



Unidentified newspaper cutting

Fig. 1. The Ottoman parliament building near the Istanbul seafont, photographed in November 1918 when allied battle ships were anchored in front of the parliament.



Original in author's possession

Fig. 2. ‘*Bu da geçer Yâhû*’ (O God, this too shall pass!), by the famous calligrapher Tuğrakeş İsmail Hakkı (1873-1946), from the Sufi perception of the transitory nature of everything, good or bad. This was displayed in his shop window during the occupation years, 1918-22. It rapidly became a slogan of national resistance and began to decorate all shop windows belonging to Muslim/Turkish tradesmen.

Debating the Armenian Massacres in the Last Ottoman Parliament, November – December 1918

by Ayhan Aktar

No serious historian of the nations and nationalism can be a committed political nationalist, except in the sense of believers in the literal truth of the Scriptures, while unable to make contributions to evolutionary theory, are not precluded from making contributions to archaeology and Semitic philology. Nationalism requires too much belief in what is patently not so.

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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the question ‘what happened to the Ottoman Armenians in 1915?’ is deceptively simple. Certainly, the answer is far from straightforward; it is becoming progressively more politically encumbered and is now polarized into two distinct and uncompromising discourses. The first of these was set up by a group of Turkish nationalist historians and their foreign colleagues in the early 1980s. They argued that during World War One the Ottoman Armenians staged an armed uprising in Eastern Anatolia and collaborated with the invading Russian army. Hence the Young Turks in power known as *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (the Committee of Union and Progress, hereafter the CUP) in Istanbul decided to ‘relocate’ the Armenian population to deserts in Syria and Iraq. According to this narrative, the decision for relocation should be interpreted simply as a strategic measure to secure the rear of the Ottoman Army fighting against the Russians on the Eastern front. One of the major proponents of this ‘official thesis’, was the late Ambassador Kamuran Gürün. According to him:

Various deaths occurred for various reasons during the relocation. Some of the deaths were due to epidemics, some were due to climatic factors, some were due to the hardships suffered during the journey, some were due to attacks, because officials did not protect them or because officials engaged in illegal acts . . . Many others died while fighting against the Turks in the Russian Army which they joined as volunteers.²

Naturally this mode of reasoning tried to minimize the death toll of Armenians, and justify as ‘collateral’ the nature of the subsequent deaths during these massive deportations. Gürün also estimated conservatively that ‘the number of casualties of the Armenians of Turkey, for all reasons, did not exceed 300,000’.³ However, alternative opinions suggest a figure not less than 900,000.

Taking these ‘facts’ as the main premise of analysis, a corpus of ‘semi-official’ literature proliferated in Turkey from the early 1980s, which shared a common narrative structure.⁴ Central to this structure was the unquestioned belief that Muslims and Christians had lived peacefully together within the Ottoman *millet* system until it collapsed in the second half of nineteenth century. This collapse was, to a large extent, the fault of the Great Powers who intervened in the domestic affairs of the Ottoman Empire and exploited the position of the non-Muslim minorities living there. Later, the Armenian revolutionary elites, captivated by the false promises of self-determination and independence, took up arms and organized rebellions against the Sultan. Finally, during World War One the Armenians sided with the invading Russian army and consequently had to be deported to Syria and Iraq.

Next, this defensive line of argument against the ‘allegations of the so-called Armenian genocide’ was replaced with a new and intensified counter-offensive. In the last decade, a group of state-sponsored Turkish historians have argued that it was actually the Muslim population of Anatolia which was massacred by Armenians and subjected to genocide. In order to prove this point, they exhumed ‘newly discovered mass-graves’ in Eastern Anatolia and could thus wave bones and skulls to the cameras, for Turkish TV, as proof that innocent Muslim people were massacred by the armed Armenian rebels during the First World War.

But the debate has not belonged solely to local historians with different views on one chapter of late Ottoman history never discussed until the early 1970s. Instead, following the resolutions of several European parliaments in the last decade to recognize the deportation and massacre of the Ottoman Armenians as ‘genocide’, and the approval of Turkey’s candidacy for membership to the EU in 2004, the debate on the fate of Ottoman Armenians has reached the international stage, and as consequence, has become more and more contaminated with political considerations. A considerable proportion of the Turkish public has become convinced since the late 1990s that the pressures exerted on the nation by the Armenian diaspora and European parliaments to recognize the ‘so-called Armenian genocide’ are another imperialist plot to divide the Turkish fatherland. So this debate not only triggered already deeply ingrained fears within the Turkish collective conscience, it has also begun to haunt the Turkish political agenda. Such fears find fertile ground in Turkey. For instance, American historian Justin McCarthy – who is one of the staunch supporters of the official Turkish line – concluded his lecture at

a special session of the Turkish parliament in Ankara in 2005 with the following words:

How can it be right to become a member of an organization [EU] that demands you lie as the price of admission? Would any honest man join an organization that said, '*you can only join us if you first falsely say that your father was a murderer?*'... History teaches that the Armenian nationalists will not stop their claims if the Turks forget the truth and say there was an Armenian Genocide... I hope and trust that the EU will reject the demands of the Armenian nationalists... But whatever the EU demands, I have faith in the honour of the Turks... I know that the Turks will never say their fathers were murderers. I have faith in the Turks.⁵

Unsurprisingly, Professor McCarthy received a standing ovation from the deputies. But this type of political rhetoric could also create fear, and even paranoia, in a society where the individuals had been educated in such a way that the historical threat of dismemberment, xenophobia and self-victimization had been an indispensable part of their political socialization.

It must be clear by now that we are not dealing with a simple academic disagreement between historians. In fact Gerard Libaridian rightly argues, 'the entrenched position of each side is now part of their [Armenians' and Turks'] respective identities, identities that not only define the boundaries of the ethno-cultural self-definitions but also the socio-political context within which they see their present and project the future'.⁶ Over the last two years conservative and nationalist political circles in Turkey have also exploited the Turkish-Armenian debate as a means of opposing the reform processes and to hinder further negotiations with the EU.

The second discourse, the historiography produced by Armenian and pro-Armenian scholars, is very different, and rightly underlines the basic fact that the deportations and massacres of 1915 brought to an end the collective existence of the Armenian people in Anatolia. For the sake of simplification, we can say that such nationalist Armenian historians believe that what happened to Ottoman Armenians in 1915 was the first coherent, well-organized and premeditated genocide of the twentieth century. But such historiography is problematic too, not least when early events like the inter-communal clashes between Muslims and Armenians are read in retrospect, and employing hindsight. Any kind of armed conflict between the Ottoman army, Kurdish regiments and Armenian revolutionaries in the 1890s therefore is interpreted within this teleological model as 'dress rehearsal' or the preliminary events which led to an organized genocide in 1915.

A further, more theoretical, problem originates from the discipline of 'genocide studies' itself. Many Armenian and pro-Armenian scholars start

their analyses with the UN 'Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide' which became a document for international law from the day of its adoption in 1948. As a result, genocide studies stands at the junction where international law and history/social sciences intersect. Use of the legal concepts and categories embedded in this convention in order to interpret the historical data available for 1915 creates further complications. As Jacques Sémelin rightly argues, 'there is an inherent difficulty in using a legal concept as a category in social science analysis'.⁷ In social sciences and history the data is used to try to reach 'truth' through interpretation. The legal expert or a jurist on the other hand is searching for 'legal evidence'. Historical truth and 'legal truth' therefore might differ considerably. Besides, it is unbecoming for historians to play amateur jurists, or public prosecutors transforming their historical writings into legal treatises. For instance, Vahakn N. Dadrian – one of the very few Armenian historians who can read sources in Turkish – tries to illustrate the 'genocidal intent' of the CUP by underlining certain common denominators between the CUP and Nazis:

Perpetration of genocide requires the presence of genocidal intent. The preceding discussion indicates, if not demonstrates, a certain interconnection at such a mental level between incidence of the Armenian genocide and of the Jewish Holocaust. An additional detail, to be discussed now, is the extent to which the murderous legacy of the Mongol warlord Genghis Khan emerges as a nexus, as a functional link between Ittihadists [the CUP] and the Nazis... there can be no doubt that the example of Genghis Khan impacted the organization and implementation of both the Armenian and Jewish genocides.⁸

Vahakn Dadrian goes on to explain how Hitler admired the 'merciless murderousness' of Genghis Khan and to highlight similar attitude among the Young Turks, citing the example of Enver Pasha's uncle, Halil Pasha, who was a commander on Syrian front and ordered the massacre of thousands of Armenians. Drawing on the testimony of allied German Colonel Ernst Paraquin, who worked under the command of Halil Pasha, Dadrian informs us that Halil Pasha named his youngest son Genghis and daydreamed of conquering Turkistan in the near future!

Here, a third problem emerges. This line of argument was clearly rooted in Orientalist images of the 'terrible Turk', prevalent in Europe. Many Armenian scholars base their explanations on such crude nationalist analyses and bitterly essentialist premises. Again Dadrian, in his major work, argues that the militaristic *weltanschauung* of the Turks, combined with the limited tolerance associated with Islam, created a cultural setting favourable to genocide against Christians.⁹ What is inconsistent here is

that neither the Islamic faith nor the military were the main instruments of massacre. Besides, is it not un-academic for a scholar to categorize any people or culture as inherently murderous? Michael Mann presents a more balanced argument in his excellent work: '[Armenian genocide] was not primarily an Islamic but a secular nationalist genocide, though the long European struggle between Christian and Muslim had left deep marks on community enmities'.¹⁰

Some common ground might yet be found in the simple observation that since the mid 1990s Turkish society has entered the introspective process of 'soul searching', regardless of opinion or affiliation. Many taboos are now openly discussed as the result of democratization and the requirements of candidacy to the EU. The opening of private TV channels has provided discussion programmes with ratings comparable to soap operas or football matches. Many national myths have been brought under scrutiny and many long-silenced issues, previously swept under the carpet, have been discussed in public quite openly. The critique of Turkish nationalism and the question of the Armenian genocide is no exception, although such debates have proved divisive.

But to contest and challenge such entrenched nationalist historical paradigms, supported by the establishment, is no easy task. When a group of social scientists and historians teaching in Turkish universities and abroad started to discuss 'what really happened to the Ottoman Armenians in 1915?' their discussions were conducted in private first and later found their way into the Turkish press in the form of interviews. Of course, the works of the Armenian or pro-Armenian scholars were translated into Turkish and read extensively, despite being tagged with 'politically incorrect' labels, negative stereotypes and many essentialist statements about Turks and Islam in general. Eric Hobsbawm's words concerning believers who have absolute devotion to Scriptures were certainly applicable to Armenian nationalist historiography, which had 'too much belief in what is patently not so'. Revengeful assertions and generalizations based upon nationalist sentiment reduced the credibility of this literature, although it contributed a lot to our understanding of the processes of mass murder. Furthermore, the narrative structure and style of these works was similar to legal indictments in a criminal tribunal. The quest for the 'politics of genocide recognition', and the goal of trying to prove 'genocide' and especially 'premeditation and genocidal intent' at all costs, regrettably transformed some Armenian scholars of the diaspora into amateur jurists.

In May 2005 a group of critical and anti-nationalist Turkish scholars, myself included, organized a conference in Istanbul entitled 'The Ottoman Armenians during the Demise of the Empire: Issues of Democracy and Scientific Responsibility'. This triggered much public debate and was immediately branded a 'genocide conference' in the Turkish media. The aim had been to present the multiplicity of perspectives that existed

within Turkish academia and the public sphere, hitherto not included in the official accounts. Hence, the three-day programme was designed so as to include more than fifty Turkish scholars and public intellectuals analyzing various dimensions of the Armenian question. A day before the conference opened the president of Bosphorus University decided to postpone it because of mounting pressure from the Turkish government and the state, as well as increasing concerns about the threat from protesters to the security of participants. The *coup de grace* that confirmed the postponement came from a discussion in the Turkish Parliament on the same day, when an opposition-party deputy, retired Ambassador Şükrü Elekdağ, brought the issue to the floor and accused both Bosphorus University and the conference participants of ‘committing treason against the Turkish nation’. The government spokesman, Cemil Çiçek, Minister of Justice, responded not only by concurring, but by accusing the conference of ‘stabbing the Turkish nation in the back’, borrowing an expression from Hitler.

The conference was finally held four months later at a different university (23–25 September 2005). The nationalist militants were again mobilized, and threw tomatoes and eggs at the participants. A day before, the ‘Association of Retired Army Officers’ threatened to parade in front of the university’s gates. Regardless, and with the assistance of the AKP government, the conference was successfully held under the strictest security measures. This article is the English version of the paper I presented at this conference.

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In this book, great effort has been put forth to describe the pure reality by taking into account nothing but humanity. All the greedy actions: killing people, scrambling for land and overwhelming mankind by blood and fire, must be in our conviction, condemned absolutely . . . My soul equally suffers for all the Turks and the Armenians who have painfully perished during this terrible period.¹¹

Ahmet Refik (1876–1937)

The quotation above is taken from the foreword to *İki Komite, İki Kitâî* (Two Committees, Two Massacres) a memoir by the prominent historian Ahmet Refik (later Altnay) who had first published his recollections in *İkdam* daily newspaper between December 1918 and January 1919. One of the committees referred to in the title of this book is the *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (the Committee of Union and Progress), effectively in power from 1913 to 1918, which carried out the Armenian deportations and massacres. The second committee is the *Dashnakzutiun* (Armenian Revolutionary Federation,

hereafter ARF) the Armenian nationalist political party. It is of particular significance that the author chose the term *kitâl*, meaning 'massacre'.

The first chapter of this book covers the impressions of Ahmet Refik Bey relating to the year 1915 when he was in charge of 'The Military Transportation Commission' in Eskişehir, in Central Anatolia. Ahmet Refik does not hesitate to confront the Armenian Question, describing the oppression and misery the Armenians suffered, seized from homes in various parts of Anatolia and forced to join the grim and arduous deportation marches. He harshly criticized the CUP administration responsible for the deportation policy and its implementation. In the second chapter he recounts his observations as a journalist reporting from Erzurum at the Eastern front after the withdrawal of the Russian army in 1918. In great detail he also narrates the massacres carried out by the members of the ARF in that region.

Ahmet Refik was one of the few intellectuals who succeeded in keeping a critical distance from the bloody nationalistic confrontation that took place in the Ottoman lands from 1912 to 1922. He ends his foreword: 'For a historian coming a hundred years later, this little book will be a document revealing the reality in all its tragedy'.¹² Indeed, eighty-eight years after its publication, Ahmet Refik's book has gained in significance because it provides the first-hand impressions of an Ottoman intellectual concerning the Armenian massacres.

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The aim of this article is to draw on the debates about the Armenian Question in the Ottoman Parliament during the last two months of 1918 and to analyse certain issues in detail. I shall observe that some of the views repeatedly put forward nowadays by official circles in Turkey were originally expressed in the Ottoman Parliament. Further, I shall try to analyse how conditions resulting from the Armistice period and the occupation of Istanbul affected these discussions.¹³

THE ALLIED OCCUPATION OF ISTANBUL AND POLITICAL TURMOIL

The resignation of the Talat Pasha cabinet and the signing of the Mudros Armistice with Britain on 30 October 1918 by the Ahmet İzzet Pasha cabinet created political turmoil in the Ottoman capital. With the Armistice, it was understood that the country would be occupied, so to evade prosecution the CUP leadership left the country on the night of 1 November 1918 on board a German submarine. The political atmosphere in the Ottoman capital was highly charged.¹⁴

First of all, the political opposition, suppressed since 1912, argued vehemently both in the press and in Parliament that the CUP was responsible for all disasters caused by the First World War. Secondly, the

agenda of the Ottoman parliament was dominated by the attempt to hold the CUP accountable for the Armenian massacres, and thereby absolve the rest of the political establishment in Turkey from responsibility. In this way, the Ottoman elite tried to prepare its defence against the accusations which could be expected at the imminent Paris Peace Conference of 1919, and to secure the rights of Ottoman citizens *vis-à-vis* the victors of the war.

During the war the CUP government had censored all publication pertaining to the negative course of the war. Though it did indeed lift political censorship by June 1918, it had decided to continue military censorship in order to conceal from the public the fact that the situation at the fronts had turned to the disadvantage of the Ottoman army. From summer of 1918 on, numerous newspapers and magazines commenced publication: a result of first the relaxation and later the total removal of censorship. After the flight of the CUP leadership in the first week of November, political pressure on the press ceased. At this point the destruction, defeat and misery suffered between 1912 and 1918 began to be questioned in the press. In short, the Ottoman capital rediscovered political opposition and self-criticism in a relatively free political environment.

At the final party congress, held a week after the Mudros Armistice was signed, the CUP legally dissolved itself. At the same party congress, *Teceddüt Partisi* (Renewal Party) was founded instead, under the leadership of Fethi Bey [later Okyar]. The members of Parliament previously affiliated with the CUP became deputies of the new party. In the following two months there was a burst of political participation and nearly twenty new political parties and associations were established. Besides newspapers and magazines which functioned as mouthpieces of the newly-founded political parties and associations, there were also publications that tried to cultivate a more independent position. In this period an important source of tension was the fact that according to Clause 7 of the Mudros Armistice, Istanbul was under occupation. The occupation forces of the Entente Powers did not directly seize the administration of the city, preferring that the Ottoman public bureaucracy continue to operate. The decision to keep the Ottoman Parliament functioning at that time was in accordance with the intention of the occupation forces not to intervene in local politics. Yet on 21 December 1918 Parliament was dissolved by the order of Sultan Mehmet Vahdettin under the pretext of holding new elections. However, the elections were postponed for a long period. When Parliament finally reconvened with the newly-elected deputies on 12 January 1920 it was dominated by supporters of the resistance movement which had developed in Anatolia, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Pasha (later Atatürk). This alarmed the occupation forces, which raided the Parliament on 16 March 1920, terminated its juridical existence and sent many of the deputies into exile in Malta. Remaining deputies fled to Ankara and

later formed the legislative body of the new parliament that assumed administrative functions during the Turkish War of Independence, 1920–22. From March 1920, the occupation of Istanbul was official and the Ottoman cabinets, severed from the Parliament, worked under the command of occupation forces that had the last word in the administration of Istanbul.¹⁵

In February 1919, when allied forces under the command of French General Franchet d'Espèray held occupation ceremonies, the Muslim/Turkish population of Istanbul realized that the war was completely lost. Moreover, the enthusiasm of non-Muslim minorities for the occupation forces had aroused anger and resistance. Four months earlier, on 13 November 1918, sixty-one allied warships anchored in the harbour and brought maritime transport between the two shores of Istanbul to a temporary halt. Just a week before, Mustafa Kemal Pasha, who had been in charge of Ottoman forces in Syria, left his mission after the collapse on the Palestinian Front and the occupation of Mosul by British forces. Interestingly, on the day the allied ships took control of the Bosphorus, Mustafa Kemal Pasha arrived at the train station on the Asian shore and was subjected to a long wait before he could cross to the European side of the city. It is reported that the view of the foreign battleships in the harbour inspired him to comment: 'They will go back the way they have come!'.¹⁶

It is hardly surprising that all these rapid changes caused great frustration and disappointment among the Muslim/Turkish population of Istanbul. The people of Istanbul, unable to obtain accurate information from the front between 1914 and November 1918, continuously misinformed by the government and comforted by false promises of 'final victory', now experienced 'total surrender' in the course of only a month. This began on 8 October 1918, with the resignation of the last CUP cabinet, was followed by the signing of the Armistice on 30 October, and ended on 13 November, when enemy battleships anchored at the entrance of the Bosphorus. October and November of 1918 can thus be summed up as 'a period of social trauma' for the Ottoman elite and the Muslim/Turkish people of Istanbul.

During this period the renowned calligrapher Tuğrakeş İsmail Hakkı (1873–1946) wrote '*Bu da geçer Yâhû*' (O God, this too shall pass!) and put it up in his shop window (Fig. 2). This sentence, originating from the Sufi perception of the transitory nature of everything, good or bad, was rapidly transformed into a slogan of national resistance and began to decorate all shop windows belonging to Muslim/Turkish tradesmen.¹⁷

Yahya Kemal's poem '1918' conveys the emotional climate of that period – the combination of feeling ill-treated and repressed, of *ressentiment* and pain:

The dead ones had already passed away,
We're suffering with the living ones.

In our own country, we're no more than a despised community
 The dead ones, at last, were liberated from this chaos
 At the back of their eyelids, the vision of the good old fatherland,
 Remained as 'our place' until Doomsday.

Those who are left behind: young, old, women and men
 They're all in, wrecked, living with the suffering of such a destiny,
 With the pain of seeing the enemy in the fatherland.

In our country we are in the middle of a nightmare, it's true
 But this cannot last long,
 The dawn will certainly break.
 One day, our army will wipe the stain away with fire and blood,
 That is this [Mudros] Armistice, a black smudge on humanity.¹⁸

After the CUP leadership fled abroad and Istanbul was occupied by the Entente Powers, it was assumed that the victorious countries would start to determine who was responsible for the Armenian massacres and take legal action against them. It is possible to trace through the press of that time, the attempts of the Ottoman elite or representatives of certain institutions to argue that they had not been involved in the massacres. In the atmosphere of Armistice and occupation, everybody seemed too eager to emphasize their innocence.

In his memoirs Refik Halid [later Karay], a prominent Turkish novelist, mentions a reception hosted by Grand Vizier Damat Ferit Pasha in 1919 at the Lycée Impérial de Galata-Serai. The Grand Vizier, imitating European statesmen of the period by holding a reception in an elite school, invited not only the commanders of the occupation forces, but also foreign journalists. Before the dinner, the Grand Vizier and Ali Kemal Bey, the Minister of Education, made speeches. Refik Halid recounts the speech of Ragıp Bey, a graduate of the Lycée:

One of the directors of the Board of Public Debts Office and a graduate of the school, Ragıp Bey made a beautiful speech in French; there was one sentence within it that was both true and very precious for the school. 'Gentlemen,' he said, 'Not a single person educated in the Lycée Impérial de Galata-Serai is among those responsible for the war, deportations and mass-killings, this place is the home of free and virtuous people.'¹⁹

Ottoman intellectuals tried to avoid any imputation of being connected as individuals to the Armenian massacres, and also to stress that oppression and atrocities committed against Armenians were the work of a small minority in power, and that it was thus wrong to blame all.

DEBATE IN THE PARLIAMENT: WHY DID WE ENTER THIS WAR?

Discussion of the Armenian massacres in the Ottoman Parliament began with motions calling the Union and Progress governments to account. When on 4 November 1918 the Ottoman Parliament convened in Istanbul the political attempts to find the perpetrators started with the first motion, tabled by Baghdad-Divaniye deputy Fuat Bey a few days earlier. This demanded that the members of the Sait Halim Pasha and Talat Pasha cabinets be tried by the High Court.²⁰ The motion's ten clauses enumerated the actions of the two cabinets which had led the country towards destruction: entering World War One without valid reason; making false declarations in Parliament about the motivation for entering the war; rejecting proposals from the Entente Powers before war was declared; dragging the country into the war without obtaining certain guarantees from Germany; wasting lives during the war through individual misdeeds and frenzied actions without justification in military science; turning the country into a scene of catastrophe through 'provisional laws' that contradicted the spirit of general law and the Constitution; concealing the course of the war from the public; rejecting every single peace proposal made by Entente Powers during the war and thus bringing about this ominous end; enabling certain sections of the population to be enriched by speculation and profiteering and thus ruining the economic life of the country and limiting the freedom of press by applying censorship without relying on any specific law. Clause 10 made direct reference to the Armenian deportations and to the *Teshkilat-ı Mahsusa* (the Special Organization), an irregular military force organized by the CUP leadership that had carried out deportations and massacres. In this final clause the offences of the CUP-backed governments were summarized as follows:

Creating administrative chaos within the country and facilitating attacks of certain gangs against security of life, property and chastity [of the people] and thus contributing to the atrocities these gangs brought about.²¹

In the same session, Aydın Deputy Emanuel Emanuelidis, İzmir Deputy Vangel and Çatalca Deputy Tokinidis put forward a motion with more detailed claims, asking the new government about their attitude to the offences of CUP-backed governments, and their plans to deal with them. The crimes were listed in eight 'acts of government':

1. A population of one million people guilty of nothing except belonging to the Armenian nation were massacred and exterminated, including even women and children.
2. Two hundred and fifty thousand people of the Greek minority, which has been a true agent of civilization in this country for at least forty

centuries, were thrown out of the Ottoman territory and their properties were confiscated.

3. Before the war five hundred and fifty thousand Greek people were also massacred and exterminated along the coasts and inland districts of the Black Sea, Dardanelles, Marmara and the Prince's Islands, and their properties too were confiscated and usurped.
4. By prohibiting non-Muslims from engaging in any commercial activity and by leaving trade to the monopoly of certain influential people, nearly the entire nation was robbed.
5. [Armenian] deputies Zohrab Efendi and Varteks Efendi were murdered.
6. The treatment deemed proper for noble Arab people has constituted the main reason for recent disasters.
7. The lives of the two hundred and fifty thousand people [who were mainly non-Muslims] of the Labour Battalions constituted by way of mobilization were wasted as a result of starvation and deprivation.
8. Entering the World War without any reason and leaving a section of the country to the Bulgarians in order to attain this ominous honour.

The motion ended with three succinct questions:

What does the new government in power know about the perpetrators, how does it view the true nature of these acts and when will it start to take measures against all this?²²

With this motion, the Armenian deportations and general anti-minority policies of the Unionists (the CUP and its successors) were clearly set out in Parliament for the first time. The main objective of the three deputies (all non-Muslim) was to force the Ahmet İzzet Pasha cabinet, which was perceived as the 'rearguard cabinet' of the CUP, to take a stand on this issue.²³ Moreover, they hoped with this motion to cause trouble for the new government by also exploiting the flight abroad of the CUP leadership, and thus ensuring that immediate action could be taken to punish those involved in the Armenian deportations and massacres.

Yet it could not be expected that a government which included Unionists and which had signed the Mudros Armistice right after its foundation, would act in a tough and decisive manner regarding the Armenian question.²⁴ Aydın Deputy Emanuel Emanuelidis insisted that his main aim was to understand what the new government contemplated doing about this issue:

My intention is to know what the programme of the new government on this issue is. All the existing laws were unable to prevent this disaster. All the measures concerning this issue have failed. Does the new government have any internal policies in this regard?²⁵

Naturally the answer to this question was neither short nor simple. The members of the Ottoman Parliament had held their seats since the last election in 1914. There were Unionist deputies who could not raise their voices against the acts of the old governments during the war; indeed, some of them had been directly involved in the Armenian deportations and massacres. Moreover, there were deputies from regions like Yemen, Jerusalem, Medina, Baghdad, Aleppo, Mousul, Basra, Beirut and Damascus which had been under Ottoman rule for the 1914 election, but by the time of these debates were under British occupation. Thus it was politically impossible for the new government, obliged to make use of its executive power by relying on such a shaky base, to provide satisfying answers to the above-mentioned questions and to punish those involved in the Armenian massacres.

BUT TURKS HAVE SUFFERED TOO!

Fethi Bey, the Minister of the Interior and leader of the *Teceddüt* Party, which was founded to replace the CUP, replied to the motion of Aydın Deputy Emanuel Emanuelidis. He began by stating that the disasters experienced by the non-Muslim minorities had also happened to the Turkish people.

As you gentlemen know, within the last four years very bad and hazardous currents have passed through the atmosphere of the country and turned the country upside down. Because of this I assure you, Turkish people have suffered equal or even greater harm than the Greek, Armenian and Arab minorities. I wish that Emanuel Efendi had also mentioned that Turkish people suffered the same, or maybe even more than all these minorities.²⁶

Minister of Interior Fethi Bey then summarized the aim of the government as follows:

The approach of the government will be to grant freedom and perfect equality to all segments of society without making any distinction as to race or religion. Apart from this, it is the intention of the government to cure every single injustice done up until now, as far as the means allow, to make possible the return to their homes of those sent into exile, and to compensate for their material loss as far as possible. And activities have started to be carried out in this regard. But it is also our common duty to make sure that such an event does not recur, that nobody dares to commit such deeds and that officers or any other person who attempted to perpetuate such actions are prosecuted.²⁷

Emanuelidi Efendi reclaimed the floor after these remarks, and noting that as a member of the Ottoman Parliament he had the right to comment on various non-Muslim minority groups, he responded:

They have expressed that the Turkish segment of the society too has very much suffered and that they wish me to make a reference to this. I am just as affected by the suffering of Turkish people as I am by that of the Greek minority. The reason I did not mention the Turkish people is the fact that today sovereignty is exercised in the name of the Turkish majority. (Cries from the benches: ‘God willing, always’.)²⁸

When we read the minutes of Parliament in that period, we notice something else: while deputies of minority origin brought the actions of old governments on to the agenda and proposed motions aimed at pushing the new government to take a political stand against the cruelties and crimes committed, the Unionist deputies either tried to hinder the discussion by making use of the advantages granted them by internal statute, or took the position that ‘in the past, bad things happened; let’s not stir up these issues’.

The motion put forward by deputies of Armenian origin Deputy of Kozan Matyos Nalbantyan, Deputy of Aleppo Artin Boşgezenyan, Deputy of Erzurum Medetyan, Deputy of Sivas Dikran Barsamyan, Deputy of İzmir Onnik and Deputy of Maraş Agop Efendi during the session on 4 November 1918 was intended to force the government to take a clear position. It placed on the agenda demands that the deportation decision of 27 May 1915 and the decree of 27 September 1915 concerning expropriation of abandoned properties and real estate should be revoked, and that those deported from their native land be permitted to return. It further asserted that the administrative measures facilitating the sharing out among local notables of properties which had belonged to deported Armenians went absolutely against the spirit of the Ottoman Constitution of 1876. The last part of the motion demanded:

What does our Government think of doing to restore justice to destroyed families...[restore justice] for the crushed dignity and honour [of those individuals] and for all Ottoman citizens who perished, their orphans and widows who died unnecessarily and for the confiscated wealth and sacred things which all was the result of the laws and decrees put into force?²⁹

The government was asked to declare all the measures to be taken regarding this issue. Deputy of Kozan Matyos Nalbantyan Efendi, who had signed this motion, declared that he supported it not only as a representative of the Armenians but in the name of the ‘whole Ottoman nation’. Stating that all

deputies already knew the issue, he underlined how widespread its effects had been.

I find it superfluous to say here how people were treated on the basis of these laws and to what conditions people were exposed. I saw many friends expressing their grief by shedding tears. I know those who could only speak with tears in their eyes. Therefore sensitivity on this issue should not be attributed to things like 'fanaticism'. In the name of humanity, I appeal to your conscience; these matters have made us all weep. In my opinion, many family hearths were put out without any distinction of race and religious conviction. Yet their smoke is still rising. Today many women live in misery here and there.³⁰

The chairman of the session, Hüseyin Cahit (later Yalçın) Bey, then proposed to proceed to the next clauses and his proposal was accepted. In response to Nalbantyan's remarks, Minister of Interior Fethi Bey said that the government would try to provide 'the return of the deported [Armenians] to their districts', but added that it was uncertain whether those who returned would find any place to live or a hot meal to eat; thus, things should be taken care of slowly. Moreover, he reminded the parliament that complaints against officers committing atrocities and injustices had to be filed on an individual basis.

Still at the 4 November session, Minister of Interior Fethi Bey placed on the agenda the repeal of the decree dated 27 September 1915 concerning the sale of abandoned properties and Armenian deportations. Deputy of Aleppo Artin Boşgezenyan Efendi made a speech about this temporary law:

This is a knife, this is an axe that has caused great cruelty. By blunting this knife, this axe we cannot do away with that cruelty... There is still the blood of those who suffered on it... The houses it demolished are countless... We should not only repeal it but also request that those who relied on this law to ruin the country should be punished; those who passed and used this law for the purpose of murder should be punished too.

Up to that point the discussion had been conducted between deputies of minority origin and members of the government. Then Deputy of Trabzon, Mehmet Emin Bey took the floor, saying that during the discussion of the parliamentary inquiry he had not been able to voice his opinion. He challenged the figures given in the earlier eight-clause motion from Deputy of Aydın Emanuel Emanuelidi ('besides 550,000 people of Greek minority, 1,000,000 children and women were exterminated solely because they were Armenian while 250,000 people of Greek minority were deported'). This was the first mention in the Ottoman Parliament of the 'debate on the casualty figures' which is still an inevitable

part of all discussion about the Armenian question. Mehmet Emin Bey announced that as long as those involved in Armenian deportations were not punished, he would give no vote of confidence to the government:

It is not right to undo one injustice by means of another injustice. I believe Emanuelidi Efendi has exaggerated on this point and understood that he departed from the issue a little bit. Yes, Gentlemen, I also say that our officials butchered many Armenians, including women and children and that their properties were plundered. But there was a beginning to all of this.³¹

Mehmet Emin Bey then started to relate his impressions of 1907 in Muş where he was public prosecutor. He said that a document belonging to an Armenian nationalist had made clear that Armenians were always trying to prove that their population in the region was higher than it actually was, and suggested that Emanuelidi Efendi had obviously been influenced by such figures. He asked too why Emanuelidi Efendi did not mention the Turks who had also suffered atrocities in this context. At this point, the discussion began to get heated. Mehmet Emin Bey was interrupted by cries such as 'Let us not open up this issue again!'. Later on Mehmet Emin said that claims about the deportations of the Greek minority were correct, but explained that Greeks had taken guns and ammunition from Russian enemy ships coming to the shores of the Black Sea and had engaged in brigandage, and for this reason were forced into involuntary migration 'as it was deemed necessary'. At the end of Mehmet Emin's speech, he stressed that nothing had happened 'without cause!'. Artin Efendi responded 'May God curse the tyrants', to cries of 'Amen' from other deputies.

MUTUAL KILLINGS OR MASSACRES?

On 8 November 1918, four days after these discussions, the cabinet of Ahmet İzzet Pasha resigned and Tevfik Pasha formed another cabinet, which received the full support of Sultan Mehmet Vahdettin. The formation of this new cabinet, which contained no Unionist deputies, was a source of tension for the Unionists and for journalists close to *Hürriyet ve İtilaf Partisi* (Freedom and Harmony Party), who accordingly intensified their criticism.

At the session on 18 November the programme of the new Tevfik Pasha cabinet was read out by Minister of Foreign Affairs Mustafa Reşit Pasha and discussed. It consisted of very general wishes for peace, and made no mention of any measures directed at those involved in the Armenian deportations and massacres. Deputy of Aleppo Artin Boşgezenyan during this session expressed his views pertaining to the efforts for peace. He brought up the

issue of the Armenian deportations, which he felt would probably come up at the Paris Peace Conference that was soon to convene:

Soon every nation, be it victorious or defeated, will sit around the conference table. I say that we should not go to that table with empty hands. We should go there prepared to defend ourselves and protect our rights. Let us speak frankly: Gentlemen, you know that in the eyes of the world of civilization and of politics, Turkey is today in the dock. (Cries of 'God forbid!')... There has been a great murder that constitutes the most mournful, the bloodiest phase of Ottoman history. This great murder that has shaken both earth and heaven is known as the Armenian massacre, the Armenian tragedy. The Turkish nation is being accused of this crime. But in fact those who should be blamed are not the Turkish people but the former Turkish government and/or administration. (Cries of 'Bravo')... I say that this great murder, of which they are accusing the Turkish nation, was committed by the former administration, to be more exact, by a gangster administration. The most dreadful link in the chain of suspicion thrown around the neck of the Turks, namely the Armenian tragedy, was committed by a small but noisy minority in the centre, and their officers in the provinces, such as governors, local governors, commanders of the gendarmerie, police chiefs, soldiers of the gendarmerie, the Special Organization, etc. To me, blaming a whole nation for the crimes of a few murderers, and some lunatics, is an act worthy of a gang. There can be a murderer or five murderers following such a policy but it is not appropriate to condemn a whole nation because of this. This [accusation] would be [a kind of legal] banditry – I cannot find any other expression.³²

The efforts of Deputy of Aleppo Artin Boşgezenyan to explain all that had happened by comparing the CUP leadership to a gang and his proposal to punish everybody involved in these affairs before the Paris Conference so that the Turks would not go there with 'empty hands', caused a heated debate, during which Deputy of Sivas Dikran Barsamyan demanded that the new government immediately take action in favour of Armenians whom he referred to 'remnants of the sword'. Deputy of Muş İlyas Sami Bey next took the floor, trying to explain it all:

Gentlemen, was this a massacre or mutual killing? I will determine this in your presence. [Artin Boşgezenyan Efendi] absolved the Turks. I am now asking officially for the re-evaluation of this great murder, of which they absolved every member of the nation. Was it murder or mutual killing? I am addressing all humanity with the voice of my conscience and saying that although the secondary matters, the consequences, the particulars were painful, deplorable and tragic, I believe that no one has considered how all this began. At its inception, this situation was a

mutual killing. Gentlemen, if it is a necessity for the present Parliament and Government and humanity to understand all this, then please allow me here to present the realities in all clarity. That is, please do not lose your temper.³³

After summarizing the development of the Armenian nationalist movement, İlyas Sami Bey turned to the rebellion in Van that took place at the beginning of the First World War, saying that seventy per cent of the Muslim population in Van was killed. That rebellion, according to him, 'the weapon thrust into the heart and soul of the Ottoman government by Armenians', had 'brought about the tragic consequences which I myself hate and am disgusted by', when the Turkish side had responded with massacres. Mutual massacre followed, according to İlyas Sami Bey, but it was Armenians who started it all. He demanded punishment of everyone involved, on both sides, saying that 'Muslim or Armenian, whoever they are, they are to be beheaded like a dragon; they are to be squashed. This should be recorded exactly in these words'.

In this speech İlyas Sami Bey justified the things done by arguing that 'if in Britain such a rebellion had taken place and a part of the society had betrayed [the British government], it would discipline and destroy them by pouring cannon balls of stone and iron on to them'. The fact that Britain was cited as an example is very meaningful because during the Easter days of 1916, as a result of the rebellion started by the IRA, the administration of Dublin had been taken over by the rebels for a period. That rising was bloodily repressed by British forces. In fact during this section of İlyas Sami's speech, those on the benches of the Parliament cried: 'As in Ireland!'³⁴

After some further debate it was Deputy of Kozan Matyos Nalbantyan's turn to speak. Pointing out that İlyas Sami Bey claimed that the Armenian question was limited to certain events and mutual massacres in Eastern Anatolia, he posed a challenge.

Then I ask İlyas Sami Bey: if a band [of Armenians] comes out and causes some incidents, and inhabitants of that region [Eastern Anatolia] participate in those events and perform some illegal acts, would this situation necessitate the removal and extermination of all Armenians including for instance those Armenians in the West like in Edirne, İzmit and Armenians living along the [Western Anatolian] coast, the complete destruction of their honour and the confiscation and plunder of their properties?... To what extent was it right for the government to observe all this happen and find all Armenians guilty and then take such a decision about them? Did the government get out of control? Individuals

and tribes might get angry and out of control but the principle of government action is the treatment of all matters with justice and equality.³⁵

This speech by Nalbantyan Efendi was an important intervention, pointing out the individual responsibility for crime from the juridical point of view. He wound up with these words:

The government cannot execute me because of the crimes committed by my son. Neither can it behead me nor destroy me in any way. This is unacceptable. To say that Armenians caused all this to happen is by no means reasonable and cannot be accepted... We will punish those responsible and will return the damaged properties to the owners. We have to make clear that we will give back their legitimate wives, their girls and the little children who are still in the hands of the savages. We have to demonstrate our sensitivity towards the world of civilization, our humaneness and our veneration of all things sacred.

He thus made clear that he was expecting the government to take a political and moral stand.³⁶ After this a motion to end the debate was submitted in order to proceed to a vote of confidence concerning the programme of the government.

At the session on 11 December a debate was started by deputies of the Greek community about the forced migration of the Ottoman Greeks in Anatolia and Eastern Thrace during the war and the plunder of their properties. The quarrel between Deputy of Trabzon Yorgo Yuvanidis Efendi and the Deputy of Edirne Mehmet Faik Bey is indicative of the CUP policies pertaining to forced migration of the Greek population and the Turkification of Anatolia during the First World War.³⁷

At the same session, the Deputy of Edirne Mehmet Faik Bey argued that the Ottomans had not invented forced migrations and deportations, they had learned such tactics from neighbouring countries like Greece and Bulgaria. (This was a reference to the ethnic cleansing of 450,000 Rumelian Muslims during the Balkan Wars, 1912–1913.) He stressed that a total of 28,800 Ottoman Greeks had left the country to join the Greek army during the Balkan Wars and the First World War and had fought against the Ottomans. He did accept that 82,000 Ottoman Greeks from the settlements around the Sea of Marmara had been deported to the inner parts of Anatolia, saying that the deportation was recommended by the Ottoman Chief of Staff. During the Gallipoli Campaign in 1915, he said, allied submarines passed the Dardanelles and conducted ‘hit and run’ operations against the Ottoman Navy in the Marmara Sea.

According to Ottoman military intelligence reports the local Greeks were instrumental in provision of food and other necessities to these submarines.³⁸

In next day's session, on 12 December, Deputy of Kozan, Matyos Nalbantyan Efendi responded forcefully to renewed claims about the sufferings of Turks:

[Deputy of Mosul Mehmet Emin Bey] says we have suffered, Turks have suffered, too. But the suffering of Turks is the suffering of a majority in power . . . Some people [namely] Armenians were killed like animal herds. Of course, I accept the suffering of the Turks. But as a matter of principle, there are two types of death: one is noble, the other is ignominious. In any case, we have to acknowledge this. Turks died heroically at the frontiers, Armenians were killed ignominiously.

The point Matyos Nalbantyan Efendi wanted to stress here was that the battlefield deaths of the Turks in defence of their country at Gallipoli, the Russian front and Palestine, should not be compared to the deaths of those who were massacred by the roads.

DEBATES IN THE OTTOMAN SENATE: WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

At the Ottoman Senate (*Meclis-i Ayan*), which convened on 21 November 1918, the motion of Ahmet Rıza Bey was read out.³⁹ Ahmet Rıza had been a senior member of the Young Turk movement and had opposed the despotic regime of Abdülhamid II (1876 – 1909) for many years from Paris. His motion called for those responsible for the decision to enter the war to be immediately identified by a proposed Parliamentary Investigation Committee and those culpable to be brought before the High Court. Furthermore, he demanded that 'the atrocities committed under the name of deportation' be investigated; that the negative impact throughout the country be determined; and that those involved in these affairs be prosecuted. The final section of the motion declared that 'many acts and even crimes were perpetrated against all Ottomans; in particular, injustices without precedent in Ottoman history were committed against my Arab, Armenian and Greek fellow-citizens'. Ahmet Rıza Bey demanded that the government investigate these atrocities at the High Court, that the perpetrators be put on trial; and that these atrocities be accepted as individual crimes. In short, they had to be prosecuted by the Public Prosecutor's Office and ultimately those found responsible 'delivered to the grip of justice'.⁴⁰

As in the Parliament, Major General Rıza Pasha replied that among those who suffered atrocities and maltreatment there were also Turks, but that in the motion of Ahmet Rıza Bey there was no mention of Turkish people. Turks, he said, 'suffered no less than the other minorities. Therefore

I insist on my proposal. The term “Turks” should be added to the motion’.⁴¹ Ahmet Rıza Bey, who opposed efforts to generalize the issue, began to speak again and summarized his motion with great clarity within the framework of constitutional law:

Briefly I repeat that I do not acknowledge the CUP or any other organ as the perpetrator of the crime. I acknowledge only the executive power. There is no Union and Progress within the executive power. It is the executive power that is responsible for the war, for the crimes. Even if a secret association or others encourage such criminal acts, the blame falls again on the government for having allowed that. It is the government that did not perform its duty. As the government is unfortunately the Turkish government, I did not refer to what the Turks have suffered. Yes, they suffered, too. That government had no pity on the Turks either.⁴²

At the same session, former governor and Minister of Interior, Reşit Akif Pasha made a very important speech. He had been a member of Ahmet İzzet Pasha’s cabinet as the head of *Şura-i Devlet*, the Ottoman Council of State. This short-lived cabinet, known as the ‘rearguard cabinet’ of the CUP, ruled the country less than a month and signed the Mudros Armistice with Britain on 30 October 1918. During his short term Reşit Akif Pasha conducted an administrative inquiry into the organization of Armenian deportations and massacres in 1915. Although the scope of his research was limited, his findings were crucial to an understanding of the mechanisms behind this extensive mobilization and the massacre of the Ottoman Armenians. Reşit Akif Pasha summarized his findings:

There are certain confidential things that I learned during my public service, which did not last more than 25 to 30 days, in the Ahmet İzzet Pasha cabinet. In that respect, I encountered something quite strange. These orders of deportation had been given by the well-known Minister of Interior [Talat Pasha] and officially communicated to [governors in] the provinces. Following these official communiqués, the Central Committee [of the CUP] sent orders everywhere in order to secure the gangs to complete their devilish duty. Therefore, the gangs went further and cruel mutual killings took place. Here, [the activities of] this assembly known as the Central Committee [of the CUP] – that cruel and ruthless group which was solely responsible for these massacres and the countless troubles which we inflicted on the [Ottoman] State and innocent nation – was more effectual than the official orders. In my opinion, it is crucial to be able to decipher the soul of the matter when sufficient research and investigation be conducted. For ten years – not four! – there has been a treacherous group of people destroying not only the Islamic world but all of humanity. This [group] must be identified and made known to the

public. If this is done properly the whole truth will be revealed in its clarity and it will later serve as a terrible lesson to our children and to the next generations.⁴³

From this sincere and powerful speech of Reşit Akif Pasha, we can deduce the following. First of all, we note the central position of the Minister of Interior, Talat Pasha, in the deportation and massacre of Armenians. He is strategically placed as Minister of Interior and Head of the Central Committee of the CUP. Secondly, Talat Pasha had first sent the official deportation orders to governors and local officials in the provinces from his office in the Ministry of the Interior. At the same time, as the head of party organization he cabled another set of orders to local representatives of the CUP 'in order to secure the gangs to complete their devilish duty'. Talat Pasha had been a post-office director before the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 and he had a telegraph instrument installed in his Istanbul home from where these 'special orders' were sent.⁴⁴ Thirdly, while Talat Pasha organized the deportation of Armenians by using the Ottoman public bureaucracy in the provinces centrally attached to the Ministry of the Interior, he also mobilized the gangs of *Teshkilat-ı Mahsusa* (the Special Organization) so as to initiate the massacres and the plundering of Armenian property. From the speech of Reşit Akif Pasha we can conclude, therefore, that the system worked efficiently, while most of the higher-ranking CUP members in Istanbul knew nothing about all these massacres unless they travelled to Anatolia which was difficult due to the war conditions. There is no doubt then that the communications system developed by the Minister of Interior Talat Pasha enabled the whole operation to be conducted discreetly.

On 9 December 1918, Minister of Justice Haydar Molla came to the Senate in order to respond to Ahmet Rıza Bey's motion. First of all, the Minister made a general presentation of the crimes and their perpetrators as indicated by this motion. He particularly enumerated the types of crimes committed within the framework of the Armenian deportations. First were the crimes committed by state officials, which had to be brought before the High Court. Second were the crimes committed by politicians. Third were the crimes that may have been committed by the ordinary people other than politicians or state officials.

The Minister of Justice said that in order for public prosecutors to be able to start an investigation of 'ordinary citizens' who committed the above-mentioned crimes, they required either information about the committed crime or a formal written complaint by the victims. He also pointed out that state officers and politicians could not be put on trial without a preliminary investigation. According to the fifth clause of the 'Provisional Law Concerning the Trial of State Officials', issued while the CUP government was in power and still valid, the crimes committed by state officials while in office must first be investigated by their superiors, who would function as

the 'investigative magistrate'. According to this provisional law, investigations of state officials involved in the Armenian deportations and massacres would be excluded from the jurisdiction of investigative magistrates and public prosecutors who worked under the Ministry of Justice.⁴⁵

The legal obstacle presented by Minister of Justice Haydar Molla as an excuse for not being able to proceed rapidly with the investigations was in fact a rule binding the government. In addition to all this, when a commission of their superiors made a decision such as 'no prosecution is necessary' of state officers against whom there were various claims, there was no mechanism by which public prosecutors could overrule this decision.

Which authority, then, was competent to investigate these crimes and put on trial the state officers suspected of collaborating with the inhabitants of the cities where Armenian deportations and massacres took place? According to Minister of Justice Haydar Molla, there was a never-ending conflict of authority between the Ottoman High Court of Appeals (*Mahkeme-i Temyiz*) and Council of State (*Şûra-yı Devlet*). The Ministry of Justice worked to bridge this legal gap, overcome the obstacles emerging during the investigations and complete the investigations as soon as possible by appointing inspectors.

Another point stressed by the Minister of Justice was that if superiors decided that a Lieutenant Governor or a Governor should be tried for crimes he committed while in office, then he should be put on trial by the Criminal Section of the Ottoman High Court of Appeals in Istanbul. For instance, if a Governor had practised oppression, and a group of 100 or 200 people filed a complaint against him, then they would have to travel together to the Ottoman capital and present their cases personally. This was a very long process that made trial impossible in practice. Minister of Justice Haydar Molla said that a draft law had been submitted to the Parliament concerning this issue, which proposed trying state officers not in the capital city, Istanbul, but in local courts of first instance, as was the prior practice.

Thus it is understood from Ahmet Rıza Bey's motion and from the explanations of the Minister of Justice that the amendments made by the CUP leadership had rendered the Ottoman legal system incapable of putting perpetrators of Armenian massacres on trial and punishing those responsible. The legal process that could bring to light those responsible for the deportations and massacres, a matter of interest to hundreds of thousands, was blocked by some minor alterations made in the legal system and the guarantee of immunity for state officials.

OTTOMAN BUREAUCRATS RESISTING THE ARMENIAN MASSACRES

One of the speeches made in the Ottoman Parliament at this time concerned an issue which has remained off the agenda even today in discussions

concerning the Armenian massacres: the individuals who resisted the deportation decision taken by the CUP leadership and the Armenian massacres that followed it. Recent studies of the Armenian genocide make little or no mention of the Ottoman bureaucrats who resisted the deportation orders sent from Istanbul. These governors and local administrators opposed the deportation orders both directly and by delaying them. Other individuals and groups refused to implement the orders for religious, humanitarian, ideological, or cultural reasons. In the literature on the Armenian genocide there is a tacit assumption that all Ottoman subjects wholeheartedly agreed with the Armenian deportations, and that nobody resisted the decisions of the CUP government. However, the speech of Aleppo Deputy Artin Boşgezenyan Efendi at the parliament 18 November 1918 is of great significance, both for acknowledgement of people resisting the deportations and for an understanding of the feelings and thoughts that motivated such resistance:

I know of gentle, good-tempered, humanist, pious Turks who shed tears of blood along with me during the time of this tragedy. And they cursed the ones who undertook it. (Cries of 'Bravo'.) Was this all done only by individuals? There are cities whose inhabitants are true Muslim Turks; in order to rescue the helpless Armenian subjects from this cruel deportation, the Muslim people in these cities collectively opposed Government orders. But they could not in this way defeat the cruel order. They submitted when they saw that anyone who opposed the order or the acts of the Government was hanged in front of his own door. There are, for instance, the people of Erzurum. There are such cities [like Erzurum] that apart from protecting the Armenians who were their fellow countrymen, also provided refuge to those who happened to be 'the remnants of the sword' dispatched from other locations to their city. There are [for instance] the people of Konya. These are the true, honest, unspoiled, pious, helpful Muslim Turks!⁴⁶

The final words of the deputy of Aleppo were interrupted by the deputy of Konya, Ali Haydar Bey saying, 'Thank you, Artin Efendi'. Besides making general reference to the protective and humanist residents of a city, Artin Efendi went on to mention high-ranking Ottoman bureaucrats who resisted the Armenian deportations:

I know of such a Governor who after protecting the population of his own city also protected helpless Armenians who had taken refuge in this city. A mature and glorious Governor! . . . I personally know such a Governor who was distinguished with the highest virtue granted to human beings by God, namely mercy, who rather than commit such a murder, gave up his office for good. A provincial governor (*mutasarrıf*), who outdid his colleagues in competing with all other officers in

providing comfort to the needy. There is no need to prolong the speech by enumerating their names. But their number is limited and known. As opposed to them, there were very cruel governors and administrators.⁴⁷

During the debates in Parliament, the Governor of Trabzon, Cemal Azmi, along with the local administrators working with him, was mentioned as an example of cruel governors. For instance, Deputy of Trabzon, Mehmet Emin Bey, in his speech on 11 December 1918, told how:

There was a Lieutenant Governor in Ordu district. He filled a boat with Armenians on the pretext of sending them to Samsun and tipped them into the sea. I heard that Governor Cemal Azmi treated them in the same way. I could not go that far. I had to return from Ordu district. As soon as I arrived here, I told all that I witnessed to the Minister of the Interior [Talat Pasha]. Thereupon they sent an inspector and dismissed the Lieutenant Governor. They put him on trial. But I could not make them do anything more against the Governor. I struggled for three years, but I could not succeed.⁴⁸

Another Governor infamous for his cruelty during the Armenian deportations was the Governor of Diyarbakır, Dr Reşid Bey. He was tried in Istanbul in 1919 for being involved in the Armenian deportations and massacres and was sentenced to capital punishment, but he broke out of prison. On the point of being recaptured he committed suicide. A prominent Turkish journalist, Abidin Nesimî, who was a child in those days, later wrote in his memoirs how the Governor of Diyarbakır had first invited his father, the Lieutenant Governor of Lice, Hüseyin Nesimî Bey, to his office and then had him killed by an ambush laid by the gang of Harun the Circassian, who was also a member of the Special Organization:

During the governorship of Dr Reşid many crimes were committed whose agents could not be found. The most important of these are the murders of Governor of Basra Ferit, Governor of the Province Müntefek Bedi Nuri, Lieutenant Governor of Lice, my father Hüseyin Nesimî, Representative Lieutenant Governor of Beşiri, Sabit and journalist İsmail Mestan. All these people killed were either socialists or philanthropists. It was impossible to carry out the Armenian deportations with the Circassian gendarme team and members of Bedirhâni, Millî, Karakeçili tribes who were actually Kurdish militia, because these groups were interested in plunder and pillage. Unable to realize deportations they transformed them into massacres. Hence the elimination of the administrative staff who would oppose this plunder and pillage was also inevitable. Therefore this cadre deemed the elimination of the above-mentioned persons necessary, too.⁴⁹

So according to the memoirs of his son, Hüseyin Nesimî Bey and some other public administrators were killed by the gangs loyal to Governor of Diyarbakır Dr Reşid because they did not allow members of the Special Organization (*Teshkilat-ı Mahsusa*) to plunder and pillage.⁵⁰ The most important feature of the discussions in the Ottoman Parliament is the revelation of the existence of loyal and dignified Ottoman bureaucrats who opposed the Armenian deportation and massacres.

CONCLUSION: THINKING ABOUT THE 'REALITY OF FEAR'

In this article I have brought to light some key moments of the discussions concerning the Armenian massacre that took place in the Ottoman Parliament in the fall of 1918 and described their political and emotional context. Considering that those who took part in the debates consisted of witnesses who actually experienced the Armenian massacre, I would like to make the following points.

First, none of the deputies, Muslim or non-Muslim, took the position of complete denial of the atrocities and massacres. Nor were the press and Parliament legally hindered in discussing the subject at first. However, the motions of Armenian and Greek Deputies demanding a more detailed debate of the subject and the punishment of those responsible were inhibited by limits set by the internal statute of the Parliament. In a Parliament where the former CUP deputies constituted the majority, that is not surprising.

Second, we see that many positions articulated by Turkish official circles today concerning the Armenian massacres were first developed at the Ottoman Parliament. It is interesting to note that complaints made by the Unionist deputies such as 'Turks died, too', on the one hand, and the references to those responsible for massacres as 'gang members' and demands for their punishment, by Deputies of minority origin, on the other, could all be expressed under the same roof. This demonstrates that the deputies of the Ottoman Parliament were able to remain calm even while discussing such an important issue.

Third, nowadays there are two poles in discussions of the Armenian deportations and massacres: at one end there are those who argue that it was a 'genocide *par excellence*' planned beforehand; at the other are those who attempt to explain the deportations of hundreds of thousands of people as 'a simple administrative measure necessitated by the state of war'. It is very difficult to carry on an academic discussion in an environment where the voices of social scientists have become hoarse and they sometimes feel they are being accused of 'treason to fatherland'.

At this point the questions we have to ask ourselves are these. What are the political, academic and psychological reasons that keep the Turkish political elite from discussing this issue calmly in the way their grandfathers did in 1918? What is hindering the Turkish political establishment today from questioning the CUP's acts relating to the Armenian

deportations when even the deputies elected from the lists of the CUP at the Parliament in 1918 could demand that the people who had dragged the country to war be held responsible? How can we explain the persistence of the need to unconditionally defend the leadership of Union and Progress Party after ninety years? Why does it seem so hard for some people today to repeat the words written by historian Ahmet Refik Bey in 1918, 'my soul equally suffers for all the Turks and the Armenians who have painfully perished'?

It might also be appropriate to consider the sentiments of Amin Maalouf, who lived through the civil war in Lebanon and later became a world-famous novelist. In *On Identity* (1998) Maalouf considers the ethnic conflicts in the Balkans and the Middle East:

After each ethnic massacre we ask ourselves, quite rightly, how human beings can perpetrate such atrocities. Certain excesses seem incomprehensible; the logic behind them indecipherable. So we talk of murderous folly, of bloodthirsty ancestral and hereditary madness. When an otherwise normal man is transformed overnight into a killer, that is indeed insanity. But when there are thousands, millions of killers; when this phenomenon occurs in one country after another, in different cultures, among the faithful of all religions and among unbelievers alike, it is no longer enough to talk of madness. What we conveniently call 'murderous folly' is the propensity of our fellow-creatures to turn into butchers when they suspect that their 'tribe' is being threatened. The emotions of fear or insecurity don't always obey rational considerations. They may be exaggerated or even paranoid; but once a whole population is afraid, we are dealing with the reality of fear rather than reality of threat.⁵¹

It is obvious that the Turkish political elite has always dealt with the conflicts it was involved in or observed, from the 'reality of threat' perspective. In appreciating the words of Maalouf might we consider for a moment that certain things we perceive as a threat today are merely the consequences of our own fear? When we begin to think in this way, perhaps we may discover what actually frightened us in the first place. And thus, we may realize how that legacy of fear has penetrated deep into our souls and how it has evolved into a system that works subconsciously today. We should not forget that Turkey is the only country whose national anthem starts with the statement, 'Do not fear!' We should however courageously face the fears that have 'made us the way we are'. It seems apparent that there is no other way to demolish 'the kingdom of fear' that is deeply ingrained in the Turkish psyche. Only by transcending our fears may we reach a maturity that in the end will allow us to discuss everything calmly – even the 'Armenian genocide'.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

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- 1 Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, London, 1991, p. 12.
- 2 Kamuran Gürün, *The Armenian File*, London, 1985, p. 214.
- 3 Gürün, *Armenian File*, p. 219.
- 4 The most recent example of this literature is a compilation by Aysel Ekşi, *Türk-Ermeni İlişkilerinde Tarihi Gerçekler*, Istanbul, 2006.
- 5 Justin McCharty, ‘The Truth about the Armenian Problem in the Ottoman Empire’, Speech delivered at the special session of Turkish Parliament, Ankara, 24 March 2005.
- 6 Gerard J. Libaridian, ‘The Past as a Prison, the Past as a Different Future’, in *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 4: 4, winter 2005, p. 1.
- 7 Jacques Sémelin, ‘From Massacre to Genocidal Process’, *International Social Science Journal* 174, December 2002, p. 435.
- 8 Vahakn N. Dadrian, ‘The Historical and Legal Interconnections Between the Armenian Genocide and the Jewish Holocaust: From Impunity to Retributive Justice’, *The Yale Journal of International Law* 23: 2, summer 1988, p. 543.
- 9 Vahakn N. Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide*, Oxford, 2004, pp. 157–63.
- 10 Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, Cambridge, 2005, p. 172.
- 11 Ahmet Refik [Altınay], *İki Komite, İki Kutâl*, ed. Hamide Koyukan, Ankara, 1994, p. 8.
- 12 Ahmet Refik, *İki Komite, İki Kutâl*.
- 13 For a most detailed study on the Armenian genocide, see Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: the Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility*, New York, 2006.
- 14 Members of the Union and Progress who fled on the German submarine were the following: Enver Pasha, Talat Pasha, Cemal Pasha, former Police Director Bedri, Dr Nazım, Chief of *Teshkilat-ı Mahsusa* (the Special Organization), Dr Bahaettin Şakir and Cemal Azmi. These people were afterwards found to be responsible for the Armenian deportations and massacres. See Sina Akşin, *100 Soruda Jön Türkler ve İttihad ve Terakki*, Istanbul, 1980, p. 311.
- 15 Bilge Criss, *İşgal Altında İstanbul: 1918–1923*, Istanbul, 1993, p. 14.
- 16 Orhan Koloğlu, 1918: *Aydınlığımızın Bunalım Yılı - Zaferi Nihai'den Tam Teslimiyete*, Istanbul, 2000, p. 325.
- 17 After nationalist forces under the command of Refet Pasha entered Istanbul and the occupation was ended in 1922, Calligrapher İsmail Hakkı wrote, ‘Gel keyfim gel!’ [How pleasant it is!], and put it up on his shop window, this time as an expression of his happiness.
- 18 Yahya Kemal [Beyatlı], *Kendi Gök Kubbemiz*, Istanbul, 2000, p. 79.
- 19 Refik Halid Karay, *Anılar-Minelbab İlelmihrab: 1918 Mütarekesi Devrinde Olan Biten İşlere ve Gelip Geçen İnsanlara Dair Bildiklerim*, Istanbul, 1992, p. 137.

20 During the same session, the motion of Fuat Bey was accepted and the 'Fifth Branch Office' that was to work as a commission of investigation and inquiry was assigned. For minutes of this investigation and the following trial, see Osman Selim Kocahanoğlu (ed.), *İttihat -Terakki'nin Sorgulanması ve Yargılanması (1918-1919)*, Istanbul, 1998. See also Dadrian, *History of the Armenian Genocide*, pp. 319-21 and Vahakn N. Dadrian, 'The Documentation of the World War I Armenian Massacres in the Proceedings of the Turkish Military Tribunal', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23: 4, November 1991, pp. 552-4.

21 *Meclisi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi* [Parliamentary Minutes], 3rd Period, 5th Year of the Assembly, vol. 1, Ankara, 1992, p. 103.

22 *Meclisi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi* [Parliamentary Minutes], p. 109.

23 For the foundation of Ahmet İzzet Pasha's cabinet and the approach of Sultan Mehmet Vahdettin towards this cabinet see Sina Akşin, *Istanbul Hükümetleri ve Milli Mücadele*, Istanbul, 1976, pp. 27-34.

24 There were many Ministers in Ahmet İzzet Pasha's cabinet originally from the core staff of the CUP: Cavit Bey (Minister of Finance), former Sheikh-ul Islam Hayri [later Ürgüplü] (Minister of Justice), Fethi [later Okyar] (Minister of Interior), Rauf [later Orbay] (Minister of Navy), etc.

25 *Meclisi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi* [Parliamentary Minutes], p. 110.

26 As note 25.

27 As note 25.

28 *Meclisi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi* [Parliamentary Minutes], p. 111

29 *Meclisi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi* [Parliamentary Minutes], p. 112.

30 *Meclisi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi* [Parliamentary Minutes], p. 113.

31 *Meclisi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi* [Parliamentary Minutes], p. 115.

32 *Meclisi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi* [Parliamentary Minutes], p. 141.

33 *Meclisi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi* [Parliamentary Minutes], p. 157.

34 *Meclisi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi* [Parliamentary Minutes], p. 158.

35 *Meclisi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi* [Parliamentary Minutes], p. 161.

36 *Meclisi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi* [Parliamentary Minutes], p. 161.

37 *Meclisi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi* [Parliamentary Minutes], pp. 295-302. Homogenization of Anatolia was completed after signing the convention on the compulsory exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey in 30 January 1923. As the result of this treaty 1,200,000 Anatolian Greeks were exchanged with 400,000 Rumelian Muslims. On the social and political repercussions of this first 'ethnic cleansing' in history, achieved through diplomatic negotiations in Lausanne, see Ayhan Aktar, 'Homogenizing the Nation, Turkifying the Economy: Turkish Experience of Population Exchange Reconsidered', in *Crossing the Aegean: An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Exchange between Greece and Turkey*, ed. by Renée Hirschon, Oxford, 2003, pp. 79-95.

38 On the activities of British submarines during Gallipoli campaign in Marmara Sea, see the memoirs of Captain Rıza Bey, *A. E. 2. Denizaltı Gemisini Marmara'da Nasıl Batırdım*, Istanbul, 1947.

39 According to Clause 60 of the 1876 Constitution, the Senate (*Meclis-i Ayan*) consists of members directly appointed by the Sultan, whose number does not exceed one third of the total number at the Parliament. The Senate functions as an upper chamber.

40 *Meclis-i Ayan Zabıt Ceridesi* (Minutes Book of the Senate), 3rd Period, 5th Year of the Assembly, Volume 1, 1990, p. 117.

41 *Meclis-i Ayan Zabıt Ceridesi* (Minutes Book of the Senate), p. 118.

42 *Meclis-i Ayan Zabıt Ceridesi* (Minutes Book of the Senate), p. 119.

43 *Meclis-i Ayan Zabıt Ceridesi* (Minutes Book of the Senate), p. 123.

44 US Ambassador Morgenthau mentions that Talat Pasha had installed a telegraphic system in his mansion: Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 2000, pp. 93-6.

45 It is interesting to note that this law is still implemented in Turkey. Most of the human-rights violations, such as maltreatment and torture, cannot be prosecuted easily due to the legal obstructions created by superior officials trying to protect their subordinates.

46 *Meclisi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi*, p. 141.

47 *Meclis-i Ayan Zabıt Ceridesi* (Minutes Book of the Senate), p. 141.

48 *Meclis-i Ayan Zabıt Ceridesi* (Minutes Book of the Senate), p. 300.

49 Abidin Nesimi, *Yılların İçinden*, Istanbul, 1977, pp. 39-40.

50 Dr Reşid defended himself against the accusations concerning the murder of the above-mentioned local administrators in his memoirs, which he wrote while under arrest. See Dr Reşid, *Dr. Reşid Bey'in Hatıraları: Sürgünden İntihara*, ed. Ahmet Mehmetefendioğlu, Istanbul, 1993.

51 Amin Maalouf, *On Identity (Les Identités Meutrières*, 1998), transl. Barbara Bray, London, 2000, p. 24.