

America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915

Edited by

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa
<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2003

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Plantin 10/12 pt. *System* L^AT_EX 2_ε [TB]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915 / edited by Jay Winter.

p. cm. – (Studies in the social and cultural history of modern warfare)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0 521 82958 5

1. Armenian massacres, 1915–1925 – Foreign public opinion, American.

2. Genocide – Turkey – Foreign public opinion, American. 3. Armenians –

Turkey – History. 4. World War, 1914–1918. I. Winter, J. M. II. Series.

DS195.5.A47 2003

956.6'2015 – dc21 2003046119

ISBN 0 521 82958 5 hardback

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Contents

<i>List of contributors</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Map</i>	x
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xii
Introduction: witness to genocide JAY WINTER	1
Part I The framework	
1 Twentieth-century genocides SIR MARTIN GILBERT	9
2 Under cover of war: the Armenian Genocide in the context of total war JAY WINTER	37
3 The Armenian Genocide: an interpretation VAHAKN N. DADRIAN	52
Part II During the Catastrophe	
4 A friend in power? Woodrow Wilson and Armenia JOHN MILTON COOPER, JR.	103
5 Wilsonian diplomacy and Armenia: the limits of power and ideology LLOYD E. AMBROSIUS	113
6 American diplomatic correspondence in the age of mass murder: the Armenian Genocide in the US archives ROUBEN PAUL ADALIAN	146

viii	Contents	
7	The Armenian Genocide and American missionary relief efforts SUZANNE E. MORANIAN	185
8	Mary Louise Graffam: witness to genocide SUSAN BILLINGTON HARPER	214
9	From Ezra Pound to Theodore Roosevelt: American intellectual and cultural responses to the Armenian Genocide PETER BALAKIAN	240
Part III After the Catastrophe		
10	The Armenian Genocide and US post-war commissions RICHARD G. HOVANNISIAN	257
11	Congress confronts the Armenian Genocide DONALD A. RITCHIE	276
12	When news is not enough: American media and Armenian deaths THOMAS C. LEONARD	294
	<i>Index</i>	309

1 Twentieth-century genocides

Sir Martin Gilbert

The twentieth century witnessed some of humanity's greatest achievements – in medicine, science, agricultural production, communications – and some of its worst excesses. By any scale of values, looking back one – or even two – millennia, it was a century of improvement, at times vast improvement, in the quality of life for millions of people; yet the twentieth century was also one of decline in many parts of the world.

In much of my recent scholarship, I have touched on many of the attempts made in the century that is now behind us, to destroy a whole people. No episode, however horrific, resembles another. Each has its own appalling characteristics. In recent years, the researches of pioneer scholars – among them George Andreopoulos, Martin van Bruinessen, Frank Chalk, Israel Charny, Helen Fein, Leo Kuper, and Richard Hovannisian – have shown just how widespread the barbarism of governments can be, once they set as their aim the destruction or curtailment of a particular people.

Winston Churchill was once asked why the twentieth century was called the century of the common man. He replied to his questioner: “It is called the century of the common man because in it the common man has suffered most.”¹ The often tragic fate of that “common man” – and woman and child, – the young and the old, runs like a dark thread through twentieth-century history.

When the twentieth century opened the European empires, Britain, France, Turkey, Russia, and Germany – as well as the United States (which in 1898 had acquired the Philippines in the Pacific and other Spanish territory) – possessed among them enormous power: primarily military and naval, but also industrial. It was therefore not difficult for them, in a conflict with smaller nations or weaker peoples, to act, if they so wished, with ruthless, even murderous efficiency. Ottoman Turkey had already, in 1894 and 1895, massacred 100,000 Armenians, looted and

¹ Martin Gilbert, *A History of the Twentieth Century, 1900–1933* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1997 vol. I, p. 2.

set on fire several thousand Armenian homes, and forced many Armenians to convert to Islam. The Turkish Sultan, Abdul-Hamid, was almost universally known as “Abdul the Damned.”

In 1900, in the very first year of the century, in the distant eastern regions of the Ottoman Empire, Kurdish villagers attacked and murdered at least 60 Armenians – some accounts say as many as 400 – in the mountainous countryside along the upper reach of the Tigris River. One village, Spaghank, was surrounded not only by Kurds, but by a force under the direct control of the local Turkish military commander. When a group of Armenians took refuge in the village church, the troops surrounded the building and set it on fire, suffocating to death those inside, including the local priest. In the eastern Turkish town of Van, the British Vice-Consul, who had attempted to protect the local Armenians, was himself attacked by Kurds. When the British and other governments protested to Constantinople, the Sultan removed the regional military commander, but the violence against the Armenians continued.²

Thus the century began, and the fate of the Armenians was at its core. In the hundred years ahead, not only war, but racist, genocidal impulses that sometimes hide in the fog of war, were to be the grim counters to progress in the medical, technological, and environmental sciences, and the civilizing influences of the arts. It was only a narrow line between hatreds which generate war and the killing of soldiers and civilians, and genocides which set out to destroy a whole race. Also in 1900, in an attempt to weaken the Boer guerrilla movement in South Africa, the British Government seized thousands of women and children and forced them into what were called, at that time, “concentration camps.” The idea was not to exterminate the Boer people, but to cut the fighting soldiers off from their homes and isolate them to the point of despair. Seventeen concentration camps were established. They had little food and almost no medical facilities. A further thirty-five camps were set up for Black Africans who worked on the farms of the absent fighters, so that they too would be unable to plough, or harvest crops, or look after livestock.

The death toll in the camps was high. A British woman, Emily Hobhouse, who visited the camps, wrote:

I began to compare a parish I had known at home of two thousand people, where a funeral was an event – and usually of an old person. Here some twenty to twenty-five were carried away *daily* . . . The full realisation of the position dawned on me – it was a death rate such as had never been known except in the times of the Great Plagues . . . The whole talk was of death – who died yesterday, who lay dying today, who would be dead tomorrow.³

² Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. I, pp. 31–2.

³ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. I, p. 38.

Returning to Britain, Emily Hobhouse led a campaign against the camps, which were forcefully denounced by the Liberal Party leader, Henry Campbell-Bannerman. “When is a war not a war?” he asked, and gave the answer: “When it is carried on by methods of barbarism in South Africa.”⁴ The British Government quickly instituted improvements, and the death rate fell. The final toll, however, was far higher than that of the battlefield: 28,000 Boer women and children died in the camps, and more than 50,000 Africans.⁵

The cruelty of the concentration camps in South Africa was certainly barbarism, but it was not genocide. The Boers and British signed a peace treaty in 1902 and the Boers flourished – so much so that within fifty years they were imposing their own tyrannical apartheid ideology on the Black African majority.

Elsewhere in southern Africa a more sustained attempt to destroy a whole people took place in that same first decade of the twentieth century in German-ruled South-West Africa (now Namibia), where the local people – the Hereros – found their land and livelihood taken away by a group of German colonists, less than 5,000 in all, who had been acquiring land with what the German colonial department itself described as “fraud and extortion.”⁶ The Hereros rose in revolt. In the punitive expedition launched against them, thousands were killed. When news of the severity of the punitive measures reached Europe, there was widespread indignation, including in the German Parliament, that such savage destruction had been inflicted by a colonial power. The Herero people survived; so too does their folk memory of the cruelties inflicted on them.

The fierceness of colonial reaction to local “native” rebellion was often fuelled by racial, dehumanizing animosities – hatred, scorn, contempt – that could certainly be described as genocidal. In the Dutch East Indies nearly 1,000 local women and children were killed when the Dutch suppressed a rebellion there in 1904. There was indignation in Holland at what had happened, not only amongst the socialist Opposition, but also within the government. One member of the governing party declared the Dutch soldiers had behaved like “Huns and Tatars” massacring the women and children for the commercial ends of mining and oil exploration.⁷

Since May 1903 news of a reign of terror in the Belgian Congo was reaching Europe as a result of the efforts of Edmund Morel, a shipping clerk in Liverpool. Morel published graphic accounts of atrocities which arose out of the system of forced labor which was imposed by the Belgian

⁴ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. I, pp. 38–9.

⁵ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. I, p. 39.

⁶ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. I, p. 99.

⁷ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. I, p. 100.

authorities – under the direct rule of King Leopold – on the local inhabitants.⁸ What he described had all the hallmarks of genocide: Belgian punitive expeditions which, on their return to base, brought baskets of human hands as proof of their ruthlessness.

Nine months after Morel's first published exposure of the crimes, Roger Casement, the British Consul in the Belgian Congo, sent an eye-witness report of Congolese women and children chained in sheds as hostages, and men beaten up for failure to produce sufficient rubber at collection points. He wrote of mass executions, and terrible mutilations inflicted on the natives by white officials. Casement estimated that as many as 3 million native Congolese had died of disease, torture, or shooting during the previous fifteen years. A Congolese soldier who was sent to get rubber, and had to open fire to do so, had to bring back a right hand for every bullet he expended. At one rubber collection site, Casement reported, the soldiers had used 6,000 cartridges, "which means," he noted, "that 6,000 people are killed or mutilated; it means more than 6,000 – for the people have told me repeatedly that the soldiers kill children with the butt of their guns."⁹

As news of the Congolese atrocities spread, President Theodore Roosevelt, Mark Twain, and Joseph Conrad were among those who protested.¹⁰ It was only after two years of international protests, however, that the Belgian Parliament debated the situation in the Congo, and another two years until Leopold agreed to hand over his personal control of the Congo to the Belgian Parliament. The atrocities ceased. International protest had prevailed, though long after the initial cruelties were made known.

Within the Russian Empire, the fires of political and national dissent that had been lit at the beginning of 1905 continued to smolder and burst into flame. In the Armenian provinces of Russia, where resentment against Russian anti-minority policies had been smoldering for most of the year, the conflict was made all the more bloody when, in September, Azeris (a Muslim people then indentified as Tatars) attacked Armenian homes in Baku, Tiflis, and Erevan. Fearing Armenian national ambitions, and noting that the Armenians had been joined in their protest in Baku by Russian revolutionaries, the Tsarist authorities took the side of the Tatars. For their part, the Tatars raised the green banner of Islam and proclaimed a Holy War against the Armenians. Hundreds of Armenians were killed, and dozens of Armenian villages destroyed.¹¹

⁸ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. I, p. 94.

⁹ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. I, pp. 94–5.

¹⁰ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. I, p. 95.

¹¹ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, I, pp. 112–13.

In 1906 it was the turn of the British Government, then a Liberal government – led by those who had condemned the “methods of barbarism” in South Africa six years earlier – to suppress a Zulu revolt in southern Africa with great severity. More than 3,000 Zulus were killed.¹² A racist attitude of mind underlay the brutality of the action, which amounted to an exercise in extermination. That same genocidal potential was in evidence a mere three years later, in 1909, when 20,000 Armenians living in Adana and Tarsus, in southern Anatolia, were massacred by the Turks.

There were episodes during which Armenian men, women, and children were forced into churches, which were then set on fire: those who tried to run out were shot dead by armed Turkish soldiers.¹³ Thirty years later, in September 1939, in German-occupied Poland, Jews were driven into synagogues which were then similarly set alight – the SS then shooting dead those who broke out.¹⁴

Now come to the First World War and the fate of the Armenians at the hands of Turks. With Russia at war with Turkey since October 1914, the large Armenian Christian population in Anatolia, which had long been denied any national rights by the Turks, hoped against hope that a Russian victory over Turkey might lead to the recognition of Armenian national aspirations. The Russians tried to woo the Armenians. On 30 December 1914 the Tsar, on a visit to the Caucasus front, declared: “a most brilliant future awaits the Armenians.”¹⁵ As Russian troops pushed deeper and deeper into eastern Turkey, the Turks accused the Armenians of being secretly and even actively loyal to Russia. Starting on 8 April 1915, Armenians throughout Anatolia were attacked and massacred. Armenian soldiers serving in the Ottoman army, who had already been segregated into unarmed labor battalions, were taken out of their battalions in small groups, and killed.¹⁶

Henry Morgenthau, the American Ambassador in Constantinople, himself a Jew, reported to Washington on the atrocities which took place between 15 April and 20 April. His report reveals an intensity of terror with which students of the fate of the Jews a quarter of a century later will be familiar:

¹² Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. I, p. 131.

¹³ Donald E. Miller and Lorna Touryan Miller, *Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 63–4.

¹⁴ Martin Gilbert, *The Second World War: A Complete History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1989) p. 7.

¹⁵ Martin Gilbert, *The First World War: A Complete History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), p. 108.

¹⁶ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. I, p. 356.

The Turks' army turned aside and invaded their own territory of Van. Instead of fighting the trained Russian army of men, they turned their rifles, machine guns, and other weapons upon the Armenian women, children, and old men in the villages of Van. Following their usual custom, they distributed the most beautiful Armenian women among the Moslems, sacked and burned the Armenian villages, and massacred uninterruptedly for days.

On April 15, about 500 young Armenian men of Akantz were mustered to hear an order of the Sultan; at sunset they were marched outside the town and every man shot in cold blood. This procedure was repeated in about eighty Armenian villages in the district north of Lake Van, and in three days 24,000 Armenians were murdered in this atrocious fashion.¹⁷

Djevdet Bey, Governor of Van, then demanded 4,000 Armenian men from the city of Van to serve in the Turkish army. Believing this was an attempt to deny the Armenians of Van their only means of self-defense, the Armenians refused. Morgenthau's report continued:

On April 20, a band of Turkish soldiers seized several Armenian women who were entering the city; a couple of Armenians ran to their assistance and were shot dead. The Turks now opened fire on the Armenian quarters with rifles and artillery; soon a large part of the town was in flames and a regular siege had started. The whole Armenian fighting force consisted of only 1,500 men; they had only 300 rifles and a most inadequate supply of ammunition, while Djevdet had an army of 5,000 men, completely equipped and supplied.¹⁸

As the massacres intensified, the Armenians appealed for protection to Germany, the European – and Christian – power whose officers and men were nearest to them, and which, as Turkey's ally, might be able to exert a restraining influence. The Armenian appeal was rejected by the German Government on the grounds that it would offend the Turkish Government. By 19 April 1915 it was known in Berlin that more than 50,000 Armenians had been murdered in the province of Van, and that the predominantly Armenian town of Van was besieged, with 1,300 armed Armenians defending the 30,000 Armenian civilians in the town, many of them refugees from the surrounding countryside.

Details of the Armenian massacres circulated far outside Turkey.¹⁹ The German Government, troubled by the international outcry that Germany was doing nothing to restrain its Turkish ally, instructed the German Vice-Consul at Erzerum, Max Erwin von Scheubner-Richter, to intervene.²⁰ He was warned, however, not to do so in any way that might give the

¹⁷ Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page, 1918), p. 297, as quoted in Miller and Miller, *Survivors*, p. 76.

¹⁸ Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*, p. 297, as quoted in Miller and Miller, *Survivors*, p. 77.

¹⁹ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. I, p. 357.

²⁰ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. I, p. 357.

impression that Germany wanted “to exercise a right of protection over the Armenians, or interfere with the activities of the authorities.”²¹ The muted protest was duly made; the massacres continued. Seven and a half years later von Scheubner-Richter was shot dead while advancing through the streets of Munich, at the side of Adolf Hitler, during the attempt in November 1923 to overthrow the Bavarian Government.

There was one brief moment of respite for the Armenians, when Russian forces reached the besieged town of Van, and rescued those Armenians who had been trapped there under Turkish bombardment for thirty days. In a huge area of Turkish Anatolia, however, from the western town of Bursa to the southern town of Aleppo, and eastward to the Russo-Turkish front-line, the killings went on. In Bitlis, 15,000 Armenian civilians were killed in eight days. In the Black Sea port of Trebizond, in the course of a two-week orgy of destruction, an estimated 15,000 Turkish troops murdered all but 100 of the 17,000 Armenian inhabitants of the town. The Italian Consul-General was an eye-witness to the terrors of Trebizond, writing to his government a month later, having returned to Italy:

The passing of gangs of Armenian exiles beneath the windows and before the door of the Consulate; their prayers for help, when neither I nor any other could do anything to answer them; the city in a state of siege, guarded at every point by 15,000 troops in complete war equipment, by thousands of police agents, by bands of volunteers and by the members of the “Committee of Union and Progress”; the lamentations, the tears, the abandonments, the imprecations, the many suicides, the instantaneous deaths from sheer terror, the sudden unhooking of men’s reason, the conflagrations, the shooting of victims in the city, the ruthless searches through the houses in the countryside; the hundreds of corpses found every day along the exile road; the young women converted by force to Islam or exiled like the rest; the children torn away from their families or from the Christian schools, and handed over by force to Moslem families, or else placed by hundreds on board ship in nothing but their shirts, and then capsized and drowned in the Black Sea and the River Deyirmen Dere – these are my last ineffaceable memories of Trebizond, memories which still, at a month’s distance, torment my soul and almost drive me frantic.²²

In Constantinople, on the night of 23–24 April, the Turks arrested 235 Armenian political, religious, educational, and intellectual leaders, took them away from the city, and put them to death. The Armenian nation was in despair, its only protection being in the east, within the regions conquered by Russia. “There are no words in the dictionaries,” the

²¹ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. I, p. 357.

²² Richard G. Hovannisian, “Etiology and Sequelae of the Armenian Genocide,” in George J. Andreopoulos, ed., *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), p. 125.

Armenian poet Avetik Isahakian wrote a few months later, “to describe the hideousness of the terrors.”²³ Today those “terrors,” which extended for the following year, are known as the Armenian Genocide. The British, French, and Russian Governments, each of them at war with Turkey, issued a joint public denunciation, on 24 May 1915, of the Turkish “mass murders” of the Armenians, describing the killings as “a crime against humanity and civilization.”²⁴ From that day the term “crimes against humanity” entered the universal lexicon.

The eminent Armenian historian Vahakn N. Dadrian, a member of the international editorial board of the *Journal of Genocide Research*, pointed out in the first issue of the journal, in March 1999, a parallel between the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust: that in both cases, the killing followed a premeditated plan.²⁵ On 1 November 1916, the American Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, informed the American Ambassador in Berlin of “the studied intention on the part of the Ottoman Government to annihilate a Christian race. The true facts, if publicly known, would shock the whole civilized world.”²⁶ Dadrian also cites German documents that show the same word used by German observers for what they saw happening to the Armenians in 1915 as was later to be used by the SS in describing what was happening to the Jews. Thus Scheubner-Richter refers to ‘die ganzliche Ausrottung’ of the Armenians, and later to the ‘Ausrottungspolitik’: the “policy of extermination.”²⁷ This same word, *ausrottung* – extermination – was used by the SS to describe the mass killings of Jews after June 1941 in German-occupied Russia.

The death toll of Armenians in a mere eight months was horrific. Between April and November 1915 more than 600,000 Armenian men, women, and children were murdered in the area of Lake Van, the towns of Bitlis, Erzurum, and Diyarbekir, and along the upper reaches of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (the location, ironically, of the biblical Garden of Eden). As an example of the scale of the killing, of the 82 members of the Terpandjian family in Diyarbekir only 2 survived, seven-year-old Missak and his five-year-old brother Dikran. Their grandfather Megerditch, the head of the Terpandjian clan, was among the leading Armenian citizens of Diyarbekir whom the Turks put on a barge on the Tigris, sent towards Mosul, and killed on the way. The boys’ father Garabet was among 600 Armenians taken to a Turkish army barracks in Diyarbekir and killed. Their eldest brother Paul was seized by the Turks and never

²³ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. I, p. 357.

²⁴ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. I, p. 357.

²⁵ Vahakn N. Dadrian, “The Determinants of the Armenian Genocide,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 1:1 (March 1999), pp. 68–71, 76–9.

²⁶ Dadrian, “Determinants,” p. 70. ²⁷ Dadrian, “Determinants,” p. 72.

heard of again: it is believed that he was tortured and killed. Their mother, Touma, and their brothers Shukri, aged fourteen, and Philip, aged three – the youngest – were among several thousand Armenians deported from Diyarbekir and murdered in the vicinity of Mardin. The two boys who survived were also on that deportation, but were taken off by Kurds to work in the fields.

More than half a million Armenians were deported by the Turks southward to Mesopotamia (modern Iraq). Of these deportees only 90,000 survived repeated attacks by the Turks, beatings, and executions, as they were driven southward. A French naval attempt to take off as many Armenians as possible from the coast of Syria led to the rescue of 4,000.²⁸ Of those who could not be taken off, 200,000 were forcibly converted to Islam.²⁹ The rest continued to be forced southward into Syria and Mesopotamia. “The greatest torment,” writes Richard Hovannisian, “was reserved for the women and children, who were driven for months over mountains and deserts, often dehumanized by being stripped naked and repeatedly preyed upon and abused. Intentionally deprived of food and water, they fell by the thousands and the hundreds of thousands along the routes to the desert.” “In this manner,” Hovannisian concludes, “an entire nation was swept away, and the Armenian people were effectively eliminated from their homeland of several millennia.”³⁰ To this day, that homeland is under Turkish rule.

One eye-witness to the terrible suffering of the Armenian deportees was a 25-year-old Jewish woman, Sarah Aaronsohn – a member of a Jewish espionage group working for the British against the Turks – who had set out from Constantinople to her home in Palestine, and traveled that December through the Taurus mountains to Aleppo. Her biographer, Anita Engle, has written:

She saw vultures hovering over children who had fallen dead by the roadside. She saw beings crawling along, maimed, starving and begging for bread. From time to time she passed soldiers driving before them with whips and rifle-butts whole families, men, women and children, shrieking, pleading, wailing. These were the Armenian people setting out for exile in the desert from which there was no return.³¹

Captured by the Turks two years later, Sarah Aaronsohn was taken to Damascus, tortured, and took her own life to avoid betraying her companions.³²

²⁸ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. I, p. 357.

²⁹ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. I, p. 357. ³⁰ Hovannisian, “Etiology,” p. 124.

³¹ Anita Engle, *The Nili Spies* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1959), p. 62.

³² Gilbert, *The First World War*, pp. 365–6.

In the early months of 1918, Russia, under its new Bolshevik rulers, signed a peace treaty with Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey, and withdrew from the fighting. Turkish troops, seizing the opportunity of Russia's military weakness and political isolation, drove eastward through the Caucasus to the shores of the Caspian Sea. Several former Russian imperial cities fell to the advancing Turkish army, among them towns with large Armenian populations: Ardahan, Ardhanj, Kars, Erevan, and Baku. During this Turkish military advance, 400,000 Armenians were killed.³³

The First World War ended in November 1918. Turkey was defeated and the Sultan fled on a British warship. In central Turkey, Armenians living in the cities of Marash, Sivas, and Kayseri became the victims of a renewed upsurge of violence. In 1920 more than 30,000 Armenians were killed in Cilicia.³⁴ Tens of thousands more were living in refugee camps in Mesopotamia, among them Torkom Manoogian, born in 1919 in a refugee camp near Baghdad; at the beginning of our new century he was the 96th Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem.

There remained one further tragic act in the destruction of Armenian life and livelihood. In September 1922, with the loss of tens of thousands of lives, the Armenians living in the western regions of Anatolia, particularly in Izmir and Aidin, were driven from their homes and forced into exile in distant lands. By the early 1930s, the Turkish Government had formally confiscated all their property.³⁵ Among those who were forced to leave their homes in this final expulsion was Charles Mahjoubian, then aged fifteen: seventy-eight years later he remains a powerful voice for remembrance and justice.³⁶

³³ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. I, p. 496.

³⁴ Stanley K. Kerr, *The Lions of Marash* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1973), and Paul Du Véou, *La Passion de La Cilicie 1919–1922* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 2nd. edn., 1954).

³⁵ Marjorie Housepian Dobkin, *Smyrna 1922: The Destruction of a City* (New York: Newmark Press, 1998); Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia: The Survival of a Nation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, revised 2nd. edn., 1990), p. 347; Kévork K. Baghdjian, *La Confiscation, par le gouvernement turc, des biens arméniens . . . dits abandonnés* (Montreal, Quebec: published by author, 1987); Dickran Kouymjian, "Confiscation and Destruction: A Manifestation of the Genocidal Process," *Armenian Forum* 1:3 (Autumn 1998), p. 7.

³⁶ Gilbert, *The First World War*, p. xxiii; Charles N. Mahjoubian, *America's Conscience: Gorbachev's Dilemma* (Wayne, Penn.: [Mahjoubian's books cited here were published by the author, revised edn.; [1995]] Mahjoubian, *Scoundrels and Bashi-Bozooks in the Armenian Genocide* (Southeastern, Penn.: Mahjoubian, [1995]); Mahjoubian, *Supremest Tragedy of All History: Armenian Civilization under Geopolitical and Religious Conflict* ([Southeastern, Penn.]: Mahjoubian, 1995); Mahjoubian, *Garbis to America: Fifteen Years in Konya (Holy City of Turkish Islam) and One Year in Greece During the Years of the Armenian Genocide* (Southeastern, Penn.: Mahjoubian, 1995).

Between April 1915 and September 1922, 1,450,000 Armenians had been murdered. In the anguished words of Richard Hovannisian, “Our generation didn’t have grandparents. Why didn’t we have grandparents?” As with the Jewish Holocaust, so with the Armenian Genocide, the statistics are overwhelming, but it is possible to focus on many thousands of separate episodes, incidents, and individual stories. The story, for example, of the massacres in Sivas – of the fate of so many of those potential grandparents – has recently been told by Agop J. Hacikyan, a scholar and expert on the fate of the Armenians, in his novel *A Summer Without Dawn: An Armenian Epic* (written with Jean-Yves Soucy).³⁷ In 1916, in the immediate aftermath of the massacres, a starkly factual report endorsed by a leading British jurist, Viscount Bryce, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915–1916*, detailed the killings with unequivocal documentation: the author of the report, Arnold Toynbee, stressed that the Turkish claim of Armenian treason and rebellion against the Turks could not “bear examination” and was “easily rebutted.”³⁸ Another powerful portrayal of the Armenian fate, in the form of a novel, was Franz Werfel’s book *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, first published in 1933.³⁹ Werfel, an Austrian Jew, had spent three years in the Austrian army on the Russian front in the First World War. Like so many of the Armenians about whom he had written, he too became a refugee, fleeing Austria for France in 1938, and when the German army invaded France in 1940, making his way to the United States.

Out of the hundred places about which I could give an account in miniature, I have chosen the town of Kharput, the home town of Richard Hovannisian’s family. As Turkish soldiers rampaged through the town in the summer of 1915, an Armenian mother hid her baby boy in a mulberry bush and prayed to God that the Turkish soldiers would not find him. Mother and baby survived.⁴⁰ Most of the Armenians of Kharput were massacred. That baby, Michael Hagopian, now eighty-six years old and living in California, completed a documentary film in 2001 entitled *Voices from the Lake*. In it he tells the story his mother told him of how, whenever soldiers came knocking on Armenian doors with deportation orders, his mother would rush to the field where tall poplars shielded the mulberries,

³⁷ Agop J. Hacikyan and Jean-Yves Soucy, *A Summer Without Dawn: An Armenian Epic*, trans. from the French by Christina Le Vernoy and Joyce Bailey (Ontario: M&S, 2000).

³⁸ Viscount Bryce, ed., Arnold Toynbee, compiler, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915–1916: Documents Presented to Viscount Grey of Falloden by Viscount Bryce* (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, Miscellaneous no. 31, 1916), p. 627.

³⁹ *Die vierzig Tage des Musa Dagh, Roman* (Berlin: P. Zsolnay, 1933); *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, English trans. Geoffrey Dunlop (New York: The Viking Press, 1934).

⁴⁰ J. Michael Hagopian, *The Witness*, vol. I: *Voices from the Lake: A Film about the Secret Genocide* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Armenian Film Foundation, 2001).

and would make him a safe cradle in the foliage. In Hagopian's words: "The mulberry bush is symbolic. It has a purpose in the film in that by the time the leaves had fallen in that one year, the genocide had been completed."

Hagopian found a detailed account of the killings in the diaries of Leslie Davis, United States Consul in Kharput. Hearing reports that bodies had been seen floating in nearby Lake Geoljik, Davis took his camera and went to investigate, recording what he saw. In his diary he described finding what he estimated to be 10,000 bodies of Armenians in (and around) the lake.⁴¹ Hagopian's family was spared because his father was a surgeon whose skills were needed by influential members of the Turkish community. Visiting Kharput in 1967, Hagopian found no trace of Armenians there. All buildings in the Armenian quarter had been leveled to the ground.⁴²

While the Armenian massacres were at their height, a 21-year-old Polish Jew, Raphael Lemkin, who was then studying law at Lvov University, found himself in discussion with his professors about one of the dramatic events of the day.⁴³ On 15 March 1921, Soghomon Tehlirian, a survivor of the Armenian massacres, assassinated one of the leading Turkish politicians involved in them, the Minister of the Interior, Talaat Pasha. Lemkin's professors defended the Turkish action against the Armenians invoking the argument about sovereignty of States: "But 'Sovereignty of States,' I answered, 'implies conducting an independent foreign and international policy, building of schools, construction of roads, in brief, all types of activity directed towards the welfare of people.' Sovereignty, I argued, cannot be conceived of as the right to kill millions of innocent people."⁴⁴

In addition to the million and a half Armenians murdered between 1915 and 1922 there had been an enormous death toll in the four years fighting between 1914 and 1918 which constituted the First World War. Although there had been no genocidal intent in the conflict of the European Powers (into which the United States was drawn in 1917), the propaganda of hatred had been deliberately stimulated by governments in

⁴¹ Leslie Davis, *The Slaughterhouse Province: An American Diplomat's Report on the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1917*, ed. Susan K. Blair (New Rochelle: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1989), p. 87.

⁴² Hagopian, *Voices from the Lake*.

⁴³ Frank Chalk, "Redefining Genocide," in George J. Andreopoulos, ed., *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), p. 47.

⁴⁴ From the manuscript autobiography of Raphael Lemkin (ch. 1, p. 26, deposited at the New York Public Library, Main Branch), quoted in Chalk, "Redefining Genocide," p. 47.

order to demonize each enemy and impress upon the soldiers that the human beings in each facing set of trenches were in some way inhuman. For the British, French, Italians, Romanians, and Russians it was the German, Austro-Hungarian, Turkish, and Bulgarian soldiers who were to be destroyed – mown down in vast swathes by machine-gun fire, pulverized by artillery shells, bayoneted to death, or blown to pieces by aerial bombardment. Genocidal images had to be created in order to maintain motivation, to foster first the ability and then the zeal for killing in soldiers who, in civilian life, had been innocent and ignorant of the realities of war.

When the First World War ended, the Allied Powers had suffered 5,200,000 dead; the Central Powers, 3,500,000. In the Allied naval blockade of Germany an estimated 500,000 German civilians died of starvation as food supplies were ruthlessly blockaded – the same number of Germans that were killed in the bombing raids of the Second World War.

Reflecting on the first twenty-two years of the twentieth century, Winston Churchill told his constituents in Dundee in 1922: “What a disappointment the Twentieth Century has been.” A long series of “disastrous events” had darkened its first twenty years. He went on to ask:

Can you doubt, my faithful friends, as you survey this sombre panorama, that mankind is passing through a period marked not only by an enormous destruction and abridgement of human species, not only by a vast impoverishment and reduction in means of existence, but also that destructive tendencies have not yet run their course? And only intense, concerted and prolonged efforts among all nations can avert further and perhaps even greater calamities.⁴⁵

In the early 1990s, as Communism fell and the Soviet Union disintegrated, I was present in the Ukrainian capital, Kiev, for the first international conference held in a post-Soviet setting, even as the hammer and sickle was being replaced by the blue and yellow flag, and Lenin’s statues being toppled to the ground. The conference opened with a distinguished Ukrainian professor telling those present (it was a Ukrainian Jewish colloquium) that he wished to announce formally that Ukraine now recognized that millions of Jews had been murdered in the Holocaust, but hoped that for their part the Jews would recognize the equally terrible suffering of the Ukrainians during the Stalin period.

Undoubtedly the fate of the Ukrainians in the late 1920s was tragic. Several million Ukrainians were then farmers struggling to make a living from agriculture at a time when Communist institutions and economics were being ruthlessly imposed. The peasant farmer was known as a “kulak.” From Moscow Stalin characterized the kulaks as “an evil

⁴⁵ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. I, p. 648.

to be uprooted.” In his book *Life and Fate*, written after the Second World War, the Soviet-Jewish writer, Vasily Grossman, noted: “Just as the Germans proclaimed that the Jews are not human, thus did Lenin and Stalin proclaim, Kulaks are not human beings.” Grossman has left a powerful account of the Soviet demonization of the Ukrainian and other Russian peasants (not unlike Hitler’s demonization of the Jews). “They had sold themselves on the idea that the so-called ‘Kulaks’ were pariahs, untouchable, vermin,” Grossman writes:

They would not sit down at a “parasite” table; the “Kulak” child was loathsome, the young “Kulak” girl was lower than a louse. They looked on the so-called “Kulaks” as cattle, swine, loathsome, repulsive: they had no souls; they stank; they had all the venereal diseases; they were enemies of the people and exploited the labour of others. And there was no pity for them. They were not human beings, one had a hard time making out what they were – vermin evidently.⁴⁶

An official Soviet estimate of peasant deaths, in the Ukraine alone – published in Moscow in 1990, just before the disintegration of the Soviet Union – is about 4 million.⁴⁷ Robert Conquest put the number at about 5 million.⁴⁸ The final, terrible extent of the deaths will probably never be known exactly, and could well be more.

In 1933, when Hitler came to power in Germany, a British observer linked the imminent fate of the Jews with that of the past fate of the Armenians. After a visit to Europe, Eric Mills, a senior member of the British Mandate Administration in Palestine, wrote in his official report to Jerusalem:

While before I went to Germany I knew that the Jewish situation was bad, I had not realized as I now do, that the fate of German Jews is a tragedy, for which cold, intelligent planning by those in authority takes rank with that of those who are out of sympathy with the Bolshevik regime in Russia, or with the elimination of Armenians from the Turkish empire.⁴⁹

Shortly after Hitler came to power in Germany, the fifth International Conference for the Unification of Criminal Law took place in Madrid, under the auspices of the League of Nations. It was at this conference that Raphael Lemkin (who coined the term “genocide”) submitted a proposal “to declare the destruction of racial, religious or social collectivities a crime under the law of nations.” Lemkin regarded a central element in genocide as “the criminal intent to destroy or to cripple permanently a human group. The acts are directed against groups, as such,

⁴⁶ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. I, p. 761.

⁴⁷ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. I, p. 761.

⁴⁸ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. I, p. 761.

⁴⁹ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. I, p. 80.

and individuals are selected for destruction only because they belong to these groups.” This definition, although rejected – with the whole concept – by the League of Nations, was to form the basis of the United Nations Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide after the Second World War.⁵⁰

With the Japanese attack on China in 1937, a genocidal menace entered China together with the invading army. On 13 December 1937 Japanese troops entered Nanking, the Chinese capital. With an intensity that shocked even those familiar with the savagery of war, the Japanese soldiers who entered Nanking attacked the Chinese civilian population in an orgy of destruction. The “Rape of Nanking” was to take its place among the massacres not only of the century, but of modern times. When the Japanese entered Nanking the total Chinese population was estimated at between 600,000 and 700,000, of whom 150,000 were soldiers. In the ensuing slaughter more than 200,000 civilians and 90,000 soldiers were killed. The first to be killed were the soldiers who had surrendered. The orders for their execution were specific: “All prisoners of war are to be executed. Method of execution: divide the prisoners into groups of a dozen. Shoot to kill separately.”⁵¹

Japanese officers used their swords to chop off the heads of their Chinese prisoners. Soldiers bayoneted prisoners to death, often tying them up in batches first. Old people, women, children, and wounded soldiers were shot down in the streets. Shopkeepers, having been ordered to open their shops, were then killed, and the shops looted.

A Japanese soldier, Takokoro Kozo, later recalled: “Women suffered most. No matter how young or old, they all could not escape the fate of being raped. We sent out coal trucks to the city streets and villages to seize a lot of women. And then each of them was allocated to fifteen to twenty soldiers for sexual intercourse and abuse.” Takokoro added: “After raping we would also kill them. Those women would start to flee once we let them go. Then we would ‘bang!’ shoot them in the back to finish them up.”⁵² Such was the fate of human beings whose only “crime” – judged to make them worthy of death – was that they had been born Chinese, just as the only “crime” of the Armenians between 1915 and 1922 was to have been born Armenian, the only “crime” of the Jews between 1939 and 1945 to have been born Jewish.

⁵⁰ George J. Andreopoulos, “Introduction: The Calculus of Genocide,” in Andreopoulos, ed., *Genocide*, pp. 1–2. In 1946 Lemkin was an adviser to United States Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson at the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg, which tried the leading Nazi war criminals.

⁵¹ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. II, p. 162.

⁵² Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. II, p. 163.

In the fighting against the Japanese in 1938, a million Chinese soldiers were killed or wounded. Tens of thousands of Chinese civilians were killed in Japanese air raids. If not genocide, then certainly a cruel fate – simply for being Chinese.

In the spring of 1938 the Turkish Government carried out a punitive raid against the Kurds of the Dersim region (now known as Tunceli).⁵³ On 27 September 1938 the British Consul in Trebizond, after referring to the Armenian massacres in the same region in 1915, reported to the Foreign Office in London: “Thousands of Kurds, including women and children, were slain; others, mostly children, were thrown into the Euphrates; while thousands of others in less hostile areas, who had first been deprived of their cattle and other belongings, were deported to vilayets in Central Anatolia. It is now stated that the Kurdish question no longer exists in Turkey.”⁵⁴

More than 5,000 Kurds were killed in that punitive act of destruction, 10 percent of the local Kurdish population: they had been, literally, decimated – the Ancient Roman policy of killing 1 in 10 of their captives. Martin van Bruinessen writes, of the Dersim killings, “what we are dealing with was not merely the brutal suppression of an internal rebellion but part of a wider policy directed against Kurds as such.”⁵⁵ It was this murderous targeting of an entire community which constituted the element of genocide.

On 1 September 1939 Germany invaded Poland. Five and a half years later, on 8 May 1945, the fighting that had become the Second World War ended – in Europe. As during the First World War, the “enemy” had to be demonized. Decent, moderate Britons had to feel that the destruction of 42,000 German civilians in the city of Hamburg in the course of a few hours in 1943 – of half a million German civilians before the war was over – was a necessary element in war-making against “the vile Hun.” The average German citizen had already been taught that the destruction of civilians by aerial bombardment in Warsaw, Rotterdam, Coventry, London, and Belgrade was an essential aspect of war-making, even of national survival. The vast majority of Americans regarded the death of 2 million Japanese civilians in the massive bombing raids over Tokyo and other Japanese cities, as a rightful act – even before the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

⁵³ Martin van Bruinessen, “Genocide in Kurdistan?: The Suppression of the Dersim Rebellion in Turkey (1937–38) and the Chemical War against the Iraqi Kurds (1988),” in Andreopoulos, ed., *Genocide*, p. 147.

⁵⁴ Van Bruinessen, “Genocide in Kurdistan?” p. 144.

⁵⁵ Van Bruinessen, “Genocide in Kurdistan?” pp. 144–5.

That the Japanese were bayoneting to death unarmed Chinese (and also, after 1941, unarmed Allied prisoners of war) roused no moral indignation inside Japan. What rankled for the Japanese was that the two atomic bombs were dropped on them, the demonized “Orientals,” and not on “white Europeans.” Second World War songs and jingles, in every country, sought to demonize the whole populations of the enemy. These were not genocides; but they constituted a serious diminution of the respect and tolerance which, if it does not prevail among nations and peoples, can produce an atmosphere of hatred whereby some form or other of genocidal policy becomes acceptable.

The Second World War was among the most destructive conflicts in recorded history. Between the German attack on Poland in September 1939 and the surrender of Japan in 1945 as many as 50 million soldiers and civilians perished. In the mass killing of civilians civilized behavior was set aside, and civilization itself was put in danger. Captive Poles, Serbs, Russians, Czechs were murdered by their captors as if they were vermin, and were characterized as such – called “sub-human” – as were the 6 million Jews whose destruction was part of a deliberate genocidal plan (which failed, but only just failed) to destroy all the Jews of Europe.

Both the Jews and the Armenians have survived as a people, but it has taken both of them decades for their numerical strength to return to what it had been before the destructions. In the year 2000 the Jews have just reached the numbers – some 15 million – which they had reached in 1939, just as the Armenians – 7 million in 1915 – have only just reached, after eighty-five years, their earlier figure. The loss, for Jews and Armenians, of what might have been the achievement and contribution of vibrant, creative, life-enhancing, life-perpetuating generations, is incalculable.

There is one little-mentioned element of the Holocaust which I should like to mention. From the moment of the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the SS killing squads inside Russia itemized daily and sent back to Berlin lists of the thousands of Jews they had killed.⁵⁶ They noted down with pedantic precision, in separate listings, the exact numbers of Jewish men, women, and children whom they had murdered each day. They also listed, from time to time, individual Armenians whom they had killed. Like the Jews, these Armenians were not killed because they were soldiers or partisans, or constituted a threat to German rule, but because they had been characterized as beneath the dignity of human beings. Whenever I am in Lvov, one of the centres of the SS killing areas,

⁵⁶ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. II, p. 422.

I visit the Armenian quarter there, conscious of this link: that even the Holocaust had an Armenian aspect.

There is another Armenian aspect: three Armenians have been awarded the Medal of the Righteous by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum and memorial in Jerusalem, for helping to save Jewish lives during the Holocaust at the risk of their own lives. One of them, an Armenian doctor, Ara Jeretzian, saved at least 200 Jews by sheltering them in the hospital where he worked and in an emergency clinic which he set up in a private home, providing food and, when needed, false documents.⁵⁷ Another, Felicia Taschdjian, together with her husband, had hidden a Jew, Valentine Skidelsky, in the attic of their Viennese home for two and a half years.⁵⁸

In 1951 the United Nations Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (known as the Genocide Convention) came into force. It had originally been adopted by the United Nations almost three years earlier, on 9 December 1948. Its definition of genocide, which the Jewish human rights activist Raphael Lemkin had inspired, reads:

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such:

- a. Killing members of the group;
- b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.⁵⁹

Armenians, Ukrainians, Chinese, Poles, Serbs, Jews, were each among the victims of mass murder in the first half of the twentieth century leading up to the convention who came within this definition.

The coming into being of the Genocide Convention did not signal an end to genocide. The second half of the twentieth century was besmirched in that regard, year by year. The fate of Tibetans under Chinese Communist rule after 1951 was tragic. So was the fate of native Indian tribes in the forests of Brazil. So too was the fate of the people of East Timor, a former Portuguese colony which had just declared its independence, following the invasion of East Timor by Indonesian troops in 1975. As new

⁵⁷ Yad Vashem Archives, File no. 2002, Buday Tiborne, Dr. Gyori Palne and Dr. Mosonyi Laszlo, letter, 27 September 1977.

⁵⁸ Yad Vashem Archives, File no. 4962, Dara Skidelsky, letter, 24 July 1990.

⁵⁹ "Appendix I: Text of the 1948 Genocide Convention," in Andreopoulos, ed., *Genocide*, p. 229.

areas of genocidal acts emerged on the globe, it was clear that Churchill's "terrible twentieth century" had yet to run its destructive course. James Dunn, an Australian diplomat who was in East Timor at the time of the Indonesian invasion (he subsequently wrote *Timor: A People Betrayed*) has written:

The genocidal dimensions of the loss of life in East Timor emerged starkly in 1979, almost four years after the invasion, when Indonesian authorities finally allowed a small number of international aid workers to conduct a survey of the humanitarian needs of the province. The human misery they encountered shocked these officials, whose estimates suggested that in the preceding four years Timor had lost between a tenth and a third of its population and that 200,000 of the remainder were in appalling conditions in "resettlement camps," which one official, who had previously been in Cambodia, described as among the worst he had seen.⁶⁰

Also starting in 1975, in order to help secure his border against infiltration by groups hostile to his dictatorial regime, the Cambodian Prime Minister, Pol Pot, ordered the depopulation of a strip of territory along its border. This was done with a barbarity seldom seen even in the severity of South-East Asian conflicts. Pol Pot was also perpetrating terrifying crimes inside his country. The total death toll during five years of Khmer Rouge domination was a million and a half, out of a total population of 8 million. A chill indication of the scale of the killings is found in the words of the historian Ben Kiernan. "I first visited Cambodia in early 1975," he writes; "None of the Cambodians I knew then survived the next four years."⁶¹ In the words of George J. Andreopoulos, one of those who has most enhanced our knowledge of genocide, Pol Pot's regime was – he writes:

an open and shut case of genocidal activities on at least four fronts: the extermination of a religious group, the Buddhist monks (out of a total of 2,680 Buddhist monks from eight of Cambodia's monasteries, only 70 monks were found to have survived in 1979); and the persecution of three ethnic groups, including the Vietnamese community (in more than a year's research in Cambodia after 1979 it was not possible to find a Vietnamese resident who had survived the Pol Pot years there), the Chinese community (reduced by half by 1979); and the Muslim Chams (reduced by 36 percent, from 250,000 to 160,000, by 1979).⁶²

On 19 August 1984 the *New York Times* carried a news item about a recent episode in Sri Lanka. The government had rounded up some 5,000

⁶⁰ James Dunn, "East Timor: A Case of Cultural Genocide?" in Andreopoulos, ed., *Genocide*, p. 182.

⁶¹ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. III, p. 514. ⁶² Andreopoulos, "Introduction" p. 3.

Tamils over the previous weekend and executed them.⁶³ Israel Charny, author of *Genocide: The Human Cancer*, has described the persistent killing of Tamils by Sri Lankans as “genocidal massacre.”⁶⁴ The Tamil militants were not without genocidal tendencies of their own. On 30 May 1990, Amnesty International appealed to the Tamil Tigers to end their “executions” of political opponents.⁶⁵ The appeal was ignored. On 13 June the Tamil Tigers captured ninety Sinhalese policemen in eastern Sri Lanka and, having disarmed them, executed them.⁶⁶ Tamil Tigers also attacked moderate Tamil groups who were calling for restraint and compromise.

The Tamil Tigers also turned on the Muslim minority in Sri Lanka. On 3 August 1990 more than 100 Muslims were massacred at a mosque in Kattankudy. Two days later, 58 Muslims were murdered in their villages.⁶⁷ when Tamil Tigers captured the fort at Jaffna at the end of August, the Sri Lankan air force bombed the fort with considerable intensity; among the buildings destroyed in the bombing was the hospital, which had been placed under the control of the International Committee of the Red Cross. On 23 October the European Community protested at Sri Lanka’s “descent into unrestrained killings.”⁶⁸ What was being witnessed in Sri Lanka was a civil war with a genocidal aspect: hatreds inflamed between race and race, religion and religion: not unlike – though on a far smaller scale – the Catholic–Protestant killings in Northern Ireland, which cost more than 1,000 lives; or, on a larger scale, the Hindu–Muslim killings in the Indo–Pakistan borderlands in and around Kashmir, where according to recent reports⁶⁹ more than 30,000 people were killed in the 1990s.

In February 1988 the plight of the Armenians returned to the forefront of international consciousness. As the Soviet Union began to disintegrate, the Armenians of the Karabagh region – which Stalin had awarded to the overall control of the Muslim Azeris of Azerbaijan – took Gorbachev’s promise of *glasnost* and *perestroika* seriously, as they did his declarations that the time had come to rectify past errors of the Stalin era. For the Armenians a cardinal crime of Stalin was the award of Karabagh to Azerbaijan.

⁶³ “More Killing in Sri Lanka,” *New York Times*, 19 August, 1984, cited in Israel W. Charny, “Toward a Generic Definition of Genocide,” in Andreopoulos, ed., *Genocide*, pp. 77, 94 (n. 30).

⁶⁴ Charny, “Toward a Generic Definition of Genocide,” p. 77.

⁶⁵ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. III, p. 703.

⁶⁶ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. III, p. 703.

⁶⁷ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. III, p. 703.

⁶⁸ Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, vol. III, p. 703.

⁶⁹ “Kashmiri Killing Mounts as EU Arrives,” Reuters, in *Washington Post*, 27 September 2000, p. A24.