges; to employees of the agricultural bank, the state school and the Ottoman Tobacco Administration; and to members of the district's administrative council – thereby underlining the important tasks for military supply that Armenians were performing. Unimpressed, Atif ordered the removal of almost all the Armenians in question. In the case of Armenian judges, however, he lacked authority for a dismissal and sought support from the respective central government departments.⁴⁰

While these exchanges were taking place between the provincial and district leadership, in Boghaslian the *kaimakam*, Kemal Bey, had been

³⁹ DH.ŞFR 486-46, Atif to DH, Angora, 30 August 1915; 488-124, Atif to DH, Angora, 12 September 1915; 492-75, Atif to DH, Angora, 6 October 1915; AA-PA, Türkei 183/38, A 26474, Hohenlohe to BH, Pera, 4 September 1915; A 27887, Stürmer, Constantinople, 5 September 1915; Kon 170, zu J. No. 4815, Mordtmann, Pera, 21 August 1915; zu J. No. 5118, Mordtmann, 4 September 1915; Kon 96, J. No., Mordtmann, Pera, 2 September 1915; HHStA, PA XII 209, Pallavicini to Burián, Jeniköj, 3 September 1915; 464, Hofer, Memorandum, n.p., (received) 26 October 1915; Morgenthau, *Diaries*, p. 318.

⁴⁰ AAA-GC 56, Yosgad indictment, 24-27; 57, Atif to Djemal, Angora, 31 July 1915; Atif to provincial authorities, Angora, 1 August 1915; Djemal to Angora prov., Yosgad, 3 August 1915; Atif to Yosgad dist., Angora, 3 August 1915; Atif to Yosgad Public Prosecutor's Office, Angora, 5 August 1915; Atif to Ministry of Justice, Angora, 5 August, 1915.

organizing massacres. We have seen how, in early May, Armenian and Muslim deserters had hidden in Boghaslian, leading to arrests and charges of Armenian revolutionary activity. But as no further incidents occurred, the issue lay dormant until the final week of July, when Kemal Bey, declaring that Armenians in Boghaslian had attacked Muslim villages, dispatched troops. Although Yosgad authorities had contradicted Kemal's information, saying that it was Muslims who had attacked Armenian villages, Atif Bey had intervened on the side of Kemal, using his report to get the Interior Ministry's authorization for the first round of deportations and the punishment of resisters. On 4 August 1915, the Fifth Independent Army Corps' corps commander, Halil Redjai Bey, whom we have already seen foot-dragging, hearing reports that detainees were being murdered by military personnel, ordered an investigation. The military authorities at Caesarea (Kayseri), then within the army corps' region of control, responded by reporting that a civilian, Boghaslian's *kaimakam*, Kemal Bey, had been responsible for the massacre of 3,160 Armenians and that the allegations of an Armenian rebellion were just a cover-up. When Halil Redjai Bey implicated Kemal, the Interior Ministry ordered its own investigation – commissioning Atif Bey. The acting provincial governor limited his efforts to interviewing Kemal. Kemal claimed that his only action had been to deport 4,000 Armenians. That statement satisfied Atif and the Interior Ministry. The investigation had clearly been a formality.⁴¹

Muslim leaders in Yosgad district, however, took action. In an effort to save their Armenians, Yakub Hodja, a Muslim cleric of Pasha village, announced that the 250 Armenian households of Karabiyik village were Muslim. Supposedly, Muslim scholars had given them spiritual guidance and converted the people. The account left no doubt about the sincerity of these conversions, and Yakub Hodja insisted that the government had no right to interfere with religious law. Thus, he openly challenged, on religious grounds, the state's authority. Even so, the Interior Ministry dismissed the conversions. Shortly afterward, a detachment under the command of *kaimakam* Kemal Bey massacred the converts. The operatives also annihilated other Armenians nearby – who had been concealed by District Governor Djemal Bey.⁴²

On 6 August, the party secretary of the provincial CUP, Nedjati (Kurtuluş) Bey, who had been cooperating closely with Atif, met with District Governor

⁴¹ DH.ŞFR 54/A-326, Minister to Angora prov., 9 August 1915; 484-7, Atif to DH, Angora, 15 August 1915; AAA-GC 57, Halil Redjai to Caesarea Regimental Command, Angora, 4 August 1915; Shabaeddin to Ankara Division Acting Command, Caesarea, 5 August 1915.

⁴² AAA-GC 57, Atif to AC, Angora, 29 July 1915; W 483-486, Ardashes Tashjian, Constantinople, 24 December 1918; DH.ŞFR 481-107, Atif to DH, Angora, 30 July 1915; 54/A-232, Minister to Angora prov., 3 August 1915.

(*mutessarif*) Djemal Bey in the presence of the deputy, Shakir Bey. The emissary read a letter from Atif Bey about the party's policies and ordered Djemal to comply with the deportation scheme. But when Djemal asked for the letter, the CUP representative refused. In response, District Governor Djemal told Party Secretary Nedjati Bey that as he had no official function, his oral communication had no authority. Mutessarif Djemal then reiterated that deportations required military authorization. Necati Bey insisted that Armenians had to be exterminated. Djemal again refused, whereupon the CUP operative left.⁴³

The consequences were not long in coming. On 19 August, Atif Bey dismissed Djemal and appointed his subordinate and adversary, Boghaslian's *kaimakam*, Kemal Bey, to his post as acting district governor. Weeks later, this illegal personnel decision was sanctioned by the Interior Ministry.⁴⁴

Probably in September 1915, the president of Angora's Abandoned Property Commission, Nureddin Bey, and the notable Radi Bey toured the eastern areas of their province. What they saw revealed both the devastation that had taken place under the management of Atif Bey and the evidence of local disapproval. On their way to Yosgad district, they came across countless corpses. In the house of Haridzade Husni Bey, however, Nureddin Bey met an Armenian woman whom the family was sheltering. By hiding under corpses she had survived, badly wounded, an attack by regulars. Captain Husein Fikri Bey had sheltered two Armenians, who had initially been protected on orders of the regional military commander, Salim Bey, who opposed the massacres.⁴⁵ Shortly before their dismissal, Salim Bey and *mutessarif* Djemal Bey had also prevented a massacre of 472 Armenian labour battalion soldiers ordered by the provincial governor of Sivas, Muammer Bey.⁴⁶

But with Kemal Bey now taking control at Yosgad, the situation had changed profoundly. Regional Military Commander Salim Bey denounced Kemal as a fanatic who had organized the slaughter of Armenian villages. Salim Bey's list of perpetrators also included other officials as well as local Circassians and released convicts – and he added that no danger for public security had existed. But within days, atrocities engulfed the district. Ottoman

⁴³ AAA-GC 56, Deposition of Djemal Bey, 12 December 1918; Deposition of Salim Bey, 5 January 1919; Edib to DH, 10 February 1919; Burçin Gerçek, *Akıntıya Karşı. Ermeni Soykırımında Emirlere Karşı Gelenler, Kurtaranlar, Direnenler* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2016), pp. 144–51, 153, 257–65.

⁴⁴ Irade.DH 1516-23, Talaat to Grand Vizier, 11 September 1915.

⁴⁵ AAA-GC 56, Deposition of Radi Bey [December 1918]; Deposition of Ardashes Tashdjian, 23–4 December 1918.

⁴⁶ DH.ŞFR 483-56, Muammer to DH, Sivas, 9/10 August 1915; AAA-GC 56, Deposition of Djemal Bey, 12 December 1918; Deposition of Salim Bey, 5 January 1919.

soldiers massacred several hundred Armenian men four hours south of Yosgad. Near Boghaslian, gendarmes robbed 700 deportees and slaughtered 200 to 250 men and older boys, with the help of civilians as well as military recruits. Later, gendarmes and local Turkish men raped the women and girls. Abductions and more assaults followed. Along the way, survivors among the deportees learned that *all* the Armenian males in the region had been killed on the orders of Kemal Bey.⁴⁷

In view of the ongoing slaughter, the central authorities ordered the production of material to justify the carnage. Provincial authorities had to show that Armenians were in revolt. Atif Bey ordered the army corps to furnish suitable particulars. The army's commander, Halil Redjai Bey, however, continued to report that Armenians were no threat to public security, although 130 Armenian deportees had been massacred by gendarmes in Boghaslian. In a second dispatch, he confirmed the slaughter of entire families in Boghaslian *kaza*, adding that he had ordered military units there to prevent further atrocities. Undeterred, Atif Bey continued to announce armed clashes within his province, with his security units allegedly encountering strong armed resistance. But how strong could that resistance have been when the acting governor's own dispatches regularly reported dozens of armed Armenians killed, while security forces lost few or no men?⁴⁸

Conclusion

For all the dissent and foot-dragging at different levels of the local military and civilian administrations; for all the attempts of a Muslim religious leader to save Armenians by declaring them converts to Islam and of Muslim villagers to hide them; for all its corruption in implementation, the CUP in Angora had succeeded. In July 1915, before the deportations, the Armenian population of the province officially numbered 47,224. On 17 September 1915, Atif Bey reported that 21,236 Armenians had been sent away and 650 more were awaiting departure; 733 Armenian women and children had remained in Angora, but he hoped to deport them soon; 10,916 Armenians were still in Yosgad district, but plans for their departure were under way; and

⁴⁷ AAA-GC 56, Deposition of Salim Bey, 5 January 1919; AA-PA, Türkei 183/39, zu A 30012, Eugen Büge to BH, Adana, 1 October 1915.

⁴⁸ DH.ŞFR 55-150, Minister to Angora prov., 22 August 1915; 55-292, Minister to Angora prov., 29 August 1915; DH.EUM 2 ŞB 54-20, Atif to DH, Angora, 22 September 1915. AAA-GC 57, w 629-629, Atif to AC, Angora, 23 August 1915; Halil Redjai to Angora prov., Angora, 25 August 1915; Halil Redjai to Angora prov., Angora, 28 August 1915; Halil Redjai to Angora prov., Angora, 28 August 1915; Vasif to AC, 28 August 1915.

3,288 more, who remained in other locations, were to be dispersed, for the most part, in Muslim villages for assimilation. In a related dispatch, Atif maintained that, according to Bahaeddin Bey, no Protestants had been deported recently.⁴⁹

By March 1917, the local Armenian population of Angora had dropped to 12,766. About 461 Armenians had come from other areas into the province, while 4,606 Armenians from Angora province were found in places along deportation routes and within the Fourth Army's zone of control. Thus, 29,852 Armenians had disappeared. The data suggested that about 63 per cent of Angora province's Armenians had been killed. The slaughter had been systematic and comprehensive.⁵⁰

In Angora province, the foot-dragging and refusals by civil and military officials to carry out the CUP's anti-Armenian policies were met by the CUP's even stronger determination to destroy the Armenian communities. This agenda depended on abandoning the rule of law. The Interior Ministry deployed two high-ranking emissaries to purge its civil administration. Their dispatch to Angora was an exceptional measure without equivalent in any other province. Both the emissaries and their superiors were aware of the criminal nature of their conduct and so deliberately minimized the paper trail that could implicate them. Still, the extent of the killings became widely known, and the Ministry of the Interior's denials and assurances to foreign diplomats remained unconvincing. The deportations afforded opportunities for personal enrichment that perpetrators were happy to take. But in addition to greed, the perpetrators were inspired by political ideas that let them see themselves as defenders of the nation.

In 1915, declining to comply with the demands of men like Atif Bey was not a way to further one's career. After the removal of Angora's provincial governor Mazhar Bey, Yosgad's *mutessarif* Djemal Bey can have had few doubts about the consequences of his refusal to follow Atif's orders. But, like Mazhar Bey, he shared secret information with other prominent Muslims and made it clear that his position was a matter of conscience. Neither man was a willing executioner.

And they knew they could rely on support from local circles and military commanders. In the extraordinary case of Pasha village, Muslim residents

⁴⁹ DH.ŞFR 489-66, Atif to DH, Angora, 17 September 1915; 489-97, Atif to DH, Angora, 19 September 1915; DH.EUM 2 ŞB 68-79, Atif to DH, Angora, 22 September 1915; Türkiye Cumhuriyeti, Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, *Faaliyetleri*, vol. 1, p. 148.

⁵⁰ DH.ŞFR 605-34, Azmi to DH, Angora, 8 December 1918; 605-75, Azmi to DH, Angora, 12 December 1918; 606-60, Azmi to DH, Angora, December 1918; DH.EUM 2 ŞB 73-49, Atif to DH, Angora, 29 September 1915; 75-46 (no date); Bardakçı, *Evrak-ı Metrûkesi*, pp. 109-39.

notified the Interior Ministry that they opposed persecution and were saving Armenians. Their point of reference was Islam, which for them defined the limits of state power. In emphasizing their notion of religious community, Pasha villagers revealed a concept of society that was welcoming to Armenians. Their cleric, Yakub Hodja, understood that the Armenians' conversions were only nominal. This was no contradiction to his religious values. The Pasha Muslims' practical Islam privileged saving life over a narrow interpretation of their faith.

Little evidence is available about the role of the Liberal Entente Party.⁵¹ Nevertheless, Atif Bey's eagerness to eradicate the party's remnants in the area, as well as the concerted efforts of military commanders to protect such persons, suggest that officers and officials were probably not acting alone. Their systematic effort to hold the CUP and its members accountable after the war also points to the existence of a more formally organized resistance. In autumn 1918, the men of this network emerged to denounce the crimes of Atif Bey and his cronies. It was their testimony that in large part secured the conviction of perpetrators, among them Kemal Bey, who was executed for his crimes. Similarly, Commander Halil Redjai Bey's stand was based on moral conviction and respect for the law. He offered unrelenting opposition to the demands of Atif Bey and the Interior Ministry. It took the intervention of Enver Pasha to force Halil Redjai to tone down his actions. Having failed to prevent deportations as such, the officer tried to limit their impact by redefining exemptions in order to protect large groups of Armenians. Moreover, upon receiving news about massacres, he made sure that the evidence would be recorded. In 1919, he, too, came forward to testify against his countrymen. It was Halil Redjai Bey's insistence that led to Atif Bey's blunt admission that the Ottoman government's official narrative had been concocted to provide a cover. Armenians were not in rebellion. They were killed precisely because they were, overall, peaceful, and so the government did not want to miss this opportunity to exterminate them.

In Angora, the CUP's policies did not find unqualified support. High-ranking officials as well as ordinary people signalled their dissent in ways congruent with their stations and circumstances: for military men and officials, they did it with objections, foot-dragging, even disobedience; for

⁵¹ The opposition at Yozgat was connected to a prominent clan, which continued its opposition to the CUP after the end of the war when the party relabelled itself as a Turkish nationalist movement. See Yunus Özger, *Sicill-i Ahval Defterlerine Göre Osmanlı Bürokrasisinde Yozgatlı Devlet Adamları* (Istanbul: İQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, 2010), pp. 218–20; and Mahmut Celâleddin Bey, *Osmanlı Mutasarrıfı Çapanoğlu Mahmut Celâleddin (Celâl) Bey'in Hâtraları* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2013).

those in more modest circumstances, by hiding victims and/or welcoming them as Muslims. The story of these actions qualifies the stereotype of a state apparatus united in pursuit of genocide and of a largely complicit Muslim population. The role of both Ottoman state and Muslim society deserves a more careful evaluation than is reflected in much of our historiography.

Part Three

The Empire's Darkest Hour

Zohrab and Vartkes: Ottoman Deputies and Armenian Reformers

Raymond H. Kévorkian

Among members of the Armenian political elites who were the first victims of the extermination enterprise of the CUP (Committee of Union and Progress, or *İttihad ve Terakki Firkası*; commonly shortened to *İttihad* or *İttihadist*), Krikor Zohrab and Vartkes (pseudonym for Hovhannes Seringulian) are often mentioned together, perhaps because the two deputies were assassinated on the same day, 2 August 1915, by CUP military officer Çerkez Ahmed. The crime occurred in Şeytan Deresi, a deep gorge on the road to Diyarbekir, two hours from Urfa, exactly two months after their arrest and deportation from the capital.¹

Spared during the round-ups of 24 April 1915, which had emptied the capital of its Armenian elite, these two personalities were considered close friends of and highly regarded by Minister of the Interior Mehmed Talaat, the great organizer of the destruction of the Armenians. They were, in fact, the most prominent representatives of the Armenian political class. Having initiated many of the laws aimed at modernizing the governance of the Ottoman Empire, they had also been involved in the negotiations on the reforms of six (finally seven) eastern provinces, signed on 8 February 1914.

¹ Yervant Odian, *Անիծեալ Տարիներ, 1914–1919, Անձնական Յիշատակներ* (The Cursed Years, 1914–1919, Personal Recollections), published in instalments in *Jamanag* 17 (27 February 1919). Talaat or his aide in the Interior Ministry, Ali Münif, personally telephoned Zohrab's wife to tell her that 'her husband had died of a heart attack in Urfa.' A. S. Sharuryan, *Գրիգոր Չոհրապի կյանքի եւ գործունեության տարեգրություն* (Annales of the Life and Work of Krikor Zohrab) (Etchmiadzin: Armenian Catholicosate, 1996), pp. 492–493; Vahakn Dadrian, 'Documentation of the Armenian Genocide in Turkish Sources,' in Israel Charney (ed.), *Genocide: A Critical Bibliographic Review II* (London: Alan L. Berger, 1991), pp. 119–20, provides a list of the Turkish sources on these murders, as do the commentaries in Rafaël de Nogales, *Four Years beneath the Crescent* (New York and London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), p. 73, on Major Ahmed. The next day, Zohrab's watch and ring were on sale in Urfa: Aram Sahagian, *Դիւցազնական Ուրֆան եւ իր Հայորդիները* (Heroic Urfa and his Armenians) (Beirut: Urhayi Hayrenatsagan Miutian, 1955), p. 802.

Even before they met, in the aftermath of the constitutional revolution of July 1908, the two had been active in the anti-Hamidian opposition. But while Vartkes and Zohrab are often seen as alike because of their common cause, common arrest and common fate, their activism had been in very different registers: Vartkes, in the provinces, where social and political conflict and, hence, danger were greatest, and death only one step away, had been a leader in the underground; Zohrab was the intellectual and activist attorney in the capital, where hope was highest and the possibility of a peaceful outcome seemed most plausible. The revolution of 1908 brought Zohrab back from exile and Vartkes out of prison. But although the militant Vartkes makes frequent appearances in the following story, it is Zohrab's path that this chapter will follow, not only because he left a diary that provides a rich source for understanding these events but also because no one else among the Armenian political *Prominente* was so willing and so able to negotiate with his Turkish counterparts and to reach an agreement with promising prospects. The personal failure of this figure thus makes a larger point: a world in which all-or-nothing nationalism had taken over found no place for even this most conciliatory and well integrated of Armenians – not because of his failings but because of his gifts, resources and capacities. Looking at the empire and the Young Turk leadership through Zohrab's eyes allows us to follow the political dynamics that would bring Zohrab and Vartkes together, as it did most Ottoman Armenians, in a common tragedy.

Zohrab was born in Constantinople in 1861 and Vartkes in Erzerum in 1871. The first received his secondary education at the famous Getronagan High School, which trained a good number of the Armenian elites of the Ottoman capital; the second was educated at the Sanasarian High School, Erzerum, which attracted the best students from the Armenian high plateau. Both had an excellent mastery of Armenian as well as the French practised by all Ottoman elites, but unlike Zohrab, who spoke perfect Turkish and wrote in *Osmanlı*, Vartkes spoke only a rudimentary Turkish, a regional dialect of Erzerum.

Vartkes joined the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) at a very early age. He became a member of a permanent cadre in the Caucasus and then in Bulgaria, which – enjoying the goodwill of local authorities – served as a logistical base for the party. The Hamidian massacres of 1894–6 brought him back to the Armenian provinces, where he experienced his baptism by fire as a member of the resistance. In 1901, after Sultan Abdülhamid II had eradicated local networks, Vartkes was entrusted with the leadership of the party in Van. Although faced with the sultan's political police and his Kurdish guardians and living undercover, Vartkes succeeded in forming partisan units and rebuilding a political leadership. Witnesses to his fieldwork agree

that he entered into dialogue with other local forces, notably the Armenakan, the first Armenian local political party, and even with certain Kurdish tribal chiefs, whose respect he had won by leading actions against the authorities – and punishing those guilty of exactions against the Armenian villagers. This experience undercover, and of frequent clashes with the Ottoman gendarmerie under precarious conditions, mostly in the mountains, ended in 1903, when Vartkes was arrested in Van. Condemned to death, his sentence was commuted to 101 years' imprisonment, and he was interned in the Diyarbekir region. As late as March 1908, his comrades' efforts to get him released were in vain.² The torture he suffered during his detention left him with a limp for the rest of his life, forcing him to walk with a cane.

Thus, it was an experienced militant who emerged from prison in July 1908, in the euphoria of the Young Turk revolution, and who was celebrated by the local authorities, including the governor, as a hero. In the Kurdish environment of Diyarbekir, Vartkes now enthusiastically participated alongside local Unionists in official receptions. Other Dashnak militants, however, remained on their guard. Notwithstanding the optimism of the future parliamentary deputy, they refused 'to reveal . . . their organizational structure or the source of their arms.'³ They knew that apart from clandestine Armenian networks, which had contributed greatly and at heavy cost to the anti-Hamidian front, in this region the Ottoman opposition was virtually non-existent. And they had witnessed the reappearance on the local scene of Arif and Feyzi Bey, two former executioners of Armenians, who had recently also rallied to the CUP's cause.⁴

Vartkes's older colleague, Krikor Zohrab, had spent the Hamidian period in Constantinople. As a young law student, he quickly became involved in intellectual life, first publishing articles in the Istanbul press, then founding or managing Armenian-language newspapers that were confronted daily with Abdülhamid's formidable censorship. His news stories exposing social conditions rewarded Zohrab with a growing reputation. He became a prominent defence attorney for Armenian, Albanian, Bulgarian, Macedonian and Young Turk revolutionaries, as well as for other militants in opposition to the sultan. In autumn of 1896, shortly after the famous takeover of the Ottoman Bank by the Armenian revolutionaries, the Porte accused Zohrab, now a lawyer for two Armenian notables (Apig Unjian and Garabed

² Vahan Papazian, *Իմ Յուշերը* (Memoirs), vol. 1 (Boston: n.p., 1950), pp. 512–35.

³ Gaidz F. Minassian, 'Les relations entre le Comité Union et Progrès et la Fédération révolutionnaire arménienne à la veille de la Première Guerre mondiale d'après les sources arméniennes', *Revue d'histoire arménienne contemporaine* 1 (1995): 53.

⁴ Hovhannes Yeretsian, 'Հ. Յ. Դաշնակցութիւնը Տիգրանակերտին մէջ' (The ARF in Dikranagerd), *Hairenik* (April 1956): 49.

Basmajian), of ‘helping a revolutionary committee.’ The next year, he naturally agreed to chair the Dreyfusard Committee that had just been formed in the Ottoman capital. His oratorical gifts did not spare him from the vindictive powers that successfully demanded his ejection from the Constantinople bar in 1902. About to be arrested, he fled to Paris, a magnet for anti-Hamidian émigrés. In 1908, however, just a few days after the proclamation of the constitution and the coming to power of the CUP leadership, Zohrab was back in the Ottoman capital, where he became a central figure in its political life. Not affiliated with a political party, he embodied the Ottoman elite working from the inside to put an end to an Ottoman system no longer responding to the needs of the time.⁵

In the first days of the revolution of July 1908, this elite embodied, in its own words, a ‘link between conservative circles and Armenian militants from the revolutionary parties.’⁶ Krikor Zohrab, who returned from exile on 2 August, announced on 5 August that he intended to found an Ottoman Constitutional Club. On 13 August, that improvised club organized a public meeting in the Taksim gardens. Some 50,000 people from all backgrounds attended the occasion, in which Zohrab, expressing himself in Turkish, roused the enthusiasm of the crowd of Muslims, Christians and Jews by declaring, ‘Our common religion is freedom.’⁷ Zohrab also appeared very briefly alongside the main Unionist leaders, Ahmed Rıza and Dr Bahaeddin Şakir, on the occasion of liberal Prince Sultanzâde Mehmet Sabahadin’s return from exile to the Ottoman capital on 2 September 1908.⁸ A conference on the theme of the ‘Revision of the Constitution’, held on 30 August at the Sahagian College in Samatia, indicates how the revolution was being welcomed in Armenian circles. This time, Zohrab expressed himself in Armenian and stressed the need to overhaul the outdated constitution.⁹

In this new situation, power within the Armenian *millet* was uneasily shared between conservatives and activists returning from exile whose parties were now officially registered, a ‘cohabitation’ between two political cultures that was not without tension. Conservative circles, however, were represented by neither of the two Armenian deputies elected in the capital in

⁵ The fact that he left a journal, which he kept in detail until the summer of 1915 is not the least of our advantages in grasping the experience of this personality. Krikor Zohrab, *Երկերի ժողովածոյ* (Complete Works), ed. Albert Sharurian, vol. 4, *Diary, 1912–1915* (Erevan: National Academy of Sciences, 2003), pp. 341–432.

⁶ Sharuryan, *Annales*, p. 155.

⁷ Sharuryan, *Annales*, pp. 155–6.

⁸ Stepanos Sapah–Giulian, *Պատասխանատուները* (The Responsible) (Providence: Baykar, 1916), pp. 150–1.

⁹ Sharuryan, *Annales*, pp. 159–60.

the first elections of the constitutional era, Krikor Zohrab and Bedros Halajian, nor was either of them a member of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation.¹⁰ Vartkes, who *was* an ARF member, was elected to the Ottoman parliament as deputy for Erzerum, his birthplace, along with his ARF colleague Armen Garo (Karekin Pastermajian).

As for the Armenian National Assembly, after a ban of thirty years it reopened its doors on 3 October 1908. It had eighty representatives, and on its new governing board, the Political Council, led by the liberal Stepan Karayan, sat adherents of the Dashnak and Hnchak parties, Harutiun Shahrikian and Murad (Hampartsum Boyajian), respectively – as well as the inescapable Krikor Zohrab. At the assembly's 17 October session, Zohrab presented a report on behalf of the Political Council regarding the general situation in the eastern provinces, the proposals in which reveal how little had changed since the revolution. The report proposed that a joint Turkish–Armenian commission, with executive power, be established to investigate conditions in the east; that corrupt *valis* and *hamidiye* officers guilty of crimes be dismissed; that plunderers and assassins be tried before a court in Istanbul; that lands confiscated during the Hamidian era be restored to their owners; that rights and exemptions similar to those conferred on *muhacir* (Muslim migrants) be accorded also to Armenian exiles wishing to return to their villages; that extortions of Armenian peasants by beys and ağas be stopped; and that people on the verge of famine be supplied with wheat and seeds.¹¹

That said, the fifteen Armenian deputies who arrived in the Ottoman parliament dealt mainly with issues of general interest, not mentioning those related to the Armenian Question.¹² Krikor Zohrab, for example, played a fundamental role in the commission responsible for drafting the law reforming the courts; Vartkes and Garo, a training engineer, worked on the 'Chester project', a proposed railway line to link Istanbul to the Iranian border. The Dashnak physician Dr Vahan Papazian worked to reform the school system and its 'secularization'; Dr Nazaret Daghavarian, another doctor and an agronomist, drew up most of the basic law for the development of

¹⁰ Interestingly, the Ottoman Constitutional Club nominated both men on 18 September in an election by secret ballot: Sharuryan, *Annales*, p. 163. It should also be noted that, initially, the patriarch tried vainly to play a role in setting the rules for nominating Armenian candidates.

¹¹ Ատենագրութիւն Ազգային ժողովոյ: Վերաբացում 1908-09 նստաշրջանի (*Minutes of the Inaugural Session of the National Assembly 1908-1909*) (Constantinople, Armenian Patriarchate, 1909), pp. 39, 49–54.

¹² Papazian, *Memoirs*, vol. 2, p. 101. The Armenian delegation had opted for direct negotiations with the government and even the Young Turk Central Committee in order to circumvent the tensions that reigned in parliament, where many conservatives, especially from the provinces, had been elected on CUP lists.

agriculture and another for the reform of the health system and improvement of hygiene.¹³ All of this indicates the spirit – what is good for the country is good for Armenians – in which these deputies worked toward reforming the empire. Zohrab's parliamentary activity is exemplary in this respect. Although challenged by certain conservative circles, who accused him of knowing 'only the literary aspect of national life',¹⁴ as spokesman and leader of the Armenian deputies, Zohrab was noteworthy for his realism. On his way to the inaugural session of parliament, Zohrab first paid his respects to the party to which he owed his election by going to CUP headquarters, on Nuri Osmaniye Street.¹⁵ From there, he departed by car with Mustafa Asım, a Unionist magistrate.¹⁶ He sat next to Hüseyin Cahit, editor-in-chief of the Young Turks' newspaper *Tanin*.¹⁷ Yet the first intervention of the Armenian lawyer before parliament, on 24 December, illustrates the growing 'misunderstanding' that was already developing between Armenian and Unionist deputies. Zohrab denounced the apparently irregular election of a certain Serdatzâde Mustafa, known in his constituency of Şabinkarahisar as a brigand and murderer. But he was rebuked by his non-Armenian colleagues; the background of the accused does not seem to have shocked anyone.¹⁸

In Armenian circles in Istanbul, it was shameful that no deputy supported the Armenian lawyer's position, although everyone knew that Serdatzâde Mustafa had been heavily involved in the November 1895 massacres in his

¹³ Papazian, *Memoirs*, vol. 2, pp. 99–100.

¹⁴ Or so said Puzant Kechian, editor of the Istanbul daily *Piuzantion*, in no. 3706, 15 December 1908, p. 1.

¹⁵ The CUP had initially blocked his candidacy; *Piuzantion*, no. 3700, 8 December 1908, p. 1. However, in the face of the Patriarchal Political Council's insistence, and after a 6 December meeting held by the Political Council president, Stepan Karayan, with 'an important figure' at CUP headquarters, the Unionists agreed not to veto his election; *Piuzantion*, no. 3701, 9 December 1908, p. 1. In its 9 December issue, the CUP's organ, *Şûra-yı Ümmet*, announced that there were two Armenians on the committee's list of candidates for the capital.

¹⁶ A Laz born in Şoppa, Asım served as judge in Damascus, Salonika and Skopie (Uskub); in the last of these, he was president of the penal court. After 1908, a member of the CUP, he was court inspector in Salonika and interim *vali* of Kosovo; he travelled frequently to Lazistan as a CUP propagandist and was director of the Department of Criminal Affairs in the Ministry of Justice, as well as a member of the commission for the nomination of magistrates. He was charged with the duty of investigating the 'abuses' committed during the First World War at the expense of the Armenians. He was also presiding judge of the criminal and the appeals court. Archives of Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople/Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, 3 25–26–27–28–29–30–31–32–33–34, Second Report on Turks Responsible for the Armenian Atrocities.

¹⁷ Hüseyin Cahit Bey [Yalçın] (1874–1957), parliamentary deputy from the capital, vice president (1914–16) and, later, president of parliament, member of the Young Turk Central Committee, one of the main CUP propagandists, editor of *Tanin*, interned in Malta in 1919.

¹⁸ *Piuzantion*, no. 3714, 24 December 1908.

region. But the Muslim deputies from the eastern provinces, elected on the CUP's lists, had often supported the Hamidian regime and had also been more or less complicit in the massacres of 1894–6. Rumours of death threats against Zohrab, although apparently unfounded, were early signs of tension.¹⁹

Nevertheless, in the context of the time, Zohrab's appointment as professor of criminal law at the Istanbul Law School in November 1908 signified the opening of a part of Ottoman society. For his inaugural lecture on 20 November, more than 700 students, deserting their other studies, swarmed into the amphitheatre.²⁰ An interview given by Zohrab at the end of December 1908 to a correspondent of a Bulgarian newspaper makes it possible to clarify his view of the outmoded features remaining in Ottoman political life. The deputy deplored the absence of organized political groups into which 'nationalities could melt', rather than working in antagonistic national blocs. The Armenian deputies, he said, wished 'above all else to work for the general interest of the empire. The special interests of the Armenian nation will come after.'²¹ Thus he spoke out in parliament on 21 January 1909 to demand a commission to investigate the ongoing construction of the Hedjaz railway to Mecca, as there appeared to have been serious embezzlement on the part of the project's management.²² On other occasions, he suggested that the government draw up a provisional budget and submit it to a parliamentary vote, advocated the introduction of a genuine fiscal policy and otherwise championed matters of general concern. The CUPs' shop-worn explanations at the 13 February 1909 session, when their vote of no confidence brought down the cabinet of Kamil Pasha (formed on 5 August 1908), provoked another of Zohrab's interventions, embarrassing his Unionist colleagues. Everyone knew that it was the continual interventions of the CUP's Central Committee in the affairs of state, exasperating the grand vizier, that had been responsible for the permanent tension between these two sources of power.

The Armenian deputies' determination to find peaceful solutions to Armenian grievances and, above all, to do everything possible to avoid a restoration of the *ancien régime* became most evident in their response to the counter-coup of 31 March (13 April in the Western calendar), when groups of soldiers intent on restoring Abdülhamid II to power stormed parliament. By 17 April, with order restored and the mutineers returned to their camps, parliament sent a delegation to Çatalca, where Mahmut Şevket Pasha was in

¹⁹ *Zhamanag*, no. 54, 29 December 1908.

²⁰ *Piuzantion*, no. 3686, 21 November 1908.

²¹ *Zhamanag*, no. 61, 6 January 1909.

²² *Piuzantion*, no. 3736, 22 January 1909.

command of Roumeli troops, to inform him that military intervention was now unnecessary and would certainly provoke a useless bloodbath. Appointed to carry out this conciliatory mission were Krikor Zohrab, Vartkes and the lawyer Yusuf Kemal – but Şevket marched on Istanbul anyway.²³

In the meantime, however, massacres of Armenians had broken out in Adana province (Cilicia) on 14 April, claiming about 25,000 victims. Those responsible did not succeed in covering their tracks. From the outset, Armenian elites were sceptical of official excuses and explanations. Recalling only too well the old regime, they were stunned to hear the reactions of contemporary authorities echo those of the Hamidian era. When, despite the anarchy that had reigned in the capital over the past few days, the Ottoman parliament met on 19 April to clarify the situation, the Armenians, supported by the Turkish deputies Ali Munif and Ali Hikmet, submitted a motion demanding an immediate end to the massacres, with Vartkes exclaiming to his colleagues, ‘If we do not punish the people responsible for such acts, which breed hatred among the different Ottoman groups, regrettable events of this sort are likely to occur elsewhere as well.’²⁴

A few weeks later, it was once again Zohrab who was given the responsibility of expressing before parliament the feeling in Armenian circles: ‘By denying the facts that have occurred, the governor [Cevad Bey] remains faithful to the old traditions, as in the case of the events in Adana, where he long rejected the number of victims, although it was confirmed by subsequent official information.’²⁵ The reaction of many Unionist deputies, in principle open to democratic practices, reflected the Ottoman reality of the time: Zohrab was interrupted, pulled from the rostrum and roughed up. The next day, 3 July, Krikor Zohrab and Vartkes again found themselves facing a hostile majority when they tried to defend a bill to allow trade unions in the empire – one introduced by the Young Turk delegation.²⁶ The contrast between the arguments put forward by the two Armenians and the conservative, indeed extreme, responses of some of their Unionist colleagues, including well-known ‘modernists’, reveals the cultural gulf that existed between them.

The many Armenian sources available indicate that Armenian elites, and above all Zohrab, learned from these reactions of Turkish public opinion. Avoiding public arenas, they chose instead to work quietly and directly with

²³ See the Istanbul press of 19 April 1909, in particular *Piuzantion*, no. 3806, p. 3; Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey, A Modern History* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998), p. 102.

²⁴ Report on the session in *Piuzantion*, no. 3807, 20 April 1909, p. 1.

²⁵ Records of the 104th Session, *Azadamard*, no. 9, 2 July 1909, p. 2.

²⁶ Records of the 105th Session, *Azadamard*, no. 10, 3 July 1909, p. 2.

CUP officials and the government for any reparations.²⁷ Zohrab defended this strategy before the Armenian National Assembly in September 1909, as reported by *Piuzantion*: 'We cannot deny the present government's benevolent behavior towards us, because we know very well that five months ago there was a real danger that the massacres of Adana would spread to the whole of Armenia, as is proved by the telegrams and letters which have come into the hands of the national leadership.'²⁸ It was clearly the fear of seeing the Cilician violence spread to other areas that convinced Armenian officials that discretion was the better part of valour. But after maintaining such circumspection for three years – there was no official statement from the Armenian circles during this period – on 25 November 1911, Zohrab broke his own rule of 'closed doors' and gave a speech of nearly two hours' duration before the Armenian National Assembly on the state of Armenian–Turkish relations. Reviewing three years of the constitutional regime, he concluded: 'It would be a bit naive to believe that, in this country, simply proclaiming the constitution could change the general attitude of the Ottoman population [... into believing] that the Christian should be considered the equal of the Muslim, who is the only one with rights.'²⁹

The social progress and development of Armenian intellectual life and of the Armenian educational system, for which many Armenian ex-revolutionaries were working, did not go unnoticed by the CUP's Central Committee of Salonika, which – as Deputy Vartkes, now representing Erzerum, noted – found all this alarming. After its October 1911 congress, the committee adopted a more radical policy.³⁰ Vartkes detected proof of the change in the fact that, in the provinces, the Young Turk clubs were now more overtly hostile to Armenian circles.³¹ His evidence? A confidential circular sent to these clubs by the *Ittihad's* Central Committee in late 1911, which asked them to work discreetly toward limiting Armenian activity in the educational, cultural and economic fields.³²

Farther to the east, to the south of Lake Van, a young school inspector of Moks was murdered in atrocious circumstances. The ARF's press, with Vartkes in the lead, condemned the act, complaining above all that there had been no real investigation of the crime.³³ As director of the Istanbul

²⁷ Cf. Raymond Kévorkian, 'La Cilicie (1909–1921), des massacres d'Adana au mandat français', *Revue d'histoire arménienne contemporaine* 3 (Paris: Nubarian Library, 1999): 105–41.

²⁸ Editorial, *Piuzantion*, no. 3924, 20 September 1909, p. 1.

²⁹ Minutes of the 25 November 1911 session of the National Assembly, pp. 430–444.

³⁰ Papazian, *Memoirs*, vol. 2, p. 151.

³¹ Papazian, *Memoirs*, vol. 2, p. 154.

³² Papazian, *Memoirs*, vol. 2, p. 161.

daily *Azadamard*, Vartkes was imprisoned for two days, the authorities objecting to the paper's critical tone. The CUP did not react, ignoring the interventions of the Armenians, who were still its official allies.³⁴ Still, when Vartkes and Armen Garo were candidates for re-election in Erzerum, they again had the support of both the ARF and the CUP.³⁵ Both men were re-elected.

Nevertheless, the bitterness generated by the Adana–Cilicia massacres, the continuing insecurity in the eastern provinces, and government measures that were designed to disguise the CUP's goal of building a *Turkish* state seem to have convinced Armenian elites that their policy of direct collaboration with the CUP leadership stood no chance of improving the situation in the Armenian provinces. It was to Zohrab that the Political Council gave the task of drafting a plan to revive the Armenian Question and to explain to the Armenian National Assembly their reasons for this step. His motion was passed unanimously in September 1912 by the assembly leaders, who agreed that they had no choice but to take radical steps to 'put an end once and for all to the risks of widespread massacres, which have been attested by all credible information received in the recent past'.³⁶ Although conscious of the backlash their action might arouse, the harassment of eastern Armenian populations, probably orchestrated by CUP networks, had prompted all groups, including the CUP's Dashnak allies, to embark on a new path: appealing to the powers to engage Istanbul in 'social reforms' (the term used by Armenian officials) in the eastern provinces.

While we have no space here to examine in detail this partially studied but central question in the evolution of the relationship between these two elites, the role of Zohrab in spurring the controversial movement for Armenian reforms deserves attention.³⁷ Known sources indicate that he was behind the thaw in Armenian relations with the Russian embassy in Istanbul, where he had been employed as a lawyer for years, and that this thaw was the origin of the first diplomatic steps to relaunch the project of reform. It is also acknowledged that he acted as an intermediary with the German embassy, negotiating a number of points with Dr Fritz Schönberg, second

³³ Papazian, *Memoirs*, vol. 2, p.161.

³⁴ Papazian, *Memoirs*, vol. 2, p. 162.

³⁵ Archives du ministère des Affaires étrangères (Paris) (AMAE), Turquie, Politique intérieure, nouvelle série, vol. 9, fo. 56, letter from the French vice-consul in Erzerum to the ministry, 2 March 1912.

³⁶ Papazian, *Memoirs*, vol. 2, p. 183.

³⁷ Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2011), pp. 153–66.

dragoman (interpreter), to present to the ambassador, Baron Hans von Wangenheim.³⁸

When direct negotiations between Armenian and Unionist circles on the reform project began, Zohrab also played a central role. On 1 February 1913, at one of the first meetings between leaders of the Dashnaks and the Unionist leaders İsmail Hakkı, Hüseyin Cahit and Mehmed Talaat, the debate revolved around a crucial point: the role of the Great Powers in overseeing the suite of reforms. The *Ittihadists* naturally proposed that matters be settled without external mediation.³⁹ The Dashnaks replied that the Armenians had acceded to the Unionist position since 1908, only to have successive Unionist governments repeatedly reject their very modest proposals. Both actor and observer, Zohrab noted in his journal that Dr Hagop Zavriev, a Russian member of the party executive, 'was the first Dashnakist I know to admit the truth that under a Turkish government, the Armenian world can have no other future than to be exterminated', in contrast to Aknouni (Khachatur Malumian), leader of the Turkish Dashnakists, who 'was the last to come back from his turcophilic dreams'.⁴⁰

In addition to the many private interviews that Zavriev and Zohrab had with Russian ambassador Nikolai Charikov and Andrei Mandelstam, the ambassador's adviser in charge of Armenian matters, they also held extended working sessions, such as that of 12 April 1913, during which the new ambassador, Mikhael Nikolayevich von Giers, and Krikor Zohrab, representing the patriarchate, discussed in particular the demographic issues that the diplomat considered crucial and the census of the Armenian population that the patriarchate had launched in February in all the *vilayets* of Asia Minor.⁴¹ Evidence of Zohrab's key position is the fact that while the most sensitive points were directly managed at the level of the Unionist and Dashnak parties, the Central Committee of CUP often called upon Zohrab or his *Ittihadist* (Unionist) colleague Bedros Halajian to communicate with

³⁸ Archives of Délégation nationale arménienne/Bibliothèque Nubar, file 2, letter from Lepsius to Nubar, 13 October 1913.

³⁹ Sharuryan, *Annales*, p. 393; *Azadamard*, no. 1127, 2/15 February 1913.

⁴⁰ Zohrab, *Complete works*, vol. 4, *Diary*, p. 343. He seems also to have been an agent for the Russian foreign office, as he was reporting to St Petersburg on his negotiations during the time that he was representing the patriarch. For example, K. Gulkevich to Sasanov, 26 January 1914, Letter, 'Strictly Confidential', refers to Sasanov's letter to Giers, 17 January 1914, Nr. 7, reporting on what Zavriev (transliterated here as Sawrijew) had learned about the Germans' plans. In O. Hoetzsch (ed.), *Die Internationalen Beziehung im Zeitalter des Imperialismus*, vol. 1, part 1 (Berlin: Verlag Der Reimar Hobbing, 1931).

⁴¹ Zohrab, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, *Diary*, p. 343. For a complete publication of this census, see Raymond H. Kévorkian and Paul Paboudjian, *Les Arméniens dans l'Empire ottoman à la veille du génocide* (Paris: Editions Arhis, 1992).

the Dashnak chiefs. In July 1913, negotiations were thus conducted between the main members of the ARF's western division – Aknouni, Vartkes and Armen Garo – and the Unionist leaders Halil (Menteşe), Midhat Şükrü and Mehmed Talaat – but, significantly, always in the presence of Zohrab.⁴²

The apparent intimacy between the protagonists in this case (one could even speak of elective affinities between former anti-Hamidian comrades) was manifested, for example, when CUP leaders asked the Armenians not to take advantage of their delicate situation in the Balkan Wars then coming to an end, nor to appeal to external forces, especially their mortal enemy, Russia. In return, the CUP were ready to reach an agreement with the ARF and the patriarchate to implement the reforms. But, they warned, Armenians must reject any external intervention in the domestic affairs of the country, lest they provoke a reaction of public opinion. Mehmed Talaat did not mince words: the CUP 'would find the necessary means to defeat the project if the Armenians did not comply with their demands.'⁴³

About the last phase of the negotiations, in which Zohrab was the main Armenian participant, we now have a valuable source of information in his recently published diary, which sheds new light on many aspects of the acrimonious discussions between these former allies. Not by accident, the *Ittihad* appointed Halil (Menteşe), the president of the Council of State, to explain to Zohrab the party's categorical rejection of certain aspects of the Armenian plan.⁴⁴ The two men knew each other well. During the night of the reactionaries' counter-coup in April 1909, Zohrab had hid Halil Bey at his home; 'for twenty days, we extended him hospitality to protect him from persecution by the *Helaskiars*' (or Halaskâr: insurgent 'saviour' military officers).⁴⁵ Now, on 20 December 1913, the Young Turk leader called at that same home and set out to Zohrab the *Ittihad's* position, summed up in the

⁴² Sharuryan, *Annales*, pp. 396–7. The meetings took place at Zohrab's and Vartkes's houses, by turns; both men lived in Pera.

⁴³ Sharuryan, *Annales*, pp. 235–6.

⁴⁴ Zohrab, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, *Diary*, pp. 344–5, 7/20 December 1913. AMAE, *Turquie, Politique intérieure*, n.s., vol. 9, ff. 249–50, a letter of the French ambassador Louis Bompard to Stéphen Pichon, 16 December 1913, announced the publication of an imperial *irade* ratifying certain modifications of Articles 81 and 103 of the law of the *vilayets*. The *irade*, reprinted in a communiqué issued by the Agence Ottomane, provided for (1) utilization of local languages in the administration and recruitment of gendarmes and policemen among the Muslim and non-Muslim population 'in proportion to their numbers'; (2) proportional distribution of the budget for elementary education among the different communities; and (3) the allocation of subsidies to non-Muslim elementary schools.

⁴⁵ Letter in French from Zohrab to the German ambassador Baron Hans von Wangenheim, 14/24 June 1915, in Zohrab, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, *Diary*, p. 305. Zohrab informed the diplomat of this fact to show him how close he was to the *Ittihadists*.

following *formule* (Zohrab used the French word in his diary): ‘The Turks would rather die than accept interference of any kind from the Powers in the Armenian question, although they know that the country would die along with them. They regard this as . . . a question of life and death for all of Turkey and their party.’⁴⁶

After a year of negotiations, temporizing, advances and retreats, the two sides had reached the end of the road. The *Ittihad’s* declaration had accordingly to be interpreted, Zohrab acknowledged, as ‘the final, supreme argument before the rupture between Turks and Armenians was transformed into a war.’⁴⁷ Still, Zohrab and Halil tried to envisage ways of reducing ‘the reigning tension between Armenians and Turks’ and cooperating on putting some reforms into practice.⁴⁸ ‘I would have preferred,’ Zohrab wrote, ‘that someone else had been in my shoes then; someone conscious of his responsibilities and familiar with all the discouraging details of our situation; someone who saw, as if it were right there in front of him, the imminent, inevitable clash that was going to take place between the Armenian and Turkish element, with, as its consequence, the definitive failure of the Armenian question.’⁴⁹

The barrier to any resolution was a point ‘that constitutes the very basis of our question,’ and one that ‘they have always opposed’⁵⁰: the issue, in Zohrab’s words, of a ‘guarantee’ from the powers; in Halil’s formulation, of ‘supervision.’ In an effort to persuade his interlocutor to accept the terms that the Armenians preferred, Zohrab set forth a number of different arguments. He was well aware, he said, that the Porte could curry favour with Russia and Germany by granting them certain advantages. It might be possible to bury the Armenian Question in that way. But, he wondered, would that truly represent a success for the Turks? He suggested that they should try, rather, to regain the Armenians’ confidence and, to that end, carry out reforms without delay, since ‘it was not possible to leave the Armenians as dissatisfied as they were.’⁵¹ As for the role of the powers, Zohrab contended that it was not a question of ‘foreign supervision’ but of a ‘guarantee,’ since the inspectors

⁴⁶ Zohrab, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, *Diary*, pp. 344–5, 379.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 379.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 379. This section of the *Diary* was written a few weeks after the interview, around February 1914, after the signatures on the official decree ordering reforms.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 353, 8/21 to 11/24 December 1913, that is, the day after his conversation with Halil.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 351–6. The italicized notions are in French in Zohrab’s diary (written in Armenian).

would be officially 'designated by the Sublime Porte', while the ambassadors of the powers would merely signify their agreement orally. Halil, however, told him that such stipulations had already been firmly rejected by his party.⁵² 'I believe,' Zohrab nevertheless wrote, that 'I succeeded in convincing him of a point that is the cornerstone of our cause, a point [the *Ittihadists*] have always opposed . . . I prepared him to convince his party to consent . . . to the principle of a *recommandation* from the Powers . . . and go back to the formula of a European *inspecteur général* to whom powers would be delegated.'⁵³ He wrote that Halil then promised to do everything in his power to convince his party, but Zohrab added, 'It was obvious that he would have to overcome a number of difficulties, many more than we thought. A military faction among the Turks, led by [Ahmed] Cemal Bey, was the most firmly opposed, and the Committee was favorably inclined toward this faction. Halil Bey feared that precisely those in Cemal's faction, although fully aware of the consequences of their actions, would remain adamant.'⁵⁴ Thus, Zohrab was conscious of the pressure that this faction was putting on the *Ittihad* and the government, using it to take total control of the army and radicalize their politics even further.⁵⁵ Indeed, the Turkish press in this period was inveighing passionately against the Armenians in alarming terms,⁵⁶ while Vartkes, who met with Cemal Bey about the same time, around 20 December, heard the Young Turk officer (speaking even more bluntly than usual) threaten massacre in the event that the Armenians failed to abandon the clause about a guarantee from the powers.⁵⁷

Zohrab was also alarmed by the Armenian political parties' inclination to raise the stakes and their blindness to the results their decisions might have. The Armenians, he thought, had to be able to admit the possibility of not 'obtaining everything' and treating the reforms as 'a stage,' as Ambassador Wangenheim had put it.⁵⁸ The very next day, 21 December 1913, Zohrab gave an account of his meeting with the Council of State's president to the patriarch and to others in the Armenian leadership: Stepan Karayan, Vahan Papazian, Hampartsum (Murad) Boyajian and Armen Garo. Having emphasized the impasse over the issue of 'supervision' by the powers, he observed with dismay the intransigence of his colleagues and sighed, 'May God grant that we emerge

⁵² Zohrab, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, *Diary*, p. 353.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, a section of the *Diary* written after the interview, around February 1914.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 379.

⁵⁵ Naim Turfan, *Rise of the Young Turks: Politics, the Military, and Ottoman Collapse* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2000), p. 353.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 377.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 379, a section of the *Diary* written around February 1914.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 385.

from all this with as little damage as possible.⁵⁹ He reminded them that Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin, the basis for the reform plan, had provided only for an 'international guarantee', not 'international supervision'.⁶⁰ He urged them to make concessions; this would enable them to 'improve relations [with the Turks], which had become extremely bitter and were taking on increasingly threatening forms.' By way of response, he was told that the Turks' aim was to negotiate their way through this difficult moment while eluding European 'supervision', so as 'to leave the Armenians in a face-off' with them alone.⁶¹

The failure of the Council of State's president, Halil (Menteşe), to obtain the desired results from Zohrab no doubt prompted the minister of the interior to intervene in person. On 24 December 1913, Zohrab went to see Halil at his residence; there he found Talaat, who confirmed that he wanted the inspectors-general to be named by the Sublime Porte. This meant doing away with European mediation and limiting both European supervision and guarantees.⁶² Zohrab responded that it was essential that the reforms succeed; it was not enough merely to announce reforms, as had been the case with the army, where there had been no tangible results. 'You will grant,' he said to Talaat, 'that the Armenians' desire for security is legitimate. Agree, at a minimum, to make a ten-year commitment on the agrarian question and on language, military service, the school tax and the hamidiye.'⁶³ The next day, Zohrab, Vartkes and Minister of Finance Mehmed Cavid Bey, reputed to be a moderate, had a dinner meeting that represented the last chance to reach a compromise. Cavid said that he approved of the reforms but suggested that the Armenians make the concessions the *Ittihad* had asked for.⁶⁴

But there were limits to Zohrab's influence over the ARF. In his diary entry for 28 December 1913/10 January 1914, he noted bitterly that he had had to bear with the anti-czarist positions of the Dashnaks for five years (a burden on his negotiations with Russia), and now the party had broken off discussions with the *Ittihad* against his advice.⁶⁵ A year later, after receiving news from Vahan Papazian on the situation in Muş, Zohrab reflected that it had taken him three years to convince the ARF even to participate in the

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 346–7, 8/21 December 1913.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 386.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 349, 8/21 December 1913.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 356–7, 11/24 December 1913.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 356–7, 12/25 December 1913, in which he completed his notes of the previous evening.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 358–9, 13/26 December 1913.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 365.

reform project.⁶⁶ As if this weren't enough, in the winter of 1913–14 the Armenian Reforms appeared doomed in any case by a conflict between the reforms' two international sponsors, Russia and Germany, over the new German military mission in Turkey, to be headed by General Otto Liman von Sanders.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, on 8 February 1914 a reform agreement was officially signed between the Ottomans and Russia, with the approval of all the powers. But optimism was quickly dispelled when, on 14 May, the sultan failed to mention the key feature of the accord, 'the appointment of two European inspectors for the eastern vilayets,'⁶⁸ in his speech to the Turkish parliament inaugurating its new legislative period. It was an omission fraught with significance.

Then came the guns of August and the CUP's signing of a secret alliance with Germany, portending the Ottomans' eventual entry into a European war on the side of the Central Powers. The decision, on 2 August, was far from unanimous within the Ottoman elite, some of whom considered it suicidal. Armenians shared their foreboding. On the evening of 13 August 1914, aboard a steamboat bound for the island of Kinalı, among a group of deputies that included Vartkes and Armen Garo, Zohrab remarked to Papazian, who was scheduled to leave the next morning for Van (his district), 'You can be sure that they're going to do something to us.'⁶⁹ The Armenian leadership understood that it had been taken hostage and was no longer in a position to influence the course of events. Vartkes and Armen Garo, whom Zohrab had invited to his summer home on Prinkipo on 16 August, observed that 'the Turks want to profit from this war. The objectives of some of them are modest, those of others are grandiose.'⁷⁰ This apparently insignificant remark pointed to a question of crucial importance for the Armenians: what aims were the *Ittihadists* really pursuing by preparing to enter the war?

⁶⁶ The Papazian letter was dated 20 December 1914. Zohrab, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, *Diary*, pp. 421–2.

⁶⁷ Zohrab, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, *Diary*, p. 366, 2/15 January 1914. The appointment of the German general provoked a sharp reaction from Russia, generating diplomatic tensions. Frank G. Weber, *Eagles on the Crescent: Germany, Austria, and the Diplomacy of the Turkish Alliance, 1914–1918* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970), pp. 35ff. The main objection to the appointment was removed by promoting von Sanders to a position that removed him from direct command of the Turkish army that controlled the Straits. See Norman Rich, *Great Power Diplomacy 1814–1914* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1992), p. 433.

⁶⁸ AMAE, *Turquie, Politique intérieure*, n.s., vol. 9, fo. 290r^o–v^o, letter from the French ambassador in Constantinople, Paul Bompard, to the President of Conseil and Foreign Minister, Gaston Doumergue, 17 May 1914.

⁶⁹ Papazian, *Memoirs*, vol. 2, pp. 280–1. Papazian took 'the last Italian ship bound for Batum' on 14 August.

⁷⁰ Zohrab, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, *Diary*, pp. 383–4, 3/16 August 1914.

That same day, Major Nicolai Hoff, the Norwegian officer appointed by the Porte as one of the two European inspectors-general assigned to the seven eastern provinces that were the object of the 8 February accord, who had just arrived at his post in Van, received a summons from the Ministry of the Interior to return to Constantinople without delay. Talaat had arranged for an Armenian presence by inviting Vartkes and the Dashnak leader Aknouni to join him in welcoming the major back, and Vartkes saluted the Norwegian's return with a sardonic *bon mot*: 'You have reformed Armenia, *inshallah*, and now you are back.' In his diary, Zohrab wrote that 'Hoff returned with, at the very least, the conviction that Armenia needed reforms and that the Turks had no desire to enact reforms there.' On 16 December 1914, a formal end was put to the reform project by imperial decree.⁷¹ By now, Armenian leaders were well aware of the threat hanging over their nation.

Also apprehensive was Mehmet Cavid Bey, who resigned as minister of finance on 3 November to be in a position, he told Zohrab, to 'do something in case of catastrophe'. When Zohrab visited him shortly thereafter and observed that the empire's entry into the war could have terrible consequences for Turkey and that the Ottomans might even lose their capital city, Cavid replied tersely that 'Talaat and his acolytes are supposed to have said that the present war would be "winner take all"⁷²

As an old hand at Ottoman politics, Zohrab was not taken in by big public displays of enthusiasm. His diary recorded that on Saturday, 14 November

... a grand comedy was staged. The Turks solemnly proclaimed a *jihad* against four belligerent states, Russia, France, Great Britain and Serbia. The first to laugh at this farce are the Turks themselves ... In my opinion, the people of the city took no part in this demonstration ... [which ended in] attacks on commercial firms belonging to a number of enemy powers and peaked in the demolition of the Tokatlians' hotels.

The police, Zohrab also observed, played 'their traditional role, and this time smoothed the way for the work of the vandals'. 'Poor [Migirdic] Tokatlian,' he added, 'who has for five years been selflessly serving all the Ittihad's members,

⁷¹ Meeting with Hoff recounted to Zohrab by Aknouni (Zohrab, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, *Diary*, p. 411, 3/16 November 1914). Regarding the imperial decree, see Vahakn N. Dadrian, *Histoire du génocide arménien* (Paris: Stock, 1996), p. 349 and n. 1. Although the reforms are commonly said to address the 'six Armenian provinces', they in fact encompassed seven provinces, as Trabzon (Trabzon), which was not considered Armenian, was included as a concession to the CUP.

⁷² Zohrab, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, *Diary*, pp. 400–1, 3 November 1914.

great and small, 'all of whom had been his honored guests,' was punished despite his pains.⁷³

In the months after Turkey's entry into the war at the end of October 1914, Zohrab frequently encountered people in Young Turk circles who, like Cavid Bey, opposed the war. And now that an implacable system of censorship had been put in place, Cavid became an invaluable source of information.⁷⁴ Thus, Cavid reported on a meeting on 4 December 1914, convened in his home, at which those attending were from an 'important Turkish milieu.' The discussion revolved around the Germans' policy and the *Ittihadists'* criticisms of the ARF, which they accused of organizing groups of Armenian volunteers in the Caucasus. Rumours of pillage and massacre in the Erzerum region were also brought up.⁷⁵ On 17 December, Zohrab met with Nami Bey, Grand Vizier Said Halim's son-in-law, as well as with Cavid, who revealed that, immediately after the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, the Turkish cabinet had pledged to participate in the war on the German side; the Christian ministers and even certain Muslims who had opposed the Turkish-German alliance had not been invited to these cabinet meetings. According to Cavid, it was Said Halim, Talaat, Enver and Halil (Menteşe) who had put the final touches on the agreement with the Germans. As for Turkey's entry, that was decided in the course of a meeting of 'part' of the Council of Ministers, which Halil and certain members of the *Ittihad's* Central Committee also attended. It was Talaat, however, in the view of the former finance minister, who was 'indispensable to the proper functioning of the Committee.' Without him, its members would tear each other to shreds. Talaat kept an eye on everything; although mild-mannered, he was the most powerful of all.⁷⁶

As for the Ottoman Armenian population, the situation in which it now found itself was depicted in an anecdote told by Zohrab. A middle-class Armenian came to see Vartkes to tell him about his apprehensions and ask for advice. Vartkes replied that nothing could be easier; he had a very good solution that would cost no more than five *kurus*: 'Keep a white *tülbend* in your pocket. As soon as the Turks start the massacre, pull it out and wrap it around your fez to make a turban. Then declare you're a Muslim. No one will

⁷³ Zohrab, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, *Diary*, pp. 408–9, 16 November 1914. Misdating the event 20 November, Otto Liman von Sanders noted that it was these 'demonstrators who broke all the windows and mirrors in the Tokatlian Hotel' (*Cinq ans de Turquie* (Paris : Payot, 1923), p. 46). Odian, *Cursed Years*, in *Jamanag*, no. 6, reports that the demonstration was organized by the CUP together with the members of those guilds, notably the butchers' guild and the porters' guild, whose leaderships the *Ittihad* controlled.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 419, 5 December 1914.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 421.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 421–2.

harm a hair of your head.' The man exclaimed, 'I'll do no such thing, Vartkes. When the Armenians of Sasun were massacred, did they abjure their faith?' 'There's another solution,' Vartkes answered. 'Buy a weapon and defend yourself, if need be.' After a moment's thought, the man protested, 'I'll do no such thing, Vartkes, because then they'll massacre my kith and kin into the bargain.' 'What *are* you going to do, then?' Vartkes asked. 'God is merciful,' the man replied. Vartkes brought their conversation to an end with a question of his own: 'Everyone says that. The world is awash in blood and God is merciful. What if God is merciless?'⁷⁷ To convert to Islam or pretend to, to defend themselves however outnumbered, or to appeal to God's mercy: such were the Armenians' options.

Even bleaker was another story going the rounds in the capital. A twelve-year-old Turkish schoolgirl in a German school in Istanbul told one of her Armenian classmates, 'After we win the war, we're going to massacre all the Greeks first.' Bewildered, the young Armenian asked her, 'And what are you going to do with us?' The bell announcing the lunch break interrupted the conversation.⁷⁸

On 1 April 1915, the 'incidents' occurring in Cilicia and elsewhere led the Armenian patriarch Zaven Der Yeghiayan to summon Bedros Halajian, still a Unionist, to ask him to intercede with his party's leadership 'to spare the civilian population.'⁷⁹ We can deduce from this that Zaven already knew, albeit perhaps not exactly, what was being plotted in the Nuri Osmaniye Street offices. On 9 April, Halajian reported back that Talaat said he would confer with Enver about the proper policy vis-à-vis the Armenians. On 13 April, Halajian called at the patriarchate once more, with new information. He had seen Talaat again. The minister had discussed the matter with Enver in the interim and now assured Halajian, with a straight face, that 'massacres cannot take place in the provinces, because the government does not condone them.'⁸⁰ The patriarch was receiving (if somewhat belatedly) information through other channels, he later wrote, that, despite the strict censorship, told a very different story. The Armenian population continued to provide the army with clothing and supplies, offer medical assistance and helped care for the wounded, even as violent requisitions akin to looting

⁷⁷ Zohrab, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, *Diary*, p. 414. Since the declaration of *jihad*, Zohrab noted that it was preferable not to look like a European. In the streets of Pera, hats had been replaced by *fezes*. Zohrab, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, *Diary*, p. 415.

⁷⁸ Zohrab, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, *Diary*, p. 419, 19 November 1914.

⁷⁹ Zaven Der Yeghiayan, *Պատրիարքական Յուշերը* (*My Patriarchal Memoirs*) (Cairo: Nor Asdgh Publishing, 1947), p. 93. Although appointed Ottoman representative to The Hague on 18 March, Zaven declined to leave Turkey.

⁸⁰ Der Yeghiayan, *Patriarchal Memoirs*, p. 93.

were on the rise.⁸¹ The interview the patriarch had requested with the minister of interior took place a few days later, on 21 April. Talaat assured Zaven that the CUP did not have a policy toward the Armenians as such, that Armenian soldiers had been disarmed as the result of a hasty decision and that he had no information about any murders committed in the Erzerum region.⁸²

These assurances did not convince the prelate, who, on 23 April 1915, convened a meeting of the Armenian Mixed Council, at which the parliamentary deputies and senators Zareh Dilber, Vartkes and Krikor Zohrab were also present. Zaven reviewed all the violence that had recently occurred in Kayseri, Muş, Bitlis, Van, Dörtöyl and Zeitun. He saw it as evidence of patent ill will and of the government's mistrust of all Armenians. All those present reaffirmed that it was necessary to continue to offer the government guarantees, as the patriarch already had, of unswerving allegiance to the Ottoman fatherland. Zohrab urged those present to do all they could to mitigate the government's hostility; he suggested that they draw up a memorandum, to be signed by all the deputies and senators, that would summarize the most recent events, with supporting documentation. At the end of the day, Zohrab and Dilber were assigned to write this text.⁸³ Submitted at a meeting held three days later in Galata, the document they produced began by referring to the arrests that had just taken place in Istanbul. 'The Armenian nation,' it declared, 'does not understand why the government is so suspicious of it,' adding that it was 'a mistake to attribute political significance to the desertions of Armenian soldiers' and that the Armenians 'fear that all the violence inflicted on them is paving the way for a general massacre.'⁸⁴ It should be noted that, even though the *Ittihadist* government's accounts of the problems occurring in the provinces were marked by undisguised partiality, the massive press campaign against the Armenians had not yet really begun.

On 26 April the Mixed Council examined the memorandum prepared by Zohrab. It appealed to the government to treat the Armenians less severely 'out of respect for the memory of the thousands of Armenian soldiers who [had] died defending the Ottoman fatherland'. The council then chose delegates to call upon the grand vizier, Said Halim: Zohrab himself and Patriarch Zaven.⁸⁵ Responding to the protests of the Armenian leaders, Halim declared that arms and ammunition had been discovered in various localities,

⁸¹ Der Yeghiayan, *Patriarchal Memoirs*, p. 93.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 94–5.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 95–6.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

notably Van, and that the government, alarmed, had decided to neutralize political activists. Zohrab retorted that it was unjust to treat Armenians in this way when the community had demonstrated, since the general mobilization, that it was deeply conscious of its duties. The Armenians had fulfilled their obligations as citizens and as soldiers; they had often chosen, despite the abuses they had suffered, not to protest; it was unwise to make the civilian population suffer the consequences of minor faults. These people should not be unnecessarily humiliated.⁸⁶

Directly after this exchange with the grand vizier, the delegation met with Talaat, who received them in the company of the president of the senate, Rifat Bey. The minister struck a firm tone. 'All those Armenians,' he said, 'who, by their speeches, writings, or acts, have worked or may one day work toward the creation of an Armenia, have to be considered enemies of the state and, in the present circumstances, must be isolated.' When the delegates replied that among those deported from the capital on 24 April were people who had never had anything to do with the national question, the minister answered that he did not know if 'errors had been made,' as in the case of the hapless cook Abraham Pasha, but the matter would be looked into and the innocent released. He took pains to add that he continued to have confidence in the Armenians and that 'only members of political parties had been affected by the measures taken.' 'Clearly,' he said, 'we have no indication of the existence of a real movement directed against the state, but, in the interests of state security, the decision was taken to isolate party activists and dissolve the parties.' The Armenian delegates pointed out that 'it was pointless to examine the case of each individual deportee in the absence of evidence that the political parties had conspired against the state' and urged the 'return of all of them.' At this point, the patriarch wrote, Talaat called the police chief in the Armenians' presence and was told that no further arrests were to be made.⁸⁷

The round-up of the Armenian elite of the capital that had taken place during the night of 24–5 April affected several hundred people,⁸⁸ but, curiously, the two most eminent Armenian MPs, Vartkes and Zohrab, were left at liberty. Early in the morning of Sunday, 25 April, informed of the arrests the night before, particularly those of Dashnak leaders, they went together to

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁸⁸ Teotig [Theodoros Labchinjian], *Յուշարձան Նահատակ Մտաւորականութեան* (Monument to the Martyred Intellectuals) (Constantinople: Navasart Press, 1919), pp. 20–70, gives biographical information on 143 of those arrested in Constantinople and executed and on another 618 people apprehended and executed in the provinces (pp. 71–111) but does not discuss those who survived.

Talaat's house to ask their old ally for an explanation. Talaat temporized. Zohrab wrote in his diary, with some bitterness, that 'the ARF, after working side by side with the Ittihad and in its interests, has now been dealt by it a heavy blow'.⁸⁹

By early May 1915, of the Armenian elite of Constantinople only two figures of importance remained at large: the deputies Zohrab and Vartkes. Their intervention with the interior minister and grand vizier had not produced the desired results; instead, the conversations seem to have convinced the two Armenians of their government's real intentions. Let us here content ourselves with noting that on 1 May 1915, when the patriarchate received 'secret' information from the provinces of a massive wave of arrests, Zohrab, who would not be deported until 2 June, was clear-eyed about what awaited them. 'What date has been reserved for the massacre of the Armenians?' he asked his diary.⁹⁰ Both men were encouraged by their entourages to flee the country, but they refused even to contemplate leaving. On 18 May, Zohrab asked Martin Hagopian, a notable who offered to help him escape, 'To whom do you want me to abandon this people, without leadership or a chief? I do not want to leave; it is my duty to remain on the front lines to the very last'.⁹¹

The public announcement of the 'temporary' deportation law on 27 May and the information then reaching the patriarchate about massacres in the provinces left no doubt about the Unionists' intentions. In the course of a stormy exchange, on 1 June, with Talaat and the CUP's secretary general, Midhat Şükrü, Zohrab demanded an explanation for the crimes against Armenians now ongoing in the eastern provinces. He pointed out to the interior minister that he would eventually have to account for his acts and that he would not be able, when that day came, to 'justify his crimes'. Sure of himself, Talaat responded that he did not see who could possibly ask him to give an account of himself. The Armenian lawyer answered, 'I can, in parliament, in my capacity as an Armenian deputy'.⁹² The next day, Zohrab met at the Petit Club with three others who had once been close to the Young Turk government to evaluate the situation: Senator Zareh Dilber; the Unionist deputy Bedros Halajian, who had served as minister of public works; and Oskan Mardikian, who had resigned in May as minister of posts and telegraphs.⁹³ There is every reason to believe that these individuals, who knew the political mores of the CUP leaders better than anyone, concluded that a

⁸⁹ Zohrab, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, *Diary*, pp. 431–2, 25 April 1915.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 432, 1 May 1915.

⁹¹ Sharuryan, *Annales*, p. 465.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 466–7.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 467.

programme to extirpate the Armenian population was being put into effect. Nevertheless, that evening Zohrab went to the Cercle d'Orient, where he played cards with the interior minister. Two hours after he returned home, the police chief in Pera, Kel Osman, knocked at his door. Osman searched Zohrab's apartment, confiscated his personal papers and then asked the Armenian lawyer to follow him. At the same moment, Vartkes was also arrested in his home.⁹⁴ After being briefly detained in the police station in Galatasaray, the two were transferred by boat to the train station at Haydarpaşa under police escort.⁹⁵ Officially, they were sent to Diyarbekir in order to face a court martial.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 467–8.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 469.

Honour and Shame: The Diaries of a Unionist and the ‘Armenian Question’¹

Ozan Ozavci

On the morning of 8 March 1909, Mehmed Cavid Bey (1877–1926), a leading member of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) and a deputy in the new Ottoman parliament, received two telegrams from Salonika. The first informed him that his wife, Saniye Hanım, had arrived safely in the city. The second brought good news about her long struggle with tuberculosis. Her doctors were saying that her health was now improving. When Cavid received a third telegram later in the evening, asking him to go to Salonika urgently, he understood that something was wrong. He received the bad news at the Istanbul station, just before he boarded the evening train. With the shock and grief at his wife’s sudden death, perhaps because he sought consolation in writing, that evening he started to keep a diary.²

The first pages of the diary suggest that Cavid Bey was seeking emotional relief. He complained about his loneliness, the absence of his friends to console him and the insincerity of the consolation messages. But as his political career rose rapidly after that sad day, the content of his diaries changed. They came to consist of his first-hand observations of the political, economic and financial affairs of the Ottoman Empire. Writing on an almost daily basis, he used the diaries mostly as a practical reminder for his own work, but often he noted his feelings and made personal remarks about the significant occurrences of his time – including the Armenian genocide of 1915.

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² Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın, ‘Meşrutiyet Devrine Ait Cavid Bey’in Hatıraları’, *Tanin* 1 (30 August 1943); diary entry for 8 March 1909, *Tanin* 1 (30 August 1943).

Once described by Winston Churchill as a 'skilful and incorruptible' man, Cavid was widely known among Western diplomats as the most capable man of finance in the CUP.³ He was also the first Unionist to hold a cabinet position, as minister of finance, in summer 1909, and was assigned the same post in 1913 and 1917. All along, he introduced important financial reforms, secured large external loans and made huge efforts on behalf of the Unionist struggle against opposition groups to control political power.⁴ When he became Ottoman minister of finance for the first time on 27 June 1909, Sir Gerard Lowther, the British ambassador to Istanbul, wrote:

[C]avid belongs to the sect of Salonican Crypto-Jews known to the Turks as 'deunmeh' [*dönme*], which have in great part supplied the brain-power of the new movement in Turkey, and has all the financial talents of his race. Before becoming deputy he was a professor in the Salonican School of Arts and Crafts. He is exceedingly quick and intelligent, an exceptionally good orator and debater, genial, liberal-minded, and probably the most popular of the Young Turks who have come to the fore. He is, perhaps naturally, somewhat intolerant of the slow-minded methods of the real Turks, and has, in consequence, incurred their resentment to a certain degree, especially in the matter of the drastic retrenchments of which he has been the warm advocate; but, on the whole, Young Turkey is to be distinctly congratulated on his appointment, as indeed is [C]avid to be congratulated for his courage in accepting what is probably the most arduous and responsible post in Turkey. As regards his political leanings, he is pro-British, and is no great lover of German methods in Turkey.⁵

According to Lewis Einstein, the American chargé d'affaires in Istanbul, Cavid was a man 'of no mean talent, whose financial capacities are for the moment undisputed', and 'his influence is just now very considerable'.⁶

The young Ottoman minister of finance was arguably an economic and political liberal and a firm defender of Ottomanism, that is, the peaceful

³ W. S. Churchill, *The World Crisis, 1911–1918*, vol. 2 (London: Odhams Press Limited, 1939), p. 436.

⁴ Richard F. Crawford to L. N. Guillemard, 16 May 1909, the National Archives in London (hereafter, TNA), FO 800/79; Aykut Kansu, *Politics in Post-Revolutionary Turkey, 1908–1913* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2000), p. 150; Nazmi Eroğlu, *İttihatçıların Ünlü Maliye Nazırı Cavid Bey* (Istanbul: Ötüken Yayınları, 2008); Polat Tunçer, *İttihatçı Cavid Bey* (Istanbul: Yeditepe Yayınları, 2010).

⁵ Gerard Lowther to Sir Edward Grey, 28 June 1909, TNA, FO 371/777/451.

⁶ Lewis Einstein to Secretary of State, 15 July 1909, National Archives and Records Administration 20784/1095.

coexistence of different *millets* under the Ottoman identity.⁷ He was sympathetic to Sultanzade Mehmed Sabahaddin's widely discussed idea of administrative decentralization. In 1911, he would advocate including an Armenian in the new cabinet, arguing that the Armenians had been 'a most loyal millet to us'. In 1917, when he was appointed minister of finance for the last time, Halid Edib (Adivar) would write wistfully that perhaps his involvement in the cabinet could steer the Unionist government in a more liberal direction.⁸

Cavid Bey had been educated at the Fevziye schools of the Salonikan *dönmes*. He had a relatively liberal mind, perfect command of French and a remarkable network among European financiers. With his financial experience, expertise and connections, he had become an indispensable man among the Unionists. Yet, at the same time, given his liberal leanings and a background more privileged than most of the other Unionists, he appeared to be a maverick among them. When it came to key political decisions, such as the entry into the First World War, he would be sidelined. His diaries suggest that he learned the details of why the Sublime made the alliance with Germany only in 1917, and then only because Talaat was trying to convince him to enter his cabinet as minister of finance.⁹ Moreover, more than once fellow Unionists would point to his *dönme* origins as a reason for exclusion, and more than once he would give evidence of his critical distance from the Ottoman Turks by pouring scorn on their 'ill-made' methods of policymaking, as I shall demonstrate below. Yet Cavid Bey remained a Unionist all his life. It was mainly due to his CUP origins that the Kemalist authorities executed him in 1926.¹⁰

The question that concerns me here is how Cavid Bey came to regard what he called 'the Armenian Question' (*Ermeni meselesi*) of the early 1910s and the genocide during the First World War. To date, almost no attention has been paid to Cavid Bey's diaries in the historiography of 1915. Although they remained in the private archives of his son, Şiraz Yalçın, until recently, an edited version had been published by Hüseyin Cahit (Yalçın), another Unionist and a close friend of Cavid's, in the newspaper *Tanin* between 1943 and 1945. In that version, Yalçın deleted many important points on the

⁷ See, for example, Mehmed Cavid Bey, *Ekonomi İlmi* (Ankara: Liberte Yayınları, 2001); 'İngiltere Ticareti', *Ulum-u İktisadiyye ve İçtimaiyye*, 5 December 1901; 'Neşriyatımız ve Vakay-ı İktisadiye', *Ulum-u İktisadiyye ve İçtimaiyye*, 23 February 1909.

⁸ Murat Bardakçı, *Talat Paşa'nın Evrak-ı Metrukesi: Sadrazam Talat Paşa'nın özel arşivinde bulunan Ermeni tehciri konusundaki belgeler ve hususi yazışmalar* (Istanbul: Everest Yayınları, 2008), p. 150.

⁹ Diary entry for 10 February 1917, in Hasan Babacan and Servet Avşar, *Meşrutiyet Ruznamesi*, vol. III, (hereafter, *MR*) (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu), p. 359.

¹⁰ Tunçer, *İttihatçı Cavid Bey*, pp. 268–98.

Armenian issue, although other important elements remained that have long gone largely unnoticed, especially on the so-called Armenian Reform Question of 1912–14. In the 1990s, the Turkish Historical Association took possession of the diaries, and in 2014 and 2015, thanks to the diligent work of Hasan Babacan and Servet Avşar, it published a complete transcription of the diaries in four volumes.¹¹

We are in a position now to examine in greater detail Cavid Bey's 'Armenian Question.' The diaries provide us with a new lens through which to consider 1915. They complement the existing analyses and narratives of Turco-Armenian relations and the violence in the 1910s by inserting into the picture the more immediate emotional and evaluative responses of historical actors. The interaction between their political leanings and their emotions, invoking such emotional elements as commitment, distrust, betrayal and national pride and dignity, seem to have informed, at least in part, their actions in the 1910s.¹²

With the recent 'emotional turn' in historical writing, it has been argued that even though emotions may differ in form and sources, they 'tend to affect decisions to a greater extent than rational calculations.'¹³ They are indications of 'what matters, of what is valued and devalued', and are often a 'primary catalyst or hindrance to political mobilisation.'¹⁴ Their origins are usually traced to biological factors but also to the personality structure of the individuals, sociocultural constructions and social structural traditions. The last, in particular, suggests considering how 'relations of power and status generate certain kinds of emotions depending on where one is in these hierarchies and to whom one is reacting', a premise that is very applicable to the issue of Turco-Armenian and inter-imperial relations in the 1910s.¹⁵ Cavid Bey's diaries furnish us with a fairly rich source for the Ottoman perspective here.

The 1912–14 reform talks have been studied largely with reference to British and German sources, and little attention has been paid to the

¹¹ See n. 9, above.

¹² For an exemplary study that refers to emotional states in analysing genocide, see Uğur Ü. Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹³ Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper and Francesca Polletta, 'Introduction: Why Emotions Matter', in Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper and Francesca Polletta (eds), *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 13; Reinhard Wolf, 'Der "emotional turn" in den IB: Plädoyer für eine theoretische Überwindung methodischer Engführung', *Zeitschrift für Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik* 5, no. 4 (2012): 605.

¹⁴ Deborah Gould, 'Concluding Thoughts', *Contemporary European History* 23, no. 4 (November 2014): 639–40.

¹⁵ Theodore Kemper, 'Status, Power and Felicity', in J. Sets and J. Turner (eds), *Handbook of the Sociology of Emotions*, vol. 2 (Dordrecht: n.p., 2014), pp. 155–6.

Russian, Ottoman and Armenian materials.¹⁶ A recent study by Hans-Lukas Kieser, Mehmet Polatel and Thomas Schmutz, however, incorporated Ottoman state archive materials into analysis of the reform question.¹⁷ My intention here is to place under scrutiny Cavid Bey's notes, along with a number of other unexplored primary and secondary sources, including the Russian diplomatic correspondence during the rather contested Armenian reform talks. More specifically, I will look at Cavid's evaluative responses to and emotional perception of, first, the reform question of 1912–14, which was a key issue during the post-revolutionary era where the establishment of the rule of law in the eastern provinces and imperial security were concerned; and second, the Armenian genocide and its memory. What was the reform question about? What was Cavid Bey's take on it? And how did he 'live' and react to the genocide in the heat of the time and after? I have structured this chapter in a manner to address these questions respectively.

Masters of the house

The 1915 genocide was the result of a dialogical and intersubjective process, the origins of which can be traced back to the middle and later decades of the nineteenth century, when the seeds of Armenian nationalism were sown and the Ottoman Turkish elites came to target what they perceived as centrifugal movements that threatened imperial security.¹⁸ The talks surrounding the so-called Armenian reform between 1912 and 1914 formed one of the crucial moments in this process. It was in this period that the Unionists found themselves in the middle of a dispute between the Armenians and the Kurds in Eastern Anatolia. The Porte categorized the threats and interests of each group in line with its own security considerations and acted (or failed to act) in favour of the status quo in the 1910s. At the same time, it

¹⁶ Roderick Davison, 'The Armenian Crisis, 1912–1914', *American Historical Review* 53, no. 3 (1 April 1948): 481–505; Joseph Heller, 'Britain and the Armenian Question, 1912–14: A Study in Real Politik', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 16, no.1 (January 1980): 3–26. See also Raymond Kevorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2011), part 3.

¹⁷ Hans-Lukas Kieser, Mehmet Polatel and Thomas Schmutz, 'Reform or Cataclysm? The Agreement of 8 February 1914 Regarding the Ottoman Eastern Provinces', *Journal of Genocide Research* 17, no. 3 (2015): 285–304.

¹⁸ See, for instance, Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006); and Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012).

sought to fend off European pressure and intervention in Ottoman domestic affairs for reform.

The Armenian reform talks present us with an excellent showcase of the intersubjective character of security logic and practices. Throughout the talks, the Porte faced both international and domestic dangers. It tried to avoid international intervention in its problems (most immediately, in the form of some European governor in the east, appointed by the powers) without encouraging local resistance to its own designs – all the while keeping an eye on Russia and Germany, who were competing to establish and sustain their respective strategic and economic influence in Eastern Anatolia. A multisided tug-of-war took place between 1912 and 1914 in which imperial elites, European and Ottoman, and indigenous elites, Armenian and Kurdish, endeavoured to privilege their own threat perceptions and protections within a globally recognized hierarchy of interests.

As minister of finance, Cavid Bey was familiar with the dynamics of domination and resistance in imperial systems both internationally and domestically, for he had devoted his entire financial career to battling Europeans' controlling influence over Ottoman finances and the economy while at the same time endeavouring to secure loans and direct investment agreements from the same European powers. The negotiations around the Armenian reform question would place the Unionists and Cavid Bey in a depressingly analogous and familiar dilemma. On the one hand, the Unionist leadership would strive to give a strong message to the powers that the CUP were the masters of their own house and capable of solving the Eastern Anatolian land problem, a domestic problem, on their own. On the other hand, due to Ottoman financial difficulties, the ongoing Balkan Wars, bureaucratic and administrative inefficiencies and conflicting interests in the East, the Unionists would prove incapable of addressing the concerns of both Armenians and Kurds to the concurrent satisfaction of each. What were these local concerns? And how would the Unionists overcome their 'dilemma'?

The origins of the Armeno-Kurdish land disputes in the aftermath of the 1908 revolution can be located in the Hamidian massacres of 1894–7. During the massacres, a great number of Armenians had abandoned their lands in the Eastern Anatolian provinces, voluntarily or forcibly. The local gentry in the region, particularly the Kurdish chiefs from the *Hamidiye* cavalry regiments, had thereafter seized these lands, while the Porte had 'used some of these properties for the settlement of immigrants and nomadic Kurdish tribes'.¹⁹ After the 1908 revolution, the egalitarian and constitutional

¹⁹ Kieser, Polatel and Schmutz, 'Reform or Cataclysm', p. 288.

discourses inspired hopes for the return of these confiscated lands to their original owners. In pursuit of this goal, the Armenians ran a campaign of public protests and petitions, which included appeals by the Armenian Revolutionary Foundation (ARF), the Social Democratic Hnchak Party and the Armenian patriarchate. Although the Adana massacres of 1909 disrupted the talks between the state authorities and the Armenian groups, by autumn of the same year, an agreement was reached to establish a commission to investigate and settle the land disputes in the region. Local commissions, the minister of the interior ordered in August, were to mediate the interests of local elements.

These measures and the prospect of some of the land being returned fanned the flames of Kurdish protests and resistance. Kieser, Polatel and Schmutz write that 'As local commissions started to take decisions regarding the return of disputed lands to Armenians, a group of influential Kurdish chiefs, including the notorious Haydaranlı Hüseyin Paşa, fled to Persia with their families, men and livestock.'²⁰ But the authors do not explain the reasons for his flight. Since Ottoman military power was formed in significant part by the men of Haydaranlı Paşa, whatever the reasons, his departure constituted 'a security risk' for the Porte, which therefore 'promised' in 1910 'to recognise their rights over the properties they had seized on the condition of their return in a short period of time.'²¹ This concession meant curbing the arbitration process and allowing the continuation of land disputes, with a new wave of violence in the region.

After 1910, the Porte would restart 'the policy of settling Muslim migrants and nomadic Kurdish tribes on disputed Armenian lands.'²² In summer 1911, when Cavid Bey paid a visit to Eastern Anatolia to garner support for the CUP, his public utterances represented a Unionist bid for the support of Muslim popular opinion. As the British consul of Erzurum reported, the policy of the government was disaffecting the Armenian population; CUP-ARF relations were daily losing intimacy, and local Kurdish movements were causing the authorities anxiety.²³

At the end of 1911, Armenian deputies issued a joint memorandum asking for the 'resolution of land disputes vital for the establishment of order and rule of law and criticised the constitutional regime for failing to fulfil its promise to guarantee the lives and properties of all Ottoman subjects.'²⁴ The

²⁰ Kieser, Polatel and Schmutz, 'Reform or Cataclysm', p. 289.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Consul McGregor to Lowther, 21 August 1911, TNA, FO 424/228. This citation was kindly and generously drawn to my attention by Mehmet Polatel.

²⁴ Kieser, Polatel, and Schmutz, 'Reform or Cataclysm', p. 289.

Porte responded with a 'notification to the Minister of Justice for the faster implementation of court orders in cases of land disputes and to abolish the temporal limitation established for the arbitration procedure'.²⁵ About two months before its fall in July 1912, and amid the political crisis with the opposition within, led by the *Halaskers*, the CUP cabinet agreed on establishing a reform commission for the eastern provinces that would inquire into land disputes and settle them in absolute terms. The commission experienced great delays, however, before it was ready to start its work, which was interpreted by foreign observers as foot-dragging. According to Kieser, Polatel and Schmutz, 'no substantial legal or administrative plan was put into force' until the radical change in international dynamics accompanying the eruption of hostilities in the Balkans.²⁶

Along with other Unionists, Cavid Bey was alarmed when the first of the bilateral alliances that would become the First Balkan League was signed between Serbia and Bulgaria in March 1912, and when the Italians began bombarding the Dardanelles to force the Porte to surrender Tripoli on 8 April. Cavid had contacted Winston Churchill, seeking an alliance with Britain against the Italians, but despite Churchill's positive attitude, the Foreign Office turned down the Ottoman proposal.²⁷ He was also in continuous talks with European diplomats at the time about access to the Straits, closed by the Porte following the Italian bombardment. When the Porte finally lost Tripoli and the Balkan League attacked Turkey, Cavid would write in his diaries that no friend appeared to defend the Ottoman cause.²⁸ The late summer and autumn of 1912 brought a dramatic turn of events. In July, the CUP fell from office, and Cavid, after imprisonment for twenty days in mid-September, fled to Europe. He decided to retire from politics for good and look for a job in Europe with the support of the Ottoman Armenian Calouste S. Gulbenkian.²⁹

In the meantime, amid uncertainty in Eastern Anatolia, unrest among the Kurds raised tensions dramatically. The Armenians then appealed for international support: first, Armenian Catholics and the Armenian Orthodox patriarch of Istanbul appealed to Russia as 'a defender of the native Christian peoples in the East ... to take under [its] wing [the] suffering Armenian

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 289–90.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 288, 289, 290.

²⁷ Diary entry for 23 October 1911, *Tanin* 52 (22 October 1943). See also Churchill, *World Crisis*, vol. 2, pp. 432–3.

²⁸ Diary entry for 29 April 1913, *Tanin* 231 (21 April 1944)

²⁹ [Cavid Bey] to Gulbenkian, 29 December 1912, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Archives, Lisbon, LDN00051.

people living in Turkish Armenia.³⁰ The Russian ambassador Mikhail Giers saw this appeal as an opportunity to advance Russian interests in Eastern Anatolia. Providing assistance to the Armenians would keep them from immediate engagement with other Great Powers in the region, and Russia would gain Armenian trust, which it badly needed among its own Armenians. In Giers's view, it was necessary to give Ottoman Armenians all the protection possible. He dismissed the option of Russian occupation of the 'Armenian provinces,' however, finding it 'a premature idea.' Instead, Russia must follow the path of pressuring the Ottomans for reform. Meanwhile, in Russia, the Echmiadzin Catholicosate applied to Illarion Vorontsov-Dashkov, the Russian viceroy of the Caucasus, demanding Russian assistance in this process. In addition, a commission under the presidency of Boghos Nubar Pasha was sent to Europe by the catholicos of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, Gevork V, to lobby for reform.

Beset from so many sides, the new cabinet under the Anglophile Kamil Pasha anxiously turned to Britain, requesting the appointment of British officials to preside over the implementation of reforms in order to avoid a Russian military intervention³¹ – just as an Armenian delegate in Istanbul approached the British embassy for 'the execution of the guarantees of reform in the Treaty of Berlin.'³² The Foreign Office initially regarded the question as an Ottoman internal affair or at least wanted to delay, as did the French, and not deal with it until the Balkans were peaceful. Cavid wrote in his diaries that 'his British friends and friendship have shown Kamil Paşa [their real face] . . . Have Kamil Paşa and his friends [finally] understood that the policies of nations do not change for persons[?]'³³

Between July 1912, when the CUP fell from power, and January 1913, when it returned after its coup d'état, the 'Armenian Question' became ever more delicate and complex to grapple with: there was great risk of the recurrence of a Kurdish uprising in the region in the event of the implementation of reforms, the Ottoman army was being pummelled in the humiliating Balkan Wars, imperial finances were almost wrecked and the

³⁰ Mikhail N. Giers (Constantinople) to Sergey D. Sazanov (Petrograd), 26 November 1912, in *Ministerstvo inostrannykh del. Sbornik diplomaticheskikh dokumentov. Reformy v Armenii 26 noyabrya 1912 goda–10 maya 1914 goda* (Petrograd: Gosudarstvennaja tipografija, 1915), p. 4. See also E. K. Sarkisian, 'Armyanskij Vopros i Rossiya v 1912–1914 gg.', *Պատմա-քաղաքական հանդես*, vol. 1 (1995), pp. 111–112. Sarkisian notes that Krikor Zohrab was in the committee that went to see Giers.

³¹ Tefik Paşa to Hariciye Nezareti, 3 October 1912, in Münir Süreyya (ed.), *Ermeni Meselesinin Siyasi Tarihiçesi (1877–1914)* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Basımevi 2001), p. 94.

³² Davison, 'Armenian Crisis', p. 485.

³³ Diary entry for 21 November–4 December 1912, *Tanin* 168 (18 February 1944).

potential foreign involvement on behalf of the Armenians was perceived by the Unionists as a threat to the territorial integrity of the empire. At the human level, there was little military protection for the Armenian peasantry against the armed Kurdish chiefs, as Armenian soldiers had been called to the Balkan front, while subordinate Turkish officials were tending 'to favour their fellow Muslims against Christian Armenians'.³⁴

Throughout 1913, negotiations for the reform plan were held at a rather slow pace between the representatives of the CUP, on the one hand, and the European Great Powers and the Armenians, on the other. This was partially because the particular interests of Germany and Russia were also on the table. The question was of great importance for the Germans, because clashes between the Kurds and Armenians were taking place within the Berlin–Baghdad railway zone. The newly appointed Istanbul ambassador, Baron Hans von Wangenheim, whom Cavid considered 'very pro-Turkish',³⁵ was convinced that Russia was provoking the clashes to use them as a pretext for military intervention.³⁶ Russian domination in the region could diminish the prestige of the Germans.³⁷ Therefore, Wangenheim came to defend German cooperation with the Porte in order to make reforms in the region, thus at once precluding Russian intervention and making the Porte grateful to Germany.³⁸ In February 1913, he would tell Cavid that Germany would work 'to prevent the Armenians falling onto the lap of the Russians'.³⁹

National pride and local security

Little effort is required to discern in Cavid Bey's diaries his growing frustration at the increasing involvement of the European powers in Ottoman domestic politics. Although he spent most of 1913 abroad, dealing with the infamous loan and concessions negotiations with European agents, he was also engaged in several talks with Europeans and Armenians on the Armenian reform question. Moreover, he paid a second visit, in summer 1913, to Eastern Anatolia to make his own observations first hand. According to William

³⁴ Heller, 'Britain and the Armenian Question', p. 6; Davison, 'Armenian Crisis', p. 490.

³⁵ Entry for 27 February 1913, *Tanin* 192 (13 March 1944).

³⁶ Davison, 'Armenian Crisis', p. 489.

³⁷ Wangenheim to Theobald von Bethman Hollweg, 12 April 1913, AA (M) R 14079:7087; cf. Thomas Schmutz, 'The German Role in the Reform Discussion of 1913–14' (paper read at the conference 'The Clash of Empires', University of Cambridge, 13 June 2014), p. 4.

³⁸ Davison, 'Armenian Crisis', p. 492.

³⁹ Entry for 27 February 1913, *Tanin* 192 (13 March 1944).

Edward Goschen, the British ambassador to Berlin, Cavid Bey considered the issue a question of land redistribution rather than politics. For him, it was an internal problem that could be solved by restoring, as far as possible, the land taken from the Armenians and settling the 250,000 Muslim refugees under favourable climatic and economic conditions.⁴⁰ In his talks with European officials, therefore, he insisted repeatedly that the Porte was willing to undertake reforms in Armenia, but this had to be done without hurting the national pride of the empire.⁴¹ Otherwise, he believed, interference could jeopardize the security and union of the entire country, as previous experience in Crete, the Balkans and eastern Rumelia had shown.⁴²

As far as Armenian–Unionist relations were concerned, the absence of reforms in 1913 that had been promised since 1895 would fuel Armenian suspicions that the Porte was insincere in its profession about implementing reform. The Armenian elites would ask for ‘guarantees’ in the form of a foreign governor appointed in Eastern Anatolia.⁴³ Although Cavid’s frustration at this point was concentrated on European involvement in Ottoman affairs, he became increasingly anxious that the Armenians were ‘unwittingly’ serving as a channel for growing Russian influence over Ottoman domestic politics.⁴⁴ At a luncheon meeting in Paris in April 1913 at the residence of the Ottoman Armenian oil magnate Calouste Sarkis Gulbenkian, the conversation between Cavid and Boghos Nubar Pasha was illustrative of this mutual discomfort. The latter was in the city to encourage cabinet-level initiatives in France and Britain that might bring about the appointment of a European governor of the ‘Armenian’ provinces.⁴⁵ When Boghos Nubar mentioned his plans, Cavid was exasperated, contending that the best interests of Turkey (‘Türkiye’, as Cavid wrote in his diaries) and Armenia would be served by working together – that is, without European interference – for reform.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Sir William Edward Goschen to Grey, 7 March 1913, TNA, FO 371/1798/195.

⁴¹ Entries for 23 August 1913, *MR II*, p. 33; 25 August 1913, *MR II*, p. 39; 5 November 1913, *MR II*, pp. 208–9.

⁴² Entry for 28 September 1913, *MR II*, p. 114.

⁴³ For an analysis of the Armenian approach to the problem, see Robert Koştaş, ‘Zohrab, Papazyan ve Pastırmacıyan’ın kalemlerinden 1914 Ermeni reformu ile İttihatçı–Taşnak müzakereleleri’, *Tarih ve Toplum Yeni Yaklaşımlar* 5 (2007): 159–78.

⁴⁴ Entry for 23 September 1913, *MR II*, p. 105.

⁴⁵ Francis Leveson, Viscount Bertie to Grey, 10 January 1913, TNA, FO 800/180; Davison, ‘Armenian Crisis’, p. 490.

⁴⁶ Entry for 28 April 1913; *Tanin* 225 (15 April 1944). Only a month earlier, Boghos had informed the Russian ambassador Izvolsky that Turkish Armenians did not wish to raise the question of autonomy or change of nationality; they were intending only to ensure the implementation of the reforms envisaged by the Treaty of Berlin. Aleksandr Petrovich Izvolsky to Sazanov, 13 March 1913, in *Ministerstvo*, pp. 23–5.

He then informed Boghos Nubar that the Porte was planning to appoint British civil servants and a British gendarmerie in the Armenian provinces. Boghos, for his part, feared that such a measure would be a temporary diversion, which would culminate in the end with the civil servants' dismissal. He and the Armenian leadership were looking to obtain more solid guarantees.

The prominent Armenian writer and lawyer Krikor Zohrab outlined the Armenian aspirations publicly and very articulately in a pamphlet published in 1913 under the pseudonym Marcel Leart. According to his account, for the Armenians, the remedy was 'un vali Européen, participation des Arméniens des fonctions publiques et décentralisation'.⁴⁷ These were the three *sine qua non*s for the Armenians. Such a governor would be chosen by the Europeans, and he would possess 'toute la liberté d'action nécessaire' (full liberty to act as necessary).⁴⁸ In the eyes of Zohrab, a *Turkish* governor, flanked by European advisers and gendarmerie, would lead only to personal friction and competition as had been the case, he believed, in the Balkans only recently: 'C'est la Macédoine sous Hilmi Paşa'.⁴⁹ Yet even then, Zohrab wrote to Cavid Bey from Istanbul in April 1913 that he was not pessimistic about finding a solution to the reform question.⁵⁰

For Cavid Bey, however, as for other leading Unionists, the appointment of a foreign governor was out of the question. On 24 April 1913, the Porte once again asked Britain to send to Eastern Anatolia officers for the gendarmerie; inspectors for the gendarmerie, agriculture and public works; and an adviser and inspector-general for the Ministry of the Interior.⁵¹ At first, British officials wanted to comply with the Turks' suggestion immediately, but Russia strongly opposed this plan, arguing that it was owed the leading role in a matter on its very border. Berlin took Russia's reaction to the Ottoman plan as a sign that the Russians were not sincere in their demand for reform in Asia Minor. St Petersburg, for its part, was indeed apprehensive about the presence of British agents (and possibly gendarmes) on its border. Under pressure from the Russians, as Wangenheim later told Cavid,

⁴⁷ Marcel Leart, *La Question arménienne à la lumière des documents* (Paris: Librairie maritime et colonial, 1913), pp. 19–21. English: 'a European governor, participation of Armenians in public offices, and decentralization.'

⁴⁸ Leart, *La Question arménienne*, p. 21.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21. English: 'It's Macedonia under Hilmi Pasha.'

⁵⁰ Zohrab was also asking the latter to arrange for him a position as civil servant in Paris because he was feeling too stressed in the Ottoman capital. Entry for 16 April 1913, *Tanin* 221 (11 April 1944).

⁵¹ Yusuf H. Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi*, vol. 2, book 3 (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1951), p. 52; Heller, 'Britain and the Armenian Question', p. 8.

differences of opinion developed among Britain's representatives.⁵² With the preservation of the Entente paramount in London's considerations, the end result was that the Foreign Office decided not to risk Russian jealousy and instead to revise the Porte's plan in a way that would invite all the powers to participate in the execution of reforms. In the meantime, the Porte invited French and German officers to act as inspectors in Eastern Anatolia, another initiative that bore no fruit.

During his visit to Eastern Anatolia in July 1913, Cavid Bey would announce that the only difference of opinion between the Unionists and Boghos Nubar was on the issue of 'guarantees'. He was hopeful that the issue could be resolved by the appointment of European officials with long-term contracts, who would remain in power even when a cabinet changed. The Porte, he added, was serious and sincere in its desire to implement reforms as soon as possible, because disturbances in Eastern Anatolia could affect the stability of the entire empire. This was why the Porte had wanted to employ officers from Britain, Germany and France.⁵³

However, European security concerns were already pushing the powers toward multilateral diplomacy. In the summer of 1913, a European commission was established in Istanbul with the participation of the dragomans of the five European powers. No Ottoman representative was invited. The dragomans held eight meetings at the summer house of the consul of Austria in Yeniköy, Istanbul, in July 1913, mainly to discuss the scheme propounded by André Mandelstam, first dragoman at the Russian embassy in Istanbul. The Mandelstam plan called for the creation of a single province out of the six provinces in Eastern Anatolia associated with historic Armenia, and for the appointment by the Great Powers of a Christian as Ottoman governor.⁵⁴ The German dragoman, Fritz Schönberg, was dissatisfied with the articles favouring non-Muslims. His ambassador, Baron Wangenheim, similarly believed that 'privileges for the Armenians could lead to social envy and, subsequently, to massacres, as had been the case, in the German's view, in Adana in 1909'.⁵⁵ Moreover, the new province would

⁵² Heller, 'Britain and the Armenian Question', pp. 8–9; entry for 23 September 1913, *MR II*, p. 105.

⁵³ 'Cavid Bey Efendinin Beyanati', *Tanin* (16 July 1913), p. 3. I would like to thank Mehmet Polatel for drawing my attention to this source.

⁵⁴ André N. Mandelstam, *La Société des Nations et les Puissances devant le Problème Arménien* (Paris: Pédone, 1926), pp. 21–3. While devising plans, the Russians turned for inspiration to the negotiations of the 1860s for the establishment of a security regime in the Ottoman-controlled Mount Lebanon. Giers to Sazanov, 8 June 1913, in *Ministerstvo*, pp. 51–69.

⁵⁵ Kieser, Polatel and Schmutz, 'Reform or Cataclysm', p. 296.

include lands within the sphere of the railway being built to Baghdad, in which the Germans were the principal investors.⁵⁶

The outcome of the meetings was a stalemate, the lack of compromise demonstrating that an international agreement could be achieved only 'if Germany and Russia found a common denominator'. Hence, after the commissioners' meetings ended in July, negotiations were conducted on a 'bilateral level between the main [European] protagonists of the diplomatic crisis'.⁵⁷

In the following months, exacerbating circumstances would dictate decisions. In autumn 1913, local discontent reached new dimensions when the head of a prominent Kurdish clan, Abdurrezzak Bedirxan, sought 'to instigate a Kurdish nationalist movement with Russian assistance', an event 'inextricably linked to the issue of Armenian reforms'.⁵⁸ The Kurdish chief was protesting against the fact that the Kurds had not been consulted in reform talks about a region whose majority population were Kurds.

Wangenheim and Giers were then 'ordered to find a solution and present it to other powers', the diplomats eventually agreeing to a two-sector solution, with 'the inclusion of Trabzon as a seventh province' – Trabzon being notably less 'Armenian' in history and ethnic composition.⁵⁹ According to the new Russo-German consensus, after the signing of a treaty there would be two sectors, each with its own inspector-general. The inspectors would be chosen by the Porte, but would come from Europe. And after a new census, Christians and Muslims would ultimately be represented in local government (the 'general councils' [*Medjlissi Oumoumi*] and administrative committees [*Endjoumen*]) in each of these provinces proportionate to their share of the provincial population; although, to insure against foot-dragging by the Porte, Armenians would be given *equal* representation until the new census was complete.⁶⁰

Unaware of this agreement and having seen that conference diplomacy in July had failed, in mid-October the Porte had thrown in its lot with the British for the third time.⁶¹ On 19 October, Talaat informed Cavid that he had

⁵⁶ Davison, 'Armenian Crisis', pp. 497–8; *Armyanskij vopros i genocid arman v Turtsii (1913–1919): Materialy Politarhiva MID Kajzerovskoj Germanii* (Erevan: Gitijun, 1995), pp. 67–8; Mandelstam, *Société des Nations*, pp. 21–3; Sarkisian, 'Armyanskij Vopros i Rossiya v 1912–1914 gg.', p. 117.

⁵⁷ Kieser, Polatel and Schmutz, 'Reform or Cataclysm', p. 296.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 296–7. The text of the agreement appears in André N. Mandelstam, *Le Sort de l'Empire Ottoman* (Lausanne: Payot, 1917), pp. 236–8.

⁶¹ Ambassador Sir Charles M. Marling to Grey, 7 October 1913, TNA, FO 371/1815/45803.

personally asked Robert Graves, adviser at the Ottoman Ministry of the Interior, to act as inspector-general in Armenia and Kurdistan. British reports suggest that Talaat brought this proposal also to the attention of Richard Crawford, adviser to the Ministry of Finance. The Ottoman authorities then offered Graves and Crawford appointments on five-year contracts as inspectors-general of the two regions of northeastern Anatolia, with powers indeed similar to those of Hilmi Pasha in Macedonia. Neither man was eager to accept. In the end, the British Foreign Office decided to eschew approving unilateral Ottoman action and did not authorize the appointment of the British officers 'at a moment when the whole problem of Armenian reforms is under discussion between all Powers'.⁶²

Upon this, Talaat and Cavid agreed that the only solution was for the Porte to appoint Ottoman inspectors itself and present the powers with a fait accompli, which Cavid communicated to Wangenheim a few days later: the Porte would draw the attention of Western public opinion to the fact that the Europeans were not providing Turkey with inspectors-general and were admitting that they would not send even secondary bureaucrats.⁶³ The Ottomans would therefore have to dispatch their own personnel and would not agree to even minimal European control.⁶⁴

The Unionist plan received no endorsement from the Germans, however, because by that point they had already made an agreement with the Russians. Wangenheim would tell Cavid that he had brought Giers around and that the Russian demands were now more acceptable.⁶⁵ But this did not leave the Porte the sole master in its own house. When Giers submitted a private report to Grand Vizier Said Halim Pasha explaining the new plan, the pasha categorically refused it.

Cavid Bey was equally disturbed with European endeavours to impose such a plan. He was of the view that the attitudes of European officials on the Armenian reform question were insincere and opportunist.⁶⁶ He told the French ambassador, Maurice Bompard, and wrote in his diaries on 28 October that there was nothing humanitarian and no civilizing element in the attitude of the powers toward the issue. Britain was speaking of reforms but not giving officers. Russia was asking for reforms but had also been providing the Kurds and Armenians with financial support to incite a revolt in Kurdistan. He admitted to Bompard that the Porte was not without

⁶² Grey to Marling, 14 October 1913, TNA, FO 371/1815/45803.

⁶³ Entry for 19 October 1913, *MR II*, p. 160.

⁶⁴ Entry for 22 October 1913, *MR II*, p. 169.

⁶⁵ Entry for 28 October 1913, *MR II*, p. 185.

⁶⁶ Giers to Sazanov, 29 October 1913, in *Ministerstvo*, pp. 101–3.

its faults. Even then the Europeans would be ‘more guilty and responsible’ in the event that no solution was reached.⁶⁷ The powers were not only preventing political reforms, he wrote in early November, but were also hampering infrastructural investments, such as the construction of the Baghdad railway in the Armenian provinces, on whose concessions he had long been working.⁶⁸

In Cavid Bey’s view, the powers were not going to sacrifice their immediate financial and economic interests to solve the Armenian Question. He therefore did not take seriously any of the threats of financial pressure that came from the Russians or the Armenians. As he once only half-jokingly told Arthur Zimmermann, the undersecretary of state at the Germany Foreign Office, if the powers would give the Porte its economic freedom in return for Armenian reform, the Porte would be keen to accept their scheme as proposed.⁶⁹ As a matter of fact, the reform agreement *was* linked to the financial talks of 1913–14, as the Quai d’Orsay slowed down loan talks with the Porte to ‘exert pressure for the acceptance of Russian demands.’⁷⁰

Given the Russian–German agreement, however, by the end of October the Porte had little room for manoeuvre. Although Talaat Bey seemed to British agents inclined to make real reforms, he seemed ‘equally determined to resist their imposition by the Powers.’ According to Sir Louis Mallet, the British ambassador in Istanbul, the situation was now largely a question of form:⁷¹ ‘[Talaat] would listen to and probably adopt suggestions made by the Powers . . . privately.’ Thus, in the face of the Russo-German agreement, in the second half of November 1913 Talaat came to terms with the idea of appointing European officers, but they would come from smaller nations and be chosen by Istanbul. In a telegram to Cavid, he wrote that the issue could be resolved by (1) accepting the principle of proportional representation of the Armenians in the administrative councils, (2) accepting the appointment of security officers through an appropriate formula, (3) agreeing to the appointment of inspectors from smaller nations, (4) giving them

⁶⁷ Entry for 28 October 1913, *MR II*, pp. 188–9. At another meeting, on 28 October, Cavid asked Talaat to send inspectors-general to the east immediately. Hüseyin Cahit, who was also present at the meeting, agreed to act as inspector, and Talaat agreed to appoint him shortly.

⁶⁸ Entry for 1 November 1913, *MR II*, p. 199; Note pour le Ministre des Affaires Étrangères au sujet du Cavid Bey, 18 March 1913, Archives Ministère des Affaires étrangères et du Développement international, La Courneuve, Paris (hereafter, AMAE) CP Turquie 373/147.

⁶⁹ Entry for 4 December 1913, *MR II*, p. 367.

⁷⁰ Davison, ‘Armenian Crisis’, pp. 503–4. See also Memo sur Relations de la France avec la Turquie, 19 February 1914, AMAE CP Turquie 300/47.

⁷¹ Mallet to Grey, 31 October 1913, TNA, FO 371/1815/49535.

competencies, and (5) demonstrating to the powers through their ambassadors that the Porte was acting on the issue. Talaat added that the Armenians would not oppose these suggestions.⁷² He was right. Following a private meeting with Zohrab and Vartkes later in December, Cavid wrote in his diaries that the Armenian position and Talaat's suggestions were now reconcilable.

Amid rumours that organized Armenian forces in Eastern Anatolia might revolt and reports of the growing danger that new massacres might be perpetrated by Muslim mullahs awaiting orders from the CUP,⁷³ Cavid Bey started negotiations with Giers on the details and wording of the treaty.⁷⁴ The official reform plan was signed between Russia and the Ottoman Empire on 8 February 1914.⁷⁵ It stipulated that the powers would verbally advise the Porte on the names of two foreign inspectors-general with extensive control. The latter would reside in Eastern Anatolia. In an open letter published in *The Times*, Boghos Nubar Pasha celebrated a new era that was opening for the unfortunate Armenian populations in the region.⁷⁶

The agreement, with the nuances in wording, with the choice of smaller nations as the source for the new foreign inspectors and with the 'advisory' role of the European powers, was prima facie a success for the Porte. Yet it was hardly a success for local Muslims, whose sentiments had been vetted as early as Cavid's 1911 trip to Eastern Anatolia. In early April, the Porte chose Louis Constant Westenenk, a manager at the Dutch East Indies Company, and Nicolai Hoff, a major in the Norwegian army, as the new inspectors. Shortly thereafter, the papers reported a Kurdish revolt in Bitlis, which had been engineered by reactionary elements among the Kurdish tribes who opposed the projected reforms.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, two conflicts in Erzurum, it was reported, had given rise to 'ill-feelings between the Turks and Armenians.'⁷⁸ Although,

⁷² Said Halim Paşa to Ottoman Ambassadors, 19 November 1913, in *Ermeni Meselesinin Siyasi Tarihiçesi*, p. 108; entry for 21 November 1913, *MR II*, p. 284.

⁷³ Entry for 27 December 1913, *MR II*, p. 420; Paul Weitz to Geheimrat [Unknown], 12 January 1914, Deutsche Bank Archives OR1322; Sazanov to Giers, 28 December 1913, in *Ministerstvo*, p. 131.

⁷⁴ Entry for 30 December 1913, *MR II*, p. 429. When Giers left Istanbul, Constantin Gulkevitch continued and concluded the talks. Adamov to Giers, 28 December 1913, in *Ministerstvo*, p. 133; entry for 28 December 1913, *MR II*, p. 426.

⁷⁵ Mallet to Grey, 2 February 1914, TNA, FO 371/2116/4583; Heller, 'Britain and the Armenian Question', p. 20; Davison, 'Armenian Crisis', p. 504. In early February, Boghos Nubar Paşa sent a message to the Porte congratulating them on the peaceful solution achieved. In his reply, Said Halim Paşa offered Nubar Paşa a post as minister in the Porte. The latter declined the offer; Münir Süreyya Bey, in *Ermeni Meselesinin Siyasi Tarihiçesi*, p. 114.

⁷⁶ 'Armenian Reforms: Nubar Pasha on the New Scheme', *The Times*, 20 February 1914, p. 5.

⁷⁷ Mallet to Grey, 19 April 1914, TNA, FO 371/2130/131.

⁷⁸ R. W. Bullard to Mallet, 8 April 1914, TNA, FO 371/2130/18246.

in May, Westenenk and Hoff signed their contracts and started preparations to set off for Eastern Anatolia, the reform plan, anxiously awaited by the local Armenians, was never put into practice. War broke out, Westenenk never got farther than Istanbul, and Hoff was recalled from Eastern Anatolia in August. In January 1915, the two men were officially dismissed from their duties.

The question that needs to be asked is how all these developments affected Cavid Bey's perception of Unionist–Armenian relations. In September 1913, he still refused to believe the Russian ambassador, Aleksandr Izvolsky, when the latter told him that the powers' recent diplomatic interventions had not been *their* idea but that the Armenians had called for foreign interference in the first place. According to Cavid, if the Russians had not announced that the Armenians were under their protection, the Armenians would not have internationalized the issue, and an agreement between the Porte and the Armenians would not have been difficult to achieve.⁷⁹

His correspondence with other European diplomats and bureaucrats reveals that Cavid constantly put the blame for provoking the Armenians at the door of the Russians. It was not the Armenians, he repeated to Zimmermann in early November on his trip to Berlin, who had pressured Russians. 'There may be a few Armenians who would have brought up the issue,' but the Armenians would not have considered options like autonomy. Once the issues of land, security and justice were settled, he wrote wishfully in his diaries, the rest would be resolved.⁸⁰ Russia's efforts to make other powers interfere in the issue, Cavid thought, was undermining the position of the Armenians within the empire. He feared that it would lead to wrath and animosity towards them and undermine their interests. In this view, the Armenians were putting their own interests in danger because of their insistence on foreign control. He told Edouard Huguenin of the Anatolian Railway Company that Armenians were engaged with big business more in Istanbul and Western Anatolia than in Armenia. Public opinion would turn against the Armenians if people were made aware of their attitude. This, he feared, would lead to unwanted consequences and harm.⁸¹ It is not difficult to discern in Cavid Bey's diaries his discomfort with foreign intervention and with Armenian efforts to perpetuate this involvement, as well as a continuous fear that worse could ensue.

⁷⁹ Entry for 28 September 1913, *MR II*, pp. 114–15.

⁸⁰ Entry for 2 November 1913, *MR II*, pp. 199–200.

⁸¹ Entry for 5 November 1913, *MR II*, p. 209.

‘An irremovable stain’

Cavid Bey resigned from his position in the Ottoman cabinet in early November, just after the Ottoman Empire entered the First World War. He had already felt betrayed and excluded by the Unionist leadership when, on 2 August 1914, he had found out that a secret agreement had been made with the Germans without his knowledge or consent.⁸² He was against entering the war, knowing that the empire’s finances were unfit for it, and for some time he had been forcefully resisting Enver Pasha’s designs.⁸³

After the start of the war, and until 1917, Cavid Bey did not take up any cabinet position. Yet indirectly he ran the government’s financial policies, seeking ways to maintain the economy such as making loan deals in Berlin and Vienna and tightening domestic financial policy. He also played a leading role in the internal loan campaign and the establishment of the National Credit Bank.⁸⁴

In April 1915, he was in Berlin with orders from Talaat not to return to Istanbul before resolving the disagreements around amendments to the final version of the Baghdad Railway contract, or at least not until ‘putting them in a shape that would allow for continuing the negotiations in Istanbul’.⁸⁵ Perhaps because his attention was on financial matters and on negotiations with the Porte’s allies, the situation of Eastern Anatolia in late 1914 and in the first half of 1915 receives no mention in Cavid’s diaries – even though he did spend about ten days in Istanbul after 10 May, before returning to Europe. Judging from the content of the diaries per se, he seemed to have had no knowledge of the CUP’s policies on the Armenians in Eastern Anatolia until June 1915.

This is when his notes on ‘the Armenian Question’ begin. On June 14, when he was still in Berlin, he received a letter from Krikor Zohrab’s son that Zohrab and Vartkes had been sent away to Konya. Their families had got in touch with Halil Bey, and the latter had cabled Talaat that such conduct toward two deputies without any reason would damage the honour and dignity of the chamber. Cavid commented that ‘[Halil] is unhappy with the treatment. Yet the poor man has no power to insist.’⁸⁶

⁸² Entry for 2 August 1914, *Tanin* 1 (15 November 1944)

⁸³ Cemal Kutay, *Şehit Sadrazam Talat Paşa’nın Gurbet Hatıraları*, vol. 2 (Istanbul: Kültür Yayınları, 1983), pp. 907–9; Y. Hikmet Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi*, vol. 3 (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1991), p. 188.

⁸⁴ Zafer Toprak, *İttihad-Terakki ve Cihan Harbi: Savaş Ekonomisi ve Türkiye’de Devletçilik* (Istanbul: Homer Kitabevi, 2003), pp. 109–10.

⁸⁵ Entry for 27 April 1915, *MR III*, p. 69.

⁸⁶ Entry for 14 June 1915, *MR III*, pp. 84–5.

The diaries suggest that, ten days later, Cavid's understanding of the events had unfolded further. He had received a letter from Hüseyin Cahit that mentioned the deplorable situation of the wives of Zohrab and Vartkes. According to Cahit, Madam Zohrab was asking whether Cavid Bey could intercede on behalf of her husband. Cavid was uncertain if he could help: 'But to whom [can we] tell problems?' He clearly intuited something dire, for '[i]f the aim was to interrogate only, they wouldn't send these men from Istanbul all the way to Diyarbekir.'⁸⁷ Nevertheless, he wrote a letter to Talaat about the two Armenians, apparently in a mildly disapproving tone, for he noted rather vaguely in his diaries that 'I [wrote that] the issues that he considered [now] resolved are [still] uncertain for the future [and] that with his intelligence, he should have understood this.'⁸⁸

Although the two exchanged several telegrams on financial and economic issues in the following days and weeks, which Cavid noted down regularly, he never mentioned in his diaries whether he received a reply from Talaat on the fate of Zohrab and Vartkes. As Raymond Kévorkian explains in his chapter in this volume, what actually happened to the two Armenian deputies was that during their journey to the east they were first treated as honorary guests of the government, then murdered in cold blood near Urfa on 2 August.⁸⁹ Cavid Bey never mentioned the murder of the two in his diaries either.

After his return to Istanbul on 19 August,⁹⁰ in his diary entry for 29 August–14 September 1915 (he stopped writing on a daily basis during this period), we find how Cavid perceived the cataclysms then taking place. The massacres went into the diaries again under the title 'the Armenian Question.' In the 1943–5 version of the transcription, Hüseyin Cahit cut out this part. But Babacan and Avşar's transcription discloses how at least one Unionist observed and experienced the occurrences in the heat of the moment.

A lengthy passage, which in English comes to well over 600 words, allows us to follow Cavid's tortuous reasoning as he poured out his anguish: 'Ottoman history has never opened its pages, even during the time of the Middle Ages, onto such determined murder[s] and large scale cruelty,' he exclaimed.

⁸⁷ Entry for 24 June 1915, *MR III*, p. 89.

⁸⁸ Entry for 25 June 1915, *MR III*, p. 90.

⁸⁹ Mr. Alberto to Elliot, 23 April 1916, TNA, FO 371/2770/94760. See also Kévorkian's chapter in this book.

⁹⁰ Entry for 19 August 1915, *MR III*, p. 128.

The darkest tortures of [ancient times] remain child's play next to the occurrences that have been told. Even if there is nothing else to wish, then one would [hope] that these stories and accounts are lies, or at least exaggerated.

But he immediately realized that such hopes were in vain, for

I am of the opinion that Talaat was involved in this with complete conviction and celebrated its fundamentals. Together with a few idiotic, mentally crippled Central Committee [members]. The [course of events] that started in the Armenian provinces has extended to the nearest provinces and perhaps [these] nearest provinces witnessed the most disastrous scenes. One day we were at [my place], Talaat was saying, 'Sad thing, it comes into my dreams, but it was an imperative for the country. What will we tell Paris?'

Baffled (and infuriated) at Talaat's priorities, Cavid's despairing rant unleashed the invective he had been too startled to deliver to Talaat's face:

If you want to bloody the Armenian question politically, then you scatter the people in the Armenian provinces, but scatter them in a humane manner. Hang the traitors, even if there are thousands of them. Who would entertain hiding Russians [and] the supporters of Russians? But stop right there. You dared to *annihilate the existence of an entire nation* [*bütün bir kavmin ... mevcudiyet-i hayatiyesini imha*], not [only] their political existence. You are both iniquitous and incapable. What kind of conscience must you have to [be able to] accept the drowning, in the mountains and next to lakes, of those women, children and the elderly who were taken to the countryside! And then those miscreants, the governors and officials.

Apparently, the interior minister had tried to placate Cavid with excuses and assurances that he was doing his best, but Cavid did not believe him:

Talaat storms about them beyond measure. [He says] he will establish an inspection committee [and] he will punish the culpable. But will the things that have been done be undone by this? They are doing this to remove the Armenians ... A crude and tactless tide of nationality has taken the place of the stream of Ottomanism. Into what does a beautiful humanity turn, in the hands of stupid butchers?

And then the once and future finance minister lamented the complete mismanagement of the sector that had once been his own bailiwick:

There is no individual who considers the future, the economy and the resources of this country well. Many industrial branches are being ruined. The need, they say, will create Turkish workers. They heard the name of a bill. But they do not worry over how many centuries [it will take] for that to lead to the emergence of Turkish workers; until then, there will be more need for foreigners than now; the burgeoning need, more even than now, will not bring about development in the short-run. It will be necessary to fill the vacated places. It is frightening that the Germans might fill these. Those who are intellectually capable in the country see this situation with despair, and among the intellectually incapable, there is a mindless rejoicing. Probably nobody has the power to say anything. Even then, what profit can be expected from words? The foreigners are complaining. The Austrian ambassador told me that they would not be able to defend us in the *Reichsrat* [Austrian parliament]. He complained that it was not possible to make the dignitaries of our government listen to him. He said that the Germans sent three respective notes and, to mitigate the effects, these notes were not sent under orders from Berlin, but they did this jointly with the ambassador who does not know the country.

The Austrian ambassador was referring to his new German counterpart, Prince Ernst Wilhelm von Hohenlohe-Langenburg, who had arrived on 20 July to stand in for Wangenheim, whose health had collapsed and who was on an extended 'cure' until early October. Hohenlohe had angered the Unionists by almost immediately making energetic protests about the treatment of the Armenians. Cavid continued, referring to the CUP's foreign minister and former leader in parliament:

Halil [Menteşe] Bey is opposed to the Armenian affair. [He says] that it wasn't discussed in the Central Committee. And in the end harsh and absolute commands were sent to the provinces. I do not know to what extent these are complied with. But in any case it is a bit late . . . With these acts we have [ruined] everything. We put an *irremovable stain* on the current administration. By openly disclosing that we are a nation incapable of self-government, we wiped out the little hope and trust [in us].

There was now 'no chance for the abolition of capitulations', Cavid lamented, referring to his long-standing hope, and then concluded presciently:

[A]nd I fear even more that Talaat, who saved himself from the spies of Abdulhamid, from the Greeks, Bulgarians and from his Ottoman opponents, will be a target for an Armenian bullet.⁹¹

This was Cavid's most detailed diary entry on his sense of the cataclysm that had engulfed the Armenians. His emotions seem to have been so strong while writing that some of his sentences make little or no sense from a linguistic point of view. It is sometimes difficult to grasp what he actually meant. Yet it is not hard to detect his intense feelings of shock, pain, disappointment, anger, fear and isolation in these lines.

Cavid's diaries, unless they were self-censored or edited with hindsight, suggest that he was not involved in the Porte's decision-making processes regarding the Armenians during the war, nor the decisions taken by the Central Committee. As a matter of fact, Taner Akçam points out that when Halil Menteşe travelled to Berlin to start talks about Armenian deportations in March 1915, even though Cavid was in town, he was not informed of the talks because he was not trusted in the Armenian matter.⁹² This partially explains Cavid's emotional reaction to the news at the end of summer 1915.

The diaries do show, however, that he talked to Talaat about the events retrospectively. The entry also serves as a testament to the fact that, as a leading Unionist, albeit one sometimes excluded from political decision-making, Cavid had no doubt that the occurrences were a deliberate act of extermination of an ethnic group.

The content of his entry complements the observations and reports of many European and Eastern Anatolian figures who witnessed the events and whose notes at the time have long been utilized in the literature on the 1915 genocide. One of these witnesses was Mr Alberto, a British subject, formerly director of the Tabac Regie at Beirut. Alberto had been arrested in June 1915, spent two months in the prisoners' camp in Urfa and was then sent to Istanbul, where he lived in comparative freedom. In April 1916, he set down his observations for the British Foreign Office.

While at Urfa, Alberto saw massacres taking place. He stated that, after the murder of Armenians in two or three houses, the Armenians rose and held out against the Turks until Fahri Pasha, Cemal Pasha's second in command, 'bombarded the town and killed off the Armenians to the last soul'. Armenians who had been brought in by rail and on foot from towns in Asia Minor were divided up in Urfa. The old men, old women and younger children were

⁹¹ Entry for 29 August–24 September 1915, *MR III*, pp. 135–6. Emphases mine.

⁹² Akçam, *Young Turks' Crime against Humanity*, p. 184.

separated into one group, the able-bodied men into a second group, and the marriageable girls and young women into a third group.

The separation of these groups naturally meant the most heartrending scenes imaginable. The first group would then be put in [the] charge of gendarmes and taken over hundreds [of] miles of desert towards Rakka and Deir-el-Zor, there to be handed over to the tender mercies of the Bedouine. In the course of a short time the majority of these people perished. On one occasion in July 1915 the Bedouins themselves revolted against the appalling cruelty shown to the Armenian women and attacked the military granaries at the Bagdad line station at Alabyed, two hundred miles east of Aleppo, in order to get food for the starving Armenians. The second group, that of the able bodied men were led off and killed in batches in the neighbourhood of Urfa. The cynicisms [sic.] of the Turks in uselessly bringing these people 600 miles in order to butcher them in cold blood at the end of their journey adds a note of still greater horror to their cold-blooded brutality. As for the third group, that of the young girls, their fate may be imagined.⁹³

An unsigned memo on the Armenian massacres prepared by the Foreign Office reported that Urfa was only one of several places used as a terminus for bringing Armenians to their various fates.

The Governors of Ismidt, Angora and Diarbekir completely wiped out all the Armenians in their district. Although in the case of Angora the first Governor refused and was dismissed. At Konia Djelal [Celal] Pasha refused and after his dismissal under the new Governor the Armenians were deported rather than massacred. At Kutahia the Governor took up such [a] strong line that he threatened to arrest and kill any man who laid a finger on the Armenians. Cemal Pasha, in Syria, actually hung twelve of the worst blackguards sent by Enver Pasha as ringleaders for the Armenian massacres there. While Bekir Sami scrupulously guarded the 50,000 Armenians living in Aleppo whom he had collected from neighbouring places that were menaced.⁹⁴

According to Cavid's diaries, the horrendous news arriving in Istanbul would lead many deputies, including those who had been wholehearted 'supporters' of the policies at the beginning, to denounce the atrocities. In autumn 1915,

⁹³ Mr Alberto to Elliot, 23 April 1916, TNA, FO371/2270/94760.

⁹⁴ Note on the Armenian Massacres, n.d., TNA, FO371/2270.

when Hüseyin Cahit (Yalçın) wanted to resign from the chamber over such incidents, for which he refused to accept moral responsibility, Talaat invited him over to discuss matters. Cavid poured scorn on these ‘discussions’: ‘Instead of consulting [each other] now, should they not have met before the evils reached this stage?’⁹⁵

Aside from these notes, however, thereafter there is a noticeable ‘silence’ in the diary entries for the years between 1915 and 1918 on matters concerning the extermination of the Armenians and the atrocities in Eastern Anatolia. Was Cavid uninformed about the incidents? Or did he prefer to remain indifferent to them in his diaries, even as he made very detailed notes on other issues? There is little evidence to provide definitive answers to either of these questions.

By the time that Cemal Pasha was assassinated by an Armenian in 1922, Cavid Bey seems to have changed his perception of the extermination and would write that the murder of Cemal, his old compatriot, was unfair. He had received a letter in 1917 from Halide Edib, who had been in Aleppo at the time, about the situation of Armenians. At least this letter confirms that he knew that the Armenians were speaking very highly of Cemal Pasha and for his protection. This was probably why Cavid Bey wrote in his diaries five years later that Cemal Pasha had partaken in the Adana deportation (*tehcir*) ‘a bit’ (*biraz*), but he had also made great efforts to preserve the lives of thousands of Armenians in Syria – testimony that accords with the aforementioned account of British agents. For this, Cavid Bey added, Cemal was deserving of Armenian lenience, if not their gratitude.⁹⁶

Memory of the genocide

At the end of the war, Cavid Bey’s name was on the wanted list of Admiral Somerset Gough-Calthorpe, the British high commissioner in Istanbul. The commissioners asked the Porte to arrest certain members of previous Ottoman cabinets to bring them to justice.⁹⁷ They were charged with crimes against rival politicians, war captives and Armenians. It is noteworthy that Cavid Bey was the subject of ‘special’ treatment. Arthur Balfour, now foreign secretary in Lloyd George’s cabinet, had asked his staff to prepare a report specifically on the charges against Cavid. The resulting evaluation argued that there was ‘a lack of any definitive proof against him’, and it would be difficult

⁹⁵ Entry for 26 September–18 October 1915, *MR III*, p. 149.

⁹⁶ Entry for 22 July 1922, *MR IV*, p. 381.

⁹⁷ Richard Webb to Arthur J. Balfour, 5 March 1919, TNA, F0371/4173/42787.

to prove his individual responsibility. According to Admiral Calthorpe, however, Cavid Bey's moral responsibility was enormous.⁹⁸

In 1919, with the help of the French, Cavid escaped to Switzerland to avoid arrest and imprisonment. His perception of the wartime cataclysms had changed. On 4 November 1920, he received a letter from his friend Hüseyin Cahit, who had been interned in Malta by the British along with other Unionists and was writing from the island with the help of a Unionist Armenian, Bedros Halladjian, whose card was also in the envelope. As we see in the diaries, Hüseyin Cahit wrote that since he had been imprisoned, he had found plenty of time to think. Seeing the illiberal attitudes of 'the so-called liberal Europeans' towards eastern prisoners had made him a different man. He had come to believe that the most auspicious, the most foresighted, the wisest and the most altruistic action carried out by the Porte during the war, 'or in fact since the Ottoman government had been established', was 'the Armenian deportation [*tehcir*]'.

People were killed! [?] Starting from Macedonia, did they kill few Muslims? Did the Armenians perpetrate a few massacres in Azerbaijan and [Turkey]? Do you see any *gavur* who mention and complain about these? Did the Greeks not do a massacre in Izmir during occupation? Lloyd George does not publish even the official report . . . Because of the Armenian incidents, these guys [*herifler*] will come and monitor the Turks, won't they?

According to Cahit, the principles of justice and humanity were discussed only when the Turks were carrying out atrocities, whereas everyone was committing such acts. The war in Anatolia between the Greeks and the Turks was a war incited by the British for their own goals. David Lloyd George was 'the real murderer'. If Eastern Anatolia had been left to the Armenians, there would have been a massacre of Muslims there. All nations perpetrated, and would perpetrate, atrocities and crimes to maintain their existence. '[Are] the Turk[s] the [only] culpable because they [sought to] maintain their existence?' If the Turks were Christians, Cahit added, then they would not be regarded as blameworthy.⁹⁹

Cavid was moved by this letter: 'I should have felt this when I took my head in my hands and thought several times . . . of the shameful of Europe.' The words of humanity, justice and right were always uttered by the Europeans, he wrote, but when it came to actions, one saw oppression, rage

⁹⁸ Calthorpe to Balfour, 20 April 1919, TNA, FO 371/4173.

⁹⁹ Entry for 4 November 1920, *MR IV*, pp. 160–1.

and wildness.¹⁰⁰ In fact, he had already seen the post-war massacres in the Caucasus as reciprocal killings, but now, in 1920, five years after writing in his diaries that the annihilation of the Armenians was an irremovable stain, he appeared to be convinced that 1915 could be understood as comparable to atrocities perpetrated by Armenians and other groups. This attitude he maintained until his death in 1926. Whenever in a conversation he felt that the CUP was being accused of the 1915 events, he would ask his interlocutors to pay attention to the fact that 400,000 Muslims had also been murdered during the war.¹⁰¹

The case of Cavid is an early example of what is now called the culture of denial, denial that can be traced to the emotional reactions of the perpetrators of crimes or their close associates to becoming fugitives or prisoners, or to the experience of awaiting trial in the immediate aftermath of the war. Seeking to justify the CUP's acts or perhaps seeking emotional relief, Hüseyin Cahit highlighted in his letter an argument that had already loomed large at the parliamentary meetings in 1918–19.¹⁰² According to this argument, it was not only the Turks who had committed massacres and atrocities. The Turks were only one of many, and the fact that it was only their crimes that were foregrounded at the time was merely a consequence of their being non-Western, non-Christian or politically weak.

The element of truth in these perceptions relied on the fact that Muslims had also been massacred during the war by Armenian groups in Eastern Anatolia. In a report in mid-July 1915, Mark Sykes wrote about his conversation with Sourene Bertevian, the Dashnak editor of the *Houssaper*, according to whom 'no Moslems now survived in the city of Van, [and] the district was rapidly filling with refugees from the Caucasus, and . . . the Armenians hoped soon to be in possession of Mush.'¹⁰³ Although the claim that no Muslims survived in Van was somewhat exaggerated, the massacres, mass killing, pillage and raping of Armenians had set the stage for the horrendous scenes and miseries that would then be inflicted on Muslim locals there. The Ottoman administration's measures were analogous, yet obviously disproportionate.

Let me conclude with a historical anecdote. In January 1918, 'an absolutely sure source' reported to British intelligence that in the middle of the month

¹⁰⁰ Entry for 4 November 1920, *MR IV*, pp. 160–1.

¹⁰¹ Mehmed Cavid, *Felaket Günleri: Mütareke Devrinin Feci Tarihi* (Istanbul: Temel, 2000), pp. 103–5.

¹⁰² Ayhan Aktar, 'Osmanlı Meclisi Ermeni Meselesini Tartışıyor: Kasım–Aralık 1918', in Fahri Aral (ed.), *İmparatorluğun Çöküş Döneminde Osmanlı Ermenileri: Bilimsel Sorumluluk ve Demokrasi Sorunları* (Istanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2010), p. 367.

¹⁰³ Mark Sykes to Major General C. E. Callwell (Director of Military Operations), 14 July 1915, TNA, FO 371/2490/108253.

Kara Kemal, an influential member of the CUP, arrived in Switzerland. He went to Geneva and spent two days at the Ottoman consulate. Kemal brought with him the archives of the CUP, which had previously been in Vienna, as well as the committee's funds and the personal funds of some of its members. He deposited these funds and archives in several banks in Geneva and Zurich. According to British intelligence, this seemed to indicate that the committee wanted to take every precaution in the event that they dropped out of the alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary, then battling the Entente powers.¹⁰⁴

We still do not know the whereabouts of the CUP's long-lost archives. In the absence of such sources, however, the diaries, memoirs, autobiographies of the leading or other figures of the time, and other used and unused materials play a doubly important role. This is obvious. What is also important is to test the reliability of these sources, especially of memoirs and autobiographies. We must remember that there is always the risk of misreading late Ottoman history through the prism of one person's diary or memoir. As Hayek once speculated, 'the existence of an autobiography may lead to our knowing less about its subject matter.'¹⁰⁵ The existence of a diary may likewise lead us to an island of knowledge where its author, wittingly or unwittingly, has taken us, and where our angle of vision might be shadowed or obscured by his subjectivity.

Also important is the interplay among historical facts, ideas and the emotions of the author reflected in these sources. In the case of Cavid, we have seen an evolving political and emotional position as far as the Armenian Question was concerned. In 1912–14, he was experiencing anxiety and a feeling that Ottoman national honour was being sullied by European intervention in Ottoman domestic affairs. In 1915, like many, he seemed to be shocked and disappointed and became extremely pessimistic about the future. His outrage was coloured by shame. But he moved on. He even took up a new ministerial position, and after the war, perhaps with guilt or even anger excited by the circumstances of the time, he shared the Unionist belief that everyone was doing it; all had committed such crimes during the war.

Cavid was often depicted by his contemporaries as a moderate, indeed a liberal, politician. And these depictions were partially true. But above all, he was a committed Unionist.

¹⁰⁴ H. Rumbold to the Foreign Office, 24 January 1918, TNA, FO 371/3388.

¹⁰⁵ F. A. Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor: Their Friendship and Subsequent Marriage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951), p. 16.

A Rescuer, an Enigma and a Génocidaire: Cemal Pasha*

Ümit Kurt

I appreciate the loftiness of my duty . . . And I am also aware of the kind of great difficulties I will be faced with while carrying out this duty . . . I will not stop at any sacrifice in order to gain victory. If I cannot be victorious, I will fill the water of the canal with the corpses of myself and my friends . . . Undoubtedly, the heroes who are left behind will walk over our corpses and enter the land [of Egypt] . . . They will rescue this Islamic country from the invasion of the British.¹

As pointed out by Ziya Şakir, Cemal Pasha (1872–1922) held the most significant position following Talaat (1874–1921) and Enver (1881–1922) in the history of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) government.² Following the re-declaration of constitutionalism (*Meşrutiyet*) on 23 July 1908, Cemal was elected member of the head office (*Merkezi Umum-i*), thus being thrust into the forefront of the CUP. He joined the Action Army (*Hareket Ordusu*), which the CUP mobilized against the counter revolutionary uprising that broke out in April 1909 (*31 Mart Vakası*).³ He served in Istanbul as district governor of Üsküdar in 1909 and was then dispatched to Adana as governor. In 1911 he was appointed to the

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¹ The speech delivered by Cemal Pasha as the commander of the Fourth Army at the Haydarpaşa Station, addressing the crowds gathered to see him off as he left for Syria. Cited in Ziya Şakir, *Yakın Tarihin Üç Büyük Adamı: Talat, Enver, Cemal Paşalar* (Istanbul: Anadolu Türk Kitap Deposu, 1943), p. 189.

² Şakir, *Yakın Tarihin Üç Büyük Adamı*, p. 181. This work by Şakir also features the detailed biographies of Cemal along with Enver and Talaat.

³ Hasan Kayalı, 'Cemal Paşa, Ahmed', in 1914–1918 online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. Ute Daniel et al., Freie Universität, Berlin, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/cemal_pasa_ahmed (accessed 12 May 2015)

governorship of Baghdad. During the Balkan War (1912–13), Cemal commanded reserve troops in Thrace as colonel. He took part in the CUP putsch in January 1913 against the Freedom and Accord Party (*Hürriyet ve İtilaf Fırkası*) government. The new grand vizier Mahmud Şevket Pasha (1856–1913) assigned Cemal the military governorship of Istanbul. He was promoted to general, in December 1913 became Pasha and in February 1914 he became the minister of navy.⁴ Soon after the Ottoman Empire entered the war in November 1914, Cemal Pasha also accepted the posts of military commander and governor in Greater Syria. He then became General Governor of Syria, Palestine, Cilicia and the Hejaz, making Jerusalem his military headquarters on 4 February 1915. In late February, however, Cemal turned over command of the area comprising the north and central regions of Beirut, Syria, Aleppo and Adana provinces to Fahri Pasha, who held the title of the Twelfth Army Corps Commander.⁵

Known for his rigid policies towards Arab nationalists and Zionists during his posting in Greater Syria, Cemal Pasha and his role in the Armenian genocide has always remained an issue of contention. There are important accounts of Cemal's activity, particularly during the First World War, which have found him to have had no active role in the deportation and extermination of Armenians – here differing from the other two pillars of the CUP, Enver and Talaat. On the contrary, such accounts argue that he extended a helping hand to Armenians in so far as his authority and power would allow, and that he even faced off against members of the central government in Istanbul and the CUP head office to do so.⁶ This chapter will question that argument, examining the politics of Cemal Pasha during the war, while concentrating on his approach to the Armenian matter. I will also explore his own responsibility for the genocide and discuss the context and contingencies of the way in which his role as a genocide perpetrator manifested itself.

⁴ Şakir, *Yakın Tarihin Üç Büyük Adamı*, p. 189; Hikmet Özdemir, *Cemal Paşa ve Ermeni Göçmenler: 4. Ordu'nun İnsani Yardımları* (Istanbul: Remzi Kitapevi, 2009), p. 49. See also Hasan Kayalı, 'Cemal Paşa, Ahmed', in *1914–1918 online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. Ute Daniel et al., Freie Universität, Berlin, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/cemal_pasa_ahmed (accessed 12 May 2015).

⁵ ATASE Arşivi: K.162, D. 713, F. 35 cited in Özdemir, *Cemal Paşa ve Ermeni Göçmenler*, p. 51.

⁶ M. Talha Çiçek, *War and State Formation in Syria: Cemal Pasha's governorate during World War I, 1914–17* (London: Routledge, 2014); Hilmar Kaiser, 'Regional resistance to central government policies: Ahmed Djemal Pasha, the governors of Aleppo, and Armenian deportees in the spring and summer of 1915', *Journal of Genocide Research* 12, no. 3–4 (2010): 173–218. For another work that has the same propensity, see Özdemir, *Cemal Paşa ve Ermeni Göçmenler*, p. 14.

Cemal Pasha's 'Armenian policy'

The memoirs of Falih Rifki, who served as Cemal Pasha's adjutant on the southern front on the Sinai Peninsula, open with a scene in which the pasha lines up the Arab gentry of Nablus in his room. He begins by asserting his power over the leading figures of the city, subjecting them to a strong scolding for their allegedly nationalist activities before exhibiting his merciful side, by ordering that their punishment be confined to exile in Anatolia.⁷ This scene gives us a glimpse of Cemal's power and his style of implementing it. While the pasha firmly believed in modernization and civilization, he was also an advocate of ruthless discipline and did not hesitate to use force as a vehicle of power. According to Falih Rifki, the mannerisms of the pasha, in the Arab regions in particular, were reminiscent of those of European colonial masters.⁸ In the end, he argues, Cemal was a power whose 'single utterance meant life or death from Yemen to the Euphrates'.⁹

While the literature is in agreement that the words from the mouth of the pasha usually meant death where Arabs were concerned, there is no consensus on his stance towards Armenians. Hilmar Kaiser, for example, stresses that Cemal stood resolutely against genocide, noting that he espoused a strategy, even if only partially implemented, that remained independent of the political centre.¹⁰ Raymond Kévorkian, on the other hand, highlights the military rationale behind Cemal's practice of husbanding the labour power of the Armenians – prior to their later extermination.¹¹ Kévorkian as well as Donald Bloxham also point to a secret agenda behind Cemal's milder measures, noting that he had aspirations, encouraged by the Allies in Greater Syria, of forming a government of his own in the region.¹² Fuat Dündar, on

⁷ Falih Rifki Atay, *Zeytindağı* (Istanbul: Pozitif Yayınları, 2004), p. 17.

⁸ Atay, *Zeytindağı*, p. 56.

⁹ Flavia Amabile and Marco Tosatti, *Halep'in Baronları* (Istanbul: Aras Yayıncılık, 2015), p. 42.

¹⁰ Hilmar Kaiser, *The Extermination of Armenians in the Diyarbekir Region* (Istanbul: Bilgi University Publications, 2014), p. 384. For detailed analysis of the 'regional resistance', see Kaiser, 'Regional resistance to central government policies', pp. 173–218, esp. p. 209.

¹¹ Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), p. 681.

¹² Raymond Kévorkian, 'Ahmed Djémal pacha et le sort des déportés arméniens de Syrie-Palestine', in Hans-Lukas Kieser and Dominik J. Schaller (eds), *The Armenian Genocide and the Shoah* (Zurich: Chronos Verlag, 2002), pp. 197–212; Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, pp. 683–85; Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 139. It is an interesting parallel that Mithat Pasha, who served as the governor of Syria province approximately forty years before Cemal Pasha, was also said to have desired the secession of Syria from the empire and the establishment of his own administration in the region. Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 34.

the other hand, asserts that Cemal Pasha's more lenient treatment of Armenians was aimed at counterbalancing the weight of Arab influence in the region.¹³ Talha Çiçek rejects all of the aforementioned interpretations and holds that Cemal, contrary to the anti-Armenians Talaat and Enver and other core members of the CUP (as represented by two physicians, Bahaeddin Şakir and Nazım Bey), all of whom had adopted an exterminatory policy, was acting on entirely humane impulses, as he wished to protect Armenians and save them from genocide.¹⁴

Here I shall argue that, on the contrary, Cemal Pasha's real position on the Armenians differs substantially from the assessments available in current scholarship. I hold that his conduct towards the ethnic groups in Greater Syria – beginning first and foremost with Arabs, Armenians and Jews – was aimed at subduing them, so as to make them incapable of harming the sovereignty, unity and authority of the Ottoman state. To this end, he practised radical and harsh disciplinary methods, exerting great effort to ensure especially that the Armenian population would not constitute a majority in any of the regions to which they were deported, nor be in a position to make claims that might pose a threat to the sovereignty and survival of the Empire. As a matter of fact, Cemal's perception of the Armenian 'Question' was not so very different from the general stance of the CUP, and thus that of Talaat and Enver. Cemal Pasha considered the Armenians' demands for reform, and the incentive they offered to the European Great Powers to put pressure on the Ottoman government, which had resulted in the February 1914 accord, as a stain on the honour and dignity of the empire. Thus he held the same view as Talaat and Enver, and the wings of the party that they represented: that such a threat and the 'trouble' it encouraged should be eliminated – absolutely.¹⁵ According to Cemal Pasha, 'The Armenian uprisings [sic] are events that place the existence of the state in danger and whose suppression creates an obligation for self-defense.'¹⁶

Yet throughout his career as a statesman, Cemal maintained good relations with the Armenian congregation's leaders and leading members of this community. Particularly during his time as the governor of Adana (August

¹³ Fuat Dündar, *Modern Türkiye'nin Şifresi: İttihat ve Terakkî'nin Etnisite Mühendisliği, 1913–1918* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2010), pp. 324–8.

¹⁴ M. Talha Çiçek, *War and State Formation in Syria*, p. 109. Çiçek also stresses Cemal's initiation of major infrastructure and construction projects as well as his administrative reforms in his jurisdiction. See Çiçek, *War and State Formation in Syria*, pp. 19–20, 168–9, 180–4, 191–4. See too Yuval Ben-Bassat and Dotan Halevy, 'A tale of two cities and one telegram: the Ottoman military regime and the population of Greater Syria during WWI', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 45, Issue 2 (2018): 212–230.

¹⁵ Cemal Paşa, *Hatırat* (Istanbul: Arma Yayınları, 1996), p. 371.

¹⁶ Quoted in Enver Ziya Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, vol. 9 (Ankara: TTK Yayınları, 1996), p. 452.

1909), he played an active role in the trial and punishment of those involved in the massacres of Armenians that had occurred in the province that spring, coming to the aid of Armenians who had been subjected to these atrocities.¹⁷ Such behaviour put Cemal in a position to assume the role of a negotiator, as compared to Talaat and Enver, where Armenians were concerned.

The most fundamental difference between Cemal and the other two leaders was *the methods* he wanted to employ to decrease the number of Armenians to a level that would no longer pose a threat to the Ottoman state.¹⁸ It is at this point that Cemal Pasha emerges as an assimilationist – and a disciplinarian – as opposed to a proponent of extermination. He adopted a project for the Turkification and Islamization of Armenians and systematically implemented these ideals. Thus he did not allow mass extermination to take place in the provinces, townships and administrative authorities (*mutasarrıflık*) under the command of the Fourth Army over which he presided. He did, however, intensively implement conversions to Islam in these regions, actualizing his ideals. The result was that he pursued policies that, where the Armenians were concerned, were subject to change at any moment.

A rescuer: Cemal Pasha seen through the eyes of Armenians

Our understanding of Cemal, and of his role in the use of violence, has been shaped by the perceptions of his victims. In both his correspondence with influential members of the Armenian community and in the memoirs of some of those who survived the genocide the picture of Cemal differs vastly from that of Talaat and Enver.

The correspondence between Cemal Pasha and Sahag II Khabaian, Catholicos of Cilicia, in February 1915, when the deportations began in Zeitun and Dörtıyol, and at various phases of the deportation through March of that year, present us with important data about the Armenian policies of the central government and the position and stance held by Cemal on these decisions. One of the first points that comes to the fore in these telegrams is the continual and insistent requests by the Catholicos to Cemal for an improvement in the situation of Armenians and for the protection of their lives, possessions and

¹⁷ FO 195/2307, from the British Vice-Consul to the Istanbul Consulate-General, Adana, 25 August 1909; 1 September 1909.

¹⁸ Mark Levene, 'The changing face of mass murder: massacre, genocide and postgenocide', *International Social Science Journal* 54, no. 174 (2012): 448.

honour. In fact, the correspondence itself is evidence that he believed that Cemal could and would play an effective role in overcoming the myriad and mounting difficulties facing the Armenians. Had Cemal not energetically set about ameliorating the Armenians' condition after he had been appointed governor to Adana, in the wake of the April 1909 Armenian massacres? These, and other helpful policies, constituted an historical memory that made it possible for the Catholicos to have hope in Cemal's goodwill.¹⁹

Thus he would send a telegram to the Pasha regarding the detainment of draft evaders on 23 March 1915, requesting that the actions being taken by the gendarmes not be expanded to include the innocent population. In this telegram, the Catholicos would stress that the majority of Armenians were loyal to both the state and the governing authority and had followed the general call for mobilization faithfully. He stated that they too wished for the draft evaders to be caught; he requested, however, that the security measures being taken not affect the safety and peace of ordinary Armenians in Zeitun.²⁰ In fact, Cemal Pasha agreed with him. In his response, a telegram dated 26 March, he stressed that he held the same point of view, and that it was a sacred duty for him to protect the lives and possessions of the innocent people.²¹ However, he strongly cautioned the Catholicos against his people's creating even the slightest impression that they looked kindly upon the 'bandits' that these draft dodgers in fact were, let alone that they actually supported them in any way.²² Afterwards, Sahag II Khabaian, who then resided in Adana, informed the Zeitun Armenian bishop (*murahhas*) on 27 March 1915 of his correspondence with Cemal, conveying the warnings that were given by him.²³ On the same day, he would send a telegram back

¹⁹ During his time as the governor of Adana, Cemal Pasha's administration was praised by Armenians. For information on this, see Der (Father) Nerses Tavukjian, *Dar'abanqi Orakro'wt'iwn* (Diary of Miserable Days), ed. Toros Toramanian (Beirut: High Type Compugraph – Technopresse, 1991); Zaven Der Yeghiayan, *My Patriarchal Memoirs* (Barrington, RI: Mayreni Publications, 2002); Nevzat Artuç, *Cemal Paşa, Askeri ve Siyasi Hayati* (Ankara: TTK, 2008), pp. 71–7.

²⁰ Krikor Guerguerian Private Collection (hereafter KGPC), File no: 22, Dossier number: 16, Cilicia Catholicos Sahag II to Fourth Army Command, 10 March 1331 (23 March 1915), p. 135. I would like to thank Taner Akçam for allowing me to use his transcripts. These documents were obtained from the Archive of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem by the priest Krikor Guerguerian. Akçam initiated an archival project to collect numerous materials copied by Guerguerian. He has released the Guerguerian Private Collection through the Library Database of Clark University in late 2018.

²¹ KGPC, Cilicia Catholicos Sahag II to Fourth Army Command, 13 March 1331 (26 March 1915), pp. 135–6.

²² KGPC, Cilicia Catholicos Sahag II to Fourth Army Command, 13 March 1331 (26 March 1915), p. 136.

²³ KGPC, Cilicia Catholicos Sahag II to the Zeitun Envoy, 14 March 1331 (27 March 1915), p. 136.

to the Pasha, reporting what he had done. He did not stop at this, however. On 29 March he would send another telegram to the bishop, to inform the people that they should not be concerned, as he had secured Cemal Pasha's guarantee that their lives and possessions would be protected.²⁴ To this end, he advised the people to refrain from any activity that would violate the peace and good order.

During this same period, however – March and April 1915 – the deportation of Armenians in the province of Adana and surrounding districts began.²⁵ In April the Catholicos tried again to intervene. And of course his primary contact during this period was Cemal Pasha. Sahag II Khabaian, who had found out that all of the men from the Suveydiye district's five villages had without exception been deported, reported the situation to Celal Bey, governor of Aleppo. In his telegram dated 6 April 1915, he noted that the Armenian population there made its living mostly through the silk worm trade, and that if the community were deprived of its male population, it would result in great economic privation. Thus, he requested that Celal Bey have all men who had passed the age of military conscription, as well as those who had not yet reached it, sent back to their homes.²⁶ In another telegram, dated 3 May 1915 and addressed to Cemal Pasha, he would stress yet again that the whole of the Armenian congregation in his spiritual circle were faithfully loyal to the state.²⁷ Yet despite all these efforts, the deportation of the entire Armenian population of Zeitun had begun.²⁸ The ill-treatment and misfortunes that befell the Armenian community deported from Zeitun deeply saddened the Catholicos. He would send another telegram to Cemal about the case on 3 May 1915. While informing him of what had happened to Zeitun's Armenians, he again requested Cemal's intervention. He would highlight once again that while there might be some Armenian partisans in the region, these people were not representative of the community as a whole, nor accepted by them, as the Armenians of Zeitun remained deeply loyal to the state. He would add further that it was not just the Armenians of Zeitun,

²⁴ KGPC, the Zeitun Envoy to the Cilicia Catholicos Sahag II, 16 March 1331 (29 March 1915), p. 137.

²⁵ *Askeri Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi*, no: 81, 1982, doc 1823, 10 April 1915; AA-PA, Türkiye 183/38, A 27584, 15 April 1915, cited in Kaiser, 'Regional resistance to central government policies', p. 180, n. 36.

²⁶ KGPC, File no: 22, Dossier no: 16, Cilicia Catholicos Sahag II to Aleppo Province, 24 March 1331 (6 April 1915), p. 139; KGPC, Cilicia Catholicos Sahag II to Fourth Army Command, 24 March 1331 (6 April 1915), pp. 140–1.

²⁷ KGPC, Cilicia Catholicos Sahag II to Fourth Army Command, 20 April 1331 (3 May 1915), p. 157.

²⁸ BOA.DH.ŞFR 52/48, coded telegram from Ministry of the Interior to the Province of Aleppo, 20 April 1915.

but the vast majority of those in Marash, Aintab, Kilis, Hacin, Adana and Aleppo who remained loyal to both their state and their government.²⁹

It appears, however, that the Catholicos' hopes were in vain, for the destination of the deportees actually worsened, shifting from Konya to Deir-ez Zor on 24 April.³⁰ As of 7 May, a total of 4,384 Armenians had been exiled from Marash as well.³¹ On 15 May, in another telegram from Adana to Cemal Pasha, a desperate Catholicos pleaded that, at the very least, the weakest be spared:

[I ask] that on behalf of the innocent, comprised of the sick, the pregnant women, the children and adolescents, [so] that the streams [and] hilltops don't become their graves, their demise. Their prayers [of thanks for you] are what will enrich your life with value . . . Please show mercy, so that you may please the Almighty Creator. I seek refuge in your conscience. I have no other door to knock on. I ask that you grant a benevolence that will wipe the tears from my eyes and become balm to my wound.³²

Following this, Cemal sent an important telegram to Talaat on 17 May. In this telegram he would reveal, in a sense, his own deportation strategy. He would stress that he had embraced the central government's decision to deport all the Armenians in Zeitun, including Dörtüyl, Hacin and Hasanbeyli. However, the sick and disabled as well as pregnant women should temporarily be exempted.³³ In the meantime he would mobilize military resources to assist transportation and provide other provisions for the Armenian families. He also stated to Talaat Bey his view that the possessions and properties left behind by the Armenians should be placed under legal protection. He alluded particularly to the situation of Armenian women and children, underlining that any tragedy that befell them would gravely taint the reputation of the state.³⁴

The hopes of the Catholicos, however, would once again prove in vain. Deportations from the areas surrounding Adana, Zeitun and Marash would continue at full speed.³⁵ On 15 June, Sahag II Khabaian, who now resided in

²⁹ KGPC, File no: 22, Dossier no: 16, Cilicia Catholicos Sahag II to the Fourth Army Command, 20 April 1331 (3 May 1915), pp. 158–9.

³⁰ BOA.DH.ŞFR 52/93, coded telegram from Talaat Bey to Cemal Pasha, 24 April 1915.

³¹ BOA.DH.ŞFR 470/65, 7 May 1915.

³² KGPC, File no: 22, Dossier no: 16, Cilicia Catholicos Sahag II to the Fourth Army Command, 2 May 1331 (15 May 1915), p. 160.

³³ BOA.DH.ŞFR 471/53, 17 May 1915; BOA.DH.ŞFR 471/54, 17 May 1915. Cited in Kaiser, 'Regional resistance to central government policies', p. 186.

³⁴ BOA.DH.ŞFR 471/53, 17 May 1915; BOA.DH.ŞFR 471/54, 17 May 1915. Cited in Kaiser, 'Regional resistance to central government policies', p. 186.

³⁵ Kaiser, 'Regional resistance to central government policies', pp. 188–9.

Aleppo, would send a telegram to Cemal Pasha, reporting on the situation of those deportees who could still be reached. The details in the telegram are very important. He noted that it was the innocent along with the guilty who were being torn from their homes, and under horrific conditions. They were not being given food or shelter; there were not even graves to bury the deceased. He requested that at least twenty to thirty members of a household be allowed to live in a single locale.³⁶ Cemal, however, did not want Armenians to reside together any more than did Talaat or Enver. The existence of Armenian communities must not be allowed under any circumstances.

On the same date, the Catholicos would send another telegram, this time to the provincial authorities of Adana. In his communication he explained that the Armenians who had arrived in Aleppo after an arduous twelve-day journey, during which they were hungry, thirsty and deprived of any kind of subsistence, after having been forbidden to gather up even the smallest of their personal belongings, had been subjected to all forms of oppression at the hands of the officers who had been appointed to protect them on this journey.³⁷ Upon hearing this, on 21 June 1915, Cemal Pasha sent a telegram to Sahag II Khabaian, asking if there had been any violation of the bodies, possessions or properties of Armenians who had been transferred to various sites. He asked that he personally be informed if such occurrences had taken place. Similarly, he gave his word to the Catholicos that the help he requested in his previous telegram, in addition to other needs, would be met.³⁸

In a telegram dated 26 June, the Catholicos replied that there had been no direct attacks on the lives or possessions of the deportees to whom he had referred. He stressed, however, the existence of cases involving the deliberate targeting of the honour of Armenian women, which required investigation. But lest even this picture appear benign, he added that Armenians had been displaced without any money, clothing or provisions, and that the owners of farms and animals were not even allowed to sell their livestock in order to purchase a vehicle – this, while being forced to abandon their lands in the middle of harvest season.³⁹ He stressed to Cemal Pasha that everyone had been deported, regardless of their condition, even the elderly, critically ill,

³⁶ KGPC, File no: 22, Dossier no: 16, Cilicia Catholicos Sahag II to the Fourth Army Command, 2 June 1331 (15 June 1915), pp. 172–4.

³⁷ KGPC, Cilicia Catholicos Sahag II to Aleppo Province, 2 June 1331 (15 June 1915), p. 175.

³⁸ KGPC, Fourth Army Commander Cemal Pasha to Armenian Catholicos in Aleppo, 8 June 1331 (21 June 1915), p. 182. See also Hilmar Kaiser, 'Shukru Bey and the Armenian deportations in the fall of 1915', in M. Talha Çiçek (ed.), *Syria in World War I* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 172–3.

³⁹ KGPC, Cilicia Catholicos Sahag II to the Fourth Army Command, 13 June 1331 (26 June 1915), pp. 182–7.

pregnant women and widows, as well as families whose sons were serving in the military. Those deported had not been supplied with any form of transportation; they had been forced to walk for days, carrying their belongings on their backs, forcing some to leave their small children and babies along the way. They were also not supplied with any provisions, and were not even permitted to fetch water from nearby neighbourhoods. He added that the deportees had been subjected to indecent, insulting and harsh treatment at the hands of gendarmes, soldiers and officers on duty.

Informed of the situation by Sahag II, and to appease Turkey's German ally, which had again expressed its disapproval of the treatment of the Armenians, three days later Cemal apparently gave a German information officer in Damascus a transcript, in French, of a circular of a series of commands regarding the Armenians to be published in the other provinces. It said that his previous orders, demanding that Armenians deported to different regions not be treated badly, had been violated; that the officers and officials who had accompanied the Armenian convoys had treated them harshly and insultingly; that some families had been deported separately from their heads, spouses and children; that some women had been forced to sell their children as they lost the strength to carry them; and that all such ill-treatment should come to an end. This was a matter that cast a shadow on the empire's national honour and tainted the ideal of Ottomanism (*Ittihad-ı Anasır*). Consequently, the circular announced that those who had engaged in such ill and oppressive treatment of Armenians were to be swiftly placed under investigation, and those officers who were damaging the honour of the Ottoman state were to be tried for treason in courts martial. It required the authorities in Aleppo province to send orders to all provinces that deported Armenians were to be provided with the vehicles necessary to accommodate their move; that all their needs along the way were to be met by gendarmes and other staff; and that the ill among them were not to be moved until they regained their health.⁴⁰

Hilmar Kaiser accepts the circular in question as authentic, whereas Wolfgang Gust asks why Kaiser concedes its authenticity so uncritically,

⁴⁰ 'Publication for the provinces', undated, enclosure 4, Oppenheim to Bethmann Hollweg, Damascus, 29 August 1915, AA-PA Türkei, 183/38, A 27584, available in the original German in Wolfgang Gust (ed.), *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern 1915/16* (Springen: Zu Klampen Verlag, 2005); in English translation (which lacks, however, the earlier edition's valuable appendix of abbreviations) in Wolfgang Gust (ed.), *The Armenian Genocide: Evidence from the German Foreign Office Archives, 1915–1916* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2014), pp. 339–40 and online at Gust (ed.), www.armenocide.net, 1915-08-29-DE-001 (accessed 17 March 2018). For a different translation of this publication, see Kaiser, 'Regional resistance to central government policies', p. 192.

when otherwise he relies on Ottoman documents in Ottoman archives, not French transcripts sent to Berlin; when the German official transmitting it to Berlin was hostile to Armenians and therefore untrustworthy; and when there is no evidence that such an order was ever enforced in the provinces? If Cemal, one of the triumvirate in the Ottoman Empire, did send an order to the provinces to protect the deportees' lives, property and honour, then why was that order not carried out? As things stand now, we cannot rely on the authenticity of this circular for we do not have hard evidence to prove it.⁴¹

Meanwhile, Cemal ordered the execution of six Circassians upon learning of their involvement in an attack on a convoy of deported Armenians. He had already announced on 19 June that those army commanders and governors who bore responsibility for the Circassians' attack would be brought to trial. He would give orders that Armenians were not to be left without 'bread, shelter and burials'. And recognizing the desire of large Armenian families to live together, he decreed that 'ten people' were to be 'placed in one home and the ill [were to be] left alone until they regained their health'.⁴²

In his telegram to Cemal Pasha dated 5 August 1915, the Catholicos – perhaps for the first time – openly narrated the oppression inflicted upon the deported Armenians. He noted that the men in Diyarbekir and its surroundings had been indiscriminately massacred with no exception; that boys and girls from five to ten, as well as many of the widowed and single women who had been sent to Aleppo, had been raped in Deir ez-Zor and Ras al-Ain before being sold as slaves. He drew attention to the fact that the girls, women and children who had been abandoned in the sun around Arap Pınar and the Ras al-Ain station were intentionally detained, despite repeated appeals for their transfer to Aleppo, and that the attacks against them had continued.⁴³ Families that were sent from Aintab in two caravans had been blockaded by the

⁴¹ Kaiser, 'Regional resistance to central government policies', esp. pp. 190, 192, 196, and Wolfgang Gust, 'The question of an Armenian Revolution and the Radicalization of the Committee of Union and Progress toward the Armenian Genocide', *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 7, no. 2 (2012): 251–64, esp. p. 255. Kaiser has converted the dates on the enclosures from Cemal in Oppenheim's report of 27 August 1915 from the Rumi calendar to our Gregorian calendar, so they do not match the dates in Gust's document editions, which retain the Rumi dating of the archival originals. But Kaiser is in error in dating (pp. 190 and 214, n. 86) a dispatch from Cemal to Celal, governor of Aleppo, in enclosure 3 in Oppenheim's report, 27 June 1915. Cemal's letter to Celal is dated 10 June 1331 in the original, which, converted to Gregorian, would be 23 June.

⁴² Ali Fuad Erden, *Birinci Dünya Harb'inde Suriye Hatıraları* (Istanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2003), p. 121; Kaiser, 'Regional resistance to central government policies', p. 191.

⁴³ KGPC, File no: 22, Dossier no: 16, Cilicia Catholicos Sahag II to the Fourth Army Command, 23 July 1331 (5 August 1915), p. 199.

gendarmes and Muslim residents of the area, with their belongings and possessions looted and the group suffering deaths and injuries.⁴⁴

In his reply, a telegram dated 8 August, Cemal Pasha, now in Aleppo, noted that Armenian resistance in Fındıcak meant that deportation could not be delayed, explaining that orders had been given once again to all sides to ensure that Armenian families were protected from all forms of misery.⁴⁵ However, there is no sign that such orders, if they in fact existed, were ever obeyed – a laxity that is hardly compatible with Cemal's reputation as a disciplinarian. The deportation was continuing at full speed with the Armenians subjected to this forced migration suffering all sorts of attacks in the new regions where they arrived.⁴⁶

Krikor Bogharian, who was deported from Aintab in the middle of August 1915, was someone who, in addition to Catholicos Sahag II, penned interesting notes regarding Cemal Pasha in a diary he kept throughout the deportation. Bogharian notes a request addressed to Cemal on 19 April 1916 by a group of Armenian women located in the Salamiyya district of the Hama, which was part of Aleppo province. In this request, they asked that the conditions to which they were being subjected be improved, even if only by a little, and for their survival needs to be met, and for the safety of the spouses and children of the men who were being held for military service.⁴⁷ Cemal Pasha would look

⁴⁴ KGPC, p. 199. The deportation of Aintab Armenians was initiated on 1 August 1915. On this date, fifty Armenian families who were members of the Armenian Orthodox Church were sent off from the Akçakoyunlu train station destined for Aleppo. For detailed information on the deportation of Aintab Armenians, see Bibliothèque arménienne Nubar, Paris (BNu) /Fonds A. Andonian, J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, 'The Deportation of Armenians in Aintab', p. 7; Elie H. Nazarian, *Badmakirq Nazarean Kertasdani (1475–1988)* (History of Nazarian Family) (Beirut: Zartonk, 1988), p. 184; Kersam Aharonian, *H'òwshamadean Medz Egher'ni* (Memory of Great Crime) (Beirut: Atlas, 1965), p. 46; Kevork Barsumian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ah'ni'abi H. H. Tashnagco'wt'iwn 1898–1922* (History of Aintab Armenian Revolutionary Federation 1898–1922) (Aleppo: Tigris, 1957), p. 204; Sebuhan Aguni, *Milion mi Hahero'w Ch'arti Badmo'wt'iwny* (History of the Massacre of One Million Armenians) (Istanbul: H. Asaduryan Vortik, 1920), p. 311; M. Arzumian, *Ha'hasdan, 1914–1917* (Armenia, 1914–1917) (Yerevan: Hayasdan 1969), p. 438.

⁴⁵ KGPC, File no: 22, Dossier no: 16, Fourth Army Commander and Naval Minister Cemal Pasha to Cilicia Catholicos Sahag II, 29 July 1331 (11 August 1915), pp. 199–200.

⁴⁶ Raymond Kévorkian describes the period of the Armenian deportation between the summer of 1915 and the end of 1916 as the 'second phase of the Genocide'. He examines this phase of the deportation in all its details. See Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, pp. 625–91.

⁴⁷ The diary that Krikor Bogharian began to pen at the time when he was deported from his hometown of Aintab is the tale of a 497-day life in exile. It starts on 11 August 1915 and ends on 19 December 1916. Krikor Bogharian, 'Orakro'wt'iwn Darakir Geanqis', in Toros Toromanian (ed.), *Ceghasban T'òwraq Vgahò'wt'iwnner Qaghò'wadz Hrashqò'w Prgo'wadznerò'w Zro'hnere'ni* (The genocidal Turk: Eyewitness accounts culled from the accounts of people who were miraculously saved) (Beirut: Shirag, 1973), p. 167. In his recently published book, Vahé Tachjian illuminates the story of Bogharian families (along with Der Nerses Tavukjian) who endured forced relocation and deprivation in

favourably upon this request. He expedited the distribution of sustenance and from 26 April until 1 September suspended the detention of Armenian men born between 1894 and 1897. In his diary, Bogharian also noted that in Salamiyya, where he himself was located, the situation of the Armenians was better than that of Armenians exiled to the Deir-ez Zor region, attributing the difference to Cemal's efforts. Elsewhere, he noted that he and his fellow exiles in Hama were 'grateful to Cemal Pasha' for their relatively fortunate situation.⁴⁸

Others rescued by Cemal Pasha included Melkon Kalemkerian and his family, who resided in Aintab. In his memoirs, Melkon Kalemkerian's son, Avedis, notes that it was Cemal who played an important role in his family's being placed in Damascus instead of being exiled to Deir ez-Zor. When Cemal Pasha had served as governor of Adana, he had been presented with a samovar hand-crafted by the coppersmith Melkon. The pasha became enamoured by the craftsmanship he perceived in this item. Upon hearing that Cemal would be visiting Aleppo, Melkon wrote him a letter and visited him at the Baron Hotel, which belonged to the Mazlumian brothers. He requested that he and his family not be sent to the desert along with the peasants and Bedouin families and that they instead be sent to an area where he could continue to work at his craft.⁴⁹ Afterwards, Cemal Pasha would order his aide to prepare a document for Melkon and his family that would allow them to be placed in Damascus. Another interesting incident involved Melkon's son, Avedis Kalemkerian. Avedis, who was a member of the Social Democratic Hunchakian Party (SDHP), was being sought by the Unionists. When they found out that he was in Damascus, the Unionists began to pursue him, eventually catching him and throwing him in jail. Afterwards, when Avedis was brought before Cemal, he was immediately released. Cemal understood that the defendant was Melkon's son and so ordered that he be sent home. In the end, Avedis would end up employed as a head workman in a construction factory established by Cemal Pasha in Damascus in December 1917, with the help of certification provided by Cemal himself.⁵⁰

Hrant Sulahian, born in Aintab in 1871, is another Armenian who survived the genocide due to the intervention of Cemal Pasha. Sulahian, who was exiled to Damascus along with the other members of his family in October 1915, was arrested there and sent back to Aintab in March 1916. After spending four months in a jail, he returned to his family in Damascus.

and around modern-day Syria. See Vahé Tachjian, *Daily Life in the Abyss: Genocide Diaries, 1915–1918* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 2017).

⁴⁸ Bogharian, 'Orakrōwt' iwn Darakir Geanqis', p. 182.

⁴⁹ Vahe N. Gulesserian (ed.), *H'owshamadean Awedis Kalemqereani* (The Memoir of Avedis Kalemkerian) (Beirut: Dibaran Der Sahagian, 1965), p. 60.

⁵⁰ Gulesserian, *H'owshamadean Awedis Kalemqereani*, p. 70.

He was arrested yet again and this time transferred to Aleppo. There he was sentenced to capital punishment by a military court on charges of having participated in 'revolutionary and nationalist activities'.⁵¹ His death penalty was commuted, however, upon the intervention of the Pasha, and he was later released on his orders. Yet another Armenian whose life was rescued by Cemal was Dikran Sebuĥ Chakmakchian of Aintab (1894–1964). Chakmakchian, who was among the leading photographers and artists of the city, was exiled to Damascus, and then to Beirut during the deportation. He drew the portraits of the serving governor and district governors of both cities, bestowing on Cemal Pasha a portrait of himself as well.⁵² Cemal took him under his wing in appreciation of this gift. Chakmakchian stressed that Cemal saved the lives of many other Armenians along with himself.⁵³

In another personal narrative, this by Kevork A. Sarafian, Cemal Pasha was singled out as a conscientious Turk who came to the aid of surviving Armenians. Sarafian explained that despite having received orders to evacuate his own region's Armenians, Cemal did not follow these instructions and in fact, unlike the harsh policies he enacted with Arabs, displayed more leniency where Armenians were concerned.⁵⁴ Sarafian stressed that the Pasha even found employment for Armenian men who had been deported. More importantly, he pointed out, no massacres occurred in the territories that Cemal was overseeing and that remained under his control.

Yet another interesting example of his mercy is related in an issue of *Jamanak*, published in Armenian in Istanbul following the armistice. An article dated 7 November 1918 stated that Cemal and Enver Pasha were not as responsible as Talaat Pasha, Bahaeddin Şakir and Dr Nazım for the deportation and extermination of Armenians. In fact, it particularly underlined the aid that Cemal provided to the Armenians in the Aleppo region.⁵⁵

⁵¹ 'Hirant K. Sulahian 1871–1949', *Nor Aintab* 13, no. 50–1 (1972): 11–14; BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, pp. 11–2; Kevork A. Sarafian, *A Briefer History of Aintab: A Concise History of the Cultural, Religious, Educational, Political, Industrial and Commercial Life of the Armenians of Aintab* (Los Angeles: Union of the Armenians of Aintab, 1957), p. 290.

⁵² Yervant Babaian (ed.), *Badmo'wt'iwn Ahnt'abi Hahòc* (History of Aintab Armenians), vol. 3 (Los Angeles: Union of the Armenians of Aintab, April Publishers, 1994), p. 933; Raymond Kévorkian et al. (eds), *Les Arméniens de Cilicie: Habitat, mémoire et identité* (Paris: Presses de l'Université Saint-Joseph, 2012), p. 154; Sarafian, *A Briefer History of Aintab*, p. 299.

⁵³ Babaian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ahnt'abi Hahòc*, vol. 3, p. 933; Sarafian, *A Briefer History of Aintab*, p. 299.

⁵⁴ Kevork A. Sarafian (ed.), *Badmo'wt'iwn Ahnt'abi Hahòc* (History of Aintab Armenians), vol. 1 (Los Angeles: Union of the Armenians of Aintab, 1953), p. 1052.

⁵⁵ 'I Ghegavarner'e, E'sd Hayeri' (The CUP Leaders According to the Armenian View), *Jamanak*, no. 3347, 7 November 1918.

Are these testimonies sufficient to allow us to describe Cemal Pasha as someone who saved Armenians? It is not possible to respond affirmatively to this question. Holocaust scholars have presented us with two clear criteria that are necessary in defining a rescuer during a genocide. The first is that they 'undertook . . . [their actions] with full cognizance that detection might result in death to themselves and frequently to their families'. The second criterion is that they 'undertook their task without monetary compensation'.⁵⁶ If we accept these criteria, then the term rescuer cannot be applied to Cemal Pasha. Yet, he did indeed save the lives of *some* Armenians directly, and may even, through his milder administration of his colleagues' genocidal policy, have indirectly contributed to the survival of even more.

Saving the lives of some fortunate Armenians does not exempt Cemal from the label 'génocidaire', for he was fully committed to the disappearance of Armenians from Turkish soil. In fact, he was distinguished from Talaat, Enver, Tahsin, Cevdet, Abdülkadir and others not in his goals, but in his more confident, more pragmatic and more realistic choice of *means*. Talaat's practices appear to have been deliberately cruel, aimed at the death of deportees; Cemal's less violent practice was, one could argue, more realistic because it would not have robbed the new Turkey of so much labour (which Anatolia had always needed, but especially after almost continuous warfare since 1911), nor of so much human capital: skills, know-how and contacts. Cemal's post Armenian Turkey would have been more prosperous and more competitive internationally. The only 'down side' (for a génocidaire) was that the empire would become *Armenierrein* more slowly, as the next generation of Islamicized children gradually replaced their parents. But the Turkish economy would not have been thrown into such chaos and valuable resources would have been conserved.

An enigma: the Cemal Pasha who required Armenians to convert

As mentioned above, Cemal Pasha held an assimilationist approach towards the 'elimination' of Armenians from Anatolia; that meant Turkification through the conversion of Armenians to Islam.⁵⁷ According to his own

⁵⁶ Samuel Oliner and Pearl M. Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe* (New York: Free Press/Macmillan, 1988), p. xviii.

⁵⁷ Raymond Kévorkian, 'L'extermination des déportés arméniens ottomans dans les camps de concentration de Syrie-Mésopotamie (1915-1916), la deuxième phase du génocide', *Revue d'Histoire arménienne contemporaine* 2 (1998): 51.

memoirs and the recollections of Halide Edib, the motivation behind his persistent policy in the conversion of Armenian widows, the elderly, as well as orphaned girls and boys was, in fact, to save the lives of Armenians.⁵⁸ Another source for this interpretation of Cemal's actions is Bishop Kud, who was present at a private meeting he held with Sahag II Khabaian's aide.

The Catholicos, who was sent to Jerusalem from Aleppo on Cemal's orders, would file a written complaint to the Pasha in which he stated that the Armenians deported to the towns and villages of Syria and Jordan were being forced to become Muslim and that this was taking place at the hands of a special delegation deployed from Istanbul, which included a conversion unit.⁵⁹ Sahag II Khabaian noted that bishops and priests were similarly being forced into Islam and those who objected were being tortured and killed. Furthermore, the Catholicos said that neither the Justice nor Interior Ministry officials, nor Cemal Pasha himself, were keeping their promise of helping the Armenians who had been deported. Cemal, in response, asked the Catholicos to send his most trusted representative to Damascus immediately. Sahag II Khabaian sent Bishop Kud. When Kud came face to face with Cemal, who had reacted quite angrily to the letter he received, he heard the following gripping words:

I see this matter [of conversion] in a very humane fashion. Go and tell the Armenians there that until the end of the war they are free to live as Muslims, Jews, non-believers, monkeys, donkeys or whatever else they should please. Is that clear? Go and tell the Catholicos precisely this.⁶⁰

It seems certain that Cemal was infuriated at what he saw as Armenian ingratitude for his protection, and so, frustrated at these constant complaints and requests, he exploded. Though he did not express himself clearly, his first line seems to congratulate himself for his kindness in allowing Armenians to be converted, which he saw as *humane* – because the alternative (understood, if unspoken) was deportation and – probably – death. It is also important to note that Talaat eventually forbade conversions en masse or individually, recognizing that they were done to secure a way for Armenians to remain in their native land.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Cemal Paşa, *Hatıralar*; Halide Edib Adivar, *Memoirs of Halide Edib* (London: Gorgian Press, 2005), pp. 390–1.

⁵⁹ *Badmo'wt'iwn Ahint'abi Hah'oc*, vol. 1, p. 1053.

⁶⁰ Catholicos Papken I, *Badmo'wt'iwn Gatoghigosats Gilikiyo (1441en minchev mer orere)* (History of Cilicia Catholicate from 1441 until Today), 2nd edn (Antilias, Lebanon: Cilicia Catholicate, 1939/1990), pp. 951–3.

⁶¹ BOA.DH.ŞFR 54/254, coded telegram from the Ministry of the Interior's General Security Directorate to the Provinces and Provincial Districts of Erzurum, Adana, Bitlis, Aleppo, Diyarbakır, Trebizond, Mamuretülaziz, Musul, Van, Urfa, Kütahya, Marash, İçel and Eskişehir, dated 1 July 1915.

Then, when Talaat did allow Armenians to convert, he stated that even Islamicized Armenians were to be deported anyway.⁶² It was puzzling that Cemal's list in this quote, though eclectic about the ways Armenians were 'free to live', does *not* include 'as Christians.' It could be claimed that he was simply in such a fury that his omission of Christians was an oversight, made in the heat of the moment. Or he might also have meant that once the war was over, Armenians would be free to become Christians again. In either case, it is clear that Cemal himself was in such a lather that he made no sense.

Shortly after this meeting, Cemal would head for Jerusalem and Sahag II Khabaian would visit him there. During his visit, the Catholicos complained that the government was not providing the required aid to Armenians, only to hear the Pasha, who had recovered his composure, respond in the following fashion:

I am speaking to you not as Commander Cemal Pasha, but more as a friend. If you knew of what has befallen the Armenians outside the regions I command, you would feel gratitude towards me for the state of Armenians in Aleppo, Damascus and Jerusalem and their surroundings. The time we are in calls for silence. Just pray for the war to end soon; the sooner the war ends, the better it will be for you.⁶³

In fact, Cemal would have the conversion unit of the delegation he brought in from Istanbul on hand as part of the Special Committee to help Armenians that he formed on his own initiative in March of 1916. The existence of this delegation demonstrates that Cemal had noteworthy support for his programme within the Ottoman elite, and that the long arm of his influence stretched all the way to Istanbul. That the purpose of the Special Committee was a genuine desire to help the surviving Armenians is demonstrated by the complaint of one of its members, Hüseyin Kazım Kadri Bey, a founder of the CUP and of its official newspaper, *Tanin*, who had formerly been governor of Aleppo. Hüseyin Kazım Kadri Bey had travelled all the way from Istanbul to help bring relief to Armenians only to eventually resign in protest in May 1916, when he felt that the authorities were not sufficiently fulfilling *their* responsibilities and that the committee's work was being obstructed. Was the obstruction by design, or simply the inherent inertia of any bureaucracy? We don't know. But the very presence of the Istanbul delegation, with its conversion unit and its members on the Special Committee to bring relief to

⁶² Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), p. 175.

⁶³ *Badmo'wt'iwn Ahint'abi Hahòc*, vol. 1, p. 1053.

Armenians, showcases Cemal's assimilationist policy. But the committee, even if established to aid Armenians, also served another very important purpose: by providing some measure of relief among dependent new arrivals, Cemal was laying the foundations of an independent power base for himself among this potentially important new 'demographic', thus magnifying his own authority in a province far from the capital and its rulers.⁶⁴

But whatever direct or indirect support Cemal may have given Armenian deportees, it was the activities of the Armenian Aid Council in Aleppo, founded during the deportations on the initiative of the Armenian episcopacy in Aleppo, and now spreading outside of the empire, that enabled Armenians to survive at all in the lands to which they had been deported. The Aid Council's efforts far transcended the works initiated by Cemal in improving the situation of exiled Armenians.⁶⁵ Although its work depended upon Cemal's toleration, the Aid Council's success in getting help to the deportees, and providing minimum subsistence, healthcare and employment, cannot be attributed to Cemal Pasha alone.

In the end, for Cemal, reducing the Armenian population to an ethnic minority that no longer posed a threat was possible once the Armenians abandoned their nationality, which would automatically 'thin' the numbers of those who identified as Armenians. In order to realize this goal, he aimed his conversion and assimilation policies particularly at widows, orphaned boys and girls under twelve. He encouraged the marriage of Armenian widows to Muslims; established orphanages for boys and girls where the speaking of any language other than Turkish was banned; and ordered Turkish families to adopt Armenian orphans, give them a Turkish upbringing and inculcate in them Turkish morals and culture.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ See Erden, *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Suriye Hatıraları*, p. 152; Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, p. 185. For Hüseyin K. Kadri Bey's memoirs, see Hüseyin Kazım Kadri, *Meşrutiyetten Cumhuriyete Hatıralarım* (Istanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2000).

⁶⁵ For a breakdown of the superhuman aid activities of the Armenian Aid Council in Aleppo throughout the period of deportation, see Khatchig Mouradian, 'Genocide and Humanitarian Assistance in Ottoman Syria (1915–1917)' (unpublished PhD thesis, Clark University, MA, 2016), pp. 27–77.

⁶⁶ The best known among the orphanages in question is the Ayn Tura Orphanage in Beirut, where Halide Edib served as headmistress for a time. Assigned to this post at the request of Cemal Pasha, her most important task was teaching Armenian children Turkish and educating them in Turkish culture. One Armenian who was subjected to this treatment while staying at the Ayn Tura was Karnig Panian. Panian, who would later pen an account of her experiences in *Goodbye, Antoura: A Memoir of the Armenia Genocide* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015). Furthermore, Murat Bardakçı's work, titled *İttihatçı'nın Sandığı*, which features a document from the CUP's Minister of Finance Cavid Bey, including sections of his correspondence with Halide Edib, provides very interesting information for those curious about her activities at the Ayn Tura. Murat Bardakçı, *İttihatçı'nın Sandığı* (Istanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2014), pp. 124–5.

Throughout these efforts, Cemal Pasha continued to blame his 'friends in Istanbul' whenever practices and decisions emerged that were detrimental to the Armenians. German officials accepted Cemal's criticism of Istanbul and dissociation of himself from the brutality at face value. According to German sources, it was evident that he did not approve of the CUP's or its local representatives' harsh precautionary measures against Armenians and had even attempted to soften the rigidity of their deportation policies.⁶⁷ Colonel Friedrich Freiherr Kress von Kressenstein, who in 1915 was with the Fourth Ottoman Army as Cemal's Chief of Staff, on coming upon a group of deported Armenians at the Toros Mountains on 29 November 1915, noted that:

Cemal Pasha had become so distraught by what he saw that he was unable to speak for a long period of time. He finally broke his silence with these words: 'Because they cannot witness with their eyes the incredible disaster and misery it will cause, my friends in Istanbul do not hesitate in taking such measures.'⁶⁸

The German consul at Aleppo, Walter Rössler, was more laconic, reporting that 'There are serious signs that the method of killing the exiles on the march shall also be followed in the districts of Marash and Aleppo. Djemal Pasha's orders stand in the way, but the Committee [CUP] is working for it.'⁶⁹

Talaat and his supporters within the CUP, unfazed by the deaths of deportees, appear to have been deliberately cruel, and so do seem the opposite of Cemal, who hoped to limit as much as possible the deportees' inevitable suffering. Yet in principle Cemal supported the deportations with equal vigour. He stood firmly behind the decision that all of the deportations mandated in the period of February–May of 1915 were necessary.⁷⁰ Later on, in a coded telegram he sent to the minister of the interior on 24 July 1915, he would request that the necessary steps be taken to deport the Armenians in the districts of Aintab and Marash to the townships in Aleppo and Syria.⁷¹ On 24 August, Bekir Sami Bey, the governor of Aleppo, reported in another coded telegram to Talaat that Cemal had ordered the deportation of *all* Armenians, regardless of their religious denomination. Knowing that Talaat,

⁶⁷ Gust, *The Armenian Genocide*, p. 10.

⁶⁸ Özdemir, *Cemal Paşa ve Ermeni Göçmenler*, pp. 92–3; Ramazan Çalık, 'Alman Kaynaklarına Göre Cemal Paşa', *Journal of Ottoman Studies* 19 (1999): 239, n. 36.

⁶⁹ 1915-08-12-DE-011 and 1916-01-03-DE-002 in Gust, *The Armenian Genocide*, pp. 68–9, 73.

⁷⁰ 1915-12-07-DE-001 in Gust, *The Armenian Genocide*, pp. 72–3.

⁷¹ BOA.DH.ŞFR 481/17, 24 July 1915; BOA.DH.ŞFR 54A/113, 26 July 1915.

in his previous order, had stressed that Protestant Armenians were to be exempted from deportation, the governor was making sure that he had Talaat's approval for Cemal's *more* sweeping measure!⁷²

Moreover, Cemal Pasha would personally use deportation as a way of both disciplining and disposing of any ethnic and religious groups that he felt posed a threat to the state. In 1915 and 1916, on the basis of French documents he had obtained, he ordered the death penalty for leading Arab figures/nationalists who were alleged to be in the process of organizing a rebellion to found an independent state, and he exiled their families to Anatolia.⁷³ Approximately 5,000 other Arab families who 'had no political power or [participation in] activities' were also exiled to inner Anatolia, for alleged 'political reasons'.⁷⁴ As the historian Hasan Kayalı underscores, the underperformance of Arab regiments in Sinai during the February 1915 Suez campaign provided Cemal Pasha with a pretext to carry out a campaign of repression against the Arab nationalist movement in the spring of 1915.⁷⁵ The Jews of Jaffa, who were thought to have supported anti-Ottoman propaganda during the war, were also threatened with 'deportation as had been done to the Armenians'.⁷⁶

Yet despite the fact that Cemal executed the deportation orders coming from the central government, he did not hesitate to credit himself with every development that worked to improve the situation of Armenians. When rejecting requests by the US and Germany to allow their private charities to deliver assistance, he would insist to the German Ambassador, Paul von Wolff-Metternich, that while he personally supported helping the Armenians as much as his means allowed, orders from Istanbul had tied his hands.⁷⁷

The 'génocidaire' Cemal Pasha

Determining Cemal Pasha's role in the Armenian genocide and his actions as a perpetrator requires us to examine these actions within the scope of

⁷² BOA.DH.ŞFR 485/47, 24 August 1915. Cited in Kaiser, 'Regional resistance to central government policies', p. 200.

⁷³ Eliezer Tauber, *The Arab Movements in World War I* (London: Frank Cass, 1993), pp. 54–5; Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks*, p. 193; Cemal Paşa, *Hatıralar*, pp. 235–330.

⁷⁴ Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks*, pp. 193–4; Dündar, *Modern Türkiye'nin Şifresi*, pp. 96–105.

⁷⁵ Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks*, p. 193.

⁷⁶ Atay, *Zeytinadağı*, p. 71. For how this was stopped, largely through German pressure, see Isaiah Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, and Zionism, 1897–1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

⁷⁷ Cemal would instead send a message to Germany noting that he was ready to accept aid so long as it was distributed to the Armenians by the Turkish authorities. See DE/PA-AA; R14091; A 08702, a report dated 29 March 1916 from Metternich to the German chancellor in Gust, *The Armenian Genocide*, p. 565.

genocide literature.⁷⁸ In the end, there are methods, moments, situations and attitudes that define being a perpetrator. The most important charge against Cemal is that he supported a policy that would rid the new Turkey of its Armenian population. The attorney for the defence would say: his intent was to transform Ottoman Armenians; not eliminate them, but turn them into Turks – by assimilation, albeit compulsory assimilation. According to the concise definition of Raphaël Lemkin, who coined the term genocide, forced assimilation is ‘the destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group’ and ‘the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor’.⁷⁹ To this end, Cemal, within the scope of his area of responsibility as the Fourth Army commander, followed a systematic and intentional assimilation policy in Greater Syria. There, where he was deployed, so far from both Istanbul and the Armenian heartland, it remained conceivable for an Armenian to transform herself or even himself into an ‘ideal Ottoman’, that is, one who expressed a Turkish identity, one mark of which was to embrace Islam, at least culturally if not ideologically. For this transformation to take place, however, the annihilation of the Armenian ‘burden’ was absolutely necessary. Once that identity disappeared, the Armenian issue would itself disappear, ceasing to be a ‘burden’ – for Turkey, and for the former Armenian. Thus the policies and methods employed by Cemal Pasha did not have an exterminatory character. But that does not absolve them from the charge of being genocidal in their own right, nor did his assimilationist solution to the Armenian ‘problem’ and his adoption of deportations and other forms of compulsion, absolve him of his own share of responsibility for the genocide. On the contrary, they make him an important supporter and implementer of it.

⁷⁸ There is a prodigious amount of scholarship that examines the perpetrators’ actions and the motivations according to different perpetrator categories, such as idealist, opportunity careerist, conformist, etc. For example, Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992); Daniel J. Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1996); Edward B. Westermann, *Hitler’s Police Battalion: Enforcing Racial War in the East* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005); Olaf Jensen and Claus C. Szejnmann (eds), *Ordinary People as Mass Murderers: Perpetrators in Comparative Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Wendy Lower, *Hitler’s Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013); Wolfgang Sofsky, *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Thomas Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide: Hitler’s Community, 1918–1945* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); Michael Mann, ‘Were the Perpetrators of Genocide “Ordinary Men” or “Real Nazis?” Results from Fifteen Hundred Biographies’, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 14, no. 3 (2000): 331–66.

⁷⁹ Raphaël Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944), p. 79.

Furthermore, it is necessary to recall that there may have been a variety of motives behind Cemal's initiatives for helping the Armenians. One was his desire to create a new political order in Greater Syria and to establish the state's authority there. That required using to maximum advantage the skills of an Armenian labour force, which the state needed. In assuming key roles in the CUP regime – naval minister, governor general of Syria, Fourth Army commander – Cemal chose to adhere to the decisions of the central government and the CUP Central Committee rather than taking the initiative at times when he might have had the ability to influence the Armenian situation for the better or to alter it entirely. For example, Cemal Pasha played a key role in concealing the merciless treatment to which the deportees had been subjected, by giving orders on 13 September 1915 for the German staff and engineers responsible for the construction of the Baghdad Railway to turn over their photographs, along with their negatives, of the starving and naked Armenians trudging along the railway line, to the Baghdad Railway Military Police Unit within 48 hours. He threatened to put on trial in a military court those who defied this command.⁸⁰ Thus Cemal Pasha contributed to the cover-up, in line with the orders of the central government. According to the memoir of an Ottoman Jewish civil officer during the war, Cemal ordered the deportation from Damascus of anyone who offered shelter to Armenian deportees.⁸¹ Having appreciated 'the loftiness of his duty', he never acted contrary to his patriotic, nationalist and imperial impulses.

Conclusion

Suggesting an explanation for the actions of someone who has actively participated in mass violence should not be equated with forgiving, legitimizing or turning a blind eye to actions that constitute a crime. But we have an obligation – in a simple sense – to try to understand how people can turn into killing machines. For the actors who perpetrated these crimes deserve our attention at least as much as the institutions and structures within which they operated. Generally speaking, in actions where there is

⁸⁰ 1915-9-03-DE-002 in Gust, *The Armenian Genocide*, pp. 356–7. See also BOA.DH.ŞFR 493/62, Cemal Pasha to Ministry of the Interior, 13 October 1915, and Kaiser, 'Shukru Bey and the Armenian deportations', p. 198.

⁸¹ Baruch Katinka, *From Then until Now* (Jerusalem: Qiryat Sefer, 1961), pp. 214–15. Katinka was the technical manager of the Dera'a–Medina section in the Hejaz Railway Administration (HRA), and the manager of the central HRA factory in Al-Qadam, a suburb of Damascus. He also maintained that he ignored these orders and hid Armenian refugees. I would like to thank Omri Eilat for drawing my attention to this significant source and translating relevant parts from Hebrew into English.

continuous, state-sponsored violence, the decision-makers are top-level political leaders and high-ranking soldiers, such as Cemal Pasha. Such actors are loyal to an ideology and to a perception of the future that legitimizes, in their view, the violence they consider necessary to realize their vision.

The core perpetrators at the top of the CUP hierarchy were distinguished as the 'ideological elite'. They carried the responsibility for organizing mass killings. Despite its complex and varying content, ideological loyalty played a vitally important role in binding together the members of this core group. But depending on the individual, other motives – from revenge to careerism, from the booty that is obtained by seizing and looting when coincidentally taking part in the massacres, to the idea of belonging to a large, important group – may become mixed with the central ideological one.⁸² Indeed, any combination of these motivations can affect a person's role as perpetrator.

The Armenian genocide was a man-made act; that is, an act of human responsibility. But how and why do 'regular' human beings become part of such processes? It is important to avoid the reassuring assumption that such events take place somewhere beyond the realm of 'normal' reality. To assume this would be to make these events even more difficult to understand than they seem to be. While it may be comforting to assume that normal people like ourselves, and normal societies like 'our society', are incapable of committing genocide, we have found, through historical example, that ordinary people can and do engage in extraordinary evil. As historians, our responsibility is to attempt to explain the events and the ideas that move people to such evil and try to understand the periods in which this occurs.⁸³ It is in this context that Cemal Pasha's actions as a perpetrator of genocide become less incomprehensible.

As Salim Tamari eloquently notes, the First World War obliterated four centuries of a rich and complex Ottoman patrimony, replacing it with

... what was known in Arabic discourse as 'the days of the Turks': four miserable years of tyranny symbolized by the military dictatorship of Ahmad Cemal Pasha in Syria, *seferberlik* [forced conscription and exile], and the collective hanging of Arab patriots in Beirut's Burj Square on August 15, 1916.⁸⁴

⁸² Jensen and Szejnmann, *Ordinary People as Mass Murderers*, p. 42.

⁸³ For an interesting perspective which makes similar points in the context of the Holocaust, see James Waller, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. xii, esp. Christopher R. Browning's preface.

⁸⁴ Salim Tamari, *Year of the Locust: A Soldier's Diary and the Erasure of Palestine's Ottoman Past* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), p. 5.

Tamari looks at what Falih Rifkî called the ‘Turkish problem’ in Syria, ‘namely the inability of Ottoman constitutional reform to create a multiethnic domain in which Syria (including Palestine) would become an integral part of the empire.’⁸⁵ These hopes of reform collapsed under the burdens of war and the dictatorial regime of Cemal Pasha. As a twentieth-century nationalist, Cemal firmly believed that his sacred duty was to rescue Ottoman land from the decades of British ‘encroachment’, a cause he felt was worth any sacrifice, including the risk of filling ‘the water of the [Suez] canal with the corpses of [himself] and [his] friends’ to obtain victory.

Immediately after the resignation of Talaat Pasha’s cabinet on 8 October 1918, Cemal fled with seven other leaders of the CUP to Germany, lived in Munich for some time and then went to Switzerland. Tried in absentia for war crimes by a military tribunal in Istanbul, he was found guilty in July 1919 and sentenced to death.⁸⁶ But he actively supported the Kemalist-nationalist movement in Anatolia, recognized Mustafa Kemal’s leadership in Ankara and had close contact with him until 1921–2. After the establishment of the Kemalist government, he worked for it as liaison officer in negotiations between Ankara and Russia’s new communist regime. Earlier, in 1920, he served as a military advisor for the modernization of the Afghan army in Central Asia. On 21 July 1922, in Tbilisi, Georgia – where he came to act as a military liaison officer to negotiate over Afghanistan with Soviet Russia – Cemal was killed by Armenian assassins, revenge for his role in the destruction of Armenians.

Cemal was a pillar of the CUP and a ruthless assimilationist who nevertheless ‘refused blatant extermination of minorities, in contrast to some of his more exalted political friends.’⁸⁷ He acted against Arab nationalists in accordance with an Istanbul-centred imperial logic and reproached them for refusing the centralist Ottoman rule demanded by Talaat. In fact, in Arab historiography, he has been commonly referred to as *al-Saffah*, the blood-spiller, and ‘blamed for trying to force Turkification on Greater Syria and for executing hundreds of suspected supporters of Arab nationalism.’⁸⁸

Unlike his treatment of certain Arab families, he did not use the Deportation Law of May 1915 ‘in the perverted, exterminatory way of Talaat against the Armenians.’⁸⁹ As Hans-Lukas Kieser cogently states, Cemal’s

⁸⁵ Tamari, *Year of the Locust*, p. 3.

⁸⁶ Dirk Steffen, ‘Djemal Pasha, Ahmed (1872–1922)’, in Spence Tucker and Priscilla Roberts (eds), *Encyclopedia of World War I: A Political, Social, and Military History Volume I* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005), p. 358.

⁸⁷ Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Talaat Pasha: Father of Modern Turkey, Architect of Genocide* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), p. 297.

⁸⁸ Bassat and Halevy, ‘A tale of two cities and one telegram’, p. 214.

⁸⁹ Abram I. Elkus, *The Memoirs of Abram Elkus, Lawyer, Ambassador, Statesman* (London: Gomidas Institute, 2004), p. 84. Also see Kieser, *Talaat Pasha*, p. 298.

detailed telegram to Talaat of 3 November 1916 is ‘telling proof of his harsh, social technologist, and imperially biased but non-extermatory attitude.’ Cemal demanded ‘humane [demographic] transfers’ (!) and ‘forcibly converted tens of thousands’ – thus saving their lives.⁹⁰ In his letters during the war, and even in his memoirs written afterward, Cemal is happy to ‘fraternize’ with Talaat: ‘That God bless the country through your services. I kiss your cheeks.’⁹¹ At the end of day, Cemal was not only a genocide enabler but also a perpetrator, even by the definition of the UN Genocide Convention. He did not, however, demonstrate the exterminatory zeal against the Armenians of his brother-in-arms, Talaat.

⁹⁰ BOA.DH.ŞFR 541/120; BOA.DH.ŞFR 527/19, 1 August 1916, cited in Kieser, *Talaat Pasha*, p. 473, n. 233.

⁹¹ BOA.DH.ŞFR 519/63, 10 August 1916; similarly, ‘my brother’, from both sides, BOA.DH.ŞFR 62/294, 10–11 April 1916, cited in Kieser, *Talaat Pasha*, p. 473, n. 233.

‘The Very Limit of Our Endurance’: Unarmed Resistance in Ottoman Syria during the First World War

Khatchig Mouradian

‘Where there is power, there is resistance.’

Michel Foucault

My dear *Badveli* [Reverend], barely out of bed from his sickness, disregarding the personal hardships and peril to his own life, relentlessly labored day and night to save other lives. Together we pressed ourselves to the very limit of our endurance. All our time, energy, effort, sleep, food, clothing, and other material possessions we put on the line on behalf of this wretched, miserable mass of torn and battered humanity.

So wrote the wife of the Reverend Hovhannes Eskijian in a letter in 1919.¹ Until his death in March 1916, Rev. Eskijian, the pastor of the Emmanuel Armenian Evangelical Church in Aleppo, provided food, shelter and medication to deportees arriving in the city, risking his own life in the process. His health was failing and the Ottoman Turkish authorities were tracking his movements. The disease got to him first. He died at age thirty-four from typhoid he had contracted from deportees.

Rev. Eskijian was part of a loose, unarmed resistance network in Ottoman Syria that saved thousands of deportees caught in the maelstrom of the Armenian genocide by finding them safe houses and provisions and helping them evade redeportation or escape internment, forced labour and sexual slavery. In this chapter, I maintain that the historiography and public discourse on the Armenian genocide have long emphasized armed resistance – or the

¹ Letter from Gulenia Danielian Eskijian to Esther Barsumian, 13 February 1919, Eskijian Family Private Archives.

lack thereof – and neglected the less conspicuous yet more effective and common civilian resistance and self-help. I challenge explicit and implicit depictions of Armenians as passive recipients of violence on the one hand, and of Western humanitarian assistance on the other, arguing for expanding our conceptualization of resistance to include subtler, more common forms of organized opposition and humanitarian action.

The allure of the sword

Genocide unfolds under conditions of inexorable power asymmetry, with the perpetrators hell-bent on suppressing dissent and defiance as they proceed with mass murder. And although the genocidal machine aims to maximize the very power asymmetry that propels it, it cannot possibly erase the agency of the victims as individuals and as a group: the perpetrator never wields absolute power, and the victims never stand completely powerless.² They often demonstrate feats of individual resilience and, acting together, organize resistance.³ They will always make choices – ‘choiceless choices,’ perhaps⁴ – but choices still.

Ironically, scholarship on mass atrocity often ignores the victim even as it examines the process of victimization. Genocide is depicted as an avalanche of destruction, while the resistance of every single rock and pebble along its path is overlooked. In her groundbreaking work on resistance to the Nazis, the sociologist Nechama Tec observes:

By the 1950s and beyond, historians who had examined the destruction of European Jewry concentrated on the perpetrators rather than the

² Some scholars would disagree. The construct ‘absolute power’ is central to sociologist Wolfgang Sofsky’s work on Nazi concentration camps, where, he argues, one cannot describe power systems by employing ‘customary conceptions of social power’. He notes that, in these camps, absolute power ‘breaks [people’s] resistance, herds them together, shreds social ties; it dissolves action; it devastates life’, and that ‘it is not bent on achieving blind obedience or discipline, but desires to generate a universe of total uncertainty, one in which submissiveness is no shield against even worse outcomes’. Wolfgang Sofsky, *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 16, 14, 17.

³ Nechama Tec states, ‘Resilience is individual in orientation, resistance assumes others.’ Nechama Tec, *Resistance: Jews and Christians Who Defied the Nazi Terror* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 4.

⁴ A phrase coined by the scholar Lawrence Langer. See Lawrence Langer, ‘The Dilemma of Choice in the Death Camps’, in Alan Rosenberg and Gerald Myser (eds), *Echoes from the Holocaust: Philosophical Reflections on a Dark Time* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), pp. 118–27.

victims . . . This inattention should not come as a surprise, given that the enormity of the German crimes overshadowed their victims. Perhaps, too, it should not come as a surprise that early historians of that period were primarily interested in learning about the forces that caused such unprecedented destruction.⁵

A shift 'from an examination of the mechanics of death to an exploration of the dynamics of survival'⁶ has occurred in Holocaust historiography over the past three decades, but not without resistance. 'The entrenched fixation of historians with the "warrior element" of resistance, an inflexible, individualized and masculinist view of what it takes to win a total war and the fronts on which one fights an ideological war, has led to an impasse (or revisionism in certain contexts) in resistance studies,' observes the historian Vesna Drapac.⁷ This entrenchment had led to ignoring or, at best, ascribing a supporting role to unarmed, humanitarian resistance and, consequently, women's contribution to it. As Anna Bravo has remarked:

For decades, most scholars have in fact shared a stereotype of the resistance, presenting it almost exclusively as an armed action and almost entirely masculine . . . Later, references began to appear to the unarmed actions and those of women, but only rarely did such mention go beyond an emotional homage.⁸

Armenian genocide scholarship and public discourse continues to suffer from these ailments, magnified and exacerbated by the Turkish state's aggressive campaign of denial in international politics and academia. Scholars have focused on the victimization and destruction of Armenians,

⁵ Tec, *Resistance*, p. 3. Other important contributions to the study of unarmed resistance – or, as French historian Jacques Semelin calls it, 'civilian resistance' – include Jacques Semelin, *Unarmed against Hitler: Civilian Resistance in Europe 1939–1943* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), and Bob Moore, *Resistance in Western Europe* (New York: Berg, 2000).

⁶ Judith Tydor Baumel, 'Women's Agency and Survival Strategies during the Holocaust,' *Women's Studies International Forum* 22, no. 3 (1999): 329–47; here, p. 329. For an exploration of the differences in the way Jewish men and women experienced and confronted Nazi terror, see Nechama Tec, *Resilience and Courage: Women, Men, and the Holocaust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

⁷ Vesna Drapac, 'Women, Resistance and the Politics of Daily Life in Hitler's Europe: The Case of Yugoslavia in a Comparative Perspective,' *Aspasia* 3 (2009): 55–78; here, p. 55.

⁸ Anna Bravo, 'Armed and Unarmed: Struggles without Weapons in Europe and in Italy,' *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 10, no. 4 (2005): 468–84; here, pp. 472–3. Nathan Stoltzfus's *Resistance of the Heart: Intermarriage and the Rosenstrasse Protest in Nazi Germany* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001) stands as one such exception.

ignoring the historical record on Armenian resistance, armed and unarmed – as if, by granting perpetrators absolute power and stripping the victims of agency, the case for genocide were strengthened. In those rare instances when Armenians indeed resisted, it was by taking up arms, which they did in places such as Van, Urfa, Musa Dagh and Shabin Karahisar, the literature tells us.⁹ The scarcity of armed opposition has even perplexed some scholars. The oral historians Donald E. Miller and Lorna Touryan Miller observed:

In the course of our interviews, we often wondered why there was so little resistance to the deportations. This is a complex question . . . First, the Armenian leadership had been imprisoned or killed; second, weapons had been confiscated; and, third, the young men most capable of defending their communities had been drafted into the Turkish army.

The authors also attributed Armenian passivity to an ingrained disposition toward obedience to authority that had developed over centuries and to the fact that ‘they could not perceive the master plan of extermination that was unfolding.’¹⁰ The historian Ronald Suny agrees: ‘Survival was haphazard, a matter of accident or luck. Most Armenians did not resist, hoping that they would survive by obeying the authorities, not imagining that arbitrary and massive killing was occurring daily.’¹¹

Defining resistance

A strict, narrow definition of resistance and the use of the concepts ‘resistance’ and ‘armed resistance’ interchangeably stand as staples of Armenian genocide scholarship.¹² But most Armenians did indeed resist – often without weapons

⁹ For a treatment of the Urfa uprising, see Carlos Bedrossian, ‘Urfa’s Last Stand’, in Richard Hovannissian (ed.), *Armenian Tigrankert/Diarbekir and Edessa/Urfa* (Santa Ana, CA: Mazda, 2000), pp. 467–507. For the Shabin Karahisar uprising, see Simon Payaslian, ‘The Armenian Resistance in Shabin Karahisar, 1915’, in Richard Hovannissian (ed.), *Sebastia/Sivas and Lesser Armenia* (Santa Ana, CA: Mazda, 2000), pp. 399–426. For Van, see Anahide Ter Minassian, ‘Van 1915’, in Richard Hovannissian (ed.), *Armenian Van/Vaspurakan* (Santa Ana, CA: Mazda, 2000), pp. 209–44.

¹⁰ Donald E. Miller and Lorna Touryan Miller, *Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 72.

¹¹ Ronald Grigor Suny, *‘They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else’: A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 332.

¹² Exceptions are rare. Hilmar Kaiser, for example, refers to the actions of Rev. Eskijian and others in Ottoman Syria between 1915 and 1917 as ‘humanitarian resistance’. See Hilmar Kaiser, *At the Crossroad of Der Zor: Death, Survival, and Humanitarian Resistance in Aleppo, 1915–1917* (London: Gomidas Institute, 2002). In my work, I make a further distinction between humanitarian assistance and resistance, based on whether the

– as soon as the arrests, deportations and massacres started in April 1915. They organized a clandestine network of communication between the provinces, Constantinople and the outside world, smuggling reports on developments that served as raw material for politicians, humanitarians and newspapers. They created networks that procured, transferred and distributed funds, food and medication to deportees. They focused on upholding – as far as practicable – sanitary conditions in transit and concentrations camps. And the list goes on. These actions were conducted, against the law or against the will of the Ottoman Turkish authorities, by loosely organized clandestine groups, whose members continuously risked getting arrested or killed.

In Holocaust scholarship, a broad definition of resistance now stands as the norm, although the emphasis varies. Tec sees resistance 'as a set of activities motivated by the desire to thwart, limit, undermine, or end the exercise of oppression over the oppressed'.¹³ The historian Bob Moore defines resistance to Nazis in Western Europe as 'any activity designed to thwart German plans, or perceived by the occupiers as working against their interests'.¹⁴ Yehuda Bauer has defined resistance to the Holocaust as 'any group action consciously taken in opposition to known or surmised laws, actions or intentions directed against the Jews by the Germans and their supporters'; more recently he has argued for including individual acts of resistance and referring to the perpetrators as 'Germans and their collaborators'.¹⁵ Although they vary in their specificity (oppressor vs oppressed, Germans vs Jews), these definitions carry symmetric components.

In my work I have used the definition 'actions carried out illegally, or against the authorities' will, to save Armenian deportees from annihilation'.¹⁶ I emphasize the 'illegal/against the authorities' will' dimension to distinguish between acts of humanitarian relief and those of humanitarian resistance. This distinction is important, because genocidal policies are not implemented in unison and uniformly across space. Genocide unfolds in leaps and bounds. Priorities at the centre and local dynamics generate lags in implementation. During the Armenian genocide, for example, while the destruction of Armenian communities was progressing in full force in eastern Anatolia in

actions were tacitly approved (first months of deportation) or opposed (beginning in autumn 1915) by the authorities in Ottoman Syria. Khatchig Mouradian, 'Genocide and Humanitarian Resistance in Ottoman Syria, 1915–1916', *Études arméniennes contemporaines* (2016): 87–103.

¹³ Tec, *Resistance*, p. 4.

¹⁴ Moore, *Resistance in Western Europe*, p. 2.

¹⁵ Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 119.

¹⁶ Mouradian, 'Genocide and Humanitarian Resistance', p. 87.

spring 1915, local authorities in Aleppo were coordinating efforts with the local Armenian community to provide shelter and assistance to deportees arriving in the region. During that period, humanitarian activities aimed at saving Armenian lives in, say, Van constituted resistance, while similar actions in Aleppo did not. A few months later, however, when authorities cracked down on humanitarian efforts in Aleppo, relief workers were forced to go underground and form an unarmed resistance network.

Humanitarian relief

Armenian survivors arrived in Syria within a month of the beginning of the arrests, deportations and massacres. According to a document in the Aleppo Armenian prelacy archives, 322 deportees from Zeytun¹⁷ arrived in Bab, north-east of the metropolis, as early as 18 May 1915.¹⁸ The small Armenian community of Aleppo immediately organized relief committees to help the arriving deportees.¹⁹ On 24 May the Armenian Apostolic Church formed the Council for Refugees (*Kaght'aganats zhoghov* in Armenian; henceforth, the council), tasked with 'caring for the immediate financial, moral, and health needs' of the arriving Armenians. The city's Armenian Evangelical and Catholic churches launched their own relief initiatives and coordinated efforts as needed. These churches mounted an expansive humanitarian effort that received the tacit approval and even the support of the local authorities until the autumn of 1915: they compiled detailed lists of deportees in Aleppo, Bab, Mumbuj, Idlib, Riha, Maarra and Hama; prepared reports on the conditions of deportees and identified the pros and cons of settling deportees in each of the aforementioned areas; provided funds, food, shelter, medical assistance and necessary supplies to the thousands arriving in the region; dispatched priests and pharmacists to camps all the way to Der Zor to

¹⁷ For a detailed examination of the chain of events that culminated in the deportation of the Armenians of Zeytun, see Aram Arkun, 'Zeytun and the Commencement of the Armenian Genocide', in Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Göçek and Norman M. Naimark (eds), *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 221–43.

¹⁸ Armenian National Council, List of Armenians around Aleppo, Folder 41, 14–15. All dates are according to the Gregorian calendar. The documents from the Aleppo Armenian prelacy archives include the minutes of the meetings of the Council for Refugees, established by the Armenian Apostolic Church of Aleppo in May 1915; lists of deportees compiled by this committee; and ledgers and receipts that provide a detailed accounting of donations collected to assist the arriving deportees and expenses made to provide them with food, shelter, medical care and safety.

¹⁹ This was a community of around 10,000 that was, by and large, not deported.

distribute funds and medication and to provide spiritual nourishment; organized fundraisers; established orphanages; and coordinated efforts with local authorities, consuls, missionaries and local Christians and Muslims who helped with the effort. This lifeline set up by the Aleppo Armenian community was the primary, and often the only, means of subsistence for tens of thousands of deportees encamped or settled in and around Aleppo province. The US consul in Aleppo, Jesse B. Jackson, noticed this groundswell of support from the community early on, reporting to his superiors on 5 June that the deportees were being 'taken care of locally by the sympathizing Armenian population of this city.'²⁰ In another report, he noted, 'Each religious community has a relief committee to care for its own.'²¹

Large sums of money transferred from the bank account of the Apostolic Church of Aleppo to the council helped meet deportee needs. On 23 May the council withdrew 100 Ottoman liras (12,700 *kuruş*) from the bank. Two days later, a significant sum (300 Ottoman liras) from the Catholicosate of Cilicia was placed at the council's disposal. Donations from the local Armenian community and some non-Armenians constituted another important source of income.²² The council regulated the process of collection as much as possible: 'Taking into account the fact that many individuals are handing their donations to this or that [random] person, it was decided to make announcements in church that donations be given only to the council's treasurer, Sarkis Djierdjian.'²³

From the beginning, the council did not confine its efforts to the city or even the province of Aleppo, sending aid and dispatching missions all the way to Der Zor. As the Armenian Apostolic Church did not have a presence there, Der Zor's Armenian Catholic Church served as a local partner, and communication between the two was achieved via telegrams sent from the Armenian Catholic prelaty in Aleppo to its counterpart in Zor. This triangle of coordination would prove useful for aid efforts in Zor during these early months. Already in its meeting of 27 May the council resolved to send

²⁰ NA/RG59/867.4016/77. Report by Consul Jackson sent to Ambassador Morgenthau on 5 June 1915, in Ara Sarafian (ed.), *United States Official Records on the Armenian Genocide* (London: Gomidas Institute, 2004), p. 57.

²¹ NA/RG59/867.4016/219. Consul Jackson to Ambassador Morgenthau on 29 September 1918, in Sarafian, *United States Official Records*, p. 308. Several small communities in Syria, Mesopotamia and Palestine that were spared wholesale deportation during the war (Haifa and Jerusalem, for example) formed relief committees of their own, caring for arriving deportees. See Vahram L. Shemmassian, 'Armenian Genocide Survivors in the Holy Land at the End of World War I', *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 21 (2012): 227–47.

²² While most contributions were 1 lira or less, a few sizeable gifts were also made. Between 18 and 20 May nearly ten donations were made, only one of which was significantly large (1,000 *kuruş*). Armenian Apostolic Church of Aleppo, Council Records, Folder 22, 4.

²³ Council Records, Folder 38, Session 8.

40 Ottoman liras through the Catholic prelatry in Aleppo to Zor, earmarked for deportees from Zeytun.²⁴

Thus, the Aleppo Armenian community's organized and sustained effort to help deportees was in full swing four months ahead of the establishment of the Armenian Relief Committee (ARC) in the United States in September 1915.²⁵ A month later, the ARC cabled \$100,000 to the US ambassador in Constantinople, Henry Morgenthau. By the end of 1915, the committee had raised \$176,929.²⁶ The distribution of relief funds was entrusted to a committee of prominent Americans in Constantinople headed by the ambassador.²⁷ US diplomats faced significant hurdles from Ottoman authorities as they tried to dispense money to the deportees in Istanbul, Aleppo and other areas of concentration. As Ambassador Morgenthau pointed out, the ministers of war and foreign affairs objected 'to Americans distributing relief to Armenians because assistance by foreigners encourages such idealists as the Armenians to further resistance against the government, although the government has admitted at other times that Armenians are not in a position to effectively oppose the Government.'²⁸ The Ottoman ministers proposed the transfer of American funds to *government* accounts, with relief administered by the authorities. Morgenthau refused, citing the wishes of the American donors that the funds be administered by no one other than the US ambassador.²⁹ He continued to distribute relief money through US consuls, and Turkish authorities did not interfere for the time being.³⁰ Still, they denied a request by the Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief in December to send a commission 'to ascertain the exact conditions and needs of the Armenian refugees, and to reach them at the earliest possible moment with effectual relief.'³¹ The idea of sending a commission was abandoned, and sums continued to be transferred through the consuls to the Armenian survivors.

²⁴ Council Records, Folder 38, Session 4.

²⁵ The American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief (ACASR) soon took over operations in the Ottoman Empire.

²⁶ Realizing that the sum was nowhere near sufficient, fundraising efforts were increased in the United States. The next year, the committee raised a whopping \$2,404,000. Donated funds continued to increase, even doubled, during the next few years. See James L. Barton, *Story of Near East Relief* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), p. 409.

²⁷ Barton, *Story of Near East Relief*, p. 17.

²⁸ NA/RG59/867.48/199. Telegram from Ambassador Morgenthau to Secretary of State on 29 November 1915, in Sarafian, *United States Official Records*, p. 388.

²⁹ NA/RG59/867.48/199. Telegram from Ambassador Morgenthau to Secretary of State on 29 November 1915, in Sarafian, *United States Official Records*, p. 388.

³⁰ NA/RG59/756.48/205. Letter from Ambassador Morgenthau to Secretary of State on 21 January 1916, in Sarafian, *United States Official Records*, p. 392.

³¹ NA/RG59/756.48/205. Letter on behalf of the Secretary of State to Rev. James L. Barton of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) on 13 December 1915, in Sarafian, *United States Official Records*, p. 391.

The scholarship misses an important link in the chain here: the role of the Armenian humanitarian network. In Aleppo, it was primarily the Armenian relief network that distributed the American funds to deportees. In his memoir, John Minassian, a survivor, highlighted one way in which money reached the Armenian relief network in Aleppo: 'I began delivering messages in folded envelopes to Mr. Jackson, the American Consul, who, when evening fell, would send his secretary to visit Reverend Eskijian³² to leave him a small canvas bag.³³ This job may not have been too dangerous in September 1915, but it would soon become so.

Humanitarian resistance

When Armenians surviving the deportations and massacres began arriving in Syria in May 1915, local authorities scrambled for patched-up solutions in the absence of practicable guidance from the centre. The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) leaders orchestrating the empire-wide deportations and massacres were paying little attention to the deportees who managed to arrive in 'the regions of southeastern Aleppo, Der Zor, and Urfa'.³⁴ This changed from the autumn of 1915, following a series of developments: a number of high-level meetings and consultations in the region; the formation of the Sub-Directorate for Deportees in Aleppo; the dispatch of officials to the city to oversee the redeportation process; the replacement of governors (twice, and finally with an Armenophobe);³⁵ the crackdown on the leadership of the Aleppo Armenian community (particularly the arrest of lay leaders and the banishment of the Catholicos to Jerusalem); and the decisions to

³² Eskijian's role in the humanitarian relief effort in Aleppo is documented in Kaiser, *At the Crossroad of Der Zor: Death, Survival*.

³³ John Minassian, *Many Hills Yet to Climb* (Santa Barbara, CA: Jim Cook, 1986), p. 93.

³⁴ Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (Ottoman Prime Ministry Archives), Dahiliye Nezareti Şifre Kalemi (abbreviated BOA/DH.ŞFR) 52/188, coded telegram from Talaat to provinces on 2 May 1915.

³⁵ Talaat's brother-in-law and governor of Bitlis, Mustafa Abdülhalik, became Aleppo governor on 4 October 1915. As we see in Mehmet Polatel's chapter in this volume, Abdülhalik had already burnished his anti-Armenian credentials in Bitlis, where deportations were unnecessary, as the entire Armenian population, with only a handful of exceptions, had been murdered on the spot. Abdülhalik was intimately involved in the decision-making process in Bitlis, arrested Armenian dignitaries and leaders and recruited Kurdish bandits to buttress the Special Organization that committed the massacres. See also Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2011), pp. 337–53. Abdülhalik's appointment constitutes an important tactical move in what Armenian genocide scholars refer to as the 'dual-track'

remove all Armenian deportees from the city and to ban the entry of newly arriving convoys. The central authorities exerted a sustained effort to neutralize any organized Armenian response to their policies and deal with what they perceived to be a demographic problem created by the arrival of tens of thousands of survivors.³⁶

As the noose tightened, the members of the humanitarian relief network – overwhelmed, overburdened and even demoralized by arrests and persecutions – went underground and continued their work clandestinely. Helping deportees in Syria now came with a price. This was not relief work anymore, as it confronted the expressed will of the authorities. I refer to it as humanitarian resistance: actions carried out illegally or against the will of the authorities to save Armenian deportees from annihilation. Humanitarian resistance is humanitarianism in a hostile environment. It is important to make this distinction since, beginning in the autumn of 1915, efforts to help the Armenian deportees were, by and large, being conducted *against* the will of the Ottoman authorities, and hence they should be properly designated as resistance. This struggle saved the lives of thousands by distributing food and medication clandestinely,³⁷ caring for orphans, hiding deportees in homes,³⁸ treating the diseased.³⁹ And it tried to keep deportee morale high by

mechanism: an official track employed government communication to convey (re)deportation orders, resettlement and the liquidation of Armenian property, while an unofficial track ordered 'extralegal acts of violence, such as forced evacuations, killings, and massacres' privately, through trusted party functionaries. For a brief discussion of this mechanism, see Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime against Humanity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. xxiv–xxv.

³⁶ A telegram issued by the Ministry of the Interior on 18 October 1915 indicated that there were 30,000 deportees in Aleppo city alone awaiting redeportation. See Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Dahiliye Nezareti Emniyet-i Umumiye Müdürlüğü (abbreviated BOA/DH.EUM), 2 Şb. 68/80. Tens of thousands had already been deported to Bab, Mumbuj and Maarra or farther to Urfa, Zor and Mosul. BOA/DH.EUM, 2 Şb. 68/76. Telegram from Governor Bekir Sami to Interior Ministry on 5 September 1915.

³⁷ Aleppo's Armenian underground entrusted the difficult task of secretly entering camps to the camouflage skills of a few Armenians who often made the stopover in the cloak of darkness or disguised as Muslim merchants during the day.

³⁸ For an overview, see Mouradian, 'Genocide and Humanitarian Resistance', pp. 87–103.

³⁹ Armenian doctors, pharmacists and nurses played a key role in the humanitarian relief and resistance network. They donated their time and risked their lives battling epidemics, attended to the sick and the elderly, vaccinated children against communicable diseases and advised the deportees on hygienic practices in camps. Their story remains to be written. In Holocaust scholarship, some strides have been made in this regard. For an exploration of medical resistance against the Nazis, see, for example, Michael A. Grodin (ed.), *Jewish Medical Resistance in the Holocaust* (New York: Berghahn, 2014).

establishing a secret communication network across concentration camps, circulating handwritten newspapers, among other efforts.⁴⁰

Individual actors and Armenian self-help

What I refer to as the humanitarian resistance network was, at its core, composed of a few dozen dedicated Armenian religious and secular community leaders, based in Aleppo, and several Western missionaries and diplomats. They served as the glue connecting a much larger constituency of Armenians (and, sometimes, Muslims and other local Christians)⁴¹ who pulled strings; bribed officials; secured *vesikas* anchoring deportees in Aleppo; volunteered medical services; raised funds; cooked meals; smuggled deportees out of danger; secretly distributed funds, medication and food to deportees in camps; and helped with whatever they could. Many others were only loosely associated with the core activists of the network. One such person was Elmasd Santoorian. A 'massacre widow' from Marash who lost her husband during the Adana massacres of 1909, Santoorian went on to study midwifery in Constantinople before returning to her hometown in 1914. A year later, she was caught in the genocide, was deported from her hometown, contracted typhus in Aleppo and recovered with the help of an Aleppo Armenian doctor. Her skills as a nurse and her newfound immunity to typhus propelled her, within a few months, to the position of head nurse at a top Ottoman military hospital in Aleppo's Azizieh quarter. There, she hired 'Armenian refugee girls, some orphaned, but all hiding from the gendarmes,' securing *vesikas* for them and anchoring them in the city.⁴²

Santoorian's case, while fascinating, was by no means unique. Women played a key role in unarmed resistance during the genocide. In the Meskeneh concentration camp, a number of women who witnessed the destitute

⁴⁰ For an overview of Armenian agency in the concentration camps, see Khatchig Mouradian, 'The Meskeneh Concentration Camp, 1915–1917: A Case Study of Power, Collaboration, and Humanitarian Resistance during the Armenian Genocide,' *Journal of the Society of Armenian Studies* 24 (2015): 44–55; and Khatchig Mouradian, 'Internment and Destruction: Concentration Camps during the Armenian Genocide, 1915–1917,' in Panikos Panayi, Stefan Manz and Matthew Stibbe (eds), *Internment during the First World War: A Mass Global Phenomenon* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

⁴¹ George Sukkar, an Assyrian in Der Zer, is one such example. He helped deportees in convoy after convoy as they arrived in Zor. Survivor accounts speak effusively of his kindness and dedication. He contracted typhus from deportees in early 1916 and died.

⁴² John Halajian, *A Widow's Story: Tales of an Armenian Genocide Survivor* (Mustang, OK: Tate Publishing, 2016). See also [no author given] 'A Nurse's Odyssey: From Marash to Aleppo and Back,' in Paren Kazanjian (ed.), *The Cilician Armenian Ordeal* (Boston: Hye Intentions, 1989), pp. 442–54.

condition of children set up an orphanage on 11 March 1916. Three women from Nigde took on the responsibility of caring for the orphans, with support from a priest, Yetvart Tarpinian, who had arrived in Meskeneh only a week earlier.⁴³ As word spread, more and more orphans came to the tent. What started as a shelter for a few soon provided refuge to 100 children. The women frantically tried to secure supplies for the orphans: they pleaded with camp officials, asked deportees for donations and tried to solicit outside help. They were not always successful. One of the women, Rakel Kirazian, was beaten up on several occasions by the *anbâr memuru* (warehouse official) Ali Riza for repeatedly requesting food for the starving children. Some deportees at the camp gave from the little they had. Those who got married at the camp – and there were indeed dozens who did so, either despite or because of the destitute conditions at the camp and the uncertain future – made donations to the orphanage to celebrate the occasion.⁴⁴ The most significant assistance came from two Evangelical Armenian women who were referred to as ‘members of the *ruhci* sect’. They offered to provide bread to the orphans regularly and did so, with funds from a German woman missionary based in Aleppo.⁴⁵ After a confrontation with camp director Hüseyin, the two women and many of the orphans in the tent were deported to Der Zor.⁴⁶

Certainly, not all children were in orphanages. Hundreds roamed the streets fending for themselves – stealing, begging and collecting food from garbage dumps. They, too, resisted destruction. One such example was Nshan, an Armenian boy from Diyarbekir, barely twelve, who with a few other boys monopolized the dumpster of Hotel Baron, attacking anyone who dared approach it. Nshan, his gang and a street dog that helped them guard the refuse huddled together in some corner of the city at night and lived off the dumpster during the day until the end of the war.⁴⁷ The voices of children like Nshan, to quote Holocaust scholar Debórah Dwork, were ‘conspicuously, glaringly, and screamingly silently absent’ in the historiography.⁴⁸ This absence is even more glaring in Ottoman historiography, where orphans and destitute children are ‘habitually ignored, and essentially invisible and

⁴³ Levon Mesrob (ed.), *1915: Aghed yev Veradzenount* (1915: Disaster and Rebirth) (Paris: Arax Publishing, 1952), p. 459.

⁴⁴ Mesrob, *1915: Aghed yev Veradzenount*, p. 460.

⁴⁵ Mesrob, *1915: Aghed yev Veradzenount*, pp. 460–1. Tarpinian does not mention the name of the missionary in his account. He admitted that ‘I was against turning a nation that was being persecuted for their religion and ethnicity to be the plaything of sect members, but did not dare prohibit them, because they were providing bread.’

⁴⁶ Mesrob, *1915: Aghed yev Veradzenount*, p. 461.

⁴⁷ Mesrob, *1915: Aghed yev Veradzenount*, p. 461.

⁴⁸ Debórah Dwork, *Children with a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 253.

voiceless actors.⁴⁹ Armenian genocide scholarship is no different: children are portrayed either as victims or dependents.

The farther away one moved from Aleppo, the less the influence and role of the network and the greater the significance of independent actors. Take, for instance, the case of Levon Shashian in Der Zor. An exiled Armenian intellectual from Constantinople, Shashian became district governor Ali Suat Bey's partner and close confidant during the process of settling deportees in and around the city. Shashian, 'a kind-hearted, young gentleman ... with a keen eye for political developments,' had been deported from Istanbul to Der Zor on the accusation of being an arms dealer for Armenian rebels but had soon become a friend of the district governor,⁵⁰ as well as the de facto leader of the Armenian deportees in Der Zor. One of thirty prominent Armenians in the city, Shashian was financially well off and had rented the municipal garden 'for special considerations,' noted a fellow exile, Mihran Aghazarian.⁵¹ Aram Andonian's records indicate that Shashian had conscientiously established an agency there to purchase assets from deportees at fair prices, sparing them the ordeal of selling their possessions for close to nothing in the town market and storing them there to resell.⁵²

When the central authorities replaced Der Zor's district governor, Ali Suat, with Salih Zeki Bey, Levon Shashian's situation changed dramatically.⁵³ In a letter (17 July 1916) to the Swiss missionary Beatrice Rohner,⁵⁴ Araxia Jebejian, a relief worker, reported, 'Today they arrested all clergymen and male leaders. Some of the people have left, others will be going soon, and the order has been given out by the crier that they must all leave by the end of the

⁴⁹ Nazan Maksudyan, *Orphans and Destitute Children in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014), p. 4.

⁵⁰ Mihran Aghazarian, *Aksoragani Husher* (Memoirs of an Exile) (Adana: Hai tsayn Printing, 1919), p. 13.

⁵¹ Aghazarian, *Aksoragani Husher*.

⁵² Aram Andonian Archives at the Bibliothèque Nubar, Paris (henceforth, BNU/Andonian), Folder 52: The massacres of Der Zor, 'Levon Shashian,' pp. 35–7.

⁵³ BNU/Andonian, Folder 52: The massacres of Der Zor, 'Levon Shashian,' pp. 35–7. Armen Anush, *Passage through Hell, A Memoir* (Studio City, CA: H. and K. Manjikian Publications, 2007), p. 30. For names of some of those arrested on that day, see BNU/Andonian, Folder 52: The massacres of Der Zor, 'Der Zor,' pp. 52–8. See also, Raymond Kevorkian, 'L'Extermination des déportés Arméniens ottomans dans les camps de concentration de Syrie-Mésopotamie, 1915–1916,' *Revue d'histoire arménienne contemporaine* 2 (1998): 178.

⁵⁴ Beatrice Rohner played a key role in the humanitarian resistance network. For a treatment of her life and work, see Hans-Lukas Kieser, 'Beatrice Rohner's Work in the Death Camps of Armenians in 1916,' in Jacques Sémelin, Claire Andrieu and Sarah Gensburger (eds), *Resisting Genocide: The Multiple Forms of Rescue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), pp. 367–82.

week.⁵⁵ Levon Shashian and some fifteen others from the group were taken away by armed Chechens and gendarmes, who tortured them to death.⁵⁶ The others, 'teachers, lawyers, and clergymen are said to have been . . . imprisoned', reported the chargé d'affaires at Germany's consulate in Aleppo, Hermann Hoffmann.⁵⁷ The massacres of Der Zor followed. The US consul in Aleppo, Jesse B. Jackson, noted how deportees

... from certain regions such as Aintab, Marash, Angora, etc., [were] cited to leave on stipulated days. They were told that they would be conducted to certain villages on the Khabur river . . . and were sent off under strong escort of gendarmes. Some arrived at small villages on the Khabur, but the greater part were taken only a few hours from Deir-el-Zor, where . . . the most horrible butcheries imaginable occurred.⁵⁸

Conclusion

Can one define resistance simply by one's access to, training in and willingness to use guns? Is resistance ineffective, even impossible, without a machine that employs gunpowder to propel pieces of metal? Although scholarship on resistance to the Nazis during the Second World War has made great strides in recent years toward broadening the spectrum of actions that constitute resistance, the literature on other cases of mass violence has been slow to catch up.

The study of resistance during the Armenian genocide leaves much to be desired. The struggle against genocide denial has produced and perpetuated perpetrator-centric narratives (it *was* genocide, here's why), and the related drive for genocide recognition around the globe has produced Western humanitarian-centric narratives (your ancestors witnessed the genocide/saved Armenians, now *you* should recognize it). Thus, the action is genocide,

⁵⁵ DE/PA-AA; R14093; A 21969; Report from Rossler to Hollweg, enclosure 1, on 29 July 1916, in Wolfgang Gust (ed.), *The Armenian Genocide: Evidence from the German Foreign Office Archives, 1915–1916* (New York: Berghahn, 2014), p. 609.

⁵⁶ BNu/Andonian, Folder 52: The massacres of Der Zor, 'Der Zor', p. 37. See also, Kévorkian, *L'extermination*, p. 178. According to the account by Mesrob Tashjian of Hussenig, who worked with Shashian, they pulled out his teeth, cut out his eyeballs and cut off his ears, nose and testicles.

⁵⁷ DE/PA-AA; R14093; A 25739; Report from Hoffmann to embassy in Constantinople on 19 August 1916, in Gust, *The Armenian Genocide*, p. 617.

⁵⁸ NA/RG59/867.4016/373. Jackson's report on 'Armenian Atrocities' sent to the Secretary of State on 4 March 1918, in Sarafian, *United States Official Records*, pp. 590–1.

the reaction is Western outrage and humanitarianism,⁵⁹ while victims exercise no agency.

Treating genocide largely as the action of the perpetrator while dismissing the *reaction* of the victim not only is ahistorical but also inadvertently reinforces the very act of the perpetrator to strip the victims of their agency. This chapter, part of a larger research project on genocide and resistance, argues that Armenian unarmed resistance constitutes an integral part of the history of the Armenian genocide, without which our understanding of the dynamics will be at best incomplete. By focusing on one region in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War, I have striven to demonstrate how Armenians led and coordinated a significant humanitarian resistance effort, which succeeded in saving the lives of thousands in Ottoman Syria. These resisters influenced the course of events in their immediate environment. Taken individually, many of their actions may not have amounted to much, but the number and condition of Armenian survivors at the end of the war would have been very different without their cumulative impact.

⁵⁹ Of course, Western humanitarianism provided tremendous material and moral support, yet, as this chapter demonstrates, it was the Armenians themselves who led the effort and shouldered the larger share of the burden. See Mouradian, 'Genocide and Humanitarian Resistance', pp. 95–6.

Part Four

Unmaking the Empire, Shaping
the Turkish Nation

Proactive Local Perpetrators: Mehmet Yasin (Sani Kutluğ) and Ahmed Faik (Erner)

Ümit Kurt

While there is an extensive body of literature addressing the Armenian genocide, significant gaps persist. The events and processes of the genocide have been unearthed and examined, but genocide is not a phenomenon set in motion by a force of nature; on the contrary, the systematic destruction of Ottoman Armenians was designed and executed by a cadre of individuals, most of whom are little known today. My aim here is to recover the stories of two such actors in a particular town, Aintab (Anteb), modern-day Gaziantep, and in the surrounding district, where both were actively involved in the destruction of Armenians. In this destruction, they were supported by the citizenry of the town, who – whether or not they approved of the actions of these two operatives – did not criticize them and did profit from their activities. And while one of these two leaders went through hard times after the war, the town itself, and its elites, flourished, not least because of the wartime policies of these men. Biographies of a genocide's local leaders – the simple, objective features of their backgrounds and careers and their relationship with their communities – can illustrate the social processes, institutional cultures and power relations that undergirded the violence. This chapter hopes to do this by highlighting the human element: the actors, their motives and their actions, which ultimately bore responsibility for the catastrophic loss of life. I focus on the life stories of two leading players in Aintab, Mehmet Yasin (Sani Kutluğ) (1889–1973) and Ahmed Faik (Erner) (1879–1967): their backgrounds, deeds and involvement in the 1915 Armenian deportation and genocide, as well as their careers in post-genocide Turkey.

Motivations

As James E. Waller convincingly shows, genocide and mass killing are ‘replete with examples of perpetrators who used situations of extremity to also advance their personal self-interest by claiming power, property and goods.’¹ The expropriation of Armenian property created such a powerful dynamism precisely because it enabled numerous profiteers to combine the ideological tenets of the regime with their personal material interests. It had a radicalizing impact on the persecution of the Armenians. The prospect of material gain encouraged collaboration with the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), motivating many of those who played important roles during the deportations and massacres. In this way, ‘they were bound even more tightly in their allegiance’ to the CUP regime.²

Expropriation was ‘solidly anchored in a nexus of ideological reasoning and rationale.’³ Thus, substantial numbers of ‘perpetrators’ did not view their participation in confiscation as acts of robbery or plunder but rather as an appropriate reward and compensation for their active involvement in the elimination of ‘harmful and traitor elements.’⁴ As renowned Holocaust historian Frank Bajohr cogently states, ‘without this internalized ideological content, the fervor and lack of scruples’ displayed by so many of those engaged in ‘expropriation’ – that is, robbing the Armenians in their own communities – would be hard to explain.⁵ Hence, in this process, the actors were not motivated solely by crude greed. Ideological commitment, although ‘it was complex and varied, played a crucial dual function amongst the core group of perpetrators: it served as motivation for individuals and provided a focus of orientation for a variety of competing interests.’⁶ This dual function

¹ James E. Waller, ‘The Ordinarity of Extraordinary Evil: The Making of Perpetrators of Genocide and Mass Killing’, in Olaf Jensen and Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann (eds), *Ordinary People as Mass Murderers: Perpetrators in Comparative Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 160.

² Frank Bajohr, ‘Expropriation and Expulsion’, in Dan Stone (ed.), *The Historiography of the Holocaust* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 55.

³ Bajohr, ‘Expropriation and Expulsion’, p. 59.

⁴ The same process can be observed in the case of the Holocaust, in the context of the ‘Aryanization’ of Jewish properties by the Nazi government. See Bajohr, ‘Expropriation and Expulsion’, pp. 52–64, esp. p. 55. For a comparative analysis on the expropriation and plunder of Armenian and Jewish properties under the veil of law during the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust, see Ümit Kurt, ‘Legal and Official Plunder of Armenian and Jewish Properties in Comparative Perspective: The Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust’, *Journal of Genocide Research* 17, no. 3 (2015): 305–26.

⁵ Bajohr, ‘Expropriation and Expulsion’, p. 59.

⁶ Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann, ‘Perpetrators of the Holocaust: A Historiography’, in Jensen and Szejnmann (eds), *Ordinary People as Mass Murderers*, p. 40.

provides us to explain 'the smoothly functioning division of labour' and the networks of the CUP persecution that 'coordinated genocide in a polycratic environment'.⁷

The total destruction of the Armenians marked the first time in modern history that a government had tried to 'eliminate a particular group among its own citizens as a part of an effort to settle what they considered to be a political problem'.⁸ Between 1895 and 1922, Ottoman Armenians suffered massive loss of life and property as a result of pogroms, massacres and other forms of mass violence.⁹ The Armenian genocide in 1915 consisted of a series of strategies: the mass executions of elites, deportations by category, forced assimilation, the destruction of material culture, and collective dispossession. The deportation and genocide directed at Aintab Armenians were not implemented by a rabble brought in from the countryside to carry out an act recognized as too contemptible for respectable people; they were not even effected by Aintab's own ordinary have-nots. The policy was put into practice by the district's Muslim notables and landowners and the city's elites. These people prospered through the acquisition of Armenian property and wealth – elevating them into an even more privileged stratum.

As Hilmar Kaiser and Uğur Ü. Üngör have, independently, revealed in the case of Diyarbekir,¹⁰ a careful examination of the participation of the urban notables and provincial elites can tell us much about both the implementation of the genocide and the significance of Armenian property within the context of the entire process. As Jan T. Gross eloquently remarks, the participation of local people is generally considered 'a necessary condition to ensure the effectiveness of genocidal policies'.¹¹ The planned extermination of all members of a given category of citizens is impossible without the involvement of their neighbours – the only ones who know who is who in any given community.¹² It is therefore important to explore the relationship between the national CUP and the influential local people in order to illuminate the

⁷ Jensen and Szejnmann, *Ordinary People as Mass Murderers*, p. 40.

⁸ Ümit Kurt, 'Confiscated Armenian Properties', *Haytoug Review* (October 2013, 2016): 1.

⁹ Christian Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies: Mass Violence in the Twentieth-Century World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 92–120; Uğur Ümit Üngör and Mehmet Polatel, *Confiscation and Destruction: The Young Turk Seizure of Armenian Property* (London and New York: Continuum, 2011).

¹⁰ Hilmar Kaiser, *The Extermination of Armenians in the Diyarbekir Region* (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Press, 2014); Uğur Ümit Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹¹ Jan T. Gross with Irena Grudzińska Gross, *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 83.

¹² Jacques Sémelin, *Purify and Destroy: The Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide* (London: Hurst & Co., 2007), pp. 193–5.

effective power and control mechanisms of the deportation scheme of the CUP in Aintab.

Aintab was a medium-sized city, within a district of the same name, situated on the boundaries of Syria and Cilicia (today known as the southern part of Anatolia), near both the Mediterranean Sea and the Gulf of Alexandretta. It was fairly developed in trade and artisanship and had become a centre of commerce, as various trade routes passed through the city. This enrichment in economic life contributed to the growth of its population. It lay within the boundaries of Aleppo, one of the greatest provinces of the Ottoman Empire after Istanbul and Cairo. The connection with Aleppo played a pivotal role in the commercial and cultural life of Aintab.¹³ Aintab was also far from the Russian border, thus denying it the excuse given for the deportation of Armenians in other regions in Eastern Anatolia.

Respectable Aintab Muslims acted eagerly on the deportation orders, encouraged by the prospect of material gain. Such prospects led administrators, politicians and civilian leaders to engage pragmatically in the eradication of Armenians, more actively even than the central authorities. Motivated by their anticipation of benefiting from a regime of plunder made 'legal', one where the 'liquidated' property of the Armenians would be up for grabs, many of Aintab's citizenry not only moved into their vacant houses and abandoned businesses but were willing to collaborate, and even assumed a direct role in the deportation and annihilation of Aintab's Armenians. Property provided an incentive that encouraged – or perhaps, in many cases, reinforced – hatred of the deportees. It enabled the CUP's leadership to carry out their ultranationalist ideological policies with the support and consent of 'ordinary men'. The ideological and the material worked in tandem and reinforced each other.

The Aintab CUP club and the main perpetrators

After the Young Turk revolution of 23 July 1908, new political currents and empire-wide political changes resonated strongly in Aintab, and the heroes who had carried out the revolution – particularly Resneli Ahmed Niyazi and

¹³ Leslie Pierce, *Morality Tales: Law and Gender in the Ottoman Court of Aintab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. 20; Hale Şıvgın, '19. Yüzyılın İlk Yarısında Ayıntap', *OTAM – Ankara Üniversitesi Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi* 11 (Ankara, 2000): 536; Stephan Astourian, 'Testing World System Theory, Cilicia (1830s–1890s): Armenian–Turkish Polarization and the Ideology of Modern Ottoman Historiography' (unpublished PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1996), pp. 151, 206–7.

Enver Bey – were met with a massive outpouring of support.¹⁴ A general contentment was felt everywhere.¹⁵ Lieutenant Yahya Bey of the military reserve battalion stationed in Aintab began organizing meetings to establish a local CUP club. At least eighteen representatives of the Muslim elites of the city took part in the club's foundation and formation.¹⁶ Although the lieutenant had founded the organization, he believed that it would be more appropriate for it to have a civilian leader. Therefore, Ali Cenani Bey, the parliamentary deputy for Aintab, was elected president.¹⁷ Taşçızâde Abdullah Efendi was the vice president.¹⁸ Among its permanent members, Bulaşıkzâde Müftü Hacı Arif Efendi became the general secretary.¹⁹ Two other founding

¹⁴ Nerses [Mahdesian] Hagopian, 'Hay Yeghap'okhagan Tashnagts'ut'iwně Aynt'abi mëch ew Yaragits' Tëbk'er' (Armenian Revolutionary Federation in Aintab and Following Events), in Kevork A. Sarafian (ed.), *Badmo'wt'iwn Ahn'abi Hah'oc* (History of Aintab Armenians), vol. 1 (Los Angeles: Union of the Armenians of Aintab, 1953), p. 972.

¹⁵ Sarafian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ahn'abi Hah'oc*, vol. 1, p. 538. Rev. Fred Field Goodsell, 'Shepard of Aintab: The Beloved Physician', *Envelope Series* 19, no. 2 (1916): 10. Despite the general positive reception of the revolution, there was a different situation in some places in the eastern provinces. In those areas, the ancien régime continued to rule. For example, the declaration of the constitution brought no reform in Muş. On the contrary, the Hamidiye regiments and the Kurdish tribes continued to oppress the population. In Bitlis, the announcement of the constitution was met with a violent reaction. Sir G. Lowther to Sir Edward Grey (Received 26 September), *Therapia*, 20 September, 1908, in 'Correspondence respecting the Constitutional Movement in Turkey, 1908', *Parliamentary Papers*, 1909, p. 88, cited in Bedross Der Matossian, 'Ethnic Politics in the Post-Revolutionary Ottoman Empire: Armenians, Arabs, and Jews during the Second Constitutional Period (1908–1909)' (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2008), pp. 213–14.

¹⁶ Attendees included Cenanzâde Ali Bey (a deputy from Aintab), Taşçızâde Abdullah Efendi, Tuzcuzâde Hafız Ahmet Efendi, Ahmet Muhtar Bey, Kethüdazâde (today known as Göğüş), Hüseyin Cemil Bey, Bulaşıkzâde Müftü Hacı Arif Efendi, Mahmut Çitçi, Rüştü Attaroğlu, Hacı Hanifzâde Abdullah Efendi, İztirapzâde (today known as Barlas), Şefik Bey, Cenanzâde Rıza Bey, Nizipli Hacı Mehmet Efendi, Battal Beyzâde (today known as Budak), Tahir Bey, Mennazâde Mustafa, Celal Kadri Bey and Daizâde Hasan Sadık Bey. See 'Celal Kadri Barlas' in Dilinden, 'İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti Nasıl Kuruldu?', *Gaziantep'i Tanıtıyoruz* 2, no. 2 (1963): 16–17. Celal Kadri Barlas took charge of the administrative boarding of the Aintab CUP branch, aka 'the club'; see Şakir Sabri Yener, 'Celal Kadri Barlas' Kaybettik', *Gaziantep Kültür Dergisi* 6, no. 68 (1963): 177.

¹⁷ 'Celal Kadri Barlas'ın Dilinden, İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti Nasıl Kuruldu?', p. 16.

¹⁸ 'Celal Kadri Barlas'ın Dilinden, İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti Nasıl Kuruldu?', p. 16. Upon Ali Cenani Bey's election as the deputy of Aleppo, Taşçızâde Abdullah Efendi became the president of the club. Ömer Asım Aksoy, 'Arkadaşım Faik Taşçioğlu', *Gaziantep Kültür Dergisi* 5, no. 56 (1962): 173. BNU (Bibliotek Nubar)/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J.1/3, file 4, Aintab, ff. 11–7.

¹⁹ *Gaziantep'i Tanıtıyoruz* 3, no. 2 (1968): 3. During the British occupation, which started in December 1918 in Aintab, along with Unionists Bahtiyar Patpat and Muhtar Ahmet Agha, Bulaşıkzâde was arrested at Central Turkey College and then sent to Aleppo. After the British left, he returned to Aintab. BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J.1/3, file 4, Aintab, f 10v.

members, Rüştü Attaroğlu and Mahmut Çitçi, served on its administrative board.²⁰ Immediately, the new club began to operate vigorously in Aintab, organizing various conferences and, as part of its activities, founding branches of the nationalist organizations Türk Yurdu (Turkish Homeland) and Türk Gücü (Turkish Power).²¹ These organizations and their distinguished membership legitimized what was to follow. All those named as members of Aintab's CUP branch played pivotal roles in the mass deportation of Armenians and organized plunder, confiscation and despoliation of their properties in 1915–17.²² They were the main profiteers in the destruction of the city's Armenians.

It is important to underscore that the deportations organized in Aintab were supervised by a *Sevkiyat Komisyonu* (Deportation Committee), presided over by the district governor, Ahmed Faik Bey. On the Deportation Committee, every branch of respectable Aintab society was represented: the district's parliamentary deputy and his brother; the head of the provincial cabinet and a local prefect (*muhtar*); and a variety of municipal officials, including the president of the municipality, its financial officers, including the head of its treasury, two officials in the tax department and two secretaries in the finance department, a census officer, two judges, a magistrate and the first secretary of the court. Law enforcement was also prominent, including two gendarmerie commanders, a sergeant in the gendarmerie, two police lieutenants and a prison warder. The military was also there, including a

²⁰ 'Çitçi ve Arsan ailelerinden yetişen On Fikir ve İş adamı', *Gaziantep Kültür Dergisi* 8, no. 88–9 (1965): 16–17; *Gaziantep Kültür Dergisi* 2, no. 20 (1959): 181. Mahmut Çitçi was previously an honorary director of the CUP's *Türktepe Birinci Ana Mektebi* (Türktepe Primary School) during the First World War. 'Çitçi ve Arsan ailelerinden yetişen On Fikir ve İş adamı', p. 18.

²¹ BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, 'The Deportation of Armenians in Aintab', p. 1. Turkish Homeland was the pioneering attempt to promote Turkish nationalism in the Ottoman Empire, founded on 31 August 1911. The organization aimed at defending the rights of the Turkish people within the empire; expanding Turkish nationalism; delivering all the news, negative or positive, from every corner of the Turkish world; and foregrounding Turkish interests. For a comprehensive study of this institution and its role in forming early modern Turkish nationalism, see Ümit Kurt, *Türk'ün Büyük, Bıçare Irkı: Türk Yurdu'ndan Milliyetçiliği Esasları (1911–1916)* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2012); Kurt and Doğan Gürpınar, 'The Young Turk Historical Imagination in the Pursuit of Mythical Turkishness and Its Lost Grandeur (1911–1914)', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 4 (2016): 560–74. On the eve of the First World War, the main task of these two organizations was to orchestrate the harassment of Armenian institutions, promote confiscation of farms on various pretexts and generally promote Turkism. BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, 'The Deportation of Armenians in Aintab', p. 1.

²² In addition to those already mentioned, founders included Tuzcuzâde Hafız Ahmet Efendi, Ahmet Muhtar Bey, Kethüdazâde Hüseyin Cemil Bey, Hacı Hanifzâde Abdullah Efendi, İztrazâde Şefik Bey, Cenanzâde Rıza Bey, Nizipli Hacı Mehmet Efendi, Battal Beyzâde Tahir Bey, Mennazâde Mustafa, İztrazâde Celal Kadri Bey and Daizâde Hasan Sadık Bey. See BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J.1/3, file 4, Aintab, ff. 11–7.

regimental commander, a member of the general staff, a regimental secretary and the commander of a gang squadron of 400, along with several religious leaders: a former mufti, two imams, two *ulema*, two sheikhs and the secretary of a religious charity. A physician, a lawyer, the director of an orphanage, the director of the agricultural bank and local leaders of the CUP were also on its rolls.²³ The list points to the breadth of social support that underpinned the regime's genocidal policies in Aintab. Perhaps more importantly, men such as these legitimized the process of genocide. None of these local worthies did anything to stop the convoys, hide the vulnerable or even protest against the expropriations and deportations.

Portraits of perpetrators

Mehmet Yasin Sani Kutluğ (1889–1973)

Yasin Bey was born in Rumkale, Urfa, in 1889, to a family of landowners, and graduated from Rüştiye (Ottoman junior high school). As someone active in the Armenian deportation and genocide in Aintab, he deserves special attention. An officer during the war, his official duty was as a military dispatcher in Akçakoyunlu, the railroad station closest to Aintab. His was the responsibility for conveying and guarding the convoys of Armenian deportees from the city to the station – and then, for taking these people from Akçakoyunlu to Aleppo by rail. Once in Aleppo, the deportees were to be dispersed in various counties and districts in Bilad al-Sham in Syria. However, it is unlikely that all of them arrived, for en route to the train station, Yasin Bey permitted attacks, attempted murders and pillaging of the Aintab Armenians. Indeed, he participated in the assaults himself, and in stealing their assets in Sazgın village and Akçakoyunlu.

As the commander of Akçakoyunlu railroad station, Yasin Effendi of Rumkale made sure the Armenians slept outside, even on the coldest snowy winter days, and forced them to pay for their train fares.²⁴ An example of how this young soldier, just twenty-six, conceived of his duties can be seen in his

²³ For the full list of those responsible for deportations and plunder in Aintab in 1915–17, see BNu/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J.1/3, file 4, Aintab, ff. 11-7; and 'Turks (List) Responsible', Archive of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Jerusalem (thanks to Taner Akçam for the use of his transcript). See also Sebuğ Aguni, *Milion my Hahëro'w Çharti Badmo'wt'iwny* (History of the Massacre of One Million Armenians) (Istanbul: H. Asaduryan Vortik, 1920), p. 312; Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2011), p. 609.

²⁴ BNu/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, 'The Deportation of Armenians in Aintab', p. 13.

treatment of Father Harutyun Melkonian (1886–1916), a dignitary in the Armenian Protestant church in Aintab, and his family, who were among the Armenians brought to this station. They were to be taken to Aleppo and from there sent to Deir ez-Zor. Father Harutyun's fourteen-year-old son, Hagop, had kept a diary before the deportation in Aintab began and continued it now, making a record of daily events.²⁵ Hagop carried on making entries when the train was delayed and they had to wait at the station for a few days. During one of those days, Hagop was sitting inside his family's tent and organizing his diary when Yasin Effendi entered the tent and discovered the diary. He grabbed it from Hagop's hands and arrested the boy.²⁶ After having someone translate it from Armenian to Turkish, he threw Hagop into prison. Then Yasin Effendi demanded a bribe of 30 liras from Father Harutyun to save his son from punishment. A poor man, Harutyun could not pay the required amount. Hence, Yasin Effendi sent Hagop to prison in Aintab.²⁷ After an investigation, charges were brought against him on the basis of some of his diary entries, and the authorities went so far as to bring him and his father before a military court.

On 21 September 1916, the sultan confirmed the death sentences of the dignitary and commissary to the Armenian Protestant Church in Aintab, Harutyun Melkonian (fugitive), and his son Hagop (under arrest), issued by the military court in Marash. They were found 'guilty of treason by working for the secession of a region of the state, with the goal of establishing an independent Armenia.'²⁸

As it happened, in late November 1915, Hagop was put in the same prison as Sarkis Balabanian, a native of Aintab, who survived the war. Balabanian described him as a very smart, good-natured, gentle and naïve young man.²⁹ When Hagop saw his name among other prisoners who were to be tried in

²⁵ Sarkis Balabanian, *Geaŋqis Daq o'w Bagh Orery: Ah'nt'ab, Qe'sab, Hale'b* (Hot and Cold Days of My Life: Aintab, Kesap, Halep) (Aleppo: Atlas, 1983), p. 70; *Hay Aintab* 9, no. 19 (1968): 57.

²⁶ Balabanian, *Geaŋqis Daq o'w Bagh Orery*, p. 72; *Hay Aintab* 9, no. 19 (1968): 60.

²⁷ Balabanian, *Geaŋqis Daq o'w Bagh Orery*, p. 72; *Hay Aintab* 9, no. 19 (1968): 60. According to the information provided in the Andonian file, Yasin Effendi sent both Harutyun and his fourteen-year-old son to Maraş to be executed; see BNu/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, 'The Deportation of Armenians in Aintab', p. 13; Harutyun Kahana Der Melkonian (1866–1916), *Ayntabiana*, vol. 2, in *Mahartzan: Mahakro'wt'iwnner, Tampanaganner ew Gensakragan No'er* (Funeral Monument: Necrologies, Funeral Orations and Biographical Notes) (Beirut: Atlas, 1974), p. 505. In contrast, Gulesserian stated that both Harutyun and his son were sentenced to death and both were executed in Urfa, along with bookbinder Bedros from Aintab. V. N. Gulesserian, 'Dasnmeg Egheragan Dariner Ah'nt'abi meçh 1908–1919', in *Badmo'wt'iwn Ah'nt'abi Hah'o'c*, vol. 1, p. 1027.

²⁸ BOA.BEO 4432/332342, 21 September 1916.

²⁹ Balabanian, *Geaŋqis Daq o'w Bagh Orery*, p. 72; *Hay Aintab* 9, no. 19 (1968): 60.

Aintab, he believed that he would be released like the rest of them.³⁰ The head of the military court, Aintab's district governor Ahmed Faik Bey, and the head of the deportation committee read out the names of those who were to be released in December 1915. Hagop's name was also on that list. Everyone was happy and excited to be free again. Like other prisoners, Hagop was released from the prison. Unfortunately, Hagop caught the eye of the district governor, Ahmed Faik, whom we will encounter again.

When Ahmed [Faik] Bey saw Der Harutyun [Melkonian] waiting to embrace his son, he suddenly pulled Hagop's father's arm and started shouting 'There must be a mistake here! This child will not be released.' The district governor ordered Hagop to return to prison ('Child, you go back inside').³¹

There were three other detainees in the prison with Hagop: the iron worker Nerses (an empty shell case was discovered in his shop), Hunchak Avedis 'Şaban Agha' (they found the lines of the Armenian national anthem in his chest pocket) and Badveli (Pastor) Kharlambos.³² After four months, the four prisoners were taken to Marash, where they were all executed.

As commander of Akçakoyunlu railroad station, and thus able to claim credit for this incident, young Yasin Effendi lost no time in putting pen to paper to express his pride at how these events unfolded, using accusatory language against Armenians in general and against Hagop Melkonian and his family in particular:

Aintab Armenians were sent to Akçakoyunlu and gathered there ... Incidentally, while searching in Der Harutyun's tent, his wife's huge belly drew our attention. I told the police officer Halo, now deceased, to search her. All of a sudden, people in the tent were alarmed. I asked them what she was hiding underneath of her belly, they said the 'Bible.' I said '[T]ake it out and let us see it.' Thereupon, they took out the Bible, but next to it there was a notebook. We examined that notebook. When we went through its pages, we saw that the provinces, dates, and names of officials in charge of deportation of Armenians were all recorded. We seized this notebook and registered it. Thereupon, well-known tradesmen among the Armenians in Akçakoyunlu, men like Arakliyan [Arakelian], Birecikliyan, and especially Adanaliyan and Ardeşit [Ardashes], begged

³⁰ Balabanian, *Geanqis Daq o'w Bagh Orery*, p. 72; *Hay Aintab* 9, no. 19 (1968): 60.

³¹ *Hay Aintab* 9, no. 19 (1968): 60.

³² Balabanian, *Geanqis Daq o'w Bagh Orery*, pp. 72–3.

me to destroy this notebook and also offered me all of their gold, and if that were not enough, they said they would give all their money, assets and wealth. In response to this offer, I said 'Impossible.' Then, I sent Father Harutyun, his wife, his young son [Hagop], and his daughter to Ahmed [Faik] Bey, Aintab's *mutasarrıf* [district governor] at that time – under armed guard. As a result of the verdict in the Marash military court, these people were sentenced to death and they were executed. By this means, this slanderous conspiracy against Gaziantep and [the] Turkish people was revealed, and the culprits were punished.³³

This incident shows the efforts the regime went to in order to prevent a paper trail of culpability, as protection not only against foreign critics but also against any of the Melkonians' fellow citizens who might be squeamish about the whole genocidal action. Hagop's diary was both a threat and an asset: by prosecuting its owner, the Ittihadists could turn the incriminating diary into 'evidence' that proved the treason of the Melkonians and demonstrated that, like other Armenians, they were really being 'punished' for their deeds, not just randomly killed in the massacres. That would also send a message to other Armenians about what would happen to those who kept records.

Yet there was more than one young Armenian in Aintab who was keeping a diary. Krikor Bogharian (1897–1975), at eighteen only four years older than Hagop, was also making a record. Krikor, who was deported to Hama and, thereafter, Salamiyya,³⁴ towns that today are located in neighbouring Syria, found time to describe in his diary Akçakoyunlu's eager railroad station commander, Yasin Effendi. Yasin, he said, was a man who seemed kind but who sometimes treated deportees cruelly and carried around a whip, with which he would punish them.³⁵ Krikor Bogharian depicted Yasin wandering

³³ Yasin Kutluğ, 'Gaziantep Savaşının Bilinmeyen Yönleri', *Gaziantep'i Tanıtıyoruz* 2, no. 2 (1962): 13.

³⁴ At that period, Salamiyya was a district located in the south-east of Hama, seven hours from Homs. With its population of around 6,000 people, it evolved into a town. The people were members of the Ismaili sect, with only a few people from the Sunni branch of Islam. These few Sunnis were the government officials of the town. Salamiyya was the region to which the great number of Aintab Armenians, mostly Gregorians, were deported and managed to survive. Krikor Bogharian, 'Orakro'wt'iwn Darakir Geanqis', in Toros Toromanian (ed.), *Ceghasban To'wrqy Vgah'o'wt'iwnner Qagho'wadz Hrashq'o'v P'rgo'wadznerow Zro'h'nere'n* (The Genocidal Turk: Eyewitness Accounts Culled from the Accounts of People Who were Miraculously Saved) (Beirut: Shirag, 1973), pp. 131–6, 154–7, 182; Father Nerses Tavukjian, *Dar'abanqi Orakro'wt'iwn* (Diary of Miserable Days), ed. Toros Toromanian (Beirut: High Type Compugraph–Technopresse, 1991), pp. 83–8. For a remarkable study of these two diaries, see Vahé Tachjian, *Daily Life in the Abyss: Genocide Diaries, 1915–1918* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 2017).

³⁵ Bogharian, *Orakro'wt'iwn Darakir Geanqis*, p. 127.



Figure 11.1 Mehmet Yasin (Sani Kutluğ).

around inspecting the surrounding area, visiting the tents of Armenians awaiting deportation. When he entered the Bogharian tent, he saw a chest, which he ordered opened. It was filled with books, and he asked Krikor's father what these books were. Fortunately, his father, the priest Karekin, succeeded in convincing Yasin Effendi to allow the priest to keep his books, and in return, Karekin gave him some handmade embroidery as a gift.³⁶

After the end of the First World War, Yasin Effendi escaped to Ankara, joined the Kuvayı Milliye (National Forces) and in May 1920 became a deputy for Aintab in the Grand National Assembly (GNA) of Ankara. He also became a member of the national forces in Halfeti, in the county of Urfa, from April 1920 to 1921, and played an active role in the war between nationalist forces and French military units in Aintab.³⁷ In the GNA, as a dauntless champion of the proposal to change the names of all those villages, towns, cities and parts that could be deemed irreconcilable with Islam and Turkishness, Yasin Effendi continued to display his commitment to preserving the 'proper' memory of his country's past. Alluding to the *Rûm*, the name of the Orthodox Greek *millet* (nation) in the Ottoman Empire, in May 1921, Yasin Effendi aired a grievance perhaps more reflective of his identification with his birthplace, Rumkale, than of any concerns in Gaziantep, which he was supposed to be representing. He complained:

³⁶ Bogharian, *Orakro'wt'iwñ Darakir Geanqis*, p. 128.

³⁷ Yasin Kutluğ, 'İstiklal Savaşı'ndan Hatıralar', *Gaziantep Halkevi Mecmuası* 25 (1940): 12; *Başpınar Aylık Edebiyat ve Kültür Mecmuası* 16–17 (July 1940): 11; *Başpınar Aylık Edebiyat ve Kültür Mecmuası* 25 (March 1941): 13; *Başpınar Aylık Edebiyat ve Kültür Mecmuası* 28 (June 1941): 7; *Başpınar Aylık Edebiyat ve Kültür Mecmuası* 30–1 (July–August 1941): 8.

There is a province called Rumkale [the Greek Castle] ... There is not one Greek there. Hence, this place has nothing to do with Greeks in terms of its water, soil, or roots. Because the name of the place was Rumkale, the Ottoman administrator had sent us ... a Greek administrator. I plead to you: more than [changing names of] villages, it is imperative to change the foreign names in the provinces, and give them names that would really be proper to Islam.³⁸

In return for Yasin Effendi's services, Mustafa Kemal rewarded him and promoted him to membership of the El Cezire Independent Tribunal on 5 February 1923. He was not, however, re-elected to the parliament that year.³⁹ He died in November 1973, at age eighty-four.

Ahmed Faik (Erner) (1879–1967)

Aintab's district governor, Ahmed Faik Bey, was born in Bursa in 1879. A classmate of Mustafa Kemal, he graduated from the military academy as staff lieutenant in 1905. After graduation, he was appointed vice commander of the Second Regiment in Yanya. While he was in Yanya, Ahmed Faik became a member of the CUP.⁴⁰ As a staff lieutenant, he came to Istanbul along with the *Hareket Ordusu* (Action Army), commanded by Mahmud Şevket Pasha, to repress the counter-revolution of 31 March 1909 (13 April 1909, in the Gregorian calendar), which was organized by opposition and reactionary forces representing mainly conservative religious circles. The same year, he was appointed director of the Yıldız Police School.⁴¹ He was an officer whom Talaat Pasha trusted highly, and he was very close to Talaat's wing within the CUP.⁴²

From then on, Ahmed Faik rose rapidly. On 24 February 1910, he was promoted to the rank of major and sent by Talaat to Basra as gendarme commander. Then, before the First World War, he was appointed commander of the Bagdad Gendarme Regiment – at Cemal Pasha's request. He also took on the role of the Bagdad police director.⁴³ On 18 October 1914, he was made

³⁸ Turkish Grand National Assembly, 9 May 1921, p. 270, cited in Yeşim Bayar, *Formation of the Turkish Nation-State, 1920–1938* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 42.

³⁹ I was not able to find out anything about Yasin Sani Kutluğ from 1923 through to his death in 1973. I recently came across the fact that his daughter, Neriman Kutluğ Gökçe, passed away in Gaziantep in 2002; see <http://www.telgraf.net/gaziantep-milletvekilininkizi-vefat-etti-haberi-33656.html> (accessed 14 October 2015).

⁴⁰ Nermidil Erner Binark, *Şakir Paşa Köşkü: Ahmet Bey ve Şakirler* (Istanbul: Remzi Kitapevi, 2000), p. 37.

⁴¹ Binark, *Şakir Paşa Köşkü*, p. 39; BOA.DH.MKT 2827/50, 19 May 1325 (1 June 1909).

⁴² Binark, *Şakir Paşa Köşkü*, p. 42.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

assistant governor of Bagdad,⁴⁴ finally rising to district governor of Aintab in late August 1915.

When he arrived at Aintab, the deportation of Orthodox Armenians had already begun. Once Ahmed Faik Bey assumed his office, he took the matter in hand, broadened the scope of the deportation and accelerated the entire process. On 8 September 1915, however, he informed Bekir Sami Bey, governor-general of Aleppo, that the deportation, implemented in order to render Armenians incapable of undertaking a nationalistic movement, had not attained its goal. Aintab remained the centre of Armenian activity for the region that Armenians themselves referred to as Cilicia and 'Little Armenia.' In such a significant centre, Ahmed Faik deemed it a serious threat for 20,000 Armenians to be able to carry on any kind of collective existence.⁴⁵ In the eyes of Ahmed Faik Bey, the remaining Armenian population constituted a danger and should be immediately deported so that they would be unable to pursue their aspirations for an independent Armenian state.

The information in Ahmed Faik's telegram coincided perfectly with Talaat's general policy towards the Armenians. In his report to the cabinet on 26 May 1915, and in a later cable (29 August), Talaat clearly stated that the decision to deport the Armenians was made so that the Armenian population would be diminished to a level that would render them incapable of constituting a problem for the Ottoman state.⁴⁶ Thus, the thinning out of the Armenian population became synonymous with a final solution to the Armenian Question. The cipher telegram sent by the minister of the interior to the province of Aleppo on 9 September 1915 noted that Ahmed Faik Bey's reflections on the deportations of remaining Aintab Armenians were true and to the point, and thereby their deportations were also deemed

⁴⁴ Binark, *Şakir Paşa Köşkü*, p. 42; FO 371/6500, 'Ahmet Bey', Malta No. 2724, Interned 02/06/1919, Native of Bursa, Appointments. See also Vartkes Yeghiayan (ed.), *British Foreign Office Dossiers on Turkish War Criminals* (La Verne, CA: American Armenian International College, 1991), p. 108.

⁴⁵ BOA.DH.ŞFR 488/33, Aleppo Governor Bekir Sami Bey to Interior Ministry, 8 September 1915.

⁴⁶ BOA.DH.ŞFR 55/292. Coded telegram from the Interior Ministry's General Directorate of Security (EUM) to the Provinces of Hüdavendigâr (Bursa), Ankara, Konya, İzmit, Adana, Marash, Urfa, Aleppo, (Der) Zor, Sivas, Kütahya, Karesi (Balıkesir), Niğde, Ma'muretül-aziz, Diyarbekir, Karahisar-ı Sahib (Afyon Karahisar), Erzurum and Kayseri, dated 29 August 1915. In his telegram, Talaat Pasha stated, 'The objective that the government expects to achieve by the expelling of the Armenians from the areas in which they live and their transportation to other appointed areas is to ensure that this community will no longer be able to undertake initiatives and actions against the government, and that they will be brought to a state in which they will be unable to pursue their national aspirations ...' See also Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 134–5.

necessary.⁴⁷ In addition, Talaat Pasha ordered that Catholics and Protestants who were ‘harmful’ (politically speaking) be deported too, along with Orthodox Armenians.⁴⁸

In accordance with this order, Ahmed Faik Bey did not hesitate to deport all of the Catholic and Protestant Armenians in the city in late 1915 and early 1916. Using as an excuse the opinions expressed in the newspapers *Ruhcular* (Spirituals) and *Yeni Ömür* (New Life), published by Protestant Armenians, he and his associates organized raids on Protestant houses and made numerous arrests.⁴⁹ The detainees were kept for twenty-two days. Gradually, this entire process increased Protestant Armenian fears that they would be deported, for the events taking place around them resembled neither the first days of the general deportation of Orthodox Armenians nor the house raids and arrests of April 1915.

As historian Raymond Kévorkian notes Ahmed Faik Bey expeditiously organized a second wave of Protestant deportations, on the principle that ‘if one is guilty, all are guilty’.⁵⁰ The first measure he took, around mid-October, was to mobilize the males between ages sixteen and twenty who were still to be found in Aintab and assign them to a labour battalion to work on the *Bagdadbahn* (Baghdad Railway) construction site in Rajo.⁵¹ It was during his term that the direction of the deportation changed from the route of Aleppo–Hama, ending in the Hauran, to the route of Meskené–Deir ez-Zor. The depth and severity of the deportations also drastically intensified.⁵² Not surprisingly, given his ‘radical opinions towards Armenians’, Ahmed Faik was considered ‘a harsh man who spread terror all around’.⁵³

In fact, Ahmed Faik was so adamant about the removal of all Armenians from the city that he did not hesitate to confront those respectable Muslims who protected certain Armenians. For example, on 19 October 1915, he reported to İsmail Canbolat Bey, the director of general security, that he had found deported Armenians hiding in a farm named Tel Hâlid, and that their

⁴⁷ BOA.DH.ŞFR 55-A/174, 9 September 1915.

⁴⁸ BOA.DH.ŞFR 55-A/174, 9 September 1915.

⁴⁹ Gulnesserian, ‘Dasnmeg Eghegeragan Dariner Ahnt’abi mëch 1908–1919’, p. 1028. Some of the Protestants arrested were Prof. Lutfi Levonian, Babikian Badveli Kharalambos, Mihran Halladjian, Dokmeci Nerses (a famous Hunchak), the Protestant priest of Kayacak Church, Hovhannes Hasırdjian, Manase Andonian, Abraham Hoca Levonian and Sarkis Balabanian. Balabanian, *Geanqis Daq o’w Bagh Orery*, p. 66.

⁵⁰ BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, ‘The Deportation of Armenians in Aintab’, p. 5. Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, p. 607.

⁵¹ Gulnesserian, ‘Dasnmeg Eghegeragan Dariner Ahnt’abi mëch 1908–1919’, p. 1028. Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, p. 607.

⁵² Bogharian, *Orakro’wt’iwn Darakir Geanqis*, p. 125.

⁵³ BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, ‘The Deportation of Armenians in Aintab’, p. 9; Stina Katchadourian, *Efronia: An Armenian Love Story* (Princeton, NJ: Gomidas Institute Books, 2001), p. 131.

protector acted in this way for his own interest.⁵⁴ Ahmed Bey did not want a single Armenian to remain in his district and made great efforts to reveal those who ‘protected’ them. Two days later, he sent another cipher telegram to İsmail Canbolat, emphasizing that he had learned that the Armenians Bedros Ashjian⁵⁵ and Sarkis Krajian,⁵⁶ who owned half of Orul (an Armenian village, the biggest and most prosperous in Aintab), had secured such ownership after ten years’ occupancy, and he had heard from the villagers that the Interior Ministry had ordered the governor-general of Aleppo to make sure those two stayed in Aleppo.⁵⁷ Ahmed Faik obviously smelled a rat. Had these two rich Armenians bribed someone? Someone in the Interior Ministry itself? He reported that, as a result of his in-depth investigations, he had come to think that these two harmful *komitacıs* (‘committeemen’, referring to their putative membership in the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, a party that had been allied with the CUP until 1912) had achieved their privileges and protection through none other than Ali Cenani Bey, former president of Aintab’s CUP club – the man who, next to Ahmed Faik himself, was most responsible for organizing Aintab’s deportations. Ahmed Faik politely requested that ‘the exceptional status for them be eliminated, as it will affect the [Muslim] public negatively and cause despair among them.’⁵⁸

The correspondence reveals an interesting point: although both Ahmed Faik Bey and Ali Cenani Bey played an active role in fostering an environment that would facilitate the deportation of Armenians, ensure a strict and radical

⁵⁴ BOA.DH.EUM.KLH 5/48, 19 October 1915.

⁵⁵ Bedros Ashjian was a brilliant businessman; owner of a vast acreage of pistachio nuts, he had amassed enormous wealth. He was a major supporter of the Armenian church and Armenian schools and charities. By the time of his death, in Alexandria, Egypt, he had lost all his wealth because of the deportations. See Kevork A. Sarafian, *A Brief History of Aintab: A Concise History of the Cultural, Religious, Educational, Political, Industrial and Commercial Life of the Armenians of Aintab* (Los Angeles: Union of the Armenians of Aintab, 1957), p. 289.

⁵⁶ Sarkis Effendi Krajian (1872–1929) was an intelligent, highly educated and successful businessman as well as a public-spirited citizen of Aintab, another major contributor to charity and the civic welfare. He was also very active in Armenian affairs and a member of both the municipal and national provincial councils. One of the founders of the Athenagan School in Aintab, Krajian served on its board for many years. As a member of the judicial court, he was fairly active in the Ottoman government of Aleppo province. In 1904, Sarkis Effendi married Zarman Nazaretian, third daughter of Garabed Nazaretian, who belonged to one of the most respected and wealthy families in Aintab. He owned two villages, Küçük and Büyük Kızılhisar, and also extensive pistachio groves. His other pursuit, Krajian and Co. Manufacturers of Embroidered Handkerchiefs, founded in 1896, was a philanthropic venture to give employment to destitute women, victims of the 1895 massacre. See Kevork A. Sarafian (ed.), *Badmo’wt’iwn Ahnt’abi Hah’oc*, vol. 2 (Los Angeles: Union of the Armenians of Aintab, 1953), p. 763; Shusan Yeni-Komshian Teager, *The Krajians of Aintab* (Belmont, MA: n.p., 2007), pp. 21, 55, 57.

⁵⁷ BOA.DH.EUM.KLH 5/48, 21 October 1915.

⁵⁸ BOA.DH.EUM.KLH 5/48, 21 October 1915.

policy against them and allow the seizure of their properties, the two men were at odds. There may have been several reasons, but one was surely that Ali Cenani was willing to make exceptions. They were competing for the same loot, but Ali Cenani thought he could get more from *cooperating* with the rich Armenians through bribes than he could from deporting them and having to divide the loot with other actors (including Ahmed Faik). The latter knew that if the former won and these two Armenians stayed, he would keep his bribe, but there would be no other loot to divide. There are, of course, many other possible reasons for Ali Cenani's willingness to offer protection, such as, perhaps, a personal friendship between him and these two wealthy Armenian families. But the conflict between the deputy, Ali Cenani, and the district governor, Ahmed Faik, reached the point that Ahmed Faik filed an official complaint in Istanbul against Ali Cenani for protecting Armenians – in spite of the latter's position as a member of the parliament.

Ahmed Faik Bey had married well. Ayşe Hanım was the daughter of Kabağaçlızade Mehmed Şakir Pasha (1855–1914), who had been grand vizier to Sultan Abdülhamid II between 1891 and 1895. We have some reason to believe that she may have regretted it. Their daughter, Nermidil Erner Binark, would later write a memoir about her father in which she openly related the deplorable conditions of Aintab's deported Armenians, the result of her father's stringent policies, which she had learned about through talks with her mother, who happened to have visited her husband in Aintab at that time. On her way to Aintab, Ayşe Hanım saw the terrible situation of the deportees and, much later, disclosed what she saw:

We were passing through the Gavur Mountain [*Gavur Dağı*] with our horse cart. One side was the mountain and the other side was the cliff. People were traveling on the roads. There were many old people, kids, women walking in this frozen weather. Some people's faces were covered with flies and they were about to die. Many of them were begging to get into my cart. One woman bolted onto my cart, begging me 'Please take me to your cart, I will be your slave.' People were dying as they walked. During the night, we were hearing voices from the tents of children, who were crying, 'Mayrik' [Mother]. What I saw was terrible. We had happened into the middle of the Armenian deportation.⁵⁹

On 23 March 1916, Ahmed Bey left Aintab. Despite not being a local, he and Ali Cenani had become the main organizers of the Armenian deportations from the region, playing a major role in the liquidation of their movable and

⁵⁹ Binark, *Şakir Paşa Köşkü*, p. 45.

immovable properties, and creating a fortune for himself by acquiring those assets.⁶⁰ Singled out by Talaat and entrusted with carrying out the deportation in the city, he had 'successfully' fulfilled his work. Next, he was to be the new director-general of police at Istanbul, replacing Bedri Bey in late May 1916.⁶¹ The promotion was Talaat's reward for his relentless effort and 'success' in deporting Aintab Armenians and for carrying out their massacre. He remained in this position until his appointment as governor of Sivas.⁶²

After the First World War, however, Ahmed Faik Bey was arrested by the new Turkish government and handed over to the British military authorities for deportation to Malta on 2 June 1919.⁶³ The charge? He had been one of the 'main authors of the deportations of Armenians of Aintab (25,000)', accused of being an 'active, relentless, harsh, venomous, and chauvinist Ittihadist'.⁶⁴

Ahmed Faik managed to escape Malta in 1921, alongside Ali İhsan Sabis, Ferit Bey, Şükrü Kaya, Fevzi Bey and several others.⁶⁵ He fled first to Rome and then Berlin, to see Talaat Pasha. In Berlin, the two met frequently.⁶⁶ In mid-1922, he and his family moved to Samsun, where he started a tobacco business. After the declaration of the republic, however, he returned to Istanbul. Closing his tobacco business, he opened a textile company and founded a blacksmith factory. Yet all his business endeavours failed, and he went bankrupt.⁶⁷ In her memoir, his daughter writes of her father's great financial difficulties. He could not even pay his electricity bills.⁶⁸ In 1930, he moved to Buenos Aires, Argentina, together with his family, where

⁶⁰ BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 9.

⁶¹ BOA.DH.ŞFR 520/18, 17 May 1916. According to the memoirs of Naim Bey, Ahmed Faik became the chief of police of Istanbul on 14 May 1916; see FO 371/6500, 'Ahmet Bey', in Yeghiayan, *British Foreign Office Dossiers*, p. 110. Actually, before being appointed to Istanbul, he was recommended to Cemal Pasha by Talaat for the position of assistant governor of Syria province; see BOA.DH.ŞFR 62/190 and 62/194, 1 April 1916. For the activities of Ahmed Faik Bey as the chief of police, see Cemil Filmler, *Hatıralar: Türk sinemasında 65 yıl* (Istanbul: Emek Matbaacılık, 1984), p. 35.

⁶² Binark, *Şakir Paşa Köşkü*, pp. 46–7; FO 371/6500, 'Ahmet Bey', in *British Foreign Office Dossiers*, p. 108. In her memoir, Nermidil Erner Binark noted that her father was sent to Damascus as governor in November 1915 and that he did not get along with Cemal Pasha over there. That is why he was appointed to Istanbul as a police director by Talaat Pasha (*Şakir Paşa Köşkü*, pp. 46–7).

⁶³ Bilal Şimşir, *Malta Sürgünleri* (Istanbul: Bilgi Yayınevi 1985), p. 110.

⁶⁴ FO 371/6500, 'Ahmet Bey', Malta No. 2724, Interned 02/06/1919, Native of Bursa, Appointments; see also Yeghiayan, *British Foreign Office Dossiers on Turkish War Criminals*, p. 109.

⁶⁵ İhsan Birinci, 'Akan Kan Benimdir', *Hayat Tarihi Mecmuası* 2, no. 7 (1966): 63–6; Binark, *Şakir Paşa Köşkü*, pp. 57–8.

⁶⁶ Birinci, 'Akan Kan Benimdir', pp. 65–6; Binark, *Şakir Paşa Köşkü*, pp. 58, 61.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

he served as Turkey's honorary consul. He opened another tobacco factory there.⁶⁹

Some Armenian survivors from Aintab had also ended up in Buenos Aires, where they founded a Union of Aintab Armenians in the 1920s.⁷⁰ When Ahmed Faik arrived, those Armenians became aware of his presence. They knew of the crimes that Aintab's former governor had committed in their hometown. Nermidil Erner Binark, who was with her father in Argentina, mentions a striking event. One day, she writes,

... a 'commemoration of the Armenian massacre' was organized. Armenians booked a big hall for the event. They engaged in propaganda against Turks in this event, and even sent an invitation letter to my mother warning her not to 'come here with your husband'. Of course, my mother did not attend this event.⁷¹

In 1933, once again her father's business affairs failed, and he lost his factory in Argentina and returned to Turkey. Again he experienced considerable economic hardship. Nermidil Erner recalls those days, when she was a small child:

Every now and then some stuff from home would disappear. My father's gold watch was gone. In fact, one day he sold his dressing gown to the junkman. We used to burn tree branches that we collected from the garden instead of wood.⁷²

When Mustafa Kemal heard that Ahmed Faik, his former classmate from the military academy, was in economic straits and living in such misery, he intervened to make it possible for him to retire on physical disability, with benefits. That seems to have been the beginning of the family's recovery of economic and social respectability. In the 1940s, Ahmed Faik received a job offer from the Skoda weapon factories and got a senior position in one of its plants in Turkey. His son, Erdem Erner, was employed by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and served as Turkish ambassador to various countries.⁷³

⁶⁹ Binark, *Şakir Paşa Köşkü*, p. 75.

⁷⁰ Sarafian, *Brief History of Aintab*, p. 221.

⁷¹ Binark, *Şakir Paşa Köşkü*, pp. 75–6.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁷³ Erdem Erner wrote his memoir about his experiences as an ambassador; see Erdem Erner, *Davulun Sesi: Dışişlerinde 44 Yıl* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1993).

Ahmed Faik Bey spent the last years of his life in poor health in the mansion of Şakir Pasha on the Prince Islands (Büyükada). In 1967, his health declined sharply. One day, as he lay in bed with a severe illness, his wife suddenly began to talk about the Armenian deportation and criticized the policy. Nermidil Erner Binark tells the rest of the story:

When he heard that my mother had said something bad about the policy of deporting Armenians, all of a sudden this sick man, quietly lying in his bed, revived, beating his fist onto his quilt and yelling at my mother: 'If I were born once more, I would do it again. Do you understand me, Ayşe! I would do it again!'⁷⁴

Ahmed Faik Erner died later that year. He was eighty-eight.

Conclusion

The genocidal process may be desired by the centre, but it is inevitably guided by the locality. Any orders from above are subject to acceptance or rejection by local power brokers – the social and political elites.⁷⁵ The relationship between the central and local power brokers is symbiotic: the central authorities need local actors to carry out their orders, while local actors need the central authorities to 'legitimize' their actions, in turn solidifying their social standing. As Uğur Ü. Üngör demonstrates in the case of Diyarbakir, some families could bring dozens of men into the streets to murder, rape and pillage, but others could mobilize hundreds, earning them greater favour in the eyes of the central authorities.⁷⁶ This dynamic can 'give rise to a mobilization process in which men participate in mass killing in exchange for economic and political benefits granted by the state.'⁷⁷ The Ottoman district of Aintab serves as a good example of how these dynamics produced the Armenian genocide at the local level.

⁷⁴ Binark, *Şakir Paşa Köşkü*, p. 181.

⁷⁵ Examples of local studies of genocide include Tomislav Dulic, *Utopias of Nation: Local Mass Killing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1941–42* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Library, 2005); Ann Lee Fujii, *Killing Neighbors: Webs of Violence in Rwanda* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2009); Victoria M. Esses and Richard A. Vernon (eds), *Explaining the Breakdown of Ethnic Relations: Why Neighbors Kill* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008); Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005). See also Üngör, *Making of Modern Turkey*, pp. 104–5.

⁷⁶ Üngör, *Making of Modern Turkey*, p. 105.

⁷⁷ Üngör and Polatel, *Confiscation and Destruction*, p. 166.

Following the destruction of the Aintab Armenians, the promise of economic power rallied active support for and participation in the macro-policy of the CUP, which aimed to annihilate all of Turkey's Armenians. Additionally, the property and material benefits acquired from victims were an important means of binding beneficiaries to each other and to the CUP regime. Therefore, one could argue that what motivated the urban Muslims of Aintab to join the CUP and take part in its policies was not solely a shared ideology but also self-interest. This attitude, in turn, greatly widened the scope of complicity – not just in the sense of more people being involved as perpetrators or as beneficiaries after the genocide had been initiated, but also in the sense that more sections of society actually encouraged genocide in the first place, as the next chapter will demonstrate.

The republican regime was closely linked to its CUP predecessor via its personnel, ideology and persecutory economic policy. As in the case of Ahmed Faik and Yasin Kutluğ, the perpetrators and their families profited from the genocide to the extent that, after 1923, entire generations were educated and provided for by the 'start-up' capital of Armenian property acquired in 1915. For instance, the family of Daizâde Mahmud (Mahmut Dai), who purchased the properties of Armenians in Aintab at ridiculously low prices, became one of the wealthiest in Aintab in the 1930s and 1940s. In fact, Mahmut Dai was chairman of the Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce and the founding member of the Republican People's Party (RPP) in the city. Obtaining Armenian properties at very low prices was the source of Mahmut Dai's riches and, later, of his family's. We see a similar case in the career of İncözâde Hüseyin (Hüseyin İncioğlu), who returned to Aintab during the French occupation in 1919–20, participated in the war and fought against the French and the Armenians on the front line as the head of the district. İncözâde Hüseyin was also one of the leading members of the Antep Heyet-i Merkeziye, a local resistance organization founded by Aintab local elites.⁷⁸ As the French retreated and the Armenians, whom the French had encouraged to return, again left Aintab en masse, İncözâde Hüseyin purchased Movses Jamgochian's house at auction for a knock-down price.⁷⁹ Another house in Aintab, classified as abandoned property, was gifted to him by Mustafa Kemal for his various services to the nation. Furthermore, with Mustafa Kemal's support, he was elected to parliament and became a deputy of Aintab.

In the same way, many former CUP members continued to serve the Turkish state and its governments in the republican era; some as deputies in

⁷⁸ Sahir Üzel, *Gaziantep Savaşının İç Yüzü* (Ankara: Doğu Matbaası, 1952), p. 253.

⁷⁹ Interview with İclal İncioğlu, 20 December 2014. The İncö family got İncioğlu as the last name in 1934. İclal İncioğlu is granddaughter of İncö Hasan.

the national assembly, some as active members of political parties, especially, initially, the Republican People's Party.

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From Aintab to Gaziantep: The Reconstitution of an Elite on the Ottoman Periphery

Ümit Kurt

Much of the literature on the destruction of the Ottoman Armenians tells the story of a state captured by a radical party that enforced genocidal measures throughout the land.¹ Scholarship about genocidal activity at the local level, however – what social scientists might call ‘the periphery’ – is still in its infancy.² The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to examine such activity on the

¹ Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006); Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Vahakn N. Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2004); Ronald G. Suny, *They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else: A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); David Gaunt, *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors: Muslim–Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia during World War I* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006).

² Some important local studies include Hilmar Kaiser, *The Extermination of Armenians in the Diyarbekir Region* (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Press, 2014); Hilmar Kaiser, ‘“A Scene from the Inferno”: The Armenians of Erzerum and the Genocide, 1915–1916’, in Hans-Lukas Kieser and Dominik J. Schaller (eds), *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern und die Shoah: The Armenian Genocide and the Shoah* (Zurich: Chronos, 2002), pp. 129–86; Kevork Yeghiazakjian, *Genocide in Trebizond: A Case Study of Armeno-Turkish Relations during the First World War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981); Uğur Ümit Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Uğur Ümit Üngör, ‘Explaining Regional Variations in the Armenian Genocide’, in Hans-Lukas Kieser et al. (eds), *World War I and the End of the Ottomans: From the Balkan Wars to the Armenian Genocide* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2015), pp. 241–61; Uğur Ümit Üngör, ‘Diyarbakir (1915–1916): Young Turk Mass Killing at the Provincial Level’, *Sciences Po: Mass Violence and Resistance-Research Network*, <http://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/en/document/diyarbakir-1915-1916-young-turk-mass-killings-provincial-level> (accessed 25 March 2009); Uğur Ümit Üngör, ‘Center and Periphery in the Armenian Genocide: The Case of Diyarbakir Province’, in Hans-Lukas Kieser and Elmar Plözka (eds), *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern, die Türkei und Europa: The Armenian Genocide, Turkey and Europe* (Zurich: Chronos, 2006), pp. 71–88; Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2011).

Ottoman periphery, focusing on the district of Aintab (or Anteb) – modern-day Gaziantep. Located in Aleppo province, 55 kilometres west of the Euphrates and 45 kilometres to the north of the modern Turkish–Syrian border, Aintab in 1914 had an Armenian population that probably numbered somewhere between 30,000 and 37,000 people.³ It is estimated that the number of Armenians deported from Aintab was approximately 32,000.

The chapter has two parts. Drawing upon primary sources from Ottoman, Armenian, British and French archives, as well as from memoirs and personal papers, the first part examines the persistent efforts of some of Aintab's most prominent citizens to get the central government to expel the district's Armenians, demands that seem to have enjoyed locally a considerable level of social support. Yet, for some time these demands encountered resistance from several powerful civil and military figures. The result was that Aintab's Armenians were deported later than most of their eastern neighbours. The second part of the argument focuses on events after the genocide: the successive British and French occupations of the district; the return to Aintab of Armenians who had managed to survive; their efforts to recover their property; and then a second, and final, expulsion. Those in Aintab now in possession of Armenian property, no longer vulnerable to challenge, used their political power during the republican era to consolidate their hold on these assets. Much of the physical and financial capital of Aintab and its elites were products of the Armenian genocide.

Aintab as outlier

The deportation of Aintab's Armenians began in August 1915,⁴ late compared to the deportations in most eastern regions. The first such deportations, from the Cilician towns of Dörtiyol and Zeitun, began in mid-February 1915. They

³ These figures reflect Armenian, British and French sources. Turkish sources reduce these numbers to 20,000–30,000. Population figures for the Ottoman Empire have always been controversial, and the rich literature for these estimates is too extensive to list here. See Yervant Babaian (ed.), *Badmo'w'i'wnt Ahint'abi Hahöc* (History of Aintab Armenians), vol. 3 (Los Angeles: Union of the Armenians of Aintab/April Publishers, 1994), pp. 11–12; Kevork A. Sarafian, *A Briefer History of Aintab: A Concise History of the Cultural, Religious, Educational, Political, Industrial and Commercial Life of the Armenians of Aintab* (Los Angeles: Union of the Armenians of Aintab, 1957), p. 11; Kemal Karpat, *Ottoman Population (1830–1914): Demographic and Social Character* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 176; *Arşiv Belgeleriyle Ermeni Faaliyetleri 1914–1918*, vol. 1 (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 2005), p. 655.

⁴ BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, 'The Deportation of Armenians in Aintab', p. 1.

were an informal, small-scale response to local events. Dörtyol, because of its location on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, was vulnerable to Entente military landings, and Armenians there were not trusted.⁵ Zeitun had been a site of Armenian draft resisters. The first *formal* decision for deportation was issued on 8 April 1915, following an exchange of coded wires between Enver Pasha (minister of war), Talaat Bey (minister of the interior), and Cemal Pasha (governor of Syria and commander of the Fourth Army).⁶ In a telegram sent to Enver, Cemal Pasha had declared, ‘The transfer to Konya of those whose residence in Zeitun and Marash is deemed to be harmful is absolutely necessary,’ because ‘otherwise the enemy’s landing’ would ‘make it necessary to station many troops in this area.’⁷ Zeitun’s deportations began with the departure of thirty-four Armenian notables and their families. The moves were not aimed at extermination; they were strategically motivated and resulted from political and military anxieties.⁸ The transition from strategic to genocidal deportations occurred during the Van uprising on 19 April 1915. The large-scale deportations on 24 April and 23 May ‘signified an intensification of anti-Armenian measures.’⁹ They were followed, on 21 June, by orders for still wider sweeps.

Aintab, however, had not yet become an ‘area of displacement’.¹⁰ In fact, in a coded telegram sent by Talaat to Cemal regarding the deportations, its Armenians were not mentioned among those to be expelled from Aleppo province.¹¹ Only at the end of July 1915 was Aintab included in the planned deportation scheme.

⁵ Fuat Dündar, *Crime of Numbers: The Role of Statistics in the Armenian Question (1878–1918)* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2010), p. 72.

⁶ James Bryce and Arnold Toynbee, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915–1916: Document Presented to Viscount Grey of Falloden by Viscount Bryce* (Princeton, NJ: Gomidas Institute/Taderon Press, 2000), p. 636.

⁷ For the 9 April 1915 coded telegram, see the Archive of Turkish General Staff Directorate of Military History and Strategic Studies (ATASE), cl.2287, ds.32-12, n.1-37, Documents sur les arméniens I, Présidence du conseil direction générale de la presse et de l’information, cited in Dündar, *Crime of Numbers*, pp. 71–2.

⁸ Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide*, pp. 80–2.

⁹ Üngör, ‘Diyarbakir (1915–1916)’. See also Donald Bloxham, ‘The Beginning of the Armenian Catastrophe: Comparative and Contextual Considerations’, in Kieser and Schaller (eds), *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern und die Shoah*, pp. 101–28.

¹⁰ *Arşiv Belgeleriyle Ermeni Faaliyetleri*, vol. I, p. 152; Azmi Süslü, *Ermeniler ve 1915 Tehcir Olayı* (Ankara: Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1990), vol. 1, p. 112.

¹¹ BOA.DH.ŞFR 53/94 coded telegram from minister of the interior to Fourth Army commander, 23 May 1915; *Arşiv Belgeleriyle Ermeni Faaliyetleri*, vol. 8 (Ankara: Genelkurmay ATASE ve Genelkurmay Denetleme Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2008), p. 3.

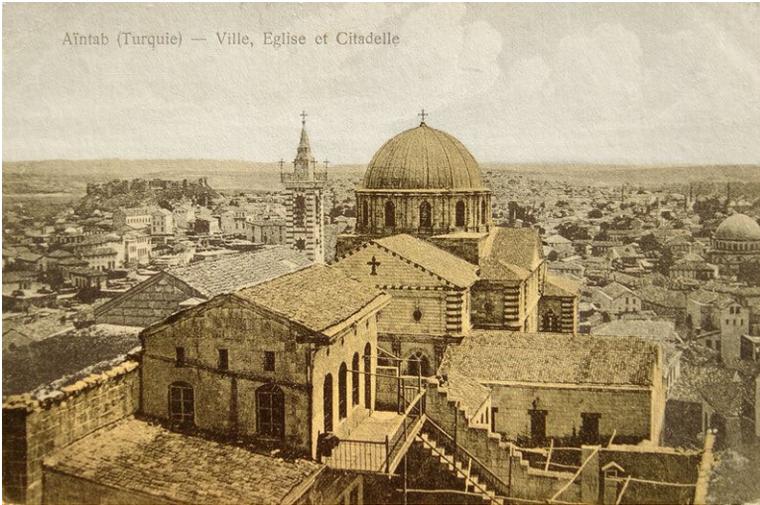


Figure 12.1 A postcard of the Holy Mother of God Church, Aintab, date uncertain; subsequently converted to mosque.

Provocateurs and protectors

In late March 1915, Aleppo's provincial governor Celal Bey reported to Cemal Pasha that some Armenians living in Aintab's Muslim quarters were discreetly moving their belongings to the Armenian quarters. The news was creating great concern among the Muslim population, who feared that the Armenians were preparing to revolt. Cemal Pasha informed the Ministry of the Interior, which in response ordered Aleppo province to make the following announcement in Aintab on 29 March: 'No Armenian shall be allowed *tebdil-i mekan* [a change of place]; those who have done so shall return to their prior neighborhood.' But it added the reassuring promise that 'the properties, lives, and honor of the population loyal to the Government shall be protected against any attacks, and the slightest assault by the Muslim population against any Armenian, even if they were revolutionaries or rioters, shall be subject to immediate disciplinary action.'¹² As it turned out, Aintab's Armenians eventually *were* deported – but only in August 1915, after much of the rest of

¹² BOA.DH.EUM.II.Şube 68/34 and 466/92, Aleppo Governor Celal to Ministry of the Interior, 29 March 1915.

Eastern Anatolia had already been ‘cleansed’. Why were Aintab’s Armenians spared for so long?

Aram Andonian, an Armenian journalist and intellectual who survived arrest and deportation in late April 1915 and found refuge in Aleppo, had immediately begun collecting information on the government’s annihilation campaign and would continue to do so throughout the war. His files contain materials on Aintab that are an invaluable source for the dynamics driving the fate of Aintab’s Armenians.¹³ Andonian learned that as early as March 1915, the leaders of Aintab’s CUP club – led by Ali Cenani, the district’s parliamentary deputy; Fadil Bey, the former district governor of Kilis; and Hacı Mustafa Bey, a prominent Kilis notable – began taking advantage of the incidents in Zeitun and Marash to depict their own Armenians as a harmful element. They repeatedly appealed to Istanbul, hoping to obtain a deportation order for the Armenians of Aintab and Kilis.¹⁴ They were thwarted, however, by Şükrü Bey, Aintab’s district governor, and Hilmi Bey, Aintab’s military commander, even though both men – as Armenian survivors noted – were themselves Unionists. The military commander simply informed the central government that there was no valid reason for deportation. Two other Armenians in the district, Krikor Bogharian and Sebuğ Aguni, confirm Andonian’s picture of Şükrü Bey’s and Hilmi Bey’s opposition to deportation.¹⁵

Undaunted by this official opposition, the three Aintabi notables, with the assistance of their Marash counterparts, then organized a series of

¹³ After the war, Aram Andonian remained in Aleppo, staying for a while at the Baron Hotel. There he received numerous letters, personal/private papers, diaries, notes and other documents from genocide survivors regarding their experiences. Andonian collected and classified these materials province by province and district by district. Aintab was one of the districts. He also produced one of first analytical publications on the Armenian massacres. Andonian then became the first curator of the Nubarian Library of the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) in Paris. Andonian’s files, to which this chapter owes much, are available in the Nubarian Library.

¹⁴ BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 3.

¹⁵ BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 3. Krikor Bogharian (1897–1975), who was deported to Aleppo, then Hama and finally to Salamiyya, along with his entire family, also kept a diary about his life from 29 July 1915 to 6 December 1916. Krikor Bogharian, ‘Orakro’wt’iwn Darakir Geanqis’ (Diary of My Life in Exile), in Toros Toromanian (ed.), *Ceghasban T’owraqy Vgahö’wt’iwnner Qaghö’wadz Hrashqö’v P’rgö’wadznerö’w Zro’h’neren* (Genocider Turk: Testimonies Composed from the Accounts of Armenians who Miraculously Survived) (Beirut: Shirag, 1973), pp. 121–2. Sebuğ Aguni, *Milion my Hak’erö’w Ch’arti Badmo’wt’iwny* (History of the Massacre of One Million Armenians) (Istanbul: H. Asaduryan Vortik, 1920), p. 310. Sebuğ Aguni was the former editor of the daily *Zhamanag*. He was the first to publish a global study of the massacres, basing his work on a large number of documents at the patriarchate’s disposal.

provocations.¹⁶ They also sent telegrams to the central government claiming that Aintab Armenians had attacked mosques with weapons, killed Muslims, raped Muslim women, burned down Muslim houses and plundered their property.¹⁷ Hilmi Bey responded by personally requesting that Cemal Pasha punish the notables – as provocateurs. Although his opponents countered by branding Hilmi as an Armenian sympathizer,¹⁸ Aleppo's provincial governor, Celal Bey, added his support for the commander by reporting that this situation was causing great panic among Aintab Armenians. His investigations revealed an Armenian community that feared *umumi kıtal* (a general massacre).¹⁹

In light of these charges and counter-charges, Cemal Pasha dispatched the Fourth Army's second-in-command, Fahri Pasha, to Aintab in April 1915, to investigate in person. Police searches of the Armenian neighbourhoods failed to provide any confirmation of the accusations of Deputy Ali Cenani and his cronies.²⁰ In fact, the American consul in Aleppo, Jesse B. Jackson, noted that Fahri Pasha announced to Aintab's leading Muslims, in the presence of Christians, that 'If any Muslim frightened Christians [Armenians] or in any way treated them unkindly, he would himself hang him, even if the offender were his own brother.'²¹ He himself behaved toward Christian leaders in Aintab in a very friendly manner.

After Fahri Pasha left Aintab, however, the situation worsened. Ali Bey, a ranking member of Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa (the Special Organization)²² and a

¹⁶ In fact, it was clear that, as Eberhard Graf von Wolffskeel, chief of staff to Fahri Pasha, had confirmed, certain circles in Marash sent a blatantly 'made-up telegram' to Istanbul in which they affirmed that the Armenians had 'occupied a mosque' and 'began to kill the Muslims'. See the letter to his wife, 24 April 1915, in Hilmar Kaiser (ed.), *Eberhard Count Wolffskeel Von Reichenberg, Zeitun, Mousa Dagh, Ourfa: Letters on the Armenian Genocide* (London: Gomidas Institute, 2004), p. 14.

¹⁷ BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 4.

¹⁸ BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 4.

¹⁹ BOA.DH.ŞFR 52/48, Ministry of the Interior to Aleppo Province, 20 April 1915; BOA.DH.ŞFR 468/54; BOA.DH.ŞFR.II.Şube, 10/89, 21 April 1915.

²⁰ BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 4.

²¹ NA/RG 59, 867.00/761, Report from United States consul in Aleppo, J. B. Jackson, to Ambassador Morgenthau, 21 April 1915, in Ara Sarafian (ed.), *United States Official Records on the Armenian Genocide, 1915–1917* (Princeton, NJ: Gomidas Institute, 2004), p. 12; 'Miss Frearson's Experiences and Observations in Turkey', The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (hereafter ABCFM), 16.9.6.1, 1817–1919. Unit 5, Reel 670-7.1.20, Vol. 2, Part 1, p. 10.

²² For more information about the Special Organization, see Polat Safi, 'History in the Trench: The Ottoman Special Organization – Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Literature', *Middle Eastern Studies* 48, no. 1 (2012): 89–106. Units of this organization were involved in executing the deportations, boycotts and massacres directed at Ottoman Christians during the First World War; see Ryan Gingeras, *Heroin, Organized Crime, and the Making of Modern Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 38–9; Vahakn N. Dadrian and Taner Akçam, *Judgment at Istanbul: The Armenian Genocide Trials* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011).

chetebashi (bandit leader), was summoned by Ali Cenani and in late April arrived in Aintab with a squadron of *chetes* (bandits), who began organized pillaging and murders outside the city.²³ Then, on 30 April 1915, the first raids *inside* the city took place.²⁴ To obtain the weapons and 'harmful' writings alleged to be hidden in Aintab, the houses of prominent Armenians, including Dashnak and Hunchak members, were raided. Nothing incriminating was found.²⁵ Nevertheless, many Armenians were arrested. Another wave of house searches was conducted on 1 May, and ten men were arrested and brought before the military court in Aleppo.²⁶ In addition, thirty leading political figures from the Armenian community were sent to Aleppo for interrogation. After questioning, eighteen were returned to Aintab.²⁷ Again, no incriminating evidence was found, and all were set free. On 12 May, house raids and individual arrests of intellectuals peaked, with the collective arrest of 200 people,²⁸ but the provincial governor, Celal Bey, helped release most of those apprehended. Some detainees were freed on the same day, others a few days later.

Watching their future

Meanwhile, however, Aintab's Armenians became witnesses to the deportations of those from less fortunate regions. As house raids and police searches in Aintab continued, on 3 May they saw the first convoy, comprising 300 women and children from Zeitun, pass through their city.²⁹ The deportees

²³ BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 5. Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, p. 606.

²⁴ BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 5; Aguni, *Milion my Hahëro'w Ch'arti Badmo'wt'iwny*, p. 310.

²⁵ BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 5.

²⁶ Kevork A. Sarafian (ed.), *Badmo'wt'iwn Ahnt'abi Hahòc* (History of Antab Armenians), vol. 1 (Los Angeles: Union of the Armenians of Aintab, 1953), p. 1020; Bogharian, 'Orakro'wt'iwn Darakir Geanqis', pp. 121–2; BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 4; Der [Father] Nerses Tavukjian, *Dar'abanqi Orakro'wt'iwn* (Diary of Miserable Days), ed. Toros Toramanian (Beirut: High Type Compugraph–Technopresse, 1991), pp. 66, 69; Aguni, *Milion my Hahëro'w Ch'arti Badmo'wt'iwny*, p. 310; Kevork Barsumian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ahnt'abi H. H. Tashmagco'wt'iwn 1898–1922* (History of the Aintab Armenian Revolutionary Federation 1898–1922) (Aleppo: Tigris, 1957), p. 49; Hiran K. Sulahian 1871–1949; *Nor Ahnt'ab* 13 (1972): 11; Kévorkian, *Armenian Genocide*, p. 606.

²⁷ Bogharian, *Orakro'wt'iwn Darakir Geanqis*, p. 122; NA/RG59/867.4016/95, from Henry Morgenthau, American Ambassador, Istanbul, to the Secretary of State, 20 July 1915, in *United States Official Records on the Armenian Genocide*, p. 98.

²⁸ Sarafian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ahnt'abi Hahòc*, vol. 1, p. 1020; Bogharian, 'Orakro'wt'iwn Darakir Geanqis', p. 121; BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 6.

²⁹ Sarafian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ahnt'abi Hahòc*, vol. 1, p. 1019; Sarkis Balabanian, *Geanqis Daq o'w Bagh Orery: Ahnt'ab, Qe'sab, Hale'b* (Hot and Cold Days of My Life: Aintab, Kesap, Halep) (Aleppo: Shirag, 1983), p. 54; Kévorkian, *Armenian Genocide*, p. 606.

had suffered greatly on their way. Some were injured, their wounds infected and their clothes in tatters.³⁰ Miss Frearson, an American missionary worker, noted that Aintab's Armenians could form a relief committee for the deportees. John Merrill from the Central Turkey College and Dr Hamilton and the nurses from the American Hospital also exerted strenuous efforts to aid the deportees, many of whom – including children – were suffering from serious knife wounds.³¹ Larger convoys of about 2,000 people followed.

Indeed, throughout June and July 1915, convoys from Zeitun, Marash, Elbistan, Gürün, Sivas and Furnuz continued to fill the streets of Aintab on their way south toward Syria.³² All of them were in a similarly destitute condition, having suffered continual attacks on their persons and property along the way. All deportees were kept in the Kavaklık neighbourhood, fifteen minutes from the city centre, near a spring where they had to pay gendarmeries a quarter of *mecidiye* (5 *piasters* – the smallest denomination of Turkish currency; 1 piaster = 15 pfennigs) for a glass of water.³³ Aintab's Armenians bribed the gendarmeries and tried to supply the deportees with food and water themselves. Yet, while the Aintabzys bore witness to these horrors, they did not consider the possibility that they might face a similar fate.³⁴ Vahe N. Gulesserian, who was there, described this state of mind:

In spite of everything that was happening around us and in spite of all the facts standing right in front of our eyes, the number of those who buried their head in the sand like an ostrich was not small. These people convinced themselves that they were happy, and they tried to deceive themselves into believing that a similar deportation was not possible for Aintab and that nothing bad would happen to them.³⁵

³⁰ Balabanian, *Geaŋqis Daq o'w Bagh Orery*, pp. 54–5; Bogharian, 'Orakro'wt'iwn Darakir Geaŋqis', p. 122; Stina Katchadourian, *Efronia: An Armenian Love Story* (Princeton, NJ: Gomidas Institute Books, 2001), p. 126.

³¹ Report by Miss Frearson, a missionary in Aintab, written in September 1915 after her departure from Turkey, in Bryce and Toynbee, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 541–50; James L. Barton, *Turkish Atrocities: Statements of American Missionaries on the Destruction of Christian Communities in Ottoman Turkey, 1915–1917* (Ann Arbor, MI: Gomidas Institute, 1998), p. 107. Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, p. 606.

³² Bogharian, 'Orakro'wt'iwn Darakir Geaŋqis', p. 122; Tavukjian, *Dar'abanqi Orakro'wt'iwn*, p. 65; Balabanian, *Geaŋqis Daq o'w Bagh Orery*, p. 63.

³³ BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 9; Balabanian, *Geaŋqis Daq o'w Bagh Orery*, pp. 55–6. Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, p. 606.

³⁴ Sarafian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ah'int'abi Hah'òc*, vol. 1, p. 1020; Balabanian, *Geaŋqis Daq o'w Bagh Orery*, p. 56.

³⁵ Sarafian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ah'int'abi Hah'òc*, vol. 1, p. 1020.

Previously, Aintab Armenians had relied on the honesty and kindness of Celal Bey, Şükrü Bey and Hilmi Bey – the provincial and district governors and Aintab’s military commander – to shield them from deportation.³⁶ The period of wishful thinking ended when Cemal Bey, general secretary of Aleppo’s CUP branch, arrived in late June, accompanied by a few propagandists. The mission of this Unionist cadre was to convince Aintab’s notables to repeat their entreaties to Istanbul to issue a deportation order. Cemal Bey succeeded in pressuring the local CUP and other Muslim leaders to send new slanderous letters to the capital. On 21 June 1915, the German consul at Aleppo, Walter Rössler, reported that Governor Celal Bey was to be removed from his post because of his refusal to deport Armenians.³⁷ Indeed, on 30 June, in a reshuffle of provincial governorships, Bekir Sami Bey was given the Aleppo seat, while Celal Bey was moved to Konya.³⁸ On 5 July, Celal left Aleppo. Aram Andonian mourned his departure, noting in his Aintab file, ‘Aintab Turks collaborating with Unionists in Aleppo [have] succeeded in removing the honest, charitable, and reasonable governor of Aleppo from his post.’³⁹

Still, as late as 17 July, Aintab’s own district governor, Şükrü Bey, was able to inform the Ministry of the Interior that no Armenian had been deported (*harice çıkarılmadı*) from Aintab.⁴⁰ Dissatisfied with that state of affairs, Talaat replaced Şükrü with Ahmed Faik on 26 July 1915.⁴¹ Around the same time, Hilmi Bey, Aintab’s military commander, also resigned.⁴² On 29 July, the local CUP at last received a ‘positive’ reply to its entreaties from the central

³⁶ BNu/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 7.

³⁷ AA-PA, Konsulat Aleppo, Paket 1, Vol. 1, J. No. 1311, Rössler to Embassy, Aleppo, 21 June 1915, telegram 9 cited in Hilmar Kaiser, ‘Regional Resistance to Central Government Policies: Ahmed Cemal Pasha, the Governors of Aleppo, and Armenian Deportees in the Spring and Summer of 1915’, *Journal of Genocide Research* 12, no. 3–4 (2010): 193; Rössler to Embassy, Aleppo, 21 June 1915 J. No. 3790 AA-PA Konstantinopel 169 telegram 9; Rössler to Embassy, Aleppo, 21 June 1915, J. No. 3799 AA-PA Konstantinopel 169 telegram 10, in Hilmar Kaiser, with Luther Eskijian and Nancy Eskijian, *At the Crossroads of Der Zor: Death, Survival, and Humanitarian Resistance in Aleppo, 1915–1917* (Princeton, NJ: Gomidas Institute Books/Taderon Press, 2001), p. 15.

³⁸ Kaiser, ‘Regional Resistance to Central Government Policies’, p. 193.

³⁹ BNu/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 8.

⁴⁰ BOA.DH.ŞFR 480/53, 17 July 1915.

⁴¹ BOA.DH.ŞFR 54A/113, 26 July 1915. Şükrü Bey was appointed to the district governorship of Çankırı on 27 July 1915. BOA.İ.DH 1515/1333, 27 July 1915. His official appointment decree was promulgated in *Takvim-i Vekayi* on 21 August 1915 (*Takvim-i Vekayi* 2266: 1).

⁴² Aguni and Andonian believed that District Governor Şükrü Bey and the military commander Hilmi Bey resigned so as not to have to carry out the deportation order. Aguni, *Milion my Hahero’w Ch’arti Badmo’wt’iwny*, p. 310; BNu/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 4.

government, and Aintab was added to the deportation list.⁴³ By the time Ahmed Faik Bey reached Aintab on 26 August, the deportations had already begun.

Once they received the good news from Istanbul, local Young Turks called an emergency meeting and prepared the list of Armenians to be deported.⁴⁴ The very next day, consul Rössler notified his superiors that the order to deport Armenians from Aintab and Kilis 'had just been issued.'⁴⁵ The American representative passed the news 'along to his ambassador a few days later, adding that the order also applied to Antakya, Alexandretta and Kesab.'⁴⁶ In Beşgöz, between Aintab and Kilis, the people of the village were already discussing the fact that deportation was to commence in Aintab the next day. 'After a while, a well-dressed gentleman, by his appearance a Circassian, wearing partly civilian and partly officer's clothing, joined the group and inquired from' which part of the town people would leave, which road they would take, what kind of people they would be and what one could possibly pilfer from these people.⁴⁷ 'When one of those present asked him if he was a civilian or a member of the military,' he grinned slyly and questioned rhetorically, 'Is there a more opportune moment to be a soldier than the present one?'⁴⁸ On 30 July, fifty Armenian families were ordered to leave Aintab within the following twenty-four hours.⁴⁹ Their deportation began on 1 August 1915.⁵⁰

⁴³ BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 7.

⁴⁴ BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 7.

⁴⁵ Telegram from the German consul in Aleppo, Walter Rössler, to the embassy in Istanbul, 30 July 1915, in Johannes Lepsius (ed.), *Archives du génocide des Arméniens*, doc. 125, pp. 119–20, cited in Kévorkian, *Armenian Genocide*, pp. 606–7.

⁴⁶ Letter from the Consul Jackson to Morgenthau, 3 August 1915, in *United States Official Records on the Armenian Genocide*, p. 169. Cited in Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, p. 607.

⁴⁷ 1915-09-03-DE-002, in Wolfgang Gust (ed.), *The Armenian Genocide: Evidence from the German Foreign Office Archives, 1915–1916* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014), p. 351.

⁴⁸ 1915-09-03-DE-002, in Gust, *The Armenian Genocide*, p. 351.

⁴⁹ Sarafian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ah'int'abi Hahòc*, vol. 1, p. 1022; Tavukjian, *Dar'abanqi Orakro'wt'iwn*, p. 70; Vahe N. Gulesserian (ed.), *H'o'wshamadean Awedis Kalemqereani* (Memoir of Avedis Kalemkerian) (Beirut: Dibarun Der Sahagyan, 1965), p. 56; Barsumian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ah'int'abi H. H. Tashnagco'wt'iwn*, p. 49; Balabonian, *Geaqis Daq o'w Bagh Orery*, p. 58.

⁵⁰ Different dates are given in memoirs regarding the exact beginning of the deportation of Aintab Armenians. See BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 7; Bogharian, 'Orakro'wt'iwn Darakir Geanqis', pp. 122, 126–9; Elie H. Nazarian, *Badmakirq Nazarean Kertasdani (1475–1988)* (History of Nazarian Family) (Beirut: Zartonk Press, 1988), p. 184; Katchadourian, *Efronia*, p. 137; Kersam Aharonian, *H'o'wshamadean Medz Egher'ni* (Memory of Great Crime) (Beirut: Atlas, 1965), p. 46; M. Arzumian, *Ha'hasdan, 1914–1917* (Armenia, 1914–1917) (Yerevan: Hayasdan 1969), p. 438.

The deportation of Orthodox Armenians

At first, only Orthodox Armenians were deported. On 1 August, the fifty families (approximately 400 Armenians)⁵¹ departed with a few belongings, locking their doors and leaving behind nearly all their assets.⁵² The first convoy was not given time to gather all their valuables. According to instructions, each family was expected immediately to pack a few of their belongings. They would be allowed to take food, bedding, jars, clothes and blankets.⁵³ The testimony of Yervant Derentz, a survivor from Aintab, vividly evokes this very first day of deportation: ‘Children, elders, were all on the road. Our neighbors, the Turks, were singing from their homes, we could hear them: *Ît yola bindi . . . Ît yola bindi . . . Ît yola bindi* [The dog is on its way . . . the dog is on its way . . . the dog is on its way].’⁵⁴

Even then, comforting rumours softened the blow: that this exile was only for three or four months; that the deportees would be sent to places like Aleppo, Damascus, Hama and Homs, where life could continue; that no one would be managing the convoys; and that only individuals suspected of subversive political activities would be deported.⁵⁵ The first convoy, consisting primarily of notable and affluent families such as the Jebejians, Demirdjians, Pirenians, Kabakians, Kurkchuians and Leylekians,⁵⁶ along with members of the deportation relief committee,⁵⁷ left for Aleppo, after which it continued on to Hama. Walking in a line, these deportees proceeded to Akçakoyunlu, the railroad station closest to Aintab, with their carts, hired camels and other draught animals. Akçakoyunlu was a transition camp for many deportees. Their ultimate destination, however, was the desert.⁵⁸ As this convoy was

⁵¹ Bogharian, ‘Orakro’wt’iwn Darakir Geanqis’, p. 123; Tavukjian, *Dar’abanqi Orakro’wt’iwn*, p. 71; Sarafian, *Badmo’wt’iwn Ahnt’abi Hahòc*, vol. 1, p. 1023. Additionally, according to Miss Frearson’s accounts, the first convoy of Aintab Armenians were sent away on 30 or 31 July 1915. ‘Miss Frearson’s Experiences and Observations in Turkey’, ABCFM 16.9.6.1, 1817–1919. Unit 5 Reel 670-7.1.14, vol. 2, part 1, p. 4.

⁵² Sarafian, *Badmo’wt’iwn Ahnt’abi Hahòc*, vol. 1, p. 1023.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 1023, 924.

⁵⁴ Interview conducted with Yervant Derentz, USC Shoah Foundation, Visual History Archive Online, Armenian Film Foundation.

⁵⁵ Sarafian, *Badmo’wt’iwn Ahnt’abi Hahòc*, vol. 1, p. 1023; Bogharian, ‘Orakro’wt’iwn Darakir Geanqis’, p. 122.

⁵⁶ Like other families mentioned above, the Leylekians were a rich and prominent family of textile manufacturers. They lost everything during the genocide. Shusan Yeni-Komshian Teager, *The Krajians of Aintab* (Belmont, MA: n.p., 2007), p. 51.

⁵⁷ Report by Miss Frearson, written on 11 April 1918, in Byrce and Toynbee, *Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 543–4; Bogharian, ‘Orakro’wt’iwn Darakir Geanqis’, p. 136.

⁵⁸ Sarafian, *Badmo’wt’iwn Ahnt’abi Hahòc*, vol. 1, p. 1026.



Figure 12.2 Armenian refugees in Relief Committee tents, Aintab.

making its way from the western side of Aintab, bands of 400 men, led by Ali Bey, Yasin Bey and Hacı Fazlızâde Nuri Bey, set off from the east side, intending to assault them in the nearby Sazgin village, where deportees would spend the night. İsmail Bey, nephew of Hacı Fazlızâde Nuri, helped his uncle as chief of the bands; Hacı Hamza Bey, *mukhtar* of Sazgin village, was the chief of other bands.⁵⁹ Fortunately, these bands departed later than the first convoy and missed most of the deportees. However, they were able to catch Nazaret Manushagian, a member of the municipal council, who fell behind the convoy, and murder him.⁶⁰

On 7 August, the second convoy of fifty Armenian families was deported.⁶¹ On the same day, *chetes*, this time formed by peasants from the villages of

⁵⁹ ‘Turks (List) Responsible’, Archive of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Jerusalem (thanks to Taner Akçam for the use of his transcript).

⁶⁰ BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 8; Tavukjian, *Dar’abanqi Orakro’wt’iwn*, p. 71.

⁶¹ Sarafian, *Badmo’wt’iwn Ahintabi Hahoc*, vol. 1, p. 1023. Meanwhile, Krikor Bogharian gives 4 August 1915 as the the date of departure for the second convoy of Armenian deportees from Aintab. Bogharian, ‘Orakro’wt’iwn Darakir Geanqis’, p. 123. He also mentions that the second convoy was composed of approximately eighty Armenian families. In addition to that, according to Tavukjian’s diary, the second convoy was composed of fifty-five families. Tavukjian, *Dar’abanqi Orakro’wt’iwn*, p. 72.

Tilbaşar, Mezra, Kinisli, Kantara, Ekiz Kapı, Bahne Hameyli and Sazgın, carried out attacks on deportees. The bandits were led, however, by an important figure in Aintab's 'good society', Emin Effendi, manager of Ziraat Bankası (the Agriculture Bank), a man who had already shown his colours by becoming a member of Aintab's Deportation Committee.⁶² Less than a day's march away from the city, the second convoy was systematically pillaged by *chetes*.⁶³ As deportees from this second group had been allowed to take their valuables with them, the attackers (all locals) looted a huge amount of money and jewellery – with the consent of several government authorities. Assigned to protect the deportees, Kurd Hacı Nuri collaborated with the bands and beat to death Nazar Nazarian, a wealthy Armenian and permanent member of the city council.⁶⁴

After the departure of the first and second convoys, discrimination – and worse – against the remaining Armenians prevailed in Aintab and Nizip. The *mukhtar* of Aintab's Tilfar village murdered six Armenian children by throwing them off a mountain.⁶⁵ During this time, bands that had formed in the surrounding Kurdish villages operated on a regular basis between Aintab and Nizip, robbing and murdering all deportees who crossed their path. Meanwhile, early on 8 August, the third convoy departed, composed of 100 families from the Kayacık and Akyol neighbourhoods, again with carts, camels and draught animals.⁶⁶ After spending the night at Sazgın village, they were led to the Akçakoyunlu station.⁶⁷ The fourth convoy was led out from Aintab on 11 August.⁶⁸ This convoy consisted of more than 100 families,

⁶² BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 8; Bogharian, 'Orakro'wt'iwn Darakir Geanqis', p. 123.

⁶³ BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 8; Tavukjian, *Dar'abanqi Orakro'wt'iwn*, p. 72; Balabanian, *Geanqis Daq o'w Bagh Orery*, p. 57; NA/RG59/867.4016/148, Letter from Consul Jackson to Morgenthau, 19 August 1915, in *United States Official Records on the Armenian Genocide*, p. 207; Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, p. 607. In another report to Morgenthau on 3 August 1915, Jackson notes, 'Now all Armenians have been ordered deported from the cities of Aintab, Mardin, Kilis, Antioch, Alexandretta, Kesab, and all the smaller towns in Aleppo province, estimated at 60,000 persons.' NA/RG59/867.4016/126, Letter from Consul Jackson to Morgenthau, 3 August 1915, in *United States Official Records on the Armenian Genocide*, p. 169.

⁶⁴ BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 8; Bogharian, 'Orakro'wt'iwn Darakir Geanqis', p. 123; Tavukjian, *Dar'abanqi Orakro'wt'iwn*, p. 72.

⁶⁵ BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 9.

⁶⁶ Sarafian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ahnt'abi Hahòc*, vol. 1, p. 1025; Tavukjian, *Dar'abanqi Orakro'wt'iwn*, p. 72. Kayacık and Akyol were the two neighbourhoods in which the majority of the Armenian population resided. Even today, their original features have been preserved, including the architectural fabric as well as Armenian schools and churches, although these are now used for other purposes or have become private property.

⁶⁷ Bogharian, 'Orakro'wt'iwn Darakir Geanqis', p. 123.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

many of them well off, from the Kayacık, İbn-i Eyüp and Kastelbaşı neighbourhoods.⁶⁹ The fifth convoy set off on 13 August.⁷⁰ It numbered more than 120 families (approximately 1,200 people) from Eblahan and Akyol.⁷¹

On 23 August, the sixth convoy reached Akçakoyunlu station.⁷² There were around 120 Armenian families from Kayacık, the neighbourhood of Surp Asvadzadzin (St Mary) Church, Eblahan, İbn-i Eyüp and Kastelbaşı. Unlike other convoys, those who came from Aintab included men, women and children over ten years old.⁷³ From Akçakoyunlu, the first two groups (the ones from 1 and 7 August) were sent to Damascus. The rest were held in a transit camp surrounded by barbed wire while waiting to be loaded into stock cars for transport to Aleppo. These deportees were later sent on foot to the region of Deir- ez Zor.⁷⁴ Surprisingly, Aleppo's new provincial governor, Bekir Sami Bey, in a telegram to the Ministry of the Interior claimed that deportees from Aintab, Kilis and the province's border regions were sent only to Hama, partly by train and partly overland.⁷⁵ As of August, to prevent them from fleeing, all Armenians were prohibited from leaving Aintab unless a deportation order was issued for them.⁷⁶

Deportation of Catholic and Protestant Armenians

As of 24 August 1915, the population of Protestant Armenians in Aintab was approximately 5,100⁷⁷ and that of Catholic Armenians, around 350–370.⁷⁸ The new district governor, Ahmed Faik Bey, arrived in the city on 29 August and launched preparations for the deportation of Catholic and Protestant Armenians, as well as the remaining Orthodox. Only after the Orthodox Armenians had been expelled did the authorities issue the order, on 19 September, to deport the

⁶⁹ These were neighbourhoods where most of the Aintab Armenians resided.

⁷⁰ Bogharian, 'Orakro'wt'iwn Darakir Geanqis', p. 124.

⁷¹ As in Eblahan, Armenians and Muslims resided together in Akyol. However, the Armenian population was higher in number within this neighbourhood.

⁷² Bogharian, 'Orakro'wt'iwn Darakir Geanqis', p. 128.

⁷³ NA/RG59/867.4016/148, Letter from Consul Jackson to Morgenthau, 19 August 1915, in *United States Official Records on the Armenian Genocide*, p. 207.

⁷⁴ Sarafian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ahint'abi Hahòc*, vol. 1, p. 1026; BNu/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 9. Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, p. 607.

⁷⁵ BOA.DH.ŞFR 486/7, 29 August 1915. Also see Kaiser, 'Regional Resistance to Central Government Policies', p. 199.

⁷⁶ FO 371/4241, from governor of Aleppo to district governor of Aintab, dated 21 August 1915, No. 4410, Code No. 25.

⁷⁷ BOA.DH.ŞFR 485/48 and BOA.DH.EUM.II.Şube 73/18, 11, Aleppo Governor Bekir Sami Bey to Ministry of the Interior, 24 August 1915.

⁷⁸ Sarafian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ahint'abi Hahòc*, vol. 1, p. 1026.

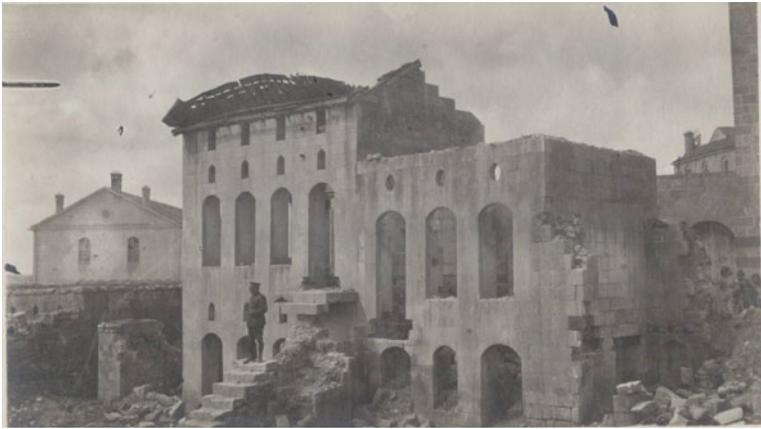


Figure 12.3 Sandjak (villayet) of Aleppo, early twentieth century.

Catholics of Aintab.⁷⁹ A report sent by American Consul Jackson in Aleppo to Henry Morgenthau, the American ambassador in Istanbul, on 29 September noted, 'In Aintab, before the deportation, there were seventy-five Catholic families; after the deportation there were none! Twenty of them were [now] located in Aleppo; fifty-five in Bab. The situation of Catholic Armenians in Aleppo was fair, whereas in Bab, it was miserable.'⁸⁰ Eventually, all Catholic Armenians from Aintab were sent to Deir-ez Zor.

As Kévorkian notes by late September, three-quarters of the Armenian population of Aintab had been deported.⁸¹ In early October, Ahmed Faik Bey and his allies organized raids on Protestant houses and made numerous arrests.⁸² The process they had been witnessing eventually eroded the Armenian Protestants' hopes that they would be spared the deportation suffered by the Orthodox and the Catholics. But there were no measures they could take against

⁷⁹ Kévorkian, *Armenian Genocide*, p. 607.

⁸⁰ NA/RG59/867.4016/219, 29 September 1915, in *United States Official Records on the Armenian Genocide*, p. 314.

⁸¹ Sarafian, *Badmō'wt'iwn Ahint'abi Hahòc*, vol. 1, p. 1027. Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, p. 607.

⁸² Sarafian, *Badmō'wt'iwn Ahint'abi Hahòc*, vol. 1, p. 1028; Bogharian, 'Orakro'wt'iwn Darakir Geanqis', p. 125. Professor Lutfi Levonian, Babikian Badveli Kharalambos, Mihran Halladjian, Dokmeci Nerses (a famous Hunchak), the Protestant priest of Kayacık Church, Hovhannes Hasirdjian, Manase Andonian, Abraham Hoca Levonian and Sarkis Balabanian were among the Protestants who were arrested. Balabanian, *Geanqis Daq o'w Bagh Orery*, p. 66.

it. On 20 November, Protestant pastors were arrested and house raids increased.⁸³ All the coffee houses and other places where people congregated were shuttered and a curfew was imposed.⁸⁴ Circumstances deteriorated further when Colonel Galib Bey, commander of a military reserve battalion from Urfa, arrived in Aintab on 30 November.⁸⁵ Galib Bey held certain Aintab Armenians responsible for the resistance to deportation in Urfa that October, and he aimed to use that event as a pretext to deport Aintab's Protestant Armenians. However, *Askerlik Şubesi Reisi* (Draft Office President) Yusuf Effendi, military commander Osman Bey and Mayor Sheikh Mustafa Effendi objected to Galib Bey's plan.⁸⁶ Despite this disagreement, on 15 December the officers registered the names of Armenian Protestants who would be deported.⁸⁷ On 19 December, the first convoy was sent, again via Akçakoyunlu, to Deir-ez Zor.⁸⁸ It was followed by the second, third and fourth convoys up to 23 December.⁸⁹ By now, Aintab's Protestants had had ample time to learn what deportation to Deir-ez Zor meant and did not hesitate to use every means (such as bribery, personal contacts and other social capital) to make sure that they would be deported via the Homs–Hama–Damascus route instead.⁹⁰ It was to no avail. On 24 December, it was announced that deportations would be suspended for the Christmas period until the new year.⁹¹ They recommenced on 4 January 1916, when the fifth convoy was sent away.⁹² Of 600 Protestant families in Aintab, 200 were deported,⁹³ the majority of whom were annihilated in Deir-ez Zor.⁹⁴ In total, by January 1916, more than 20,000 Aintab Armenians had been exiled.⁹⁵

⁸³ *Hah Ahînt'ab* 7 (1966): 32.

⁸⁴ Sarafian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ahînt'abi Hahòc*, vol. 1, p. 1030.

⁸⁵ *Hah Ahînt'ab* 7 (1966): 32.

⁸⁶ Sarafian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ahînt'abi Hahòc*, vol. 1, p. 1033.

⁸⁷ *Hah Ahînt'ab* 7 (1966): 34.

⁸⁸ Sarafian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ahînt'abi Hahòc*, vol. 1, p. 1035; Balabanian, *Geanqis Daq o'w Bagh Orery*, p. 73. The report by Elvesta T. Leslie, an assistant to the American vice-consul in Urfa (11 April 1918) in Barton, *Turkish Atrocities*, p. 107, gives 14 December as the first convoy's departure date.

⁸⁹ *Hah Ahînt'ab* 7 (1966): 35.

⁹⁰ Report by Miss Frearson, written on 11 April 1918, in Byrce and Toynbee, *Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 546–9.

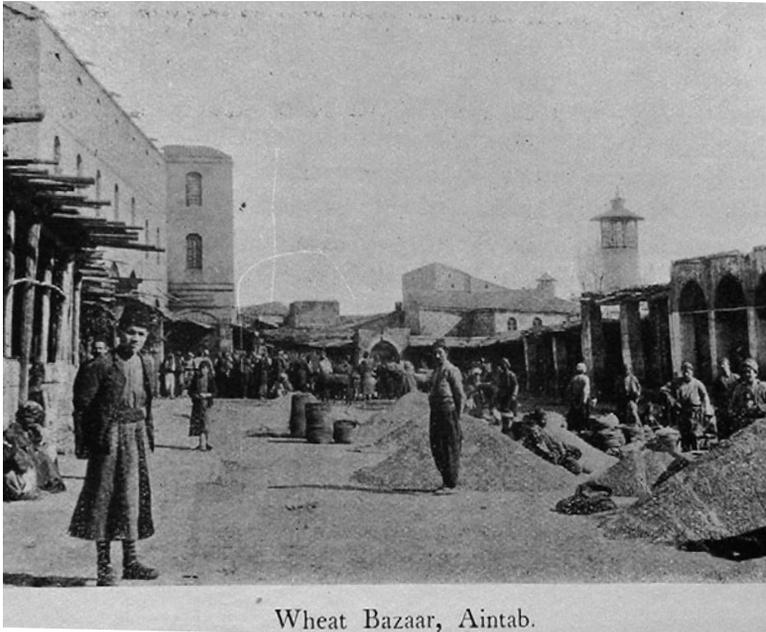
⁹¹ *Hah Ahînt'ab* 7 (1966): 35.

⁹² Yervant Kuchukian, *Hariwr Zham Ahînt'abi: H'ò'wsher ew Dbawò'ro'wt'iwnner* (100 hours in Aintab: Memories and Impressions) (Beirut: Aravot, 1958), p. 21.

⁹³ Sarafian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ahînt'abi Hahòc*, vol. 1, p. 552. Sarafian stated that out of 5,500 Protestants in Aintab, 2,450 survived.

⁹⁴ Sarafian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ahînt'abi Hahòc*, vol. 1, p. 548.

⁹⁵ BOA.DH.EUM.II.Şube 73/73, Governor-General of Aleppo Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey to the Ministry of the Interior, 10 January 1916.



Wheat Bazaar, Aintab.

Figure 12.4 Aintab wheat market.

An evaluation

The Armenians of Cilicia in general, and Aintab in particular, were deported to three places. The first group was sent to the Deir-ez Zor region in the Syrian desert, where very few survived. The second group was sent to the region of Hama, Homs and Salamiyya, located in the central part of the Syrian desert. Except for very young and old deportees, the majority here survived thanks to local Arabs. The third group was sent to the region of Jebel Druz and the desert areas of Jordan, where most survived.⁹⁶ The exact number of deportees, the total death toll and the number of survivors for Aintab are not known. It is estimated, however, that the number of deported Armenians from Aintab by the end of the war was approximately 32,000, with 20,000

⁹⁶ Yervant Babaian, *Pages from My Diary/Archpriest Der Nerses Babaian* (Los Angeles: Abril Publishing, 2000), p. vi; Babaian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ah'nt'abi Hahòc*, vol. 3, p. 18.

perishing as a result of genocide and 12,000 surviving.⁹⁷ Survivors were most numerous among those deported via the Homs–Hama–Damascus route.⁹⁸

It is clear that the deportation depended on close coordination and collaboration between the central authorities and various Aintab actors. In fact, administrative, political and civilian agents in Aintab proved far more efficient than the central authority. In this regard, Aintab is a microcosm of the CUP's genocidal policies as they unfolded throughout the country. Without the enormous effort put in by these locals on the periphery, it would have been impossible for the CUP at the centre to carry out the expulsion and ultimate dispossession of almost the entire Armenian population of Aintab. For some of Aintab's inhabitants, the acquisition of Armenian property was a strong incentive to participate in the anti-Armenian measures. The prospect of personal enrichment served effectively to implicate and integrate local collaborators in the national process of displacement and destruction – and perhaps also to inoculate them against moral misgivings.

Post-genocide Aintab and the return of survivors

With the disastrous conclusion of the war drawing inescapably nigh, on 8 October 1918, the CUP government resigned and fled. The rest of the party, meeting at its final congress, dissolved itself on 4 November.⁹⁹ The Ottoman Empire's new government, established by Ahmet İzzet Pasha on 11 October, signed the Armistice of Mudros on 30 October. In the 7th Article of the armistice document, the Entente Powers reserved the right to occupy any Ottoman lands in cases where the security of their armies was threatened. British forces entered Aintab on 15 January 1919, on the grounds that they

⁹⁷ BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 20. According to a report prepared and sent by Admiral Bristol to the US Secretary of State immediately after the First World War, the number of Armenians who were not deported from Aintab was 12,000. NARA 860J.01/341, in Kemal Çiçek, *Ermenilerin Zorunlu Göçü (1915–1917)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2000), p. 194.

⁹⁸ BNU/Fonds A. Andonian, P.J. 1/3, file 4, Aintab, p. 10; Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, p. 609.

⁹⁹ In its place, Teceddüt Fırkası (the Renovation Party) was founded by the Unionists present at the final CUP party congress on 11 November. Although the party officially denied that it was a continuation of the CUP, its takeover of CUP assets, such as its organizational networks, real estate (the clubs) and cash, undermined the credibility of this claim. Eric Jan Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2010), p. 198; Eric Jan Zürcher, *The Unionist Factor: The Role of the Committee of Union and Progress in the Turkish National Movement 1905–1926* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984), pp. 72–3. The party was abolished and its members banned from politics.

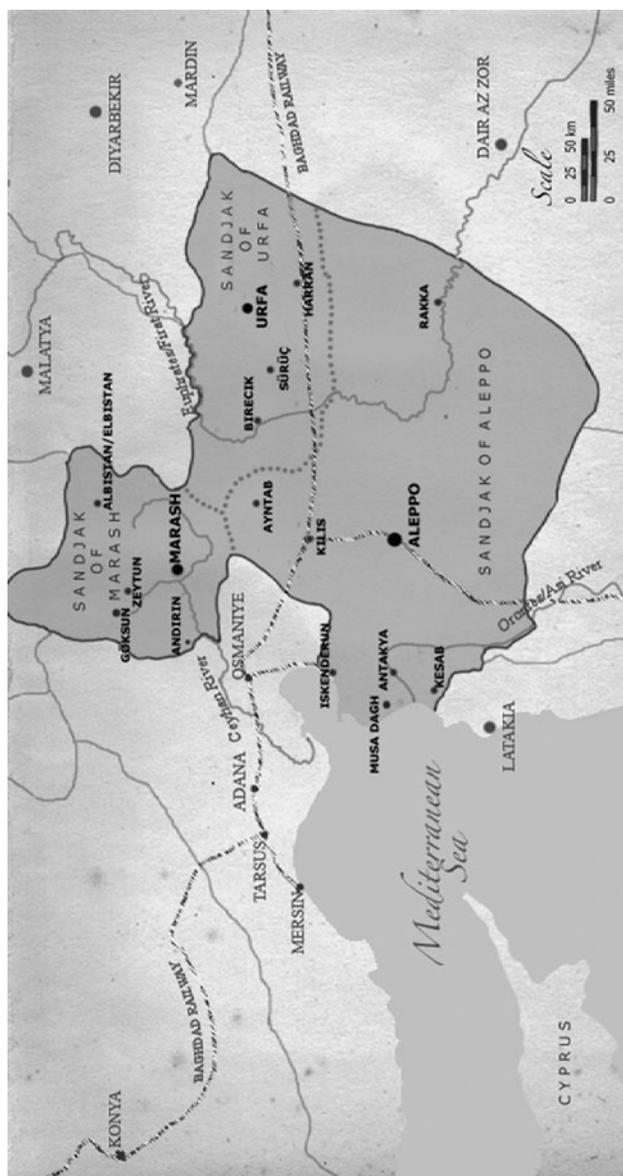


Figure 12.5 Post-war Aintab.

needed to procure food for the cavalry's horses and to ensure the security of their units in Aleppo.¹⁰⁰

The city itself was in dire straits. According to missionary reports, as a result of conscription and the deportations, its population had dropped by about 30,000 (with the loss of labour and services that this implied), 'but in place of them we have about 12,000 Muslim refugees, women and children, who are entirely dependent on relief'.¹⁰¹ Added to this, the very fact of British occupation enraged the Muslim community, who claimed that not a single event endangering the safety of returnees had occurred in Aintab and that therefore the occupation was illegal. In early 1919, prominent figures from Aintab's branch of the CUP, men who had been active in the deportation and dispossession of Armenians and knew that they would be targets of the occupiers' justice – Taşçızâde Abdullah, Kethüdazâde Hüseyin Cemil Bey, Mamat Ağazâde Ali Effendi, the Kurd Hacı Osman Agha and Hafız Şahin Effendi, who was still a parliamentary deputy – met together. Their object was to build a resistance front against the occupiers and to provoke the Muslims to continue the struggle.¹⁰²

But they failed. British troops were able to keep the lid on the situation, while their commander, Major Mills, worked on disarming the Muslim population, salvaging whatever documents could be found pertaining to the exile and expropriation of Aintab's Armenians and bringing to justice those former CUP members who had participated in those activities.¹⁰³ In late

¹⁰⁰ Babaian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ahint'abi Hah'oc*, vol. 3, p. 45; Yeghia H. Dolbakian, *Aynt'abn u Aynt'abahayê* (Aintab and Aintab Armenians) (Yerevan: n.p., 1992), p. 40; N. Abadi, *Türk Verdünü Gaziantep: Antep'in Dört Muhasarası* (Gaziantep: n.p., 1999), p. 26; Ali Nadi Ünler, 'Antep Savunması', *Gaziantep Kültür Dergisi* 1, no. 10 (1957): 10. According to some sources, Aintab was occupied by British forces on 17 December 1918; see Ahmet Hulki Saral, *Türk İstiklal Harbi*, Vol. 4, *Güney Cephesi* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1966), p. 50; Eyüp Sabri [Akgöl], *Esaret Hatıraları (Bir Esirin Hatıraları, Gaziantep'te İngiliz Tecavüzünün Başlangıcı ve Türk Üserasına Zulüm ve İşkenceler)* (Istanbul: Tercüman, 1978), p. 13; Ramazan Erhan Güllü, *Antep Ermenileri: Sosyal-Siyasi ve Kültürel Hayatı* (Istanbul: IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, 2010), p. 296; Stanley E. Kerr, *The Lions of Marash: Personal Experience with American Near East Relief, 1919-1922* (Albany: State University of Albany of New York Press, 1973), p. 35; Ali Fuat Türkgeldi, *Mondros ve Mudanya Müzakerelerinin Tarihi* (Ankara: Güney Matbaacılık ve Gazetecilik, 1948), p. 67; Zeki Sarhan, *Kurtuluş Savaşı Günlüğü*, vol. 1 (Ankara: Öğretmen Dünyası, 1982), p. 79.

¹⁰¹ ABCFM 16.9.6.1, 1817-1919, Unit 5, Reel 667, vol. 2, part 1, no. 274.

¹⁰² Babaian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ahint'abi Hah'oc*, vol. 3, p. 1074; Katchadourian, *Efronia*, p. 159; Balabanian, *Geanqis Daq o'w Bagh Orery*, p. 149.

¹⁰³ Sarkis Laleian (ed.), *H'owshamadean: No'wiro'wadz Ado'wr H. Lewo'neani, Inqanagsakro'wt'iwn ew Tro'wakner ir Geanqen o'w Ko'rdze'n* (Memoir: Dedicated to Adur Levonian, Autobiography and Episodes from his Life and Work) (Beirut: Shirag, 1967), p. 37.

January 1919, Mills started arresting the masterminds of the Armenian deportation¹⁰⁴: Besim Bey, an accountant; Hakkı Bey, clerk of religious foundations (*awqaf*); İncözâde, a butcher; the Kurd Hadji Ali Bey; and several more were summoned to the Central Turkey College, where they were taken into custody and charged with ‘vandalizing Armenian houses while they were sent away, of committing murder, and of prospering from Armenian wealth.’¹⁰⁵ The trial was to be held in Aleppo, which the group reached on 23 January 1919. In late February, Mills ordered the disarmament of the population of Aintab.¹⁰⁶ Even so, the dragnet continued. On 2 March 1919, those charged were exiled to Egypt.¹⁰⁷

Eyüp Sabri Bey, a founding member of the local CUP and one-time official at the land registry office (and thus a key figure in the redistribution of Armenian lands, for which he, too, was summoned by Mills to Central Turkey College), expressed his disgust that the British occupiers had met with absolutely no resistance, not ‘even the smallest attempt’ from any side. Taking a dim view of the ‘remarkable tranquility’ of his Aintab countrymen, which only increased the hopes and ambitions of the British, he charged municipal functionaries with supplying the occupiers’ every need, even producing propaganda on their behalf, paid for off the books (without entry into the municipality budget). All this, he said, was done with the permission and direction of District Governor Celal Kadri Bey, whom he damned as ‘a collaborationist.’¹⁰⁸ It is worth remarking that Celal Kadri Bey was, like Eyüp Sabri Bey himself, one of the founders of the Aintab CUP.

The most urgent task for British occupation forces was to facilitate the return to their homes of those Aintab Armenians who had managed to survive the genocide, to restore their properties and assets and to find the women and children now dispersed among Muslim households and return them to their families. With military control of Aleppo in the hands of British forces under General Edmund Allenby, the Allied commander-in-chief, this

¹⁰⁴ Babaian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ah'nt'abi Hah'òc*, vol. 3, p. 1074; Katchadourian, *Efronia*, p. 159; Laleian, *H'ò'wshamadean: No'wiro'wadz Ad'ò'wr H. Lewo'neani*, p. 45; Balabanian, *Geaŋqis Daq o'w Bagh Orery*, p. 149.

¹⁰⁵ Eyüp Sabri (Akgöl), *Esaret Hatıraları*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁶ Babaian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ah'nt'abi Hah'òc*, vol. 3, p. 1075; Balabanian, *Geaŋqis Daq o'w Bagh Orery*, p. 149.

¹⁰⁷ Eyüp Sabri (Akgöl), *Esaret Hatıraları*, p. 45.

¹⁰⁸ Babaian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ah'nt'abi Hah'òc*, vol. 3, p. 1074; Eyüp Sabri (Akgöl), *Esaret Hatıraları*, pp. 14, 24–5. See ‘Celal Kadri Barlas'ın Dilinden, İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti Nasıl Kuruldu?’ *Gaziantep'i Tanıtıyoruz* 2, no. 2 (1963): 16–17; and Şakir Sabri Yener, ‘Celal Kadri Barlas'ı Kaybettik,’ *Gaziantep Kültür Dergisi* 6, no. 68 (1963): 177.

matter had been specifically mentioned in a twelve-article instruction given by Allenby to the Ottoman Sixth Army command.¹⁰⁹

Yet, the precarious political-military situation in the Anatolian hinterland and the scarcity of sufficient transportation were two major hurdles for immediate repatriation. Notwithstanding these difficulties, some Armenians, beginning with those in Kilis, did venture to return to Cilicia as early as 1918.¹¹⁰ In January 1919, other convoys of Armenians – from Dörtyol, Mersin and Tarsus; Alexandretta, Kırık Han, Hacin and Toprakkalı – followed the Kilis refugees and began the return to Cilicia-Adana in trains. This tremendous effort was organized in Aleppo by the Armenian National Union (ANU), a group that formed in Egypt in early 1917 and, promoted by the Allies, brought together an array of Armenian parties and organizations.¹¹¹ A ciphered telegram of 6 January 1919, sent by the Interior Ministry to the Ottoman Ministry of War, requested the transfer of 2,000 liras from the *seferberlik tahsisatı* (mobilization allowance) to the district of Aintab, to reimburse it for the return expenses of those surviving families.¹¹²

So far, repatriation had been confined to the core areas of Cilicia. Beginning in February, it was extended to Aintab, Marash and Urfa, an area now called the Eastern Territories.¹¹³ According to statistics produced jointly by the ecumenical and Armenian patriarchates early in 1919, only 430 Armenians had by this point managed to return to Aintab.¹¹⁴ On 12 May of that year, the

¹⁰⁹ BOA.HR.SYS 2704/11, 31 December 1918; and BOA.DHEUM.AYŞ 32/16, 11 February 1920; Edouard Brémond, 'La Cilicie en 1919–1920', *Revue des études arméniennes* 1, no. 3 (1921): 309, 311; Du Véou, *La passion de la Cilicie*, pp. 66, 90–1 in Vahram L. Shemmassian, 'Repatriation of Armenian Refugees from the Arab Middle East, 1918–1920', in Richard G. Hovannissian and Simon Payaslian (eds), *Armenian Cilicia* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2008), p. 432; Zaven Der Yeghiayan, *My Patriarchal Memoirs* (Barrington, RI: Mayreni Publications, 2002), p. 191; Doğan Avcıoğlu, *Milli Kurtuluş Tarihi*, vol. 1 (Istanbul: Tekin Yayınevi, 1977), p. 115.

¹¹⁰ *Darakir* (Deportees) (Aleppo), 25 December 1918. Detailed lists of potential repatriates are in France, Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Nantes, Beyrouth: Cilicie 1919–1921, Cilicie-Alep, cartons 319–31; APA, Files 42, 46–52; cited in Shemmassian, 'Repatriation of Armenian Refugees from the Arab Middle East', p. 429.

¹¹¹ The French in Cilicia and the British in Syria recognized the need of interlocutors 'who could fairly claim to represent the diverse components of Armenian society'. As soon as the Mudros armistice was signed, both Allenby, commander of the Allied forces in the Near East, and François Georges-Picot, the French commissioner, 'encouraged the formation of the branches of the ANU in all the Allied-occupied areas' where 'there was an Armenian population'. In Cilicia, the ANU, along with the representative of the Paris-based Armenian National Delegation, Mihran Damadian, were quasi-official spokesmen for Armenian interests. Vahé Tachjian, 'The Cilician Armenians and French Policy, 1919–1921', in Hovannissian and Payaslian (eds), *Armenian Cilicia*, p. 542, n. 4.

¹¹² BCA, 272.00.00.74.68.37.5, 9 January 1919.

¹¹³ Tachjian, 'The Cilician Armenians and French Policy, 1919–1921' in *Armenian Cilicia*, p. 543.

¹¹⁴ APC/APJ (Armenian Patriarchate Jerusalem), PCI Bureau, 367, list of the regions where the Armenians and Greeks were repatriated, cited in Kévorkian, *Armenian Genocide*, p. 748.

director of the Central Service of Armenian Repatriation issued an order respecting the disposition of the Marash and Aintab refugees.¹¹⁵ By the end of the month, 4,221 Aintab Armenians had returned.¹¹⁶ By 20 July 1919, the number on record had risen to 5,607.¹¹⁷

The exact number of Aintab Armenians who came back to their homeland, however, is unknown. Armenian and Turkish sources give contradictory figures. Turkish sources record approximately 18,000 Muslims and 37,000 Armenians in Aintab in 1918–19 and the number of Armenians who returned with the support of the British at around 25,000.¹¹⁸ Calculations based on Armenian sources suggest that 18,000 Armenian survivors managed to return to Aintab by the end of the year.¹¹⁹ These estimates became very important for the ANU Committee of Aintab in 1920, as it used the numbers to calculate the distribution of food rations as equitably and economically as possible.¹²⁰

From the British to the French: occupation in Aintab

By July 1919, the attitude of the British military authorities toward Ottoman Muslims had evolved from hostility to open friendship, a change that seems

¹¹⁵ Barsamian and Ge[dz]vianian on behalf of Ehneş refugees to Aleppo Armenian National Union (ANU) chairman and members, 16 January 1919; Barsamian on behalf of 25 Ehneş refugees to Aleppo ANU chairman and members, 13 February 1919; cited in Shemmassian, 'Repatriation of Armenian Refugees from the Arab Middle East', p. 424 fn 19. Colonel Clouscard [director of the Central Service of Armenian Repatriation], announcement in Armenian regarding repatriation of Armenians to Aintab and Marash, 12 May 1919. See also Colonel Clouscard to President of Inter-Provincial Committee of Aleppo, 8 June 1919, in Shemmassian, 'Repatriation of Armenian Refugees from the Arab Middle East', p. 424 fn 19.

¹¹⁶ RG 84, Vol. 83, Correspondence, American Consulate, Aleppo, 1919, Jackson, Political and Economic Conditions, 31 May 1919; NARA, RG 59, 867.00/897. Also see Shemmassian, 'Repatriation of Armenian Refugees from the Arab Middle East', p. 440.

¹¹⁷ US National Archives, RG 59, 867.48/1316, Jackson to Secretary of State, 23 August 1919; Harutyun Simonian (ed.), *Hawel'owazd: Ahint'abi Hah'oc Badmo'wt'iwn* (Collected: History of Aintab Armenians) (Waltham, MA: Mayreni, 1997), p. 105.

¹¹⁸ Uğuroğ Barlas, *Gaziantep Tıp Fakültesi Tarihi ve Azınlık Okulları* (Gaziantep: Gaziantep Kültür Derneği, 1971), p. 14; Mahmut O. Göğüş, *İlk İnsanlardan Bugüne Çeşitli Yönleriyle Gaziantep* (Ankara: Cihan Ofset, 1997), pp. 69, 306; Sahir Üzel, *Gaziantep Savaşının İç Yüzü* (Ankara: Doğuş Matbaası, 1952), p. 7. Another local source claims that 50,000 Armenians gathered in Aintab after the British occupation of Aintab: *Gaziantep Kültür Dergisi* 3, no. 28 (1960): 89.

¹¹⁹ Barsamian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ahint'abi H. H. Tashnagco'wt'iwn*, p. 331. Archpriest Nerses Babaian, who reached Aintab on 21 November 1919 from his exile, estimated the Armenian population in Aintab at 17,000–18,000; see Babaian, *Pages from My Diary*, p. 31.

¹²⁰ Sarkis Karaian, 'On the Number of Armenians in Aintab in 1914', in Sarafian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ahint'abi Hah'oc*, vol. 3, p. 17. An administrative body named the Armenian National Union Committee of Aintab and composed of seven elected members was formed in early 1919. See Sarafian, *Badmo'wt'iwn Ahint'abi Hah'oc*, vol. 1, p. 1080.

to have been reciprocated. The shift came at the expense of justice for Armenians, as arrests of perpetrators slowed, along with efforts at restoring Armenian property.¹²¹ The British were, in fact, preparing to leave Aintab. This significant change in attitude reflected larger developments in the policy of the British Empire. To acquire oil resources in Mosul, Britain now reversed the Sykes–Picot Agreement and ceded Marash, Urfa and Aintab to France in the Syrian Agreement with the French government signed on 15 September 1919.¹²² Desiring to depart Aintab without leaving behind problems with the Muslim people, the British became more lenient. For instance, Major Mills’s first action after the Syrian accord was to end the censorship of Mustafa Kemal’s telegrams and letters.¹²³ The cipher telegram sent by Sabri Bey, deputy to the district governor of Aintab, to the Ministry of the Interior on 11 October 1919 revealed that according to the agreement reached by the British and the French, Britain would withdraw from Syria and Aintab by the end of the month.¹²⁴ Syria would remain under French occupation.¹²⁵

In fact, the final British brigade did not leave Aintab until 19 November 1919. Significantly, before they left, they returned to the Muslims the weapons they had confiscated. By 29 October 1919, two companies of French mounted infantry had arrived, welcomed by Armenians in the city.¹²⁶ On 4 November 1919, Aintab was officially handed over to French troops.¹²⁷ The fate of Armenians now lay in French hands, beginning a period that all inhabitants experienced as uncertain and insecure.¹²⁸ The French military occupation proved utterly ineffective. Although some reinforcements were sent, the High Command was unable and, it would appear, unwilling to undertake adequate offensive measures against the resurgence of Turkish nationalists. The French

¹²¹ Ali Nadi Ünler, *Türk’ün Kurtuluş Savaşı’nda Gaziantep Savunması* (Istanbul: Kardeşler Matbaası, 1969), p. 15.

¹²² Yaşar Akbıyık, *Milli Mücadele’de Güney Cephesi (Maraş)* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı, 1990), pp. 48–52; Gotthard Jaeschke, *Kurtuluş Savaşı ile İlgili İngiliz Belgeleri* (Ankara: TTK, 1991), p. 46.

¹²³ Sarafian, *Badmo’wt’iwn Ahnt’abi Hah’oc*, vol. 3, p. 1080; Mustafa Budak, *İdealden Gerçeğe, Misak-ı Milli’den Lozana’na Dış Politika* (Istanbul: ATAM Yayınları, 2003), pp. 116–21.

¹²⁴ BOA.DH.ŞFR 648/44, 11 October 1919.

¹²⁵ Sarafian, *Badmo’wt’iwn Ahnt’abi Hah’oc*, vol. 3, p. 553; Tavukjian, *Dar’abanqi Orakro’wt’iwn*, p. 195.

¹²⁶ Abadi, *Türk Verdün’ü Gaziantep*, p. 30; Sarafian, *Brief History of Aintab*, p. 152.

¹²⁷ Sarafian, *Badmo’wt’iwn Ahnt’abi Hah’oc*, vol. 3, p. 553; WO 32/5730, 9 November 1919; BOA.DH.ŞFR 648/44, 6 November 1919; Ünler, ‘Antep Savunması’, p. 10; Dolbakian, *Aynt’abn u Aynt’abahayê*, p. 40.

¹²⁸ Sarafian, *Badmo’wt’iwn Ahnt’abi Hah’oc*, vol. 1, p. 1080; Balabanian, *Geanqis Daq o’w Bagh Orery*, p. 150; *Hayasdan Azkayin Arhives* (Armenian National Archives, HAA), Catalogue No. 430/1/824, 28 April 1920.

failed not only to protect the Armenians but also to allow them the means of protecting themselves.¹²⁹

Property restitution and Aintab's return to war

Even under the best of circumstances, restitution in Aintab would have been a political hornet's nest. The return of Aintab's Armenians led to conflict between the 'new' arrivals and the Muslim immigrants and refugees, also relatively new, who had been settled in their houses, as well as conflict with those local officials and prominent Turks to whom Armenian houses had been rented, given or, in some cases, sold by the government. Thus 'return' for some necessarily meant 'eviction' for others. The issue was made worse by the fact that many of the houses' current occupants had no place to go.

Given the immense difficulties involved in recovering the documents that would have established rightful ownership, British military authorities often had no choice but to rely on the claims of the conflicting parties themselves. Initially, at any rate, it was the Armenians who were given the benefit of the doubt. Thus, if an Armenian pointed to one of the 'Turkish' houses, declaring, 'This house used to belong to me, Turks took it away by force,' then the Turk would be immediately forced out, and the house would be given to the Armenian.¹³⁰

In the case of Aintab, however, it was the attitude of the local Muslim authorities that was key. These men were reluctant to restore properties to the returnees even after the new Ministry of the Interior ordered the restoration. Thus, while occasionally houses were given back when demanded by their original owners, in most cases local authorities simply refused to evict the current occupants, so that returning Armenians were made to suffer considerably as a result.¹³¹

The growing insecurity in Aintab itself was another factor that impeded restitution. The city's initial 'tranquility', of which the CUP stalwart Eyüp Sabri Bey had once complained, evaporated as the return of increasing numbers of Armenians allowed local CUP networks to exploit the anxiety and anger of the townsfolk at the loss (real or prospective) of their homes and to raise a hue and cry. This environment and the uncertainties of British and, especially, French occupations turned the restitution process toxic, despite

¹²⁹ FO 608/278, British Armenian Committee, Cilicia, 8 June 1920, 181–2; Balabanian, *Geanqis Daq o'w Bagh Orery*, p. 151.

¹³⁰ Göğüş, *İlk İnsanlardan Bugüne Çeşitli Yönleriyle Gaziantep*, pp. 69, 306; Şakir Sabri Yener, *Gaziantep'in Yakın Tarihinden Notlar* (Gaziantep: Gaziyurt Matbaası, 1968), p. 42.

¹³¹ FO 608/95, General Headquarter Intelligence Summary, 4 March 1919, p. 17.

the orders of the new government in Istanbul. Aintab's townspeople responded by forming national defence organizations in the city. Violence broke out when such national forces attacked returning Armenians, and the homes of non-Muslims more generally again became targets for pillaging brigands.¹³² From late 1918 through to 1921, as nationalist forces, led by the *Antep Cemiyet-i İslamiye* (Aintab Society for Islam) and *Antep Heyet-i Temsiliye* (Aintab Committee of Representation), fought the French, and Armenians sided with the latter, Aintab became a theatre of war. In Armenian historiography, the war is referred to as 'the struggle for the existence of Armenians' or 'the self-defence war of Armenians'. Turkish historiography codifies it as the 'Aintab war' or the 'Aintab resistance and defence'. In it we can see the emergence of two diametrically opposing historiographies – alike, ironically, in their nationalist point of view.

The entire process of restoring Armenian properties was a casualty (perhaps a preordained one) of what we can call 'the Turkish–French war in Aintab', which started on 1 April 1920, and ended with the city's surrender to French military forces on 9 February 1921.¹³³ According to mutual agreement, set down in the Ankara Treaty signed between Turkey's Grand National Assembly and the French government on 20 October 1921, all military activities on the Turkish–French fronts were to cease and the French withdrawal from Aintab was to speed up.

Seeing the writing on the wall, Armenians had gradually begun to leave Aintab, beginning in March 1921, ceding their properties (or prospective properties) to so-called French protection, and settling in Aleppo and Beirut, both now under a French mandate.¹³⁴ On 4 November 1921, the French officially declared their evacuation of Aintab complete, creating a great panic among those Armenians who remained and who now saw themselves delivered into the hands of Kemalist forces – which would bring about their

¹³² Ali Nadi Ünler, who was a native of Aintab, joined the Aintab war between French and Kemalist forces in 1920–1 as a senior military officer and later wrote his memoirs about the war, in which he claimed that a committee named *Muhafaza-i Emval Komisyonu* (Commission for the Protection of Properties) was formed in June 1920 to protect the assets of Armenians who were residents of the Aintab's Turkish quarters at the time. See Ünler, *Türk'ün Kurtuluş Savaşı'nda Gaziantep Savunması*, pp. 48–9. During my extensive research in various archives, including Gaziantep's local libraries, I could not find reports or records of the said commission.

¹³³ The interesting point here is that the people who wrote war accounts were the Muslim Turks and Armenians from Aintab who had participated in it and who were real witnesses to the war era. There is an enormous Turkish and Armenian literature on the Aintab–French war.

¹³⁴ BNU/Fonds, Notes sur La Cilicie, p. 3; HHA, Catalogue No. 340/1/716, 19 April 1921; Tavukjian, *Dar'abanqi Orako'w'iwn*, pp. 352–3; Harutyun H. Nazarian, *Eghernēn Verabrogh H'o'wsher* (Memoirs of a Genocide Survivor) (Aleppo: n.p., 2009), p. 67.

final destruction.¹³⁵ In early December, 8,000 Armenians had managed to quit Aintab by their own means, even though French authorities had prohibited migration and declined to issue passports (albeit temporarily) that would have allowed them to go to Syria and Lebanon.¹³⁶ On 1 January 1922, France forbade Armenians from entering Syria, over which they now held a League of Nations mandate.¹³⁷ In a letter full of pain to Arshak Chobanian, in Paris at the time, the deputy of the Armenian Catholicate, Father Nerses Tavukjian, revealed the Armenians' sense of abandonment, especially by the French, who had betrayed their promises to protect their lives and property. But Tavukjian's bitter reproaches were also aimed at the Armenians, including himself, for their naiveté in believing the promises of the French civil and military authorities, when in fact, he said, 'the French sacrificed Armenians to the enemy [the Kemalists]'.¹³⁸

In November 1922, the Kemalist government declared that the goods of any Armenian who failed to return to Turkey within three months would be seized. Meanwhile, it also announced that it would not recognize the validity of passports that had been issued earlier by the French authorities to the Armenians for the purposes of crossing over to Syria.¹³⁹ Rather, all Armenians of Anatolian descent were to be counted as Ottoman citizens. Apparently, by not voiding Armenians' Turkish citizenship, the new republic could more easily confiscate their properties. The Armenians did not take the bait. When, under the terms of the Ankara agreement, Cilicia was returned to Turkish rule, and the final French contingents left on 4 January 1922,¹⁴⁰ the Armenians

¹³⁵ BNU/Fonds, Notes sur La Cilicie, p. 1; HAA, A Letter from Catholicate Deputy Father Nerses Tavukjian to Arshak Chobanian, 14 November 1921, Catalogue No. 430/1/842, p. 6. On that note, Tavukjian asked the French authorities to facilitate their exodus from Aintab under French protection and to settle them in places designated for Armenians, as well as to take the proceeds from the sale of once-Armenian houses and give the monies to their former owners. For a similar letter, written by Tavukjian to the President of the French Republic, see HAA, Catalogue No. 430/1/844, 16 November 1921.

¹³⁶ BNU/Fonds, Notes sur La Cilicie, p. 1. As of 14 November 1921, according to Father Nerses Tavukjian, there were 8,500 Armenians in Aintab. HAA, 14 November 1921, Catalogue No. 430/1/842, p. 9.

¹³⁷ Babaian, *Pages from My Diary*, p. 58.

¹³⁸ HAA, 14 November 1921, Catalogue No. 430/1/842, p. 6.

¹³⁹ BNU/Fonds, *Notes sur La Cilicie*, a report from the president of the Commission of Immigrants dated 12 February 1922, Larnaka.

¹⁴⁰ Vahé Tachjian, 'The Expulsion of Non-Turkish Ethnic and Religious Groups from Turkey to Syria during the 1920s and early 1930s', in Jacques Semelin (ed.), *Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence*, p. 6, http://www.massviolence.org/IMG/article_PDF/The-expulsion-of-non-Turkish-ethnic-and-religious-groups.pdf (accessed 5 March 2009). According to the report of the British consulate in Aleppo, as of November 1922 there were still 3,000 Armenians living in Aintab. See FO 371, 'Diplomatic Records: Report on the forced exile of the remaining Armenians from Aintab and Marash', 15 November 1922; HAA, Catalogue No. 430/1/838, 1922.

left the region too. They settled mainly in Syria and Lebanon. A year later, on 4 January 1923, the Armenian population of Aintab numbered eighty persons.¹⁴¹

During these turbulent years, some Armenians had been able to sell their properties – though such people were few in number. Despite the fact that the sales had been made under compulsion, and for prices considerably lower than their real value, the fact that technically they had been ‘purchased’ gave a colour of legality to the transactions. As for the properties that had been (briefly) restored to Armenians, which they now had to leave behind, these were henceforth listed under the rubric of ‘abandoned properties’ according to the Abandoned Properties Laws. As such, they were now at the government’s and local administrations’ disposal.¹⁴²

Confiscated property and the consolidation of a Turkish-Muslim elite

As we have seen, the expulsion of Armenians from Aintab had been accompanied by the seizure of their assets and properties. Armenians had owned not only houses but fields, inns, schools, shops and churches, most of which were appropriated by the municipal government for its own purposes. Aintab’s CUP leadership was convinced that by this means they could ensure that the Armenian exodus would remain permanent; that an Armenian communal life on Turkish soil was over forever. The properties that Armenians were forced to abandon were expected to serve, however, yet another patriotic purpose: to strengthen an already ‘national’ bourgeoisie in Aintab.

It is important to note that certain individuals, especially those who had participated in the Turkish–French war and were the commanders on a variety of fronts (such as Suburcu and Çınarlı neighbourhoods), were appointed, after the foundation of the Turkish Republic, to vital positions in the official agencies of the state. Most of the immovable Armenian property ended up in the hands of these men, as well as with the local gentry and other veterans of the 1920–1 war. These men had bought the abandoned properties through the *Milli Emlak* (National Estate) and the *Defterdarlık* (Internal

¹⁴¹ Tachijian, ‘Expulsion’, p. 6.

¹⁴² For detailed analysis of abandoned properties laws and regulations, see Taner Akçam and Ümit Kurt, *The Spirit of the Laws: The Plunder of Wealth in the Armenian Genocide* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015); and Ümit Kurt, ‘The Plunder of Wealth through Abandoned Properties Laws in the Armenian Genocide’, *Genocide Studies International* 10, no. 1 (2016): 37–51.

Revenue Office), which had put them up for sale at very competitive prices.¹⁴³ Local notables colluded to hold down the price in order to buy the properties at cut rates.¹⁴⁴

For instance, the buildings of the Atenegan (Armenian) School and the Catholic Church were passed on to the National Estate after Armenians had to vacate the city. Later, these buildings were turned into the *Velic İplik ve Dokuma* (Thread and Weaving) Factory and given to Cemal Alevli, a young native of Aintab, by the special order of Mustafa Kemal, as part of the effort to create a class of entrepreneurs and capitalists in the city. With a Western education as his 'social capital', and with Mustafa Kemal acting as his venture capitalist, Cemal Alevli became the biggest textile supplier for Aintab in the Turkish Republic. He admitted that he had learned the textile business from Aintab's Armenians. 'Since my childhood,' Alevli said, 'I used to watch how Armenians in my neighbourhood worked on their textile looms for hours as I headed back and forth to school. I was amazed to follow how Armenian weavers created beautiful fabrics by combining various tones of red, yellow, green, blue and white thread cones.'¹⁴⁵

The abandoned properties were also transformed into schools, government offices and prisons to meet the needs of state agencies. The Aintab municipal authority used them for the Central Bank, Agriculture Bank, Post Office Building (PTT) and *Emlak Kredi Bankası* (Real Estate Credit Bank).¹⁴⁶ The Armenian Apostolic Church (St Mary's), in a particularly repellent twist, became a prison in the republican era, although in 1988 it was converted to a mosque, named Liberation Mosque (*Kurtuluş Camii*).¹⁴⁷ One of the large commercial buildings known as *Millet Hanı* (Millet Inn), founded by the Armenian community in 1868–9 to benefit Armenian schools and part of the estate of St Mary's Church, was sold by the Treasury to third parties.¹⁴⁸ In a book sponsored and published by the Gaziantep governorship in 2005,

¹⁴³ Interview with Murad Uçaner and Kamil Gereççi in Gaziantep, 18 April 2014.

¹⁴⁴ *Gaziantep Kültür Derneği Dergisi*, 4, no. 48 (1961): 268.

¹⁴⁵ Yener, *Gaziantep'in Yakın Tarihinden Notlar*, p. 38; Hulusi Yetkin (ed.), *Gençlere Başarı Yolu: Cemil Alevli'nin Hayatı ve Hayat Görüşü* (Gaziantep: Işık Matbaası, 1963), p. 20. Born in Aintab in 1901, Alevli witnessed the city's economic, political and cultural improvement and personally contributed to this development. As a literate resident of Aintab who had received a good education abroad and who had a Western worldview, Alevli was also a significant representative of the rural bourgeoisie in the city, which had played an active role in Aintab's primitive capital accumulation. Doubtless, behind this accumulation lay the movable and immobile (real estate) properties of Armenians who had left Aintab in 1921–2.

¹⁴⁶ Mustafa Güzelhan, 'Dünkü ve Bugünkü: Çukurbostan', *Gaziantep Kültür Dergisi* 6, no. 68 (1963): 185–7.

¹⁴⁷ *Gaziantep Kültür Envanteri* (Gaziantep: Gaziantep Valiliği Yayını, 2005), pp. 124–5.

¹⁴⁸ Göğüş, *İlk İnsanlardan Bugüne Çeşitli Yönleriyle Gaziantep*, p. 192.

Gaziantep Kültür Envanteri (Gaziantep Cultural Inventory), the Millet Inn was designated a ‘Turkish cultural asset’.¹⁴⁹ The inn, known as *Kürkçü Hanı* (Kürkchuian Inn), founded by Hanna Kurkchuian in 1890, was sold to Mustafa Humanızlı¹⁵⁰ by the Treasury. Similar in status to the Millet Inn, Kurkchuian Inn is another Armenian building that acquired the honour of being named a Turkish cultural asset.¹⁵¹

Finally, some of the houses that belonged to Armenians were used in 1921–2 for charitable purposes, distributed at no charge to Muslim families who had lost their own dwellings during the Turkish–French war. This was the fate, in 1922, of the house owned by the father of Harutyun Nazarian, who was forced to leave Aintab and settle in Aleppo along with the rest of his family when he was fifteen. In a memoir, Nazarian recalled the event:

Before we left the house, a state official accompanied by two women came into our yard early in the morning. Then the official said, ‘As you are leaving Aintab and the houses of these two women were demolished due to the battle and bombardments, and in addition to that, since the state and local government have authorized you to leave Aintab, your house along with other empty houses will be occupied by others.’ He also asked these two women how many rooms there were in their wrecked houses. In this manner, our house was registered into [sic] the list of other occupied houses.¹⁵²

Several years after the war, abandoned houses and estates of the Armenians were still being used to settle immigrants and *muhajirs* (refugees). A telegram of 17 August 1924, sent by the Ministry of Population Exchange, Development, and Settlement (*Mübâdele, İmar ve İskân Vekâleti İskân Şubesi*) to the Gaziantep province, reported that there had been 19,500 Armenians in the province whose houses and estates, following their departure, could accommodate a large number of *muhajirs*. The ministry directed that *muhajir* families be settled in these properties according to their needs.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ *Gaziantep Kültür Envanteri*, pp. 101–2. Both the inn and workshops in it have been in private ownership since 2000.

¹⁵⁰ Mustafa Humanızlı, a well-known Aintabzy entrepreneur and businessman, had bought Armenian properties at low prices from auctions in Aintab in the early 1930s and became very rich. I gained this information from my personal interview with Aykut Tuzcu, a native of Aintab, on 12 March 2014 in Gaziantep.

¹⁵¹ Göğüş, *İlk İnsanlardan Bugüne Çeşitli Yönleriyle Gaziantep*, p. 193. Kurkchuian Inn has also been in private ownership and used as workshop and storehouse since 2000. See *Gaziantep Kültür Envanteri*, pp. 66–8.

¹⁵² Nazarian, *Eghernēn Verabrogh Hōwsher*, p. 40.

¹⁵³ BCA/TİGMA 272.00.00.11.19.91.17, 17 August 1924.

Through the personal directives of Mustafa Kemal, Armenian land assets were sometimes also bestowed on individuals as rewards for noteworthy accomplishments during the *Milli Mücadele* (National Struggle). Turkmenzâde Ahmet Effendi, a parliamentary deputy of Aleppo who hailed from a family of Antioch notables and had resided in Gaziantep ever since the Middle East's national boundaries, redrawn after the war, had left Aleppo outside the new Turkish nation-state, was such a beneficiary. It was Mustafa Kemal himself who gave instructions, on 14 December 1924, that Turkmenzâde Ahmet Effendi, whose previous house in Antioch, worth 30,000 liras, had been confiscated by the French, was to be awarded a sizeable garden and courtyards from abandoned properties-turned-national assets of equal value, due to his outstanding services during the national struggle.¹⁵⁴ The order was approved by the decree of the Ministerial Cabinet and implemented on 23 December 1924.¹⁵⁵

Abandoned properties were also used to meet needs deemed essential to the people. In an enactment dated 3 November 1926, it was decreed that an estate that had once belonged to a local Armenian, located in the Çukurbostan neighbourhood in Gaziantep, was to be allocated to the municipality – for the purposes of building a bakery – for a sum to be assessed.¹⁵⁶ Immovable properties of the Armenians were also given to Muslim immigrants who had been settled in Gaziantep. For example, when an immigrant from the Adilcevaz district in Bitlis province applied to the Administration for the Settlement of the Gaziantep Province for relocation to the city, his request was referred to the Ministry of the Interior.¹⁵⁷ In the ministry's 5 March 1927 response to the Gaziantep administration, it was stated that the settlement of Abdullah, son of Haji Reşit, in Gaziantep posed no problem, and that a house from the remaining 'abandoned Armenian properties' of the Aintab Armenians be given to him, so that he and his family could live comfortably.¹⁵⁸ As can be seen from this example, as late as 1927 the distribution of Gaziantep's Armenian properties was still going on.

¹⁵⁴ BCA/TİGMA 272.00.00.12.43.59.32, 14 December 1924.

¹⁵⁵ BCA/TİGMA 272.00.00.12.43.59.32, The Ministry of Population Exchange, Development, and Settlement to the Ministry of Finance, 23 December 1924.

¹⁵⁶ BCA/Secretariat of the Prime Ministry, 030.0.18.01.01.021.67.010, 3 November 1926.

¹⁵⁷ BCA/TİGMA 272.00.00.12.52.117.27, 10 February 1927.

¹⁵⁸ BCA/TİGMA 272.00.00.12.52.117.27, 5 March 1927.

Conclusion

Official Turkish historiography claims that the Turkish–French war in Aintab was a heroic struggle for national independence, which earned the city glory and its grand title, *ghazi* (conqueror). Gaziantep's 'heroic epic' was in fact a struggle whose incentive was to wipe out the Armenian presence in the city for good. Its main motive was to ensure that the Armenians of Aintab would never be able to return to the city. Whether forcibly removed or through various administrative measures, the outcome of all of these 'struggles' rendered it impossible for Armenian repatriates to remain in their native cities, towns or villages. Hoping to make these people flee their homeland again, the brave national warriors continued to terrorize them. When the Armenians left Aintab for good in 1921–2, their left-over houses, fields, estates and other properties were sold at bargain prices.

With the new administrative and legal regulations coming into effect after the Lausanne Treaty in 1924, and with other bilateral agreements between the republics of France and Turkey in 1926 and 1932 that invalidated the return of properties that had belonged to Armenians throughout Cilicia, all movable and immovable properties of the Armenians who had been forced to leave for Aleppo and Beirut were appropriated. At that time, 'France was the mandatory power over Syria and Lebanon', and it was easy to imagine that 'the mandatory power might act as a defender of the refugee Armenians whose rights had been violated'. As Vahé Tachjian notes, 'the reality, however, was different. France wanted to establish close links with the newly-created Turkish state and it pursued a policy to that end.'¹⁵⁹

More particularly, Armenian properties were offered at auctions organized at the initiative of local administrations and sold especially to members of the Aintab gentry who had participated in the Turkish–French war or supported the national forces financially and logistically. Otherwise, the numerous properties once owned by the Armenians of Aintab were used to house the offices of the civil service of the central government. In yet other cases, properties were handed out free of charge on the orders of the central government and Mustafa Kemal. Thus, the rich and wealthy Turkish Muslim class whose foundations were laid in Aintab during the period between 1915 and 1918 was able, in the weeks between December 1921 and January 1922, when the exodus of Aintab Armenians was made irreversible, to consolidate its status.

¹⁵⁹ Vahé Tachjian, 'An Attempt to Recover Armenian Properties in Turkey through the French Authorities in Syria and Lebanon in the 1920s', *International Criminal Law Review* 14, no. 2 (2014): 345.

Until the mid-1940s, the influence of Muslim elites over the city continued. The mayors of the city for the years 1921–50 all derived from the same influential families.¹⁶⁰ These elites entirely dominated the industry and economy of Gaziantep in the 1930s and 1940s. Most of these men, moreover, were members of the Republican People's Party (RPP) and representatives of the party's branch in Aintab.¹⁶¹

Armenian assets such as shops, estates and houses in the neighborhoods of Kozanlı, İbrahimli, Körkün, Eblehan, Büyükkızılhisar, Akyol and Eyüboğlu began to be sold at rigged auctions to the members of those prominent families for very low prices in post-genocide Turkey.¹⁶² This real estate was auctioned by dealers associated with the Gaziantep Revenue Office. Auctions were preceded by newspaper announcements about the details of the sales in question, listing the approximate location, type and value in liras of the properties in question, and, most important, their previous owners – but with no reference to the state that had acquired the properties and now constituted their current owner.

To sum up, the *nouveau riche* of Gaziantep were not only influential figures in the national resistance and the republican period but also emerged as the new captains of industry in the city. The economic elite of Aintab was being reconstituted along political lines. A new political class, based on such qualifications as previous CUP service, zeal in the French–Turkish war, and political reliability as republicans, was able, through its acquisition of Armenian wealth, to lay the economic foundations that would sustain its status over generations, long after the First World War and its aftermath were only a memory.

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¹⁶⁰ Some of those families were Ahmet Mazlum (1921) from the Zafizâde; Ahmet Effendi Kethüzâde, Mustafa Agha (1922) from Kaleağazizâde; Mehmet Ali (1922–4, 1927–31) from Hacı Ömerzâde' Şefik Barlas (1924–7) from Izrapzâde; and Hamdi Kurtlar (1931–46) from Mısrızâdes. See Mahmut O. Göğüş, 'Günümüze kadar şehrimizde ticaret odası başkanlıkları yapanlar', *Gaziantep'i Tanıtıyoruz* 3, no. 2 (1962): 13; 'İktisadiyat 1913–1923–1933', in *Gaziantep Halkevi Broşürü* (Gaziantep: Gaziantep Halk Fırkası Matbaası, 1935), pp. 301, 308.

¹⁶¹ *Gaziantep Halkevi Broşürü*, pp. 14–15.

¹⁶² *Gaziantep Gazetesi*, 11 May 1931, p. 4; 28 February 1935, p. 3; 1 August 1935, p. 3; 8 August 1935, p. 3; 24 March 1939, p. 4. My two interviewees, Aykut Tuzcu and Murad Uçaner, attribute the sudden emergence of many rich families in the city to this phenomenon. Interview with Aykut Tuzcu and Murad Uçaner, 28 March 2014, Gaziantep.

Afterword: Talaat's Empire: A Backward Country, but a State Well Ahead of Its Time

Hamit Bozarslan

As is well known, the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu was quite sceptical about the heuristic value of biographical studies, warning scholars of the dangers of a 'biographic illusion'.¹ A Bourdieu hard-liner might also argue against 'micro-scaled' approaches – that is, local histories – contending that their focus on a given time or space pushes scholars to overestimate the importance of conjunctural factors at the expense of structural ones. This volume on the Ottoman cataclysm's 'unhealed wounds, perpetuated patterns' invites us, however, not to exaggerate such risks. These chapters demonstrate that life stories in specific times and spaces can constitute fruitful heuristic entrées into issues even as complex as genocide and, thanks to their 'thick descriptions',² offer an understanding of complex power relations, structural contradictions and ideological tendencies that were active over a long period of time and throughout a broader space. They also demonstrate that what might be perceived at first glance as 'conjunctural' participates in fact in the very structuration of a society.³

Local history as national history

The 'genocidal conjuncture' of 1915, which constitutes the main topic of this book, cannot be analysed without taking into account the violent chronology of 1908–15. Similarly, the fall of the empire and the birth of republican

¹ Pierre Bourdieu, 'L'illusion biographique', *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 62–3 (1986): 64–72.

² Cf. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

³ Cf. Viviane Jabri on the 'structuration' theory of Anthony Giddens, *Discourse on Violence: Conflict Analysis Reconsidered* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), and Bruno Latour, *Changer de société. Refaire de la sociologie* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006).

Turkey cannot be understood without taking into account the upheavals of 1915, a paroxysm that was undeniably the culmination of a process of brutalization⁴ of Ottoman society that had begun during the first decades of the nineteenth century.⁵

Local histories of the late Ottoman and early republican era are at the very heart of this volume. But going well beyond the ambition of renewing the historiography of this field, some of the chapters also revisit local history as a genre from a transdisciplinary perspective. As it is defined here, the 'locality', whether a province or an administrative district or a *zone de passage*, is a territory with its own historical, economic, political, ethnic or religious specificities and, as such, becomes one of the meaningful scales of analysis for the late Ottoman period in its entirety. The chapters, for instance, of Ümit Kurt and Hilmar Kaiser that deal with the genocide of the Armenians in Aintab (Gaziantep) and Angora (Ankara), respectively, describe a microcosm of local power holders, their relationships with the central power and their willingness to execute or resist the orders issued by Istanbul. They also show that, for better or worse, the dynamics of macro, mezzo and micro levels of late Ottoman spaces were strongly dovetailed with each other. Here we see that in the Ottoman Empire power could be efficiently mobilized, radicalized, rationalized and indeed projected for purposes of mass destruction; it could do so thanks to the micro-level resources that a *vilayet* organization could offer and to the web of personal contacts and relationships that linked a province to its neighbour, from the very heart of Anatolia to Aleppo or to Der Zor.

Local actors participated in the genocide for a variety of reasons. Those serving heavy sentences for serious crimes, for instance, could take the opportunity the regime offered to leave their jails and build an internal solidarity among themselves through collective participation in murder; for those coming from *muhacir* (Muslim migrant) families from the Balkans and the Caucasus, killing Armenians was a brutal way of taking revenge on Christians in general or of proving their loyalty to their new masters. Others had ultranationalist convictions, were influenced by the jihadi discourses of the *ulema* or were convinced that the 'homeland' could be preserved only at the price of ethnic and religious purification. But they all acted in conformity with the will, if not the direct orders, of Istanbul authorities, which licensed

⁴ For 'brutalization' more generally, see George L. Mosse, *The Culture of Western Europe: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. An Introduction* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1961).

⁵ Cf. Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Der verpasste Friede. Mission, Ethnie und Staat in den Ostprovinzen der Türkei 1839–1938* (Zürich: Chronos, 2000).

every form of participation in the genocide. Without paying attention to the dovetailing of the CUP's goals with the aims of the army, the *Teşkilât-i Mahsusa* (Special Organization) and the *çete* units on the empire's peripheries, enabling Istanbul to project power, one cannot explain how, in a country with very poor resources and which had suffered a massive and humiliating defeat in Sarıkamış only months earlier, the genocide could be organized without any obstacles, and with a high level of proficiency, multiplying the destructive energy of each actor involved in it. In the Ottoman Empire of 1915, as in Nazi-occupied Europe of the 1940s or Rwanda of 1994, each single act of the genocidal process took place in a *local* time and space, found some of its resources in the mobilization of local actors, but was *never* a local affair. It required organization and sometimes complex logistical coordination. Even when they did not belong officially to the *state* apparatus, hired thugs escorted their victims into some narrow or remote space according to a road map and a timetable prepared by Istanbul; seldom did the killers act under the impact of spontaneous anger or 'ancestral hatred'. Rather, through their crimes, *local* history took on the shape of the *national* history par excellence.

Moreover, for non-state wielders of power, such as urban dynasties, religious leaders and bands of former convicts who volunteered to participate in the killings, the genocide constituted a local power-building resource. State officials and those already well off were obviously the major beneficiaries of the spoils that followed immediately on the deportations and killings, but the formation of the *çetes* (bands) offered even deprived strata of society – a *lumpenproletariat* – the possibility of gaining visibility and patriotic 'dignity' and of claiming their own portion of the Armenians' 'abandoned' wealth, however restricted that might be. As revealed in Talaat's telegrams, sent to the provincial authorities (18 August 1915 and 30 April 1916), in which he allowed the marriage of Muslim men to Armenian girls and widows,⁶ Armenian femininity was also expropriated as part of the new 'national' wealth, spoliated along with Armenians' more obvious material assets. The local actors who confiscated this wealth were naturally acting on their own behalf and often with an incredible brutality.⁷

⁶ Cf. T. C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü and Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı, *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeniler (1915–1920)* (Ankara: T. C. Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 1994), p. 85.

⁷ Cf. Anahide Ter Minassian, 'Un exemple, Mouch 1915', in Comité de Défense de la Cause Arménienne, *L'actualité du génocide des Arméniens* (Créteil: Edipol, 1999), pp. 231–52; Lerna Ekmekcioglu, 'A Climate for Abduction, a Climate for Redemption: The Politics of Inclusion during and after the Armenian Genocide', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55, no. 3 (July 2013): 522–53.

Comparative perspectives: the 1910s and 2010s

The contributions to this book also permit the reader to make useful comparisons across time and space and demonstrate that events that might appear ‘conjunctural’ in fact represent a pattern susceptible to being reactivated many decades later. Candan Badem’s chapter, for instance, shows how the CUP, the army, the famous *Teşkilat-i Mahsusa* and Muslim bands in the Russian Caucasus had *already* melded into a single body before the war. The pre-war practice of ethnic cleansing in some Caucasus villages constituted a ‘matrix for the genocide’ and demonstrated that a body of men who could carry out a genocide was already present – if not in its organizational shape, at least in its psychological readiness and self-radicalizing dynamics. Badem gives us a picture of the Unionist *Weltanschauung*: Unionism read history as a permanent state of war, and world history as the world’s history of war against Turkishness. The First World War was not only understood as *totaler Krieg*, as it was already present in the mind if not in the theory of war of Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz ‘Pacha’,⁸ but also as *the* historical turn that would allow the Turkish nation to take its revenge on a long history of military defeats.

One cannot fail to be impressed by the analogies between the Unionist rule of the 1910s and the regime of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of the 2010s.⁹ In a move quite similar to the Unionist overture to the Christian minorities in the late Ottoman Empire, which ended with genocide, the Erdoğanist overture to the Kurds in the 2000s has now been brutally suspended by a full-scale war against the Kurdish movement in Turkey and in Syria. Like the Committee of Union and Progress, which in 1908 expressed its desire for Turkey to become a democratic European society, replicating the ‘French Revolution on the Bosphorus’ and establishing equality and fraternity among the Ottoman Empire’s components, Erdoğan’s ‘pro-European’ Justice and Development Party (AKP) presented itself as a ‘Muslim democratic’ conservative party during its first decade in office and promised to resolve the Kurdish question through integration, equality and reform. But it, too, ended up defining history as a permanent, Social Darwinist battlefield and adopting the most radical and exclusive form of Turkish nationalism as its official ideology. Like

⁸ Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz (1843–1916) had served in the Ottoman army. See his *Das Volk in Waffen. Ein Buch über Heerwesen und Kriegführung unserer Zeit* (Berlin: R. v. Decker’s Verlag, 1883); see also Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz, ‘Stärke und Schwäche des türkischen Reiches’, *Deutsche Rundschau* 24 (1 October 1897): 95–119.

⁹ On Erdoganism, cf. my article ‘La Turquie brutalisée’, *Esprit* 433 (2017): 57–68; as well as Guillaume Perrier, *Dans la tête de Recep Tayyip Erdogan* (Arles: Actes-Sud, 2017); and Ahmet Insel, *Nouvelle Turquie d’Erdogan. Du rêve démocratique à la dérive autoritaire* (Paris: La Découverte, 2017).

the Unionist state, which was not a ‘rational-legal’ state as political philosophy and Weberian sociology defines it, nor a *Rechtstaat* governed by the rule of law, but rather a paramilitary state, so, too, the Erdoğanist state has gradually ceased to be a rational-legal one and has incorporated many paramilitary elements into the web of its coercive apparatus: for example, the famous Special Forces of the Police (PÖH) and the Gendarmerie Special Operations (JÖH); the Grey Wolves of the radical right; the militants of the association known as the Ottoman Hearth; and the ultra-Islamist private security company SADAT A.S.–International Defence Consulting. Like the CUP of the 1910s, Erdoğanism of the 2010s has interpreted the troubled times in the Near East as an opportunity to avenge the ‘humiliations’ of the Turkish nation’s past. As was the case with the CUP, the AKP expresses a violent nostalgia for empire and promotes a necrophilic nationalism, according to which ‘the land cannot become a fatherland [*vatan*], nor the cloth a flag’ unless it be ‘drenched in the blood of martyrs.’¹⁰ Like Unionism, Erdoğanism insists that the Turkish nation has an historical mission to dominate the world in order to bring harmony and order and to protect Islam – that is, Sunni Islam – a mission that, in its view, has been interrupted by the plots and aggression of external enemies and the betrayals of internal ones. Like Unionism, Erdoğanism accuses the civil servants of the Tanzimat era (1839–76) of having been alienated from ‘Turkish-Islamic’ civilization, from state traditions and authentic values. Finally, just as the CUP destroyed any kind of *Rechtsstaat*, along with the legal and institutional checks and balances crucial for its survival, so Erdoğan power acts in what the German sociologist Karl Mannheim might deem a ‘chiliastic way’.¹¹

From Unionism to the Republic: inheriting the cataclysm

Erdoğan, who has dominated the destiny of Turkey since the autumn of 2002, has explained on many occasions that the Ottoman ‘homeland’ has been

¹⁰ Cf., among others, ‘Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Toprak şehit kanıyla yağrulduğu zaman vatandır, yoksa tarladır tarla!’, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/osmangazi-koprusu-erdogan-ve-binalli-yildirim-in-katilimiyla-aciliyor,347944> (accessed 20 April 2018).

¹¹ According to Mannheim, ‘the chiliastic mind’, while contesting the very principle of reality, trusts voluntarism and brutality to undo the unfoldings of history. Mannheim redefines the notions of Kairos and Chronos: in his reading, Kairos ceases to be the divinity of opportunity and becomes a god of pure will, able to change the reality by its own autonomous dynamics. Cf. Karl Mannheim, *Idéologie et utopie* (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1956), p. 167.

reduced from a territory of 18 million square kilometres to a small country of only 780,000 kilometres, due to internal betrayals and wars imposed by 'imperialist powers'.¹² Reviving the tropes of Turkist-Islamist literature of the 1960s and 1970s, namely, Kadir Mısırlıoğlu's sulfurous *Lozan: Zafer mi, Hezimet mi?* (Lausanne: Victory or Humiliating Defeat?) of 1963,¹³ he has characterized the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, the founding international act of the Turkish Republic, as a plot against the Turkish nation and has called for its revision.

The present volume and its predecessor¹⁴ show that, 100 years before Erdoğan, the Unionists interpreted the loss of Macedonia, a consequence of the First Balkan War (1912–13), in similarly apocalyptic terms. For that generation, the loss indeed marked the end of a world: *their* world. The Balkans had constituted the territory whose conquest had allowed the small Ottoman *beylicat* (principality) to become a regional power before the fall of Constantinople in 1453. The destiny of the empire was determined by the Balkans during the dramatic year of 1808, when Selim III, who wanted to institutionalize reforms he called the *Nizam-i Cedid* (New Order), was overthrown by the Janissaries and killed. Mustafa IV, who suspended the *Nizam-i Cedid*, was in turn overthrown and killed by a 'reformist' army organized by Bayraktar Mustafa in the Balkans.¹⁵

Macedonia, the Ottoman Empire's remaining European stronghold in the nineteenth century, was the land of the 'offspring of conquerors' (*evlad-i fatihan*), who considered themselves the aristocracy of the empire.¹⁶ It was also the birthplace of the CUP, whose members acted simultaneously as state agents and as an anti-state military force, fighting the Christians' separatist revolutionary committees (*komitadji*) by day and plotting against their own

¹² 'Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Vicdansızlar, ahıksızlar, edepsızler', discourse of 24 February 2018, <http://www.ıha.com.tr/haber-cumhurbaskani-erdogan-vicdansızlar-ahıksızlar-edepsızler-713218/> (accessed 11 March 2018).

¹³ Kadir Mısırlıoğlu, *Lozan: Zafer mi? Hezimet mi?* (Istanbul: Sebil Yayinevi, 2010).

¹⁴ Hans-Lukas Kieser, Kerem Öktem and Maurus Reinkowski (eds), *World War I and the End of the Ottomans: From the Balkan Wars to the Armenian Genocide* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2015).

¹⁵ Cf. Ali Yaycıoğlu, *Partners of the Empire: The Crisis of the Ottoman Order in the Age of Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016). Indeed, for centuries the European provinces had been the empire's 'heart and soul' and 'the demographic center of the Empire remained in Europe until quite near the very end. Population densities in Rumeli (the Balkans) were double those in Anatolia, while these latter were triple the densities in Iraq and Syria and five times those in the Arabian Peninsula ... Demographically, the Balkans were crucial and their loss was a terrible economic blow for the Ottoman economy and state'; Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 2, 111.

¹⁶ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 24.

state, which had failed them, after sundown. The Army of Action, which in 1909 would save the Unionist power from total destruction, had been formed in the Balkans. It was in Macedonia also that Hamidian and Unionist plans for political, organizational and demographic/territorial engineering were first elaborated. This 'engineering' was successfully put into practice, first, through the ethnic cleansing of the Greeks in Thrace and Asia Minor in 1913–14; then, during the genocide of the Armenians and other Eastern Christian communities in the context of the First World War; and finally, between 1925 and 1939, through the repression and Turkification policies in Kurdistan: Diyarbakir, Dersim (Tunceli), Bingol, Batman, Muş, Van, Agri, Mardin, Siirt, Hakkari and Şirnak.

Last, but not least, Macedonia determined the future of the empire by its subtraction from the imperial and republican map after the debacle of 1912. The CUP had not been in power before and during that first Balkan War, but thanks to its radical bellicosity and mass demonstrations in the capital, it had hastened the process leading to the war. The humiliation of being defeated by the Balkan armies, derided by Yusuf Akçura (1876–1935), one of the founders of the Turkish nationalism, as 'the Bulgarian milkmen, Serbian pig-sellers and Greek taverna-keepers',¹⁷ constituted a long-lasting narcissistic wound among Unionist circles. During the negotiations of 1913–14 on the so-called Armenian reforms (leading to the Reform Agreement of February 1914), during which the CUP leaders behaved brutally, threateningly, vis-à-vis the Armenian representatives, they accused the Armenian parties of creating a new Macedonian problem, this time in the empire's eastern provinces. More than a decade later, Kurdistan would be defined by many pro-Kemalist¹⁸ and anti-Kemalist figures¹⁹ as a new Macedonia.

A similar continuity can be observed through the rehabilitation, in the republic, of the men of the Ottoman ancien régime, starting with Abdülhamid II. Following the path of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904–83), the well-known Islamist thinker who occasionally flirted with the radical right, President Erdoğan has celebrated Abdülhamid II (1842–1918) as the *Ulu Hakan* (Great Ruler) of the late empire.²⁰ Enthroned before a disastrous war with Russia in 1877–8, which put an end to the Tanzimat era, Abdülhamid had abrogated the constitution, recentralized power in his own hands and aimed at the

¹⁷ Quoted in Ali Engin Oba, *Türk Milliyetçiliğinin Doğuşu* (Istanbul: İmge Yayınevi, 1995), p. 111.

¹⁸ Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver, *Dağ Yolu* (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1987), c°1, s. 2–3.

¹⁹ R. Nur, *Hayat ve Hatiratım* (Istanbul: Sebil Yayınevi, 1968), vol. 4, p. 1604.

²⁰ Cf. Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Ulu Hakan Abdülhamit Han* (Istanbul: Büyük Doğu, Yayınları, 2003).

restoration of what he perceived as the genius of Ottoman state traditions. The bloody massacres of Armenians that occurred in Anatolia from 1894 to 1896 on a large scale and those that took place in Macedonia in 1903 on the heels of the Ilinden Uprising earned him the moniker 'the Red Sultan'. During their opposition years, and particularly on the eve of their July 1908 *pronunciamento*, many figures of the Unionist civil and military intelligentsia, beginning with Enver, dreamed of 'destroying the body' of the sultan.²¹ The Hamidian state was indeed dismantled within a couple of months in 1908, with the brutal purge of hundreds of high-ranking officials. The sultan-caliph was himself overthrown, in spite of the strong opposition of the *sheikhulislam* (the head of the Ottoman religious apparatus), less than a year later under very humiliating conditions and with his fortune despoiled. Still, the Unionists couldn't get rid of this figure that they had hated so intensely before they became masters of the empire. Indeed, for Bahaeddin Şakir (1877–1922), one of the key architects of the genocide, Abdülhamid was the only Turk 'possessed of a will strong enough to become the *Übermensch*.'²² Talaat, too, paid his respects to the aging former sultan a few times during the First World War years and couldn't hide his tears while assisting at his funeral in February 1918.²³ The Unionists' Oedipus complex has subsequently been resolved by the rehabilitation of the man the Unionists themselves had denounced as a 'sanguinary despot' during the long period of their clandestine opposition. Indeed, Unionism itself had no other reason to radicalize than the one it had inherited from the 'father' it had betrayed, and no other programme than the sultan's own most cherished dreams, which it fulfilled in the course of unleashing incredible energy, brutality and cruelty. As Hans-Lukas Kieser reminds us in the opening of his chapter, Talaat took pride in having achieved in three months what Abdülhamid had been unable to fulfil in thirty-three years, that is, the quasi-total extermination of the Armenians.

Talaat constitutes, without doubt, the key figure linking the Hamidian empire to the Kemalist republic. He was the dominant member not only of the Unionist troika but of the entire Unionist organization, organized as a cartel or a 'polycracy' and kept together through a communion in crime. Cemal Pasha, second member of the troika, presided over only a small circle

²¹ Cf. especially Turgut Çeviker, *Burun, Abdülhamid Karukatürleri Antolojisi*, (Istanbul: Adam Yayınları, 1988); and the memoirs of Kazım Karabekir, *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti, 1896–1909: Neden Kuruldu? Nasıl Kuruldu? Nasıl İdare Olundu?* (Istanbul, Türdav Ofset, 1983), pp. 73, 98, 134.

²² Cf. Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2011), p. 191. In the original French edition, *Le Génocide des Arméniens* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2006), the quotation is on p. 244.

²³ Cemal Kutay, *Şehit Sadrazam Talat Paşa'nın Gurbet Hatıraları* (Istanbul: n.p., 1983), pp. 16, 847.

of close confidants and, after his nomination as the CUP's proconsul in Damascus and Beirut, was in any case kept away from the capital. The third member of the triumvirate, Generalissimo Enver Pasha, was obsessed with his own grandeur and satisfied with commanding the army and directing the war. Talaat, in contrast, could for a long time claim only the honorific title of *bey* and the office of minister of the interior, his official status in the organization of the Ottoman state. Only in February 1917 was he elevated to *pasha* status upon his appointment as grand vizier of the empire. But in fact, all along Talaat *was* the state. All of the official state was under his authority, as well as the extensive parastate apparatus whose components were, in reality, much more important than those of any minister with public visibility.²⁴ It is worth noting that many of Talaat's men – such as Atif (Bayındır), the governor-perpetrator of Ankara; Mustafa Abdülhalik (Renda), whom we have met as governor of Bitlis during the genocide; Şükrü (Kaya), head of the Directorate for the Settlement of Tribes and Migrants, whose main task was 'managing' the Armenian deportations; Midhat Şükrü (Bleda), one of the founders of the OFO (Ottoman Freedom Organization), forerunner of the CUP, who had helped organize political murders before the war; and Celal (Bayar), a CUP general secretary and head of the *Teşkilat-i Mahsusa* in Izmir – were integrated into the Kemalist state and ran it until the 1950s, in some cases into the 1960s. Against a well-worn cliché according to which the Republic of Turkey has been built by the military, one can argue, as Kieser does in this book, that the republic was the ultimate masterwork of Talaat. It is true that, from the very beginning of the republic, Mustafa Kemal enjoyed a high degree of legitimacy and exerted outstanding authority, thanks to his status as commander-in-chief during the War of Independence (1919–22). If, however, he succeeded in consolidating his power to the extent of easily becoming the *Tek Adam* (Unique Man), that was thanks to his skill in marginalizing Enver's adventurous military faction and in co-opting Talaat's inner circle almost in its entirety in the process of making the new state.

The Unionist biographies

Even Mustafa Kemal obviously retained some admiration for Talaat, with whom he exchanged a series of letters during the War of Independence.²⁵ When the former grand vizier was assassinated in Berlin on 15 March 1921,

²⁴ Cf., e.g., Galib Vardar, *İttihad ve Terakki İçinde Dönemler* (Istanbul: İnkilâp Kitabevi, 1960); and Mustafa Ragıp Esatlı, *İttihat ve Terakki* (Istanbul: Hürriyet Yayınları, 1975).

²⁵ İlhan Tekeli and Selim İlkin, 'Kurtuluş Savaşında Talat Paşa ile Mustafa Kemal'in Mektuplaşmaları', *Belleten* 44, no. 174: 301–46.

the Kemalist press lauded him as ‘a giant of history whose immense personality will hold a well-deserved place in posterity’.²⁶ Kemal’s complicity with Talaat cannot be explained only by elective affinities, nor by the fact that the two men had similar sociological profiles. Talaat was himself no theorist, but he knew how to use Social Darwinism and a radical, cold-blooded nationalism in the service of the project of Islamization and Turkification of Asia Minor, to which he was wholly committed. That was also the case with Mustafa Kemal. Moreover, in spite of its polycratic features, Talaat’s CUP constituted the matrix of the A-RMHC (*Anadolu ve Rumeli Müdafaa-i Hukuk Cemiyeti*, the Committee for the Defence of the Rights of Anatolia and Rumeli), also known as the First Group, founded on 10 May 1921, which would, in 1923, give birth to the Kemalist Republican Party of People,²⁷ the ruling party in a one-party state.

Talaat’s empire was an economically, intellectually and militarily backward country. But his *state* was well ahead of its time. As Kieser argues, and as far as my comparative readings allow me to conclude, his was the first single-party regime in world history. Together with Talaat’s ‘emissaries’, who often orally communicated the orders to deport and kill Armenians and other Christians to local officials, the party’s ‘inspectors’ had the ultimate authority at the provincial level, to which the governors (*valis*) and district governors (*mutasarrıfs*) were usually subordinate. The CUP certainly did not have the capacity to penetrate every aspect of the lives of its Ottoman citizenry and could not impose a *Führerprinzip* on society, as would soon be the case in Nazi Germany. Still, it corresponded perfectly to the definition that Hannah Arendt gave to ‘totalitarian parties’: ‘a secret organization acting in the daylight’.²⁸ The first and second circles of organization of the CUP were linked to the troika and to each other through a ‘pact’, a shared sacred commitment, consolidated by an oath linking each to the party. According to this oath, reformulated on 3 August 1908, each member promised to ‘serve the CUP until the last breath of my life in order to protect the homeland, and to kill, with my own hands, anyone daring to work or to plot against it’.²⁹

²⁶ *Yeni Gün*, 11 April 1921, quoted in *Bulletin périodique de la Presse turque* 14 (1921): 9.

²⁷ Mete Tunçay, *Türkiye Cumhuriyetinde Tek Parti Yönetiminin Kurulması (1923–1931)* (Ankara: Yurt Yayınları, 1981), p. 36.

²⁸ My translation is from the French edition of her masterwork on totalitarianism, Hannah Arendt, *Les origines du totalitarisme: Eichmann à Jérusalem* (Paris: Gallimard, 2013), pp. 701–6. In the English edition, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York and London: Harcourt, 1966), she makes the same quip on p. 376 – ‘The totalitarian movements have been called “secret societies established in broad daylight”’ – and repeats it on pp. 379, 380, 414, 435ff.

²⁹ Quoted in Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi*, vol. 1, part 1 (Ankara: TTK Yayınları, 1963), p. 75.

As Jean Baudrillard once suggested, such a pact could only be based on blood and therefore could only be dissolved by bloodshed; it could not be assimilated into a theory of 'contract', social or political, where the contract is the outcome of negotiations between actors with sometimes conflicting interests.³⁰ But as the sixteenth-century French political thinker Etienne La Boétie (1530–63) noted presciently in his famous *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*, a pact is neither a guarantee of loyalty nor a promise of sincerity:

There can be no friendship where there is cruelty, where there is disloyalty, where there is injustice. And in places where the wicked gather, there is conspiracy only, not companionship: these have no affection for one another; fear alone holds them together; they are not friends, they are merely accomplices.³¹

No wonder, then, that the Unionist universe was full of internal plots and competing power strategies. The troika, however, was able to preserve the unity of its organization; if necessary, at the cost of eliminating those comrades who were acting too autonomously or were too compromised, such as Yakup Cemil (1883–1916), a putschist, or Çerkez Ahmet, the murderer of the Armenian deputies Vartkes and Zohrab.

One of the members of the troika, however, Cemal Pasha, was tempted to a betrayal in secret negotiations with the Entente powers. His 'massive reign of terror' in the Syrian province,³² marked by the execution of twenty-one Arab dignitaries in Damascus and in Beirut (6 May 1916), was possibly a direct consequence of the failure of this attempt. In the chapter that he devotes to Cemal, Ümit Kurt insists on another aspect of this military proconsul of *Bilad al-Sham* (greater Syria): like some other Unionist (and, later, Nazi) figures, while he participated in the genocide, he also occasionally played the role of 'saviour' and would be remembered as such by many victims. His post-war memoirs give evidence that he was an admirer of the Armenian revolutionaries who, according to him, were 'more courageous and heroic than (Greek and Serbian) revolutionaries', didn't 'know what hypocrisy was, [and] were loyal in friendship and determined in enmity'. But he also hated the Armenian community, 'a snake introduced in the country by

³⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *L'Esprit du terrorisme* (Paris: Galilée, 2002).

³¹ Cf., for the English translation of *The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude*, <https://mises.org/library/politics-obedience-discourse-voluntary-servitude/html/c/116> (accessed 11 March 2018).

³² Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1918* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), p. 193.

Russia.³³ To complete Cemal's list of brutalities, one should mention that he was the main architect of the 'evacuation' of the Jews of Jaffa, which started in 1917, after the achievement of the Armenian genocide.³⁴

Some 'second-string' Unionists such as Hasan Tahsin (Uzer), examined in this volume by Hilmar Kaiser, present ambiguities similar to Cemal's. Tahsin, who had a long career in Macedonia, Albania and Asia Minor, was certainly no humanitarian; still, he could oppose the persecution of Armenians in Van, just as he dared in 1911–12 to criticize the repressive policies of the Ottoman authorities in Albania.³⁵ He was aware that, as Kaiser notes, 'Armenians in Van province were rendering stronger support for the war effort than Muslims, while the repressive measures in Erzerum were causing anxieties that were not helpful.' Later on, Tahsin would confess, 'There would have been no revolt at Van if we had not ourselves created, with our own hands, by using force, this impossible situation from which we are incapable of extricating ourselves.'³⁶ There is no doubt that it was Tahsin's replacement by Enver's brother-in-law, Cevdet Pasha (who had a well-earned infamous reputation), that allowed the organization of the genocide in Van. But meanwhile, Tahsin, the 'protector' of Van's Armenians, had become the executioner-in-chief of the Armenians in the neighbouring province of Erzurum. This switch from clemency to the most ruthless severity, a result of solidarity within the Unionist cartel as well as changing circumstances, went hand in hand with a hardening of Tahsin's own views on Armenians. The case of Aintabli Abdulkadir Bey, also examined by Hilmar Kaiser, is a much more coherent one and can be seen as almost the ideal type for a second-rank Unionist leader. Abdulkadir's trajectory leaves no doubt that he was a Unionist *fidai* ('the one who sacrifices himself for the cause'), a role highly admired within the CUP's political culture. But Abdulkadir was apparently a *fidai* who could excel only when he didn't face personal risk. Hence, he used local actors and played the 'Kurdish card' when orchestrating massacres *in situ*, before granting the Armenians their ultimate quietus: extermination in Der Zor.

³³ Cemal Paşa, *Hatıralar. İttihat ve Terakki, I. Dünya Savaşı Anıları* (Istanbul: Çağdaş Yayınları, 1977), pp. 404 and 411.

³⁴ Cf. Fuat Dündar, *Modern Türkiye'nin Şifresi. İttihat ve Terakki'nin Etnisite Mühendisliği (1913–1918)* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2008), pp. 385–6. German intervention limited, then ended, the Jaffa 'evacuations', which had been initially intended for a much larger region. See Isaiah Friedman, *Germany, Turkey and Zionism, 1897–1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 347–73.

³⁵ Tahsin Uzer, *Makedonya Eşkiyalık Tarihi ve Son Osmanlı Yönetimi* (Ankara: TTK Yayınları, 1980), pp. 98 and 101.

³⁶ Quoted in Kévorkian, *Génocide des Arméniens*, p. 290; in the English edition, *Armenian Genocide*, p. 231.

A much more complex case is that of Cavid Bey, whom Ozan Ozavci examines in this book. Cavid never belonged to the inner circle of the committee, and his role as minister was strictly restricted to the economic domain. He was a Francophile, had rather liberal opinions and defended the project of decentralization of the empire that the Unionists had strongly condemned. He was opposed to the Ottoman alliance with the Central Powers and knew perfectly well that the ‘nation’ was being destroyed under Unionist rule. As Ozavci reminds us, Cavid could also express indignation (but privately, to his diary) about the Unionists’ genocidal policy:

You dared to *annihilate the existence of an entire nation* [*bütüün bir kavmin ... mevcudiyet-i hayatîyesini imha*], not [just] their political existence. You are both iniquitous and incapable. What kind of conscience must you have to [be able to] accept the drowning, in the mountains and by the lakes, of those women, children and the elderly who were taken to the countryside!

Still, Cavid did not hesitate to re-enter the Unionist cabinet in early 1917, and he maintained good relations with the surviving Unionist leaders – until he found, at his own execution in 1926 by the Kemalist power, that a pact is not a contract. Before that disappointing finale, however, Cavid’s relationship to the Unionist-Kemalist regime bears similarities to that of Ahmed Rıza (1858–1930), leader of the first CUP during their exile years in Europe. During and after the genocide, Rıza actually dared to condemn the Unionists without reservation.³⁷ By 1922, however, he was making strenuous efforts to defend ‘Turkishness’ and denounce the ‘faillité morale de la politique occidentale en Orient’ (moral bankruptcy of Western politics in the East).³⁸

Resistances

This book on the Ottoman cataclysm is also about different forms of resistance. One form took place within the state. As Talaat’s telegrams³⁹ and

³⁷ Cf. Ayhan Aktar, *Türk Milliyetçiliği, Gayrimüslimler ve Ekonomik Değişim* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2006), p. 84.

³⁸ For a new edition, cf. Ahmed Rıza, *La faillité morale de la politique occidentale en Orient* (Ankara: Ministère de la Culture, 1990).

³⁹ Cf. Taner Akçam, *‘Ermeni Meselesi Hallolunmuştur’: Osmanlı Belgelerine Göre Savaş Yıllarında Ermenilere Yönelik Politikalar* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2008).

his famous black notebook⁴⁰ show, the state's officials in the provinces essentially ran the genocide, while remaining accountable to Istanbul and acting according to its official or unofficial orders until the end. But as Hilmar Kaiser shows in his chapter on Angora, in the Ottoman Empire as in other genocidal societies, a space for active or passive disobedience to the centre's exterminatory policies did exist, at least for short periods. Ultimately, power holders within the state apparatus who persistently resisted were either killed or replaced by new, ultranationalist men.

A second form of resistance, broadly speaking, took place in the Kurdish regions – not in 1915, but in the pre-genocidal, yet very tense, context of 1908–14. This poorly studied period was marked by a series of Kurdish disturbances that had an anti-Armenian but also an anti-state aspect. As Mehmet Polatel shows, a movement for Kurdish autonomy was gradually gaining momentum, to the extent of formulating almost exclusively Kurdist demands during a short-lived rebellion in Bitlis in spring 1914. In spite of some support among local tribal and religious power holders, however, Kurdish resistance to the CUP state was fragmented. In contrast to other Kurdish riots, the Bitlis uprising was not expressly anti-Armenian; however, neither had it any connection with the Armenian political parties that had, by then, a strong influence in the region, namely in Bitlis. As Polatel suggests, the suppression of the rebellion was seized as an opportune moment for the CUP to reorganize the state's authority in the province, purging officials who were indulgent or ineffective and putting a strategy in place that combined repression with the cooptation of Kurdish leaders. This 'new order', which worked out perfectly, explains why the genocide was able to unfold in this region 'with a singular intensity within a very short period of time'.

A third form of resistance was exemplified by individuals who took a stand in support of universal human and political values, regardless of the consequences – a resistance that reached its terminus during the final tragedy of 1915. It is incarnated in the famous Armenian deputies Zohrab and Vartkes, whose life stories, as told here by Raymond Kévorkian, extend from their support for Captain Alfred Dreyfus during the 1890s to the project of reforming the Ottoman Empire. In spite of some scepticism among them, the Armenian revolutionaries of 1908, such as Rouben Ter Minassian (1882–1951), genuinely believed, at least for a while, that the moment of their emancipation *and* the emancipation of all the Ottoman peoples, starting with the Turks themselves, had finally arrived, and that they could trust their

⁴⁰ Cf. Murat Bardakçı, *Talât Paşa'nın Evrak-I Metrûkesi: Sadrazam Talât Paşa'nın Arşivinde Bulunan Ermeni Tehciri Konusundaki Belgeler ve Hususi Yazışmalar* (Istanbul: Everest, 2008).

Turkish revolutionary partners, even to the point of disarming themselves.⁴¹ By June 1914, as we have seen, Rouben Ter Minassian had changed his mind. Like many non-Muslim Balkan revolutionaries, such as Yane Sandansky (1872–1915), leader of the Macedonian Internal Revolutionary Organization (IMRO),⁴² the Armenians had imagined themselves the brothers in arms and in faith (faith in ‘liberty’) of their Turkish and Muslim fellow fighters. Many of the Armenian revolutionaries had demonstrated fervent Ottoman patriotism during the 1912–13 Balkan Wars. Obviously, however, their internationalist and revolutionary generosity obscured the very nature of Unionism until it was too late. While they had believed in an Ottoman universalism and understood by ‘revolution’ the refounding of the empire on egalitarian and fraternal principles, the revolution the CUP had in mind was a ‘nationalist’ and exclusive one. The ARF’s utopia ended in their elimination by the Unionists.

The surviving Armenians in Aleppo, examined here by Khatchig Mouradian, tried to develop their own unarmed resistance, through organizing the very weakest Armenian actors, children twelve years old and even younger, in efforts to survive. Survival was also a declaration of hope, a way to testify that the community of victims would not accept passively the process of their own destruction. Such hope survived among this remnant of a people, even as the Unionists continued the genocide through new waves of deportation from Aleppo to the ultimate sites of extermination in Der Zor.

⁴¹ Rouben Ter Minassian, *Mémoires d'un partisan arménien* (La Tour d'Aigues: Editions de l'Aube, 1990), p. 141.

⁴² Quoted in Fikret Adanır, *Makedonya Sorunu: Oluşumu ve 1908'e Kadar Gelişimi* (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 2001), p. 267.

Chronology

1894–7

Massacres of Armenians under Abdul Hamid II, also called the ‘Hamidian Massacres’, increase the demand for reforms by the European powers, even as Kurds in the eastern provinces seize the opportunity to appropriate the lands of Armenians who had fled, been killed or were left without male protection.

1908

Young Turk Revolution in July reinstates not only the 1876 constitution, but also the concept of Ottomanism and wider political participation.

1909

Armed attempt in April by supporters of Abdul Hamid II to restore the Hamidian regime and roll back the egalitarian and constitutional gains of the 1908 revolution is put down, but not before massacres of Armenians break out in Adana province.

1912–13

The Balkan successor states go to war against the Ottoman Empire and then against each other. The Ottomans lose 80 per cent of their Balkan territory and must take in up to 400,000 Muslims.

23 January 1913

CUP putsch against liberal Ottoman cabinet and establishment of single-party rule.

April 1913

Hasan Tahsin Bey becomes governor of Van.

1913–14

The Armenian reform question, so prominent in the mid-1890s, returns to the international agenda and dominates diplomatic circles on the Bosphorus.

8 February 1914

Pressed by the Great Powers, the Ottoman Empire unwillingly signs an accord with Russia, promising reforms in Eastern Anatolia, to be overseen by two European inspectors-general appointed by the Porte. These ‘Armenian Reforms’,

seen by some as vital for the future of an egalitarian Ottoman Empire, are perceived by the CUP and many Kurds as its death knell.

Spring and summer 1914

Concerted boycott campaigns, coupled with violence, lead to the flight and/or expulsion of around 150,000 Ottoman Greeks (*Rûm*) from the Ottoman Empire during these months.

Late March 1914

An uprising begins in Bitlis province by Kurdish groups fearing a potential secular turn in the government's policies and angered by the 8 February 1914 accord, which raises the possibility that they might be required to return Armenians lands and properties seized in the Hamidian period.

2 August 1914

Secret military alliance signed between the German Reich and the Ottoman Empire. Believing in a rapid German victory, the main CUP leaders promise immediate entry into the First World War and demand non-interference by the Central Powers in their 'internal affairs'. Although the empire is officially still a neutral power, the Ottoman army and society begin mobilization.

Early August 1914

Bahaeddin Shakir Bey and Ömer Naci Bey, leaders of the Special Organization (*Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa*), arrive in Erzurum to prepare special operations across the Russian border. They appeal to the ARF's Ottoman branch to urge its Russian counterpart to support Ottoman incursions, which it declines to do, exciting anger and suspicion.

August–December 1914

Beginning with cross-border sorties by irregulars, Ottoman operations gradually escalate to larger-scale military operations along the borderlands. Surveillance and hostilities against Armenians increase.

September 1914

Van's governor, Hasan Tahsin Bey, is appointed to Erzurum to oversee operations, although his arrival is delayed until early November.

29 October 1914

The Ottoman navy, without a declaration of war, opens fire on Russian ports on the Black Sea. Russia declares war on 2 November.

11 November 1914

Ottoman Empire declares war on the Entente.

30 November 1914

Talaat, in consultation with Tahsin and Bahaeddin Shakir, takes far-reaching decisions for the destruction of ARF self-defence units throughout the East, measures that involve extensive house searches and arrests, the disarming of Armenians employed in the gendarmerie, and surveillance of communication routes.

December 1914

Small-scale massacres of Christians in the Russian Caucasus are committed by Special Organization and regular and irregular Ottoman military units operating across the border. Later in the month the first major Ottoman offensive is launched by War Minister Enver Pasha against Russian positions in the Caucasus.

January 1915

Enver's Caucasus operation ends in disaster at Sarikamiş. The mission of the two European inspectors-general for the 'Armenian Reforms' is officially declared ended.

Spring 1915

Clashes between Ottoman irregulars and ARF self-defence units and deserters occur along the Iranian border. Without the approval of his superiors, Shefik Bey, the acting governor of Van who deputizes for Cevdet Bey, enlists Arshag Vramian, ARF member of parliament, to calm Armenians throughout the province. The attempt fails, Vramian is murdered by Cevdet's men and massacres of Armenian villages begin along the strategic route between Bitlis and Van.

18 March 1915

Ottoman forces beat back an Entente naval assault on the Dardanelles, their first victory in the war.

18 April 1915

The governor of Bitlis, Abdülhalik Bey, telegraphs the Interior Ministry that 'the extermination of these [Armenian] elements, which had always been a threat to the state in these parts of the homeland . . . [was] a requirement for the security of the state.'

19 April 1915

The governor of Van, Cevdet Bey, orders the 'extermination' of Armenians in his

province and the execution of any Muslim who tries to help them escape. Tahsin Bey advises the Ministry of the Interior to 'truly' solve the Armenian question – by destroying the Armenians' social base.

20 April 1915

Van Armenians begin an armed self-defence, misrepresented in nationalist Turkish historiography as an uprising coordinated with the Russian army to aid its invasion.

24–5 April 1915

Armenian intellectuals and prominent political figures in the capital are arrested and later killed, an event that later became the date for commemorations of the Armenian genocide.

25 April 1915 onwards

Battle of Gallipoli (Çanakkale). A combined Entente attack of French, British, Australian and New Zealand troops aimed at capturing the Straits and the Ottoman capital. Facing strong Ottoman resistance, the attack turns into a disaster. In January 1916, the last remaining ANZAC forces are withdrawn.

23 May 1915

The Ottoman government issues the order for the deportation of all Armenians from Van, Erzurum and Bitlis, along with Adana, Aintab and Aleppo. A general deportation law (by decree) follows on 27 May.

24 May 1915

Declaring the treatment of the Armenians 'crimes against humanity,' the Entente announces that it will hold the Ottoman government and its agents personally responsible.

June 1915

Major massacres occur in the eastern provinces. In Bitlis, except for a few villages around the provincial capital, by 15 June all Armenian villages and their inhabitants are reported to have been destroyed.

August 1915

As the war continues, telegrams with deportation orders extend over Asia Minor. Mass deportations of Armenians begin in Aintab and Ankara, although Catholics and Protestants in Aintab are told they can remain. Talaat sends instructions to

replace foot-dragging officials in order to increase the efficiency of the deportation process.

2 August 1915

Krikor Zohrab and Hovhannes Seringulian (Vartkes), members of parliament and now prisoners, are murdered on the road to Dyarbekir, thus ending the lives of Ottoman Armenia's most significant representatives, ones who had pressed for a peaceful solution to ethnic and religious conflicts within the Ottoman Empire.

17 August 1915

Istanbul orders the governor of Bitlis to deport the Armenians of Muş and Bitlis districts, but the governor replies that, except for a few women and children, all the Armenians of Bitlis have already been liquidated.

End of August 1915

Talaat writes to the governor of Ankara that the 'Armenian problem' has been solved in the eastern provinces and there remains no need for large massacres.

September–November 1915

Deportation of Aintab's Protestant and Catholic Armenians.

December 1915

The Armenian Relief Committee in the United States raises \$176,929.

15 August 1916

On Cemal Pasha's orders, Arab patriots in Beirut, accused of treason, are publically hanged.

4 February 1917

Talaat Bey becomes grand vizier, acquiring the title pasha, while retaining his position as minister of the interior, thus cementing his power and underlining his role in the Ottoman government.

8 October 1918

Resignation of Talaat's cabinet. The three pashas (Talaat, Enver and Cemal) escape to Germany and are condemned to death in absentia by an Istanbul court martial. Other Ottoman leaders are interned by British authorities on the island of Malta.

1918–20

An Armenian Republic exists briefly as an independent state.

10 August 1920

The Treaty of Sèvres is signed by the Ottoman Empire, forcing it to accept the loss of large swaths of territory to the victors and to make other concessions, including the prosecution of war criminals, causing outrage among Turks.

February 1921

Aintab's successful resistance to the French siege during the Turkish War of Independence is honoured by Turkey's Grand National Assembly with the title 'Ghazi' (Muslim war hero). Gaziantep becomes the city's official name in 1928.

5 March 1921

Talaat Pasha is assassinated in Berlin by Soghomon Tehlirian, a young member of Operation Nemesis, an organization of Armenians dedicated to hunting down the *genocidaires*.

1921–2

Aintab's Armenians, who have been encouraged by the French army to return to their hometown, are driven out again when the French withdraw.

21 July 1922

Cemal Pasha is assassinated in Tbilisi by three members of Operation Nemesis.

4 August 1922

Enver Pasha is killed in battle against Soviet troops in Turkestan.

November 1922

The Kemalist government announces that the goods of any Armenian who failed to return to Turkey within three months will be seized.

24 July 1923

The Treaty of Lausanne revises the Treaty of Sèvres in favour of the new Turkish Republic. Armenians, Jews and Greeks are now legally referred to as 'minorities' within the Turkish state.

29 October 1923

Founding of the Turkish Republic with its capital in Ankara and Mustafa Kemal as its president.

26 August 1926

The CUP hitman Abdülkadir Bey, after serving as governor of Ankara province

from 1922 to 1923, is publically hanged for his alleged involvement in a plot to assassinate Mustafa Kemal. Cavid Bey, the CUP's former minister of finance, is publically hanged the same day on the same charges.

5 December 1939

Hasan Tahsin [Uzer] Bey dies in his bed, having served in the Turkish National Assembly after the war and representing, at various times, Ardahan, Erzurum and Konya.

1967

Ahmed Faik Erner, district governor of Aintab in August 1915 and an unsuccessful businessman after the war, dies in his bed at age eighty-eight.

1973

Mehmet Yasin Sani Kutluğ, military dispatcher of deportees at the rail station near Aintab, and responsible for the arrest and execution of fourteen-year-old Hagop Melkonian for keeping a diary, dies in his bed at age eighty-four, after a successful post-war career as a landowner and mayor of Halfeti county.

2005

The Millet Inn, built by Aintab Armenians in 1868–9 to support their schools, is designated a 'Turkish cultural asset' in a book commemorating Gaziantep's cultural heritage.

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