

Rethinking Genocide: Violence  
and Victimhood in Eastern Anatolia, 1913-1915

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of  
Cultural Anthropology in the Graduate School  
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ABSTRACT

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation examines the conflict in Eastern Anatolia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the memory politics around it. It shows how discourses of victimhood have been engines of grievance that power the politics of fear, hatred and competing, exclusionary claims to statehood and territory by Turks, Armenians, and Kurds. Grounded in extensive archival research in American, British, Turkish, and Armenian historical repositories, I trace how discourses of communal victimhood were generated around the traumatic ordeals in the two decades that preceded the Armenian genocide of 1915-6, carried out by the Young Turk government. The dissertation pays special attention to the nature of political tension and debate among Armenians on the eve of the genocide as well as rethinking the events and later interpretations of the iconic Armenian uprising in the Ottoman city of Van in 1915. The analysis here goes beyond deterministic, escalationist and teleological perspectives on the antecedents of the Armenian genocide; instead, it highlights political agency and enabling structures of the war, offering a new perspective on the tragic violence of Eastern Anatolia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

To my parents  
Gülsüm and Ali Cavit

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# 1. Introduction: Nations of Victims

We, the descendants of the late Ottoman Empire, are still connected today, more than by anything else, as a nation of *victims*; we all believe that we are victims of sorts; our collective victimhoods define and delimit the divide between ‘us’ and ‘them’ perhaps more than any other criteria. We imagine ‘our’ nation(s), too, through historicized narratives of shared injustice. Common to mainstream brands of ethnonationalist political ideologies is the premise that shared suffering marks ‘us’ as a unique community, ever threatened and continually in need of preemptive self-defense. Widespread, simplistic and stereotypical historical understandings of past grievances fuel these defensive, divisive perceptions of communal identity.

In official Turkish nationalist discourses, for example, ‘the Muslim Turk’ has been the victim of the great powers and supposedly treacherous subjects – mostly non-Muslim – since the era of the Ottoman Empire. For their part, the proponents of Armenian nationalism, including the Republic of Armenia’s current government, ground the entire idea of Armenian collective identity in terms of its martyrdom at the hands of the ‘Turk.’<sup>1</sup> As far as Kurdish nationalism is concerned, it operates by defining Kurdishness in terms of long ages of bloody

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the term martyrdom had been used by missionaries and Armenian writers to refer to the Armenian massacres as well as their routine persecution by the Ottoman State and local Muslims (typically Kurdish) since the 1890s. In the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide, martyrdom was very commonly used by British, French and German as well as Armenian analysts of this time to describe the 1915 catastrophe.

suppression by what Kurds call the *Roma res*, namely the Ottoman and its successor Turkish state.<sup>2</sup>

I should underline from the outset that none of these historical events, each the basis for Armenian, Turkish and Kurdish nationalist imaginaries, are simply fictitious. All credible scholars agree that following the war of Tripoli in 1911, if not earlier, the great European powers –England, Russia, Germany and Italy – regarded the Ottoman Empire, and its subjects, as easy prey for their imperial ambitions and scramble for new colonies. The Armenian pogroms of 1894-96, *Cilician Vespers* of 1909, and the most recent and heinous of all, the Armenian genocide of 1915-16, indeed occurred. It is also true that large numbers of Kurds have been exterminated pursuant to the *fermans*,<sup>3</sup> the brutal castigation of defiant Kurds, over the last century and a half. There can and should be no space for denialism in our efforts to make better sense of histories of violence.

The tensions over eastern Anatolia date back, most obviously, to the late 19th century. As the empire crumbled, varied nationalist interests stepped forward, and formerly less severe ethnic tensions between Turks, Armenians, and Kurds materialized with new force. The formation of the new nation-state of Turkey in 1923 (under charismatic founding figure Mustafa Kemal) was premised on the claim that all of Anatolia should and does belong to (Muslim) Turks. After World War I, virtually the entire Armenian population of eastern Anatolia was wiped out through massacres and forced deportations. An Armenian state subsequently formed

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<sup>2</sup> Literally black Rome; Blackness is attributed to the conscience of the Turkish/Ottoman state, Rome refers to the Roman Empire; for centuries people in Anatolia called official authorities located to their west generically as Roman.

<sup>3</sup> *Ferman*, literally order, edict or decree, refers to royal (or Ottoman Sultan's) decrees ordering castigation of defiant Kurds; in Kurmanji the verb *ferman rakirin* is a synonym for the verb *qir kirin* (to massacre).

in the contiguous region of the southern Caucasus: first, as an independent nation of its own; second, as part of the Soviet Union; and finally, in 1991, as an independent nation once again. Turkey and the Republic of Armenia still have only precarious diplomatic ties because of their dispute over the events of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as outstanding Armenian territorial claims and the Azeri-Armenian conflict over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Meanwhile, as the map of the Middle East was redrawn after the First World War, Kurds were entirely excluded, a group without a nation-state and instead at the margins of four: Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran. Tension between Kurds and the newly founded nation-state of Turkey found expression in long-running insurrections (and of course there has also been Kurdish unrest in Iran, Iraq, and Syria). In Turkey, beginning in the 1980s, Kurdish protest has taken the form of a guerrilla war led by the PKK. Today Eastern Turkey, the area of greatest Kurdish concentration, is still in a state of violent conflict. The PKK continues its attacks. Brutal reprisals by the Turkish security forces have sometimes heightened international tension by ranging across the border into Kurdish-controlled areas of northern Iraq. The Turkish state has also persecuted Kurdish (as well as Turkish) politicians and activists who advocate a peaceful solution to the conflict, leading to further polarization. The current political outlook, oscillating daily between reconciliation and civil war, reflects the precarious and, even now, potentially catastrophic dynamics of the conflict.

Discourses of victimhood, then, not only haunt the historical imagination, but also have real force in the current moment, helping to shape collective anxieties. They seem to explain why ‘we’ – whether the collective subject is Turkish, Kurdish, or Armenian – are not better off today, the fault always seeming to lie with the ethnic “other” if not with foreign powers. The memories

of past injustice against 'us' also shape visions of the future, sometimes dictating the imperatives of what should come next. The result is an ethnicizing, essentialist narrative of exclusionary injustice, suffering and innocence. This rhetoric defensively reconstitutes national identities; creates and rigidifies group boundaries; and establishes a notion of perpetually unpayable 'social debt.' Paradoxically, the sense of victimhood can fuel aggressive reactions, including acts of collective hatred and mass violence.

Collective trauma, genocide in particular, very often stretches on for decades or even centuries, far beyond the living memory of survivors.<sup>4</sup> More than a decade ago, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman remarked in a thought-provoking article that after half a century the Holocaust continued "polluting the world of the living." He pointed out "hereditary victimhood" – the *sui generis* claim of victim status by virtue of belonging to a historically victimized group ("victim by proxy")—as one of the troubling contours of "the Holocaust's life as a ghost."<sup>5</sup> Victimhood claims do not operate merely as an expression of identity status, but also generate those very identities. For instance, most Armenians, Turks and Kurds are by now at least five or six generations removed from the bloody early 20<sup>th</sup> century turmoil in eastern Anatolia. And yet, they often believe that they—as unique collectivities—are still victims of those events. Victimhood discourses, after all, are not uniform and stagnant; they can wax,

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<sup>4</sup> Researcher Honnah Starman suggests that in the case of Holocaust survivors, victim identity or trauma is transmitted by "the parents' experience of trauma and *not* by the parents' experience itself." She explains that "the vehicle of the transmission of trauma is the very set of coping strategies that helped the victim survive in the first place." Hannah Starman, "Generations of Trauma: Victimhood and the Perpetuation of Abuse in Holocaust Survivors," *History & Anthropology* 17, no. 4 (2006): 329-30. These psychological insights help us explain the transmission of trauma of victimization from actual victims to others, particularly to family members, yet we need sociological and anthropological perspectives to understand how an abstract and non-personal experience of trauma trespasses across time and space and haunts collective identities of groups,

<sup>5</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, "The Holocaust's Life as a Ghost," *Tikkun* 1998.

wane, or take new forms across the decades. This dissertation suggests that one major determinant of the formation, circulation, and popularization of discourses of victimhood is perceived political, social, and cultural uncertainty. Discourses of victimhood often respond as much to the anxiety and insecurity felt by an individual, group or nation about the present and future as to the past. This partly explains why the theme of victimhood remains as widespread as ever among Turks, Kurds and Armenians in the progressively globalizing world of the past two decades, one which, as anthropologist Arjun Appadurai puts it, has generated “a new order of uncertainty.”<sup>6</sup> Today, under the influence of the strong global wave of what might be called “anxious nationalisms,” the rhetoric of victimhood and the threat of the “Other” is as seductive as ever, if not more so.

An example of the never-ending cycle of anxious uncertainty, “victim” rhetoric and preemptive violence is the Sèvres Syndrome (from the 1920 treaty that envisioned partitioning Ottoman territories along ethnic lines). This syndrome of victimization, that is, the fear of disintegration, still haunts Turkish foreign and domestic politics; it propels xenophobic and aggressive patriotism in the drawing of ethnic and national boundaries and the stigmatization of other groups. Within this framework, efforts to question the idea of Turkish victimization meet official discouragement, and are sometimes painted as tantamount to treachery to the nation. Thus, recent proposed resolutions in the United States and France to recognize the Armenian Massacres of 1915 as acts of 'genocide' immediately sparked aggressive political and popular uproar in Turkey against what one politician demagogically labeled “the external enemies and their domestic pawns.” Public intellectuals, activists, and scholars advocating new views on

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<sup>6</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers : An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham, N.C.; London: Duke University Press ;, 2006).

Turkish history, including the mistreatment of Kurds and Armenians, are still legally persecuted. Sometimes, those who depart from nationalist dogma, as in the in the case of Hrant Dink, the well-known editor of the bi-lingual Istanbul-based Armenian weekly *Agos*, are even murdered by ultranationalist thugs.

When Dink was shot down in early 2007, some commentators described him as the 1,500,001st victim of the Armenian Genocide.<sup>7</sup> By the same token, in the early 1990s, large sections of the worldwide Armenian diaspora mobilized in support of the Republic of Armenia – the former Soviet Republic having become an independent nation shortly before the disintegration of the Soviet empire – in its war against Azerbaijan over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. This support included diplomacy, money, and ammunition, and also fighters. Hundreds of Armenian youth from the diaspora (including the United States, Canada and France) poured into the region, forming battalions to fight against ‘the Turk’ (equating Azeris with Turks for linguistic, religious and cultural affinities between the two groups) and avenge real and imagined past wrongs. In Yerevan, the Armenian capital, two Armenian militants engaged in the bloody campaign to force Azeris from their homes told me that their cause was “righteous,” as they did what their “history had taught them to do.” But the subject of massacres committed in Nagorno-Karabakh still remains a strict taboo in Armenia.

And consider the case of the Kurdish guerilla leader Abdullah Öcalan. When he was captured in Kenya in February 1999 and subsequently tried in Turkey, many Kurdish intellectuals, including his first attorney, claimed historical continuity, namely that

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Fisk’s account of the Dink assassination can be found at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/robert-fisk-awardwinning-writer-shot-by-assassin-in-istanbul-street-432860.html>

Öcalan was being persecuted in just the same way as previous Kurdish rebels, among them Sheikh Said<sup>8</sup> and Seyid Rıza.<sup>9</sup> A prominent PKK leader recently explained the group's decision to end the ceasefire it declared before the 2011 parliamentary elections by describing the guerilla movement as "the Freedom fighters of a people which has endured [for hundreds of years] the greatest injustice and massacres possible in history." He added that the current AKP government's policy was only formally different from earlier state policies towards Kurds of extermination and imprisonment. This time, the PKK leader said, the Kurdish movement would not be deceived, as was the case with previous Kurdish uprisings.<sup>10</sup> The subsequent spiral of armed violence included a bloody PKK attack, which claimed the lives of dozens of Turkish security forces and led to harsh counterattacks by the army, who allegedly used chemical weapons and napalm bombs to kill forty guerrilla fighters in a single assault. Each side, as usual, imagined itself to be the "real" victims in a conflict, and themselves to blameless.

An obsession with historical *truth* is part of the equation. All sides fetishize archival documentation; they embrace the fantasy that recovered data from the archives will prove their own version of themselves as the true victims and rival groups as the perpetrators.<sup>11</sup> When I decided to study the history of this conflict more than ten years

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<sup>8</sup> The leader of the Kurdish anti-Kemalist movement of 1924.

<sup>9</sup> The chief of the Sheyh Hesenan tribe of Dersim. He is commonly named as the leader of the Kurdish 'insurgency' in the Dersim area in the early years of the republic. During the genocidal campaign against Dersim (1935-38) he was invited to Elazığ for negotiation, arrested and later executed in September 1937 after a summary trial.

<sup>10</sup> A full text of the letter can be found at <http://www.firatnews.com/index.php?rupel=nuce&nuceID=51047>.

<sup>11</sup> This attitude is particularly widespread within the Turkish side. The Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan has repeatedly claimed that the discussion of Armenian claims to genocide should be left to historians and he has called on the Armenian government to open up its archives for use by independent scholars. Ironically,

ago, I also believed that more substantiated knowledge of the past would pull back the curtain of ideology and falsehood to reveal the truth. Perhaps naively, I felt that better understanding of the roots of the current conflicts could contribute to reconciliation.<sup>12</sup>

But I have come to think the conflict centering on eastern Anatolia over the past century is not really about the truth of the past at all. Instead, I believe we owe the current manifestations of the conflict to the radical transformations of the last three decades, rather than to the catastrophes of a century and a half ago or the harvest of their bitter fruits between 1894 and 1938. Instead, I believe that the rival ethno-territorial claims, less than the harvest of their bitter fruits between 1894 and 1938, are as much as anything a modern product, taking shape and hardening in a more pronounced way in the last three decades in an increasingly uncertain post-Cold War world, under the sweeping winds of globalization.

In other words, as I see it, what we have today in the region is indeed a new and not an ancient conflict. Recall, in fact, that the major state and would-be state actors -- the Republic of Armenia, post-Cold War/neo-liberal Turkey, and the PKK -- in the drama only came into being in this relatively recent period. Now the battle is *globally* fought—weaponized with *non-conventional* tools—both in the region and in diasporas by multiplying novel actors who are ironically then lumped into strictly historicized ‘camps.’ In a nutshell, the specter of history, conceived in radically different ways by the competing sides, haunts the confrontations today. To be sure, though the conflict bears

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in Turkey today’s Turkey governed by Erdoğan’s government, scholars and intellectuals are still being persecuted with trumped up charges (for aiding or being members of terrorist organizations).

<sup>12</sup> In my over three years of research at Turkish, Armenian, British and American archives, I have never come up with even a single such miraculous document and I have doubt anyone ever will!

traces of the bloody past, its full body and form are located resolutely at the current moment, as must be any hopes for lasting peace and a measure of mutual trust and understanding.

In 2009, the Turkish Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, met in Switzerland with his Armenian counterpart, Eduard Nalbandyan. The two men signed historic documents delineating a road map to reconciliation between the two countries and perhaps the two peoples. Tellingly, the agreements included creating a history sub-commission. But Armenian groups protested against the Armenian government for endorsing the protocols. They feared that the Armenian side agreeing on a roadmap to reconciliation and normalization in the face of the Turkish state's persistent denial of the genocide would jeopardize the cause of genocide recognition, if not shelve it for good.<sup>13</sup> For Armenian critics the most irking and humiliating of all was the proposed history sub-commission to unveil the 'truth,' which the current Turkish (AKP) government had been advocating for many years. Under growing international pressure, including from the USA and Russia, the Armenian Foreign Minister reluctantly agreed to sign the protocols. The charter for the history sub-commission was:

to implement a dialogue with the aim to restore mutual confidence between the two nations, including an impartial scientific examination of the *historical record* and *archives* to define existing problems and formulate recommendations, in which Armenian, Turkish as well as Swiss and other international experts shall take part.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Another clause in the agreement which received widespread protest from Armenian circles was the Armenian side's recognition of Turkey's territorial integrity which unequivocally meant putting aside Armenian territorial claims on the parts of Eastern Anatolia.

<sup>14</sup> Full text of the two protocols in English can be found at [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009\\_2014/documents/d-tr/dv/1006\\_10\\_/1006\\_10\\_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/d-tr/dv/1006_10_/1006_10_en.pdf). The full

The fact that *historical research* became a focal issue in the negotiations might sound bizarre to outsiders; it certainly did to some of my American friends. Yet if the parties involved in a conflict draw their very rationale and dedication to conflict from incessant references to past wrongs, then *we need to take history seriously*. We must do so not only to understand what really happened in the past, but also to explore how particular historical constructions of the past are produced and to what ends. We need more nuanced, critical archival research into the actual events of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Even more crucial perhaps is exploring the ways in which essentialist discourses of victimhood sustain conflict in an ever-globalizing world. We need to examine, in other words, how history itself has come to be used, narrated, and sometimes re-imagined for xenophobic ends and the politics of antagonism and violence. This study is a step in that direction.

## 1.1 Dissertation Overview

Tracing the development of the historical imagination in Eastern Anatolia is an immensely demanding, logistically challenging task; it requires research across countries, languages, historical periods and political positions. As an initial and, admittedly, very incomplete step in describing the genealogies of discourses of victimhood, this dissertation explores key sites for the construction of ethnonationalist discourses of innocence, accusation, and guilt. I treat history – simultaneously understood as an academic endeavor, popular discourse, and archival record – *seriously*. My account, however, neither aims to solve the *mystery* of historical *truth*, nor does it presume that doing so would be the proper course for

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text of the Protocol on Development of Relations between The Republic of Turkey and The Republic of Armenia, which includes the clause on the History Sub-Commission, in Armenian, Turkish and English languages can be found at [http://www.mfa.am/u\\_files/file/20091013\\_protocol1.pdf](http://www.mfa.am/u_files/file/20091013_protocol1.pdf).

research. This dissertation should be read, then, less as a history of Eastern Anatolian conflict and the Armenian genocide, and more as an ethnographic exploration of the cultural formations of victimhood, specifically among Armenians on the eve of the most catastrophic victimization of the Armenian people.

Exploring key historical episodes occurring between June 1913 – August 1915, my chapters trace how dissimilar and often exclusive discourses of communal victimhood have been dynamically generated around them, bending what actually happened to the agendas of ethnic and national blamelessness and suffering. I show how such historical discourses emerged (a) as expressions of vulnerability and anxiety in the face of uncertainty; (b) as manifestations of worrisome prospects haunted by the nightmares of the massacres of previous two decades; (c) as political rhetoric that helped spread impatient dreams and foment aggressive mobilization; and (d) as an ideological means for exclusive nationalist claims and state formation, or more broadly, for governmentality, in the classic Foucauldian sense of a modern regime of bureaucracy and control. Hence, this manuscript treats *victimhood* less as a cause than an effect, that is, a post-traumatic condition of collective memory and identity formation that itself guarantees continuing mistrust and worse.

In the field of Armenian genocide scholarship, a growing number of researchers have over the past decade diverged from the “premeditated continuum” position, which presumes, as historian Richard Hovannisian puts it, description, that “the death warrant for the Armenian people had already been issued in secret meeting of the Young Turk dictators,” and the war simply “created the conditions in which genocide could be

implemented.”<sup>15</sup> Analysts in this camp have commonly identified the motive of the perpetrators as some combination of radical (pan)Turkism, social Darwinism, and Islamist intolerance and fanaticism.<sup>16</sup>

At least ostensibly, the “wartime radicalization” position rejects the idea of “a direct linear link”<sup>17</sup> between the design of the genocide and the pre-war developments. Here it is claimed that the decision to carry out genocide only occurred with changing conditions related to the outbreak of World War I in 1914. The break with the underlying assumptions of the premeditation position, however, is not altogether complete in the “wartime radicalization” position, with some degree of genocide’s premeditation still assumed. The larger premise is --that the ante-bellum was a time of growing ideological polarization with widening political tensions and rising confrontation among political elites, communities of eastern Anatolia and between state and society in general. A view of escalation as an ideologically, politically, and socially foreordained process is so normalized in Armenian genocide scholarship that even those who have raised fundamental challenges to its dimension of teleological historical

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<sup>15</sup> Richard G. Hovannisian, "The Armenian Genocide : Wartime Radicalization or Premeditated Continuum?," in *The Armenian Genocide : Cultural and Ethical Legacies*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that there is significant variation within the “premeditated continuum” approach. A major point of contention within this “camp” of scholarship is how the ideological structures claimed to be the motives behind the genocidal intent are described. Some locate the formation of those structures within the context of the Young Turk revolution, Turkish modernization and nation state formation: see Robert Melson, *Revolution and Genocide : On the Origins of the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Gérard Chaliand and Yves Ternon, *The Armenians, from Genocide to Resistance* (London; Totowa, N.J.: Zed Press ; U.S. distributor, Biblio Distribution Center, 1983). Others, however, point to a longer historical processes and more deeply embedded socio-cultural dynamics: see Vahakn N. Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide : Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1995); H. Kazarian, "The Turkish Genocide of Armenians: A Premeditated and Official Assault," *The Armenian Review* 30, no. 1 (1977).

<sup>17</sup> Taner Akçam, 'Ermeni Meselesi Hallolunmuştur' : *Osmanlı Belgelerine Göre Savaş Yıllarında Ermenilere Yönelik Politikalar* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2008), 133-34.

determinism concur that “on the eve of the First World War, the empire and its Armenian population stood on the edge of a precipice.”<sup>18</sup>

A very common presumed tipping point toward escalation is the Balkan Wars (1912-13). For the proponents of the escalation approach, the humiliating defeat of the Ottoman Empire against a coalition of Bulgarian, Serbian, Greek and Montenegrin armies in the wars and its demographic, cultural, ideological and political consequences marked a “watershed” regarding the conflict in Eastern Anatolia. What followed is treated as a “politics of confrontation” –a process of escalation which continued until the genocide.<sup>19</sup> The three major pillars of the escalation argument are, first, the assumption of an ideological radicalization of Turkish nationalist thinkers and policy makers after the tragedy of the Balkan Wars; second, and interrelatedly, the tensions produced by the implementation of radically exclusionary economic and administrative measures by the central government for the ends of Turkification of non-Turkish groups; and, thirdly the fear of disintegration among the elite of the CUP produced in the diplomatic dogfight generated by the Eastern Anatolian Reform Project, with the CUP coming to see Ottoman Armenians and their political organizations as agents of destruction.

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<sup>18</sup> Donald Bloxham, *Genocide, the World Wars and the Unweaving of Europe* (London; Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008), 26. Bloxham’s work has been one of the most significant contributions to the study of Armenian genocide over the past decade. Aside from Michael Mann’s, it is Bloxham’s work that offers a clear analytical break from the determinism of the premeditation position. His insight that “there was no pre-war evidence of intent, and no precedent,” is one of the earliest calls to for a re-evaluation of the Armenian genocide. Donald Bloxham, “The Beginning of the Armenian Catastrophe,” in *Der Völkermord an Den Armeniern Und Die Shoah / the Armenian Genocide and the Shoah*, ed. Hans-Lukas Kieser and Dominik J. Schaller (Zürich: Chronos, 2003), 105. After all, it is extremely illustrative of the prevalence of the escalation model that even in his account we find the idea that a catastrophe at the scale of Armenian genocide was to be expected on the eve of the war.

<sup>19</sup> Fikret Adanir, “Armenian Deportations and Massacres in 1915,” in *Ethnopolitical Warfare : Causes, Consequences, and Possible Solutions*, ed. Daniel Chirot and Martin E. P. Seligman (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001), 75.

I do not dispute that these factors had contributed to conditions that made genocide possible. But my analysis goes farther to ask, first, whether these dynamics had the same effect on the eastern question and/or Eastern Anatolia as they did on other groups or geographical areas; and second, if their *only* consequence was more conflict in the region.

To do so, I investigate the political debates and on-the-ground situation in the Eastern Anatolian provinces. My examination shows that the period between June 1913 and July 1914 was, in fact, not one of escalating conflict. The political configuration indeed offered manifold choices for the elites from various groups who, even in the midst of competition and rivalry, continued to cooperate. Regarding inter-communal relations and the security situation in the eastern provinces, there was no sign of steady deterioration. On the contrary, although invisible in the ex-post facto scholarship of the escalationists, there were actually plenty of signs of improving relations between Armenian politicians and activists and their counterparts in the CUP government.

In short, I conclude that there was no indication of the kind of aggression that would allow us to deduce that as of August 1914, when the war broke out, any group in the region was standing “on the edge of a precipice.” Quite the opposite: I show that for the most part, Armenian journalists and political figures shared a similar optimism that Dr. Ussher, a Protestant American Missionary stationed in Van, expressed a few months

before the First World War broke out: “the present outlook seems brighter than any near since the granting of the Constitution [the Young Turk Revolution of 1908].”<sup>20</sup>

So what does the fact that such strong consensus continues to persist around the escalation approach tell us about the study of genocide in general and the Armenian genocide in particular? That the subject of genocide studies being perhaps the most traumatizing collective human experience possible has certain disorienting effects in the way mass violence comes to be narrated in the aftermath of its occurrence. One such effect is what I call *escalation bias*, namely a tendency to focus on the factors that led to genocide over those that militated against it. Whatever pertains to peace or the possibility of de-escalation, in other words, is often downplayed, ignored or left unnoticed in the historical discourses produced around the genocide, sometimes including that of scholars.

The first and foremost cause of this bias is that the very subject of the study is hatred, dehumanization, violence and destruction in its most severe, exceptional and *unthinkable* form, and thus seems to demand the reassurance of explanation. Genocide scholars commit themselves to the grueling task of “deciphering genocide,” that is exploring this horrifyingly extreme phenomenon to make sense out of it and to discover analytical patterns through a comparative investigation of various cases.

The second and related cause is the common underlying motive of the field: predicting genocide. Sociologist Thomas Cushman points out that the field of genocide studies “implicitly and explicitly” holds the conviction that by cracking the codes of

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<sup>20</sup> 1913-1914 Annual Report of Van Medical Mission (Received by the ABC office on July 1914) by Clarence D. Ussher, Papers of the ABC 16. 9. 7. (Reel 712: 130).

genocide, we can predict and help design mechanisms to prevent it. I concur with Cushman that this assumption overlooks the most salient qualities of genocide, namely “its contingency, unpredictability, and its status as a product of *human agency*.”<sup>21</sup>

The suggestion that genocide is unpredictable bears crucial theoretical implications. First, no genocide is an *a priori* given, as structural factors can be necessary but never sufficient conditions of genocide. Further, human agency in genocidal processes depends on forces that often go beyond any sense of rational action. Hence, genocides are not inevitable events; even after a conflict enters its “danger zone,” all red flags flying, the process could still reverse towards de-escalation. Barbara Harff, in fact, asks: “How many times have we discovered that all conditions specified are present yet somehow an apparently escalating crisis fizzled due to some unanticipated event?”<sup>22</sup> Further, even in cases ending in genocide, the onset of violence is not characterized solely by increased conflict or escalation.

*Escalation bias*, regardless of the author’s intentions, leads to a *teleology of genocide* which renders alternative scenarios impossible and downplays political agency, reconstructing genocide as the inevitable outcome. My analysis of the eve of the Armenian genocide (June 1913 – July 1914) highlights the drawbacks of escalation bias and helps us understand with more precision that the pathway to genocide is seldom, if ever, unidirectional. I show in chapter 2 that there was not a foreordained escalation

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas Cushman, “Is Genocide Preventable? Some Theoretical Considerations,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 5, no. 4 (2003): 524.

<sup>22</sup> Barbara Harff, “Early Warning of Humanitarian Crisis: Sequential Models and the Role of Accelerators.” In, John L. Davies and Ted Robert Gurr, eds., *Preventive Measures : Building Risk Assessment and Crisis Early Warning Systems* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield,1998), 72.

towards a *final solution*. To the contrary, there were important historical forces at play for de-escalation.

The argument here is not that conflict simply disappeared. My discussion indeed acknowledges that ethnic and other forms of violence continued to be part of everyday life and the shadow of apprehension did not magically dissipate. I demonstrate instead that a precarious peace replaced the more aggressive social and political situation of 1911-1912. As of July 1914, many outcomes were still possible. The eventual catastrophe was only one of those possibilities, and indeed perhaps the least foreseeable. That disaster occurred was not guaranteed by what happened in the aftermath of the Balkan Wars, but rather by political actors' decisions after the start of World War I.

In the specific context of Armenian genocide scholarship, I suggest that the field is still constrained by a fallacious *ideological determinism*. What we still have is a "tacit assumption," as Erik Zürcher insightfully observes, that ideological constructs (Turkism, Islamism, Ottomanism, or a mixture of these) "formed the frame of reference for the political leadership of the Young Turks."<sup>23</sup> Likewise, many accounts of the Armenian genocide postulate that the state formation *project* of the CUP elite by and large, shaped the draconian policies of the central authority; that is, in such analyses the Armenian genocide is explained in connection --either as a direct effect, a stage or a byproduct-- of an already configured state formation *project*, such as Turkism or pan-Islamism. More recently, several younger scholars have added to ideological determinants the

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<sup>23</sup> Erik Jan Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building : From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey* (London; New York; New York: I. B. Tauris ; Distributed in the United States exclusively by Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 217-19.

“scientific” techniques of high modernist governmentality, the interest of the CUP in a new grid of citizenship and control that had little place for minority groups like the Kurds and Armenians.<sup>24</sup>

Exploring the linkages between Young Turk-era ideology and the Armenian catastrophe helps us contextualize the genocide within the evolving nation-state paradigm. Likewise recent studies of high modernist thinking in the late Ottoman period and consequent practices of demographic engineering tell us much about the evolution of one thread of Turkish state mentality in the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet ideological determinism, which effectively replicates the “premeditated continuum” framework, ignores (political) agency and, more importantly, muddies the matter of responsibility for violence.

In my view the problem is the assumption that genocidal motives –in the form of reified ideologies and fetishized projects—pre-existed any actual genocidal design, intent and target. This form of explanation searches out aggressive nationalist discursive formulations and policy blueprints and then use them as evidence for the veracity of the escalation narrative, counting down toward its *inevitable* conclusion.

It is true that the ideologies articulated by individual or collective actors allow us to analytically and comparatively *contextualize* historical episodes, especially genocides.

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<sup>24</sup> For instance one analyst depicted the deportation and massacres as part and parcel of “the Young Turk social engineering in Eastern Turkey [between 1913-50]” Uğur Ümit Üngör, “Seeing Like a Nation-State: Young Turk Social Engineering,” in *Late Ottoman Genocides : The Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and Young Turkish Population and Extermination Policies*, ed. Dominik J. Schaller and Jürgen Zimmerer (London: Routledge, 2009), 14-22. In the same vein, another scholar argued more recently that statistics (both the data collected during the decades preceding the genocide and statistics as a technique) in the hands of the “positivist” Young Turk government (1913-1918) was not only the “vehicle” but also the “reason,” for the genocide Fuat Dündar, *Crime of Numbers : The Role of Statistics in the Armenian Question (1878-1918)* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2010).

Yet ideological frameworks are not simple roadmaps to action. Ideological analysis will only be useful as long as *it first contextualizes discursive positions and prejudices within their historical context*. In the Armenian case and all genocides, this kind of analysis requires, as I hope to show, a careful historical ethnography of what sets of ideas meant for the actors; second, a commitment to establish the actual links between ideology and action, paying special attention to the constraints and possibilities specific to that milieu. Finally, I argue that practices are often not merely the epiphenomenal effects of underlying ideological causes, but rather the basis for the elaboration of line-drawing ideologies of exclusion and inclusion. This is a particularly salient point when studying events (such as genocides) that point to the radical rupture of an entire social world.

I discuss the forms of ideological determinism that pertain to Armenian genocide studies in detail in Chapter Two. One striking example of is the recurrent citation in studies of the Armenian genocide of the writings and utopian nationalist poetry of Ziya Gökalp, the most influential Turkist ideologue for the Young Turk and early republican elite and also a member of the CUP central committee, whose famous Turan<sup>25</sup> poem can be read as embryonic form of expansionist Turkish chauvinism (and easily linked to anti-Armenian sentiment). But if we are to believe Hüseyin Cahit the editor of the pro-CUP newspaper *Tanin* and a notable figure in the inner circle of the CUP (and I see no reason why not to in this context), then how should we interpret his statement that Ziya

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<sup>25</sup> Imagined homeland of the united Ural-Altai language group. This utopia initially inspired by the works of European historians and linguists around the turn of the century, in later versions the unity was modified as one of Turkic peoples. In the Ottoman Empire the Turanist utopia became popular after 1912, particularly among the intellectuals gathered around the Turkish Homestead (Türk Ocağı). It should be noted that most of these intellectuals occasionally switched positions across Turanism, Pan-Turkism and (Anatolia) Turkism.

Gökalp was one of the three central committee members to oppose “the shape the deportation of Armenians has taken”<sup>26</sup> His writing and thinking, in other words, was not so neatly tied to the project of Armenian extermination as an escalationist interpretation would have it.

However, I also show in chapter 2 how in the aftermath of the Balkan Wars, especially in Eastern Anatolia, conspiracy theories related to past atrocities and future danger had begun to brew in everyday talk and popular culture; a noticeable anxiety and the expectation of imminent victimization is clear in the correspondence and writings of politicians and military men. I argue that these fears did not derive from an actual escalation of political tension or an upsurge of inter-communal violence, but rather by perceived uncertainties about the survival of the Ottoman Empire after its humiliating defeat in the Balkan Wars.

This moment of instability opened up the space for a powerful mixture of panic, speculation and opportunism among the nationalist community leaders and fear among lay people. Hence, the discourses of communal victimhood in this period reflected a deep feeling of insecurity. This anxious psycho-political mood presented an extremely combustible environment as World War I began, and became an important dynamic in

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<sup>26</sup> Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın, *Siyasal Anılar* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 1976), 236. There is no evidence to suggest that Ziya Gökalp stood against the idea of deportation, as such. On the contrary, after the war he defended the draconian measures against Ottoman-Armenian population as an act of self-defense in (mutual warfare). Yet, the point here is that there is no proof to comfortably argue --as one would expect from the ideologue of the movement at the time-- that he was a fervent supporter of genocidal policies either. And Hüseyin Cahit's testimony, although not specific, suggests that he was not among the eagles or hardliners regarding the Armenian deportations.

the eventual violent collapse of inter-communal coexistence in Eastern Anatolia during the war.

The fifth chapter of the dissertation revisits the most controversial site of the Armenian genocide, the Eastern Anatolia province of Van in 1915. However, it does so in a very unconventional way: focusing exclusively on the short-lived Armenian governorship in Van in the summer of 1915, this chapter diverges from the bulk of existing studies. Conventional accounts, Armenian, Turkish, Russian and North American alike, have focused on the first phase of the catastrophe, namely the famous Armenian rebellion in Van in April 1915. In fact, few other episodes of the Armenian genocide have attracted as much interest as the Van rebellion; in all genres of historical representation, including fiction, cinema and memoir, the events of the early spring of 1915 in Van have unparalleled symbolic weight.

As I show, however the enormous attention paid to the rebellion has been accompanied by a noteworthy and (with a few exceptions<sup>27</sup>) almost complete erasure of the story of the Armenian governorship. My chapter is currently the only English language account that directly addresses this extremely significant episode in the history of the region, which Armenian historian Anahid Ter-Minassian has called “the first nucleus of “Armenian sovereignty.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The fact that only exceptions to the general rule of oblivion come out of the historiography of Armenian state formation that has flourished in the Republic of Armenia since its independence in 1990 is very telling. This demonstrates that in Armenian historical writings, the experience of Armenian rule in Van becomes visible only once the subject is distanced from the battleground of *the war of positions* vis-à-vis 1915 and resituated as part of the Armenian nation state formation, specifically as a precursor to the *First Armenian Republic* (or as it is often called, *the Dashnag Republic*) in the Southern Caucasus in 1918.

<sup>28</sup> Anahide Ter Minassian, "Van 1915," in *Armenian Van/Vasporakan*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers, 2000), 242.

I suggest that the lopsided reconstruction of *Van 1915* (that is, the rebellion and Armenian governorship) reflects a desire to recall and give significance to historical images only insofar as they can be indexed in the neatly catalogued *archives of communal victimization*. The Armenian uprising and defense of Van in April 1915 fits such Manichean historiographical imperatives; the events serve as a rare episode where a community under existential threat consolidated and intra-communal heterogeneity and tension seemed to dissipate.

In contrast, the Armenian governorship experience exhibits a composite picture, one which challenges the fetish of nations as dominant actors, and makes visible multiple ideational and social positions, such as class status, political affiliation and allegiance to place. The historical record of this two-and-a-half month rehearsal for an Armenian nation-state also challenges the binary of victim/perpetrator and exhibits the intricacies of Van Armenian victimization. It is these very intricacies that have rendered the experience of Armenian governorship tangential or marginal to simplistic yet canonical victim-perpetrator frameworks.

This chapter is also unconventional in terms of the questions that guided my research. My primary objective was to explore a major contour of victimization, namely, what a victimized collectivity does with its victimization. Therefore the chapter tackles the ordeal of Armenian victimhood in Van 1915 both empirically and symbolically. My account documents and disentangles multiple sources and forms of collective suffering. But it also conducts an analysis of shifting discursive reconstructions of the suffering experience. Ultimately, this chapter inquires into the (re)production and politics of

(collective) victimhood, its changing meanings and what defines it amid rapidly shifting power matrices and political agendas.

It should be underscored that the Armenian Genocide of 1915 had major geographical variations. Within the intricate landscape of the panorama the province of Van in the spring and summer of 1915, has a very distinct place. Van --the hub of the CUP-ARF alliance after the Young Turk revolution of 1908— is interestingly the first place in the empire where inter-communal coexistence entirely and violently collapsed. Between August 1914 and April 1915 the political barometer in the province measured the growing tensions along the fault line that stretched from the Russian Southern Caucasus and Northern Iran to Istanbul through Van.

Van is also the site in the Ottoman Empire where the genocidal intent of the Young Turk government first materialized. It was the ruling elite's fantasy of an imminent "Armenian conspiracy" that triggered the so-called Armenian Rebellion in April 1915. The consequent *self-defense (inknapashtpanutiwn)* --the decades-old dream of the Armenian revolutionaries to unite and mobilize the entire nation for its salvation— took shape with unprecedented and unexpected success in this context. Van Armenians managed to resist the government's utterly exterminationist repression in the city and other districts in the province. Yet, the CUP would turn its "failure" to quell the Van uprising as one more justification (along with its battleground reverses to the Russians supported by volunteer Armenian battalions) that the CUP government drew on to depict its Armenian subjects as internal enemies.

Van became the first Ottoman province to fall under Russian occupation in May 1915. Above and beyond its unique political significance, Armenian governorship in Van between May-July 1915 presented an historical irony: at a time when the rest of the Ottoman-Armenians were being subjected to widespread arrests, deadly deportations and unprecedented massacres, Van Armenians were building their *own* rule in the province under Russian protection. For seventy-four days, one hundred and fifty thousand Armenians of the province, largely cut off from the rest of the country and with extremely limited knowledge of the ordeal of Ottoman-Armenians outside of Van, lived in a new political cosmos. This moment in Van featured a new matrix of power along lines of cultural/ethnic, class, political and spatial allegiance; it also involved the discursive and social production of new victims and victimizers alike, with new identities and new forms of suffering.

The unexpected retreat ordered by the Russian military authorities in mid-July had momentous consequences for Armenian history. First, it marked both the destruction of the historic city of Van and the end of Armenian presence as a social unit. Second, tens of thousands of Van Armenians perished during the arduous and sometimes violent (due to Kurdish attacks) retreat. Finally, it signified the collapse of the wartime pan-Armenianist political strategy pursued by the Armenian movement gathered around the National Bureau in Tiflis and led by the ARF.

As I show, Van was the epicenter of the Armenian genocide, the place where it incubated. Paradoxically, however, genocide as such did not occur in the province. In this sense, Van was not what Primo Levi famously called a *gray zone*, the shifting social

space between a fixed oppressor and a clear-cut victims. On the contrary, the entire power structure in Van swiftly and radically changed hands between Turks and Armenians multiple times in a matter of a few months. True enough, the sides, insofar as we can treat ethnic groups as actors at all, had very clear distinctions between themselves and others and collective violence swept the province in successive waves. But Van in 1915 was a distinctive space within the larger devastating landscape of the Armenian genocide, one where myriad experiences, agendas, and actors clashed and coexisted without any single dynamic or force establishing its unquestioned hegemony. Further Armenians were deeply divided amongst themselves in many ways. Further, all groups suffered comparable destruction: Reliability of any statistical data from the period is disputable, yet, only during the exodus and in the following few months one third of Van Armenians perished,<sup>29</sup> and Justin McCarthy *et al* claim that only 38 percent of Van Muslims (mostly Kurdish) survived World War I (1914-1918).<sup>30</sup>

Insofar as chapter 5 shows with the formation of the Armenian provisional government table turned; the new regime brutalized Muslims and sometimes other Armenians in its period of rule destabilizing facile assumptions of the fixity of structures of power and victimhood. I take inspiration from political scientist Mahmood Mamdani's study of the Rwandan catastrophe, that demonstrates how a subaltern

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<sup>29</sup> This number not cover those Armenians who were killed during the massacres, assault and clashes between November 1914 – July 1915. *Ibid.*, 242-43.

<sup>30</sup> Justin McCarthy, *The Armenian Rebellion at Van*, Utah Series in Turkish and Islamic Studies (Salt Lake City, Utah: The University of Utah Press, 2006), 246.

group, the Hutus, effectively metamorphosed into brutal genocidaires of the ruling Tutsis in the course of changing political circumstances.<sup>31</sup>

The shift from victim to victimizer status is indeed a frequent occurrence, especially in ethnic conflicts. In anthology edited by Nicholas A. Robins and Adam Jones, the contributors examine the topic of genocides by the oppressed. Covering cases of mass-killing by historically subaltern peoples between the 17<sup>th</sup> to late 20<sup>th</sup> centuries from colonial Latin America to Cambodia, the book underscores that the downtrodden, when circumstances converge, may be just as capable of carrying out exterminationist or mass-killing campaigns as more powerful institutional actors or social groups.<sup>32</sup> As important as the statement that the subaltern too may have “genocidal capacity,” acts of subaltern violence must, of course, also be contextualized in the specificities of the history and circumstances.

My chapter on Armenian Governorship in Van does not directly address the topic of subaltern genocide, and yet it does throw into relief the way the need to move beyond essentialized view of groups treated as “victims,” in this case Armenians. Far from homogenous, I show in chapter 3 and 4 how various sometimes radically divergent political positions emerged and evolved in Armenian political circles, specifically in Istanbul and Tiflis, the two major Armenian cultural and political centers of the time. In

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<sup>31</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers : Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001). Considering the new chapters added to the tragedy, *ibid.* Unfortunately, Mamdani’s observation seems to have been (re)validated in Rwanda over the past decade and Hutus once again became killers since the study came out as a recent UN report suggests. A concise discussion of the UN report can be found at <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/Africa-Monitor/2010/0826/Bombshell-UN-report-leaked-Crimes-of-genocide-against-Hutus-in-Congo> (last seen November 27, 2011).

<sup>32</sup> Nicholas A. Robins and Adam Jones, *Genocides by the Oppressed : Subaltern Genocide in Theory and Practice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

these chapters, I trace the history of escalation leading up to the genocide from the Armenian side, exploring how an idea of past and future victimization affected Armenian war agendas. To tackle this problem, I first investigate diverse outlooks of Armenian political and religious organizations regarding the war's impact on Ottoman-Armenians; secondly, and in consequence, I discuss different formulations of Ottoman-Armenian victimhood and how these formulations took shape and evolved in relation to the changing geopolitics of wartime.

I suggest that the most decisive factor determining the war agendas of Armenian political actors was their optimism or pessimism concerning the consequences of the war. Accordingly, Armenian political circles in the Ottoman Empire, in the Southern Caucasus, and elsewhere in the world were split into two major camps. On one side were those who envisioned a short war that would end with an Entente victory (and an easy Russian victory against the Ottoman Empire (if the Ottoman Empire decided to participate in the war on the German side). Such an easy victory with little or no cost to the Armenian people, the Armenian optimists thought, would create a favorable regional and international environment for Armenian autonomy, or perhaps even for more. By contrast, the pessimists in this heated debate on the eve of the genocide expected that the war would be calamitous for the Armenian people, especially in the event of a Russian--Turkish clash; they believed the CUP (Committee of Union and Progress) government of the Young Turks would use the war to exact revenge from the Armenians, all the more so for their perceived "disloyalty" in having insisted on foreign control of the recent Eastern Anatolian Reform talks.

As I show, there was much variation within the optimist and pessimist positions; further, the strength of each position varied across place and according to political affiliation. The optimist position prevailed particularly among the Armenians in the Russian Empire and diaspora especially in France and in USA, whereas pessimistic visions were more often expressed among Ottoman-Armenians, perhaps because they had the most to fear from Ottoman reprisals if things went wrong. Although I address the war agendas and victimhood discourses of various Armenian political groups, my primary focus in Chapters Three and Four is on the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), the main group dealing with CUP government.

My analysis highlights *political agency* as a decisive dynamic in the course of genocidal escalation. Drawing on political theorist Perry Anderson's formulation, I define political agency as the *conscious activities of collective subjects directed toward a public goal*. By conscious activity, I mean choices made according to a political program shaped by the collective subject. As Anderson explains it, a focus on political agency means examining how goals and choices can "acquire an independent historical significance as causal sequences in their own right," as opposed to *private* agency that remains less meaningful more "molecular samples of social relations."<sup>33</sup> In this usage, political agency involves a programmatic intervention into structural conditions and barriers – an intervention, to be sure, shaped by culture and history and yet never entirely determined by them, as Marx famously had it in the 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire.

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<sup>33</sup>Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism* (London: NLB, 1980), 19-20.

But why is my emphasis on political agency? Does it really change the way genocide scholarship treats the Armenian case? It is worth remembering, in this context, that there is something horribly puzzling about the Armenian genocide, namely its complete unexpectedness. In chapter 2, I argue that in fact genocides can often be *unpredictable* events, often not planned in advance by the perpetrators and unexpected by the victims who are caught by surprise, as was the case with the Rwandan and Cambodian genocides.<sup>34</sup>

In the Armenian case, as we shall see, genocidal escalation occurred after a period when the Armenian public in the empire and elsewhere was hoping for a much brighter future, with little anticipation of the massacres and wholesale destruction that awaited. The signing of a reform plan on February 8, 1914 and arrival in July 1914 of European inspectors in the country prompted major optimism, even jubilation. Nor did the attitude of the CUP elite and the government officials toward Armenians seem to foreshadow a campaign of extermination. The almost cordial relations between the

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<sup>34</sup> Genocidal escalation in Rwanda followed the signing of the Arusha accords between the Hutu controlled government and the Tutsi guerrilla organization Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), which provisioned free elections and power sharing between the two groups. The agreement provoked escalation by Hutu extremists which eventually triggered a genocidal campaign when President Habyarimana's airplane was shot down on April 6, 1994. Likewise, when the Khmer Rouge was expected to enter the capital and take over the country after a bloody guerrilla war in 1975, cautious optimism was common among the pundits. Sydney Hillel Schanberg, the *New York Times* correspondent in the region, having lived in Indochina for five years and considered an authority on Cambodia, sent a commentary from Phnom Penh on August 13 a few days before the establishment of Democratic Kampuchea by the Khmer Rouge (August 17) entitled *Communist Rule is At Least Uncertain; Napalm is not: Indochina Without America: For Most, a Better Life*. In the article Schanberg remarked: "Some critics of American policy in Indochina have gone so far as to predict that the peninsula will become a virtual paradise once the Americans have gone. This is perhaps wishful polemic, for it is difficult to predict with any degree of confidence what Indochina will be like under Communism. Some politically conscious Indochinese, for example, are hoping that insurgent leaders will be more nationalist than Communist, which would mean that the future government would more reflect the gentle and flexible Khmer than the rigid outlook of Hanoi and Peking." *New York Times* April 13, 1975. Unfortunately what followed was beyond imagination, one of the most destructive genocides of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Schanberg's book on his assistant, Dith Pran during the genocide in Cambodia inspired the famous 1984 movie *The Killing Fields*.

Armenian ARP and the CUP Young Turks is evident in the writings of Armenian political figures and journalists at the time as well as in their memoirs, as I will show in detail in chapter 2.

Even with the outbreak of World War I, and the sudden confusion it introduced, the most cynical skeptics among the Armenian intellectual and political classes never expected anything so catastrophic as what was to follow in a matter of months. One especially poignant and striking record of the mood at that moment among Armenian leaders in Istanbul is the journals of Kirkor Zohrab, perhaps the most iconic victim of the genocide because of his. Shortly after the outbreak of the European War, on August 16, Zohrab gathered with two important members of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), Armen Garo (Garekin Pastermadjian) and Vartkes Serengulyan. All three men had become members of the Ottoman Parliament following the Young Turk Revolution. In a kind of informal political parlor game, they each drew up responses. To eight questions prepared by Zohrab. Their answers differed on every question except one: on question 8, all of them felt that Armenians in the Ottoman Empire would politically *benefit* from the war. Vartkes and Pastermadjian predicted that a new massacres would never occur; only Zohrab thought mass violence against Armenians a possibility, though even he thought it would be limited and in border areas at the very worst.

On the CUP side, too, when the war broke up there was much confusion about the future and how to react. Remain neutral? Join the Entente? Or the German bloc? These were all viable possibilities considered by the Young Turk leaders. The main

objective of the CUP elite, in the broadest terms, was simply to survive the crisis without a total and final disintegration of what had once been the vastly large and powerful Ottoman empire, and, if possible, to come out of the war gaining political strength and recovering lost territory. And,, among the Ottoman government elite, there were also both pessimists and optimists, hardly a unified bloc. The pessimists were concerned with survival, whereas the optimists saw opportunities in the war. By contrast to, say, the Nazis with their ideology of Aryan supremacy and ethnic purity already by the late 1930s well before the Holocaust, there was no hint that the wartime agenda of any sector of the CUP involved the persecution, let alone extermination, of Ottoman-Armenians.

The war mobilization the CUP government launched in late July 1914, three months before the empire decided to enter the war on the side of the Germans, including conscription and a war tax, created resentment among Armenians in eastern provinces, though also among other sectors of the population. Armenian business owners complained about the taxes as well as harsher measures the authorities launched to conscript the Armenian youth, who were often less than eager to enlist for the army. But there is little evidence of any general and systematic persecution of Armenians yet at that time. Further, in the provinces, the relations between the Armenian political elite (particularly the ARF) and the government continued to be generally good. In Muş, for example, the Young Turk governor created an ethnically-mixed body of Turks,

Armenians, and Kurds to supervise the war mobilization.<sup>35</sup> And in Van, the ARF leaders sought to encourage the Armenian youth to enlist for conscription.<sup>36</sup>

Yet things turned upside down in a matter of four months. By late October 1914, early warning signs of catastrophe came from the clashes and escalating violence in Northern Iran. In early November, the Ottoman Empire joined the war, and soon after clashes began along the Caucasian border. By late November 1914, following the retreat of the Russian troops, the specter of genocidal extermination first showed its face in Başkale and Saray, located in the eastern districts of Van province.<sup>37</sup> In retrospect, Armenian historian Leo observed that those massacres (also spread over parts of Northwestern Iran) were unlike the “usual” Russo-Turkish wartime looting and killing of Armenians and other Christians by Ottoman troops and Muslim/Kurdish irregulars; those attacks, though brutal, were “partial and many would have survived.” In the new attacks that lasted from late November to mid-January, he suggested, “whoever (Armenian) existed were being put to sword.”<sup>38</sup>

The carnage came to a halt after January 1915, yet meanwhile, *de jure* and *de facto* measures of discrimination and persecution of Ottoman-Armenians had been put into motion. These included the disarming and sporadic killing of Armenian soldiers; the

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<sup>35</sup> Sargis Bdeyan, Misak Bdeyan, and Aghan Taronetsi, *Harazat Patmutiwn Taronoy* (Gahire: Sahak-Mesrop, 1962).

<sup>36</sup> Armen Seryozhayi Asryan, *Aram Manukyan : Kianke Ev Gortse ; Azatagrakan Sharzman Ev Ankakh Petakanutyun Verakangnman Ughinerum* (Erevan: Kh. Abovyani anvan Haykakan petakan mankavarzhakan hamalsaran, Hayots` patmut`yan ambion, 2005), 93-94.

<sup>37</sup> A-do, *Mets Depkere Vaspurakanum, 1914-1915 Twakannerin* (Erevan: Loys, 1917), 115-21.

<sup>38</sup> Leo, *Antsyalits* (Erewan: Pahpanoghakan kusaktsutyun "Shem" hratarakchutyun, 2009), 282-83.

removal of Armenians from government posts; travel restrictions; and the selective arrest and execution of “suspected” Armenian political activists.

In spring of 1915, a second Russian incursion into northern Iran and the eastern Ottoman provinces paved the way for the final catastrophic outcome. Four days after the uprising in Van broke out, on April 24, 1915, the government, angered by this direct Armenian rebellion, rounded up hundreds of Armenian notables, intellectuals and political leaders in Istanbul. Many were moved and incarcerated in central Anatolia. Only a handful survived. Meanwhile, the forced removal of Armenians together with mass-killing were already spreading.

Finally, on May 29, 1915 the government passed the infamous Temporary Law of Deportation (*Tehcir Kanunu*). It authorized the forced *relocation* of those who were deemed a security threat. The law made no explicit mention of Armenians, yet the target was evident. The final destination for the deportees was Deir ez-Zor in what is today eastern Syria by the Euphrates. Only Armenians from the areas under Russian occupation (as of May 1915), Istanbul, the prominent port city Izmir (both being too visible to western eyes) and a few other regions escaped the forced removals. Deportations were often accompanied by looting; the killings of able-bodied adult men; and the abduction of children and young women. Many refugees perished on the way due to the harsh weather, continuous attacks and starvation. Those who reached Deir

ez-Zor had to deal with famine and contagious diseases, which took a further toll on the already traumatized survivors.<sup>39</sup>

By the end of 1916, the destruction of the Ottoman-Armenians was complete. Particularly in the Ottoman eastern provinces, which many called, reflecting a vision of it as the Armenian heartland, “*historic Armenia*” or “*the Armenian Plateau*,” thousands of years of Armenian presence was virtually extinguished. The correlation between the evolution of the genocidal campaign and World War I is unmistakable; the first round of Turko-Russian clashes in the late fall of 1914 ignited the escalation, and the second wave in the spring of 1915 triggered the full-fledged genocide.

In retrospect, the movement from escalation to genocide seemed to have moved at a frighteningly *orderly* and swift pace. It was certainly possible to think that the war simply sparked preexisting explosively destructive energies. But what role, exactly, did the war play in the genocidal escalation? What qualities of warfare catalyzed the furious slaughter? Is modern warfare -- with its unprecedentedly destructive means, its new paradigm of *total war*, and ideological frame of nationalism and utopian radicalism— inherently genocidal?

To adapt political scientist Martin Shaw’s phrasing, the war became “the most direct structural context” for the Armenian Genocide.<sup>40</sup> Yet the war, whose making and

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<sup>39</sup> There is no documentation of the Armenian deportations and massacres that is not contested. Although it was prepared during the war for anti-German propaganda purposes, the British Blue Book, drawing mostly on eyewitness accounts of Christian missionaries, offers a succinct glimpse into the tragedy of Ottoman Armenians. Fallodon Sir Edward Vt Grey of and James Vt Bryce, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire* (London [usw.]: Hodder & Stoughton, 1916). For another comprehensive account of the deportations and massacres published immediately after the war in Istanbul, see S. Akuni, *Milion Me Hayeru Jardi Patmutiwne* (K. Polis: Hratarakut’iwn Hayastan gratan, 1921).

timing were independent of the will or influence of the *genocidaires*, was an exogenous factor in the larger sweep of things. The crucial aspect of this new *structural* context in terms of leading into the genocide was the undermining of the political, economic and diplomatic constraints of the past; the old rules of the game no longer quite seemed to apply in the tumultuous upheaval of the war. Within this new social framework, leaders – both Armenian and Turkish -- developed new policies and approaches and took unprecedented and unanticipated measures that could not have been easily anticipated from their respective antebellum positions.

A telling example of shifting positions among political elites comes from the memoirs of Avedis Terzibashian, a prominent Van businessman. A reception had been given in honor Tahsin Bey, the former Ottoman Governor of Van, in late September or early October 1914.<sup>41</sup> The event was held at the mansion of Set Kapamadjian, and a mixed group of Muslim and Armenian notables attended. Terzibashian delivered a speech asserting the devotion of Armenians to the Ottoman homeland, ending with a toast to the empire. Immediately after, Ömer Naci Bey, a leading member of CUP, who at the time was in Van making preparations to leave for Iran to supervise the organization of Kurdish volunteers against Russia, leaned forward and muttered into Terzibashian's ear, "you are fooling yourself!" After stating the governments' awareness of the Armenian revolutionaries' pro-Russian activities in the Caucasus, Ömer Naci went on to warn Terzibashian that

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<sup>40</sup> Martin Shaw, "The General Hybridity of War and Genocide," *Journal of Genocide Research* 9, no. 3 (2007): 466-67.

<sup>41</sup> Terzibashian does not give the exact date; yet Tahsin Bey left Van on October 13.

We will participate in the war, against the Entente powers. If Armenians support the Russians, we will massacre them. We will slaughter them ruthlessly, without remark, without concern for the consequences; we will kill even the host of our table whose champagne we are drinking at the moment.<sup>42</sup>

Ömer Naci's words shocked Terzibashian. The next morning, he hurried to Vramian, the ARF Deputy to the Ottoman parliament from Van, and Ishkhan, another ARF leader in Van, to inform them of what he had been told. After Terzibashian related the story, Vramian shrugged his shoulders and said, "he is crazy and a drunkard," while Ishkhan remained silent. Vramian was one of the key figures in the ARF-CUP negotiations after the war began, and yet had no foreshadowing of what was to come. Ironically, Vramian would become one of the earliest high-profile victims of the genocide six months later.

I do not mean to imply that the historical antecedents to the conflict or the preexisting ideological compass of the political actors did not matter; they definitely did. And yet, I argue that the pre-war evolution of the Armenian Question was not the principle cause of the genocidal escalation, as it would later be widely assumed. This leads me to propose that the study of a genocide is not the same as the study of the conflict that leads to that genocide. That is, a genocidal process has its own specific spatial, temporal and political dynamics, and potential discontinuities –not just continuities—between the genocid and the tensions and conflicts that precede it. Therefore these discontinuities should be paid special attention. I also contend that, wars are not in and of themselves genocidal either, unless we stretch the term beyond any

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<sup>42</sup> Avedis. Terzibashian, *Andranik* (Paris: [Imp. A. Der Agopian], 1942), 128.

usefulness. Hence the central aim of the study of genocide is precisely to interrogate and address the knotty question of why certain historical contexts and structural conditions give rise to genocide, when others, sometimes equally or more volatile, do not.

I suggest that political agency is the key to understanding this question. My Chapters Three and Four do not offer a complete history of the escalation or the decision to commit genocide, as I hope to in further work. As a first step, however, these chapters trace the making of the wartime agendas of various Armenian political actors, particularly the ARF. One issue addressed in the first part of Chapter Three is why the actions and decisions of the ARF mattered. I illustrate how the ARF's constitution as the representative of Armenians was carved out in the course of the constitutional regime (1908-1914) and how the CUP indeed desired and supported the ARF's takeover of the political representation of the community.

In reconstructing the wartime positions within the ARF, I look at the debates within the party and among Armenian circles in both Istanbul and Tiflis. Also crucial to my analysis are the ARF-CUP negotiations in Erzurum in early August 1914, immediately after the war broke out. The dramatically and continuously changing position and discourse of the ARF demonstrates how the war effectively proliferated political possibilities in the eyes of its influential leaders, setting a new structural frame for action. The party had never attained complete unanimity about its wartime agenda, yet the overwhelming majority of its organizations outside of the Ottoman Empire took the unexpected step of starkly contradicting the party's political stance of neutrality

agreed by delegates at the ARF's July-August 1914 Congress in Erzurum in the early days of World War I.

The ARF's decision to back the Russian war effort against the Ottoman Empire and to organize volunteer battalions to fight alongside the Russian Army ended up making this leading Armenian group seem an enemy force to the CUP. As volunteer troops appeared on the battlefield, the CUP authorities showed their anger and frustration in increasing aggression against the Ottoman-Armenian population, including prominent Armenian politicians and even Armenian soldiers who had been serving in the Ottoman Army. The ARF's wartime policies played an irrefutably significant role in fueling anti-Armenian feeling in the CUP, which the government turned into a genocidal campaign in a short period of time. The analysis of the CUP's genocidal decision-making will form the next stage of my work on early 20<sup>th</sup> century violence in Eastern Anatolia.

Ironically, the ARF, having commenced organizing battalions well before the Russo-Turkish war began, declared war on the Ottoman Empire before the latter showed signs of systematic aggression against the party or Armenians. I show in Chapter Four that these wartime policy decisions of the ARF were not determined by the party's doctrinal perspective or any other structural necessity, but clearly reflected a set of institutional choices. In particular, the party leadership in the Caucasus, unshakably convinced of an easy Russian victory, believed that their course of action was the reasonable one at that "historic moment." The party, as a result, actively incited the nationalist and militaristic fervor among Armenians in the Southern Caucasus, and

its cadres were themselves influenced by this intense nationalist mood. Hence, despite criticism from other Armenian circles and even from within the party, the ARF leadership resolutely insisted in its *calculation* or “calculus of passion”<sup>43</sup> –in other words its peculiar simultaneous appeal to rationality and an embrace of populist enthusiasm prevalent in the area.

As I also show in Chapter Four, when the Turko-Russian began optimistic fervor swiftly dispersed with the news contradicting a prompt Russian victory, thousands of Armenian refugees fleeing to the Russian side and early massacres. Hence, in the heated policy debates that took place after November 1914 within the ARF circle in the Caucasus had in common an assumption that Armenian suffering in the heartland of the Ottoman Empire was an almost “natural” inevitability. In the process, these groups engaged in what Michel Rolph-Trouillot has called a “formula of banalization” in which victimization of Ottoman-Armenians was almost taken for granted, presented as a necessary sacrifice for larger Armenian objectives. Here, once more, a simple historicized dichotomy between victim and perpetrator goes only so far, in this case undermined by the fact of divergent agendas and hierarchies of power and influence across all groups.

The Armenian genocide remains one of the great tragedies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It remains also, I believe, among the most poorly understood, a set of events that have too

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<sup>43</sup> In am borrowing this term from Political Scientist Donald Horowitz who used “calculus of passion,” to describe the making of rioters’ decisions in ethnic riots. I think the term is very relevant to the case of the ARF’s decision making in Tiflis; because the party leaders shaped their war agenda on the one hand through a rational calculation regarding post-war political advantages for Armenians and on the other, they too were aroused by the nationalist enthusiasm in Donald L. Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 555-60.

often been manipulated to serve revisionist nationalist agendas that dehumanize the victims all over again in their own way. I hope in this dissertation to contribute to a better understanding of the terrible events of 1914-5 and the ways they have been used and misused across the long century since then.

## 2. On the Eve of Genocide: The Forgotten Peace in Eastern Anatolia, June 1913 - August July

### 2.1. Teleologies of Genocide

Can genocide be predicted? Scholars have debated this question since the 1980s, and some political scientists will confidently respond that they can. In one recent essay, Barbara Harff suggests that her model accurately “postdicts” (i.e. using ex post facto data) 74 percent of genocides and political mass murders between 1955 and the late 1990s.<sup>1</sup> In line with poststructuralist orthodoxies in areas of the humanities and social sciences, some researchers emphasize complexity, contingency and messiness of the processes that lead to mass violence, implicitly or explicitly rejecting “positivist” models that seek to predict behavior.<sup>2</sup> Others prefer to avoid the question. Unlike more commonplace, less radical forms of ethnic violence and repression, a “truly murderous cleansing,” is “unexpected,” according to Michael Mann.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Harff, "No Lessons Learned from the Holocaust? Assessing Risks of Genocide and Political Mass Murder since 1955," *The American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (2003): 57. See also Helen Fein, "Dangerous States and Endangered Peoples: Implications of Life Integrity Violations Analysis," in *Early Warning and Conflict Resolution*, ed. Kumar Rupesinghe and Michiko Kuroda (New York, N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 1992); Gregory Stanton, "Could the Rwandan Genocide Have Been Prevented?," *Journal of Genocide Research* 6, no. 2 (2004); Ted Robert Gurr, *Minorities at Risk : A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflicts* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> See, Jacques Semelin, *Purify and Destroy : The Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Mark Levene, *Genocide in the Age of Nation-State. Vol. 1, the Meaning of Genocide* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy : Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 7.

Although genocide's storm clouds are usually more visible than the phrase "unexpected" suggests, I concur with Mann that genocides are unpredictable events not only for analysts and researchers, but also for the actors involved in the processes leading up to such exterminationist violence.<sup>4</sup> Sociologist Thomas Cushman points out that the field of genocide studies shares "implicitly and explicitly" the conviction that "genocide is preventable and that knowledge about genocide will help bring about prevention."<sup>5</sup> This premise that deciphering genocide will or should allow us to prevent it from reoccurring, is nurtured, according to Cushman, by "positivistic, naturalistic and deterministic models of genocide which miss some of the most important aspects of genocide as it appears in modern social conditions: its contingency, unpredictability, and its status as a product of *human agency*."<sup>6</sup>

Many of us may not share Cushman's pessimism about preventing genocides, yet the historical record repeatedly attests to the complexities of prediction. We have many cases of similar background conditions leading to different outcomes, sometimes genocidal and sometimes not.<sup>7</sup> But aside from the problem of validity, systematic

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<sup>4</sup> My postulation needs clarification from two respects: genocides are unpredictable for whom and until when? In the sense I use, the phrase predicting genocide refers to forecasting implementation and consequences of a systematic policy of wholesale eradication against a victim group before the eliminationist aspirations of a perpetrator group are designed into specific strategies of destruction by *genocide architects* and prior to such designs of extermination and elimination are put into action.

<sup>5</sup> Cushman, "Is Genocide Preventable? Some Theoretical Considerations," 524.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Two striking recent examples are Burundi and Kosovo vs. Rwanda and Bosnia. Despite many analysts' and researchers' anticipation the latter two became the actual scenes of genocidal mass killing. For the Balkans see, Martin Mennecke, "Genocide in Kosovo," in *Century of Genocide: Eyewitness Accounts and Critical Views*, ed. Samuel Totten, William S. Parsons, and Israel W. Charny (New York: Garland Pub., 1997), 449. For prediction that Burundi would more likely be the site a genocide, see Barbara Harff, "Early Warning of Humanitarian Crises: Sequential Models and the Role of Accelerators," in *Preventive Measures: Building Risk Assessment and Crisis Early Warning Systems*, ed. John L. Davies and Ted Robert Gurr (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 76.

violence targeting a group as such is unpredictable specifically for two reasons: First, it is often external events that push a brewing conflict to a genocidal outcome, among them wars and regional international crisis, or unanticipated or random escalators such as coups and assassinations. These triggering or escalating factors are unforeseeable. Second, genocide depends on the actions of flesh and blood human beings (and not just the quantifiable rationality of larger social forces as some scholarship suggests).<sup>8</sup> Those who may come to advocate the mass extermination of others do not necessarily follow anything like a calculated or “rational” script; to the contrary, as I highlight in my next chapter, they very often construct an often delusional rationality of their own, a paranoid understanding that frames their subsequent actions.<sup>9</sup> These “rationalities” have no basis in reason, and yet become a powerful motor for killing on a mass scale.

My suggestion that genocides are not predictable events has crucial theoretical implications. First, no genocide is an *a priori* given, as structural factors and historical background can be necessary but never sufficient conditions of genocide. Second, human agency in genocidal processes depends on forces that often go beyond any sense of rational action,<sup>10</sup> and instead depend, as anthropologist Clifford Geertz once put it in

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<sup>8</sup> Levene, *Genocide in the Age of Nation-State. Vol. 1, the Meaning of Genocide*, 12-14.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-48; Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy : Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, 23-26.

<sup>10</sup> This is not to say that perpetrators do not design “rational” models and systems of mass destruction. The Holocaust is a stereotypical example of “genocide engineering.” Yet this does not suggest that the very decision of mass destruction is motivated by a rationality or moral system which is universally perceivable by others. For an excellent study on the making of the Nazi moral order and rationality see Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2003). Also see Ronald Aronson, “Social Madness,” in *Genocide and the Modern Age : Etiology and Case Studies of Mass Death*, ed. Isidor Wallimann and Michael N. Dobkowski (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987).

a different context, on “webs of meaning” that they themselves “have spun”.<sup>11</sup> Hence, genocides are not inevitable events; even after a conflict enters its “danger zone,” all red flags flying, the process could still reverse towards de-escalation. Barbara Harff, in fact, asks: “How many times have we discovered that all conditions specified are present yet somehow an apparently escalating crisis fizzled due to some unanticipated event?”<sup>12</sup>

Even in cases ending in genocide, the outset of violence is not characterized solely by increased conflict or escalation. Yet, most scholarship in the field of genocide studies understandably adheres to what might be called an “escalation bias,” namely a tendency to focus on the factors that led to genocide as opposed to those that militated against it. Whatever pertains to peace or the possibility of de-escalation, in other words, is often downplayed, ignored or left unnoticed. Such a bias, regardless of the author’s intentions, creates a *teleology of escalation* which (a) renders episodes of cooperation or potential for peace invisible, (b) downplays human agency and responsibility and (c) locates genocide as an inevitable outcome.

A close historical analysis of the Young Turk genocide of Armenians after 1915 confirms, and helps us understand with more precision, that the pathway to genocide is seldom, if ever, unidirectional. In the Ottoman case, as I will show in this chapter, there was not a foreordained escalation towards a *final solution*. To the contrary, there were

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<sup>11</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures : Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5. Human agency is a dialogical and contingent process which neither depends simply on free choice nor is unidirectional. Actors with a particular ideological affiliation, at a given historical moment, constrained by certain political, social and economic possibilities/opportunities, respond to a specific set of questions on their agenda. These choices limit or shape the options for the next set of questions. From the actors’ point of view their decisions and behaviors almost always look reasonable, appropriate and feasible given the psychological and social conditions under which they operate.

<sup>12</sup> Harff, “Early Warning of Humanitarian Crises: Sequential Models and the Role of Accelerators,” 72.

important historical forces at work for de-escalation. Scholarly examinations of the conflict over the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire mark specific episodes as turning points for the escalation to the catastrophe of 1915. The most common such historical episode is the Balkan Wars (October 1912 - May 1913), in which the Ottoman State fought against ex-subject nation states. But I want to examine the intricate and sometimes contradictory forces at work in the post- Balkan Wars period in more detail. A closer look at Eastern Anatolian affairs in general and the Armenian Question in particular shows that a fragile, now-forgotten moment of peace existed, along with very real possibilities for a less catastrophic outcome than was to occur in the end.

## **2.2. The Eastern Anatolian Question in the Post-Balkan Wars Period**

The Ottoman Army fought in the Balkan Wars (1912-13) against a coalition of Bulgarian, Serbian Greek and Montenegrin armies. It also had a religious dimension in the sense that the sides viewed each other as the Muslim Ottomans pitted against a coalition of Christian ex-subject nations, which had only recently gained independence from the empire.<sup>13</sup> The result was humiliating for the Ottoman Empire, which pundits had already declared “the sick man of Europe.” First, over 85% of the empire’s European territories were lost. Second, the political turmoil led to an influx of desperate, tormented and enraged Balkan Muslims, radically changing the demographic

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<sup>13</sup> One of the most detailed and comprehensive accounts of the Balkan War was written by an Armenian author and published during and in the immediate aftermath of the battles, *Aram Andonian, Patkerazard Endardzak Patmutiwn Palkanian Paterazmin, 2 vols., Hratarakutiwn "Masis" Enkerutian, 1. (K. Polis: Tpagrutiwon O. Arzuman, 1912-13)*. For a recent thorough study see, Richard C. Hall, *The Balkan Wars, 1912-1913 : Prelude to the First World War, Warfare and History* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000).

configuration of the empire in the remaining Thrace region and in Anatolia. At the levels of political culture and popular sentiment, the Balkan wars also fostered more exclusionary and antagonistic nationalist and religious visions among the intellectuals and the governing cadre of the empire.<sup>14</sup> The post-war period saw the rise of radical versions of Turkism and religious fanaticism. The political situation was further exacerbated in January 1913 after a military coup led by radicals dissatisfied with the government's submissive war policies. The coup brought about a one-party dictatorship under the Committee of Union and Progress, controlled by the triumvirate of Talat, Enver and Cemal Pashas.

The Balkan Wars officially ended on May 30, 1913 (London Peace Treaty). But they were followed closely by the First World War, and the Ottoman Empire declared war on Russia in November, 1914 as an ally of the German coalition. The situation deteriorated in the eastern provinces of the empire over the course of the war, with military clashes, draconian state policies, ethnic strife and massacres. These calamities included the brutal ethnic cleansing of the Christians of the area, the Armenian Genocide of 1915 and also major human casualties among the Muslim populations. It was a catastrophe that ripped apart the entire social fabric of the region.

My focus in this chapter is the period between the Balkan Wars and World War I. For the most part, scholars have treated this period as one of increasing tension between the Committee of Union and Progress-controlled government and the empire's Christian subjects, particularly over the eastern provinces and the Armenian Question. In this

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<sup>14</sup> M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

chapter, I will question the widely accepted and inevitably teleological escalation thesis, which marks the Balkan Wars as the immediate precursor of the Armenian Genocide and the catastrophe in Eastern Anatolia, if not the prelude. Far from being a simple period of escalation, the interregnum brought a fragile peace that had real potential to become lasting and avert genocide. I endeavor to make this argument, first, by exploring the political debates over the region, which show important arguments being made on all sides for coexistence. Second, by analyzing exemplary anecdotes which, while exposing widespread anxiety, illustrate the conditions that promoted dialogue, cooperation and compromise.

As far as the political debates and on-the-ground situation in the Eastern Anatolian provinces are concerned, the historical record shows that the period between June 1913 and July 1914 was, in fact, not one of escalating conflict. To be more precise, there was no indication of an aggression that emanated from a single source, steadily increased over time or was directed against one precisely targeted group. The political configuration in this period still offered manifold choices for the actors involved. The political debates measured continuous uncertainties, contingencies that involved both centrifugal as well as centripetal forces at both inter and intra-communal scales. Further, in the eastern provinces there was no sign of deterioration of inter-communal relations, general security or the condition of Armenians. On the contrary, there were even signs of improvement in particular locales as reflected in various episodes during the period.

The existing literature on the period mostly offers narratives of escalation; such descriptions focus on three major issues: (a) ideological radicalization of Turkish

nationalist thinkers and policy makers after the tragedy of the Balkan Wars; (b) the diplomatic dogfight around the Eastern Anatolian Reform Project; (c) the implementation of radically exclusionary economic and administrative measures by the central government for the ends of Turkification of non-Turkish groups.<sup>15</sup>

While it is impossible to ignore the sudden and widespread popularization of radical versions of Turkism and Pan-Turkism among Turkish intellectuals and political actors, the question of just how widespread the new radical discourse might have been and its consequences for everyday political and social life must be approached with caution. Further, did this dramatic shift affect all non-Muslim and non-Turkish Muslim groups such as the Kurds, Circassians and the Arabs, living in different parts of the empire in the same, or even similar, fashion and scale? And did these new radical ethnic nationalist currents have a wide indoctrinated following among the Ottoman political elite? Unfortunately, none of the standard works on the period adequately addresses these questions. If one goes even further and attempts to relate this ideological radicalization directly to the Armenian Genocide, which indeed is often, implicitly or explicitly, done, then as Bloxham asks, "how an ideology of exclusivist nationalism was

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<sup>15</sup> For a general analysis of nationalist economic policies of the government, see Zafer Toprak, *Milli İktisat, Milli Burjuvazi*, Türkiye Arastirmalari, 14 (Besiktas, Istanbul: Tarih Vakfi Yurt Yayinlari, 1995), 101-24. For social engineering and Turkification in the context of Eastern Anatolia see, Fuat Dünder, *İttihat Ve Terakki'nin Müslümanları İskân Politikası, 1913-1918* (Cağaloğlu, Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001); Fuat Dünder, *Modern Türkiye'nin Şifresi : İttihat Ve Terakki'nin Etnisite Mühendisliği, 1913-1918* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2008); Üngör, "Seeing Like a Nation-State: Young Turk Social Engineering." Akçam, 'Ermeni Meselesi Hallolunmuştur' : Osmanlı Belgelerine Göre Savaş Yıllarında Ermenilere Yönelik Politikalar.

translated into the most extreme practice conceivable [i.e. genocide of Armenians],” must still be explained.<sup>16</sup>

Only very recently, scholars began to question “tacit assumption” of ideological determinism, the idea that these ideological constructs “formed the frame of reference for the political leadership of the Young Turks.”<sup>17</sup> Between the Young Turk revolution of 1908 and the end of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) government in 1918, mainstream ideological discourse of the CUP elite did indeed move from a vaguely defined, authoritative and somewhat inclusive version of Ottomanism – the view that suggests religious and ethnic coexistence under the umbrella identity of Ottoman citizenship— to a “strongly Turkist” Ottomanism. Yet, there was far less unanimity or purity to the new hard-line views than has normally been assumed. It should also be noted that despite the significant ideological radicalization, the Turkish nationalists, with a few exceptions, were still unclear themselves about just what Turkism meant; for many Turkism (even pan-Turkism) continued to be a component of the Ottomanist or Pan-Islamist view, as opposed to the idea of an ideal of an exclusively Turkish nation.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Donald Bloxham, "Determinants of Armenian Genocide " in *Confronting the Armenian Genocide: Looking Backward Moving Forward* ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2003), 23.

<sup>17</sup> Erik Jan Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building : From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey* (London; New York; New York: I. B. Tauris ; Distributed in the United States exclusively by Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 217-19.

<sup>18</sup> For detailed accounts of emergent visions of Turkish nationalism in the late Ottoman period, see Masami Arai, *Turkish Nationalism in the Young Turk Era*, Social, Economic, and Political Studies of the Middle East, V. 43 (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1992), 29-73; François Georgeon, *Türk Milliyetçiliğinin Kökenleri Yusuf Akçura : (1876-1935)*, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayinlari, 40 (Besiktas, Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayinlari, 1996). Jacob M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism : From Irredentism to Solidarity* (C. Hurst, 1995). For analysis in the context of Eastern Anatolian affairs see, Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide : Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus*, 195-97; Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy : Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, 120-23; Taner Akçam, *From Empire to Republic : Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide* (London; New York; New York, NY: Zed Books ; Distributed in the USA by Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 65-67. Also see, Stephan Astourian, "The Armenian Genocide: An Interpretation," *The History Teacher* 23, no. 2 (1990): 127-35. Also

As a result, CUP Ottomanist discourses still had an appeal even by 1915, at least among the Armenian economic and social elite of the empire.<sup>19</sup> Finally, political ideologies should not be reified as simple instruments, and political actors' relation to political ideology should not be treated as a relation outside things. Commonly used mechanistic statements such as "having abandoned Ottomanism and Pan-Islam by 1914, the Young Turks turned ardently toward Turkish nationalism,"<sup>20</sup> both hides the interwoven nature of these separately categorized sets of ideological discourses, and undermines the dialogical relationship between political ideology and action. That is, Turkish nationalist discourse did not simply lead to action but it emerged and was (re)shaped within action.

Further, in the aftermath of the Balkan Wars the CUP government was especially cautious about reducing tension in "trouble spots," particularly in Eastern Anatolia to avoid "fresh rounds of armed conflict."<sup>21</sup> The Balkan Wars, as Michael Reynolds points out in his dissertation, "severely constricted the Ottoman government's already limited room for maneuver in Anatolia."<sup>22</sup> With regard to the Eastern Anatolian provinces, the Ottoman state's capacity to maintain an aggressive radical Turkist/Pan-Turkist stance was additionally debilitated by Europe's interest in the region due to the Eastern Anatolian Reform debates. Therefore, from the end of the Balkan Wars until WWI, Ottoman policies vis-à-vis the eastern provinces were essentially geared towards de-

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see, for a recent and insightful study which discusses the popularization of the nationalist discourse in the Ottoman Empire as a consequence of regional and broader international dynamics, Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914 : The Ottoman Empire and the First World War*, Cambridge Military Histories (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 19-41.

<sup>19</sup> Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, 166-67.

<sup>20</sup> Melson, *Revolution and Genocide : On the Origins of the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust*, 163.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>22</sup> Michael A. Reynolds, "The Ottoman-Russian Struggle for Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus, 1908-1918: Identity, Ideology and the Geopolitics of World Order" (Princeton University 2003), 113.

escalating the conflict in order to avoid further foreign involvement and the total disintegration of the empire.

The second major foundational assumption of the escalation argument has been the audacious implementation of an aggressive nation-building and Turkification program following the Balkan Wars, in order to ethnically and culturally homogenize the population, especially in the Anatolian provinces. The policy hallmarks of this vision were administrative centralization, liquidation of the non-Muslim bourgeoisie through legal and political measures, reshaping the ethnic and cultural landscape of the empire via demographic engineering and resettlement and, finally, imposing cultural assimilation by means of nationalist language and education policies.

All of this is indeed true; especially after the Balkan Wars, the CUP government's administrative, economic, demographic and cultural policies had radical and nationalist overtones. Likewise, I do not dispute that the leading cadre of the government sought to prop up their crumbling empire in ambitious and radical, often utopian, social engineering projects.<sup>23</sup> Yet, in order to show that these Turkification policies contributed to increasing tension regarding Eastern Anatolian affairs or the Armenian Question, two crucial linkages need to be demonstrated: (a) that such Turkification schemes were pursued and implemented in the eastern provinces before World War I and that Armenians, Kurds and other communities of the Eastern Anatolian provinces were

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<sup>23</sup>Dündar, *Modern Türkiye'nin Şifresi : İttihat Ve Terakki'nin Etnisite Mühendisliği, 1913-1918*. Üngör, "Seeing Like a Nation-State: Young Turk Social Engineering."

significantly impacted by these policies; (b) that these groups perceived the Turkification program as a threat and reacted to it.<sup>24</sup>

Despite its general slant towards Turkification and centralization in the rest of the empire, the CUP government, as I discuss below, itself proposed a decentralization scheme for the eastern provinces. Later in February 1914, they even, albeit not very enthusiastically, endorsed a reform plan that entailed increased administrative, political and cultural autonomy for the region. The impact of economic measures of Turkification was almost non-existent in the region. For instance, the boycott against non-Muslim businesses, with the exception of few incidents in Erzurum, did not hurt Armenian businesses in the eastern provinces. The boycott only affected smaller Armenian communities residing in the European territories and those Anatolian towns where significant Greek populations lived.<sup>25</sup> Further, the Ottoman government was far from effectively imposing any cultural assimilation policies upon the Armenians in this period. It was even more unlikely that Kurds, among whom schooling was extremely rare, would be significantly affected by such efforts.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Few scholars point to the irrelevancy of a direct link between such policies and the Armenian Genocide. Taner Akçam, although he is a proponent of the escalation approach, points out the problems of setting a “linear and unidirectional connection” between Turkification policies and the extermination of the Armenians. Akçam, *‘Ermeni Meselesi Hallolunmuştur’: Osmanlı Belgelerine Göre Savaş Yıllarında Ermenilere Yönelik Politikalar*.

<sup>25</sup> Armenian businesses became targets of the only in the areas with large Greek communities such as Malkara (Tekirdağ), Trabzon, İzmir, Bergama, Akhisar, Manisa, Balıkesir which see *Azatamart* n. 1446 March 8, 1914; also see *Azatamart* n. 1453 March 15, 1914.

<sup>26</sup> Kurdish intellectual were not banned from establishing their own schools at least outside of eastern Anatolian provinces. Although such examples are rare, a Kurdish elementary school which was announced to be established in Istanbul after the Young Turk revolution see *Azatamart* n. 190 January 22, 1910. In few instances the government took the initiative to open schools in the eastern provinces. The Armenian paper *Haraj* wrote in October 1911 that the governor announced its plan to open an elementary school specifically for Kurdish kids, see *Haraj* n. 119 Oct. 11, 1911. Likewise in a May 29, 1914 message the governor of Van stated his plan to build two schools for Kurdish children, see Prime Ministry Ottoman Archive (BOA) DH.

The third major piece of the escalation argument is the so-called Eastern Anatolian Reform crisis, which has often been cited as a contributing cause to the severe polarization between the government and the Armenians or between the Muslim Kurds and Armenians.<sup>27</sup> The process of reform debates was the single most important political and diplomatic matter regarding Eastern Anatolian affairs in the post-Balkan Wars Ottoman Empire. The reform issue, indeed, by and large reshaped and determined the terms of the eastern (Anatolian) question in this period. Below I discuss the Eastern Anatolian Reform process, highlighting the reasons why the debates did not lead to escalation. I demonstrate that one key reason why is that when the reform talks ended, as historian Roderic H. Davidson concluded, “there were no losers.”<sup>28</sup> Hence, the prospect for further competition and bargaining as well as for cooperation still very much existed.

In this chapter I argue that the increased ideological and political tension in the empire did not cause escalation regarding the Eastern Question. I will address three decisive factors: (a) the way reform talks ensued and were concluded; (b) the implications of the rapprochement between certain Kurdish notables and tribal leaders with Russia; (c) the willingness of the major actors --the government, Armenian political and community leaders and Kurdish notables—to cooperate.

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KMS. 20/49. The motive behind such initiatives was to win the sympathy and support of the Kurds in the face increased anti-government and anti-Ottoman agitation among the Kurds, rather than cultural assimilation. Also, there is no record to suggest that these schools were indeed created.

<sup>27</sup> See J. Kirakosyan, *The Armenian Genocide: The Young Turks before the Judgment of History* (Madison, Conn.: Sphinx Press, 1992), 86; Akçam, ‘*Ermeni Meselesi Hallolunmuştur*’: *Osmanlı Belgelerine Göre Savaş Yıllarında Ermenilere Yönelik Politikalar*, 134; Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus*, 198; McCarthy, *The Armenian Rebellion at Van*, 144-50.

<sup>28</sup> Roderic H. Davison, *The Armenian Crisis, 1912-1914* (New York: Armenian National Council of America, 1948), 25.

## 2.2.1 The Eastern Anatolian Reform Debates

The discussion around the Eastern Anatolian Reform plan, as it is officially called, dominated regional affairs from mid-1912 until World War I. As the slow Ottoman collapse became evident, Russia initiated a diplomatic campaign to increase its influence in the eastern provinces of the decaying empire. This international pressure was grounded on the Berlin Treaty, signed following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, when after their colossal defeat, the Ottoman government committed itself to implement reforms protecting the Armenians against abuses and attacks by “Kurds and Circassians.” However the Ottoman government was not sympathetic to the reform plans imposed by European powers, especially by a “belligerent” state like Russia. In recent years, similar reform plans had led to autonomist and separatist movements in Macedonia and Lebanon. Yet as the humiliating defeat in the Balkans demonstrated the political and military weakness of the empire to the great powers, the Ottoman Porte could not simply reject the Russian plan. Instead, the Young Turk government sought to go along with the plan while minimizing foreign control.

In July 4, 1913, after extensive preparations, ambassadors of six great powers – England, Russia, Germany, France, Italy and Austria – convened in Istanbul to discuss the Russian plan. The negotiations were marked by harsh bargaining between Russia and Germany. The latter objected to Russia’s proposed plan believing it would threaten its own strategic interests in Eastern Anatolia, which were centered on the development of a German railway through the region. Oddly enough, neither officials of the Ottoman government nor the Armenian representatives were permitted to participate in the

negotiations. However, German pressure watered down the plan to the point where the Ottomans were satisfied with the result. In February 1914, the Grand Vizier Said Halim Pasha agreed to restructure the administration of seven eastern Ottoman provinces into two regions each of which would be under the supervision of a European inspector.

One first reason why the reform process did not cause an immediate and irreversible escalation in Eastern Anatolia is that the Ottoman government publicly admitted the need to implement reforms even before Russian-sponsored European diplomatic pressure began.<sup>29</sup> The idea was to act before the Great Powers imposed their own package on the Porte. The government's stated willingness to carry out some type of reform ruled out, among the pro-government circles and hardliners in particular, public expression of categorical opposition to reform. It also induced the government to implement measures pursuant to its own avowed reform plan, which had at many localities a positive impact on the security situation and toned down the level of antagonism in public debates.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> On May 27, 1913 a set of decisions taken at the council of ministers meeting was announced. The ten point decisions included, (1) measure to establish security by fortifying the security forces and increasing the control over the administration and staff, (2) taking austere military measures against the disruptive tribal elements, (3) strict persecution of abduction of girls and forestalling their forced conversion to Islam (4) creation of local commissions to investigate and settle land disputes, (5) reviewing and re-organization of *Hamidian Battalions* (by the ministry of war), (6) strictly barring the imposition and farming of arbitrary (non-official) taxes, (7) appointment of more non-Muslim officials to local administrative units in the area. See BOA., MVM., 177/20, also see Zekeriya Türkmen, *Vilayât-I Şarkiye (Doğu Anadolu Vilayetleri) Islahat Müfettişliği, 1913-1914 : Avrupalı Devletler Denetiminde Ermeni Meselesine Çözüm Arayışları* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2006), 39. This plan clearly identifies the eastern-Anatolian problem as primarily a security and administrative issue. The Ottoman official position throughout the discussion was that the remedy to the wounds of the Eastern Anatolian provinces entailed the establishment of security and economic measures.

<sup>30</sup> These policies included an attempt to solve the decades old Armenian seized properties issue, improving security situation and taking measures to prevent inter-communal violence. See, *ibid*; Reynolds, "The Ottoman-Russian Struggle for Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus, 1908-1918: Identity, Ideology and the Geopolitics of World Order", 112.

After inflowing reports and warnings from Ottoman foreign missions on the preparations of the Russian government and activities of Armenian representatives in European diplomatic circles,<sup>31</sup> the Ottoman government decided to come up with its own proposal. The idea was to preclude, at any cost, a Russian-imposed and controlled plan at the empire's vulnerable eastern provinces bordering Russia. To that end, the Young Turk government first resorted to the old tactic of playing various powers against each other. Minister of the Interior Talat Pasha sent a telegram to the Ottoman ambassador in London, Tevfik Pasha, and ordered him to request that the British government appoint a governor for the Ottoman eastern provinces in order to supervise the reforms in the region.<sup>32</sup> Tevfik Pasha conveyed the Ottoman request to the British minister of foreign affairs, Sir Edward Grey, who received the message with admiration. The British government proposed Lord Milner as the governor and stated this to Tevfik Pasha. However, the plan did not work out due to Russian diplomatic pressure.<sup>33</sup>

The other step the Porte took was to introduce and implement a "reform of its own"; in March 1913, a provisional law, which called for decentralization and fostered authority of local administrations, was passed.<sup>34</sup> Later, on May 27, 1913, the Ottoman Council of Ministers announced a set of new administrative and security measures which were meant to respond to some major complaints of the Armenians –without

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<sup>31</sup> See, BOA. HR.SYS. 2817-1/44, BOA. HR.SYS. 2817-1/72, BOA. HR.SYS. 2818-2/3.

<sup>32</sup> Halil Mentese and Ismail Arar, *Osmanli Mebusan Meclisi Reisi Halil Mentese'nin Anilari* (Istanbul: Hürriyet Vakfi Yayınlar, 1986), 168.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Türkmen, *Vilayât-I Şarkiye (Doğu Anadolu Vilayetleri) Islahat Müfettişliği, 1913-1914 : Avrupalı Devletler Denetiminde Ermeni Meselesine Çözüm Arayışları*, 32-33.

naming Armenians explicitly.<sup>35</sup> What laid the subtext of the government measures was a stubborn refusal to acknowledge the problem as a political one (i.e., as the Armenian Question), but rather a security and corruption issue that affected the entire population of the area. Panicked about another foreign military intervention and having already lost self-confidence after the tragic Balkan defeats, the Porte's main objective was to prevent foreign, particularly Russian, control over the reform process in order to save face as a sovereign state to its own constituency.<sup>36</sup>

A second factor that occluded escalation was that in the course of the reform debates, both in the initial stage of lobbying, and in the course of the diplomatic talks, the Ottoman Armenians kept an extremely low profile. This prevented a direct encounter between the Ottoman Armenians and the Young Turk government. In the course of public debates regarding the reforms, the Armenian leaders and media did not avoid (a) fervently advocating the necessity of reform in "Armenian Provinces," (b) firmly standing behind the demand for foreign control over the reforms,<sup>37</sup> and (c) publicizing violations against Armenians and politicizing their sufferings<sup>38</sup> more than

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<sup>35</sup> These points included, (1) to establish security by fortifying the security forces and increasing the control over the [corruption and mistreatment] by administration and staff, (2) taking austere military measures against the disruptive tribal elements, (3) strict persecution of abduction of girls and forestalling their forced conversion to Islam (4) creation of local commissions to investigate and settle land disputes, (5) reviewing and re-organization of *Hamidian corps* [(most) Kurdish irregular cavalry units], (6) strictly barring the imposition and farming of arbitrary (non-official) taxes, (7) appointing increased number of non-Muslim officials to local administrative units in the area. BOA. MVM. 177/20.

<sup>36</sup> Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, *Türk İnkilâbi Tarihi* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi, 1991).

<sup>37</sup> "Until now not even one branch of the Turkish administration has ever been reformed solely by Turkish means. ... Regarding reforms in the eastern provinces, it is not only likely but also necessary that we utilize European eagerness, European expertise, and European military and political officials' capabilities, cooperation, greatness and counterpoise." *Biwzandion* n. 5145, September 25, 1913.

<sup>38</sup> In this time period the Armenian dailies published in İstanbul (*Azatamart*, *Zhamanak* and *Biwzandion*) also the Armenian press in the provinces such as *Ashkhatank* (Van), *Haraj* (Erzurum) and *Van Tosp* (Van) publicized almost every possible even potential cases of intimidation, assault or exploitation of Armenians,

ever—with the assumption that these would translate into more concessions on Armenians' behalf.<sup>39</sup>

Yet many feared creating the impression that the Ottoman Armenians were organically linked to the reform initiative, thinking that such an impression would inevitably locate those Armenian leaders, in the eyes of Ottoman audience, as the fifth column of the Great Powers, particularly Russians, which in turn would put the Armenian community in a difficult position vis-à-vis its own government.<sup>40</sup> During the reform plan debate, an Egyptian national named Boghos Nubar,<sup>41</sup> the chairman of the Armenian National Assembly, stood as the sole and fully authorized representative of the Armenians. He had been appointed by a non-Ottoman national, Gevorg V., Catholicos of all Armenians—a Russian national who resided at the spiritual center of Orthodox Armenians, Etzmiadzin, in the Russian Caucasus. Although the CUP hardliners' doubts about Armenians' "true" intentions never entirely dissipated, Armenian leaders were especially careful (a) not to render publicly visible their

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in order to highlight Armenian sufferings. Meanwhile the Armenian Patriarchate, in the course of the reform debates, formed two commissions to monitor violations against the Armenians in the eastern provinces—one of them to investigate the incidents of exploitation of the Armenians and the other to watch the situation of security. See Zaven Ter-Eghiayean, *Patriark`Akan Hushers : Vaweragirner Ew Vkayut`iwnner*, Mtaworakan Spasarkut`eants` Graseneaki Hratarakut`iwn, 7 (Gahire: Tparan Nor Astgh, 1947), 30-32.

<sup>39</sup> Fearing diplomatic consequences, the Porte was very sensitive about the reports or complaints of violations appearing in the Armenian press or expressed by community leaders. Such news were meticulously investigated and confirmed with the local officials. And in many cases the Press Bureau would refute Armenian papers fine them if the bureau decided that the news items were false. For an example and commentary see *Azatamart* n. 1357, November 19, 1913. Regarding one particular case, the Ministry of Justice informed the Armenian Patriarch that two representatives of the Armenian Church in the provinces, the prelate of Bitlis and the vice-Prelate of Kigı would be taken to court for charges of calumny. According to the ministry the bishops had fabricated and disseminated false news about violations against Armenians. For a commentary on the case see *Shant*, n. 35, September 6, 1913.

<sup>40</sup> Awetis T'erzipashean, *Nupar* (Paris: Imp. A. Der Agopian, 1939), 90-106.

<sup>41</sup> Boghos Nubar is the son of Nubar Pasha, Egyptian politician and Prime Minister, and one of the founders of the Armenian General Benevolent Union.

diplomatic interventions and contacts; (b) to underscore incessantly that it was foreign Armenians, not Ottoman nationals, who called on foreign powers to pressure the Sublime Porte for reforms. These factors strengthened the position of the leaders of the Ottoman Armenian community as legitimate ‘domestic’ participants in public debates. The response of Puzant Kechian, editor of the İstanbul based Armenian *Biwzandion*, to the pro-CUP and nationalist Turkish paper *Tasvir-i Efkâr*, regarding the accusation that the Armenian Patriarch in İstanbul requested foreign intervention on behalf of the Ottoman Armenians—epitomized the stance of many Armenian public figures:

The spiritual leader of all Armenians [Catholicos], does not have the habit of taking orders from Kumkapi [the seat of Ottoman Armenian Patriarchate]. ... but regardless of what the spiritual leader of Armenians [Catholicos] does, we [Ottoman Armenians] will keep calling upon the Sublime Porte concerning our sufferings, as long as we find a political understanding ... which fulfills our legitimate expectations.<sup>42</sup>

The third important prophylactic factor was that at no point during the reform debates did Ottoman political actors, i.e., representatives, intellectuals, bureaucrats, categorically reject the idea of reform. If, during the second constitutional period (1908-1914), there was one catchword that appealed to the broadest spectrum of Ottoman political and public life, that was reform. This consensus opened up a forum for dialogue, bargaining and contestation concerning what the reforms should be. For those who opposed reform, the main concern was not the idea or content of reform, but rather whether the motive was “earnest” and whether it would be carried out in “good faith.” Many Muslims, especially the Kurds from the region who publicly expressed opinion,

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<sup>42</sup> *Biwzandion* n. 5200 November 29, 1913.

raised doubts that the reform would be implemented for the good and benefit of the Christians only. And finally, for the Armenians the fear was that once again the plan would stay in word only, as happened before in 1878 and 1897, unless it was launched and maintained under maximum European control.

For most CUP leaders and Turkish nationalists it was not an easy task to endorse a reform which was initially titled “Armenian reform.” Likewise, a Russian-sponsored plan for Eastern Anatolia was deemed suspicious, since, as I mentioned above, it was common belief that “reform” was a covert initial step, utilizing Armenians as an alibi, for the ultimate detachment of the region from the Ottoman Empire. Yet even some radical and core CUP leaders publicly stood against such suspicions and accusations against the Armenians. On December 16, 1913, towards the end of reform talks, Ömer Naci,<sup>43</sup> a prominent figure in the CUP’s core leadership and a renowned Young Turk agitator, expressed his complete trust in the “Armenian revolutionaries” and his support for the reform plan:

It is my personal conviction, upon my investigations, that ungrounded misunderstandings [regarding the “true” intentions of Armenians] stem from not being closely familiar with the spirit and mindset of the leading intellectual circles of the Armenians. Because I personally know that the leaders of Armenian political parties –for instance the most organized of them, the leaders of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation [ARF, or Dashnaktsutiwn]— are convinced

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<sup>43</sup> Ömer Naci is one of CUP members who have had close contact with the Armenian revolutionary groups and particularly with the ARF. After the constitutional revolution of 1908 he has always been a key figure in the relations between the CUP and the ARF. He was one of the major activists who led the January 23, 1913 Bab-ı Ali Coup, which marked the single party dictatorship of the CUP. Ömer Naci with Bahaeddin Şakir was sent to Erzurum in August 1914 to negotiate with the ARF leadership –who were in the city for the ARF’s World Congress— regarding the ARF’s stance in case of a Ottoman-Russian war. After the outbreak of WWI he commanded the volunteer troops incursion to Iran, which was deemed as part of the Pan-Turkist plans of Enver to open the way to the Turks of Central Asia. He dies in northern Iraq in 1916 due to typhus. For a somewhat incomplete and sketchy biography of Ömer Naci see Fethi Tevetoğlu, “Ömer Nâci,” Milli Eğitim Basımevi : [Dagitim yeri] Devlet Kitapları.

that so long as the cultural identity and national rights of the Armenian people are respected, the ultimate objective of the Armenian community should be to remain as a loyal Ottoman constituency.<sup>44</sup>

Liberal pro-reform voices could also be heard in Ottoman nationalist newspapers. Ali Kemal, in a series of articles for the Turkish daily *İkdam*, often referred to Eastern Anatolia as Armenia and advocated the legitimacy of Armenian calls for reform: "Previously, [the reform] was urgent; if it is delayed even further, [the results] will be catastrophic."<sup>45</sup> Ali Kemal rejected the suggestion that Ottoman Armenians harbored separatist aspirations:

It is not only difficult to detach the Armenians from the Ottomans, but it is also an offence. In the case of such a separation, we [Ottomans] would naturally suffer economical and spiritual damage, but they [Armenians] would also be greatly hurt, because they would not be able to benefit from independence. They would be subjected by another [state, i.e., the Russian Empire] to no purpose. Under their new sovereign, they would long for the Ottomans, if we set aside those bad days [referring to the Armenian massacres of 1894-96 and 1909]. We should confess that, in order to avoid such a catastrophe, we must carry out the reforms that we promised our fellow Armenian citizens many years ago, without making excuses. Otherwise, even if the majority of our fellow Armenian citizens accept these conditions, the foreigner's finger, the foreigner's propaganda will manipulate this situation, exploiting the gullible or the trouble-makers or the tormented.<sup>46</sup>

Ali Kemal's commentaries were countered by the pro-CUP Kurdish senator from Siirt, Sheikh Abdulkadir Efendi, in a letter to the paper.<sup>47</sup> Even he, a leading figure in the

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<sup>44</sup> *Tasvir-i Efkâr* n. 942, Kanun-i Evvel (December) 16, 1913; see also *Azatamart* n. 1381, December 17, 1913.

<sup>45</sup> *İkdam* September 11, 1913; for an Armenian translation of the article see *Heratzayn* n. 54, September 12, 1913

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*; see also *Biwzandion*, September 11, 1913.

<sup>47</sup> In the article, Eastern Anatolia, Ali Kemal argues that the major source of problems in the region is the backward situation of the Kurdish society: "To [be able to] briefly explain the Eastern Anatolian question, sickness, let's say that the Kurds, majority of those nomadic Kurds do not do not know what productive force is; and [they] try to secure their livelihood not by agriculture, nor with commerce, nor with craftsmanship but by fighting, and bravery. [They] do not spend five *para* [penny] to buy agricultural tools

Kurdish community and a strong supporter of the Ottoman government, insisted on the importance of administrative reform in Eastern Anatolia:

Today the need for reform and civilization in Kurdistan is very obvious, and all Kurds wholeheartedly desire that. Even if no single Armenian existed, Kurds would still demand reform for the same places. But reforms should be for the good of all and entirely comprehensive, not in a manner favoring one nation's interests at the cost of others, or in a manner securing special interests that contradict [others'] ethnic or religious traditions. ... Kurds too, by and large, are in favor of the construction of roads, development of manufacturing and tax reform. Kurds too will be happy when foreign advisors and specialists contribute to economic development. For Western [style] progress and reform, Kurdistan is a very suitable ground, on condition that [Kurds'] religious, intimate sentiments are not hurt. I repeat: reform should not favor one nation's special interests; on the contrary it should be comprehensive. Consequently, even at this early stage we see that an expert editor like Ali Kemal Bey writes untruthful [statements] against the Kurds, and as result of negligence he uses the word "Armenia," which does not leave a good impression.<sup>48</sup>

The next day, Mahmud Sadık, a non-Armenian columnist, responded to Abdulkadir Efendi in an article that appeared in the daily newspaper *Sabah*. Mahmud Sadık suggested that the government should negotiate with the Armenians –as it did with the Arabs—regarding the reforms. Commenting on Abdulkadir Efendi's critique on Ali Kemal Bey's use of the term "Armenia" for the eastern Ottoman provinces, he argued: "It appears that using the word 'Armenia' when talking about the eastern provinces inhabited by our fellow Armenian citizens does not sound very pleasant to some of us." Noting that the term "Armenia" was banned during the reign of

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but for a rifle [they] pay ten even twenty gold lira." See *İkdam* September 6, 1913; For an Armenian translation of the article see *Shant* n. 36, September 7, 1913.

<sup>48</sup> *İkdam* September 12, 1913; In an editorial in *Heratzayn* the author—who used the appellation New Politician—critiqued Abdulkadir Efendi's comments of Armenian Kurdish relations; the author also emphasized that the Armenians' by demanding reform for their own [conditions] help the improvement of the country in general as much as, in particular, the progress of the Kurd." *Heratzayn* n. 55, September 13, 1913.

Abdulhamid, Mahmud Sadık concluded that “it does not make sense to give in to the old mentality because of fear.”<sup>49</sup> The pro-ARF daily paper *Shant* praised Ali Kemal’s and Mahmud Sadık’s articles: “At the present moment, it is also a relief for us that this time another Turkish journalist, the open-minded Mahmud Sadık Bey, an employee of *Sabah*, took the initiative to give the Sheikh the answer that he deserved.”<sup>50</sup>

On November 26, 1913, *Tasvir-i Efkâr* published an editorial by Yunus Nadi, *A Necessary Clarification*, which was perhaps one of the most harshly worded statements of the period accusing Ottoman Armenians. The author argued that many Armenian religious and political leaders pursue the political dream of an independent (or autonomous) Armenia, which, according to him, was at odds with the demographic or historical realities of Anatolia. Yunus Nadi critiqued, in a sarcastic tone, the usage of “Armenian inhabited provinces,” or “Armenia” to describe the Eastern Anatolian provinces where at least as many Kurds and Turks lived:

Where are those places located? Today the place where there are many Armenians is Kumkapi [district in İstanbul where the Armenian patriarchate is located]. In Anatolia there is no single place that the Armenians do not reside. ...If the Eastern Anatolian provinces are the target of that depiction, Muslims of the same region, I wonder, are not considered as human beings?<sup>51</sup>

Further he claimed that, because of better education and economic opportunities “The Armenian begins to see himself as higher than the Muslim.” The author also argued that the Armenian Question could be settled by merely establishing security in

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<sup>49</sup> *Sabah* September 13, 1913; See also *Shant* September 14, 1913.

<sup>50</sup> *Shant* September 20, 1913

<sup>51</sup> *Tasvir-i-Efkâr*, n. 922, *Teşrin-i Sani* (November) 13, 1913. See also *Biwzandion*, n. 5197, November 26, 1913.

the eastern provinces. He made three additional proposals first of which was addressed to “prudent” Armenians:

It is necessary that prudent Armenians should make it understood [by the Armenian people] that if the Armenians pursue independence or self-rule, either they [Armenians] or the Turks will be exterminated or will be subjected to foreign occupation. If the Armenians show goodwill and follow the reasonable path, I believe that their demand for reform would easily be initiated and implemented, since, now, the entire nation has the firm will for the reforms.<sup>52</sup>

Surprisingly, the anonymous author’s threat ended endorsing the need and general will for reform. This article received harsh criticism from both Armenian and Turkish journalists and the editor of *Tasvir-i Efkâr* published an explanatory note that it was never the intention of the editorial to threaten Armenians with massacre.<sup>53</sup>

At the same time, other Armenian authors were busy engaging in a symbolic dogfight over how to define the boundaries of the reform area. In a review article published in the pro-ARF daily *Azatamart*, the author explained why the situation in Trabzon –an eastern Black Sea province which was included in the reform region in the final stages of the debates, should be seen as part of Armenia: “We placed Trabzon in this section as the seventh province of Armenia in accordance with the new restructuring of the reform plan, if a change does not at all occur at the last moment.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> *Azatamart* n. 1387, December 24, 1913.

<sup>54</sup> *Azatamart* December 28, 1913

While competing and even aggressive ideas were voiced during the reform talks, it is significant that even those who were strictly opposing the Russian plan did not categorically denounce the idea of reform tout court. And because in the course of the diplomatic talks the initial Russian proposal was seriously changed by German pressure, those radical, aggressive voices toned down. As it became evident to everyone that the disintegration of the eastern provinces would not be possible overnight, opponents of the process moved towards a wait and see position, even though their anxiety did not entirely disappear. Likewise, the heated atmosphere of public debate concerning the reforms in the summer and fall of 1913 cooled down after a reform plan was agreed upon by the powers and the Sublime Porte in January 1914. Accordingly, an agreement between Said Halim Pasha, the Sadrazam and Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Constantin Golkevich, the Russian Ambassador to İstanbul, was signed on February 8, 1914.

It is important to note that, in the course of the public discussions, the participants' positions did not align with their ethnic/religious identities. Especially in the Muslim/Turkish/Kurdish circles, extremely diverse positions were voiced. Hence, what characterized these debates was heated competition to claim the prospective reforms both symbolically and politically. However, once an agreement was reached among the powers, it became clear that it did not allow any part to claim absolute victory, nor were there any absolute losers. This hinted that the game would continue and the table was open for new combinations. Thus, when the final draft was signed, it

did not indicate an end, but rather a beginning for new phases of dialogue and bargaining.<sup>55</sup>

The Ottoman negotiators (chiefly the Grand Vizier Said Halim Pasha) exhibited symptoms of panic and lack of self-confidence in the course of the reform talks. The Ottoman representatives were especially keen on keeping up their public image as sovereign and self-reliant state.<sup>56</sup> For this purpose, Ottoman representatives (a) endeavored to take the steps and make the bids (which they thought they would not be able to resist anyway) before they were brought to table by other European powers, mainly Russia, and (b) forcefully resisted only those clauses that would publicly and irrevocably humiliate Ottoman sovereignty. Due to this latter concern, the one steady and consistent opposition of the Ottoman state concerned foreign control over the prospective inspector(s) of the reform process.

The final plan divided the region into two sections, the Northern provinces (Sivas, Erzurum, Trabzon) and the Southern provinces (Mamurat-ül-Aziz, Diyarbekir, Bitlis and Van). Each region would be under the rule of separate European general inspectors. The creation of two separate zones –rather than uniting the six eastern

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<sup>55</sup> Although there was a detailed final plan, many important points were open to interpretation and would indeed be shaped in practice; thus who the European inspectors would be, how they would implement the agreed plan were to be determined through a continuous process of dialogue, contestation and compromise. An interesting account is the memoirs of the Dutch inspectors Westenenk, who illustrated how the *European inspectors* were selected and appointed and their relations with the Ottoman government, Western diplomatic circles and the Armenian delegation. L. C. Westenenk, "Diary Concerning the Armenian Mission," *Armenian Review* 39, no. 1-153 (1986).

<sup>56</sup> Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, *Türk İnkilâbı Tarihi 3, Bd. 2. Trablusgarp Ve Balkan Savaşları Osmanlı Asyasının Paylaşılması İçin Anlaşmalar. Paylaşmalar* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1951), 162-65.

provinces under one territorial unit and calling it the Armenian province<sup>57</sup> – was a major challenge to both the Russian plan and the aspirations of nationalist Armenians.

Another issue, at least for some Armenians, was the inclusion of Trabzon Vilayet in the reform area. In this province Armenians constituted a minority even among Christians.<sup>58</sup>

Altogether, by dividing the region into two sections and including the Trabzon Vilayet, the Yeniköy Agreement made it harder to imagine that reforms would be a clear step towards the establishment of an Armenian political entity (autonomous or independent) or the annexation of the region by Russia. Second, the agreement did not make any specific reference to the Armenian Question, but rather mentioned religious, national and linguistic groups without naming them. Third, the *Yenikoy* Agreement provisioned a census to be conducted in the provinces within the next year, in order to have the proportionate count of the population with respect to their religious, ethnic and lingual identity. The agreement also ruled to have an equal representation of Muslims and non-Muslims in the Vilayet councils (*Meclis-i Umumi* and *Encümen*) of Van and Bitlis until the census. In the remaining five provinces the seats were to be allotted between Muslims and non-Muslims with respect to the number of Muslim electorates in the last elections and the number of non-Muslims according to numbers provided by respective communities. Should the election not be held within a year, the half-and-half principle

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<sup>57</sup> The initial Russian plan proposed to unite the six provinces. This unit would be called the Armenian Province.

<sup>58</sup> For a liberal Armenian view on the agreed reform plan and its uncertainties see, T`erzipashean, *Nupar*, 106-08.

would be applied in the Erzurum province as well.<sup>59</sup> And perhaps most importantly, Western control over the implementation of reforms, which was a major point of objection for the Ottoman representatives, was diluted down to inspection and supervision.<sup>60</sup>

The above four points clearly evidenced why the reforms did not signal an absolute victory for any group. In many accounts it has been established that the Armenian communities of the empire welcomed the agreement with great jubilation. Yet, many Armenian leaders were also aware that –despite the agreement marked a promising beginning—the future was still full of uncertainties, challenges and dangers. In his dispatches to all prelates of the eastern provinces on February 17, 1914, the Armenian Patriarch Zaven, expressed mixed feelings:

This agreement contains only the fundamental points of the Armenian Reforms, we will endeavor that their details and our certain wishes be included in the instructions of the general inspectors ... [Although] these fundamental points do not satisfy our entire national demands, (but) we can [also] say that this is a first-step ... Of course, the bitter lessons of the past cannot make us very optimistic with regards to many promises; but – in spite of concurring that extreme enthusiasm is detrimental – it is necessary to fully comprehend and appreciate the real value of the acquired in order to utilize and realize it

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<sup>59</sup> Bayur, *Türk İnkilâbı Tarihi*, 169-72. The agreement text used the categories of religion, language and ethnicity (nationality) in a very ambiguous fashion. [For instance] In the final analysis the agreed reform scheme did not boil the entire problem down to a security issue as the Ottoman side would have liked to see; yet, it neither did identify the problem solely as the Armenian Question as many Armenian nationalist would have desired to see it.

<sup>60</sup> In an interview with the Turkish newspaper *Tan*, Boghos Nubar the chief Armenian negotiator commented on the control debate praising the international involvement although the final agreement watered down his delegations demands: “This term control sounded unpleasing to the [Ottoman] government. But, because neither Europe nor the Armenian Delegation were wanted Sultan’s sovereignty rights to be harmed; hence instead of control the idea of inspectorate/supervision was admitted. Because Turkey economically and from international [relations] point of view will benefit from them [European states], the implementation of the reforms have been secured. And this [European inspectorate/supervision] is material and political cooperation for the implementation of the reforms.” *Azatomart* n. 1472, April 7, 1914.

accordingly.<sup>61</sup>[Underlined in the original]

## 2.2.2 The New Face of the Kurdish Question

Another problem with the escalation argument is its disinterest in the multiplicity and multifaceted nature of the actors involved in the post-Balkan War period. It was not necessarily an era wherein “the Armenian”, “the Kurd” or “the Turk” paved a unidirectional path to aggression and polarization but it was the acts, deeds, and thoughts of pro-government as well as anti-government Armenians, Kurds, Turks, Muslims, Yezidis, and Chaldeans, villagers, party members, bureaucrats and militia created and re-created contingencies vis-à-vis other at the regional, imperial and international scale. Though this is not to deny the gravity of the Armenian Question for the CUP government, it was through these contingencies that new questions and challenges such as the Kurdish Question did emerge, forcing the government and all other actors into shifting alliances and a redefinition of positions and politics. Within this frame, if there is one incident which best demonstrates how malleable and precarious the positions of the actors involved in the conflict in the post Balkan Wars period were that was definitely the so called Kurdish rebellion in Bitlis in the spring of 1914.

First, I have to note one major twist at the delicate picture of community-state relations in the eastern provinces in the post Balkan Wars period, that is the radical shift in the outlook of the government against the Kurdish tribal and religious leadership.

After the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, Tsarist Russia initiated a policy of supporting

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<sup>61</sup> National Archive of Armenia (NAA) 57. 5. 60. 2-3 (February 27, 1914 Istanbul).

anti-government Kurdish movements in the Ottoman Empire as part of the endeavor to increase its influence in Eastern Anatolia.<sup>62</sup> This policy was echoed by Kurdish notables such as Simko, Abdurrezzak (Bedir Khan), Kör Hüseyin Pasha and Selim Taha who began to seek Russian support for their –often personal, tribal and seldom nationalist– political agendas. It should be underlined here that among them only Abdurrezzak had a more or less consistent nationalist line. For the rest, gaining the Russian support simply meant more power for the leaders and their ‘clients.’

Yet it is at this historical conjuncture that, in addition to the Armenian Question and Eastern Question, a new term, the Kurdish Question, began to be used.<sup>63</sup> This situation created enormous anxiety at the Sublime Porte. Reports on the ‘malevolent’ activities of the Kurdish “traitors of homeland” (*Hain-i-Vatan*) were pouring into political conundrum in the capital. The Ottoman missions in Tbilisi and Sourjboulak (Iran) kept informing the Sublime Porte not only about the “infidels’” contacts with the Russian military and intelligence but also on their contacts with other tribal/religious order wise potential allies of these “traitors” on the Ottoman side of the border. The rapprochement between these Kurdish notables and the Russians was a major concern in British, German and Armenian political circles. Hence, especially after the Balkan wars, the specter of a wholesale and possibly cross-border Kurdish rebellion haunted

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<sup>62</sup> Drawing on Russian archival material, Michael Reynold meticulously illustrates the making and consequences of this policy in his doctoral dissertation. See Reynolds, "The Ottoman-Russian Struggle for Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus, 1908-1918: Identity, Ideology and the Geopolitics of World Order", 91-125.

<sup>63</sup> In an editorial published by the pro-ARF *Shant* the editor quoting an interview with a researcher (P. Louise-Paul) from an article in the Turkish daily *Tan* where commenting on the continued violence in the region Louise-Paul suggests that in “eastern Anatolia it is possible to talk about a “Kurdish Question,” that creates much problems for the Turks to settle.” *Shant* n. 25, August 26, 1913.

their diplomatic communication and political strategies. Until the WWI nervousness regarding such a revolt marked the Kurdish threat as more immediate and urgent than an Armenian conspiracy, for the Ottoman Porte.

One extremely important political side effect of this state of affairs was that it opened up fresh discursive space for Armenian public figures to portray Armenians as the true Ottoman patriotic people of the eastern provinces. As the government's anxiety brewed and began to take a more aggressive attitude against certain Kurdish tribes and notables,<sup>64</sup> the Ottoman Armenian media celebrated the fact that eventually the government had come to see what they described as the "perils of the politics of lenience against the Kurdish troublemakers in the east." In an article titled "Necessary Austerity," which appeared in *Biwzandion* in August 9, 1913, the author (P. B. K – Piwzant Kechian) commented on an official press release that warned of a brewing Kurdish conspiracy:

The Armenian newspapers, which have reported the occurrences [Kurdish disturbances] day by day, have the consciousness of having committed its patriotic duties. ... We have never had any problem with the Kurdish nation, whose interests we deem as parallel to ours; [but] our entire protest is against the bloody bandit elements, which can also create immense perils for the state. It is true that until now they only coerced the poor Armenian peasantry, but those unforgivable brutalities' remaining with impunity may turn disastrous for even the entire country, especially at such a delicate period. ... These [Kurdish brigands] are not ordinary bandits, but at the same time tools in the hands of the foreigners, who have to be eradicated. Only then that the peace-abiding, laboring part of the people will be freed from the continuous slaughter and looting and

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<sup>64</sup> As a response to Tsarist Russia's policies and Kurdish-Russian rapprochement the Ottoman government on the one hand started a counter campaign among the Kurds of Eastern Anatolia and Iran in order to gain their support; on the other hand, Ottoman security forces intensified their pursuit of anti-government Kurdish brigands and tribal elements in its eastern provinces. Reynolds, "The Ottoman-Russian Struggle for Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus, 1908-1918: Identity, Ideology and the Geopolitics of World Order", 111-14.

the state will be freed from a peril which can cause many troubles. If the government has properly recognized this point and as of now has initiated the necessary measures, so that the brigands cannot continue their intimidation. We are expecting from the government to show austerity, which at other instances [i.e., against Armenians] it knew how to.<sup>65</sup>

At a time when the Western Powers were debating the reform plan in the eastern provinces, news of violence and insecurity in the region would definitively strengthen Russia's hand. This concern multiplied by the suspicion of a Russian backed Kurdish insurgency, permitted the government to spread its fight against Kurdish opponents, brigands, outlaws and criminals to the eastern provinces in their entirety. The government press bureau frequently released news about arrests of Kurdish fugitives in Van, Bitlis, Dersim and other areas.<sup>66</sup> On September 14, 1913, less than two months after the above article was published, *Biwzandion's* correspondent reported from Van:

The famous brigand Şakir of Krav and his guard have been killed, two of his sons have been wounded, and 4-5 guards were arrested with [his] sons and [his] brother. This is serious news. ... Don't think that it is unbelievable [news]. The news is true and for the past three days a source of joyful excitement for the entire city [Van]. Governor Tahsin Bey has proven his influence and saved the government's prestige. At present, the Armenian community, which was protesting against him a week ago because of the incidents regarding the killing of the dentist, has forgotten all – it is pleased by the determination he has demonstrated.<sup>67</sup>

After Şakir's killing on October 2, 1913, his nephew and another infamous brigand, Mir Mhe was killed in Catak after a relentless military chase, led by the governor of Başkale Cevdet Bey and the commander of the gendarmerie Halil Bey.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *Biwzandion* n. 5117, August 9, 1913.

<sup>66</sup> *Shant* n. 25, August 26, 1913.

<sup>67</sup> *Biwzandion* n. 5156, October 9, 1913.

<sup>68</sup> *Azatamart* n. 1345, November 5, 1913. Interestingly both were related to the Minister of War, Enver Pasha. Cevdet Bey was his brother in law and Halil Bey his only two years older uncle.

*Biwzandion's* correspondent from Van conveyed the appreciation of the people for the government's persistent efforts to eliminate Kurdish brigands and expressed optimism for their eventual success.<sup>69</sup>

This feared great Kurdish rebellion was thought to have materialized in the spring of 1914. On April 1, 1914 the Armenian papers in Istanbul announced unrest among the Kurds of Bitlis and panic among the local Armenians.<sup>70</sup> In his reports to the Ministry of Interior, Van governor Tahsin Bey described the uprising not as a Kurdish movement but as an act of religious fanatics.<sup>71</sup> The government, through an official press release, immediately labeled it as a "reactionary movement" targeting "the government's reform(ing) intention."<sup>72</sup> In the early days after the short-lived mutiny, the government, the Armenian and Turkish newspapers concurred that it was a movement [against the reform plan] organized by the malevolent and manipulative Kurdish tribal and religious leadership, which has historically exploited the ignorance of the backward and helpless Kurdish masses. The Turkish daily *Tanin* also implied that the movement might have had nationalistic aspirations. The Armenian language papers were pointing to a larger scheme or plot which might even have had foreign fingerprints (Russia).

Interestingly enough, the rebels who were believed to be agitated by religious fanaticism were extremely meticulous about not attacking the non-Muslims on their way

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<sup>69</sup> *Biwzandion* n. 5177, November 3, 1913.

<sup>70</sup> *Biwzandion* n. 5304, April 1, 1914.

<sup>71</sup> See, BOA DH. ŞFR. 422/94 (June 12, 1914); BOA DH. ŞFR. 425/14 (April 26, 1914); BOA DH. ŞFR. 421/71 (May 21, 1914).

<sup>72</sup> *Biwzandion* n. 5306 April 3, 1914, *Tanin* March 21, 1914

or in the city.<sup>73</sup> It was also reported that many Kurdish insurgents did not ignore visiting and saying farewell to their Armenian neighbors, before leaving their villages to join the rebellion. Later, it was publicized that the conspirators, before the uprising began, contacted the Armenian Prelate and asked for Armenian support in the hope of creating a united front against the government. A high ranking official told the editor of *Tasvir-i Efkar* that two letters were dispatched by the masterminds of the revolt: one addressed to the Armenian Prelate, full of assurances that they did not have any bad intentions against Armenians, and the other letter addressed to the governor, which was simply full of insults.

The Armenian Prelate in Bitlis, Suren Kalemian, wrote in a report addressed to the Armenian Patriarch that despite his worries, the attitude of the Kurds to Armenians during the mutiny had been "very well."<sup>74</sup> And again it is extremely puzzling that, as the insurgents panicked and began to disperse, the leaders of the movement and their guards who were believed to be infuriated by the reform plan sought refuge at the Russian consul. That is, they sought refuge at the mission of a state which initiated the entire reform talk and held the most uncompromising position in favor of it. Finally, many called it a Kurdish movement, yet at the time there was no clear indication that there was widespread sympathy to the movement among the Kurds, and in practice the insurgents were only composed of followers of the religious order of Sheikh

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<sup>73</sup> *Biwzandion* n. 5308, 5 April, 1914.

<sup>74</sup> NAA 57. 5. 65. 4 (March 27, 1914 Bitlis).

Shahabeddin. Furthermore, the rebels were not only Kurds, but many Turkish residents of Bitlis were also reported to have joined the uprising as the rebels entered the city.<sup>75</sup>

The Bitlis rebellion demonstrated how contingent the relations among the government, Kurdish notables and the Armenians in the area were. The governor, Mazhar Bey, was dismissed as soon as the Kurdish insurgency broke out.<sup>76</sup> Even before the rebellion, the Armenian papers had harshly criticized him for his close relations with Kurdish brigands like Musa Bey. It is also worth noting that the dismissed governor was the only chief government official who had refrained from welcoming the newly elected Patriarch Zaven, on his long trip from Diyarbekir to İstanbul. Once the newly appointed governor Abdulhalik (Renda) –ex-governor of Siirt –arrived in Bitlis, he did not hesitate to distribute 150 rifles and 10 bins of bullets to the Armenians so that they could defend themselves and the city against the rebels.<sup>77</sup>

As has been the case with many other Kurdish insurgencies of the time, this rebellion left behind a mystery more than anything else. Yet this mystery offered a blank check to many parties involved in the affairs of the region to pursue their own agendas. The mutiny united public voices from diverse strata of Ottoman society around a display of support to the reform plan, which until recently had been subject to heated debate and disagreement. For instance, the pro-CUP daily *Tasvir-i Efkar*, which had often maintained chauvinistic attitude in the course of the reform debates, hinted at dangers of a reform plan with foreigners' fingers in it yet pointed out the rebellion as a proof of

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<sup>75</sup> NAA 57. 5. 65.2 and 2 . (March 27, 1914 Bitlis).

<sup>76</sup> The dismissed governor was accused by the local Armenian leaders for disregarding their warnings and reports about the brewing Kurdish unrest NAA 57. 5. 65.5 and 2 .

<sup>77</sup> *Azatamart*, April, 5, 1914. NAA 57. 5. 65.3 and 2 . (March 27, 1914 Bitlis).

the necessity for the reforms.<sup>78</sup> *Peyam* extolled the Armenian loyalty and support to the government at such a time of crisis; “if there is any light in the midst of the darkness surrounding the same areas again, it is that this time we find our Armenian compatriots, together with the enlightened minds stand on the side of the government.” The *Peyam* commentator concluded that “now, every Ottoman (citizen) who feels affection for his/her homeland should wish that the reform plan, which Boghos Nubar [the chief of the Armenian National Delegation during the reform talks] the other day praised greatly, be implemented instantaneously”<sup>79</sup>

Likewise, the French language pro-government Turkish paper *Jeune Turc*, having praised the Armenians’ loyalty to the government during the insurrection, celebrated that “in this manner, demonstrating their attachment to the government, Armenians expressed their confidence about those who are at the head of the country’s governance, since, under the current circumstances only it [the current government] can overcome the work of the renaissance of the country.”<sup>80</sup> The *Ashkhatank* in Van responded to the *Jeune Turc* article statement in an editorial, *Armenian Lawfulness*:

The example of Bitlis is not the first and will not be the last; because Armenians – as it has been the case in the past– in the future too will be in the first ranks among the nations constituting the empire, in performing its patriotic responsibilities, if the chance is given.<sup>81</sup>

In Kurdish circles too, the rebellion instigated, at least in public statements, a show of allegiance to the government and condemnation of rebellious elements. In a

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<sup>78</sup> *Biwzandion* n.5307 April 4, 1914.

<sup>79</sup> *Biwzandion* n. 5308, April 5, 1914; see also *Peyam* April 4, 1914.

<sup>80</sup> *Biwzandion* n. 5309, April 6, 1914.

<sup>81</sup> *Azatamart* n. 1472, April 7, 1914.

telegraphed message, Kurdish chiefs from the Sasun district of Bitlis protested the rebellion, expressed their loyalty to the government and offered unconditional support to the government even 'at the expense their own lives.'<sup>82</sup> Seyid Taha Efendi, a Kurdish ex-deputy to the Ottoman parliament wrote from Başkale, Van putting the blame on 'ignorant individuals,' declared that he would go to the region (implying he would intervene in favor of the government) "despite the tense air."<sup>83</sup> One of the influential Kurdish notables in Bitlis, Abdulkadir Efendi, assured that "thanks to the government, the established calm will not be damaged."<sup>84</sup> Another Kurdish ex-deputy from Muş, Elyas Efendi, joined by notables in the town, protested the rebellion and stated that the "movement could not be attributed to the entirety of the trustworthy Kurdish subjects," and like others they affirmed their loyalty to the government.<sup>85</sup> The *Biwzandion* also announced that Kurdish senator, Abdulkadir Efendi who was in İstanbul at the time would soon visit –with a delegation composed of an "open-minded" group of Kurds— "Kurdish populated areas to explain their fellow-Kurds that insurgency is of no help and dangerous."<sup>86</sup> A group of notables, sheikhs and religious authorities (*ulema*) and ex-deputy Taha Efendi wired the ministry of interior, condemned the Bitlis rebellion and expressed their gratitude to the government for harsh measures it devised against the rebels.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> *Biwzandion* n. 5309, April 6, 1914.

<sup>83</sup> *Biwzandion* n. 5309, April 6, 1914.

<sup>84</sup> *Biwzandion* n. 5309, April 6, 1914 .

<sup>85</sup> *Biwzandion* n. 5309, April 6, 1914.

<sup>86</sup> *Biwzandion* n. 5309, April 6, 1914.

<sup>87</sup> *Biwzandion* n. 5311, April 8, 1914.

## 2.3 Elite Competition and Compromise in the Face of Anxious Uncertainty

In the aftermath of the Balkan Wars the CUP government came face to face with a delicate reality regarding the eastern Anatolian question. The Balkan Wars had clearly proven how vulnerable the Ottoman State was, not only militarily but also politically. As Russia carried its interest in the eastern provinces to the agenda of European diplomacy, Ottoman Porte's panic grew further. On top of all, the increased interest of the Tsarist Russia to mobilize Kurds against the Ottoman Empire, further fueled the Ottoman government's insecurity and limited its maneuver capacity in the area. For the first time in the region's history Russia was playing the Kurdish and Armenian cards at once against the Ottoman Empire.

It was a delicate chess game where the Porte did not have the resources and self-confidence to pursue a strategic or ideological line of action. Instead, with its limited resources and without the power of enforcement, the Istanbul government tried very cautiously to (a) prove to its public and to the international actors that it was still a viable, sovereign state; (b) preclude any chaos in the provinces that would lead to increased diplomatic pressure and perhaps Russian military intervention; (c) cultivate as much support as possible among the Armenians and Kurds in order to undermine any tendencies among Armenian and Kurdish public and political actors towards seeking cross-border alliances (especially with or within Russia).

The tough job awaiting the CUP was to show the Kurds that it was still able to punish those who did not come to terms with the government, but at the same time, to

assure the Kurdish public that it would not allow reform for Armenians to turn into a political project at the expense of the Kurds. Meanwhile, the Armenians had to be persuaded that the government, without foreign pressure and control, was already willing to take steps to secure their lives, property and honor against official corruption, and more importantly, against the attacks by their mostly Kurdish neighbors. What made things even worse for the government was that it had to play this game at a time when the country was going through its one of worst economic crisis due to recent wars.<sup>88</sup>

The Balkan Wars energized Ottoman-Armenian politics. The Ottoman defeat established that independence was a viable option for the Ottoman Christian through national mobilization and international support; second, the reform diplomacy mobilized the Armenian political figures with new force. It was a period when the expectations of the Armenian leaders and public were growing.

After the Balkan Wars the ARF increased its criticism of its old ally, the CUP; although the party officially ended its alliance with the CUP in 1912, the party continued its cooperation with the Unionists regarding practical matters especially in the provinces.<sup>89</sup> Bourgeoisie-liberal Armenian Constitutional Democratic Party (*Ramkavars*) liberal/conservative circles and the Social Democrat *Hnchak* party which had already

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<sup>88</sup> The major economic concern of the period in the eastern provinces was the problem of increased taxes; the government's determination to impose higher construction and cattle taxes caused protest among both the Armenians and the Kurds. See, Reynolds, "The Ottoman-Russian Struggle for Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus, 1908-1918: Identity, Ideology and the Geopolitics of World Order", 113.

<sup>89</sup> For a very important study that sheds important new light on the surprisingly understudied ARF and CUP relations see Dikran Mesrob Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule : 1908-1914* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2009).

withdrawn their support to the CUP after the 1909 Adana Pogrom in the aftermath of the Balkan Wars—while diligently advocating for the reforms—continued its previous position against the government.<sup>90</sup> Ottoman-Armenian politics, however, cannot be understood without locating them in the broader network of Armenian politics in the Caucasus and diasporas. The postwar situation notably radicalized the Armenians out of the Ottoman Empire. The ARF, with strong organic links with both the Russian and diaspora Armenians, stood as the key political movement in the empire.

Finally, the politics of the Kurdish groups and their leaders present a very scattered picture. Despite increased dissatisfaction about the CUP, pro-Russian agitation was still extremely limited among the Kurds.<sup>91</sup> The presence of Kurdish nationalist or politics remained to be a phantom one; Kurds lacked umbrella institutions, networks or leadership. Hence, political protest found its expression in local unrest. The reform plan did cause nervousness among the Kurds, but it did not translate into a commonly anticipated general Kurdish revolt or even increased attacks on the Armenians.

The post Balkan Wars era was a period when rumors and conspiracy theories related to past atrocities and future danger had begun to brew in everyday talk and popular culture; a noticeable anxiety and the expectation of imminent victimization is clear in the correspondence and writings of politicians and military men. These fears were not caused by the aggressive actions of any particular group, but rather

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<sup>90</sup> For a firsthand account of the Ramkavar Party's July 1913 convention in İstanbul where the delegates discussed the party's policies in the post Balkan Wars period see Artak Darbinean, *Hay Azatagrakan Sharzhman Oreren : Husher 1890en 1940*, Hratarakut'iwn Hay Azgayin Himnadrami, 3 (P'ariz: Hrat. "Hay Azgayin Himnadram", 1947), 228-34.

<sup>91</sup> Reynolds, "The Ottoman-Russian Struggle for Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus, 1908-1918: Identity, Ideology and the Geopolitics of World Order".

uncertainty about the future of the empire. If there was one single observation similarly held by all groups it was that it was impossible for the empire to survive as it was and maybe at all; “will the empire survive?” was a common question voiced publicly by authors from different groups.<sup>92</sup> On the one hand this generated a climate of political and ideological uncertainty and on the other it fueled a search for alternatives, collective or communalist.

This moment of instability opened up the space for a powerful mixture of fear, anxiety, speculation, and opportunism both among the nationalist community leaders and lay people. In this part I will examine three exemplary episodes: the murder of dentist Melkon, the murder of Musa Bey, and the election of the Armenian Patriarch, to illustrate the ways in which competition, peace, and compromise reflected themselves in everyday politics and social interactions in the period between the Balkan Wars and World War I.

### **2.3.1 *Mystery* in Van: The Murder Cases of Dentist Melkon and Musa Bey**

The first two incidents that I will explore are from Van. This province was not a focal location in the history of the Eastern Anatolian conflict, but it is the site where the precarious co-existence of various ethno-religious communities first collapsed in 1915 and became the earliest scene of the tragic catastrophe in the region in general and Armenian genocide in particular. Van was a province at the Iranian border, and was also

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<sup>92</sup> Habil Adem, *Anadoluda Türkiye Yasayacak Mı Yasamayacak Mı? : Londra Konferansındaki Meselelerden* (Der-i Sa`adet [i.e. Istanbul]). Also See Pierre Loti and Fikret Sahoglu, "Can Çekişen Türkiye 1914," Kervan Kitapçılık; Andonian, *Patkerazard Endardzak Patmutiwn Palkanian Paterazmin*.

in close proximity to the Russian Caucasus, which facilitated political, economic and social interaction among the Armenians of the two areas. Further, in the Armenian nationalist imagination Van is a most significant historical location, the place of birth of the nation and the center of the Armenian dynasty. It is also the place where the earliest revolutionary nationalist Armenian organizations burgeoned in eastern Anatolia beginning in the 1880s. Before World War I, Van was inhabited predominantly by Muslims and Christians with similarly sized populations. Among the Muslims, Kurds made the overwhelming majority.

Armenians represented the single largest Christian group, yet sizeable Assyrian and Chaldean communities lived especially in the southern parts of the province. Smaller Yezidi and Jewish populations also existed in the province.<sup>93</sup> Muslims, mostly Turkish, controlled the government bureaucracy. Yet Armenian political movements, especially the ARF and the clergy, also had considerable influence in the political arena of the province. Another significance of the province was that it was one of the major centers of Kurdish tribal – religious order networks and (cross border) insurgency. Hence Van is an important laboratory to observe the conditions of co-existence on the eve of the Armenian Genocide as well as the dynamics of disintegration toward the final catastrophe.

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<sup>93</sup> For a detailed and comparative study on the highly contested issue of ethnic and religious demography of Van see Y. Sarkis Karayan, "Demography of Van Province, 1844-1914," in *Armenian Van/Vasporakan*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian, *Ucla Armenian History and Culture Series, 1* (Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers, 2000). For a very detailed ethnographic study of the province see A-Do, *Vani, Bitlisi Ew Erzrumi Vilayethere : Usumnasirutian Me Pordz Ayd Yerkri Ashkharhagrakan, Vichakagrakan, Irawakan Ew Tntesakan Drutian* (Erevan: Tparan Kultura, 1912).

Here I will discuss the case of the killing of the dentist Melkon on September 10, 1913 in Van. I will try to pay special attention to details which I believe are extremely valuable, as they offer us insights about the intricate social and political rubric of the province.

The earliest news regarding the murder of Melkon was circulated in the capital by the Armenian daily *Heratzayn* and *Shant*, its headline reading, "Situation in Van is Grave" on September 14, 1913.<sup>94</sup> The following day, details of the incident began to reach Istanbul. On a September 12, 1913 a message sent from Van to the Armenian Patriarchate, Archbishop Sarajian Efendi had described the situation:

Since the appointment of gendarmes from Rumeli<sup>95</sup> to service here, they have been threatening the people; although it has been possible to calm down the fear and horror they have caused several times, since such acts have remained in impunity, last Tuesday afternoon at 1:30 gendarme patrols fired at girls, women, and other respectable Armenian families and killed the dentist Melkon. As the felons have not been arrested so far, people have shut down their shops and have been staying at their homes for two days; they await implementation of justice. At the funeral of the murdered, people and gendarmes came close to a clash. As long as the gendarmes from Rumeli stay here, to be sure, tragic incidents will occur. People's nervousness is at extreme degree. We await an appropriate settlement.<sup>96</sup>

The message was factually confusing and even erroneous regarding how and when the killing occurred; yet Archbishop Sarajian Efendi's conclusion was very straightforward, dentist Melkon's murder was a hate crime committed by the

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<sup>94</sup> See, *Shant* n. 1302 September 14, 1913; *Heratzayn* n. 56, September 14, 1913.

<sup>95</sup> Rumeli is a geographical term which referred to the imperial territories in the Balkans most of which were lost in the recent wars. After the Balkan Wars Muslim state employees who fled from the lost territories in the Balkans to the Ottoman Empire were appointed to positions in the remaining territories of the empire. It was a common fear among the Armenians they would target Armenians because of their hatred against Christians.

<sup>96</sup> *Biwzandion* n. 5136 September 15, 1913.

gendarmes from the Balkans (Rumeli). Given the region's history, few would demur to concur with the archbishop. Especially if one knew dentist Melkon Mir-Sakoyan's life story. He was a member of the revolutionary Armenian, socialist-leaning Hunchakian Party.<sup>97</sup> He joined the party (at the time an outlawed organization in the Ottoman Empire) after he graduated from high school in the 1890s. In the ranks of the Hunchakian Party he operated as a propagandist and an organizer in the villages of Van. He fled abroad immediately after the 1896 pogrom and later returned with other activists. Shortly after his return he was arrested and imprisoned for six months and released pursuant to a general amnesty. Yet soon he got arrested again with forty other *Hnchak* activists. Purportedly claiming the responsibility for all alleged crimes, he saved his comrades, but served twelve years of uninterrupted jail time until the Young Turk Revolution in June 1908. He got his dentistry degree during the Balkan Wars. In the war Melkon volunteered for the Ottoman Red Crescent to help the injured. He returned to Van after the armistice, just a few months before his killing.<sup>98</sup>

However, another account of the killing, by the official Press Bureau, hinted that the story may not have been as simple as the Archbishop Sarajian Efendi interpreted it. The official statement detailed the killing and its aftermath, precisely mentioning time, specifying names, quoting testimonies and mentioning opposing views, as per the information provided by the governor of Van, Tahsin Bey. According to the official version of the story, that night during their routine post, the patrols had suspected and

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<sup>97</sup> The party had marginal support in Van. Before World War I its affiliates in the city were composed of a handful of well-educated intellectuals.

<sup>98</sup> *Van-Tosp* n. 32, August 31, 1913.

tried to arrest two [Armenian] youth who resisted, and fired upon the gendarmes. The gendarmes chased and shot at them in return. When the shootings were heard in the Armenian neighborhood, “as a customary practice [reaction to gunfire] of theirs” 20-30 rounds of gunshots were fired from their homes. The two suspects had managed to escape and the patrols prompted to the Semke square where they saw that somebody was lying on the ground wounded 50 meters away from the patrols’ initial position. They immediately contacted the headquarters and had asked for reinforcement.

Shortly after, the commander of the gendarme force, Halil Bey (the uncle of Minister of War Enver Pasha), the chief of police and the chief inspector, Matteos Eplighatian<sup>99</sup> arrived at the scene and the testimonies of both Armenian witnesses and

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<sup>99</sup> Eblighatian was born in Kırkağaç, İzmir (October 21, 1881). He received a graduate law degree from İstanbul University in 1908. Although he has not been an organic and active member politically he has been close to the ARF since his early youth. After graduation he served as a judge, first in Yanya (Ioannina) and later in Aleppo. He was appointed as the prosecutor general of Van in March 1913. In August 1914 he was appointed as the Armenian interpreter for the Inspector General Hoff. He left Van with Hoff and his crew following the outbreak of WWI. Fearing persecution, he stayed in hideout in İstanbul after March 1915. Later he moved to Aydın, -an area exempted from the Armenian deportations of 1915. In November 1916 with the help of a Turkish friend, he managed to join the Turkish Army under a fake name, in order to avoid prosecution. In the army he first served as a regular draftee [er] but later he was promoted to officer rank as a coast guard at the Princess Islands, İstanbul. After WWI he worked as an Armenian relief worker and also as a representative of the short-lived independent Armenian Republic to Istanbul. In December 1922 the Embassy of the Armenian Republic was shut down. After, luckily surviving an attempt by the Turkish police to arrest him, he boarded an Italian boat to and fled to Bulgaria and later he passed to Romania. His intention was to move to Antioch –which at the time was part of Syrian territory and where Turkish and Arabic were both official languages – where he thought he could easily find a job. Yet this did not work out and instead he went to Athens in 1924 where he stayed for six years. Finally, he moved to Aleppo and worked as the supervisor of Armenian high schools. In 1935 he moved to the Sanjak d’Alexandretta (Antioch) where he stayed until the Sanjak was annexed by the Republic of Turkey in 1939. He eventually settled in Latakia, Syria and worked as a judge until he died on September 30, 1960. He first published his memoirs as a series of articles in the pro-ARF Armenian monthly *Hairenik* (Boston) between 1951-56. Later in 1987 they were published as a book in Lebanon. In his memoirs he recounted visiting the ARF daily *Azatamart* in İstanbul to get a briefing on the political situation and names to contact in Van. There he met Zartarian, the editor of the Askhatank, Vramian the ARF deputy from Van and Shirigian. He was advised to be in contact with only two persons, Aram and Ishkhan as representatives of the ARF and with all possible/due caution. Accordingly soon after his arrival in Van, Aram -one of the three chiefs of the party in the province, began to pay him periodic *late night* visits. Yet, many Armenians in Van were suspicious of the true intentions of this non-local Armenian and approached him with caution. See, Matt eos M. Eplighat’ean,

the gendarmes were taken. The official statement, acknowledging that there was widespread hearsay among the Armenians that the security forces killed Melkon intentionally, alleged that:

It is likely that the murder might have either been committed with premeditation by the two unidentified [youth] or accidentally by the Armenians shooting from the [Armenian] neighborhood; the investigation is continuing.<sup>100</sup>

Therefore, the official statement displaced the responsibility on the Armenians. Further it also claimed that, after a brief period of unrest, calm was attained and life in the city went back to normal.<sup>101</sup>

It was impossible to affirm the claims of the official statement, yet if there was one point Tahsin Bey definitely underemphasized, it was the weight of nervousness, agitation and anger among the Van Armenians. The conviction that Melkon was killed by the security forces did not only circulate in everyday hearsay but was also asserted in the two local newspapers, the pro-ARF *Ashkhatank* and pro-Ramkavar—liberal leaning Armenian political party—*Van-Tosp*. According to one such article, Melkon Mir-Sakoyan's murder occurred at around 2:00 am (September 10) when a group of Armenians were leaving a friend's home after a dinner gathering. Another reason that turned the case particularly inflammatory for the Armenian public was that among the group were very notable Armenians of the city, such as P. Harutoun Saljian and his wife, Vagharshak Putakian (a clerk at the Ottoman Bank), Karapet Efendi (representative of the Union Insurance Company), and P. Martiros Parikian. The

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*Keank` me Azgis Keank`in Mej: Akanatesi ew Masnakts`oghi Vkayut`iwnner 1903-1923* (Ant`ilias: [Tparan Kat`oghikosut`ean Hayots Metsi Tann Kilikioy], 1987).

<sup>100</sup> *Heratzayn* n.57 September 15, 1913

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, *Biwzandion* n. 5136, September 15, 1913.

shooting happened immediately after they left the host's house, located on Purnazi Street, and entered the Norashen Street with kerosene-lamps in their hands. The gunmen, four gendarmes from Rumeli and a police officer (Hamud Ağazade Asım, a native of Van) fired at the dentist and hit him in the head, whereas the others survived the assault by hiding behind a house in a construction site. Melkon Efendi's body was first taken to the Armenian Church in Norashen and from there to the *Hnchak* Party's library, called *Martik* (fighter).<sup>102</sup>

The murder of the dentist Melkon Efendi caused a very rare episode of widespread uproar among Van's Armenian community. The marketplace, where almost all shopkeepers were Armenians, was closed for four days after the incident. Armenian youth began to patrol the Armenian neighborhoods and protests against the government and the gendarmes spread all over the city. The funeral was held on Thursday, September 11. The ARF newspaper *Ashkhatank* described the funeral of the dentist as "magnificent and unprecedented." According to the paper over 5,000 people attended the ceremony.<sup>103</sup> The funeral area was heavily reinforced by gendarmes and the police. The governor's call for a quiet ceremony was denounced by the Armenian community. Armenian papers wrote that around the beginning of the ceremony some "police from Rumeli" verbally threatened to disperse the group by force and some even directed their guns to the crowd. Yet later the security forces were ordered to withdraw and no gendarmes or police were visible afterwards. According to the local Armenian

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<sup>102</sup> *Van-Tosp* n.32, August 31, 1913, 381.

<sup>103</sup> Eblighatian puts the number at 3,000, see Matteos M. Eblighatian, *Kiank Me Azgis Kiankin Mej : Akanatesi Ew Masnaktsoghi V kayutiwnner 1903-1923* (Antilias: [Tparan Katoghikosutian Hayots Metsi Tann Kilikiy], 1987), 71.

media, the Armenian shopkeepers of the city attended the ceremony without exception.<sup>104</sup> It was reported by the security forces in Van that during the funeral demonstrators shouted slogans against appointment of clerks and police from Rumeli.<sup>105</sup>

Controversy and confusion haunted the case of Melkon Mir-Sakoyan's death from the very outset. It could not be agreed upon who had fired the bullet in the darkness of the night, the gendarmes from the Balkans, the ARF militiamen or even perhaps an unintended bullet from the Armenian neighborhood? The Armenian prosecutor general of Van, Matteos Eblighatian—appointed to the post in March 1913—was a central figure during the controversy. His memoirs are one of the major accounts of the case.

Eblighatian recalled that it was almost five weeks after his arrival in Van that he heard gunfire one night. A little while after, the police chief came to his residency and let him know that a murder had been committed. He recounts what happened at the crime scene on the early morning of August 28 as follows:

In the [Armenian] neighborhood people were yelling and shouting in front of their homes. I also heard curses and fierce expressions against the government and the *devriye* (patrols) and noticing inimical demonstrations against us. ... On the way, I asked the [police] chief the meaning of it all. It became apparent that a dentist called Melkon had been killed. And given that the victim was Armenian, people were supposing that the crime had been committed by patrolling guards. ... The people were continuing to yell, shout and openly threaten us with obvious expressions. ... Ten minutes later two Armenian doctors arrived, and after reciting the conventional oath, examined the body and concurred that the wound had been caused by a bullet fired by a big military rifle. ... As this was heard, people began to manifest in a fiercer manner; was it not true that by the very statement of doctors [it was established that] the crime had been committed by those damn *devriyes* (patrols)? ... And, as a result the issue was taking a

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<sup>104</sup> *Askhatank* September 12, 1913; *Van-Tosp* n. 32, September 12, 1913.

<sup>105</sup> BOA. DH. KMS. 63/17 (30/N/1331).

controversial shape, and the appearance of a Turkish-Armenian conflict.<sup>106</sup>

Despite Eblighatian's sarcastic tone about the predisposition and impatience of the Armenian crowd, he made a daring move and hours after the murder issued an arrest warrant for the three gendarmes and the police officer based on the doctors' statement. However, issuing an order of warrant was one thing, executing the order another. Eblighatian's decision, almost unheard of in the history of the region, infuriated those very people who had the right and responsibility to execute the order.

In his memoirs Eblighatian recalled that as soon as his decision was heard, both the governor Tahsin Bey and the chief of the gendarmes Halil Bey tried to contact him. Later, he received a call from the aide-captain of the governor who relayed the governor's invitation to discuss the issue. Eblighatian declined the invitation on the grounds that he was overloaded by the work related to the murder case. During a phone conversation that same day, Tahsin Bey expressed to Eblighatian the disappointment of the chief of the gendarmes and the chief of police concerning the arrest warrant for their men. Eblighatian replied that his decision was transparent and objective and insisted that the arrest order be executed.

The contention swiftly transcended the limits of Van. Local authorities kept updating the Ottoman Porte through telegram messages, in which according to Eplighatian, they were blaming him, the *Armenian* chief inspector, for the brewing crisis. Foreign diplomatic missions in Van were also following the case with great interest. Their Armenian dragoman [interpreter], Eplighatian noted, were impatient to obtain the

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<sup>106</sup> Eblighatian, Madtews M.. 1987. Keank mi Azgis Keankin Mej: Antilias, pp. 65-66.

details of the case from him. Meanwhile, a Turkish correspondent dispatched by *Tanin*, the Istanbul-based, pro-CUP newspaper, followed the controversial handling of the case by the *Armenian* prosecutor. The Armenians in the city too were blaming the inspector who, they complained, “like a Turk defends the Turkish gendarmes and police.”<sup>107</sup>

Meanwhile, the *juge d’instruction* visited him. According to Eblighatian, the visit occurred following a meeting with the governor about the Melkon case. The judge advised him “not to resist too much,” because, he said, “you are about to destroy your career.”<sup>108</sup> The judge then took a paper out of his pocket and began reading it to him. It was a petition signed by around a hundred police. In the petition Eblighatian was accused of being one-sided from the very beginning of the investigation, having hatred towards the “Turkish” element and defaming the government, creating strife between the communities by ordering the arrest of a police, and finally discouraging the police from performing their duties.

The petition ended with the statement that the police would quit their jobs unless Eblighatian was not removed from his post within 24 hours. As he noted in his memoirs, according to the law inferiors had no right to intervene in their superior’s decisions in the course of a criminal investigation. Eblighatian therefore decided that he could initiate a lawsuit against the signatories if he had concrete evidence. In order to get the ‘evidence,’ he asked to read the petition himself. When the judge handed it to him, he immediately put it into his pocket before the judge could seize it back. Eblighatian wrote that he told the judge that, “in a case investigation police also including their chief are

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 67-68.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 68.

my inferior officials. As they insult their superior with this petition I will immediately open a criminal case against them.”<sup>109</sup>

In response, Eblighatian related, the judge began begging him to give the petition back saying that otherwise the governor would fire him. The governor had told him to read but never hand it over to “the Armenian.” In response, Eblighatian told him to “go and tell your boss, ‘he seized it from my hands.’”<sup>110</sup> Eblighatian described the aftermath of this incident as follows:

The police petition had entirely the opposite effect on me of what the Vali had anticipated. Immediately in my own handwriting, I sent an official memo to the governor in which I, briefly and straightforwardly, stated that according to the law the chief of governmental execution was himself, with this I demanded from him the execution of my arrest order. Either they had to be immediately put in action or, if he was unable it was necessary that he inform me whom to apply in order to execute the law.<sup>111</sup>

Eblighatian also sent a letter of resignation to the governor. A few hours after receiving this message and the resignation letter, the governor informed Eplighatian in an official letter that the gendarmes were in custody at the military garrison, the police officer had been sent to jail, and the police chief had been dismissed and was scheduled

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

to leave the city the day after. The governor's aide who brought the message returned Eplighatian's resignation letter and in return took the petition of the police.<sup>112</sup>

What was happening was a historically unique situation: government security forces had been arrested because of a warrant by an Armenian prosecutor on charges of murder, while on duty, for killing an Armenian in an Eastern Anatolian province! The arrests and the dismissal of the chief of police restored calm to the Armenians.

Eplighatian attributed the unusual turn of events to the political atmosphere of the reform talks:

Of course, elsewhere and at another time my conduct, aside from receiving approval could even be greatly harmful. But, as the Turks say, "the times [were] delicate" and the disagreement between the Armenian chief prosecutor and the governor could turn into a political issue; yet, the governor was one of those who wanted to settle the reforms question through direct negotiations between the Turks and Armenians.<sup>113</sup>

*Ashkatank* in its editorial celebrated that the crisis, "which was almost to cause grave and dangerous incidents," ended "thanks to government's farsighted policy in this case."<sup>114</sup> The commentary also emphasized that Melkon's murder proved once again the urgency of the reforms and pointed to the fact that the gendarmes from Rumeli should not be assigned to the provinces. Yet, the case was far away from being closed:

The corpse of the victim was not buried yet. It was necessary to carry out an autopsy before giving permission [for burial]. We set up a team of [several] doctors under the supervision of a mayor military doctor; to this team attended also [two] Armenian doctors. I and the *juge d'instruction* were also present. Two Armenian doctors

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> *Ashkatank* n. 45, September 7, 1913.

stated after the preliminary investigation that the bullet had entered from the top of skull and left from one eye, and [that] the bullet must have been released by a big gun. Indeed in the autopsy it appeared that the bullet had not left, but had been stuck in the eye cavity, and that it had not been released by a big rifle, rather something like a Mauser.<sup>115</sup>

The autopsy revealed a key lead for the investigation, the bullet; yet it also disclosed the scandalously erroneous judgment of the two Armenian doctors. It is unconvincing that the doctors intentionally misled the public. Given the circumstances of the death, an autopsy was a legal obligation after which it would have been absolutely clear that the doctors' statement was false. What is extremely striking is that the doctors examining the wound stated conclusively that the wound was caused by a rifle used by soldiers. It is not unlikely that the doctors too shared the public's apocalyptic fears.

Far from clearing up the mystery over the murder and calming the tension in the city, the autopsy initiated a new round of contention. As the bullet was now recovered it could be subjected to a ballistic examination. To avoid allegations of partiality, officials selected a team of ballistic investigators which included an Armenian gunsmith. The experts unanimously concluded that the bullet belonged not to a rifle, but a handgun (a ten-shooter-Mauser).

This report inflamed Armenian political circles; Eplighatian wrote that the Armenian papers disparaged the Armenian gunsmith as "a Turk bearing an Armenian

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<sup>115</sup> Eplighatian, *Kiank Me Azgis Kiankin Mej : Akanatesi Ew Masnaktsoghi Vkayutiwnner 1903-1923*, 70. For the full text of the autopsy report see *Ashkatank* n. 43-44, September 7-14, 1913

name.”<sup>116</sup> The ARF supporters in the city were particularly infuriated, as this type of handgun was widely used by the ARF militia. After the announcement of the report the ARF leaders in Van claimed that the gendarmes and the police usually carried an extra, personal gun, hence even if the findings were true it would not change the fact that the crime was committed by the security forces. Yet the validity of the ballistic report continued to be challenged by the Armenian media; *Ashkhatank*, in a long article objecting to the findings of the forensic investigation on technical grounds, and labeling the entire investigation as part of a broader plot, expressed his regret that:

The most saddening of all is that on this ridiculous leaflet [the ballistic investigation report] there are the signatures of two Armenians –whose Armenian-ness is evidenced by their names; here again we see what kind of ‘Armenian’ officials they appoint to our region.<sup>117</sup>

For Eblighatian, the prosecutor in the case, the ballistic examination report was a second shock, especially because he had already issued an arrest warrant. In order to confirm the ballistic report he showed the bullet to the pro-ARF Armenian secretary of the court, Tavit Papazian, who was considered knowledgeable about guns, and he also concurred with the official report’s conclusion.<sup>118</sup> Although life was back to normal after the arrests and the ceremony, the legal case was getting more and more complicated. The only evidence to keep the gendarmes and the police under arrest was testimony provided by Armenian eyewitnesses who claimed to have seen the culprit in the dark of the night; yet all new evidence, such as the autopsy and the ballistic investigation, supported the claims of the accused. Finally, a crime scene examination done by a

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> *Ashkhatank* n. 42-188, August 31, 1913.

<sup>118</sup> Eblighatian, *Kiank Me Azgis Kiankin Mej : Akanatesi Ew Masnaktsoghi Vkayutiwnner 1903-1923*, 71.

military captain, the *juge d'instruction*, and Eplighatian confirmed the patrols' claim that a shootout indeed took place. And at the location from where the patrols alleged they were fired upon, a villager's shoe was found—an additional hint that Armenian gunmen might have fired guns from that position.

Aside from legal complications and local controversy, the incident swiftly echoed in the capital and also in diplomatic circles. On September 16, 1913 Armenian representatives in Istanbul met with the Minister of Interior Talat Bey to convey their concern about the situation in Van after the killing of Melkon Mir-Sakoyan. Talat Bey claimed that the killing was not a hate crime but an occasional incident and assured the Armenian representatives that there was no reason to be alarmed, as the governor had taken all necessary steps upon Talat's strict orders. Talat Bey was clearly following the incident very closely, as he was knowledgeable about the details of the situation.<sup>119</sup> European diplomats were also kept informed. Eplighatian wrote that the commander of the gendarmes Halil Bey complained to the foreign consuls in the city—with an oath on his honor—that his soldiers were innocent and the victim was killed by “an Armenian bullet.”<sup>120</sup> Meanwhile, Asim, the accused police officer—against whom according to Eplighatian there was no evidence other than opinion—was petitioning for his release almost on a daily basis.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> *Heratzayn* n. 59, September 17, 1913.

<sup>120</sup> Eblighatian, *Kiank Me Azgis Kiankin Mej : Akanatesi Ew Masnaktsoghi Vkayutiwnner 1903-1923*, 72.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

Eplighatian recalled in his memoirs that one night, almost a week after the incident, the governor visited him to talk about the case. Tahsin Bey was trying to find an appropriate way of closing the case through negotiation and compromise:

This [case] is beyond the limits of an ordinary crime. We, Young Turks, want to vow to the entire world that there is a sharp difference between the previous [Hamidian, pre-1908 revolution] and the current rule. We can govern the country with a European understanding and we, showing a just and impartial attitude, can also satisfy the minorities and establish strong cooperation with them. You [Armenians] with your current attitude encourage contrary currents which are at odds with such cooperation, and [your] eyes are always turned towards the Great Powers.<sup>122</sup>

In his response, Eplighatian emphasized that it was necessary for the people to see the difference in practice; and referring to Melkon's murder case he claimed: "How does it contribute to the prestige of a government, if a policeman considered to be the culprit is released without investigation?" Eplighatian concluded that he would take the initiative for the policeman Asim's release if "I am convinced that he is innocent."<sup>123</sup> After a more than two hour-long discussion, Eplighatian was convinced that he would always have good relations with the governor. At least, he wrote, "the appearance was saved."<sup>124</sup>

Eplighatian indeed had good relations with the governor until he left the city in August 1914 as the interpreter for the inspector-general Hoff. The mystery of the Melkon case could never be clarified. A month later, four gendarmes and the policeman were released upon Eplighatian's conclusion that "there is no ground for trial."<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Eplighatian, *Kiank Me Azgis Kiankin Mej: Akanatesi Ew Masnaktsoghi Vkayutiwnner 1903-1923*, 73.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

The case of Melkon Mir-Sakoyan was an intriguing episode which illustrates the anxious political atmosphere and nervous social psychology in the provinces in the aftermath of the Balkan Wars. Yet it also demonstrates that due to the broader international and domestic political conditions both central and local officials were eager to negotiate, cooperate and compromise—perhaps unprecedentedly so. The Armenian actors, on the other hand, felt empowered by the post-Balkan Wars political configuration. The Armenian public was impatient with growing expectations. Hence Armenian leaders pushed for more rights and concessions for their constituencies. They did not shy away from publicly challenging the government and even protesting against it; yet in a very cautious manner they welcomed rapprochement attempts by the government and, at least publicly, expressed their eagerness to cooperate.

Yet this was not the only murder case that tested the fragile politics in the region. Shortly before Melkon's murder, Musa Bey of Kardjkan, a very prominent pro-government Kurdish notable in Van, had also been assassinated. In the summer of 1913 the governor of Van, Tahsin Bey, had nominated him for a second degree *Mecidiye Medal* and he had been also granted privileges to public lands and forests. Eblighatian noted that many had deemed him the government's candidate for the parliament from Van in the upcoming elections. It was only two weeks before the killing of Melkon Effendi that Musa Bey had paid a visit to the governor, in order to express his gratitude for the medal and other privileges granted to him by the government. On the way back to his home village on August 13, 1913, he was escorted, as usual, by 50-60 armed Kurdish horsemen. Around 4:00 pm, when the convoy was between the villages of Azadu and

Kandu, Musa Bey was ambushed by a group of gunmen. He was killed with the first shot, but the escorting gunmen fired back and the shootout continued until dark.<sup>126</sup> The culprits from the first moment were identified as Armenian, more specifically as the ARF Militia.

The news of the killing shook the city. Eblighatian related that the next day when he went to his office, he noticed that everybody was frowning. Armenians looked “depressed” and “desperate” whereas Turks seemed “gloomy” and “threatening.” He then recalled receiving a call from an irate Tahsin Bey. The governor told him that despite routine legal procedure, the prosecutor of the appeals court had been appointed to investigate the case instead of him. Tahsin Bey justified his decision suggesting that the appeals court prosecutor’s house was closer to the site of crime. Yet he also told Eblighatian, “I saved you from a disturbance.”<sup>127</sup> Apparently, the governor was unwilling to let the Armenian prosecutor to be the investigator in a case where culprits were also Armenians.

Meanwhile, the governor sent 2,000 troops to the area, which Eblighatian saw as a gesture by the government to show its support for pro-government Kurds. During the investigations bloodstains were found in the area where the assailants were positioned, indicating that some of the attackers must have been wounded. Consequently, the soldiers started a thorough search campaign in the Armenian villages, which created irritation among the villagers;<sup>128</sup> yet this did not turn, unlike many other cases, into a

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<sup>126</sup> *Ashkhatank* n. 137, August 24, 1913.

<sup>127</sup> Eblighatian, *Kiank Me Azgis Kiankin Mej : Akanatesi Ew Masnaktsoghi V kayutiwnner 1903-1923*, 79.

<sup>128</sup> *Ashkhatank* n. 138, August 31, 1913.

public demonstration or protest. Eblighatian described the reaction of Armenians to harsh searches in their houses and haylofts as “only murmuring,” since it was “not a time to make much noise.”<sup>129</sup>

Though some Armenian sources in Istanbul alleged that the murder could have well been committed by Musa Bey’s Kurdish rivals, from the outset it was clear to everyone in Van that the murder was committed by ARF gunmen.<sup>130</sup> It was no secret that the party kept its military wing alive even after the constitutional revolution when the party began to operate legally in the Ottoman territories. Especially in Van, the government either turned a blind eye to this situation or even supported ARF’s armed presence as a pro-constitutional force and a staunch ally within the Armenian community.<sup>131</sup>

However, when this “force” began to spill out of its designated domain and challenged the territory of the “Turkish revolutionaries,” [by targeting (Muslim) allies of the government] an inevitable conflict began. In this similar situation Eblighatian notes that “killing of Musa Bey attained great importance and took the shape of a struggle for influence between the government and the ARF.”<sup>132</sup>

After the assassination of Musa Bey, Tahsin Bey attempted to negotiate the situation with Aram and Ishkhan, two of the three prominent leaders of the ARF in Van. Strikingly both happened to be in the countryside. Meanwhile many Armenians in the

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<sup>129</sup> Eblighatian, *Kiank Me Azgis Kiankin Mej: Akanatesi Ew Masnaktsoghi Vkayutiwnner 1903-1923*, 80.

<sup>130</sup> *Ashkhatank* n. 136, August 17, 1913.

<sup>131</sup> Armenak Achemean L. Ekarean, *Husher, Hratarakut’iwn Azgayin Himnadrami* (Gahire: Tparan Nor Astgh, 1947).

<sup>132</sup> Eblighatian p. 79.

vicinity of the incident were arrested and brought to the city. Yet a few days later, most of the arrested Armenians, who clearly had no connection with the attack, were released and only 15-20 were left incarcerated. According to Eblighatian the bulk of the evidence against the accused Armenians was circumstantial and mostly composed of one-sided witnesses' testimonies. The legal process was moving very slowly, and submission of the file to the criminal court was time consuming enough to cool down the political temper. Eblighatian observes that during this interval, even the harsh attitude of the Vali softened. Tahsin Bey felt more comfortable after a series of military operations in the environs of the murder scene, which demonstrated "the might of the government both to the Kurd and to the Armenian."<sup>133</sup>

Meanwhile Aram and Ishkhan had returned from the countryside. Eblighatian related that Aram, who paid him one of his night visits on behalf of the ARF, concurred that Vali had initially taken an uncompromising, harsh stance yet had recently become more relaxed. This was because according to Aram, there were more important issues on the agenda, such as "the upcoming elections and other matters to be settled which necessitated the cooperation of the both sides"[i.e., the ARF and the government].<sup>134</sup> In his visit, Aram asked him about the legal process regarding the case. More importantly, Aram assured Eblighatian "sincerely," that the real assassins had already left the area and those in jail were "ordinary, innocent youth."<sup>135</sup> After meeting with Aram, Eblighatian wrote, he had started contemplating a way to release the arrested. He

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<sup>133</sup> Eblighatian, *Kiank Me Azgis Kiankin Mej : Akanatesi Ew Masnaktsoghi Vkayutiwnner 1903-1923*, 80.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

decided that the only way was to get the votes of the majority of the judges overseeing the case. Yet Eblighatian was not very optimistic, since out of five judges in Van at the time, the chair of the court was a sarıklı (turbaned) orthodox Muslim to whom “it was not even possible to approach” regarding the release of the detained Armenian youth. There was another “Turk” whom he also deemed impossible to gain to the cause. The third was a “Kurd” from Bitlis about whose personality he had no idea. The other two were Armenians, one of them Eblighatian’s roommate and the other a Turcophone Armenian native of Kayseri married to a Greek woman. Eblighatian did not find him trustworthy; as he neither had “the capacity nor the character” for the position and further he had worked as an attorney and correspondent for Turkish papers.<sup>136</sup>

Meanwhile, a series of new appointments raised Eblighatian’s hopes about both a “favorable” settlement of the Musa Bey’s case. The orthodox-Muslim chair of the court was appointed to Istanbul and the “drunkard” prosecutor general of the appeals court was appointed to Mosul. He was replaced by Asaf Bey, an acquaintance of Tahsin Bey. Eblighatian related that Asim Bey tried to establish friendly ties with Armenian political leaders when he arrived in Van. One more replacement was that of the commander of the Gendarmerie, Halil Bey, who had taken a very harsh stance against Eblighatian during the Melkon Effendi investigation. The replacements for these conservative figures created a more favorable climate for peaceful inter-communal and state-community relations.

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 83.

A verdict enabling the release of the Armenian detainees necessitated the votes of 3 out of 5 members of the court. The only seat that Eblighatian was sure about was that of the Armenian judge who was his roommate. The Turcophone Armenian member made his vote for acquittal conditional on a Muslim member's vote in that direction. But what Muslim would do so? Such criminal cases usually took a lot of time. And meanwhile important developments took place at the national level that had considerable impact on the case, such as the signing of the reform plan agreement and the "Kurdish" insurgency in Bitlis. And in Van, an area with very cold and harsh winters, this season meant little work and lots of leisure for everyone, especially for the bureaucrats. Eblighatian wrote how in the course of the late fall and winter he got a lot of time to chat with the Kurdish judge, Şakir Bey. Eblighatian asserted that in their conversations he kept trying to find Şakir Bey's soft spot. He had been appointed to the court in Van recently. He also had a recently married son who worked for the government in Bitlis; yet since Şakir Bey was appointed to Van, the son had to stay in Bitlis and the bride moved to Van with the in-laws. Eblighatian understood that Şakir Bey desperately needed help for his son's appointment to Van. In one of their conversations at his office, Eblighatian assured him that he would help him with the issue. Şakir Bey thanked him. Eblighatian narrates the rest of the conversation as follows:

"What is the latest with the Musa Bey case?" I asked. "It is to end [soon]," he said, "but the case is surrounded by so many complications and mysteries that one cannot know whom to believe." I responded that such situations are provisioned by legislators; dubious cases should be concluded in favor of defendants. And after giving him lots of examples in that direction, I dared to

add that that was also my wish. "At your command," he said, and left.<sup>137</sup>

At the trial Şakir Bey, the Kurdish judge of the court, joined the two Armenian judges for an acquittal verdict for all detained defendants in the case of the slain Kurdish chief Musa Bey. Only those who were at large were convicted (to very harsh sentences) in absentia.<sup>138</sup> Eblighatian related that in return he kept his promise to Şakir; a few weeks later, Şakir's son was appointed to Van as a clerk at Eblighatian's office.<sup>139</sup>

The verdict led to great enthusiasm, especially in Van Armenian political circles, because it was "unheard of" that in "Turkey" a political murder case would be concluded with the acquittal of all the detained suspects. Further, many optimistically forecasted, as Eblighatian noted: "*If the state of things are as such now*" then when the reforms were implemented it would be like "autonomy" for the Armenians.<sup>140</sup> Eblighatian claimed that his conscience was not disturbed by the verdict nor by his role in securing it, since Aram had assured him that "the real perpetrators had already run far away and crossed the border."<sup>141</sup>

The 1912 elections had ended in disappointment for the Armenian community; only ten Armenians, two of them CUP members, could secure seats in the parliament.<sup>142</sup> As the 1914 elections approached, a "Solidarity Committee" was formed. The committee was composed of representatives from the Armenian Patriarchate, political parties and community organizations regarding the upcoming elections. The Solidarity Committee

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule : 1908-1914*, 122-30.

demanded that in order to fulfill proportional representation Armenians should be given 20 seats. The Patriarch, Archbishop Zaven, presented the election demands of the committee to the government. Although initially Talat, the Minister of Interior, expressed sympathy for the Patriarch's requests, the CUP Central Committee later rejected the committee's proposal and announced that Armenians would only be given 13 seats. In response the Solidarity Committee declared its decision to boycott the elections. The boycott call instigated a major controversy. Eventually however, Patriarch Zaven, taking individual initiative and bypassing the authority of the solidarity committee, came to an agreement with the government. Meanwhile, the ARF also, despite disagreements within the party, stepped back from the boycott decision to avoid leaving the political representation of Ottoman Armenians to "nobodies" at the historic moment of reforms in Armenian provinces.<sup>143</sup>

The Patriarch's attitude and the ARF's change of position caused disappointment and protest from many independents, *Ramkavars* and *Hunchaks*. Hence, the dissolution of the election alliance and failure of the boycott campaign, transformed the election controversy from a conflict between the Ottoman Armenians and the CUP government to a dispute within the Ottoman Armenian community. In the particular case of Van, which was represented by three seats in the parliament, the CUP government agreed to leave two seats to Armenians.<sup>144</sup> Indeed the assassination of Musa Bey occurred in the context of elections. Unlike other armed attacks against Kurds which were primarily

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 209-12.

<sup>144</sup> BOA DH. ŞFR. 431/50 (June 25, 1914).

retaliatory or exemplary killings, the murder of Musa Bey was more of a strategic move with political goals.

The Kurdish chief Musa Bey was disliked in Armenian political circles for his “anti-Armenian” sentiments and deeds.<sup>145</sup> Given his close relations with the governor and popularity among the Kurds, Musa Bey was deemed the government’s most likely candidate in the upcoming parliamentary elections. His elimination meant the government had to pick a new candidate. Ironically, Asaf Bey, the newly appointed prosecutor who had proven his friendship to Eblighatian and to ARF due to his friendly attitude in the Musa Bey case, would eventually become the government’s candidate and be elected as the only non-Armenian representative of Van to the Ottoman Parliament in the 1914 elections.

Eblighatian in his memoirs detailed how the ARF leadership’s support for Asaf Bey was decisive in his candidacy and election as an MP.<sup>146</sup> After the second round of elections which were held in the days after Musa Bey’s killing, two of the three MPs to represent Van in Istanbul were ARF members, Vramian and Papazian, and the third was an ARF endorsed Muslim, Asaf Bey.

The way the Musa Bey case was settled is very illustrative of the workings of inter-communal and state-Armenian community relations in Van in the post Balkan Wars period. These interactions were often depended on personal and local nexus of relations yet they were continuously reshaped by the influence of greater national and international politics. Further, the killing of Musa Bey, did not, despite expectations,

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<sup>145</sup> *Biwzandion* n. 5138, September 17, 1913.

<sup>146</sup> Eblighatian, *Kiank Me Azgis Kiankin Mej : Akanatesi Ew Masnaktsoghi Vkayutiwnner 1903-1923*, 90-91.

spark any inter-communal violence between Kurds and Armenians<sup>147</sup> and the acquittal of the Armenian suspects further raised the hopes among the Armenian community for even better conditions when the reforms were to be actually implemented.

### **2.3.2 Rites of Ottomanism: Patriarch Zaven's Trip to Istanbul**

In this section I will look at the newly elected Armenian Patriarch's trip to Istanbul through the eastern provinces in the fall of 1913. The details of the trip provide us with insights, not just about inter-communal relations in the provinces, but also and perhaps more importantly the relations between the CUP leadership and Armenian community leaders at imperial scale. In August 1913 at a time when reforms in "Armenian Provinces," was at the forefront of European diplomacy and the Bab-i Ali, acting patriarch Arsharuni resigned from his seat as a result of increased pressures regarding his personal, ecclesiastical and political conduct.

The criteria for who should be the new patriarch were naturally shaped according to the priorities of the time, i.e., reform in the eastern provinces. Vahan Papazian, a prominent ARF chief, wrote that the ideal patriarch would be "one of the young prelates, who having lived for a long time in the provinces, would be closely acquainted with the local people and be cognizant of their/its demands and psychology." "Everybody shared the same view," Papazian added, "therefore, the election process was smooth and free of the usual "harsh competition and intrigues."<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Azatamart n. 1323, October 9, 1913; see also, Vali Tahsin Bey's report about the aftermath of the assassination, BOA. DH. EUM. 2. Şube (August 31, 1913).

<sup>148</sup> See, Zaven Der-Eghiayan, *Patriarkakan Hushers : Vaweragirner Ew Vkayutiwnner*, Mtaworakan Spasarkuteants Graseneaki Hratarakutiwn, 7 (Gahire: Tparan Nor Astgh, 1947), 11-12.

Indeed, bishop Zaven was a perfect fit for Papazian's description: he was only forty-five years old, he was from, Siirt, an eastern province, and had spent his last fifteen years serving at the prelacies of the three major Eastern Anatolian provinces: Erzurum (1896-1901), Van (1901-1910) and Diyarbekir (1910-1913). And finally he had proficiency in four foreign languages, Turkish, Arabic, French and English.<sup>149</sup> Not surprisingly, Bishop Zaven received the support of 64 out of 82 members of the assembly. He held the post until 1916 when he was exiled to Jerusalem, and could return to the Patriarchate in Kumkapi, İstanbul only in 1919 after the allied forces occupied the city.

Given the political and diplomatic interest on the Armenian Question at the time, Bishop Zaven's trip from Diyarbekir to İstanbul for his new post, received exceptional attention. The seven week-long excursion, from September 9 to October 28, was beyond a simple trip; it was deemed by the Armenian political and religious leadership, the Ottoman government and Western powers to be of great symbolic and political significance. In his memoirs Bishop Zaven noted that his itinerary to İstanbul was proposed by the ARF member of the Ottoman Parliament Kegham Garabedian, who suggested that he should take the route through Bitlis, Mus, Erzurum and Trabzon—important sites in the history of the Armenian Question and in the ongoing reform discussions.<sup>150</sup> Zaven also wrote that "the government ordered everywhere [referring to places he would visit in his trip] that all respect be paid to me and I have to confess that that from this point of view the officials never came up short; and all sorts of honor and

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<sup>149</sup> *Shant* n. 41, September 13, 1913.

<sup>150</sup> Der-Eghiayan, *Patriarkakan Hushers : Vaweragirner Ew V kayutiwnner*, 15.

tribute was given to the spiritual leader of the Armenian nation who was coming to Istanbul from “Armenian provinces.”<sup>151</sup>

The attitude was emblematic of the central government’s approach to the Armenians and the Armenian Question in the course of the reform debates. The government on the one hand tried to show the Western powers that it was willing and able to improve the condition of Armenians in the provinces on its own. On the other hand, the Sublime Porte diligently vied for the hearts and minds of the Armenian leaders in order to convince them to endorse a reform plan with the least, and if possible no, foreign intervention.

The newly elected patriarch left Diyarbekir on September 9<sup>th</sup> and departed for his hometown Siirt, after holding his last liturgy service at the Main Church and accepting congratulation from locals at a sumptuous farewell ceremony.<sup>152</sup> On September 16<sup>th</sup> the Patriarch’s convoy arrived at Siirt. He was welcomed by the Gazur river, an hour’s distance from the city, by the governor Mustafa Abdülhalik (Renda), a large number of government officials, Muslim notables, the mufti (highest ranking Muslim clergy in the province), the judge, and a large group of Christian (mostly Armenian) inhabitants.<sup>153</sup> Patriarch Zaven deemed it particularly noteworthy that one of the most significant Kurdish political figures of the time, the deputy Abdulrezzak, accompanied him during all the receptions held in the city and in the prelacy. The patriarch explained the “utmost

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

public excitement” of the inhabitants by the fact that they deemed him a fellow townsman and thus were feeling the pride of his appointment.<sup>154</sup>

After a three days stop in Siirt, the patriarch’s caravan headed towards another major location, Bitlis. In his memoirs the patriarch expressed his surprise that in Bitlis the governor had only a tent set outside of the city for his, unlike the sumptuous welcoming ceremonies in other locations. And a Mektubcu (a middle level official in charge of communication) with a few other lower ranking officials were sent to welcome him. In response Patriarch Zaven, rested for a little while in the tent and decided not to visit the governor’s office, which would be the first place he would stop by in other locations. Instead, he set out directly to the main church where the prelacy was located.

During his stay in Bitlis the Patriarch was hosted at the mansion of an Armenian notable, Khachmanukean. Zaven wrote that his not visiting the governor neither when he entered the city nor later, made the governor worry that the Patriarch could report his conduct to the government in Istanbul; hence, the governor contacted the patriarch’s host, Khachmanukian and asked him to hold a banquet. Patriarch Zaven quoting Khacmanukian wrote that the governor had confessed to him that his previous unwelcoming attitude was a result of agitations of fanatic Muslim sheikhs. After the banquet, Patriarch Zaven recalled in his memoirs that after he left Bitlis for Muş, the governor did not only see him off, but also traveled to Muş, his next stop, to join the governor there and welcome him again.<sup>155</sup> Among those who attended to his welcome was also Rupen, one of the prominent leaders of the ARF. Patriarch Zaven recalled that

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

the second day of his stay in the city, a military parade was held in his honor and was visited by “the governor, local governor (kaymakam), military officers and municipal officials and local notables.”<sup>156</sup>

The third day of his trip in Muş, the Patriarch passed to Saint Karapet Monastery which is one of the oldest Armenian monasteries and a major pilgrimage site. Patriarch Zaven wrote that the Monk of the monastery Vartan Vartabed related to him the controversy between him and another monk, Bishop Nerses Kharakhanian regarding where to construct the new school building on the Monastery property. The money for the school construction had been donated by a wealthy Armenian woman from Moscow. Yet the funds were not sent to Muş since the two Monks could not come to an agreement about exactly at what location to build it. Patriarch Zaven, quoting Vartan Vartabed, narrates that the Bishop Nerses Kharakhanian had, under the influence of the local ARF chief Ruben *Pasha*, insisted that the school be built at Veri Parakhner which is far away from the monastic complex and located in a valley.

The rationale of the ARF chief was, according to Vartan Vartabed, because of the distance, pupils would not be easily able to go the church so that they would be away from religious agitation. Yet, Vartan disagreed and claimed that the school should be built very close to the monastery so that the students could socialize with the pilgrims, and also “God forbid, if one day the country thunders again and if there is attack on our people and the Monastery, that building [the new school building] that will be sufficiently solid can at least be a place to take shelter for the congregation and with its

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 18.

dominant position above the monastery might help guard/protect it, whereas the other proposed place, located in a valley, is open/subject to attacks from all sides.”<sup>157</sup> Patriarch Zaven agreed with Vartan Vartabet.

What renders this controversy particularly interesting is that another prominent ARF leader and a member of the Ottoman Parliament from Van, Vramian requested explanation from the Patriarch regarding his decision about the location of school building. When the Patriarch cited the two reasons that Vartan Vartabet proposed, according to Patriarch Zaven:

Vramian stared at my face with astonishment and said “do you want to say that we will still shed blood?” “Certainly,” I responded. And I told him that the former governor of Diyarbekir Garip Pasha – who was not an İttihadist [i.e., proponent of the CUP] – visited the prelacy before he took off from the city and told me that “your *komitajis* [revolutionaries] are too naïve. If they knew about the correspondence of Talat<sup>158</sup> and I, they would be very bewildered.”<sup>159</sup>

Of course, the new school building could never be built and the historic monastery itself was razed to its foundation during the genocide. Ironically, the Van deputy Vramian was arrested in April 1915 in Van and sent to Bitlis. Soon, he was executed as one of the first high profile victims of the Armenian genocide by the order of the abovementioned governor of Siirt (later Bitlis), Abdulhalik (Renda).

The next major stop of the patriarch was at Erzurum, where he had served as the Armenian prelate for eight years. Hence in this location, the new patriarch was received with even more refulgent ceremonies which was even cited in foreign language

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>158</sup> Minister of Interior and the leader of the Young Turk troika.

<sup>159</sup> Der-Eghiayan, *Patriarkakan Hushers : Vaweragirner Ew Vkayutiwnner*, 20.

Ottoman media.<sup>160</sup> The governor and the highest level military and government officials were present at his welcome. In turn, Patriarch Zaven chose the governor's office as the first location to visit and express his gratitude, even before heading to the Armenian church and giving his blessings to the local Armenian congregation. During his stay in the city he divided his time between meetings with government officials, representatives of foreign missions, Armenian community leaders and notables.

The patriarch finally arrived at Trabzon, a port city, to continue his trip to Istanbul by ship. At this location too he received a highest profile official welcome. The patriarch and Bekir Sami, the governor of Trabzon, already knew each other from their previous posts at Van.

The day after I arrived in the governor's office at Trabzon, he let me know that pursuant to an order by the ministry of interior<sup>161</sup> the steamer *Gülcemal* had been allocated to take me to Istanbul. The same day the Russian consul too informed me that one of the Russian steamers operating in the Black Sea would arrive at Trabzon to transport me to Istanbul. I rejected the Russian Consul's offer while thanking him, which created a great impression on the government.<sup>162</sup>

As *Gülcemal*,-Patriarch Zaven on board-, entered the Bosphorus on October 28, 1913, the members of the Ottoman Council of Ministers were already waiting to welcome him at the Anadolukavağı port, at the northeast tip of the Straits. Sublime

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<sup>160</sup> Bayur, *Türk İnkilâbı Tarihi 3, Bd. 2. Trablusgarp Ve Balkan Savaşları Osmanlı Asyasının Paylaşılması İçin Anlaşmalar. Paylaşmalar*, 151.

<sup>161</sup> Apparently the Ministry of Interior closely watched Archbishop's trip to assure his security, that he received appropriate official treatment as well as to scrutinize the newly elected patriarch's political and diplomatic connections, see, BOA. DH. İD. 113/53 (November 3, 1913).

<sup>162</sup> Der-Eghiayan, *Patriarkakan Hushers : Vaweragirner Ew V kayutiwnner*, 23.

Porte was delighted to know that the Armenian Patriarch was coming to the capital on board a Turkish steamer. Needless to say, the ceremony was sumptuous.<sup>163</sup>

## 2.4 Concluding Remarks

In the introduction to the annual report of the ABCFM station in Van for 1913-1914, E. A. Yarrow commented on the political situation and prospects:

It is with deep gratitude that we are able to announce that much of the anxiety and apprehension mentioned in our last Annual Report, has passed. Politically the year has been filled with grave possibilities, and the fact that the present outlook seems brighter than any near since the granting of the Constitution, ought to encourage all those who are praying for the pacification and advancement of this troubled region.<sup>164</sup>

Likewise, Dr. Ussher, in his Report of Van Medical Mission, described the past year (June 1913 – June 1914) as “a year full of blessing – perhaps the best year in our history.”<sup>165</sup> On October 22, 1913, in the immediate aftermath of the killing of infamous Kurdish brigands Mir Mhe and Şakir by security forces, the Armenian daily

*Biwzandion*'s correspondent observed that:

In the countryside a very peaceful situation reigns ... Travelers between Norduz, Çatak and Van do not anymore feel the worry of falling into the hands of brigands and [they] journey without fear. This situation has filled the inhabitants of the countryside with content because such tranquility has not been witnessed in the last quarter century.<sup>166</sup>

Such statements of tranquility are plentiful in Armenian papers, memoirs and archival documents of the period (June 1913 - July 1914); many missionary reports point

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<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24.

<sup>164</sup> 1913-1914 Annual Report (Received by the ABC office on July 1914) by E. A. Yarrow on behalf of Van Station, Papers of the ABC 16. 9. 7. (Reel 712: 129).

<sup>165</sup> 1913-1914 Annual Report of Van Medical Mission (Received by the ABC office on July 1914) by Clarence D. Ussher, Papers of the ABC 16. 9. 7. (Reel 712: 130).

<sup>166</sup> *Biwzandion* n. 5191 November 19, 1913

to similar signs of improvement.<sup>167</sup> The peace was not only an outcome of tightened security measures in the region; there were also indications for increased inter-communal cooperation at certain locales.<sup>168</sup> My major endeavor in this chapter has been to illustrate that the post Balkan Wars period was not characterized by escalation in the eastern provinces of the empire. A precarious peace existed.

To be more precise, the detrimental outcomes of the Balkan Wars did not lead the actors involved in the conflict in and over Eastern Anatolia to a deadlock. Despite the prevalence of anxiety and ongoing competition among communities in conflict, emerging crisis could be overcome through compromise. Community and political leaders compromised because they did not expect or predict an imminent catastrophic total collapse. Hence, coexistence continued to be the most viable option for the future.

Therefore, I conclude that the time period between the end of the Balkan Wars and World War I was not a prelude to the Armenian Genocide or to the overall catastrophe in the region. Myriad scenarios were possible. The catastrophic outcome was only one, perhaps the least foreseeable, and its occurrence was not warranted by what happened in the aftermath of the Balkan Wars but rather by political actors' decisions after World War I broke out. Most scholarly accounts, however, offer almost

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<sup>167</sup> Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Iskalanmış Baris : Doğu Vilayetlerinde Misyonerlik, Etnik Kimlik Ve Devlet 1839-1938* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2005), 468, 630-31

<sup>168</sup> For instance on *Biwzandion's* correspondent in Van reported the attack of the Kurdish brigand Hasane Jango and his friends of a Kurdish tribe of Iran, to the Kurdish village of Jermuk where the brigand abducted 300 cattle. But they were stopped on one side by the Kurdish Rahmantsi villagers and on the other side by the Armenians of the Kharakons who wounded three of the assailant and seized back the abducted animals. This according to the correspondent evidence of that "what benefits/merits could the harmonious cooperation of Armenian and Kurdish neighbors bring forth and how big a mistake the government runs by seizing the weapons of the Armenians which serves only to the purposes of self-defense or protection of property *Biwzandion* October 31, 1913.

teleological narratives, which—regardless of their authors’ intent—ignore or downplay the possibility of alternative scenarios. My argument that peace was a viable and practical option suggests that in order to better understand the eruption of the conflict into genocide we need to focus more carefully on political agency.

This is not to say that the conflict ceased to exist; nor am I ignoring that ethnic or other forms of violence continued to be part of life, nor did the shadow of apprehension over everyday life, stemming from communalist rivalries dissipate. Instead I demonstrate that a precarious peace replaced the more aggressive social and political situation of the years 1911-1912.

The inflammatory socio-psychological mixture of uncertainty about the future of the empire, fear of victimization, and opportunism became detrimental in fueling exclusionary visions and violence when the actual process of escalation commenced after November 1914, following the early clashes between the Russian and Ottoman troops. In a January 26, 1915 letter to the new governor of Van, Cevdet Bey, Vramian, the ARF deputy to Van and one of the first victims of the genocide, regretfully observes the radical shift of affairs and sudden escalation after November 1914:

The *Belou* incident densely contains in it the picture of an unfortunate reality where two camps clash without understanding each other; the gendarmerie who chases the armed Armenian, the Armenian who arms due to his misgiving about the government and his Muslim neighbors. Both sides—the government against the Armenian, the Armenian against the government—are distrustful to each other. Yet, it was not long ago — only couple of months back, during Tahsin Bey’s term—that [Ottoman] officials and the Armenian political organization (ARF) used to meet one another and emphasize their sincere cooperation. Leaving aside many [other] examples, we should not forget the passionate demonstration [in support of Ottoman military conscription] under the auspices of Dashnagtsutiwn (ARF) member Aram, with drum and fife, in the early days of

the [war] mobilization in Van. In that mutual trust something has changed, but it is undeniable that this pathetic reality, whose symptoms we observe in the course of the latest incidents, was created after the outbreak- of the war.<sup>169</sup>

In the next chapter I explore how maneuvering space for actors became progressively limited after World War I broke out. In order to contextualize the process of escalation in Eastern Anatolia, I examine the changing situation in Van between August 1914 and March 1915. I place a special focus on the political, ideological and psychological matrix and discuss how uncertainty, anxiety, expectation of victimization, and finally opportunism became crucial dimensions of the escalation proces

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<sup>169</sup> NAA 227.1.416.9-10.

### 3. A Dilemma from Hell: Ottoman-Armenian Political Elite and World War I, August - November 1914

The first reports of world war in late July 1914 incited awe and puzzlement in the already war-weary Ottoman Empire. Since February 1914, Armenian leaders had been feverishly mobilizing to finally turn the recently approved and widely celebrated Eastern Anatolian Reform Plan into reality. In the spring of 1914 the two general inspectors, Belgian Hoff and Norwegian Westenenk, had arrived in Istanbul; the former had already gone to Van where the headquarters of his inspectorate would be. Not all Armenian political figures were entirely optimistic about the prospects for the reform, but the general opinion was that, as Vratsian puts it:

There was no reason to doubt that, in the end, the Turks [would] give ground, and the reforms [would] take effect. Before the Armenian people was rising a new, unlimited and fascinating horizon.<sup>1</sup>

True, the simmering conflict in Europe could create new obstacles for the reform, but, as A. Khatisyan observed, “no one was feeling that that soon would the international great storm (*Mets Potorike*) [WWI] break out.”<sup>2</sup> Yet, war did, in fact, break out, adding a whole new volatility, dissolving any presumed certainties about the future, including the plan’s implementation. In a way, the cards were reshuffled and the rules of the new game had yet to be determined.

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Vratsian, *Hayastani Hanrapetut’iwn* (Beirut: Mshak, 1958), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Khatisyan, A. “K’aghak’peti mẽ Hishataknerě,” *Hayrenik’* n. 11, September 1932, 122.

### 3.1 A Parlor Game in Istanbul: Only One Will Win!

Three days after the outbreak of the European War, Krikor Zohrab, a renowned Armenian intellectual, author, jurist and member of parliament,<sup>3</sup> met with two prominent members of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), Armen Garo (Garekin Pastermadjian)<sup>4</sup> and Vartkes Serengulyan, at Zohrab's rented house on the Princess Islands off the shore of Istanbul.<sup>5</sup> All three had served as members of the Ottoman Parliament after the Young Turk Revolution. After discussing the war, the men decided to write down their predictions for the war as a kind of parlor game. The winner would be the one whose predictions proved most accurate by the war's end; the

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<sup>3</sup> Krikor Zohrab (1861-1915) was a renowned Armenian intellectual, writer, jurist and political figure. He was born in Istanbul into a family originally from Agn (Eğin), Erzincan. He was elected as a member of the Armenian National Assembly and Ottoman Parliament in 1908 after the Young Turk Revolution in 1908. He supported the ARF but never became a member of the party, remaining independent. Zohrab also had close relations with the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) leadership. He became actively involved in negotiations with the European Powers on behalf of the Ottoman-Armenians during the Eastern Anatolian Reform Plan debates in 1912-14. He was arrested in May 1915 in Istanbul, deported and eventually killed in Urfa.

<sup>4</sup> Karekin Pastermadjian, aka Armen Garo (1873-1923), was born in Erzurum. In 1894 Pastermadjian went to France to study agriculture where he became a member of the ARF. As the Hamidian massacres broke out, he left school and returned to Constantinople as an ARF militant. He was one of the organizers of the famous Ottoman Bank Takeover in 1896. After finishing his graduate studies in Switzerland, Pastermadjian passed to the Caucasus and settled in Tiflis in 1901. He took a leading role in the Armenian "self-defense" during the Armeno-Tatar riots in Tiflis in 1906. After the Young Turk Revolution in 1908 he returned to the Ottoman Empire and served as a Member of Parliament from Erzurum until 1914. In September 1914 he went to the Caucasus to help organize the Armenian Volunteer Battalions. During the war he accompanied the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armenian Battalion as a representative of the executive committee of Tiflis to organize Armenian "self-defense" among the Ottoman-Armenians. He also briefly commanded the battalion. After the April revolution in Russia he went to Petrograd to negotiate the situation in the Caucasus with the new Russian government. He moved to America in June 1917 and served first as the representative of the Armenian National Council of the Caucasus and later as the ambassador of the first Armenian Republic.

<sup>5</sup> Vartkes Serengulyan (1871-1915) was born in Erzurum. He became involved in the Armenian revolutionary movement in 1890. Serengulyan was one of the participants of the Ottoman Bank Takeover in 1896. He continued his revolutionary activities as an ARF militant in Bulgaria, Tiflis, Alexandropol (Gyumri), Kars and Van, where he was arrested in 1903 and jailed until the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. Serengulyan became a member of the Ottoman Parliament during the constitutional regime. In May 1915 he was arrested and deported to Urfa, where he was tortured and killed.

prize would be a dinner party for twelve in his honor at the famous Tokatliyan Hotel in Istanbul, paid for by the losers:

1. Will the Triple Alliance [Britain, France, and Russia] or the Triple Entente [Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Italy] win?
2. Will the victory be major and overwhelming, or a matter of gaining advantages?
3. How long will it last until the signing of a political treaty?
4. Will small Balkan states and Turkey participate in the war?
5. Will internal insurgency break out in Turkey or not?
6. Will Turkey gain or lose from the restoration of peace, from the point of view of territorial makeup and political rights?
7. What will be the situation of Armenians during the war? What will be the course of Turkish Armenians in [the case of] a Russo-Turkish War? Will they cross to the Russian side or not? What will happen to Armenians of Central Anatolia, Cilicia, and Istanbul?
8. From the point of view of political rights, will Turkish Armenians come out as winners or losers when peace is restored?<sup>6</sup>

In retrospect, these questions may seem horribly naïve. Within a year, two of these very same Armenians were arrested and executed, and the third had fled the country. The Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire was subjected to forced deportations and massacres. These draconian measures – what some have labeled the first genocide of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Ottoman-Armenians and ended thousands of years of Armenian existence in the areas of what many call “historic Armenia.”

By August 1914, this fate was beyond even the most pessimistic predictions among the Armenian elite in Istanbul.<sup>7</sup> Many of these men had both political interactions

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<sup>6</sup> Grigor Zòhrap and Albert Srapioni Sarowryan, *Erkeri Zogovacow : C'ors Hatorov 4 Namakner, Encayagerer, Ôragrowt'iwnner* (Erevan: Grakanowt'ean ew Arowesti T'angarani Hratarakc'owt'iwn, 2003), 385.

<sup>7</sup> Retrospectively, Armenians in their memoirs have consistently and repeatedly underscored that what happened was beyond even their worst predictions.

and personal friendships with the Turkish leaders who months later ordered and oversaw their killings. The parlor game questions clearly reflected how hazy and invisible the horizons were for the Armenian political leadership. The direction of broader international geopolitical prospects, their potential repercussions for domestic politics and, finally, the impact on the Ottoman-Armenians were all frightening unknowns. Ironically, the answers given by the three Armenian political leaders differed on all the questions except one; on Question 8, all of them felt that Armenians in the Ottoman Empire would politically *benefit* from the war. Zohrab forecast victory for the German alliance, while Vartkes and Pastermadjian predicted a German defeat. Zohrab and Pastermadjian guessed that the Ottoman Empire would enter the war; Vartkes disagreed. Zohrab predicted a short war, while the other two expected war to last longer than a year.<sup>8</sup>

The questions that incited the deepest anxiety and fear were the ones concerning the fate of “Turkey” [i.e., Ottoman Empire] and the Ottoman-Armenians; more specifically, how would the war affect the policy of the nation-state growing out of the rubble of the Empire, and would a new wave of Armenian massacres follow? The zero-sum game of the questionnaire allowed only win-lose scenarios. Zohrab and Pastermadjian thought the Ottoman Empire would come out of the war as a territorial and political loser; Vartkes predicted the opposite. On the fate of Ottoman-Armenians, Vartkes and Pastermadjian felt that a new wave of massacres was not possible; Zohrab thought that Armenians living near the border with Russia would seek refuge across the

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<sup>8</sup> Zôhrap and Sarowryan, *Erkeri Zogovacow : C’ors Hatorov 4 Namakner, Encayagrer, Ôragrowt’iwnner*, 385-86.

border, and there would only be partial massacres and lootings in other areas of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>9</sup>

Zohrab “won” the bet, posthumously, having foreseen the coming massacres if not in their full scale and brutality. But he never enjoyed a dinner party in his honor at the Tokatliyan Hotel. Despite their personal friendships with leading members of the Committee of Union and Progress, Zohrab and Vartkes were arrested in May 1915 and sent to Diyarbakir in southeastern Anatolia for military trial. A CUP hit man, Çerkez Ahmet, tortured them to death on the way, near the city of Urfa. Of the three, only Karekin Pastermadjian survived the genocide; he went to the Caucasus just weeks after their fateful last dinner to help organize the Armenian Volunteer Battalions. He was in the Russian-controlled territories when the widespread persecution of Ottoman-Armenian notables and intellectuals began on April 24, 1915.

Zohrab’s pessimism haunted his diary entry on August 4, 1914. It was becoming clearer to him that the Ottoman government would enter the war on the German side: “The War Minister [Enver], an inexperienced youngster, with his pro-German inclinations, rules the country.”<sup>10</sup> According to Zohrab, the Ottoman leadership would be disastrous, not just for Christian minorities like the Armenians but for the entire Ottoman Empire:

The Turkish people too, are at the brink of collapse; I already hear their deep groans. I am worried about an explosion that at the moment it occurs will blast away this mindless government like a sheet of paper, as happened once before [referring to the Young Turk Revolution of 1908]. The [Committee of] Union and Progress has no more powerful and greater enemies and agents of destruction

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 386.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 388.

than its own chiefs. May God have mercy on this country. At the very moment when Turkey [Ottoman Empire] was supposed to heal its wounds, it is throwing itself into new and possibly fatal adventures.<sup>11</sup>

Zohrab was even gloomier about the likely future of his own people. He regretfully described the disarray of the Armenian community and the absence of something like a cohesive Armenian national sentiment, much less institutions:

... we are on the eve of major events, events that will also inevitably affect the fate of our nation. Our nation? Where is our nation? I search everywhere, but I cannot find it. ... A nation [referring to the Armenian nation] which has neither a head, nor hands and legs, nor brain, nor sense – like a primitive creature, it has only automatic convulsions to deal with each situation.<sup>12</sup>

Juxtaposing this picture with the increasingly menacing prospects for the Ottoman Empire, Zohrab's hopelessness grew:

In the context of an imminent collision between Turkey and Russia, the situation of Armenians has the nature of causing great anxiety. Which side to support? What to do? A matter which is full of responsibility. And – even if the decision is made – what entity will carry it out and instill it in the soul of the nation?<sup>13</sup>

In seeking answers, Zohrab saw a bleak panorama and an absence of viable leaders and institutions, with the exception of the ARF:

There is nobody at the patriarchate. Various secondary [Armenian] political parties lack any weight. *Only the Federation (ARF) has stood up, full of hopes but not force.*<sup>14</sup> [Emphasis added]

### 3.2 War and Genocide

The inability of the three Armenians to perceive how World War I would change the geopolitical equation – and ultimately lead to the slaughter of so many of their

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 388.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 387.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 389.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 389.

countrymen – introduces the question of the relation between warfare and genocide. Clearly, war creates fertile ground for genocidal outcomes; the Nazi Holocaust alone grimly verifies that.<sup>15</sup> But what are the conditions that render warfare susceptible to genocidal designs and their execution? Robert Melson addresses three aspects of what he terms “revolutionary war” that can increase the possibility of genocidal outcomes: “1. War gives rise to feelings of vulnerability and/or exultation. ... 2. War increases the autonomy of the state from internal social forces, including public opinion. ... 3. War closes off other policy options of dealing with internal “enemies,” such as expulsion, assimilation or segregation.”<sup>16</sup>

Eric Markusen cites five aspects of modern warfare that can hasten genocide: “First, war, particularly on the losing side—produces widespread psychological and social disequilibrium...Second, governments engaged in total war, whether democratic or totalitarian, tend to become more centralized, secret and powerful...Third, the government at war can utilize the military forces—men who have been trained to kill in the service of their nation—for the perpetration of genocide...Fourth, just as conditions of war significantly increase the power of the government, they also tend to increase the vulnerability of the governmentally targeted victim groups...Finally...modern war

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<sup>15</sup> Panikos Panayi, "Dominant Societies and Minorities in the Two World Wars," in *Minorities in Wartime : National and Racial Groupings in Europe, North America, and Australia During the Two World Wars*, ed. Panikos Panayi (Oxford, UK; Providence, RI, USA: Berg, 1993).

<sup>16</sup> Melson, *Revolution and Genocide : On the Origins of the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust*, 19.

creates a climate of psychological numbing or desensitization that increases popular tolerance of cruelty, whether directed against an external or internal enemy."<sup>17</sup>

From Markusen's perspective, war does not itself create conditions of genocide, but rather can be an external accelerator to a preexisting violence-prone situation.

Michael Mann, too, treats war as a trigger that increases "the lure toward murderous ethnic cleansing" since it provides the conditions that enable that accomplishment "at low military cost, with little fear."<sup>18</sup>

Other scholars have pointed to a more intricate and dynamic interconnectedness between war and genocide. Martin Shaw, for example, asserts that genocide "is not a form of social conflict, but also a form of war"<sup>19</sup> He proposes that "the problems of genocide and war are so intimately linked that we need to see them within a common frame."<sup>20</sup> Yet not all warfare entails genocidal destruction, if genocide is taken to mean death and suffering on a massive scale. Mark Levene defines genocide as "a type of state-organized modern warfare," highlighting that although "genocide often is conducted simultaneously or in parallel with" warfare, it is only one possible type of warfare.<sup>21</sup> (And indeed, we have examples of modern "low-intensity" conflicts that, while still very deadly, have not created destruction that approaches the extermination of a whole people.)

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<sup>17</sup> Eric Markusen, "Genocide and Warfare," in *Genocide, War, and Human Survival*, ed. Charles B. Strozier and Michael Flynn (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996), 78-79.

<sup>18</sup> Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy : Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, 32.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Shaw, *What Is Genocide?* (Cambridge; Malden, Mass.: Polity, 2007), 111.

<sup>20</sup> Shaw, "The General Hybridity of War and Genocide," 461.

<sup>21</sup> Mark Levene, "Why Is the Twentieth Century the Century of Genocide?," *Journal of World History* 11, no. 2 (2000): 311-12.

Eric D. Weitz notes that modern warfare, particularly the First World War, created “not only a culture of death but also a culture of killing that was often tied to the ideology of race.”<sup>22</sup> Donald Bloxham emphasizes the traumatic cultural and political consequences of the world wars as “total war,” by which he means “romanticisation of the front, and spawning revolution, the fear of revolution, revanchism and expansionist territorial revisionism.”<sup>23</sup> Bloxham also proposes that a more sophisticated and geographically comprehensive grasp of the increased genocidal outcomes of wars demands taking into account that warfare took the shape of *ethnic wars* in the Balkans and eastern Mediterranean – three decades before the First World War rocked Western Europe. These conflicts brought ethnicised violence with large-scale human destruction.<sup>24</sup>

Not surprisingly, both Shaw and Bloxham are critical of Mann’s view that war is an exogenous factor and “unrelated” to genocide.<sup>25</sup> Bloxham avows that “it would be unwise to see war as just an external factor, one acting on but nevertheless extrinsic to some separate, long-standing perpetrator ‘character’ or ‘intention.’ War does not fall simply into the second half of a straightforward dichotomy of long-term ideological cause versus short-term circumstantial precipitant.”<sup>26</sup> In the same vein, Shaw suggests that “wars are hardly ‘unrelated’ in reality: genocidal powers are often fighting

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<sup>22</sup> Eric D. Weitz, "The Modernity of Genocides: Race, War and Revolution in the Twentieth Century," in *The Specter of Genocide : Mass Murder in Historical Perspective*, ed. Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 71-72.

<sup>23</sup> Bloxham, *Genocide, the World Wars and the Unweaving of Europe*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>25</sup> Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy : Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, 7.

<sup>26</sup> Bloxham, *Genocide, the World Wars and the Unweaving of Europe*, 3.

conventional wars against states or armed movements to which target populations are believed to be linked."<sup>27</sup>

While I agree that wars and genocide can be interlinked, the question of whether war can be an exogenous factor to the mass slaughter of a targeted population is different and needs further attention. The major dilemma here is between treating the study of a genocide as the same as the study of the conflict that leads to that genocide – or, as I would argue, treating a genocidal process (i.e., genocidal escalation and genocidal campaigns) as something that has its own specific spatial, temporal and political dynamics, and requires, at the very least, the acknowledgement of potential discontinuities between the conflict and the genocide. To put this in more concrete terms, is the study of the Armenian genocide the same thing as the study of the so-called “Armenian Question” in the Ottoman Empire, namely the history of tension and conflict between the Ottomans and their Armenian subjects?

I would say no. The route from a conflict to genocide is often much less linear and smooth than genocide scholarship tends to assume. I will argue here that, although understanding genocide cannot and should not be separated from historical contexts, we should also question the common fallacies of teleology and explicit or implicit presumptions of inevitability in genocide studies. If we consider the two great world wars, for instance, it would be awkward and even absurd to suggest that war makers and génocidaires were two separate groups, or that broader historical, political and economic dynamics and rivalries did not have significant impact on genocidal policies.

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<sup>27</sup> Shaw, "The General Hybridity of War and Genocide," 466.

Nevertheless, it is also true that wars are not in and of themselves genocidal, unless we stretch the term beyond any usefulness. A key project for the study of genocide is precisely to interrogate and address the knotty question of why certain historical contexts and structural conditions turn certain wars genocidal.

To return to the Armenian case, the outbreak of World War I was not unrelated to the Armenian Question, which as a political problem evolved in an international context from the outset. Yet, the war was at the same time (even if partly) an exogenous factor in the Armenian genocide; it was exogenous because, first, the major actors of the genocidal escalation and the genocidal campaign, including the Ottoman government and the Armenian political leadership, had little control over decisions about the war compared to the great powers. Recall that the war's outbreak in the summer of 1914 came as a surprise and a source of uncertainty and anxiety both to the Armenian political elite and to the CUP leaders. In short, the emergence of European war was an external factor beyond the influence of the political actors who later made the choices of participating in the war and taking draconian measures against certain groups.

Second, the war was exogenous because of its timing. If the war, for instance, had started one or two years later, allowing enough time for partial implementation of the reform plan, with its proportional representation of Christians in the gendarme force in the eastern provinces where Armenians mostly resided, it is very possible that the persecution, forced deportation and extermination of Ottoman-Armenians would not have been viewed as easy an option, at least in that area. Of course, the timing of the war was also something over which the major actors in the genocide had no control.

The question of timing is particularly important regarding the Armenian genocide. As I discussed in the previous chapter, even after the Balkan wars of 1912-13 there was no linear political escalation to suggest that the future *génocidaires* were in any way conspiring, planning or even imagining the elimination the Armenian presence in the eastern Ottoman provinces. Nor did the political leaders and elites of the victim group foresee, as we saw in the case of Zohrab and his two companions, any imminent wholesale destruction of their community. Even after the war broke out, the most pessimistic predictions did not fully predict the actual catastrophe that followed in a matter of months. Genocides are unpredictable events; the Armenian genocide was, in addition to being unpredictable, altogether unexpected.

The challenge for the scholar here – and this might be argued for genocides in general – is first and foremost tackling how this unforeseeable leap to calamity occurred. Was it simply *war-time radicalization* that rendered the Armenian catastrophe inevitable? What role, specifically, did the war play? I argue that the genocidal escalation was not an automatic consequence of the war; but, on the contrary, dependent on the decisions of political actors. Making matters more complicated, I suggest that those decision-making processes cannot be explained as the “natural” expressions of preexisting ideological commitments. The actors did not simply measure, as rational choice theory might have it, an instrumental response to international and local political, economic and cultural structural determinants. The war played a very crucial role in the escalation

process, and it did so by creating a political context – to adapt Shaw’s term — that became *the most direct structural context* of the Armenian genocide.<sup>28</sup>

This new political structure did not simply magnify, radicalize or unravel the original positions of political actors, but created a *new* international, domestic and local matrix of power relations. This matrix, in turn, set in motion and multiplied possibilities and opportunities rather than constraining and limiting the political elite. It is the *newness* that needs emphasis here. Michael Mann rightly reminds us that most accounts of genocide are *overorganized*,<sup>29</sup> in the sense that they frame the transition from a conflict to genocide too neatly. In the same vein, I discussed in the previous chapter the tendency to overemphasize and overhistoricize the *outcome* — in other words, the unsatisfactory tendency toward teleology in genocide studies.

Leaving aside the oversimplified intentionalist approaches which, attributing fixed positions to collective political actors, are explicitly or implicitly accompanied by essentialist overtones, even the most recent literature on the Armenian genocide has been hindered by the spurious tidiness of the analytical frameworks. The standard fallacy is to locate effects of the genocide as its causes. This is particularly true of works that track the violence to ideological dynamics (such as Turanism, Pan-Turkism) or paradigmatic doctrinal shifts (Ottomanism/Islamism to Turkism/Turkist Islamism). As a matter of fact, these ideological positions – and their fixing of Armenians as a dangerous, untrustworthy “Other” — cannot be found in their pure forms at any moment in the history of the late Ottoman and Republic Turkish history. The evidence

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 466-67.

<sup>29</sup> Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy : Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, 112.

suggests instead that that Turkism/Turkist Islamism gained more ground at the *very moment of and after the genocide as opposed to the other way around*.

In general, scholarship highlighting the broader international contexts for the Armenian genocide go too far in privileging those contexts; imperial rivalry is adduced to frame anything and everything that happened on the eve of and during the First World War. Of course, the Armenian genocide was not simply an accident; it did not happen in a vacuum, and all the actors involved were historically located in the complex ways further explored in this chapter. Yet location does not adequately and precisely explain why the conflict ended up with a genocidal outcome at a particular moment. I would like to second Mamdani's very poignant critique of structuralist accounts of genocide:

My critique of those who tend to accent the economic or the cultural [I would add ideological and historical ] in the understanding of the genocide is that their explanation obscures the moment of decision, of choice, as if human action, even—or, shall I say, particularly—at its dastardly or heroic, can be explained by necessity alone. Though we need to take into account circumstances that constrain and facilitate—that is, necessity—we must resist the temptation to present necessity as choice and thereby strip human action of both the dimension of possibility and that of responsibility.<sup>30</sup>

In the same vein, I suggest that, to tackle the horrible *mystery* of Armenian genocide, we need to focus on political agency and decision making. The catastrophe occurred because political actors made certain choices — not out of necessity, although many political figures would allege so. These real and awful choices could have been made differently and perhaps not at all had the context and timing been different.

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<sup>30</sup> Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers : Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*, 196-97.

It is a matter of speculation, of course, whether the Ottoman government could have avoided the war. What matters for my argument is that those who favored the decision to push the Ottoman Empire into it deemed the war as an opportunity. The same applies to those Armenian political groups who made the decision to participate in the war as a third party supporting one of the camps. The war created a new structure of power. It did so by undermining the political, economic and diplomatic constraints of the past in the eyes of decision makers. Hence it was not a delimiting but an enabling moment which multiplied possibilities; it rendered the unthinkable “reasonable and acceptable.”<sup>31</sup>

One important dimension of the enabling dynamics of the new political structure was the re-evaluation of history and especially the recent past; a particularly striking example of such a reinterpretation was the reform plan. Although the final draft had not fully satisfied any party involved in the negotiations, all sides were content with what they thought they had *gained* in the bargaining. But the war ended that manner of thinking. It turned the attention of both the Ottoman government and broad segments of the Armenian political elite alike to what they had *lost* and perhaps could redeem under the new circumstances. This point is crucial, as there is a general tendency to assume that the reform debate was a major cause — or, according to some, the direct cause of escalation. After the war, the *reform issue did indeed retrospectively incite escalation*; however, this does not suggest that the reform draft or the process in and of itself was a source of increased tension. The reform issue turned into a reference of escalationist

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<sup>31</sup> Christopher J. Fettweis, "War as Catalyst: Moving World War Ii to the Center of Holocaust Scholarship," *Journal of Genocide Research* 5, no. 2 (2003): 234.

policies because of the new political opportunities, which rendered possible for the actors to radically shape their agendas.

Within this new setting and social framework, political leaders took unprecedented and unanticipated steps. By June 1914, it would be laughable to suggest that the ailing Ottoman Empire would provoke unilateral war against Russia with a naval attack. Likewise, it would be a matter of humor to suggest that the 'socialist' ARF -- whose prominent militants were still in Russian prisons or in exile in remote parts of Russia, with some even seeking refuge in Ottoman territories -- would organize battalions to fight alongside the armies of the Tsar.<sup>32</sup>

In sum, genocidal escalation in the Armenian case cannot be explained as an offshoot of political, economic and social structures within the Ottoman system; the ideological radicalization of the post-1908 constitutional regime, or broader international trends. On the contrary, as I hope to show, the genocidal escalation occurred at a time when those structures were radically undermined by the war and replaced by a new political structure. That is to say, the Armenian Question was shaped by the parameters of transforming and failing Ottoman political, economic and social structures, and politicized and evolved in the context of imperialist rivalries. The genocidal "solution," however, was only deemed doable, necessary and acceptable by the perpetrators within

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<sup>32</sup> An interesting example is Hamazasp [Srvandztian], who was arrested in 1908 as part of the persecution of the ARF in Russia. He was in jail until 1913 when he managed to escape and passed to Europe and later to Istanbul. Hamazasp advocated a most uncompromising stance against the Ottoman Government [CUP in general] at the ARF's 8<sup>th</sup> Congress in Erzurum in August 1914. He became the commander of one of the four initial Armenian Volunteer Battalions formed before the Ottoman-Russian war started.

the new context, one which put all of the above necessitating and limiting dynamics in question.

The structure of the Ottoman system, especially that of the post-1908 constitutional regime, as well as broader international trends, do help us understand the making of the Armenian Question, but they obscure more than elucidate when employed as preceding and causal conditions. The new circumstances created by the war led to decisions by the primary actors involved in the conflict that were neither conditioned by nor expressions of their respective antebellum positions.

In the course of genocidal escalation, the relationship between the ARF and CUP played an essential role. In this chapter, I discuss why ARF's position could and did have such a weighty influence on the escalation process and, more importantly, the reasons for the party's general shift in position. With the exception of committees and cadres in the Ottoman Empire and a few others elsewhere, the ARF moved to the radical position of fully supporting the Russians and the Entente forces against the Ottoman Empire, a position that would backfire with horrible consequences for their own people. This decision needs meticulous examination because, before the war, neither the CUP nor the ARF had any previous dispositions toward taking such radical steps.

### **3.3 A Revolution within the Revolution: Re-Making the Ottoman-Armenian Political Representation, 1908-14**

Among various Armenian groups and community institutions, including the patriarchy in Istanbul, why was the ARF's stance so detrimental? The answer to this question lies in two crucial transformations that took place in the course of the

constitutional regime (1908-1914): first, the remaking of the political makeup of the Ottoman-Armenian communities; and second, the radical disintegration of the Armenian patriarchy as the sole political representative of the community. These transformations warranted inter-communal polarization and turned the ARF into the core medium in the political arena between the CUP and the Ottoman-Armenians.

### 3.3.1 The Political Demise of the Patriarchate

The Armenian Patriarchy was founded in Constantinople in 1461, shortly after Mehmet the Conqueror led the Ottoman conquest of the city he would rename Istanbul. The Patriarch had traditionally been the foremost representative of the Armenian community in the city and, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, of the entire empire. The 1863 ordinance,<sup>33</sup> approved in accordance with an 1856 Imperial Reform Edict (Islahat-ı Hattı Humayun), designed a unique administrative system for the Armenian *millet*<sup>34</sup>; it created religious, secular and mixed assemblies to supervise the ecclesiastical and community issues of the Ottoman-Armenians.

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<sup>33</sup> The first two drafts prepared by Western influenced, secular and progressive Armenian intellectuals in 1857 and 1859 were both rejected by the aristocrats (Armenian *amiras* and clerics). A final draft, which was slightly changed and approved by the Sublime Porte on March 17, 1863, was eventually agreed upon on May 24, 1860. For a detailed account of the ordinance or the Armenian National Constitution, see Maghakia Ormanian, *Azgapatum*, 3 vols., vol. 3 (Jerusalem: Tparan Srbots Hakobeants., 1927), 4015-83. On the matter of the role of the Armenian National Constitution in the making of the Armenian Question, see Arak el Zatiki Sarukhan, *Haykakan Khndirn Ew Azgayin Sahmanadrutiwne Turkiayum (1860-1910)* (T'iflis: Elektrasharzh tparan "Epokha", 1912). For a brief discussion of the status of the Armenian patriarchate of Constantinople and the annulment of the 1863 ordinance in 1916 by the CUP government, see Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, *Türk İnkilâbı Tarihi 3, Bd. 3. 1914 - 1918 Genel Savaşı. 1915 - 1917 Vuruşmaları Ve Bunların Siyasal Tepkileri* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi, 1957), 49-59.

<sup>34</sup> In modern Turkish *millet* literally means nation, but in the Ottoman context the term was used for certain confessional groups. For instance, Armenian *Millet* referred to Orthodox Armenians who made the overwhelming majority of the Ottoman-Armenians.

Although this ordinance, a kind of Armenian Constitution, defined and limited the powers of the Patriarch and rendered him vulnerable to democratic pressures<sup>35</sup>, it still made him the leader of the Armenian community and the sole representative before the Sultan's palace, and the representative of his local prelates before the provincial authorities. The other leg of the traditional power group was the Armenian aristocracy, or the *amiras*. A new generation of secular Armenian intellectuals, influenced by Western ideas of constitutionalism and liberalism, emerged in Istanbul, Smyrna and Jerusalem in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Finally, revolutionaries entered the picture after 1890s, playing a progressively weightier role within the community and community-state relations.

Since the debut of the Armenian Question, the patriarchy in Kumkapi (Istanbul) was also the prime representative of the Armenian community before the Western Powers; the Armenian delegation to the Berlin Conference in 1878, who visited European capitals -- London, Paris and Rome -- to lobby for Armenian autonomy, was led by the ex-patriarch Khrimian. The delegation itself was created by the initiative of the current patriarch Nerses Varzhabedian. In the course of increasing tensions in the empire's eastern provinces after this conference, the patriarchy continued to be the principal representative, mediator and negotiator on behalf of the Armenian community.

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<sup>35</sup> 120 out of 140 seats of the mixed assembly, or the Armenian National Assembly – to which the ordinance gave the capacity to elect and supervise the patriarch and the members of the religious and secular assemblies – were elected by common vote.

In 1894, Patriarch Khoren was forced to resign after strongly protesting the Hamidian (named after the Sultan Abdulhamid II) pogroms against Armenians in the empire. During the years of these massacres, between 1894 and 1896, the seat remained vacant. Khoren's successor, Ormanian, had close ties with Sultan Abdulhamid II; the lack of major Armenian massacres during his term has often been attributed to Ormanian's closeness to and cunning manipulation of the sultan, often inspiring jokes among an appreciative Armenian public. Nevertheless, Patriarch Ormanian became one of the symbols of the bloody Hamidian regime and a chief target for the Armenian revolutionaries.<sup>36</sup> In short, despite increased religious splits among Ottoman-Armenians and challenges by secular Armenian intelligentsia and flourishing revolutionary movements, the Armenian patriarchy in Kumkapi (Istanbul) continued to stand not only as the religious leader of the Ottoman-Armenian *Millet* but also as its chief political representative and mediator both in and out of the empire, all the way until the 1908 constitutional revolution.

July 1908 marked a major turning point in the history of Ottoman-Armenians; that month witnessed the tumble of the despotic regime of Abdulhamid II. This sultan had carried out the widespread persecution and pogroms of Armenians, claiming hundreds of thousands of Armenian lives, and forced the resignation of the Patriarch Maghakia Khoren Ormanian. The long-brewing discontent of Armenian Revolutionaries with Ormanian, due to his anti-revolutionary stance and relations with the Sultan, combined with the general resentment especially stemming from corruption allegations,

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<sup>36</sup> S. Srents, *Ormanian Hanrayin Khghchin Ew Datastanin Arjew* (K. Polis: Tpagr. H. Tireak`ean, 1913). See also A. Grigorian, *Ptutian Ochakhe, Kam, Ormaniani Patriarkutiwne* (Poston: Hratarakutiwn "Azg"i, 1908).

erupted into a mass protest at the patriarchy on July 16. Ormanian fled the assembly meeting at his office at Kumkapi due to aggressive protestors and later he was declared dismissed, giving one more reason to revolutionary to celebrate in the same month.<sup>37</sup>

In the post-Revolution Ottoman and Armenian press Abdulhamid and Ormanian were condemned as the two perpetrators of the bloody oppression of the Ottoman-Armenians. Satire magazines often ridiculed the two and depicted their concurrent “fall” as a promise of liberty, fraternity and equality of the constitutional regime<sup>38</sup>. For the Ottoman-Armenian community, Ormanian’s dismissal pointed to a radical shift of political power, signaling the end of the Patriarch’s leadership. One early and major consequence of the Young Turk Revolution was the parallel replacements of spatial symbols of political power: from Yıldız Palace [Abdulhamid’s palace] to Bab-ı Ali [the Porte] and the military garrisons, and from Kumkapi to Pera, where Armenian party offices and newspaper headquarters were located.

Unlike the seat of the sultan, the seat of the patriarch never lost its symbolism. The patriarchy continued to receive the political support of Armenian liberals (organized around the Ramkavar Party), bourgeoisie and conservative circles (such as the *amiras*), but it was clear that the revolutionary parties were the rising power in Armenian politics.

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<sup>37</sup> *Droschak* n. 7(195), July 1908, 105.

<sup>38</sup> A selection of cartoons depicting Ormanian’s fall that coincided with the 1908 revolution can be found at Turgut Çeviker, *İbret Albümü, 1908* (Istanbul: İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi, Kültür İşleri Dairesi Başkanlığı, 1991), 109-15.

### 3.3.2 Empowered by Proxy: the ARF's Unstoppable Rise

The Young Turk Revolution was mostly welcomed by the Armenian community, but some political circles already voiced concerns in the early days of the constitutional regime. The Social Democrat Hnchakian Party,<sup>39</sup> for instance, expressed its contentment with the revolutionary movement's blow to the despotic absolutism of Abdulhamid II; at the same time, it was also wary of the Young Turks' nationalist tendencies combined with centralist affiliations,<sup>40</sup> cautioning that the revolution itself was far from dismantling the system and democratizing it.<sup>41</sup> The Hnchak Party called for and supported the consolidation and democratization of the constitutional regime, together with decentralization. The party's two leading names, Sapah-Kulyan and Murad — the hero of the anti-Hamidian struggle — returned to the empire to join the Hnchak

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<sup>39</sup> There was also a Hnchak split group, Reconstruction Hnchak Party, which lacked any significant influence and popularity.

<sup>40</sup> *Hnjak* June-July 1908 n. 6-7 pp. 1-2. The party had distanced itself from the Ahmed Riza wing of the Young Turks even before the revolution on similar ideological grounds. Hnchaks continued their opposition to the CUP, particularly on the issue of decentralization, denouncing its 'chauvinist' Ottomanism throughout the constitutional regime. After the Balkan Wars the party further distanced itself from the Young Turks. The Hnchak party progressively radicalized against the regime following the convention of the party's Ottoman Empire Section delegates in Istanbul in September 1912. The party on the one hand developed its alliance with the Ottoman liberals (Ahrar-İlitaf) around a program of decentralization and communal autonomy, and on the other began to advocate foreign intervention. The Social Democrat Hnchak Party decided to reinstate armed struggle against the Ottoman regime in its 7<sup>th</sup> Congress in Constanta, Romania; the congress also voted, with a very slight margin, for an assassination plot against Talat Bey, which was uncovered by Ottoman intelligence. These events instigated the de-legalization of the party and persecution of its leading cadres throughout the empire.

<sup>41</sup> *Hnjak* August-December 1908 n. 8-17 pp. 1-2

organization.<sup>42</sup> Murad's return was a major political event. He received a raucous welcome from a big crowd that included both Armenians and Muslims alike.<sup>43</sup>

The bourgeoisie-liberal Constitutional (Ramkavar) Party was also critical of CUP's centralist program. This group was founded in October 1908 in Cairo after the Young Turk Revolution by a coalition of Armenakans, a split group of Hnchaks and independents. Immediately after the convention in Cairo, the party's leaders arrived in Istanbul, including major Ramkavar figures such as Vahan Tekeyan and Mihran Damadian, from Egypt, and Suren Bartevian, Levon Papazian and Hagop Oghasapian from the United States. They shared the general optimism of the Armenian public, but, from the outset, this moderate and liberal party maintained its distance from the revolutionaries, Turkish and Armenian alike.<sup>44</sup>

In other words, both the Ramkavar and Social Democrat Hnchakian Parties welcomed the reinstatement of the constitution and the end of Abdulhamid's rule, but both took a distanced position to the CUP. Throughout the period of constitutional rule, both parties – although the latter supported the CUP block in the first election following the revolution – remained in opposition to the CUP, maintaining close links to liberal groups within the regime and liberal Turkish political circles such as the *Ahrar* (Freedom) Party and later the *Hürriyet ve İtilaf Partisi* [Freedom and Accord Party].

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<sup>42</sup> Kitur Arsen, *Patmowtiwn S. D. Hnchakian Kusaktsutian*, 2 vols., vol. I (1962), 336.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 316-18.

<sup>44</sup> Manuk G. Chizmechian, *Patmutiwn Amerikahay Kaghakakan Kusaktsutians, 1890-1925* (Frezno: Tpaqr. Nor Ori, 1930), 171-72; Artak Darbinian, *Hay Azatagrakan Sharzhman Oreren : Husher 1890en 1940*, Hratarakutiwn Hay Azgayin Himnadrami, 3 (P`ariz: Hrat. "Hay Azgayin Himnadram", 1947), 204-05.

The March 31 counterrevolution against the Young Turk regime, labeled by the CUP as a “reactionary rebellion orchestrated by Abdulhamid II,” united all Armenian political parties in support of the constitutional regime in the capital. Yet, the news of ethnic riots and Armenian massacres in Cilicia, almost concurrent with the March 31<sup>st</sup> rebellion, shocked the Armenian public. Indications and rumors that local CUP branches were involved in the massacres and some CUP leaders’ attempts to deflect blame to both sides caused frustration and distrust toward the new regime, raising serious doubts among the Armenian public and pushing Hnchaks and Ramkavars further away from the CUP. Among Armenian political movements only the ARF took a different direction, continuing and consolidating its cooperation with the CUP.

Although the relationship between the Young Turks and the ARF began in the late 1890s,<sup>45</sup> the first concrete step toward cooperation was taken in the second congress of Ottoman opposition in Paris. The other major Armenian political movement, the Hnchak party, strictly refused to participate in the congress; it pointed to Pan-Islamist and Pan-Turkist tendencies of chief Young Turk organizers such as Ahmed Riza, Ali Fahri and Hilmi Bey.<sup>46</sup>

The congress brought together representatives of the CUP, the ARF, liberal and decentralist Prince Sabahattin and Macedonian Revolutionaries around the goal of toppling the Sultan to establish a constitutional regime. The congress ended on December 29, 1907, after three days of deliberations, with the endorsement of a joint

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<sup>45</sup> Mik ayel Varandian, *H.H. Dashnaktsutian Patmutiwn*, vol. II (Gahire: Husaber, 1950), 1-2. For a detailed account of early ARF-Young Turk relations and attempts to set up an alliance, see the first volume of this work: Mikayel Varandian, *H.H. Dashnaktsutian Patmutiwn*, vol. I (Pariz: Imp. de Navarre, 1932).

<sup>46</sup> Arsen, *Patmowtiwn S. D. Hnchakian Kusaksutian*, 312.

struggle program.<sup>47</sup> Varantian suggests that solidarity and joint struggle between Armenians and Turks had developed in the provinces even before the Paris congress. In Van the local ARF leaders had already been involved in creating a joint body to organize attacks against the government.<sup>48</sup> The ARF's practical role in the 1908 constitutional revolution was not large, yet the party claimed credit before the Armenian public, emphasizing its two decades struggle against the Sultan and its cooperation with the CUP.<sup>49</sup>

The aftermath of the revolution witnessed the gradual return of Armenian revolutionaries from exile, the release of those imprisoned and the homecoming of guerilla fighters in the provinces. Yesterday's Armenian outlaws swiftly turned into political celebrities; they stood side-by-side in public ceremonies with Young Turk revolutionaries, sometimes even with local officers and bureaucrats who until recently persecuted them in the capital and in the provinces. Within months Istanbul turned into a hub for the ARF; Russian-Armenian chiefs of the party such as Aknuni, Khajak, Zavarian, Kachaznuni and Rostom, most of whom fled persecution in Russia, also arrived in the Ottoman capital. These Russian-Armenian ARF leaders would play major roles in Ottoman and Armenian politics until the World War.

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<sup>47</sup> Varandian, *H.H. Dashnaksutian Patmutiwn*, 5-6.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>49</sup> In his memoirs Armenak Egarian, an old Armenakan militant and later one of the chiefs of the Ramkavar Party in Van, writes in a sarcastic tone that the ARF militants propagated and boasted that "they "brought" the constitution." Armenak Egarian, *Husher, Hratarakutiwn Azgayin Himnadrami* (Gahire: Tparan Nor Astgh, 1947), 151. Artak Darbinian confirms Egarian's statement. Darbinian, *Hay Azatagrakan Sharzhman Oreren : Husher 1890en 1940*, 179-80.

Perhaps the most crucial moment for the ARF's position in the new political landscape was its fifth congress in Varna in August-September 1909. There, at a moment when other Armenian political organizations and circles were taking the opposite position, the CUP stood firmly behind the Young Turk regime to defend the constitution against counterrevolutionary forces in the empire. In a joint declaration signed by the CUP Central Committee [*Merkez-i Umumi*] and the ARF Committee [*Responsible Body*] in Istanbul on September 2, 1909, the alliance between the two parties was officially announced to the public.<sup>50</sup>

In the five point communiqué, the parties affirmed that they would cooperate to “give effect to the constitution and to fortify the public/general progress in the country in an unshakeable/steady manner”; to fight against “the possibility of reactionary movements”; and to “keep the holy Ottoman Homeland away from [territorial] separation and division.”<sup>51</sup> The fourth point reflected a common demand of Armenian political organizations for administrative decentralization of the Ottoman Empire; it asserted that the ARF and CUP agreed on “broadening rights of provinces,” which “warranted the advancement and progress of the common Ottoman homeland.”<sup>52</sup> The final point defined the discursive cement of the agreement -- struggle against reactionaries:

The Ottoman Union and Progress Committee (CUP) and the ARF deeming the 31 March incident and the terrible/disastrous/catastrophic massacre [*aqhet*] (in the

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<sup>50</sup> The text in both Armenian and Ottoman Turkish can be found in *Azatamart* n. 75, September 6/19, 1909.

<sup>51</sup> The point also clarified that both parties would work together to “actually/practically disperse the hearsay lies among the general public, that Armenians aspire independence, which is a legacy of the despotic regime [of Abdulhamid II].” Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

Armenian text) / *katl-i feci* (in the Turkish text)] in Adana as a forewarning, decided to work hand in hand to realize the abovementioned principal points.<sup>53</sup>

This point starkly summarized the ARF's position after the Adana massacres of April 1909; the party congress, despite disagreements and rising doubts within the organization,<sup>54</sup> decided that both incidents were signs of reactionary resistance among the Turks against the constitutional regime. Hence, the CUP had to be given time and supported actively, including the option of using force.<sup>55</sup>

After its Fifth Congress in Varna, the ARF announced that it would discontinue its underground activities in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>56</sup> Yet the military wing of the party was never entirely dismantled, especially in provinces such as Van, Bitlis and Erzurum. After the Balkan Wars the party decided to strengthen its armed wing for self-defense, or *inknapashtpanutiwn*, a term that Armenian organizations had been giving to their armed activities in the empire since the 1890s.

Under the constitutional regime — and particularly until the Balkan Wars — the ARF maintained warmer relations with the CUP than any other political organization of Christian communities in the empire. Yet the ideological grounds of the ARF-CUP alliance were very thin, little more than a common opposition to the very loosely defined threat of “counterrevolutionary reactionaries.” The British Vice-Consul in Diyarbekir Matthew's was not the only person to wonder how “nihilistic socialism of

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Dikran Mesrob Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule : 1908-1914* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 43-45.

<sup>55</sup> Hrach Dasnabedian, *History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Dashnaksutiun, 1890-1924* (Milan, Italy: Oemme Edizioni, 1990), 91.

<sup>56</sup> Also in constitutional Iran.

the Tashnaks [the ARF] can be made to harmonise with the Pan-Islamic chauvinism of the Young Turks."<sup>57</sup> But the practical political and organizational advantages of the alliance attracted the two parties; forming alliances with Armenian organizations and dissuading them from seeking intervention from the great powers<sup>58</sup> was important for the new revolutionary ruling elite of the empire, who was losing ground to Christian separatism and foreign involvement. Indeed, the CUP wanted to incorporate the Social Democrat Hnchak Party into the alliance as well. In a meeting shortly after the revolution -- between the CUP chiefs Talat Bey, Enver Bey, Cemal Bey and Bahaeddin Şakir and Hnchak representatives Sapah-Giwlian and Murad -- Talat personally invited them to form an alliance between the two parties, an offer that Sapah-Giwlian refused in diplomatic language.<sup>59</sup>

Another reason that rendered ARF support crucial for the CUP was the unpopularity of the Young Turk revolutionaries among the Muslims of the troublesome eastern provinces, especially the Kurds among them. For the ARF, in turn, the alliance with the CUP opened a new horizon full of political and organizational opportunities. The party took full advantage of that leverage throughout the constitutional period.

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<sup>57</sup> Cited in Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule : 1908-1914*, 82.

<sup>58</sup> The ARF discontinued publication of the Paris- based biweekly *Pro Armenia*, which was initiated in 1900 to lobby for the Armenian reforms as described by the 61st article of the Berlin Treaty of 1878, a gesture to show its determination to seek political solutions within the empire. The publication was reinitiated in 1912 with the title *Pour les Peuples d'Orient* and regained its original name *Pro Armenia* in 1914.

<sup>59</sup> Stepan Sapah-Giwlian, *Pataskhanatunere* (Pravitens, [Rhode Island]: Tparan "Eritasard Hayastani", 1916), 230-34.

In the course of the constitutional regime, the ARF progressively expanded its power in the empire. It was now a legally sanctioned organization,<sup>60</sup> and, as such, opened up party chapters and began to publish newspapers in the capital and in the provinces.<sup>61</sup> Following the Young Turk Revolution, the ARF used its influence with the CUP to reshape provincial administrative cadres, including appointing or dismissing governors.<sup>62</sup> It has even been claimed that the ARF intervened locally to pick non-Armenian CUP candidates for the Ottoman Assembly. For instance, Eblighatian suggests that, in the 1914 elections, the only Muslim representative to the Ottoman parliament from Van, public prosecutor Asaf Bey, could only make it to candidacy by receiving the local ARF committee's support and help.<sup>63</sup> Varantian summarizes the situation: "The ARF has turned into one of the major actors of the Turkish public/state/political life."<sup>64</sup>

ARF strongholds included Erzurum, Van and Bitlis. There, party committees and leaders worked closely with the local CUP and the governors and were actively involved in provincial policy making. These favorable conditions allowed the party to aggressively expand its influence over Armenian community institutions such as

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<sup>60</sup> Although the ARF operated freely after the Young Turk revolution and even had members in the parliament, the party was not officially legalized until August 1910. Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule : 1908-1914*, 52-53.

<sup>61</sup> During the constitutional regime the ARF published newspapers *Azatamart* (daily – also published under other titles) in 1909 in Istanbul, *Haraj* (weekly – twice a week) in 1909 in Erzurum and *Ashkhatank* (weekly – twice a week) in 1910 in Van.

<sup>62</sup> Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule : 1908-1914*, 65-68.

<sup>63</sup> Eblighatian, *Kiank Me Azgis Kiankin Mej : Akanatesi Ew Masnaktsoghi Vkyutiwnner 1903-1923*, 90-91.

<sup>64</sup> Varandian, *H.H. Dashnaksutian Patmutiwn*, 21.

schools,<sup>65</sup> provincial community councils and even churches. This expansion into educational and religious affairs provoked significant opposition and protests from the non-ARF Armenian groups.<sup>66</sup> A Ramkavar Party member, Artak Darbinian, starkly describes ARF's impact on the Armenian community after the constitutional revolution and as a result of the alliance with the CUP:

8-10 pro-ARF *Vanetsi* [Armenians of Van] scholars from the Caucasus gradually arrived in Van, and were assigned to schools. The prelate of the prelacy in Van, both secular and religious councils, and the educational board -- which is the directorate of neighborhood and central schools etc. -- fell into the hands of the ARF. From Istanbul to Van the ARF chiefs were trying to pacify others [by claiming] that they [the ARF leaders] were the ones who made the July Young Turk Revolution happen. Taking advantage of CUP power, they seized under control national [communal] and political lives of Ottoman-Armenians. And as a "socialist" party, [the ARF] struggled against "clerico-bourgeoisie" sectors [of the Armenian community].<sup>67</sup>

The party even enjoyed official tolerance and at times support for its armed activities in the provinces; their trafficking, distributing, dealing and sometimes forcible selling of arms to Armenian peasantry was condoned and, at times of threat of anti-government movements, encouraged by local authorities.<sup>68</sup> For instance, Egarian claims that the ARF pursued a policy of arming Armenian peasants and forming mixed

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<sup>65</sup> Egarian remarks that the ARF's attempts to take the Armenian schools under its influence also entailed coercive measures and even murder of its opponents, such as the killing of Armenakan chief G. Achemian. In Van, Egarian claims, all educational institutions were gradually occupied by pro-ARF teachers who arrived from Istanbul and elsewhere. These 'new generation' teachers, he regrets, attacked traditional values of the Armenian community and even advocated the idea of 'free love.' Egarian, *Husher*, 153-54. The ARF's aggressive attempts to take community organizations under its control, and its political discourse of struggle against reactionary clerics and exploitive classes within the Armenian community, as part of its socialist principles, has often been encountered with accusations of 'perversion' and 'nihilism.'

<sup>66</sup> Not only conservative and liberal circles, but also the Social Democrat Hinchaks opposed and protested the ARF's attempts to politicize the Armenian Church and particularly its insistence on using churches for political events. Arsen, *Patmowtiwn S. D. Hinchakian Kusaksutian*, 338.

<sup>67</sup> Darbinian, *Hay Azatagrakan Sharzhman Oreren : Husher 1890en 1940*, 180-81.

<sup>68</sup> Egarian writes that "The ARF started sending these [recently recruited] boys—its victims—to villages to sell guns –brought from Istanbul or elsewhere—from five-folds [even] up to ten-folds prices; a gun bought for three Gold Liras up to twenty-eight Gold liras—forcibly." Egarian, *Husher*, 156.

(Armenian-Turkish, Armenian-Kurdish) armed units to fight against the imagined threat of Itilaf [liberal-conservative Ottoman/Turkish Party and the major opposition party to the CUP] and Russia, during the days of the Balkan Wars.<sup>69</sup>

The immediate aftermath of the March 31<sup>st</sup> “counter-revolutionary” uprising and the persecution of Kurdish brigands beginning in the second half of 1913 were among the periods when the ARF’s military presence was deemed beneficial by the authorities. In the military operation against Mir Mhe and his brigands in mid-1913 in Van, the ARF militia, commanded by the ARF chief in the province, Aram, even fought side-by-side with regular Ottoman forces.

Furthermore, the ARF enjoyed an effective legal immunity regarding its actions within the Armenian community in areas of significant ARF presence, among them Van, Muş and Bitlis. In such places, the party continued to use violence or the threat of violence against its political opponents;<sup>70</sup> the authorities usually agreed or looked the other way when ARF gunmen attacked Armenians, and these gunmen were rarely if ever prosecuted.<sup>71</sup> At times, ARF attacks against Muslims were also covered up as long

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 171-72.

<sup>70</sup> Egarian claims that, in order to take the schools in Van under its control, the ARF had one of the leaders of the old Armenakan Party, H. Achemian killed. Ibid., 154. Egarian also tells the story of how ARF gunmen assassinated a teacher, Manuk, for his alleged inquiry into the looting of antiquities in the Armenian monastery on the island of Akhtamar, by the ARF chief Ishkhan. Ibid., 162-65. In his memoirs, Terzipashian gives his account of the killing of the Armenian mayor of Van, Set Kapamachian, by ARF gunmen, after the ARF discovered his letter to the patriarch in Istanbul, in which he requested action from the Patriarch to dispel the major ARF leaders from Van province. Avedis Terzibashian, *Nupar* (Paris: Imp. A. Der Agopian, 1939), 86-89.

<sup>71</sup> Egarian, *Husher*, 166. A Public Prosecutor in Van, Eplighatian, narrates one such case in which an Armenian called Melo was killed at one of the most central locations in Aygestan (Van) during day time, and not a single person admitted to witnessing the murder. Later the governor calls Eplighatian to let him know that, “according to information given to him the murder was committed to punish Melo because he had continued to extort money from people in the name of the party [ARF], despite repeated warnings.” Eplighatian notes that, “Naturally, the murderer [known by everybody] remained unknown to judicial

as authorities ascertained that the event would not lead to general disorder or a Muslim/Kurdish riot.<sup>72</sup>

Even before the revolution, the ARF recognized that the CUP and the Young Turk movement were comprised of various factions and competing political positions. When the ARF-CUP alliance was challenged by some within the ARF organization, especially after the Adana massacres,<sup>73</sup> the party's central leadership silenced or marginalized these voices of opposition, excusing abuses by referencing the fragmented structure of the CUP and/or the newness of the regime. The ARF decided to discontinue its alliance with the CUP in 1912 criticizing the CUP policies and the situation in the provinces.

It is difficult to accept at face value the ARF's claim that it terminated the alliance with the CUP merely because of its disappointment with the CUP policies and due to deteriorating situation of Armenians in the region. Indeed there is much to suggest that the ARF decision to discontinue relations with the CUP was inspired by the new international environment combined with a changing domestic power matrix. At the international level, during and after the Balkan Wars of 1912-13, the Armenian Question was once again brought to the great powers. The emergence of a new Russian initiative to implement the reforms for the "Armenian Provinces," promised in the Berlin treaty,

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authorities and the case was closed." Eblighatian, *Kiank Me Azgis Kiankin Mej : Akanatesi Ew Masnaktsoghi V kayutiwnner 1903-1923*, 61-63.

<sup>72</sup> A very striking example is the murder of Musa Bey in Van in August 1913. Despite the austere measures the governor took in the immediate aftermath of the murder, the case was closed without convictions for the arrested in order to assuage a possible Kurdish uproar. . The ARF chiefs in the province — particularly the chief of the military wing Ishkhan, whose role in the murders was commonplace, — have never been charged. Eblighatian, *Kiank Me Azgis Kiankin Mej : Akanatesi Ew Masnaktsoghi V kayutiwnner 1903-1923*.

<sup>73</sup> Dasnabedian, *History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Dashnaksutiun, 1890-1924*, 92.

lured not only the ARF but also the Armenian community institutions and political movements worldwide to turn to the European powers for assistance. The new wave of reform pressure on the Ottoman government, called for by the Armenian Catholicos in Echmiadzin, also united the ARF. Varantian analyzes the party's decision to shelve its alliance with the CUP as follows:

For us the three years (1909-1910-1911) of the Ottoman revolution passed with the mark of severe internal struggles. Yet, one year after with the days of reform [talks] and Russian-German negotiations, factional fights withered away at once; the fervor [of rivalries among Armenian groups] silenced and was replaced by an exemplary solidarity.<sup>74</sup>

The ARF officially announced the termination of its alliance with the CUP in August 1912, a decision that came after the parliamentary elections which turned out to be a fiasco for the ARF and the CUP in the region and caused much disappointment among the ARF leaders with the CUP.<sup>75</sup> Interestingly, the party's announcement immediately followed the replacement of the CUP-backed government by the liberal opponent *İtilaf* and the formation of the Kamil Pasha cabinet. However, this official decision did not bring an end to the connections, negotiations and cooperation.

Especially in the provinces, local ARF committees continued collaborating with the CUP authorities. Further, even as late as August 1914, the ARF World Congress in Erzurum endorsed cooperation with the CUP "regarding important public matters which are in congruence with the Party's programmatic demands" (albeit also deciding

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<sup>74</sup> Varandian, H.H. *Dashnaktsutian Patmutiwn*, 27.

<sup>75</sup> Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule : 1908-1914*, 121.

to “continue to remain as a firm opponent of İttihad (the CUP) and an impartial critique of its nationalist harmful and anti-public policies.”<sup>76</sup>

Leading cadres of the CUP and ARF also established personal relationships with each other, adding one more tragic layer to the Armenian catastrophe. Despite the political controversies, individuals from both organizations worked in close contact. In the March 31st movement, for example, the ARF fought together with the CUP; party members sheltered Young Turk leaders, and they even socialized together. Soon, however, those very CUP individuals would give orders to incarcerate and exterminate not only Armenians in general but also — and specifically — their close acquaintances from the ARF.

It is ironic and very tragic that Aknuni, who was one of the ARF leaders from the Caucasus and had utmost faith in his personal friendship with Talat,<sup>77</sup> the Interior Minister at the time of the genocide — even once seeking his help in a time of trouble — reportedly wondered with puzzlement while under arrest in his cell in the mid-Anatolian town Cankiri, shortly before his execution: “How it is possible that *comrade Talat* allowed our deportation here? *Did he do so in order to ensure our security?* [Emphasis added]”<sup>78</sup> Aknuni had been at the forefront of the relations and negotiations with Young Turk leaders since the congress of the Ottoman opposition in Paris in 1907. He had kept his faith in the CUP leaders and especially Talat. H. Siruni regrettably recalls

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<sup>76</sup> *Vem* n. 2, March-April 1934, 3.

<sup>77</sup> Vahan Minakhorean, *1915 Twakane : Arhawirk'I Orer* (T'ehran: [s.n.], 2006), 97.

<sup>78</sup> Quoted in Gaidz F. Minassian, *Birinci Dunya Savasi Oncesinde Ittihat Ve Terakki Cemiyeti Ile Ermeni Devrimci Federasyonu Arasindaki Iliskiler*, ed. Arsen Avagyan and Gaidz F. Minassian, trans. Mutlucan Sahan, *Ermeniler Ve Ittihat Ve Terakki : Isbirliginden Çatismaya* (Istanbul: Aras, 2005), 207.

that, even during the time of the Dardanelle Campaign in March 1915, certain ARF leaders in Istanbul were still optimistic:

We heard from a reliable source that in the palace and in Sublime Porte they already had started making bundles to move the Sultan and the government to Anatolia, as the entrance of the allied fleet into [Sea of Marmara hence to Istanbul] was expected any moment. Yet, among us there were those who attributed Turk's [Turkish Government's] mysterious commotions to this worry/concern. They [optimist ARF leaders] supposed they [the government authorities], in the worst case, would perhaps take with them a few hundred Armenian notables as hostages. Aknuni was from this camp. He could not imagine that Talat and his comrades would be as contemptible [as] to exterminate their friends of yesterday. Perhaps he had in his mind that he was the one who saved CUP chiefs from jail in the days of the Kamil Pasa government, and he was not anticipating that they [the CUP leaders] would be that ungrateful today.<sup>79</sup>

Likewise, in his last letters before his murder, Krikor Zohrab<sup>80</sup> asked his wife to request help from Huseyin Cahit [Yalcin] and Nazım and Halil (Mentese) Beys, all CUP leaders he regarded as his close personal friends. Zohrab had sheltered Halil Bey in his home during the March 31<sup>st</sup> incident to protect him from the attacks of the insurgents. When the war broke out, Halil Bey was a close aide of Talat Bey and the Head of the Council of State. Zohrab wrote to him without avail:<sup>81</sup>

I am connected to you not with political and official but rather with brotherhood ties that are based on respect and affection. I have proved and expressed this especially at dire times. I am not a brave person. Yet, at the time of attacks against you, persevering courageously, I paid my brotherhood debt. My wife

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<sup>79</sup> *Vem* n. 2 March-April 1934, 5-7.

<sup>80</sup> Zohrab was not a member of the ARF, but during the constitutional regime he positioned himself within the circle of the party.

<sup>81</sup> Khachik Petekian recounts in his memoirs that Halil Bey, who was in Germany at the time Zohrab wrote this letter, sent him a message as soon as he returned to the country: ""To Deputy of Istanbul Zohrap Efendi in Diyarbekir, [My] Brother Zohrab Efendi, I am here do not worry." He also calmed Mrs. Zohrab with encouraging words that "They promised me, they will go and bring [him back]."" Yet Halil Bey's promises never came true. Cited in A. S. Sharuryan, *Grigor Zohrape Zhamanakakitsneri Husherum Ew V kayutiwnnerum* (Erewan: Erevani hamalsarani hratarakchutiwn, 2006), 302-03.

and daughters, who are in grief and misery, will submit this request/petition. I am expecting mercy and hope from you. Only you can wipe away their tears.<sup>82</sup>

In his memoirs, Huseyin Cahit mentions Zohrab's wife visiting him with the request that they go talk to Talat together. Huseyin Cahit notes that he felt obliged to accept the request, although not with much hope, as the "poor woman's hopelessness and grief" touched him:

Talat was still sleeping. He came down still half asleep. He should have understood the matter when he saw Zohrab's wife with me.. Yet, he listened to her with great sympathy. He remorsefully asserted that Zohrab had been sent in accordance with a request by the Court Martial in Diyarbekir and it was not possible to repeal the order.<sup>83</sup>

Huseyin Cahit also states his opinion that Talat had personal sympathy for Vartkes Serengulian, the other ARF chief "sent" with Zohrab:

Talat liked Vartkes very much. He trusted, too, this Armenian Committee Member [Ermeni Komitecisi] Vartkes, who used to unreservedly cry out everything on his mind in a raw and guileless language. Because he saw bravery, resolution, and commitment to ideals in him.<sup>84</sup>

Huseyin Cahit writes that, when Zohrab and Vartkes were sent to Diyarbekir, it was obvious that "he [Vartkes] would never return."<sup>85</sup> Talat's purported personal "liking" of him perhaps kept his name off the April 24 arrest list, but it did not save Vartkes from his predictable destiny.

The personal ties between ARF and CUP leaders were further illustrated by the case of Simon Zavarian. Zavarian was one of the three ARF founders and at the time a

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<sup>82</sup> Zôhrap and Sarowryan, *Erkeri Zogovacow : C'ors Hatorov 4 Namakner, Encayagrer, Ôragrowt'iwnner*, 314-15.

<sup>83</sup> Yalçın, *Siyasal Anılar*.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 234-35.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

member of the party's Western [Turkish] Bureau as well as one of the editors of the pro-ARF *Azatomart*. He died unexpectedly on October 14, 1913, during the most heated days of the "Armenian Reform" talks. Bahaeddin Şakir, who personally and closely knew Zavarian, was among those at his funeral at the Surb Yerrortutiwn Church in Pera.<sup>86</sup> In another ironic twist of history, Bahaeddin Şakir later became one of the architects –if not *the* architect—of the Armenian genocide, and he sent many of Zavarian's comrades, whom he also knew personally, to their deaths, sometimes personally ordering their killings.

In the provinces, too, ARF leaders developed personal ties with CUP chiefs and local authorities.<sup>87</sup> In Van, for instance, Aram and Ishkhan were the most common invitees of the governor's dinner parties, which usually lasted well into the night with much drinking and toasting.<sup>88</sup> The ARF chiefs often organized their own dinner parties, hosting the governor, military commanders and other high ranking officials.<sup>89</sup> In his memoirs, Eplighatian recalls one such gathering in April 1914. Governor Tahsin Bey had invited Van notables to a day-long "picnic" in Artamet, on the Lake Van coast. In the afternoon, according to Eplighatian, the governor called for a shooting contest. An

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<sup>86</sup> Cemal Pasa (one of the triumvirate of the CUP during WWI) and Cemal Azmi — who at the time was the chief of police in Istanbul — also attended the funeral. Cemal Azmi would be remembered by his extraordinarily brutal policies against the Armenian during the genocide, when he was the governor of Trabzon. See, *Azatomart* n. 1344, October 22/ November 4, 1913; See also *Vem* n. 1 January-April, 1935 pp. 25-26.

<sup>87</sup> Rostom was perhaps the leader of the ARF, and he was based in Erzurum between 1909-1914. Vahan Minakhorian observed during his stay in Erzurum for the ARF congress that, "Rostom had developed strong relations of friendship with the Turks and was enjoying their great respect." *Vem*, n. 4, July-August 1934, 14. Shortly after the congress Rostom passed into the Caucasus and took a central role in the organization of volunteer units.

<sup>88</sup> Terzibashian, *Nupar*.

<sup>89</sup> Eblighatian, *Kiank Me Azgis Kiankin Mej : Akanatesi Ew Masnaktsoghi V kayutiwnner 1903-1923*, 86-87.

egg was placed 100 meters away and each contestant fired one shot at the target. The three contestants were Kazım Bey, the military commander; an Iranian Kurd from a pro-Ottoman tribe; and Ishkhan, the ARF commander of the party's military activities in Van. According to Eplighatian, Ishkhan won the contest; his victory caused much frustration from the Turkish commander and appreciation from the Kurd, but the fact that they were all together underscores the close personal relations that turned so bad in less than a year.<sup>90</sup>

Among the most controversial figures in the genocidal escalation was Armen Garo, also known as Karekin Pastermadjian. Within the ARF, Armen Garo was among those in closest contact with the CUP leaders from the early days of the Young Turk Revolution. He was one of the four ARF deputies elected to the constitutional assembly in the first elections in 1908, immediately after the revolution. He remained a member of parliament from Erzurum until 1912. Armen Garo was also a member of the CUP-ARF joint body in Istanbul, which had been created to establish a regular, steady channel of communication and negotiation between the parties.<sup>91</sup> Occasionally, Talat Bey also attended the meetings of the joint body.<sup>92</sup> Armen Garo was one of the most senior and publicly visible ARF figures in the Ottoman Empire, having fled and been active in organizing Armenian Volunteer Battalions to fight against the Ottoman forces.

These personal connections add a perplexingly tragic and paradoxical dimension to the catastrophe. As the larger political context turned upside-down, such friendship

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 99-100.

<sup>91</sup> Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule : 1908-1914*, 49.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 84.

ties and close knowledge of each other had a psychologically frustrating effect on those involved, a feeling that the tragedy about to unfold, far from inevitable, was a strange, nightmarish turn of events.

### **3.3.3 The Panorama of Ottoman-Armenian Political Organizations on the Eve of the World War**

During the constitutional regime, the political structure of the Ottoman-Armenian communities transformed radically. Taking advantage of favorable political conditions and bolstered by its alliance with the CUP, the ARF became the unquestionable dominant political organization within the Ottoman-Armenians. The party did so by marginalizing other Armenian political organizations elsewhere in the Empire; it also, as we have seen, undermined the Armenian Patriarchy's role as the sole political representative of the Armenian Nation. In 1914, as a sign of the times, when the patriarchy in Istanbul asked for list of potential Armenian nominees to the prelacies in Erzurum, Van and Bitlis for the parliamentary elections, only ARF members were named. Despite the patriarchy's repeated request for non-partisan nominees — and even after the ARF bureau in Istanbul made the same request — the response of the national directorate was unchanged, naming an exclusively ARF slate. In their explanation, these local, community non-partisan institutions emphasized that “no one in the provinces had the credibility or prestige to compare with the ARF leaders.”<sup>93</sup>

This is not to say that opposition to the ARF from within the community ceased to exist. Yet, clearly, the power balance had dramatically shifted toward the ARF in the

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

course of the constitutional regime. Although the patriarchate survived as an institution, it became increasingly vulnerable to the ARF, which extended its influence not only among the general public but also among the clerics and various church institutions. The patriarch's position as the representative of the community before the Ottoman state was seriously undermined by the new political map and particularly the role of the ARF.

For its part, the CUP preferred the Armenian revolutionaries, specifically the ARF, as the representative organization of Armenians across the empire. The CUP expected the ARF to undermine "traditional" Armenian leadership, including the patriarchy, and many observers reported that they supported ARF's attempts in that direction.<sup>94</sup> Finally, the Catholicos' increased intervention in the political matters of the Ottoman-Armenians during and after the Balkan Wars was another dynamic which negatively impacted the status and influence of the patriarchate. Hence, when the war broke out, the Patriarchate in Istanbul did not have the credibility, political power and channels to represent the community before the Young Turk government or to fill the vacuum if the ARF ceased to exist as a legitimate political entity in the empire.

The other major Armenian political movement, the Social Democrat Hnchak Party, was allied with the CUP's rivals from the outset. After the Hnchak congress in Constance in September 1913, the party moved to the radical position of re-initiating its underground and armed activities against the government.<sup>95</sup> Eventually, as the party's plot to assassinate Talat Bey was discovered in 1914, a general persecution of the

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 81-82.

<sup>95</sup> Arsen, *Patmowtiwn S. D. Hnchakian Kusaktsutian*, 364-72.

organization started in the country on July 15, 1914, just days before the outbreak of the war. It resulted in the arrest of 140 active members and the closing of Hnchak bureaus and newspapers.<sup>96</sup> Finally, the bourgeoisie-liberal Constitutional Democratic Party [Ramkavars] was also allied with the CUP's opponents, and lacked notable support within the Armenian community in any event.

Thus, Zohrab's observation that, "[T]here is nobody at the patriarchate. Various secondary [Armenian] political parties lack any weight,"<sup>97</sup> was a reality created and evolved in the course of the constitutional regime. Hence when the European war broke out, eyes were turned to the ARF; because, as Zohrab concluded, only the ARF had the potential to stand up and take action on behalf of the Ottoman-Armenians. The CUP also turned its eyes to this old 'ally,' which was operating not only in the Ottoman Empire, but also in the neighboring territories of its closest and foremost enemy: Russia.

### **3.4 CUP-ARF Talks in Erzurum: 'Old Friends' before the Hazy Horizons**

Coincidentally, when the initial bullets of the World War were fired, the largest global Armenian political organization, the ARF, was holding its 8<sup>th</sup> World Congress in Erzurum, an eastern Ottoman city and province bordering the Russian Caucasus. Thirty delegates and observers from the Ottoman provinces, Russian Empire, Europe and

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 380. The offer to assassinate Talat was made to Sabah-Kulyan by Serif Pasa. Besides political and ideological reasons, the party congress in Constance also voted for the plan, with a very slight margin, for financial reasons; Serif Pasa offered 20,000 Francs in return for the assassination of Talat Bey, Enver Bey and Cavid Bey. The plot was uncovered thanks to the government's intelligence agent operating within the party, Arshavir Sahakian (Yesyan). On June 15, 1915, twenty Hnchak members were hanged in Istanbul following the Military Tribunal's verdict on May 27, 1915. For a detailed account see Chizmechian, *Patmutiwn Amerikahay Kaghakakan Kusaktsutians, 1890-1925*, 154-58.

<sup>97</sup> Zôhrap and Sarowryan, *Erkeri Zogovacow : C'ors Hatorov 4 Namakner, Encayagrer, Ôragrowt'iwnner*, 389.

North America attended. The foremost agenda item was the recently approved Eastern Anatolian Reform Plan which raised hopes about the future of the Armenians in the eastern provinces.<sup>98</sup> Hence the conference commenced in a mood, as one of the participants put it, characterized by the optimism of “promising outlooks,” despite “sad occurrences in the provinces.”<sup>99</sup>

Just as the congress completed its initial session, the news about the war’s outbreak reached Erzurum, turning all prospects “upside-down.” The congress had to reformulate the party’s agenda vis-à-vis a new set of questions and uncertainties: “... What might be Turkey’s position? Could it be possible to avoid the war [for the Ottoman Empire]; or in contrary case what kind of a situation would be created? If the war led to expanding violence in the countryside, by which means would it be possible to secure the existence of the Armenian people? Could the reform [plan] indeed have any value under the new circumstances?”<sup>100</sup>

Uncertainty and confusion haunted the delegates of the ARF’s World Congress in Erzurum. Even so, the party had to contemplate different scenarios and make policy choices. Vahan Minakhoryan, a guest observer and participant in the congress, writes that the general flavor of the convention was that “the Armenian people should fulfill its civic duties” in the event that the Ottoman Empire entered the war. But what should the Armenians in the Caucasus do if Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire? The opinion of the congress, according to Minakhoryan, was again the same; the majority of

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<sup>98</sup> Please see Chapter 2 for a lengthy discussion of the Reform Plan.

<sup>99</sup> Vratsian, *Hayastani Hanrapetutíwn*, 78.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

the delegates concurred that the Russian-Armenians too, should perform their civic duties even if this might mean pitting “brother against brother” on the battlefields. At this moment, at least, the discourse of national allegiance and obligation seemed to trump any pan-Armenian solidarity.

Like many authors looking back in hindsight, Minakhoryan, writing more than three decades after the congress, believed that “there was no way out.” Yet, even by his own account, we see that different opinions and positions were voiced at the congress; some delegates, Minakhoryan said, advocated a general uprising in “Western Armenia,” or the eastern Ottoman provinces. Two delegates from Sivas province, Hamazasp (who would later become one of the commanders of the volunteer battalions) and the European Student Union delegate Tigran Khachikian, voiced that particular opinion.<sup>101</sup>

Conversely, a major party figure, Ruben Der-Minasian, proposed that the ARF side with the Ottoman Army to fight against the Russians.<sup>102</sup>

The grave, murky atmosphere became even more so with the arrival of the CUP emissaries Ömer Naci and Bahaeddin Şakir.<sup>103</sup> They had come to the congress to negotiate war scenarios with the ARF representatives. On the ARF side, Arshag Vramian,<sup>104</sup> Rostom<sup>105</sup> and Aknuni led the negotiations.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> *Vem* n. 4, July-August 1934, 14-15.

<sup>102</sup> Vratsian, *Hayastani Hanrapetutíwn*, 82-83.

<sup>103</sup> A-Do writes that Hilmi Bey was also among the CUP representatives. A. Vratzian, who participated in the congress as the delegate from America, claims that Behaeddin Şakir and Ömer Naci were accompanied by “a few dozen Caucasian, Persian and Azeri agents and fighters.” *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>104</sup> Aka Onnig Tertzagian. Vramian was born in 1870 in Istanbul. He took part in the organization of the occupation of the Bank Ottoman in 1896, for which he was arrested but then managed to escape. He fled to the Balkans in 1897, where he passed into Geneva. In Geneva he took on chief positions in the management of the Western Bureau of the party, while also working for the party’s organ *Droshag*. He became a member

Those ARF-CUP negotiations in Erzurum have been central in historical writings on the Armenian Genocide. Relying on the ARF records and memoirs written years later, the event has been commonly treated as a step on the road to the ultimate outcome, namely, the genocide, as if no other outcome had been possible. In many historical accounts, in fact, the story is simplified to a CUP offer to the ARF to organize volunteer battalions to foment an Armenian rebellion in the Caucasus, in return for Armenian autonomy in the Ottoman eastern provinces and in the seized Russian territories. In this version of events, ARF rejected the offer, but stated that Armenians on both sides would commit to their civic duties.<sup>107</sup> In an early version of such accounts A-Do describes the CUP offer as follows:

[They] proposed that the ARF carry out propaganda among the Armenians of the Caucasus and Iran, organize volunteer battalions and in case of a war join the Ottoman forces against the Russians: The Turkish representatives said that “[I]f war breaks out [between the Ottoman and Russian Empires], rebellion in the Caucasus is inevitable: highlanders, Turks and the Georgians alike will stand up, let the Armenians join them. In return we promise to give Armenians autonomy.” As a proof of their words, they produced a map with new drawings according to which Tiflis and Kutaisi provinces, environs of Batumi and part of the Trabzon province were given to autonomous Georgia. The entire Dagestan,

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of the Ottoman Parliament in 1908. When he was murdered in April 1915, an early genocide victim, he was a member of parliament from the Van province.

<sup>105</sup> Aka Zoryan Stepan. One of the founders of the ARF, Rostom was born in Tsghna (Yerevan). He took active part in the preparations of the early congresses of the ARF and also played a prominent role in the publication of the party’s monthly official organ, *Droshag*. He passed into Tabriz, Iran, in 1908 and, from 1910-14, lived in Erzurum, Ottoman Empire, working as the chief supervisor of Armenian schools in Erzurum. After the war broke out in 1914 he first passed into Europe and later into Russia. He was one of the ARF leaders who criticized the formation of the Armenian Volunteer Battalions attached to the Russian Army. He died in 1919 from typhus.

<sup>106</sup> Aka Khachatur Malumyan. One of the prominent leaders of the ARF, Aknuni was born in Meghri, Caucasus. He became a crucial figure organizing the 1907 all-Ottoman oppositions’ meeting in Paris and chaired several discussions during the congress. Aknuni went to Istanbul after the constitutional revolution in 1908. He became a major agitator for the party and delivered speeches in the U.S., Egypt, Lebanon, Smyrna and Erzurum. He was arrested during the genocide, sent to Çankırı and later killed.

<sup>107</sup> For instance see Chaliand and Ternon, *The Armenians, from Genocide to Resistance*, 93-94; Kâmuran Gürün, *Ermeni Dosyası* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1983), 195-96.

Baku province and part of Gandzak province would be given to Turks [Azeris] of the Caucasus, and the environs of Kars, Yerevan province, part of Gandzak province as well as Van, Bitlis provinces and part of the Erzurum province would be given to autonomous Armenia.<sup>108</sup>

This way of narrating what occurred paints the CUP as being infuriated and upset at receiving a negative answer to its test question about absolute loyalty and military allegiance from ARF and the Ottoman-Armenians. According to authors in this vein, this question placed Armenians in an impossible quandary because, given the recent history of the Armenian Question and the political mood of the Armenians worldwide, even an attempt to mobilize the Armenians against the Russians was obviously impossible and unthinkable for the ARF. A-Do writes that “the ARF representatives were astonished by the pretentious naiveté of the Turkish representatives,” pointing to their lack of credibility in the eyes of the ARF delegates.<sup>109</sup>

In these accounts of the chain of events, the only possible response for the ARF was to stall for time against the CUP and the government and to fend off their aggression against the Ottoman-Armenians. Such analyses, however, obscure the fact that a multiplicity of real possibilities still existed for the parties at the Congress. To assert otherwise is to underestimate political indeterminacies and impose a retrospective teleology on a process that was by no means closed at the time,, and, therefore, attribute exaggerated predispositions to the political actors regarding their agendas. Why would the CUP delegates even bother to ask an effectively rhetorical question whose answer they already knew? If ARF’s response was deemed as the proof of “Armenian

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<sup>108</sup> A-do, *Mets Depkere Vaspurakanum, 1914-1915 Twakannerin* 73-74.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

disloyalty,” does it mean that the CUP leaders came up with the idea of eliminating the Ottoman-Armenians in August 1914? Finally, did the ARF give the only response it could?

Fortunately, we get a more detailed and fuller picture of the negotiations from Dikran M. Kaligian’s research on the ARF under the Ottoman constitutional rule. Kaligian draws on documents from the ARF Archives, access to which is extremely restricted. Here we have a sense of the possibilities different from the more conventional accounts:

... While the committee was meeting, Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir and Naci Bey (Ömer Naci) arrived as representatives of the CUP and the government. They met for three days with Rosdom, Agnouni and Vramian. They asked what the ARF stance would be concerning two possible developments they were predicting. The first was the invasion of the Ottoman Empire by Russia. The second was either a Turkish advance on Russia or Turkish support for a Caucasian rebellion against Russia. The ARF representatives responded that in the first case the party would obviously defend the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire, including all of its lands and its constitutional laws. This made the CUP representatives very happy, especially Dr. Şakir. Concerning the second case, the ARF stated that they could not answer without more information, particularly as it was only serendipity that the two parties were even discussing the issue.<sup>110</sup>

Clearly, the CUP envoy did not ask the ARF representatives only one simple yes/no question about loyalty. This point is very crucial; it shows that, within the new political and international environment created by the European war, the CUP leaders, far from being bent on breaking with the ARF, now deemed it possible to re-establish an alliance. The CUP contacted ARF chiefs in Van and Muş to carry out negotiations with

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<sup>110</sup> Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule : 1908-1914*, 220.

similar proposals.<sup>111</sup> Therefore, despite the commonly proposed thesis that the genocide escalation resulted from the political and ideological radicalization of the CUP and polarization caused by the reform debates, the reality is that, as of August 1914, the CUP had not yet lost hope in the ARF — the most-widely recognized Armenian political party in the Ottoman Empire, in Russia and in the diaspora — as a possible negotiating partner. The new political map and novel opportunities that came with the war actually rendered forming a new alliance with the ARF not only beneficial to the CUP but also potentially possible. These conditions induced the CUP to make the effort — which analysts retrospectively evaluated as a sham, naïve or even absurd — to persuade their ‘old friends’ that it was possible to turn a new page and bring together the interests of the two parties and peoples.

Indeed, the ARF representatives emphasized, before and beyond responding to the two specific questions, their strong opinion that the interests of the Ottoman country lay in pursuing a resolute policy of neutrality.<sup>112</sup> Yet, according to Vratsian, the CUP representatives had already decided to enter the war.<sup>113</sup> Responding to the second question — whether the party would help support Ottoman war efforts against Russia and foment an Armenian uprising in the Russian Caucasus — the ARF leaders did not give a positive answer to the CUP, but neither did they give a negative answer; instead, they deferred the question, not because they had a hidden agenda, but because the situation was simply too serious and potentially perilous to make a prompt decision,

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<sup>111</sup> A-do, *Mets Depkere Vaspurakanum, 1914-1915 Twakannerin* 74.

<sup>112</sup> Dasnabedian, *History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Dashnaksutiun, 1890-1924*, 108.

<sup>113</sup> Vratsian, *Hayastani Hanrapetutiwn*, 9.

especially given the uncertainties. The ARF representatives, in fact, emphasized to the CUP that their congress could not make the decision on behalf of the Armenians of the Caucasus. They did, however, point out that the Armenians of the Caucasus lacked enthusiasm toward the Young Turk regime despite early admiration in the aftermath of the constitutional revolution.<sup>114</sup>

The talks between the CUP and the ARF, in other words, were not conclusive, the protagonists themselves believed. But these talks did have one definitive result: both parties revealed some of their cards to the other side, and each developed a tentative opinion of the other's stance in relation to the war. The ARF representatives reported that the CUP emissaries disclosed the government's intention to ally with the Germans –who they guessed would be victorious– and take advantage of the war to reclaim lost Ottoman territory from the Balkan states and perhaps seize the Russian Caucasus – to which they would grant autonomy depending on the “dedication and service” of its people during the war.<sup>115</sup>

An interesting conclusion drawn from the available accounts of the ARF-CUP negotiations is that people had different and even conflicting takes on the outcome. Vramian, for instance, noted that Ömer Naci and Bahaeddin Şakir were pleased by the ARF's first response; still, he “believed the Turks considered them Russian

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<sup>114</sup> It is very striking that, in response to the point about ‘the lack of enthusiasm,’ the CUP emissaries asked what the ARF wanted. The latter responded that, “they (the CUP representatives) were fully aware of the ARF demands and those in power knew better what they could and could not give the Armenians, especially during wartime.” Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule : 1908-1914*, 221.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 220-21.

sympathizers."<sup>116</sup> Describing Armen Garo's meeting with Talat, Vahan Papazian, who was in Istanbul at the time, claimed that the latter was "displeased by the ARF's indifferent stance and added that they [the Ottoman government] were free of any responsibility of the consequences of it [the stance of the ARF]."<sup>117</sup> Armen Garo later went as far as to claim that "[T]he bold retort of the Armenians to the Turks ... intensely angered the Turks, and from that very day the extermination of the Armenians was determined upon by the Turkish government."<sup>118</sup>

Conversely, Terzipashian observed that "the ARF's decision to remain loyal has left a good impression on the Turks."<sup>119</sup> An unsigned commentary in the Tiflis-based ARF newspaper, *Horizon*, interpreted the party's position in the talks as a "resolute rejection of the Turks' proposal," stating that it was not possible to expect a good situation in Turkey.<sup>120</sup> Other ARF cadres, particularly those from the eastern provinces, demanded that their comrades in Tiflis stop the volunteer movement because such a policy did not comply with the party's position in Erzurum.<sup>121</sup> In turn, a diligent and active supporter of the movement, Arshak Jamalian, responded that "those comrades did not understand well" the decision of the congress.<sup>122</sup>

Not much firsthand documentation exists on the CUP's immediate impressions, but, from Ömer Naci's letter to Vramian on December 4/17, 1914, it is clear that the

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 220-21.

<sup>117</sup> Vahan Papazian, *Im Hushere*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Pēyrut' 1952), 276.

<sup>118</sup> Garegin Pasdermadjian, *Why Armenia Should Be Free Armenia's Rôle in the Present War* (Boston: Hairenik Pub. Co., 1918), 17.

<sup>119</sup> Terzipashian, *Andranik*, 127.

<sup>120</sup> *Horizon* n. 238, October 26, 1914, 2.

<sup>121</sup> Leo, *Antsyalits*, 278.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

former assumed the ARF had 'promised' not to get involved in pro-Russian activities in the Ottoman territories and elsewhere in the Caucasus and Iran.<sup>123</sup> The Erzurum negotiations became a major reference for political actors, albeit with conclusions that varied significantly vis-à-vis respective political positions. Clearly, however, the Erzurum meeting did not mark the beginning of the end.

Immediately after the talks, the local authorities, out of aggressive curiosity and anxiety, significantly increased their surveillance of the ARF, particularly the non-Ottoman-national delegates of the party in the city. Takesian, the delegate from the Balkans, was arrested after police discovered a fake Iranian passport issued in his name; he was not released despite local ARF leaders' incessant appeals.<sup>124</sup> A few days after the convention, the police requested a list of participants. Rostom gave them the names of those still in the city.<sup>125</sup> The next day Aknuni and Minakhorian – the former one of the three ARF negotiators and a Russian national, and the latter the delegate from Samsun and an Iranian national – were also detained, but released shortly after. The ARF leaders in Erzurum became more anxious, convinced that the arrests could not simply stem from routine police investigation. At the same time, they thought that the orders came from "secondary officials" and not from the central authorities.<sup>126</sup> When Rostom complained before the local authorities, they parried the matter as a misunderstanding

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<sup>123</sup> A-do, *Mets Depkere Vaspurakanum, 1914-1915 Twakannerin* 97.

<sup>124</sup> Vahan Minakhorian, *1915 Twakane : Arhawirki Orer* (Tehran: [s.n.], 2006), 86-87.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

and assured him that Vratsian, one of the delegates of Russian nationality who was also briefly detained and then asked to leave the city, could return to Erzurum.<sup>127</sup>

### **3.5 The ARF's Great Dilemma in Istanbul and the French Factor**

Zohrab was not the only Armenian leader concerned about the Ottoman government's pro-German predilections.<sup>128</sup> This was alarming news for Ottoman-Armenians because the Germans had fervently challenged the Russian-proposed Armenian Reform Plan; they championed Ottoman interests during the post-Balkan Wars reform talks and gained notable concessions on behalf of the Ottoman government. Furthermore, as of August 1914, Germany was already at war with Russia. Therefore, for many ARF leaders, the Patriarch and most of the Armenian elite, the CUP's siding with Germany was a scary scenario. It would jeopardize the entire reform plan and inevitably result in war between the Ottoman and Russian Empires, with the Armenian population of the region sandwiched in the battle zone.

As noted in the previous chapter, the reform process dramatically reshaped the matrix of international and local deployment of powers regarding the conflict in the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire. The most significant implication of the reform debates was that Tsarist Russia, more than three decades after the Berlin Treaty, emerged once again as the patron of the 'Armenian cause'. This move generated sympathy toward Russia from Armenians around the world; it also led to a partial warming of relations between the Russian Regime and Armenian revolutionaries,

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<sup>127</sup> *Horizon* n. 198, September 6, 1914, 4.

<sup>128</sup> Papazian, *Im Hushere*, 277.

particularly the ARF. These new links remained limited, however; in August 1914, a number of ARF chiefs, arrested and exiled in the course of the Leizhin trials between 1908-1912, were still serving jail time in Russia.<sup>129</sup>

A second major consequence of the reform debates was an explosion of interest, political consciousness and concern in the Armenian diaspora for the state of things in “historical Armenia,” in the six eastern *vilayets* of the Ottoman Empire. This cause became a force that united competing factions of Armenian groups, albeit temporarily. Armenian political and ecclesiastical organizations in the Ottoman Empire and Europe and especially across the Russian Empire were mobilized. The Russian — and, more specifically — Caucasian Armenians played a particularly crucial role, as the reform plan was initiated by the Catholicos in Etchmiadzin — Tsarist Russians in a city in the Caucasus — in spite of Ottoman imperial opposition. Even as the initial Russian Plan raised the expectations of Armenian political and religious circles to a very high point, it unnerved the Ottoman government and generated suspicion about the “true” intentions of Armenians.

The final draft, a “diluted” version of the Russian proposal, eased fears of the CUP government about an imminent Russian takeover of the area. On the Armenian

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<sup>129</sup> The Russian government began keeping a closer and more suspicious eye on the ARF after the constitutional revolutions in Iran and in the Ottoman Empire, which the ARF diligently supported. This resulted in the empire-wide persecution of the party and the arrest of its operatives, including some of its major members. The trials in St. Petersburg, commonly named after the persecutor Leizhin, ended in convictions in 1912. The verdicts were much milder than expected, however; out of the 160 accused, only 52 were sentenced to imprisonment or exile [four of them to Siberia]. This, on the one hand, reflected the changing political climate within the empire [the verdict was announced after the death of Stolypin], and on the other it was an early sign of the Russian government’s renewed interest in the Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire. Varandian, *H.H. Dashnaktsutian Patmutiwn*, 116-32; Dasnabedian, *History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Dashnaktsutiun, 1890-1924*, 93-95.

side, the final version received a bittersweet welcome; it was not what most Armenian representatives had hoped for, but it was still a reform plan under European supervision and control.

The ARF was the only Armenian organization in Istanbul that Zohrab thought had the political will to endure the challenge of war. The party used its full influence to lobby government circles against entering the war, and it received assurances from the CUP that the Ottomans would not do so.<sup>130</sup> However, many party cadres in Istanbul had been gloomy about the Ottoman neutrality. In a letter to the ARF Central Committee in the US, written on August 18, 1914, ARF operative Sarkis Parseghian wrote:

There is no doubt that both Armenian and Ottoman interests urge the government's resolute neutrality in the course of the current European war. Unfortunately, our leading circles do not think that way. They think that Turkey's survival will be conditioned upon weakening or collapse of the Russian government, therefore they will take advantage of the situation and in case of a French defeat in front of the Germans they will raid into the Caucasus. According to what they [government authorities] say, they do not have the intention of governing the area, but rather they want to create an autonomous entity as a buffer zone between Turkey and Russia. Given that the French collapse has started, we are expecting to see Turkey, too involved in the general war.<sup>131</sup>

When news of the negotiations between the CUP envoy and ARF representatives at the 8th World Congress reached ARF leaders in Istanbul, there seemed little doubt that the CUP government was preparing for war against Russia. The government's decision to shelve the reform plan and call Hoff back from Van to Istanbul further

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<sup>130</sup> Papazian, *Im Hushere*, 276.

<sup>131</sup> *Vem* n. 5 September-October 1934, 113-114.

deepened anxieties and increased apocalyptic expectations.<sup>132</sup> To cope with the situation, the party organization in Istanbul was reshaped and transformed.<sup>133</sup>

Vahan Papazian relates in his memoirs that “there was the common belief among the ARF leaders in Istanbul that the Turks would “undoubtedly throw themselves into the chaos of the war.” He adds that the ARF leaders, including himself, believed the CUP would ally with the Germans to “clear off the deal with the Russians.”<sup>134</sup> This scenario frightened the party, a reversal of what the Armenians had hoped to gain through the reforms. In addition, party members felt that if they did not accede to CUP demands, such as the ones proposed in Erzurum, the merciless persecution of Armenian soldiers [in the Ottoman army] and intellectuals would follow. Still, even their direst fears could not compare with the scale of the terror soon to be unleashed.

ARF leaders in Istanbul were confused and split about the proper course of action.<sup>135</sup> Papazian relates that there were two camps. The first group predicted an early

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<sup>132</sup> Papazian, *Im Hushere*, 276-77.

<sup>133</sup> H. Siruni suggests that the ARF was receiving news about Turkish preparations against the Armenians. The party appointed new intellectual, military and woman committees, composed of publicly unknown figures. He also notes that, even in March 1915 when the allies were shelling the Dardanelles, there were still optimists in the party ranks who claimed that “there was nothing extraordinary against the Armenians.” Siruni adds that, “We heard from a reliable source that in the palace and in Sublime Porte they already had started making bundles to move the Sultan and the government to Anatolia, as the entrance of the allied fleet into [Sea of Marmara hence to Istanbul] was expected any moment. Yet, among us there were those who attributed Turk’s mysterious commotions to this worry/concern. They [optimist ARF leaders] supposed they [the government authorities] perhaps, in the worst case, would take with them a few hundred Armenian notables as hostages. Aknuni was advocating this opinion. He could not imagine/believe that Talat and his comrades would be as contemptible to exterminate their friends of yesterday. Perhaps he had in his mind that he was the one who saved CUP chiefs from jail in the days of the Kamil Pasa government, and he was not anticipating that they [the CUP leaders] would be that ungrateful today.” *Vem* n. 2 March-April 1934, 5-7.

<sup>134</sup> Papazian, *Im Hushere*, 277.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 278-79.

crushing strike of the “mighty Russian armies” against the Ottoman forces. They suggested that:

..in the Caucasus it was necessary to have volunteer troops ready, which as a vanguard force to Russian Army, would occupy important military positions in Armenia [in the Ottoman territories] not allowing Turks-Kurds to harm Armenian people. Aside from that, our political demands needed to be drafted and presented to Russian authorities through the Catholicos. At the same time, it was necessary to order the Armenian Bureau to secretly prepare their organizations in the countryside for self-defense. Yet, in case of danger these had to join the marching Armenian battalions.<sup>136</sup>

Among those supporting this view were ARF members Khazhak<sup>137</sup>, Armen Garo, Sarkis and Pashayan,<sup>138</sup> who were less pessimistic about the fate of the Ottoman-Armenians in case of war.<sup>139</sup> The other camp, which Papazian calls ‘more conservative/moderate,’ included figures such as Vahan Papazian, S. Minasian<sup>140</sup>, Hrach, Vartkes, Shahrigian<sup>141</sup> and “later Zohrab.”<sup>142</sup> Krikor Zohrab was particularly pessimistic: “If Turkey allies with the enemies of Russia, [then] she [Turkey] will take her revenge

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 279.

<sup>137</sup> K. Khazhak (Aka Karekin Chakalian) was originally from Alexandropol (Gyumri). In 1912 Khazhak came to Istanbul after years-long persecution and arrest in the Russian Caucasus due to his writings in Armenian papers and political activism as an ARF member. His final arrest was in April 1915, this time in Istanbul. Khazhak was sent to Diyarbekir and executed.

<sup>138</sup> Dr. Garabed Pashayan-Khan was a member of the Ottoman Parliament from Sivas and also a representative in the Armenian National Assembly from Kharpert (Elazig). Pashayan was arrested in Istanbul during the roundup of Armenian notables in April 1915 and later executed.

<sup>139</sup> Papazian, *Im Hushere*, 279.

<sup>140</sup> Sarkis Minasyan worked for the ARF’s official paper *Droshag* in Geneva and later became the editor of the pro-ARF, Boston-based Armenian journal *Hayrenik*. Minasyan returned to Istanbul in 1909 where he worked as a teacher and was also a member of the Armenian National Assembly. He was arrested in April 1915 and executed shortly after.

<sup>141</sup> Harutyun Shahrigian (Aka Adom) was a renowned writer and columnist. He wrote editorials and articles in various pro-ARF newspapers and journals. Shahrigian was arrested in Istanbul in April 1915 and later executed.

<sup>142</sup> Papazian, *Im Hushere*, 280.

for so many years of revolutionary activities and for the Armenian cause.”<sup>143</sup> According to Papazian these “moderates/conservatives”:

...were not very optimistic about a swift Russian advance given the possible need for vast amount of forces for the western front [German front] and the nature of the structure of the Russian Caucasian Armies command. According to their opinion, the danger for the Armenian people of Turkey was inevitable. Although it was necessary to give the order for self-defense preparations, it was also imperative to keep big units of fighter groups in the Caucasus close to the border, which would stay in passive position and would only under extreme conditions (massacres or Turkish defeat) cross the border. They were deeming it harmful in any way to form volunteer battalions and consequently, to be entirely subject to the Russian Army. Under these circumstances the Turks, besides not finding any reason for provocation against Armenians, would need to think longer before taking a step [against Ottoman-Armenians] concerning the [Armenian] forces gathered along the borders, which could easily sneak [into Ottoman territories] through secret paths and bother the Turkish Army from its back and sides, create turmoil inside [the country] and intimidate Kurdish brigand elements. ... [they] were suggesting that as of then it was necessary to caution the Turkish leaders, stating that the Armenians [fighters] on the other side of the border would not move from their positions unless the [Armenian] people in the country were not physically harmed.<sup>144</sup>

These two camps could not reach an agreement and decided to bring both points of view to the central committee. They also decided to let the Armenian Bureau of the party in the Caucasus know about the disagreement and wait until the delegates from the World Congress in Erzurum returned to reconsider the issue.<sup>145</sup> Papazian’s depiction of the disagreements over the best course of action came from an early meeting when he was still in Istanbul, but, by August 14, Papazian had left for Van . His account, then, does not address an unexpected development that occurred after he

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 279-80.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 280.

departed, which radically changed the stance of the ARF Western Bureau in Istanbul and its message to the Eastern Bureau in Tiflis.

In mid-August, Malkhas (Ardashes Hovsepian) arrived in Istanbul from Marseilles with a very important message from the ARF committee in Paris. The committee deemed it urgent to inform the Western Bureau about its exchange with the French government through Victor Bérard, a former French diplomat with close relations to the Armenians since the days of the Hamidian regime. In his memoirs<sup>146</sup> Malkhas suggests that, soon after the outbreak of the European war, the French Prime Minister, Gaston Doumergue,<sup>147</sup> contacted Bérard to inquire what stance his “Armenian friends,” particularly the ARF, would take Doumergue, highlighting the crucial role the French played during the reform debates, asked Bérard to contact the ARF Committee in Geneva and counsel them that they “should not miss that opportunity of joining the Entente so as to secure the future of the Armenian people.”<sup>148</sup>

Bérard sent a telegram to the headquarters of the ARF’s official journal *Droshak* in Geneva and conveyed the French prime minister’s message to M. Varantian. Although it is not clear if there were any direct talks between the ARF leaders and Doumergue, the latter purportedly promised, on behalf of the French government, that they would grant

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<sup>146</sup> These extremely valuable memoirs about the formation of Armenian Volunteer Battalions were published by the Armenian newspaper *Hayrenik* on August 5-6, 1942.

<sup>147</sup> One major discrepancy in Malkhas’ account is that Doumergue was not in office when the war broke out, as his cabinet was dissolved on June 13, 1914.

<sup>148</sup> Gabriel Lazian, *Hayastan Ew Hay Date Hayeworus Haraberutiwnneru Loysin Tak* (Gahire: Tparan “Husaber”, 1957), 175.

“at least autonomy for Turkish-Armenia if Armenians join the Entente and provide their support in the war.”<sup>149</sup>

The message from the French government strengthened the more optimistic of the ARF camps and “clarified” the ARF Western Bureau’s position. In a second meeting of the bureau on August 22, Armen Garo proposed sending Malkhas to Tiflis to inform the Eastern Bureau of that it was in favor of starting a volunteer movement to fight alongside Russian armies. After a final meeting with Garo, Hrach and Sarkis at the pro-ARF newspaper *Azatomart* headquarters in Istanbul, Malkhas inscribed the message of the Western Bureau on his notebook in invisible ink. Armen Garo, Malkhas suggests, emphasized that the number of volunteers should be thirty thousand and they should enter the ‘county’ [i.e., Armenian provinces] as soon as the war broke out between the two empires, as vanguard units of the Russian army.<sup>150</sup>

Obviously, some of the ARF leaders from the ‘pessimist’ camp, such as Hrach, who initially opposed the idea of a volunteer movement attached to the Russian army, changed their opinion after receiving the French message. It is not clear how many other ‘pessimists’ changed their minds about the need to be careful not to provoke the Ottoman government, but it is very unlikely that Zohrab was invited to the second meeting or was even promptly informed of the decision. Moreover, the Western Bureau made this crucial decision without conferring with other party committees in Europe or the Balkans. At the time, many very influential ARF figures in the Western Bureau’s

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 175-76.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 177.

Turkey section were not even present in Istanbul, having not yet returned from the world congress in Erzurum.<sup>151</sup>

The patriarch, on the other hand, was extremely concerned about the wellbeing of the Armenians, especially in the countryside. The CUP government's decision to send the two European inspectors back and shelve the reform plan had especially alarmed the patriarch. Patriarch Zaven was worried that the *İttihadis* would use the war as an opportunity to seek "revenge from the Armenians" for their insistence on foreign control over the reform plan; "therefore, it was necessary to be very cautious not to give excuse."<sup>152</sup> Patriarch Zaven does not mention whether he was aware of the Western Bureau's decision, but he sent an envoy to Tiflis to prevent a "thoughtless step or anti-Turk demonstration." He feared that rash measures might seriously threaten the existence of the Ottoman-Armenians.<sup>153</sup>

Consequently, as I felt the threat of the approaching crisis during the July-August months of 1914, Dr. DagHAVARIAN<sup>154</sup> went to Tiflis on my orders and there negotiated with wise and sound people, requesting to act with great caution as their Turkish-Armenian brothers' lives may be jeopardized. Dr. DagHAVARIAN returned within a month entirely desperate, because his [efforts] did not produce any results and Russian-Armenians' mindset seemed to be entirely different. After him, the Prelate of Kayseri, Archbishop Behrigian, arrived from Etchmiadzin and told me that great agitation was prevailing in Tiflis and volunteers [soldiers] were being conscripted in order to fight against the Turks in

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<sup>151</sup> For instance Aknuni one of the most influential leaders of the party in Istanbul, left Erzurum on August 23. He was a fervent proponent of the ARF's neutrality and had close relations with the CUP leaders including the minister of interior Talat Bey. Before he arrived in Istanbul and presented the decisions of the congress and his own position, the Western Bureau had already made the decision for the volunteer movement. Rostom, *Rostom : Namakani, Mahuan Utsunamiakin Artiw* (Peyrut: Hratarakutiwn H.H. Dashnaktsutian, 1999), 618.

<sup>152</sup> Der-Eghiayan, *Patriarkakan Hushers : Vaweragirner Ew Vkayutiwnner*, 49.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>154</sup> Dr. Nazaret DagHAVARIAN was among the Armenian notables incarcerated in April 1915 and later executed.

case of a war to liberate Turkish-Armenia.<sup>155</sup>

Likewise, ARF leaders in Istanbul grew increasingly concerned about the public visibility of the volunteer movement in the Caucasus; they knew that the CUP government would be angered by this Armenian initiative. So, in mid-October, they sent Garo Sasuni to the Eastern Bureau with a message requesting that it stop “*flamboyant acts,*” and carry out its work in secrecy.<sup>156</sup>

These requests would be largely ignored.

In Istanbul, Armenian intellectuals, notables, political activists and community leaders were all shaken by the grave uncertainty of the situation. Along with the shelving of the reform plan, the CUP’s growing inclination to enter the war on the German side escalated anxieties about the impact of the war on the Ottoman-Armenians. However, the same uncertainty and consequent anxiety and fear led people to take quite different positions. The non-Revolutionary circles, particularly the Patriarchy were extremely concerned and nervous about CUP intentions and advocated caution and distancing from any actions that might provoke the government into violence. These Armenian leaders called for passivity.

In contrast, the revolutionaries and their allies opposed what they saw as the submissive and potentially catastrophic strategy of passive waiting. But the ARF, too, was itself divided into two camps; there were those who were optimistic about a swift Russian victory and Ottoman defeat and considered the war an opportunity. This group suggested an offensive position that entailed the formation of volunteer troops to fight

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<sup>155</sup> Der-Eghiayan, *Patriarkakan Hushers : Vaweragirner Ew Vkayutiwnner*, 50.

<sup>156</sup> Lazian, *Hayastan Ew Hay Date Hayewrus Haraberutiwnneru Loysin Tak*, 178.

alongside the Russian Armies and the mobilization of armed groups and anti-military activities in the eastern provinces. The pessimists, conversely, had darker predictions about the consequences of the war, and they advocated taking a defensive position. Agreeing that military preparations were necessary to organize, they strictly opposed the idea of attaching those units to Russian Armies. At first the party bureau in Istanbul did not come to any agreement, but the French “promise” of eventual Armenian autonomy led the optimistic camp, headed by Armen Garo, to succeed in obtaining support for the decision to start a volunteer movement for the Russian Army – a decision that the CUP government would point at as the proof of “Armenian disloyalty” to justify its subsequent slaughter of Armenians.

## 4. Impatient Dreams and Banal Nightmares: Making the ARF War Strategy in Tiflis, August - November 1914

### 4.1 *Russian Roulette in Tiflis*

In the fall of 1914, Dr. Isahak Terterian, a military doctor deployed with the Russian Caucasian Army, was on his way to the war front. Given a day off in Tiflis, he decided to meet his old friends in the city. While strolling on Golovinsky Boulevard, Terterian came across an acquaintance, Anna Ivanovna, the sister of the mayor of Tiflis, Al. Khatisian. Ivanova invited Terterian for a coffee at her home and they began talking about the war. As Derderian recalls it, he had initiated the conversation:

“Is the number of [Armenian] volunteers going to the front high?”

“Yes, doctor, the zeal is inexhaustible.”

“Why? Have the Armenians not already sent many soldiers to the front?”

“This is additional devotion that the Armenian people show for the sake of thier cause.”

“Anna Ivanovna, is it really that the war broke out for the sake of our cause, or instead that the war will destroy it?”

“Of course not, but we have many expectations from the war. Our people through peaceful or revolutionary means could not achieve liberty. Who knows, maybe the war will help us in this [in achieving liberty].”

“Are you serious?”

“Absolutely! The Viceroy [of the Caucasus] gave big assurances about it. ... He promised to liberate entire Armenia this time.”

“How nice! Who said that?”

“The Viceroy said this to my brother.”

“In conversation, or some official statement?”

“Official!” Anna Ivanovna exclaimed in a happy voice. “The Viceroy clearly stated to our representatives — my brother, Archbishop Mesrop and Samson Harutiwnyan — that he has a letter from the tsar in which he promised to liberate Armenia.”

“And do you believe in these stories?” I asked with restrained skepticism.

“Why would one not trust in the promises of the tsar and his Viceroy? If we don’t trust their personal words, whom else shall we trust?” Anna Ivanovna said with slight indignation.

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At this interesting moment of our conversation, Ishkhanuhi Dolgorukova and Al. Khatisian entered the room. “How do you explain the Russian government’s change of stance toward us, Alexandir Ivanich? Instead of its hostile attitude, today the government is full of “fatherly” love and high “humanitarianism” to the extent that it is distributing arms to us.... I would be glad if you could explain to me this phenomenon, which seems to me at the very least very strange.”

Upon this question of mine, Khatisian threw a sharp glance toward me through his transparent lense and calmly said:

“Doctor, I find it hard to answer the question you posed because it might be the result of complex political games. Let me tell you this much only: each moment has its scheme; what was not advantageous to the Russian government in the past might today be beneficial. ... Through time people also change. ... In the same vein that the Russian government’s policy toward us might also change. ... A few days ago the Viceroy clearly told me: “I am convinced that Armenians understand very well the role of Russia regarding the matter of controlling their fate. That is what the experience of centuries show. I support the Armenian nation not as a friend but as [nation of] trustworthy and good citizens of Russia. I consider that the best that Turkish-Armenians can receive after our victory is going to be something like the Lebanese Constitution. I wrote to the Tsar likewise.”

“Please excuse my presumption [replied Derderian], Alexander Ivanich, but your answer did not satisfy me; I am younger and very inexperienced compared to you, but I would not take these assurances of the Viceroy as grounds for throwing our youth into the fire of war... Those very experiences of centuries that the viceroy mentioned do not give the grounds to think that the Tsar and his viceroy are sincere in their words. Who can, after all, predict the future and say that we will get something from the Tsar in return for those grave sacrifices that we as a nation are committing ourselves to? ... Would it not be better that we, too, like other peoples, fulfilled our duties as citizens and waited for the outcome of the war, which is always pregnant with unexpected consequences?”

Al Khatisian carefully listened to me and responded calmly:

“Doctor, there is certain truth in your statements, but I told you that each moment has its scheme whose consequences it is impossible to predict. Neither time nor people will wait for us to we fulfill our tasks for them; they are moving and pulling us from behind. This is a *spontaneous* movement that finds its expression in their [people’s] love toward the homeland and in hatred for the enemy... This phenomenon will explain why *the people, as soon as they heard the*

*news of the war, started to sign up for the volunteer battalions and marched toward the front."*

"All people are the same, Alexander Ivanich, they are all made out of the same dough; like you and me, they are all dreamy, naïve, hot-tempered –and as they receive any [such] news—are as flammable as matches. And when a disaster occurs, he'd rapidly recoil... It is not the people that govern their fate but rather their intellectual and conscious elements [political and intellectual elite].<sup>1</sup>

Raffi<sup>2</sup> (Hakob Melik-Hakobian) was a romantic nationalist novelist and a columnist for the *Mshak*. His work deeply influenced Armenian intellectuals and the political movements of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; his writings were crucial in introducing the Ottoman-Armenian question to the Russian-Armenian intelligentsia and public. Unfortunately, Raffi did not live long enough to witness the "patriotic" fervor he inspired among the Armenians in Tiflis and elsewhere in the Caucasus and the Russian Empire – intellectuals, businesspeople, clerics, high school students, teachers and political activists – in the fall of 1914, for the "liberation" of their brethren living on the other side of the border. Before his death in 1888, Raffi had regretfully observed the apathy and even aversion between the Armenians of the Caucasus and the Ottoman Empire in his articles for the *Mshak*:

Until the last Turkish-Russian war [1877-78], had [we] met an Ottoman-Armenian with his *fez* on the head we would have at once labeled him *hosos*<sup>3</sup> and would have made a contemptuous face. In our region, our youth would have even derided *Vanetsi* [Armenians from Van] and *Mushetsi* [Armenians from Mus]

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<sup>1</sup> Isahak Terterian, *Haykakan Goyamarte : Mer Tseghi Darnaghet Antsiali Seghm Patmutiwne* (Tehran: Tparan "Modern", 1957), 193-200.

<sup>2</sup> Raffi (Hakob Melik-Hakobyan, 1835-1888) is one of the most influential ideologues of pan-Armenian nationalism. He was born in Salmast (Northwestern Iran) into a middle-class Iranian-Armenian family. He paid special attention to the conditions of the Armenians of Eastern Anatolia. He travelled across the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire in the late 1850s. He was a columnist for the prominent Armenian daily *Mshak* (Tbilisi). He wrote extensively, both fiction and non-fiction, on Armenian identity.

<sup>3</sup> *Hosos* (also used as *hoshos*) was originally used only for Istanbul Armenians in Eastern Armenian. It is still used among the Armenians of Caucasus to refer to speakers of Western Armenian. The term comes from the Western Armenian word *hos* (here), which is not a word in Eastern Armenian.

Armenian peasants as *kro*<sup>4</sup>; many among us believed that the *kro* was not Armenian but rather belonged to one of the Kurdish tribes.

The *Tadjkastantsi* Armenians [Ottoman Armenians] would have similar mistaken and cloudy ideas about us. Had one of us come across a *Tadjkastantsi* on the streets of Istanbul or another city, the latter would have looked at us with perplexity, pointing [us] out to a friend and uttering, “He is one of them.” They would have deemed us alienated from Armenian-ness. We had not been acquainted with each other; they seemed repellent to us, we seemed repellent to them.<sup>5</sup>

Even before the Ottoman Empire entered the war, the political scenery was characterized by an impatient yet nervous enthusiasm about the “great historical moment” which could put an end to the eternal nightmare of the Ottoman Armenians. Perhaps more importantly, many believed that it was a moment when the historical homeland could be liberated from its age-old captivity. In a commentary in the Tiflis-based liberal Armenian newspaper *Mshak* on September 25, 1914 Chalkhushian<sup>6</sup> wrote:

These are historical moments. Our route is covered with darkness and dim haze. Is the sun going to rise and cheer us up with a magnificent smile tomorrow or is it going to be endless night? ... Do we believe in resurrection? Or not? We have always been humiliated by the tricks of fate. For all that, it is now or never. Now or never! Take a look at Europe... [In] France, Germany, Britain, Russia, everywhere war has become inevitable; all at once the individual “I” disappeared. Disagreements, clashing ideas, animosities, quarrels, they all withered away and in everybody’s lips only one word whispers. And that magical word made peace between yesterday’s irreconcilable enemies. That word is homeland, homeland! At these heavy, hard moments of responsibility, it is the holy duty of Armenians of intellect to live, to breathe for this utterance. Our homeland is those six *vilayets* [Ottoman provinces in eastern Anatolia]

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<sup>4</sup> *Kro* comes from the Kurmanji word for boy *kur* and can be literally translated as hey boy! But the term is used especially in Turkey for people from eastern provinces and especially for the Kurds or for those who lack proper, “civilized” manners or intellect.

<sup>5</sup> Raffi, *Tachkahayk : Hayots Hartse* (Vienna: Mkhitarian Tparan, 1913), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Gr. CH’alkhushian. CH’alkhushian was a historian and jurist. During the ARF dominated 1<sup>st</sup> Republic he served as a diplomat. He wrote the Russian *Red Book* about the Armenian massacres during the world war. He also wrote on the history and situation of Ottoman Armenians –particularly on the Hamidian massacres and the pogrom in Adana. His final work analyzes the political and economic reasons for the collapse of the 1<sup>st</sup> Republic.

colored, flooded with our blood; they are ours, ours! For centuries our brothers have been awaiting us. See here, that moment has reached (us?). Now or never! Let's take the beautiful example of the small European nations and propagate it from morning till evening: Solidarity and mutual love. That solidarity and that mutual love are sufficient to overthrow our enemies and liberate our homeland – colored and flooded with our blood. As many as there are Armenian heroes resting in peace there are as many [more] Armenian heroes yet needed. Let those heroes fulfill their duties; we, who will stay here waiting impatiently for their news, have big dues to pay as well...From morning until evening we will propagate solidarity and mutual love to overthrow our enemies and resurrect our homeland, which will no more be colored and flooded by Armenian blood.<sup>7</sup>

Clearly – and in stark contrast with the perplexed and depressed mood in the Ottoman Empire – the outbreak of the war incited much enthusiasm and optimism among the Armenian intelligentsia and political circles in the Caucasus. The Tiflis-based Armenian newspapers *Mshak* and *Horizon* reported almost every day ceremonies at Armenian Churches, demonstrations and events in schools and public meetings at cultural and political institutions. These events brought together Armenians from all walks of life in support of the Russian mobilization against Germany, even before the Russian-Ottoman clashes broke out in early November 1914. The Armenian print media called upon the Armenians of Russia to unite, leave aside all internal divisions and commit all possible sacrifices for the victory of the Russian Armies.<sup>8</sup> The Catholicos in Echmiadzin, in an epistle on August 5, 1914, announced his plea for supporting the Russian force.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Mshak* n. 213, September 25, 1914, 3.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, see K. Vermishian's commentary in the Russian-language paper *Baku*, cited in *Mshak* n. 191, August 31, 4. Mermishian's article was echoed and followed up by the novelist and playwright A. Shirzanzade, in *Mshak* n. 194-5, September 3-4, 1914, 2, and also by H. Arakelian, *Mshak* n. 194, September 4, 1914.

<sup>9</sup> *Mshak* n. 188, August 17, 1914, 2-3.

These responses were not unexpected. As I discussed earlier, the Eastern Anatolian Reform debates led to a worldwide mobilization of Armenian political circles and community organizations in support of the Russian reform plan. After the European War began, it was a common view that, with a Russian victory over the Germans, the Armenians would likely regain what had been compromised during the reform talks – when the Germans championed the position of the Ottoman State – and perhaps even more. Hambardzum Arakelian,<sup>10</sup> the editor of *Mshak*, expressed this general view:

We have several times stated the opinion that, even if Turkey [Ottoman Empire] does declare war, a Russian victory against Germany will also have the inevitable consequence of resolving the Armenian question once and for all, because this question is a question of honor and prestige for Russia. Once this war is declared, it will settle all knotty international questions. It would be good if, by means of the war, the Turkish question – that is, the question of the survival of Turkey [Ottoman Empire] – is also solved. Whether there is a war [between Russia and Ottoman Empire] or not, the question of Eastern Anatolia and the Armenian-populated *vilayets* [provinces] will be settled in the future [peace] congress along with other highly contentious questions.<sup>11</sup>

Such excitement was visible everywhere. However, it was not simply a natural and unmediated outburst of nationalist emotions. The previous thirty-five years of turbulence surrounding the Armenian question had already set the ground for the popular *excitement*. In the course of these years, a new Armenian national identity – the political and cultural identity Raffi yearned for – had been carved out. This new

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<sup>10</sup> Hambardzum Arakelian (1855-1918) was born in Shushi. He completed his elementary education in Tabriz, Iran. In 1872 Arakelian started writing articles about the lives and conditions of Armenians in Iran for the papers *Meghu Hayastani* and *Mshak*. He briefly worked as a school director. He was among the founders of the Shushi chapter of the liberal bourgeois-leaning Armenian Benevolent Union. In 1892, following the death of Grigor Artsruni, he became one of the two chief editors of *Mshak*. The following year he travelled in the Ottoman Empire and wrote about his impressions in *Mshak*. Under his editorship, *Mshak* followed the reform debates closely and kept a very close eye on the situation of Ottoman Armenians in the eastern provinces.

<sup>11</sup> *Mshak* n. 200, September 11, 1914, 1.

sentiment was linked to increased intellectual curiosity in the politics, culture and wellbeing of the Ottoman Armenians; the radicalization of Russian Armenians in response to the colonization policies of Moscow and the ethnic riots in the Caucasus; and, perhaps most importantly, the distress at the series of massacres of the Ottoman Armenians. These factors, coupled with the expansion of Armenian guerrilla activities, created a new reality and a new pan-nationalist Armenian self, especially among the Armenians of southern Caucasia and Iran.

The concept of Ottoman Armenian victimhood was at the center of this process of identity formation. In this sense, pan-nationalist Armenian political identity was from the outset a hierarchical venture. At the bottom – their voices the least powerful and political position the weakest– were the Armenians of the historic homeland in the eastern Ottoman provinces. Ironically, they were the major inspirational source of the entire project. When the war started, it was a moment of duty and responsibility for the Armenian intellectuals in the Caucasus to take action for the liberation of the Ottoman Armenians, who could not do it for themselves.

At the same time, Armenian intelligentsia in the Caucasus consciously and enthusiastically shaped the ‘patriotic’ and militaristic fervor of the public. These intellectuals, artists, political leaders and clerics were excited by the presumed opportunities offered by the war and sought to raise Armenian consciousness among the ‘masses.’ Hovhannes Tumanian, one of the most renowned writers and poets of the Armenian language and the president of the Armenian Literary Association at the time,

wrote retrospectively that he and others were so absorbed by the war that “all of us had become war experts.”<sup>12</sup>

Tiflis was the capital of the Caucasus and the most important cultural center for Eastern Armenians. The Armenian newspapers there, *Mshak* and *Horizon* reflected the major common ground in the war time discourses of Armenian political groups and intellectuals; yet, they also measured the deep political, ideological and tactical disagreements and rivalries among Armenian political elite.

Between August and November 1914, Tiflis became the stage for nationalist fervor and political upheaval, with momentous consequences. For the Ottoman, Russian and Western states, the major Armenian political actor at the time was the ARF. In this chapter, I explore the party’s wartime political decision-making and how its choices and strategies in the Southern Caucasus played a crucial role in the political and military escalation in Eastern Anatolia. The ARF’s strategy was neither predetermined nor expected, nor was it fixed. Its policies and debates were formulated around Ottoman-Armenians’ (historical) victimization and their hopes for liberation as the central ideological and rhetorical frame, and these representations of Ottoman-Armenian victimhood changed vis-à-vis developments in the war and shifts in the party’s political stance.

I do not address the question of why the Armenian genocide happened; but, as the party’s audacious political maneuvers in joining forces with Tsarist Russia fuelled the paranoia and rage toward Armenians, I claim that the ARF’s role in the escalation is

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<sup>12</sup> Hovhannes Tumanyan, *Erkeri Liakatar Zhogovatsu : 10 Hatorov 5 Gegharvestakan Arjak* (Erevan: Haykakan SSH GA Hratarak., 1994), 403.

undeniable. In order to contextualize the party's wartime agenda within the Armenian political climate in the Southern Caucasus, I also analyze how intellectual elites in non-ARF circles formulated their agendas and discourses of victimhood. In particular, the *Mshak* newspaper was a general intellectual and political platform for Russian-Armenians. I show that on the Russian side of the border, as was the case in the Ottoman Empire, Armenian political circles were divided between pessimists and optimists, with the latter being dominant. My discussion will address variations within and across these two positions.

## 4.2 The *Mshak* Circle

*Mshak* was the oldest and highly influential Armenian newspaper in Tiflis.<sup>13</sup> As a platform for non-ARF authors, it did not have a singular stance but rather opened its pages to commentaries voicing diverse positions about the war and the Armenians. The editorials by its editor, H. Arakelian, promoted a strong nationalist position, calling for a radical and ultimate settlement of the Armenian question. To this end, Arakelian deemed the war a potential opportunity from the outset, and he did not hide his wish for a Turkish-Russian-war. At the same time, Arakelian repeatedly identified his position as Russian *Armenian* and made his calls, requests and claims exclusively on behalf of Russian Armenians:

Armenian people (*our word is about the Armenian people of Russia*) [Emphasis added] are interested in the current war: First, as citizens [of Russia]...Second,

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<sup>13</sup> *Mshak* was founded in 1872 in Tiflis by G. Artsruni, A. Kalantar, H. Arakelian and Leo. It remained a very influential political and cultural institution until it was closed in 1921. Although *Mshak* distanced itself from the revolutionaries in terms of its ideological liberalism and rejection of violent means, the newspaper pursued a nationalist line, paying special attention to the Armenian question in the Ottoman Empire.

because the victory of the Russian force will reverberate in our brother Turkish-Armenians' liberation; the second reason will become more palpable and urgent when Turkey declares war on Russia and the latter becomes obliged to enter Turkish-Armenia. Hence, as citizen and patriot [nationalist], the Russian-Armenian's entire sympathy and sincere compassion is on the side of the support and victory of the Russian Army.<sup>14</sup>

Arakelian's insistence on his Russian-Armenian-ness was a critique of the ARF and the *Azgayin* Bureau [the National Bureau], which claimed to represent the interests of all Armenians. It also reflected his concern about the war's potentially devastating consequences for Ottoman-Armenians:

...we should admit that we are not at all familiar with the aspirations and desires of the Turkish-Armenian community; in order to not subject them to new catastrophes we should not allow ourselves to speak in their names. Recently, several adventurers [referring to ARF members] have publicly presented themselves among us as representatives of Turkish-Armenians; those are merely self-proclaimed [representatives] to whom the Turkish-Armenian has never given any capacity to speak in his name; undoubtedly, in the future, they will be held gravely responsible and be pilloried in the history books. We should very well comprehend and recognize that any step, any action by us, Russian-Armenians, in the name of Turkish-Armenians, can—by giving way to threat of new massacres, carnage and calamities—turn disastrous for them. Therefore we [Russian Armenians] have to work on this question in the most careful fashion, as opposed to erratically and according to the mood of the moment. We Russian-Armenians know only what we need to do; we are clearly convinced that the cause of our Turkish-Armenian brothers will be defended and will succeed when the Russian power comes out victorious. Therefore, we need to support that victory by all means.<sup>15</sup>

Arakelian also suggested that, because of the unfavorable circumstances, it would not be possible to understand the opinion of the "Turkish-Armenian" community through a "national conference or referendum." Hence, he concluded, "it leaves the leading Armenian circles and newspapers [of Caucasus/Russia] to carry the burden of

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<sup>14</sup> *Mshak* n. 205, September 17, 1914, 1.

<sup>15</sup> *Mshak* n. 222, October 4, 1914, 1.

elaborating the problem [i.e., what needs to be done and demanded], with all its details and sides.”<sup>16</sup>

For this purpose, Arakelian, along with other columnists and commentators in *Mshak* and *Baku* such as Shirvanzade,<sup>17</sup> Vermishian<sup>18</sup> and Sofia Daniel-Bek,<sup>19</sup> persistently called different political groups and segments of the Russian Armenian community to unite around patriotic ideals. Arakelian suggested that an immediate national conference, albeit with the participation of Russian Armenians only, was imperative to clarify Armenian demands (for Ottoman Armenia(ns)).<sup>20</sup>

Arakelian was deeply concerned about the ambiguity and confusion of the situation and what liberating Ottoman-Armenians meant for various Russian and Armenian circles. In reviewing Russian newspapers' commentaries on the Armenian question and the war, he observed that “progressive [Russian] newspapers” like *Russkoe Slovo* and *Russkii Vid* claimed that autonomy and political liberty should be given to ‘Turkish-Armenia’ “under strong guarantees from Russia.” By contrast, *Novoe Vremya* suggested that, although “Russia should liberate Armenia from the Turkish yoke, it finds it too early to talk about the future administrative organization of it.” For its part, the Tiflis-based *Kavkaskoe Slovo* did not explicitly state its position but merely argued that the question of Turkish-Armenia was linked to the question of the straits.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Mshak* n. 249, November 5, 1914, 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Mshak* n. 194, September 3, 1914, 2.

<sup>18</sup> An Armenian translation of K. Vermishian's article “Armenians and the War” that originally appeared in *Baku* can be found at *Mshak* n. 192, August 31, 1914, 2-3.

<sup>19</sup> *Mshak* n. 196, September 5, 1914, 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Mshak* n. 233, October 16, 1914, 1.

<sup>21</sup> *Mshak* n. 245, October 30, 1914, 1.

Aware that the ambiguity about how to solve the Armenian question might lead to harmful consequences, Arakelian emphasized the necessity of specifying explicit Armenian national aspirations and demands regarding the political future of *Ottoman Armenia*.<sup>22</sup> He called for the establishment of an all-Armenian body to elaborate the meaning of autonomy, Russia's role in it, and whether the Armenian side should demand annexation.<sup>23</sup>

Arakelian strongly believed that "only Russian forces can secure the liberation of much-suffered Armenia and end the martyrdom of the Turkish Armenian community."<sup>24</sup> Before the Ottoman-Russian war began the common opinion and hope was that Russia would defeat Germany and impose reforms in the eastern provinces. But, when the Ottoman Empire attacked Russia, Arakelian reframed his wish and called for the destruction and collapse of 'Turkey' [Ottoman rule]:

The time has reached to put an end to the Turkish rule and liberate many cultural [minorities], Christian races and communities from its repulsive yoke. Today Turkey is not only the enemy of Russia but also the entire civilized world. And may god strengthen Russia's hands to destroy it and put an end to its rule in Europe and in Asia.<sup>25</sup>

Arakelian continued to repeat his major demand, "autonomy for Armenia," and, at the same time, more forcefully emphasized that this autonomy had to be "under Russian protection."<sup>26</sup> Arakelian deemed the current war as a way to realize the missed

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.; See also Arakelian's article "What Should We Demand II," in *Mshak* n. 222, October 4, 1914, 1.

<sup>23</sup> *Mshak* n. 219, October 1, 1914, 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Mshak* n. 215, September 27, 1914, 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Mshak* n. 235, October 18, 1914, 1.

<sup>26</sup> *Mshak* n. 245, October 30, 1914, 1.

opportunity of the 1877-78 conflict between the two empires.<sup>27</sup> He regretfully remarked that “had Russia [in the 1877-78 war] occupied Turkish-Armenia and united it with Russian Armenia, a question called the Armenian Question would not have existed.”<sup>28</sup> Arakelian hoped Russia would not repeat the same mistake. However, Arakelian’s description of the Armenian political status after the Ottoman Empire’s anticipated demise was closer to territorial-sovereignty than autonomy:

Turkey [Ottoman Empire] is condemned to collapse; the nations that compose it should organize independently and should lead their [own] national life. There is, among those nations, the Armenian nation, too; with its past, its history, and the features of its civilization, it is worth living its independent life.<sup>29</sup>

Notwithstanding his emphasis on ‘independence’ and separate ‘national life’, Arakelian also believed that Armenians needed to compromise and seek consensus with the Muslim elements; he acknowledged that Muslims held the demographic majority in the Ottoman eastern provinces.<sup>30</sup> Besides this example, Arakelian often advocated other ideas which were not easy to reconcile, even contradictory. He claimed that the Turkish government would persecute its Armenian subjects no matter what, but he also persistently warned the Armenian public against taking political steps that might jeopardize the wellbeing of Ottoman Armenians.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, along with claiming that Russian-Armenians should shy away from speaking in the name of Ottoman Armenians, he also argued that the former should help the latter by providing means of

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<sup>27</sup> *Mshak* n. 215, September 27, 1914, 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Mshak* n. 219, October 1, 1914, 1.

<sup>29</sup> *Mshak* n. 219, October 1, 1914, 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Mshak* n. 222, October 4, 1914, 1.

<sup>31</sup> *Mshak* n. 255, November 11, 1914, 1.

*self*-defense [without specifying how].<sup>32</sup> On this issue, Arakelian harshly critiqued the ARF for exploiting the matter of Ottoman-Armenia self-defense for political interests.<sup>33</sup> Arakelian favored the idea of undrafted Russian Armenian youth signing up as volunteers for the Russian army;<sup>34</sup> but he was against the ARF –or the National Bureau, in the party’s orbit—controlling, much less leading, such a movement.

The notion of Ottoman Armenian victimhood was at the core of the Armenian national identity, and it bound together Armenian communities across the globe. Yet this process of political identity formation also presumed and created hierarchies among the Armenian communities, at the bottom of which were the Armenians of eastern Anatolia — exoticized, romanticized and represented, first and foremost, as objects of suffering, death, oppression and martyrdom. They were deprived of legitimate political agency. Since the 1880’s, *Mshak*’s Arakelian was both a producer and consumer of this process .

The representation of Turkish Armenian victimhood was not singular or static. During the early years of the Ottoman Empire’s constitutional regime, the historical “martyrdom” discourse abated in a climate of hopefulness. However, in the course of the reform debates, the notion of victimhood gained new currency in the political arena. The war, in turn, brought about two opposing interpretations of Armenian victimhood. There were those who deemed the war a prelude to another catastrophe and hence advocated moderation, caution and passivity; others valued the opportunities of the war

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<sup>32</sup> *Mshak* n. 205, September 17, 1914, 1.

<sup>33</sup> *Mshak* n. 215, September 27, 1914, 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Mshak* n. 205, September 17, 1914, 1.

over the threats and strived to utilize this 'historical moment' to put an end to the "centuries- long" suffering of the Ottoman Armenians. Arakelian – and the *Mshak* in general – tended to follow the second view.

Another commentator, writing under the pseudonym Ankakh, advocated a stance very close to Arakelian's. He concurred that a Russian victory held hope for Armenian liberation. But, unlike Arakelian, he did not assume that an Entente or Russian victory would inevitably bring about the settlement of the Armenian question. If an Ottoman-Russian war broke out, he cautioned about alternative scenarios:

In that case [if the Russians cross the border and occupy Ottoman-Armenia] what we Armenians need to do is very understandable and clear. But if today it is not part of the Russian military tactics to declare war on Turkey and cross to the other side of the border, then [in that case] developing the correct line of action is something to seriously ponder.<sup>35</sup>

Ankakh did believe that a Russian-Turkish war was virtually inevitable. He proposed that Ottoman-Armenians should organize self-defense, but a non-aggressive self-defense based on common sense and *self-help*. He deemed it crucial that Ottoman Armenians react utilizing only their own means ; thus, he welcomed the idea of undrafted Russian-Armenian youth signing up as volunteers for the Russian Army. But Ankakh insisted that those volunteer units should be part of the Russian Army and not have their own command structure. The units should avoid any excessive or arbitrary action, as he was concerned that an "unbidden and inconvenient intervention" of

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<sup>35</sup> *Mshak* n. 221, October 3, 1914, 1.

Russian Armenians could “add insult to injury” – in other words, provoke Ottoman reprisals against the vulnerable Ottoman-Armenian population.<sup>36</sup>

A. H. Muradian, another *Mshak* columnist, invited the Armenian public to moderation and realism. In his commentaries, Muradian called on Armenian political circles and community leaders not to incite the public with futile hopes, raise expectations and lose sight of reality when advancing demands. Diverging from Arakelian’s position, Muradian did not see the question of speaking on behalf of Russian or Ottoman Armenians as a major issue. He boldly emphasized that settling the Armenian question was beyond the capacity of either Russian or Ottoman-Armenian communities and revolutionary organizations. Further, he deemed the ARF hopes of receiving the great powers’ support not only fruitless but also dangerous; according to him, such ‘daring’ acts had been the pretext for previous massacres of Armenians:

True that “there are moments in history when we can be daring.” There are occurrences which are not repeated even once a century. To utilize the means that historic circumstances provide is valuable wisdom. ... [But] Aside from not having come across such moments when the Armenian has had the possibility of being daring, several Armenian movements [of the past] were entirely inappropriate. It is the consequence of such inappropriate movements that the great powers had Abdulhamid sign the memorandum, which was followed by Armenian massacres<sup>37</sup> in the countryside. Later, there was the incident of *Banque Ottomane*,<sup>38</sup> which was succeeded by massacres in Istanbul. I have been advocating—and today I am of the opinion—that there should be congruence between our demands and political conditions. Otherwise, not only our ‘big’ demands will not be met, but also they might have disastrous consequences. It is one thing to be genuine in expressing a wish and another to resort to activities to

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<sup>36</sup> *Mshak* n. 222, October 4, 1914, 1.

<sup>37</sup> The author is referring to the Armenian pogroms of 1894-96 which resulted in the destruction of many Armenian communities and hundreds of thousands of casualties.

<sup>38</sup> The famous takeover of the *Banque Ottomane* headquarters in Istanbul by a group of ARF militants

realize it.<sup>39</sup>

In response to calls for Armenians to make sacrifices — on behalf of the Entente and more specifically Russia — for the liberation of *Turkish-Armenia*, Muradian wrote that, when the international “political situation is shaped such that it is necessary to settle the Armenian question,” it would be solved “regardless of whether we have sacrificed much or little.”<sup>40</sup> Muradian’s stance was a minimalist position; he believed that the Ottoman Armenians could not settle the Armenian question with their own forces.<sup>41</sup> Muradian also felt that other Armenian efforts would not have any decisive impact, either. In his point of view, Armenian agency in general was extremely limited; its misuse, he suggested, could potentially add another page to the history of the Ottoman Armenian victimization.

The *Mshak*, with its open-ended editorial policy, also published several commentaries and statements that took a zealous militarist-organic nationalist stance. These writings commonly employed a very emotionally agitated tone. Such authors trivialized the “costs” of rash action to Ottoman-Armenians and instead constructed an idea of trans-historical victimhood that would be overcome by joining the war and creating a ‘bright future’ for Armenians. Particularly interesting in such discursive constructions was the erasure of any temporal-spatial specificity of Ottoman-Armenian suffering and replacing it with a centuries-long suffering under the ‘Turkish yoke.’ Historical revanchism was another common theme in these feverishly nationalist

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<sup>39</sup> *Mshak* n. 255, November 11, 1914, 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Mshak* n. 256, November 12, 1914, 2.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

formulations. Finally, such narratives were inherently pan-Armenian; the subject positions of the author and the victim were often indistinguishable, no matter the major historical and geographical differences across the Armenian diaspora. These voices were heard more loudly and more often after the Ottoman-Russian War began. A frequent contributor to *Mshak*, Sofia Daniel-Bek, wrote:

The time has come. The tense waiting mode has ended. We are in war against Turkey. It is a great and [also] decisive moment. We are standing against our centuries-long, historic enemy, who has, like a leech, sucked Armenian's blood, destroyed Armenian's home, trampled Armenian's honor. We are standing against our sworn enemy. Full of fiery revenge and limitless anger. The moment of vengeance has arrived. We have suffered much from the Turkish yoke; we have shed much blood and tears; we have sacrificed hundreds of thousands of victims; every inch of Turkish-Armenia's soil has been dyed with Armenian blood, flooded by Armenian tears. The bloodless Armenians fought many preternatural fights to destroy the villainous slavery, but .... We were lonely and weak. Now circumstances have changed, the mighty Russian army is our supporter. The hour of liberation, the moment of freedom of Turkish Armenians has been reached. Standing in front of the Armenian world is a matter of "to be or not to be." [it is] now or never! To die or to live with honor! Our fight is a fight of principles and [it is] fatal. We are fighting in the name of ideas, which we have caressed in the course of decades; we are fighting in the name of rights, freedom and civilization; in that sacred fight we will stretch all our strength; we will stand up, turning into one man, one soul; all of us without division -- woman and man, wealthy and poor -- we will stretch our physical, material and spiritual strength. We will sacrifice everything for that sublime cause: our life, our material means, and we will be victorious. We have to be victorious. We believe in the victory of the Russian force, we believe in the creation of "free Dardanelles" and "free Armenia."<sup>42</sup>

An unlimited optimism about creating a new life and a new future for Armenians – in particular the Ottoman Armenians—was perhaps the underlying sentiment propelling such endorsements of Armenians joining the Russian side. In its

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<sup>42</sup> *Mshak* n. 238, October 22, 1914, 2.

call to the Armenians of Moscow, the Armenian Committee of Moscow and Refugee Association stated:

The end of the Bacchanalia of iron and blood has come; freedom and a bright future will succeed these. Under the mandate of Russia, the liberator of the oppressed peoples of the east, a new dawn is rising on the other side of Ararat's peak, shining brightly and with its cheerful light bearing good news of a new life to Armenian people. We Armenians of Moscow, as children of our nation, as citizens of great Russia, will fulfill our duties to the end. Let's gather today at the church to pray to god for the victory of the heroes who are going to war front. Let's fulfill those [duties] that the current historic moment obliges us.<sup>43</sup>

The most remarkable writings in this militarist-nationalist thread are those which forecast or presume the very destruction of the Ottoman-Armenians as a consequence of the war and the final battle of their liberation. In an article which appeared originally in *Russkii Vid*, the renowned historian, art critic and writer, Alekseï Jivelekian, commented:

In the current war being fought against Turkey, Armenians should play a major role. This perhaps will be *the gravest ordeal* yet to which this long-suffering people –which has carried the torch of culture in the near east for 3,000 years –will have to bear. But this ordeal will be the last. ... All this [referring to the failure of settling the Armenian question through political means since the 1877-78 Ottoman-Russian war] created the persuasion among the Armenians that without the use of force they will never reach a good future. *That is why the emerging Turkish-Russian war is a holy war for Armenians.* ... Thanks to Armenians, Russians will feel as if they are in their homeland, [while fighting] in an enemy country. Yet Turks, on the contrary, fighting on their own land, will feel like they are in an enemy country. *This requires huge sacrifice from Armenia such as it [Armenia] has never endured before, because this time, Turks, with German guidance, will be merciless and will (re)launch Abdulhamid's recipe of extermination.* Perhaps more misery will fall on Armenia than Poland or Belgium. But *Armenians are obliged to all these sacrifices.* The future that awaits them –free political existence under the protection of Russia –is worth all sacrifices [Emphasis added].<sup>44</sup>

What is peculiar to this thread is what might be called the banalization of the need for Ottoman Armenian sacrifice. This essentialized understanding of Ottoman

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<sup>43</sup> *Mshak* n. 241, October 25, 1914, 1.

<sup>44</sup> *Mshak* n. 245, October 30, 1914, 1.

Armenian victimhood erases agency, as if their collective suffering was ordained by fate and duty. Although Jivelekian believed the war –the last game of Armenian’s *fate*— would subject the Ottoman-Armenian people to an unprecedented calamity, he still celebrated and sanctified the war and the obligatory Armenian sacrifice. It was as if the Ottoman-Armenians were the sacrificial victims who could be killed to redeem the larger Armenian cause. In such commentaries (which I will discuss in greater detail in following sections), the destruction of Ottoman-Armenians, described as *sacrifice*, is portrayed as the only and inevitable means of their liberation from suffering. The sacrifice of Armenians in Turkey became acceptable and even celebrated insofar as it was depicted as part of the “holy” cause. In other words, these authors ironically — and paradoxically — saw the *liberation* of the Ottoman Armenian subject in its *destruction*.

In the war’s early months, David Ter-Danielian offered a unique historical perspective in the *Mshak* circle, one that did not portray the Ottoman Armenian’s collective suffering as given or necessary. The author, who used the pseudonym D. Ananun (literally “nameless” or “anonymous”) in his historical commentary series “Armenian Community Building” (*Hayeri Havakume*), conducted a comparative, critical analysis of Armenian collective identity formation in Russia and in the Ottoman Empire. He argued, drawing primarily on Stepanos Nazarian’s writings, that ever since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Russian-Armenian thinking about building an Armenian collectivity or unity had prioritized the creation of a ‘spiritual (cultural) vessel’ (*hokegan anot’*) rather than a political one.

According to Ananun, the Russian-Armenians had shied away from seeking a 'political vessel' (*kaghakagan anot'*) not because they disagreed that it would provide a large-scale basis for the existence of the Armenian nation, but rather because they believed that such an effort would be futile given the existing political conditions. Hence, Russian-Armenian intellectuals advocated the adoption of a Russian political identity and focused on culture, religion and language -- the "spiritual vessel" -- as the cement of Armenian collective identity. Ananun suggested that even Russian-Armenian revolutionaries recognized that a "political vessel" for Armenians was not viable and therefore never advocated an exclusively Armenian political entity or separatism.<sup>45</sup>

In a subsequent commentary, Ananun turned to Ottoman Armenians. This time he targeted the presumed cultural and political hierarchy of the Russian over the Ottoman Armenians, so taken for granted among the intelligentsia in the Caucasus. Ananun wondered if Turkish-Armenians had contemplated or wanted "nation building" themselves, or, as sections of the Russian-Armenian intelligentsia 'swaggeringly' insisted, if the idea of Turkish-Armenian community building had been exported to the "homeland" (*yerkir*) by the Russian Armenian intellectuals. He pointed out that while Stepanos Nazarian was debating the two routes to national unity -- "spiritual vessel" or "political vessel" -- in Moscow, "progressive Turkish-Armenian intellectuals [in Istanbul] were drafting the "[Armenian] National Constitution," which would provide political and legal grounds for Armenian cultural autonomy.

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<sup>45</sup> *Mshak* n. 234, October 17, 1914, 3.

The ordinance, eventually enacted in 1863, recognized Ottoman-Armenians as an autonomous entity that would be administered by a body (assembly) they create. In accordance with this ordinance, the state would leave mandates concerning cultural matters to that body. Ananun deduced that, “considering its form and legal status, the National Constitution of Turkish-Armenians was such a huge achievement that *Russian-Armenians could not even dream about*. [Emphasis added]”<sup>46</sup> Challenging the assumption that Russian-Armenians were in the vanguard, Ananun flipped the tables to argue that the Ottoman-Armenians had taken a far greater role in determining their own fate than other commentators in the Caucasus and Russia allowed.

After discussing how Turkish-Armenian leaders effectively utilized the 1863 ordinance, despite its shortcomings, for Armenian community building, Ananun returns to the initial question:

After all this, is it possible to say either that the idea of Turkish-Armenian community building has been imported [by Ottoman Armenians] from Russian-Armenian intellectuals, or that the Turkish-Armenian has always followed a slave-like, submissive path and that it was the external forces who inspired in them the feeling of dignity? We think not. The Turkish-Armenian has embraced his state’s spirit and created respectable institutions through which he looked to secure his national self-dependence [autonomy]. Advice-givers from the outside [Russian Armenians and the great powers], diverted him from [his] institutional work and put his future through grave ordeals. Those ordeals have never come to an end. [Today] the cause of Turkish-Armenians is once again brought to the public agenda in the name of Armenian community building; [they] are murmuring various “emancipatory” advice into the Turkish-Armenians’ ear; they are talking about a common national policy and proposing the demand of a separate “political vessel.” But does the current situation of Turkish-Armenians allow them to be infatuated with the prospect of a “political vessel?” Or the demand of a “spiritual vessel,” –that continues to be the only smart and perfectly practical demand, at the same time making more unified Armenian community

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<sup>46</sup> *Mshak* n. 235, October 18, 1914, 3.

building possible.<sup>47</sup>

In a final commentary, Ananun turned to the spatial and demographic makeup of Ottoman-Armenian society, politics, and culture. He rejected the new version of “political vessel” as a means of creating an Armenian territorial entity in the eastern Anatolian provinces, described by advocates as “[Ottoman-Armenians] taking their place under the sun.” Ananun argued that such a project, aside from being utopian, was also at odds with the Ottoman Armenian demographic and territorial reality and with the very interests of Ottoman Armenians — who were spread all over the empire. This was particularly the case for the bourgeoisie and educated classes of the Armenian community. Ananun asserted that -- as in Greece where the creation of a Greek state did not end the Greek problem but rather exacerbated it — creating a political-territorial entity for Armenians would not settle the Armenian question in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>48</sup> Highlighting that nation building is not a once-and-for-all act but rather a continuous project, Ananun put it this way:

We assume that Turkey [after the war] will continue to exist and Armenians will continue to be its citizens. There [in Turkey] the issue of Armenian community building will continue to be a matter to be occupied with. And Armenians will be concerned with creating unhampered progress for their “spiritual vessels,” which means they will embrace the demand of national-cultural self-dependency.<sup>49</sup>

This series was written as a critique of the political discourse of the ARF and the National Bureau, but Ananun never directly addressed these Armenian political groups. However, in another two-part commentary called “Unlimited Narrow-Mindedness: the

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<sup>47</sup> *Mshak* n. 235, October 18, 1914, 3.

<sup>48</sup> *Mshak* n. 236, October 19, 1914, 3.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

Hypocritical Performance of *Arew*,” he did openly address the ARF newspaper in Baku. Ananun emphasized that, to avoid mistakes that would lead the Armenian nation to grave losses, it was necessary that Armenian efforts be determined according to *collective will* rather than the narrower perspectives of certain individuals or political party agendas.

Ananun seconded Arakelian’s and many other non-ARF intellectuals’ call for an immediate convention of an all-Armenian congress. He admitted that, because of the unfavorable conditions of the war, such a congress would not achieve an ideal representation of all Armenians; however, regardless of its limitations, the congress would still be “more capable to speak and take action in the name of Armenians than any [single] Armenian group.”<sup>50</sup> Ananun harshly criticized the pro-ARF authors’ foot-dragging about this proposal; he condemned *Arew*’s “narrow-mindedness” which, according to him, was also a “cunningness” that implied, “National Congress, yes, certainly, but we will be the ones electing and being elected; yes to the expression of collective will, but that will should be ours.”<sup>51</sup>

In the second half of the commentary, Ananun explored the Russian-Armenian intellectuals’ vision of the Ottoman and Russian empires. He remarks that, beginning in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, *conservatives*<sup>52</sup> deemed the tremendous pro-Russian feelings of Russian-Armenians to be a threat to the survival of a separate Armenian identity; they

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<sup>50</sup> *Mshak* n. 211, September 23, 1914, 1.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> An influential Russian-Armenian intellectual and cultural movement advocated by Petros Shanshian, Petros Simeonyants and other writers in the journals *Pordz* and *Arzagank* in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

saw the Armenian future as a nation of Ottoman-Armenians only. The 1877-78 war also led the Russian-Armenian public to embrace the idea that an Armenian renaissance would be in the Ottoman Empire. Later, Russian-Armenian democrats incorporated these conservative ideas into their revolutionary tactics, which the conservatives firmly rejected.<sup>53</sup> Comparing these two groups and linking their story to current debates,

Ananun writes:

*Conservatives* knew one thing which revolutionaries remained unaware of until the end: Armenians, as a merchant-industrialist community and as bureaucrats, were an extremely indispensable element for Turkey. The *conservatives*, perhaps unrealistically, expected and believed that Turkey could be capable of coming out of its Asiatic shell and embrace the contemporary kernel and form through its collaboration with Armenians. For them, Turkey in the future might be another Austria [in terms of tolerance to minorities and level of development]. But Armenian Revolutionary movements' reliance on foreign intervention on behalf of Armenians wrecked the *conservatives'* program. [Thereafter] the idea of a Turkish-Armenian rapprochement was refused for decades and [only] after the 1908 July [Constitutional] revolution did debates begin once again for that [rapprochement]; the type of consequences that the Turkish-Armenian rapprochement issue has brought about are obvious to everyone today, and it is not a secret that the national barrier has taken an awful shape in Turkey today. Turkish-Armenians and those who speak on their behalf have always repeated that they do not intend to secede from Turkey, that [they deemed] reform in [Turkish] Armenia a general public improvement; this position helped bring about good-will toward the Armenian question among certain serious-mindedly and bureaucratically connected groups. But it appears that Armenians have not been sincere in their assurances—[given the claim] that Turkey as a political entity cannot not be deemed a tolerable protector. The Russian-Armenian newspaper *Arew*, which has turned itself to pleasing Turkish Armenians, is advancing this opinion. ... [in response to that opinion and *Arew's* statement that "we cannot pretend that we have received any blessing from foreign [Ottoman] rule":] Is it that we have desired foreign [Ottoman, Russian or Iranian] rule with our own will? Or is it that we have had the means of seceding from that rule? And finally, do we have the means of shaking off that [Ottoman] rule today? The greatest political wisdom is that political leaders of a people tell them what exists; illusions disappear, facts remain. The *Arew* is evading the factual situation; it is

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<sup>53</sup> *Mshak* n. 219, October 1, 1914, 3.

building illusionary castles for the naïve Armenian reader. This situation might advance unrealizable fantasies which might be followed by mindless deeds. The politics of incitement, which might open the door of disaster for Armenians, must be avoided.<sup>54</sup>

The ARF columnists, enraged by Ananun's commentaries in *Mshak*, responded with very harshly worded editorials in the pro-ARF publication *Horizon*. These anonymous columnists accused Ananun –whom they labeled as “extreme leftist” (because of Ananun's advocacy of Marxism and his affiliation with the Hnchak Party)— and others calling for a national congress of either being “short-witted and unfamiliar with our reality,” or “feigning and desiring to abort the crucial effort for the *self-defense* of Armenian people through conspiratorial methods.”<sup>55</sup>

Ananun responded to these editorials in an article on October 3, 1914. Reacting to the specific charges about his call for a national congress and the matter of *self-defense*, he poignantly described his motive and concern: “may *self-defense* [*inknapashtpanutiwn*]<sup>56</sup> not turn into suicide.”<sup>57</sup>

I have paid special attention to David Ananun's writings in *Mshak* for several reasons. First, Ananun rejected the idea of a single and sublime Armenian national ideal or interest. On the contrary, Ananun's historical analysis boldly underlined how there had always been multiple projects and positions among Armenian intelligentsia regarding the ways of building Armenian community. He acknowledged the mutual influence of Ottoman and Russian Armenian intellectuals, but he also insisted that the

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> *Horizon* n. 212, September 26, 1.

<sup>56</sup> *Inknashtpanutiwn* is the Armenian word for suicide, literally meaning self-killing.

<sup>57</sup> *Mshak* n. 221, October 3, 1914, 3

two groups had distinctive and not necessarily overlapping political, cultural and historical trajectories.

Finally, Ananun emphasized the shifting nature of the political interaction between Ottoman and Russian states and their respective Armenian communities. Indeed — and perhaps most importantly — Ananun’s nuanced historical analysis went beyond a Manichean, essentialized and monolithic portrayal of collective actors. In his account, Ottoman and Russian-Armenians, revolutionaries, the Ottoman and Russian Empires and others involved in the conflict were all dynamic subjects. Consequently, he saw the Ottoman-Armenians not as *eternal victims* living under the Turkish (or Muslim) yoke, nor their traumatic experiences inevitable fate or historical destiny, but rather as extreme events in the making of which both ‘*the Turk*’ and other actors, especially Armenian revolutionaries, played at least circumstantial roles.

One might criticize Ananun for underemphasizing the political agendas and responsibility of the Ottoman state for the oppression of its Armenian population. I would argue, however, that this was not because he underestimated the potential for Ottoman atrocities, but because he deemed it more crucial, at that moment, to highlight how the stance of Armenian political actors could have had a grave impact on and helped worsen the conflict.

Ananun’s narrative of Ottoman-Armenian suffering does not render Armenian victimhood and agency as antonyms; he acknowledges that Armenian nation-building projects have had structural limitations due to political, spatio-demographic, cultural and military conditions. Yet he suggests that those structural obstacles did not make the

agency of Armenian community builders and political movements meaningless; the latter, Ananun argued, have had momentous impact in steering their communities both toward economic and political empowerment and cultural renaissance, and into calamities and disasters.

Concerned about the short-sightedness in political circles — especially in the ARF — once the war broke out, Ananun persistently underscored that Armenian political leaders should keep the longer-term structural limitations and possibilities of Armenian communities in mind. Furthermore, he cautioned that political actors should proceed maturely and thoughtfully, incorporating the multiple views and interests that exist, and with a full awareness of the grave responsibility and potential dangers of their decisions. He proposed a line of action guided by a more nuanced historical view that does not respond to the perceived uniqueness of the moment. However, Ananun also pointed to historical examples that showed how Armenian agency and the choices they made led to real consequences for the Armenian people, for better or worse. Given the war conditions, he cautioned that fantasies and naïve and narrow-minded calculations could result in “mindless deeds” with potentially catastrophic implications.

### **4.3 The *Horizon Circle* and the ARF’s War Games**

History is, of course, replete with ironies. Who could have imagined by June 1914, after reading the editorial “Endless Illusions,” in *Droschak’s* (the ARF’s official journal) May-June 1914 issue, that only a few months later the ARF would undertake its most ambitious political campaign to organize fighters to join the Tsar’s armies in hopes of liberating the *Armenians of the homeland*, its parlance for the Ottoman-Armenians. It is

not any less ironic that the party would join forces with its long-standing ideological and political rivals – the less-appealing elements among the Armenian bourgeoisie and conservative clerics – in this enterprise. In the editorial “Endless Illusions,” the ARF editors employed their usual sarcastic tone:

This [the idea that Russia has committed itself to the Armenian cause] was particularly prevalent out of the mouths of our *moderate* and *cautious* compatriots. And their *insightful* ideologues were naively rolling off the presses “Russia!,” “[our] uncle,” “our historical protector,” “our traditional defender.” And they were ready to declare skeptics –who were not much tempted by the “uncle’s” protection or his real motives— as offenders and traitors. ... After all these [referring to inconsistent and, from their point of view, unsatisfactory policies of Russia regarding the reform plan] *it would be a terrible naiveté to hope that Russia intends to ... bring reforms and peace to [Ottoman] Armenia*[Emphasis added]; the minister [of foreign affairs] Sazanov’s latest speech in the Duma, which was interwoven with contradictions, does not at all alleviate our agony and we involuntarily recall our unforgettable Pressensé’s<sup>58</sup> last words, which he sent us from his hospital room before his death: “Be wary that the very state, which today presents itself as a friend and an advocate of your nation’s cause, may tomorrow conspire a bloodshed in Turkish-Armenia in order to advance its expansionist plans. I do not insist that this is going to happen for certain, but it may. Be prepared!” *It is extreme naiveté, therefore, to comfort the people by investing hopes in the Turks’ commonsense and the Russians’ Armenophilic stance* [Emphasis added].<sup>59</sup>

In his September 17, 1914 editorial H. Arakelian voiced a cynical reminder that, until only a few years ago, the ARF had been collaborating with the Young Turks and propagating *Ottomanism* (the idea of the unity of all *millets* of the empire regardless of religious and ethnic origins) among the Ottoman Armenian public. Referring to the article “Endless Illusions,” Arakelian sarcastically pointed out this inconsistency:

Only 2-3 months ago ARF’s journal *Droschak* published an article opposing Russian policy and the [Russian] government concerning the Armenian reform

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<sup>58</sup> Francis de Pressensé (1853-1914), French socialist politician and man of letters.

<sup>59</sup> *Droschak* n. 5-6(240), May-June 1914; an abridged version of the article can be found in Lazian, *Hayastan Ew Hay Date Hayewrus Haraberutiwnneru Loysin Tak*, 166-68.

plan; but now, after the European war broke out, it has turned toward *Russophilia* [*rusasirutiwon*; emphasis added], which we salute wholeheartedly, as a confession and [expression of] regret by this party that its anti-Russian line was entirely wrong and reprehensible.<sup>60</sup>

Indeed, the article “Endless Illusions,” was not the only reason to label the ARF’s *Russophilia*, to borrow Arakelian’s term, ironic. After all, when the ARF was rejoicing in the honeymoon of the Young Turk revolution and enjoying the political opportunities the new regime provided it in the Ottoman Empire, the party had been simultaneously under heavy police surveillance in Russia. The Russian government began to keep a closer and more watchful eye on the ARF –the major Armenian revolutionary movement in Russia—particularly after the constitutional revolutions in Iran (1906) and Ottoman Empire (1908), which the latter diligently supported. It launched an empire-wide persecution of the party and many of its operatives, including the highest ranking leaders, were arrested. Others fled to the Ottoman Empire to avoid arrest and persecution.

Perhaps as an early hint of the Russian government’s renewed interest in the Armenian Question,<sup>61</sup> only 52 of the 160 accused ARF members were sentenced to imprisonment or exile after the 1912 Leizhin trials. Nevertheless, as of August 1914, many of those convicted were still serving time. Only when the war began were they released, after Catholicos sent a petition, attached with a list of 180 names,<sup>62</sup> to the

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<sup>60</sup>Mshak n. 205, September 17, 1914, 1.

<sup>61</sup> Varandian, H.H. *Dashnaktsutian Patmutiwon*, 116-32; Dasnabedian, *History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Dashnaktsutiun, 1890-1924*, 93-95.

<sup>62</sup> Lazian, *Hayastan Ew Hay Date Hayewrus Haraberutiwnneru Loysin Tak*, 170-73.

viceroys Varantskov-Dashkov. After their release, the ARF militants took their place in the volunteer units alongside the Russian Armies.

The ARF was also a pan-Armenian organization, and it was no secret that the Russian Empire, with a sizeable Armenian population in the southern Caucasus bordering Ottoman Armenia, had not been friendly to pan-Armenian revolutionary movements since the early 1890's. The ARF's ideological stance and consequent activities in Russia further added to the impression that *russophilia* conflicted with the party's political history and position. The ARF, at least discursively, adhered to a socialist worldview. A member of Socialist International, the ARF initiated discussions with the Polish socialist parties regarding a joint struggle against Tsarist Russia. At the 6<sup>th</sup> ARF World Congress in 1909, the delegates unanimously expressed their wish for an alliance of different "socialist and revolutionary factions" in the common fight against the Russian regime.<sup>63</sup>

As the war against the Ottoman Empire broke out, the old animosity with the ARF ceased to matter to Russian officials. They released party members from prison and gave them arms, military rank and even recognition. For many ARF leaders, such as Khatisian, "a [more] important issue, that is the liberation of Ottoman-Armenia," warranted the alliance with Russia.<sup>64</sup> But how did the party, especially its leaders in Tiflis, accomplish and justify their swift and sharp "turn toward *russophilia*"? In what ways did their changing perspectives on the Armenian Question influence this unexpected turn?

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<sup>63</sup> Varandian, H.H. *Dashnaktsutian Patmutiwn*, 111.

<sup>64</sup> *Hayrenik*, n. 11, September 1932, 119.

To understand the situation, I turn to the public voice of the ARF, *Horizon* newspaper published in Tiflis. This paper pursued a low, cautious profile compared to *Mshak*, including a much less agitated tone in the early days of the war. In an editorial on September 4, 1914, one *Horizon* columnist pointed to the increased likelihood of an Ottoman-Russian war, evidenced by recent deployments and reinforcements of Ottoman military forces along Russian borders. Given that a war between the two empires would occur in areas densely populated by Armenians, the writer cautioned about grave consequences:

...[T]he moment is extremely heavy and full of responsibility for Armenians, because in case of a war our situation will be like that of the Polish, as the major operations of warfare will take place in Armenian Provinces. Consequently, it is the Armenian people who will be trampled. The moment is trying and delicate; therefore it requires great tact and attentiveness by Armenians; [In order to deal] with prospective catastrophes, [Armenians] should arrange their *real* [own; emphasis added] forces such that the positions they take should be evident and they should act such that Turkish-Armenians are not inadvertently crushed. The time has reached for Armenians to show their political maturity, to put forth their age-long wisdom in order to comprehend *the great historic moment*.<sup>65</sup>

The remainder of the article emphasized the importance and necessity of national unity and avoiding separate and arbitrary actions. The article reflected the general tendency and mood in the ARF's 8<sup>th</sup> Congress in Erzurum: keep a low political profile to minimize risk, but be alert and organized to face possible imminent disasters. *Horizon* maintained this editorial line until the last week of September. It published articles that critiqued the CUP government's attitude toward Armenians and the ARF;<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *Horizon* n. 194, September 4, 1914, 1.

<sup>66</sup> For instance, in a September 2, 1914, article, the *Horizon* correspondent from Erzurum stated that there was increased surveillance of the ARF in the province after the congress and the CUP-ARF talks in the city in early August.

but, unlike *Mshak* and its editor Arakelian, who wished for an Ottoman-Russian war from the outset, *Horizon* writers boldly expressed their opposition to what they labeled a *catastrophe*.

On September 11, the *Horizon* editor expressed his concern about the rise of German influence in Istanbul. Referring to Ottoman military mobilization and the Ottoman government's activities among the Kurds of northern Iran, the author claimed that a "Turkish-Russian *catastrophe*" was almost inevitable. The author interpreted the reports of escalating "persecution against Turkish-Armenians in general and the ARF members in particular" as a symptom of the CUP government's intention to enter the war. The author critiqued the CUP for extending an offer to the ARF to fight against Russia together, even as it shelved the Eastern Anatolian Reform Plan. "Neither the Armenian people nor the ARF," the article concluded, "can any longer grasp at the promises of Turkish governments." Even so, the ARF columnist remained cautiously optimistic that "Talat(s) and Enver(s) still have time to contemplate in order to avoid the upcoming *catastrophe*."<sup>67</sup> Until the last days of September, *Horizon* shied away from explicitly promoting active involvement with the Russian side in case of a war.

At the same time, however, *Horizon* published exaggerated and sometimes even false reports of persecution against Armenians and the ARF in the Ottoman Empire;<sup>68</sup> it often cited Russian sources or correspondents for these reports, which the newspaper

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<sup>67</sup> *Horizon* n. 200, September 11, 1914, 1.

<sup>68</sup>In the editorial "Old Beast is Awakening," the author suggested that the CUP government was reintroducing Abdulhamid's exterminationist and bloody policies based on reports that the Bazaar of Bitlis, which almost exclusively hosted Armenian businesses, had been set on fire and four Armenians had been hung in Erzurum. *Horizon* n. 206, September 19, 1914, 1. Both reports were later recanted by the newspaper.

would usually later recant.<sup>69</sup> This was a clear sign of the ARF's nervousness and confusion about a hazy future and the possible destructive implications of the escalation between the empires.

Although there was consensus among the party elite in Tiflis about what the ARF's position should be vis-à-vis the ongoing war, there were still many unknowns; the most important was whether the Ottoman Empire would go to war with Russia. Also, the party had not yet completed its bureaucratic decision-making process, which required the alignment of the opinions of the three major regional committees. These uncertainties and the lack of ARF unanimity were reflected in the less than unified editorial position of *Horizon*.

Movement to endorse a more active support for the Russians was evidenced by the arrival of a special messenger. From the ARF committee in Paris to the Western Bureau (Turkish section) in Istanbul, and then from Istanbul to the ARF Eastern Bureau, Malkhas, the messenger, arrived in Tiflis with a message from Armen Garo written in invisible ink. His first stop was the *Horizon* office. That night, over twenty prominent ARF figures -- including Zavriev (aka Hagop Zavrian), Ishkhan Arghutian, and Mikayel Babajanian (a member of the Russian Duma) -- met at the house of Arshak Jamalian, a member of the *Horizon* editorial board. Malkhas informed the group of the Western Bureau's decision to start a volunteer movement. The message "was received

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<sup>69</sup> The *Horizon* correspondent in Erzurum reported that the news about the execution of the four Armenians was false. But he pointed to other troubling signs such as the disarming of Armenian soldiers in the Ottoman army and their appointment to non-military tasks like road construction. *Horizon* n. 222, October 7, 1914, 4.

enthusiastically by the participants,” with the exception of only one attendee, Avetis Shahkhatunian.

The enthusiasm was unsurprising for two reasons. First, the Western Bureau’s decision was not merely symbolic. Given that the volunteer movement would be organized for the *self-defense* and *liberation* of Ottoman-Armenians, the endorsement of their political representative, the Western Bureau, was crucial. Second, the Russian-Armenian public in general and the ARF in the Caucasus in particular had been much occupied with the Armenian Question in the course of the reform debates in the previous two years, and the cause of Ottoman-Armenian autonomy or *liberation* was still fresh. Russian-Armenians were especially interested in the reform negotiations because it was the Russian government and the Armenian Catholicos in Etchmiadzin who initiated the whole process. In addition, a few, if any, could have imagined that the Ottoman Army, after its Balkan Wars fiasco, would put up much resistance against the mighty Russian armies, even with German support. In short, the ARF concern for liberating “historic” Armenia, coupled with the belief of Ottoman military weakness, supported positive expectations for the war’s eventual implications for the Russian cause.

At the start of the war, Simon Vratsian,<sup>70</sup> who was in the Caucasus at the time, writes that a common conviction held among the Armenian circles there was that the

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<sup>70</sup> Vratsian (aka Kruzinian) was one of the prominent intellectual leaders of the ARF. He worked as the editor of major ARF publications such as *Hayrenik* (Boston) and *Droshak* (Geneva). After the European War started he arrived in the Caucasus and became actively involved in the organization of the volunteer movement. During the ARF Republic he took various positions including prime minister. He authored several very important works regarding Armenian political life and the ARF in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup>

Russian Armies would occupy “Van and Erzurum in a few months [so that] the Armenian areas would be liberated from the Turkish yoke.” He quotes [General] Andranig,<sup>71</sup> a legendary ARF senior commander of the Volunteer Battalions and a former *hayduk/fedayi* [guerrilla fighter], who confidently boasted that his volunteer forces would not even “need boots and fur coats. I will distribute them *charukh* [rawhide sandal] and *halvah* [a dense energy-rich confection] and in five days we will be in Van.”<sup>72</sup> Yet, ironically, even with regular boots and fur coats, it took Andranig six months to eventually enter Van, only, as we shall see in the next chapter, to retreat from the area two months later.

Meanwhile the delegates to the 8<sup>th</sup> World Congress of the ARF returned to the Caucasus. The decision there to remain neutral and simply fulfill their civil duties as citizens on both sides of the border did not stop the growing volunteer movement. Khatisian, the mayor of Tiflis and a leading volunteer battalion organizer, wrote in his memoirs that, on returning from the congress, the delegates “could not resist the general mood.” Instead, he recalled, “they *acceded* the task of organizing Armenian battalions [Emphasis added].”<sup>73</sup> The memoirs of other ARF leaders also retrospectively pointed to the “general mood” and “public enthusiasm” as major factors that forced the party to

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Century. His major work is *Hayastani Hanrapetutiwn* (The Republic of Armenia), which addresses the making and fall of the ARF Republic in the Southern Caucasus. Later Vratsian published the journal *Vem* (1933-1939) in Paris. He died in Beirut in 1969.

<sup>71</sup> Andranig Ozanian (1866-1927) led the famous Sasun uprising of 1904. During the Balkan Wars, Andranik fought in the Bulgarian Army against Ottoman forces. In August 1914, he left Bulgaria on the order of the Western Bureau in Istanbul and went to the Caucasus to help organize Armenian Volunteer Battalions. He commanded the first battalion. His troops played a key role in defeating the Ottoman forces commanded by Enver’s uncle Halil Pasha, in Dilman, North Iran, which opened the way for Russian and Armenian troops to reach and help the Armenians of Van in early May 1915.

<sup>72</sup> Vratsian, *Hayastani Hanrapetutiwn*, 11.

<sup>73</sup> *Hayrenik* n. 12, October 1932, 156.

get involved in the movement — or at least to not stand against it. For example, when Vahan Papzian arrived – before Malkhas – to inform the ARF leadership in Tiflis of the disagreement and the two main positions within the Western Bureau, he recalled:

To me it was already clear that, among the comrades in Tiflis, the idea of joining the Russian Armies with volunteer troops was prevalent from the outset; demonstrations by various ranks of the people and the [ARF] fighters' stubborn demands had influenced them. They were thinking that it was not possible to leave this *spontaneous passionate movement* and the mood in the ranks [of the party] to its fate, as it might take a harmful direction or become a tool in the hands of the Russian government [Emphasis added].<sup>74</sup>

What this and similar statements do not address is the truth of the situation, which was that the ARF leaders did not simply join a *spontaneous passionate movement* already in process so much as actually designed and organized that movement. The firsthand account from the historian Leo (aka Arakel Babakhanian), in his *ants'yalits'* (*From the Past*), is invaluable here. Leo relates that Harutiwnian, the chief of the National Bureau (*Azgayin Biwro*), and Dr. H. Zavriev, the ARF foreign relations chief, had begun negotiations with the viceroy to the Caucasus, Vorontskov Dashkov, immediately after the European war broke out in late July-early August 1914. According to Leo, Zavriev and Harutiwnian made “big promises” to the viceroy that “the ARF will marshal its forces under his [viceroy's] disposition, [and] Armenian people can organize volunteer units on his behalf.” The Russian authorities requested the formation of four battalions, each comprised of 400 troops. In exchange, the government would grant amnesty to the convicted ARF members in jail and in exile and

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<sup>74</sup> Papazian, *Im Hushere*, 283.

allow fugitive militants to legally return to the Caucasus. For Leo the deal was already “half-done” by early August 1914.<sup>75</sup>

Finally, Russian-Armenians were already being drafted in a rate probably incomparable to any other ethnic group in the empire. According to Vratsian, over 250,000 young men were conscripted out of the two million Armenians in the empire, well over ten percent of the population.<sup>76</sup> What the *Horizon* editors called *extra blood* — that is, the volunteer movement — was not merely an expression of people’s enthusiasm, nor did it simply spring out of *Armenian people’s psychology*;<sup>77</sup> it was a political-military project and with the ARF as a major actor.

It is true that there was widespread enthusiasm among the Russian-Armenians, but it was hardly a spontaneous outburst of patriotic and nationalist emotions. As the war broke out, the Armenian media, including non-ARF publications, almost unanimously agitated the public with a militaristic, nationalistic and messianic language for action at what was being mythologized as a “*historical moment*.” Armenian churches turned into stages for rallies where religious leaders delivered sermons to energize people for the Russian war mobilization. Armenian cultural organizations<sup>78</sup> as well as many prominent artists, writers<sup>79</sup> and intellectuals devoted their efforts to encourage popular participation in the war. Armenian political organizations, with the

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<sup>75</sup> Leo, *Antsyalits*, 264.

<sup>76</sup> Vratsian, *Hayastani Hanrapetutiwn*, 11. Khatisian puts the number at 200,000. *Hayrenik* n. 11, September 1932, 124.

<sup>77</sup> *Hayrenik* n. 12, October 1932, 156.

<sup>78</sup> An interesting example is the Armenian Theatrical Association, which decided not to discontinue its schedule but rather replace it with plays loaded with nationalistic and warlike messages such as *Vartan Mamikonian*, Raffi’s *Khent*. *Mshak* n. 195, September 4, 1914, 3.

<sup>79</sup> Tumanian and Shirvanzade were probably the two most prominent men of pen who very enthusiastically propagated support for war activities.

exception of the Bolsheviks— only a handful at the time— were also actively engaged in organizing the mobilization. Altogether, the political, cultural, religious and economic elite played a key role in shaping what was hardly a spontaneous popular *mood*.

In fact, the Armenian volunteer movement was not practically feasible without ARF institutional support. Only the ARF -- as the *Horizon* editor boasted on November 4, 1914- had the organized fighters, military experience, logistical resources and geographical knowledge to carry out such a military enterprise.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, for the promises of Dr. Zavriev and S. Harutiwnian to be made good, it was crucial to have the endorsement of all three of the Armenian (Erzurum), Western (Istanbul), and Eastern (Tiflis) Bureaus. The Armenian Bureau in Erzurum was led by Rostom, who left the city in late September and went to Europe, where he began to coordinate the effort to organize volunteers for the Entente countries in Europe<sup>81</sup> and later in the Caucasus. Because the Western Bureau had already declared its approval and sent the message to Tiflis with Malkhas, the next step was to receive the consent of the Eastern Bureau in the Caucasus.

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<sup>80</sup> Leo asks, "Had the ARF not existed, nor a similar *fedayakan* [guerrilla] organization, could a separate Armenian volunteer movement have evolved in the summer of 1914?" His answer is conclusive: "Never!" Leo, *Antsyalits*, 267-68.

<sup>81</sup> Rostom's letters show that the ARF actively solicited support for the idea of organizing volunteer units for the Entente powers. The first Armenian volunteer movement started in France, where the French government had already called for the ARF to support the Entente. In England, however, the Armenian Committee in London took the offer to the British government, who initially refused. Only after a second attempt did the British government agrees to deploy Armenian volunteers in Egypt. See February 3-21, 1914 letters by Rostom, which can be found at Rostom, *Rostom : Namakani, Mahuan Utsunamiakin Artiw*, 623-24.

From September 21 to 23, the ARF convened its Caucasus Rayonagan (Regional) Congress in Tiflis<sup>82</sup> and finalized the decision to organize volunteer troops attached to Russian Armies. The ARF leadership in the Caucasus shifted its status of involvement in the movement from *de facto* to *de jure*. An administrative committee to assist in the organization of volunteer units was created. Members of the committee included Rostom, Armen Garo, Simon Vratsian, Ishkhan Arghutian, Dr. H. Zavriev, A. Kiwlkhandarian and Nikol Aghbalian. The motto of the movement became “autonomy for the six *vilayets* (Ottoman eastern provinces) and their inseparable part, Cilicia (Adana and its environs), under Russia’s strong mandate.”<sup>83</sup> The congress also agreed on the “necessity of bringing in a national (*hamazhoghovurtakan*) character” to the movement.<sup>84</sup>

Meanwhile, the National Bureau (*Azgayin Biwro*) was revitalized as a *national* body to supervise the movement. It was initially created in October 1912, during the Balkan Wars, as a temporary body representing all major Armenian political movements and communities in the Caucasus to lobby for a favorable settlement of the Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire. The board of the bureau included S. Harutiwnian, A. Khatisian, A. Kalantar, H. Arakelian, A. Poghosian, H. Tumanian and N. Aghbalian; Leo and several others entered later, as well. After the signing of the Eastern Anatolian Reform Plan in February 1914, the bureau shifted its objective to cultural and economic

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<sup>82</sup> Murad Karapetyan, *Haykakan Kamavorakan Khmbere Ev Azgayin Gumartaknere Kovkasyan Razmachakatam, 1914-1917 Tt* (Erevan: HH GAA "Gitutyun" Hratarakchutyun, 1999), 25. Dasnabedian gives the date as September 13-14. Dasnabedian, *History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Dashnaktsutium, 1890-1924*, 117.

<sup>83</sup> Vratsian, *Hayastani Hanrapetutiwn*, 10.

<sup>84</sup> Karapetyan, *Haykakan Kamavorakan Khmbere Ev Azgayin Gumartaknere Kovkasyan Razmachakatam, 1914-1917 Tt*, 25.

projects in *Turkish-Armenia*. With help from the Armenian bourgeoisie in the Caucasus, the bureau initiated projects to open schools, chambers of commerce and an Armenian bank in the Ottoman provinces.<sup>85</sup>

The National Bureau resumed its political activities after the war broke out. As mentioned earlier, S. Harutiwnian and Dr. Zavriev were the first to get in touch with the Russian authorities regarding Armenian involvement in the war. Leo writes that it was not Catholicos Gevorg V but S. Harutiwnian who drafted the famous August 5, 1914, letter to the viceroy; Gevorg V simply put his signature on the document to assure Vorontskov-Dashkov that “Armenians residing on that side of the border [Ottoman-Armenians] also remain unbreakably loyal” to Russia. The letter also pleaded for the Russians to protect the wellbeing of the Ottoman-Armenians and, finally, listed four conditions for settling the Armenian Question in the Eastern Anatolian Provinces.

These included creating a single unit out of the six *vilayets* in eastern Anatolia; the appointment of a high-ranking official of Christian faith by Russia, independent of the Porte, as the governor of that province [*nahank*]; broad rights of self-rule and equal representation for Christians and Muslims; and exclusive Russian oversight over the implementation of the entire reform plan in order to establish Armenians’ trust in the viability of the new order. The viceroy verbally expressed his approval and promised to convey the message to St. Petersburg by the fastest means.<sup>86</sup> These demands were very

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<sup>85</sup> D. Ananun, *Rusahayeri Hasarakakan Zargatsume 1901-1918*, vol. 3 (Venetik: Tparan S. Ghazaru, 1926), 540-41. The project of opening an Armenian Bank received much support from the Armenian Bourgeoisie in the Caucasus and, as a byproduct, increased their interest in the Ottoman-Armenian Question.

<sup>86</sup> Leo, *Antsyalits*, 265-67.

close to the initial Russian reform proposal; therefore, as soon as the war started, the Armenian leaders hoped to reclaim what had been trimmed from that initial plan .

On September 2, Vorontskov Dashkov sent a letter to Catholicos with St. Petersburg's response to his August 5 message. The Russian government, pointing to the tense situation between the Russian and Ottoman Empires, instructed Catholicos to caution Armenians on the other side of the border to shy away from creating disturbances which, at that moment, were not only undesirable but also dangerous. At the same time, the viceroy requested that Gevorg V "use his high authoritative influence" to ensure that Armenians on both sides of the border would be prepared, in case of a war, to undertake the missions that he (the viceroy) would propose in accordance with the needs of the day.<sup>87</sup>

Not surprisingly, *Horizon's* stance and tone shifted radically toward the end of September 1914, as if a magic wand had touched the newspaper's editorial board. On September 26, *Horizon* published an article that reflected this shift perfectly. Sent by the correspondent Astgh (pseudonym) in Bulanik, Muş, the account, dated September 3, observed the conditions and prospects in the local area as follows:

The signs of the upcoming great storm over the much-tormented Armenian peasant are evident. The Ottoman state [after] its six-century presence, has still not wiped the corruption out of its spirit and heart; has still not held its name in honor; and has still not entered the circle of civilization. ... What ruins our world, demolishes our homes is *Sharia*; it is the religion upon the shaky ground on which the Turkish state has been swaying for a long time and because of which will fall into the eternal abyss. ... We either weep our suffering or mourn our grief; all sorts of wickedness have reached perfection: livelihood has died; [our] possessions looted and honor insulted. What reigns now are sorrowful anxieties,

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 274-75; Ananun, *Rusahayeri Hasarakakan Zargatsume 1901-1918*, 543.

heartrending moaning, inestimable tears and incurable pains. ... There is one treasure of the Armenian preserved in the Armenian's heart and soul as an inexhaustible hope and solace-- Armenian religion, church and holy cross, and the cult of the Bible for the sake of which for centuries our honored forefathers shed their honorable blood. And having gone through great political glories, they managed to pass on an immaculate tradition to their heirs from generation to generation through uncountable victims' martyrdom. But, alas, today in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, before the eyes of Christian states of the civilized world, [that] heavenly holiness is subjected to more and more sacrilege by the fanatic Turks' ferocious mockery, insults and curses. ... In one word, the [only] hope and refuge of the tormented Armenian people remains in its long awaited savior, the justice of the liberating Russian armies.<sup>88</sup>

The article reported increased surveillance and arrests (without specifying date, number or name), increased tension between communities (again without referring to any specific example), agitation among Kurds, school shutdowns and the anticipation of attacks against churches. Although many other sources also reported unrest among Armenians because of conscription and the seizure of property during the Ottoman war mobilization, they contradict the *Horizon* correspondent's account. For instance, none of the twenty-one Armenian survivor accounts compiled by ARF members in the Caucasus between August and December 1916 mention any politically motivated arrests or the shutting down of schools.<sup>89</sup> Likewise, Misag Bdeyan's personal eyewitness account of the situation in Muş does not mention such incidents until later in October 1914.<sup>90</sup> ARF chief Vahan Papazian's memoirs do not confirm the correspondent's report, either. Papazian, who arrived in Muş in October 1914 and remained in the area until the early

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<sup>88</sup> *Horizon* n. 212, September 26, 1914, 4.

<sup>89</sup> Amatuni Virabyan, Gohar Avagyan, and Arkhiv Hayastani Azgayin, *Vshtapatum : Hayots` Mets Egheerne Akanatesneri Ach`K`Erov* (Erevan: Zangak 97, 2005), 258-96.

<sup>90</sup> Bdeyan, Bdeyan, and Taronetsi, *Harazat Patmutiwn Taronoy*, 265-74.

days of the massacres, makes no reference to such incidents aside from a general “indescribable fear about the dark future.”<sup>91</sup>

As events unfolded, polarization and aggression at the level Astgh described would indeed occur, but not for a few months. The article, in other words, reflected the author’s mood, political stance and rhetoric rather than the actual situation ; it was not so much a factual account as a barometer of the ARF’s shifting public political stance in the Caucasus. The ARF had previously drawn a firm line against the ecclesiastical political tradition and its religious doctrine, and, earlier, the party would not have allowed a piece so saturated with references to Armenian Christianity and Christian theology to circulate in the print media.

Ironically, the article also contradicted an earlier September 4 *Horizon* call for moderation, caution and political maturity to avoid inadvertent trampling of Ottoman-Armenians. Although ARF columnists had, from the war’s outset, repeatedly praised the Entente powers’ sympathy for the oppressed nations, this is one of the earliest public statements in the ARF press in which Russia was designated the Ottoman-Armenian savior. It is particularly interesting that the “liberating justice of the Russian Army” was both painted as an Ottoman-Armenian hope and already authenticated by the correspondent’s supposedly firsthand writing from the region.

Astgh’s reporting also points to a particular perception of Ottoman-Armenian victimhood. In this narrative, Ottoman-Armenian collective suffering is moved to extreme abstraction; it is taken out of temporal specificity and relocated in an

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<sup>91</sup> Papazian, *Im Hushere*, 320. 22-32.

eschatological and millenarian frame of “a long time”, “generations” and “centuries.” In this depiction, the victim, “the Armenian,” and the perpetrator, “the Turk” or “*Sharia* – religion,” are not real human beings but rather emblems for two homogenous, primordial and antithetical socio-cultural cosmologies. The Armenian – stripped out of time and place – is the subject of victimization, capable only of “weeping,” “mourning,” “moanings” and “hoping.” Even when “the Armenian” “hopes,” *it* is a non-agent as the hopes are about an external “savior.” The Armenian retains agency only by protecting supposedly primordial religious values through “martyrdom.” According to this framework, The Armenian’s world is entirely saturated by consequences of victimization, as the deeds of the perpetrator kills “livelihood,” leaving no social, political or cultural space for the victim other than suffering itself.

The victimizer, “the (fanatic) Turk” or “*Sharia* – religion,” under the adoption of the language of religious Otherness, appears as the exact opposite of the Ottoman within this framework; he is immutably “corrupt,” dirty and wicked; at the same time, his agency appears unlimited in its capacity for “ruining,” “destroying” and “insulting,” all multiplying over time. The only “hope” within this essentialized mirror dance of fear and hatred became outside intervention, in this case by the Russians.

One inadvertent upshot of this abstract framing of Armenian collective suffering is trivializing and *banalizing* the actual real-life experience of victimization. The Armenian victimhood at the hands of the “Turk” and “the Muslim,” paradoxically, erases the specific responsibility of the Ottoman government for its abuses, as the misdeeds of the perpetrator become not the result of historicized intent but rather the

expression of a supposed essence or being. Here, too, intervention becomes a moral obligation to end the “eternal” suffering. In a moment, I will discuss how such an abstract treatment of the predicament of Ottoman-Armenians became the discursive frame justifying a certain stance vis-à-vis the war and Ottoman-Armenians within the ARF.

Even as Astgh provided a routinized and banalized description of suffering, he anticipated an even worse storm brewing. In this new period, the theme of an inevitable catastrophe — or at least the prefigured intentions of the perpetrators, namely the CUP government — would become a central presumption of the ARF line of argument.

The ARF’s shift in stance also included an opportunistic appropriation of the “Ottoman-Armenian” position. After elaborating on the ARF-CUP talks in detail and the reasons why the *Ottoman-Armenians* (in other words, the World Congress of the ARF) refused the Ottoman proposal and political-territorial offers in turn for Armenian support, an anonymous *Horizon* editor wrote:

There is only one thing to say about Turkish-Armenians position. They will remain indifferent to the calls of Turks and will reject their proposals as long as they have the opportunity to choose between the proposals of Turkish and other states. They will be absolutely against Turks’ proposals if they receive definite guarantees from the Entente states that the Armenian Question will be solved in the manner that they [Ottoman-Armenians] desire, regardless of whether Turkey enters the war or not.<sup>92</sup>

First, what the author calls the Turkish-Armenians’ position is clearly the position of the ARF, since they were the ones to whom the offer was made. Second, unlike ARF authors who writing retrospectively after the war argued, the *Horizon*

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<sup>92</sup> *Horizon* n. 219, October 4, 1914, 1.

columnist suggests that, despite all, even as of early October, the ARF had various possible courses of action. Finally, this editorial reflected a major political psychology within the party ranks: — that of optimism that the war would bring about opportunities for the Armenian people. The author of the editorial put it this way:

The Turkish representatives candidly expressed [in Erzurum] what they would do in case of Armenian disloyalty. Today, this “candidness” has reached to the degree of people [Turks-Turkish Officials] saying that if Armenians work against them [Turks], they, [uniting] with the Kurds, will massacre Armenians. If, conversely, the Armenians remain loyal and Kurds betray them [Turks], they will [unite with] Armenians [to] exterminate the Kurds; [but] if none of these two nations satisfy the hopes of the government, the Turks will put aside external enemies and crack down with full force on both peoples. Yes, under these circumstances, the Armenian people demand from the Entente guarantees of [Armenian] security, liberty and settlement of its cause [Armenian Question] in the most absolute manner. By receiving such guarantees, it [Ottoman-Armenians] will in peace of mind push back Turkish government’s endearments.<sup>93</sup>

Here, concern about the likely calamity of war for the Armenian people, which had dominated the *Horizon* editorials until late September, began to move toward the potential advantages and opportunities of the war. Once again, it is important to note the ventriloquism at work, through which the author uses the Ottoman-Armenian position to speak for the position of the ARF. Although he states that the Ottoman government’s promises are no longer trustworthy, the ARF columnist publicly suggests a *bargaining deal* with the Russian authorities in return for refusing the Ottoman offer to *Armenians* — a choice which, the author clarifies, might cost the Armenian people dearly. Thus the editorial was a discursive justification of the new ARF position to take an active side and part in the war. At the same time, it expressed the party’s desire to obtain a

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<sup>93</sup> *Horizon* n. 219, October 4, 1914, 1.

public statement from the Russian authorities clarifying the post-war political status of Armenians.

In the editorial “Armenians and the Current Moment I,” *Horizon* referred to organizing volunteers units to fight along Russian forces for the first time. The anonymous columnist believes that an Ottoman-Russian war would be disastrous for the Armenian people, but he describes a course of action for Russian-Armenians, should war break out, by alluding to the Polish example:

[t]he Russian-Armenian should follow the path of the Poles; that is, when Armenians happen to dispose their additional forces [other than those already conscripted] to fighting sides –even [if] in the form of volunteers—what obliges the Armenian to make double sacrifice is not simply civil duty only; there is much greater awareness sprung from the Armenian’s history, from the aspirations of the Armenian people and its freedom-loving desires. The interests of the Armenian people in this case, might coincide with the interests of the common homeland [Russia], but the additional blood of the Armenian people should be realized and appraised at its worth. And this, with double contemplation, first the Armenian people [should] feel that its *additional blood* will go to serve its citizenship duties, consequently [Armenian people] will be more animated, and also will come forth with a greater rush and suffer not for the work that is above its power. And second, if along with the interests of the common homeland [Russia], Armenian political ideals and demands regarding Turkish-Armenia are also publicly emphasized, then all kinds of misunderstandings will disappear; in that case, as there will be nothing left secret in front of the government or Armenians, consequently, [there will be] no grounds for additional and mutual doubts. Both sides will know the limits of their duties and will work accordingly to fulfill their promises.<sup>94</sup>

Unlike Arakelian or *Mshak*, the ARF never favored Russia annexing Ottoman-Armenia. The author’s criticism targeted Arakelian for advancing a demand which “is

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<sup>94</sup> *Horizon* n. 220, October 5, 1914, 1.

not at all an aspiration of Armenian people” and, for that matter, never became one, either.<sup>95</sup>

The editorial is also remarkable for pointing to a crucial shift in the ARF's formulation of the Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire. The author claimed that past demands for the settlement of the Armenian Question had not fully responded to the issue of Turkish-Armenia's *liberation*; he suggested that the *liberation* of the Turkish-Armenian should entail not only physical security but also the protection of “ethnic and national peculiarities.”<sup>96</sup> The article continued to elaborate this point the next day:

... by wanting liberation, the Turkish Armenian does not highlight the issue of saving his neck, but rather his ethnic(*tseghayin*) values. Had he given up living as a nation and agreed to be subjected to assimilation...there would have never been any threat of persecution or danger from the other side.<sup>97</sup>

The author sought to further bolster his argument by pointing to the example of the Ottoman-Iranian Armenians' willingness to join the Russian empire, a proposal based on the expectation that the Ottoman-Iranian Armenians would become stronger as a nation under Christian rule. This willingness deflated, however, when the Russian authorities in the Caucasus initiated the policy of confiscating the ecclesiastical and communal properties of the Armenians.

This new formulation of the supposed Ottoman-Armenian desire for cultural and religious autonomy was crucial to the ARF's new stance. It set up an ideological justification for exclusive political demands on behalf of Ottoman-Armenians; it also

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>97</sup> *Horizon* n. 221, October 7, 1914, 1.

legitimated more shedding of Ottoman-Armenian blood in the name of a now larger ethnic-cultural cause:

If a people embraces saving its neck as its top priority, then [it] cannot follow any higher politics than fawning upon and being obedient to the rulers. ... [T]oday, the Armenian people are more politically mature; they know [how to] value its ethnic [*tseghayin*] peculiarities and they know [how to] commit to the heaviest sacrifices in order to defend them. They will understand the issue of liberation of the Turkish-Armenian with this mindset; so today, the circumstances have been arranged such that *Armenians can play a role in shedding additional blood to help the success of this or that side*. We have to make a decision that is not simply in line with our political objectives, but, on the contrary, promotes the liberation of the Turkish-Armenian in that way—a way that the Armenian people wish, and today we are the clear spokespeople for that view. Today the interests of the Armenian people rest on the aspirations of the Entente; consequently, the Russian-Armenian is unsparing in helping the Russian forces to victory by any means... as we have already written, the political objective of Armenians is to give the Turkish-Armenian autonomy, or such reforms in the frame of which they can not only enjoy security of life, property and dignity, but also where they can manage and protect their ethnic peculiarities. Yes, it is for these objectives that Armenians now with a clear conscience bequeath their children's blood and commit themselves to tasks above his powers [i.e., liberating Ottoman-Armenia].<sup>98</sup>

These *Horizon* editorials in the first half of October outlined the ARF's war strategy and alliance policy. At first the ARF authors somewhat tentatively presented their support for alliance with Russia as a matter of calculated bargaining for national interests (October 4); later, as a necessity of history and geopolitical position (October date?); and finally, as a noble *choice* that the level of Armenian political consciousness—and the party's corresponding current political project—dictates and requires (October 7). The *Horizon* editor advocated and legitimized an alliance with Russia and the consequent sacrifice of Armenian blood by presenting them as the condition and cost of

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<sup>98</sup> *Horizon* n. 221, October 7, 1914, 1.

Armenian agency; it was a necessary intervention and price to pay in order for Ottoman –Armenians to become masters of their national destiny and end their historical victimhood. The party’s political demands regarding Ottoman-Armenia grew progressively more radical. Less than a month later, on November 4, *Horizon* published another editorial:

The Armenian people have already reached such a level of civil and political maturity that they are justified in holding high expectations regarding the future. In the course of the past quarter century, our people on both sides of the border have made such cultural achievements as to place them in the rank of highly cultured, free nations. It is possible to say that our role in the economic life of Transcaucasia and likewise of Turkish-Armenia, our cultural institutions and the number of our intellectuals here and there *give us the possibility to lead our own forces and to create our own national atmosphere* [sep’akan azgayin mt’nolort]. The military experience that twenty-five years of bloody history has provided us has earned us respect now, from our friends and even from our enemies. In the course of the development of the recent reform [plan], we realized something which was deemed unrealizable: we all gathered around one concrete plan, namely the Russian plan.... This national consensus, although temporary, brought forth surprise and respect among friend and enemy states alike. This cultural and political maturity has allowed us to create a national discipline that deserves appreciation. Given these phenomenal [germardkayin] efforts, we cannot accept the humble demand of just “security of life, property and dignity” as our ideal. ... If we demand only those three improvements, then it is impossible to understand why we deem our aspirations and plans *national*. There are [only] guarantees of national existence among those demands. Any more or less well-organized state can secure our life, our property and our honor. *To aspire only to breathe freely, eat freely and own an inviolable family is a shame and insulting to a people ready for its own homeland and to live in [its] own national way*. Fortunately, that “triple security” plan is already outdated, discarded. It is pointless for Armenian people [Emphasis added].<sup>99</sup>

Thus the *Horizon* columnist summarily ruled out the ‘triple security’ demand which had been the mantra of almost every Armenian and Western reform draft or proposal since 1878. The ‘triple security’ was the chief motive of the most recent reform

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<sup>99</sup> *Horizon* n. 245, November 4, 1914, 1.

plan, as well, which the author also rejected as unacceptable, despite all the effort that had gone into it. It is worth noting once again that, although not satisfying any maximalist positions, this reform plan was still approved by all sides. But now the wartime grail of apparent opportunity made the plan intolerable to both the CUP and the ARF.

*Horizon* never publicly clarified what it meant by demanding autonomy for Ottoman-Armenians or what areas would be covered. In fact, the newspaper intentionally avoided explicitly mentioning autonomy as a demand, even though *Mshak*, the other Tiflis paper, had been debating it for some time. The *Horizon* editorial ambiguously referred to “autonomy or such reforms” and took the resultant cultural and political guarantees much farther. The columnist, drawing on the organic and evolutionary concept of nationhood so prevalent in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, justified his demand for territorial and cultural sovereignty by pointing to the militaristic, economic, intellectual, cultural and political level of progress of the Armenian nation and to its discipline as a social body.

What is striking here is that the author left out one important core element deemed essential to any demand for autonomy or sovereignty; namely, the demographic situation of the Armenians in the region vis-à-vis other groups. Perhaps the author aimed to blunt the many criticisms against the ARF (and other Armenian circles that put forth the demand of an exclusive Armenian sovereignty) within and out of the Armenian community that the party’s demands were not realistic, given the

dispersion of the Armenian population across so many national borders and such a wide geographic area.<sup>100</sup>

Garo Sasuni, writing retrospectively in the mid-1920's, confirms that the newly voiced aspiration of Armenian sovereignty animated the ARF position. He asserts that one of the two objectives of the volunteer movement was to "create national administration [in the occupied territories of Ottoman eastern Anatolia] and transform the *country* [*yerkir*] into *homeland* [*hayrenik*]" through "direct" or "indirect" (if the Russians objected to the first option) methods.<sup>101</sup> At the time, however, it was hard to openly initiate a public debate in the pages of *Horizon* on the explosive subject of autonomy.

From Leo's account we learn that the decision to support autonomy for Turkish Armenia followed a debate in the ARF national bureau. Leo suggests that he and H. Tumanian, opposing the idea of autonomy, avowed in the bureau's meeting that the "debate is untimely, it will only lead to agitation," which would in turn cause harm to Turkish and Russian-Armenians alike. The proposal, he colorfully described, "is about sharing a bearskin, yet the bear is neither dead nor wounded." Leo also recalled cautioning bureau members about the unpredictability of the wartime future. Pointing out that the idea of Armenian autonomy was unpopular among the public in Russia,

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<sup>100</sup> The editor of *Mshak* Arakelian was a strong advocate of the demand for autonomy and a critic of any territorial sovereignty demand. First and foremost, Arakelian was a proponent of Russian annexation of the six *vilaytes*, an opinion which infuriated the ARF. Second, Arakelian acknowledged that Muslims made the majority in most parts of the *Armenian-Provinces*. Consequently, he suggested that Armenians should seek compromise with non-Muslims. *Mshak* n. 222, October 4, 1914, 1.

<sup>101</sup> Garo Sasuni, *Tachkahayastane Rusakan Tirapetutian Tak 1914-1918: Tachkahayots Gaghtasharzhe Ew Anonts Dere Hayastani Hanrapetutian Kazmutian Mej* (Boston: [s.n.], 1927), 36-37.

Leo argued that ARF support might not lead to autonomy but rather turn the public against Armenians. Leo claimed at the bureau meeting, "Today Armenians are in much need of support, so why push back against those forces which might come to support us?" A public discussion of the autonomy demand, Leo thought, would produce unnecessary antagonism against Armenians not only among the Russians but also the neighboring peoples.<sup>102</sup> Despite his and Tumanian's opposition, the ARF-dominated bureau approved the idea, and the next day, to Leo's regret, *Horizon* "started the debate about and demand for" an Armenian autonomy in Eastern Anatolia.<sup>103</sup>

What Leo and Tumanian feared did indeed come to pass. *Horizon's* publicizing of the demand for autonomy for Turkish-Armenia created unrest both among neighboring groups such as the Georgians and among the Russian political and intellectual circles that had been otherwise very sympathetic to the *Armenian cause*. As for the Russian government, it had always been averse to a political scenario in which the Ottoman eastern provinces became autonomous, because it could pave the way for pan-Armenian political aspirations that involve its own Armenian subjects.

In a commentary in the Russian paper *Golos Kavkaza*, the author, using a bluntly anti-semitic language, sarcastically criticized the Armenian demand for an autonomous state: "After having been acquainted with the Jew's pretentiousness, Turkish-Armenians' aspiration to found an autonomous state under the mandate of Russia is a second pretentiousness that is no less utopian, as Turkish Armenians, too, do not have a compact Armenian territory; further, they are dispersed about the majority of the

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<sup>102</sup> Leo, *Antsyalits*, 287.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

provinces and compose 5-10% [of those populations]. Only in the environs of Van do they compose 70% and, in Muş, 40%. Why bother to talk about it? Why destroy pointlessly and fire bullets futilely? ... It is ridiculous and sad.”

The *Horizon* responded to this commentary by stating first that, the Armenian case was not comparable to the Jewish question. Second, it utilized Ottoman official demographic data to refute the *Golos Kavkaza* author’s assertions. Furthermore, the *Horizon* columnist declared that, “in case of liberation of Turkish Armenia,” there would naturally be an “immigration” of Armenians and “emigration” of Muslims, which would in the end lead to an absolute Armenian demogaphic majority. Finally, the *Horizon* columnist contended that it was actually “ridiculous and sad” not for Turkish-Armenians to aspire to “political independence through autonomy,” but rather for *Golos Kavkaza* to misrepresent demographic figures to make Turkish-Armenian claims look foolish and unrealistic.<sup>104</sup>

A similar article appeared in the Russian-language Georgian newspaper *Zakavkaskaya Rech*, published in Tiflis. This piece also referred to the lack of demographic and geographic grounds for Armenian autonomy demands. In addition, *Zakavkaskaya Rech* expressed puzzlement and doubt toward Russian-Armenian enthusiasim for the idea: “Turkish-Armenians are aspiring for autonomy. Well, what is it to you [Russian-Armenians]? Why do you mind? What [kind of] interest do you have over there?” *Horizon* responded with the examples of Tiflis — present-day Tbilisi, capital of Georgia — and Akhilkalaki, where there were only 20 percent and 7 percent ethnic Georgian

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<sup>104</sup> *Horizon* n. 254, November 14, 1914, 1.

population, respectively. The *Horizon* writer added sarcastically that, “If Georgian nationalists suppose that it is possible to raise the Georgian population in these “Georgian” places through immigration, then in that case Armenians will find it even easier to fill their homeland with 800, 000 Armenians who have fled the Turkish yoke.”<sup>105</sup>

The ARF and National Bureau now wanted public and official promise of support from the Russian authorities, ideally from the Tsar himself as he had for the Poles. ARF leaders and many National Bureau members believed such a statement would increase enthusiasm among the Armenian public for the Volunteer Battalions. They felt that it would also mitigate the negative reactions from non-Armenian circles.

The bureau drafted an appeal and had it signed by the Catholicos Gevorg V – who, Leo wrote derisively, was “[always] ready, waiting with his fountain-pen dipped in ink,” to sign any documents brought in front of him by the bureau.<sup>106</sup> The appeal requested:

a [public] call [on behalf of the Tsar] to Turkish Armenians that the time has come to settle the Armenian Questions in Turkey once and for all , and that the Armenian people would be granted autonomy by the great Russia, which would cover the six *vilayets* of Turkish Armenia as one unit and Cilicia, which is inseparably connected to them [the six *vilayets*].<sup>107</sup>

On November 8, the appeal was presented to the viceroy Vorontskov-Dashkov. After reading the document, the viceroy supposedly asked, somewhat reproachfully, “

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<sup>105</sup> *Horizon* n. 260, November 21, 1914, 3.

<sup>106</sup> Leo, *Antsyalits*, 290.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

Is what has already been promised not sufficient?"<sup>108</sup> But he assured the Armenians that he would mention the issue to Tsar Nikolai. A final attempt was made by the Catholicos on November 29, this time appealing directly to Tsar Nikolai in Tiflis, during his trip to the Caucasus. The Tsar responded diplomatically by suggesting that "the situation of Armenians will be dealt with in the best fashion."<sup>109</sup>

Russian authorities did indeed provide military and political resources for the Armenian volunteer movement. They were also, in the early days of the war, very friendly toward the Armenian elite – revolutionary, liberal and clerical alike; yet, ironically, after all the mobilizations and growing expectations, the only thing the Armenian National Bureau (including the ARF and the Catholicos) had in hand was the Tsar's vague promise of "a very bright future."

Many Armenian memoirists as well as scholars would later claim that the Russian authorities *deceived* the Armenian side. However, a closer look into the making of the alliance between the government and the National Bureau (and/or the ARF) shows that the relationship was more synergic and reciprocal. During early negotiations with the National Bureau, the viceroy Varontskov-Dashkov seemed positive about the Armenian representatives' aspirations. He proposed that the Armenian negotiators draft the reform program and draw a map of Turkish-Armenia, the region to be reshaped, as they wished.<sup>110</sup> Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the viceroy did not hesitate to manipulate the Armenian elite and tried to take advantage of their political, military and

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 291.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 288.

diplomatic resources.<sup>111</sup> In the course of the first year of the war, in fact, the Russian government progressively increased its demands from the National Bureau. Russian authorities even proposed that the ARF assassinate Enver Pasha in Istanbul.<sup>112</sup>

The Russians hoped that the Armenian Volunteer Battalions would be of assistance. Their size – about 5,000 as of May 1915 --was small compared to the hundred-thousand-strong Russian Caucasian Armies, but the Armenian fights had importance beyond their numbers. First, even though these units were not well trained, the volunteers were extremely keen, aggressive and daring because they were driven by the sentiments, as Ananun put it, of “age-old vengeance toward the exploiters Turk and Kurd.”<sup>113</sup> Also, all of their commanders and many soldiers had experience of fighting in the terrains of Eastern Anatolia during the reign of Abdulhamid II. Therefore, they had the advantage of “excellent acquaintance with the battlefields and the enemies’ psychology, language, customs and fighting style.”<sup>114</sup>

Second — and more importantly — the volunteer units were instruments of political-psychological warfare for the Russian Army. Given that Russian-Armenians were already obliged to serve in the regular army, the Russian authorities endeavored to encourage the conscription of Ottoman-Armenians through these battalions. This would allow the Russians to tap an “unprecedented force” while also instigating “Turkish-

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<sup>111</sup> i.e., the volunteer movement.

<sup>112</sup> Khatisian confirms this proposal and states that the ARF refused the offer. Khatisian mentions an interesting detail about the Russian plan, noting that the chief of the gendarmes in Tiflis even gave them the name of the ARF militant they thought should undertake that “daring job.” *Hayernik* n. 12, October 1932, 156.

<sup>113</sup> Ananun, *Rusahayeri Hasarakakan Zargatsume 1901-1918*, 548.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 548.

Armenians to rise against their homeland [Ottoman Government]” and defect to join their brethren on the other side.<sup>115</sup> This, the Russians hoped, would lead the Ottoman Army to feel insecure about its own forces. Russian authorities also used the National Bureau’s influence to prevent Armenian desertion in the Russian Army.<sup>116</sup>

Clearly, however, the ARF, the National Bureau and the Catholicos’ representatives in the Caucasus did not initiate the volunteer movement because the viceroy gave them details of his government’s plan for Ottoman Armenia and asked for their help. Rather, Armenian circles in the Caucasus shared the belief that Russia *wanted* to resolve the Armenian Question: H. Arakelian called it Russia’s “historical role;”<sup>117</sup> an anonymous *Horizon* editor linked it to Russia’s geopolitical interests;<sup>118</sup> A. Tumanian termed the current war as Russia’s “third blow of the century” to try to liberate Armenia (after the Russo-Turkish wars in 1828-29 and 1877-78),<sup>119</sup> and the Catholicos saw intervention as part of Russia’s duty and mission to liberate Christian nations ever since Ivan the Great.<sup>120</sup> At first, therefore, the Armenian elite in the Caucasus saw Russia as a savior and assumed a natural alliance, which for some was based partly on their common Christianity. Even though the volunteer movement entailed not only Armenian bloodshed but also the financial burden of supporting the troops,<sup>121</sup> the National Bureau

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 558.

<sup>116</sup> Leo, *Antsyalits*, 293.

<sup>117</sup> *Mshak* n. 190, August 29, 1914, 1.

<sup>118</sup> *Horizon* n. 268, November 30, 1914, 1.

<sup>119</sup> *Horizon* n. 242, October 31, 1914, 1.

<sup>120</sup> *Mshak* n. 257, November 13, 1914, 1.

<sup>121</sup> Russian authorities’ support covered only rifles and other military munitions; all other needs of the volunteer battalions were provided for by the National Bureau, which tried to raise funds among the Armenians of Russia, Caucasus and the diaspora. See the May 20, 1915 report on the National Bureau’s

and the ARF sought to increase the number and size of the battalions. The Russian authorities were unenthusiastic about this initiative as they worried about losing control over these autonomous and exclusively Armenian units.<sup>122</sup>

The new National Bureau presented a very unusual coalition. Although during the post-Balkan War reform debates an almost nationwide, albeit temporary, consensus and unity emerged, the current composition of the bureau represented an unprecedented *mélange* of clergy, Armenian bourgeoisie and socialist revolutionaries. Still, the main actor in the bureau was the ARF. Between February 20 and 22, the bureau convened a national congress to study the situation of the volunteer movement and ways to broaden it. The administration of the National Bureau was reshaped in the congress: The prelate of Tiflis, Archbishop Mesrop, was appointed as the president; A. Khatisian and H. Khununts' became the vice presidents. The board members included names like Leo and H. Tumanian. H. Ananun provides more details:

In terms of social background, this body was composed of one chaplain, two doctors, four lawyers, two men of letters, seven merchants and entrepreneurs, one agriculturalist, [public] employee and three teachers. As far as party affiliation, there were two *Mshakakan*<sup>123</sup> [activists and intellectuals from the *Mshak* circle] and nine ARF members. ... [But the others], though under the title of non-partisan, favored the ARF more than the ARF members themselves.<sup>124</sup>

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activities, prepared by the vice president of the bureau, H. Khununts, which can be found at NAA 57. 28. 174-76.

<sup>122</sup> The National Bureau's request to raise the number of Battalions and increase the number of volunteer fighters to 10,000 encountered Russian military authorities' unwillingness, who said there was a lack of ammunition to allocate to them. Although the bureau received permission in the end, it was obliged to create their own channels to arm the new recruits. Leo, *Antsyalits*, 293. The Russian authorities firmly rejected another request to arm Armenians of occupied territories in Eastern Anatolia. See the May 20, 1915 report on the National Bureau's activities, which can be found at NAA 57. 28. 174-76.

<sup>123</sup> Intellectuals and activists politically positioned around the *Mshak* newspaper did not have a political party organization at the time; this liberal nationalist movement would later found the Armenian Popular Party [*Hay Zhoghovurdakan Kusakts'utiwn*] in 1917.

<sup>124</sup> Ananun, *Rusahayeri Hasarakakan Zargatsume 1901-1918*, 550-51.

The bureau was the interlocutor in the negotiations with the Russian authorities while overseeing the volunteer battalions; it remained under the strict political, organizational and ideological domination of the ARF until March 1916, when the bureau decided to try to become more genuinely non-partisan and to “bring in a national character” by incorporating non-ARF representatives.

Meanwhile, the Social Democrat Hinchak Party and liberal-nationalist Armenian circles started their own volunteer movement, commonly called the *Sixth Battalion*. This unit was not subject to the National Bureau, and *Mshak*'s H. Arakelian actively supported it.<sup>125</sup> The Sixth Battalion was started in 1915 by the Hinchak chapter in Romania with 600 fighters mostly from the Armenian diaspora, and it dissolved in 1918.<sup>126</sup> The Ramkavars, too, made an attempt to start their own volunteer movement after August 1915, without much success.<sup>127</sup>

#### **4.4 The ARF's Encounters with *Pessimism* on the Road to the Catastrophe: Discredited “Cowards”, and *Banalized* Victims**

Absolute optimism about an easy Russian victory and the subsequent “bright future” for Turkish-Armenians underlay the thinking of the ARF leadership in this early war period.<sup>128</sup> Yet some within the party –especially because of their mistrust of the Russian government and concerns about the fate of Ottoman-Armenians—did not share the same hopeful view. Even many optimists, as we have seen, expected a high cost of

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 552.

<sup>126</sup> Arsen, *Patmowtiwn S. D. Hinchakian Kusaktsutian*, 471-72. This source puts the number of fighters in the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion at 1,500.

<sup>127</sup> Chizmechian, *Patmutiwn Amerikahay Kaghakakan Kusaktsutians, 1890-1925*, 208-11.

<sup>128</sup> *Horizon* n. 247, November 6, 1914, 1.

war to Armenians—perhaps unprecedentedly high because of the party’s stance. Many Armenian intellectuals and community leaders cautioned the ARF and the National Bureau about the potentially disastrous implications of their opportunistic and audacious wartime policies.

As the Ottoman-Russian war began, reports and rumors of increased aggression, persecution and even massacres began to reach Tiflis. How did the ARF in Tiflis and the National Bureau in general deal with the *pessimists* and pessimistic expectations? How did they include the potentially cataclysmic prospects for Ottoman-Armenians in their political discourse and still justify their political maneuvers?

Here we need to examine a third position among the political elite in the Caucasus, vis-à-vis the war. This non-optimist-hardliner position evolved among the ARF and the National Bureau circles after the Ottoman-Russian war began. Proponents of this position did not justify active engagement in the war in terms of an easy victory; a in fact, some prophesied disastrous consequences for the Armenian people. They even acknowledged that their own policies might contribute to those detrimental consequences. Yet they continued to advocate daring opportunistic wartime tactics, and at the end of this section I will discuss the making of this perplexing position and how it entailed a reformulation and *banalization* of Ottoman-Armenian victimization.

From the outset, there were voices within the ARF who diverged from the overwhelming majority and advocated caution and neutrality. In the first meeting of the ARF leadership in Tiflis to deliberate on the message that Malkhas brought from the

Western Bureau, Avetis Shahkhatunian opposed the idea of the volunteer battalions.

Malkhas recounts Shahkhatunian's position:

We should not believe in the vain promises of the [great power's] diplomacy, which can be withdrawn tomorrow. The Armenian people, whatever country they live in, should fulfill their citizenship duties; a volunteer movement may have grave consequences.<sup>129</sup>

According to Malkhas, Shahkhatunian failed to understand the new enthusiasm for the fight. Shahkhatunian, he writes, could not "understand that, even if the National Bureau and the ARF had wanted to prevent the volunteer movement, they would not have succeeded."<sup>130</sup>

Likewise, Leo narrates another case of dissent within the ranks of the ARF.

Before the Turkish-Russian war, Hovhannes Kachaznuni,<sup>131</sup> the first prime minister of the independent Armenian Republic created after the war under ARF's leadership, arrived in Tiflis with a message from the ARF Central Committee in Van province, and he had opposed Armenians arming themselves to fight the Russians:

The ARF committee of Van as well as others [committees] in the country [Eastern Anatolia] are against the volunteer movement that has started in the Caucasus; they deem it to be an extremely dangerous initiative for Turkish-Armenians. ...Aside from that, based upon the decisions of the World Congress in Erzurum, the Van Committee requests an immediate termination of the movement in order

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<sup>129</sup> Lazian, *Hayastan Ew Hay Date Hayewrus Haraberutiwnneru Loysin Tak*, 177.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>131</sup> Hovhannes Kachaznuni joined the ARF in the early 1900s in Baku, working there as an architect. Kachaznuni took active part in the peace-making efforts after the ethnic riots in the city in 1905. In 1911 he fled to the Ottoman Empire to avoid ARF persecutions in Russia. He stayed in Istanbul for a while and later passed to Van. He went to the Caucasus after the war broke out. He was elected as a member of the Armenian National Assembly in 1917. Kachaznuni also served in the Transcaucasian Parliament [*Seim*] as an ARF deputy. In July 1918 he was appointed as the first prime minister of the ARF. In 1923 he published the well-known pamphlet, *the ARF Has Nothing to Do Anymore*, in Bucharest. In this pamphlet he accused the ARF for the disasters and political calamities the Armenian people went through during and after WWI. The same year Kachaznuni resigned from the party. He was allowed to return to Soviet Armenia in 1925. Kachaznuni died in prison in 1938 during the Great Purge in the Soviet Union.

to not incite the doubts of the Turkish government toward Armenians for no reason.<sup>132</sup>

Leo described Kachaznuni's statement as the "country's [Ottoman-Armenia] self-preservation instinct speaking ... for the last time." Kachaznuni's message did not change the position of the bureau; Leo thought that the Ottoman-Armenians' attempt at self-preservation was "violated by Russian-Armenians' egoism."<sup>133</sup> This does not explain, however, why certain Turkish-Armenian party members, such as Armen Garo, were among the leaders of the volunteer movement. For Leo, the bureau's dismissal of the ARF Central Committee's request for neutrality was not surprising:

The National Bureau [thought that it] was *extremely smart* and *extremely well-informed*, and knew that the volunteer movement could by no means pose any threat to Turkish-Armenians, first and foremost because the Russian Army would promptly occupy the entire Turkish-Armenia. The struggle would be a matter of a few months, and given such [high] chances, it would be impermissible [for the bureau] to leave aside such an initiative –to which great national interests were attached—pursuant to dictates of mere fear. On behalf of the ARF [members], Arshak Jamalian responded to *Vanetsis* [Armenians of Van; in this context, the ARF leaders in Van] by saying that the comrades from Van did not understand the decision of the World Congress in Erzurum very well; he had participated in the convention and knew very well the real meaning [of the decision]....Kachaznuni explained in vain the situation of the country [Eastern Anatolia] and what unbearable circumstances the "*seferberlik*" [war mobilization] had [already caused] [in the Ottoman Empire], especially for the Armenian people. The decision was quick, almost a matter of a moment; the request was declined [Emphasis added].<sup>134</sup>

The National Bureau was so confident in an easy victory as to dismiss any dissenting opinions. It unwaveringly ignored warnings from within the ARF, writing them off as fear-driven pessimism. Interestingly, Kachaznuni himself, despite his

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<sup>132</sup> Leo, *Antsyalits*, 278.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 278-79.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

opposition to the volunteer movement, decided to join the very bureau which was supervising the volunteer movement. The National Bureau and the ARF treated non-ARF critics that neither could silence or persuade with a very aggressive, uncompromising tone, rejecting them as out of touch with history and the Armenian destiny of liberation. A pair of *Horizon* editorials accused the critics of the volunteer movement – some of whom were demanding an all-Armenian congress to define common agenda and course of action -- of narrow-mindedness and/or conspiring to sabotage the ARF's efforts for the *self-defense* of Ottoman-Armenians.<sup>135</sup> One of the editorials insisted that:

Only those who cannot get themselves rid of the old spite raise this demand. And every time, when the ARF –the only political party that has the exalted fame of marshaling its able forces for the task of *self-defense* of Armenian people at times of danger --steps forward, an ineffable confusion emerges among “extreme leftists” [referring to Ananun] and rightists [*Mshak* and *Baku* circles] that *Armenians do not aspire to its {the ARF's} support and that the support would lead to loss* etc. ... If you [those who call for a congress] are sincere proponents of cooperation and [if you] do not have a hidden agenda, then step back from raising more trouble whose consequence is always discord and cleavage, and give your support to the common cause. The task of *self-defense* of the people is not a party matter but a matter of cooperation. That is how we view it. *If you do not treat it that way, then let us tell you that, under the name of consensus, you “extremists” are falsifying* [Emphasis added].<sup>136</sup>

Social-Democrat and Socialist Revolutionary Armenians, who at the time represented a tiny minority in Armenian politics in the Caucasus, rejected any active Armenian war involvement from the outset. These leftist intellectuals did not only object to the volunteer movement but also categorically rejected supporting Russian war efforts. In the fall of 1914, a group of Armenian Social-Democratic and Socialist-

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<sup>135</sup> *Horizon* n. 212, September 26, 1914, 1.

<sup>136</sup> *Horizon* n. 213, September 27, 1914, 1-2.

Revolutionary intellectuals released a statement addressed to the Armenian public; in it, they outlined their refusal to allow class politics to be trumped by an agenda of national amalgamation – obviously as a critique of the socialist ARF for doing just that. Yet, given the urgency of the moment, these leftist intellectuals deemed it necessary “to stretch all our force, to present the *maximum* of our intellectual, spiritual and material resources, and to work with all means under our disposition so that the *Turkish-Armenian may come out of this crisis-ridden situation with the least possible sacrifices, losses and martyrdom* [Emphasis added].”<sup>137</sup>

The Armenian papers in the Caucasus, both of which were pursuing a diligently pro-war policy, published this statement only months later.<sup>138</sup> Armenian Social-Democrats from Baku also participated in the National Bureau Congress in February 20-22, 1915; on behalf of the Social-Democrats, Nariman Ter-Ghazarian expressed their opposition to the bureau’s activities, which they deemed both futile and harmful. But, as Leo observed, these efforts were “too late and too weak.”<sup>139</sup>

The voices of Ottoman-Armenians calling on Russian-Armenian groups to moderate their statements seldom found their way to the Armenian public and never through the ARF media outlets. In the early days of the Ottoman-Russian war, on November 7, *Mshak* published the report of its correspondent in Istanbul, Sharayl (pseudonym), sent on October 22. The correspondent narrated the debates within the Armenian community regarding the tense situation in the countryside and the increased

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<sup>137</sup> Ananun, *Rusahayeri Hasarakakan Zargatsume 1901-1918*, 573.

<sup>138</sup> *Mshak* March 12, 1915; *Horizon* a few days before?

<sup>139</sup> Leo, *Antsyalits*, 297.

suspicion toward Armenian leaders in the capital. Sharayl noted that Armenian circles with close ties to government authorities circulated complaints and rumors about the likelihood of destructive consequences resulting from the attitude of the Ottoman-Armenian leaders.

Sharayl related that these complaints were evaluated in a special meeting of the Armenian National Assembly, where the assembly representatives discussed how to ameliorate the growingly unbearable conditions of rural Turkish Armenians. The delegates agreed that “the patriarchate should try to approach the government as much as possible and follow a path to gain its favor.” In addition, it was decided to avoid provocative language in order to not incite the Turkish public and to emphasize “Armenian loyalty and soften Turkish emotions.” It was also proposed that it would be appropriate and helpful to appeal to “the Catholicos of all Armenians so that through him a call can be made to the Armenian print media outside of the [Ottoman] country to use temperate language and take into consideration the crisis-prone situation of [Ottoman] Armenians.” The correspondent underscored that this proposal was also supported by many Hnchak and ARF members in the meeting.<sup>140</sup> In response to the report, The ARF media turned a blind eye to such calls for caution from Ottoman-Armenians.

The Catholicos in whom Armenian leaders in Istanbul had invested their hopes said, in an interview with the Russian newspaper *Rech*, a few days after Sharayl’s report:

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<sup>140</sup> Mshak n. 252, November 7, 1914, 1.

All of us have pinned our dreams and hopes upon Russia. It has created free Bulgaria, Serbia and Romania. We believe that it will revive Armenia for a new life. The Armenian people are deeply devoted to Russia. With the revival of Armenia, Peter the Great's dream, an exit to Alexandria, to the sea, will be realized.<sup>141</sup>

When asked if he was worried about the wellbeing of the Armenian patriarch in Istanbul, Catholicos Gevorg V. replied that the Turks cannot harm him in front of [the eyes of] Italian and American diplomatic representatives; but, he added, no one can guarantee the patriarch's wellbeing.<sup>142</sup>

The *Horizon*, too, reported the increasingly catastrophic prospects facing Ottoman-Armenians. The paper's correspondent in Istanbul, Ar-Khor, sent detailed accounts of the progressively deteriorating conditions as well as his pessimistic predictions. In an article published on October 10, Ar-Khor pointed to the Ottoman government's increased suspicion toward Russian-Armenians; many of these ARF members and leaders were, he observed, now treated like [Russian] spies. Ar-Khor also outlined the government's policy of disarming Armenians in Zeytun and Erzurum. These were alarming signs for the *Horizon* correspondent, who suggested that "the nation was again under the threat of a general danger [i.e., massacre]." Ar-Khor ended his article with a Latin phrase, *Caveant Consules!* — "Consuls Beware!"<sup>143</sup>

On October 18, *Horizon* published another of Ar-Khor's reports. The correspondent informed Armenian readers about what he termed a "new provocation against Armenians." He related that Istanbul newspapers such as *Tanin* and *Tasvir-i*

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<sup>141</sup> *Mshak* n. 257, November 13, 1914, 1.

<sup>142</sup> *Mshak* n. 257, November 13, 1914, 1.

<sup>143</sup> *Horizon* n. 224, October 10, 1914, 1.

*Efkar* had published articles about the Tsar's purported call to arms to Armenians. Ar-Khor quoted the opinion of Ahmet Agayev [Ağaoğlu], a prominent nationalist intellectual from the Russian Caucasus, on the matter: "these provocations" as well as the "bloody and suggestive news from the countryside" illustrate that "we live on the eve of bloody possibilities. Alas, [these] 'possibilities' are very likely and close."<sup>144</sup>

More alarming was the fact that Cevdet Bey, infamous for his brutality and cruelty, had just been appointed governor of Van. Ar-Khor offered a frightening prophecy:

The Turks may commit a crime against Armenians before the very eyes of the 'humane and enlightened' German officers [in the Ottoman Empire] – *an unprecedented and dreadful crime*. Massacre, massacre ... Every moment we hear this monstrous word whispered by the circumstances into our spiritual and physical ears. [Emphasis added]<sup>145</sup>

Ar-Khor began a third post with a general assessment of the situation in the Ottoman capital as seen from his perspective. "In my previous articles I have written, in detail, about the nightmare in which we are living. *We are sitting on bombs which may explode at any moment*. [Emphasis added]" Ar-Khor quoted a secretary at an embassy in Istanbul, who told him a "hundred times" in an half-hour conversation that "Armenians should be careful, very careful!"<sup>146</sup> Ar-Khor once again repeated the pessimistic view grounded in his conviction in the inevitability of a catastrophe:

We see the danger; [it is] coming from afar, threatening, yet [it is] coming ceaselessly, approaching, taking shape. I In the middle of night I wake up, I contemplate, I ponder remedies. This damned vision, the specter of massacre, eats at my soul. I reflect ... and [there is] no way out. Our number is few, and we

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<sup>144</sup> *Horizon* n. 231, October 18, 1914, 1.

<sup>145</sup> *Horizon* n. 231, October 18, 1914, 1.

<sup>146</sup> *Horizon* n. 254, November 14, 1914, 1.

do not have weapons.”<sup>147</sup>

Similar visions of imminent disaster were also voiced by the ARF’s public spokespeople, especially through *Horizon*. Yet even these did not intimidate or stop newspaper columnists from advocating alliance with Russia. On the contrary, the vision of an inevitable Ottoman-Armenian suffering and victimization raised the agitated tone of *Horizon* further still. A late October editorial, *Armenians and the Historic Moment*, declared it the patriotic duty of all peoples of the Caucasus to defend the common homeland against the enemy, the Ottoman armies. The author believed that the time had come to put an end to “that bloody history which is recognized as “*the martyrdom of the Turkish-Armenian*.” [Emphasis added]“ The *Horizon* columnist argued that:<sup>148</sup>

Throughout history, Armenians have been extremely cautious; that caution has often been interpreted as *cowardice and submissiveness*. Now is *not the time for caution* and [the Armenian people] are walking tall as they take to the [war] stage; aside from the Armenian soldiers serving in the Russian Armies, [the Armenian people] have deployed organized volunteer troops in the battlefield as well; they are operating alongside Russian armies and assisting, with their humble force, in the victory of the Triple Entente [Emphasis added].<sup>149</sup>

The author proudly claimed that, among the Armenians of Russia, there was widespread interest and enthusiasm for these battalions. These forces, he suggested, would both defend the common homeland and “*augment the number of those martyrs*” who have fallen for decades for the liberation of the Turkish-Armenian.<sup>150</sup> By then it was

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<sup>147</sup> *Horizon* n. 254, November 14, 1914, 1.

<sup>148</sup> *Horizon* n. 234, October 22, 1914, 1.

<sup>149</sup> *Horizon* n. 234, October 22, 1914, 1.

<sup>150</sup> *Horizon* n. 234, October 22, 1914, 1.

widely believed that the ARF members, especially the leaders in the Ottoman Empire, would be the first victims of an anti-Armenian aggression in the country. *Horizon* published numerous articles and commentaries that were not always true in their description of persecution, but they did reflect the anticipated aggression.

For instance, a late October *Horizon* editorial announced that, among many others whose names the paper could not verify, three of the highest ranking ARF leaders — Khajak, Vramian (MP from Van) and Papazian (MP from Van) — were arrested, the first in Istanbul and the other two in Van.<sup>151</sup> Although at that point the persecutions targeted only the ARF, these arrests, along with other forms of oppression, demonstrated — according to the *Horizon* columnist — that “such a moment might soon arrive when Kurdish brigands and Turkish forces begin massacres.”<sup>152</sup>

But all three people mentioned in the editorial were still *free*. *Horizon* would correct itself two weeks later, clarifying that Papazian had not been arrested “as of October 30.”<sup>153</sup> Khajak and Vramian would indeed be arrested and even executed by the government less than six months later. Papazian, who was in Muş at the time, barely avoided a similar fate; he managed to make his way to the Russian line with a group of fighters from the area. These *false reports* are extremely valuable documents that reflect the *Horizon* editors’ nervousness and gloomy prospects regarding the Ottoman-Armenians — almost as if they were, as in the title of a famous Gabriel Garcia-Marque novel, chronicling deaths foretold.

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<sup>151</sup> The editor claimed that these arrests and the broader policy of persecution against the ARF were to be expected because the latter had refused the CUP offer in Erzurum. *Horizon* n. 238, October 26, 1914, 2.

<sup>152</sup> *Horizon* n. 238, October 26, 1914, 2.

<sup>153</sup> *Horizon* n. 250, November 9, 1914, 4.

In fact, these false reports turned all too real with striking accuracy within just a few months. The ARF leadership began to act as if these awful things had already happened, and even the most stubborn optimists had to deal with these catastrophic visions and incorporate calamitous possibilities into their public discourses. This was more and more the case as Ottoman-Russian clashes began along the border and in northwestern Iran. The conflict made the flow of journalistic information out of Ottoman country difficult, and communications were increasingly limited to the rumors and stories of horror carried by Armenian refugees.

In the early days of the Ottoman-Russian war, ARF comrades still in the Ottoman Empire made another very important call for caution to the party in Tiflis. The ARF leadership in Istanbul was extremely concerned about the consequences of the volunteer movement for Ottoman-Armenians. They sent a notice to Tiflis through K. Sasuni, who left the city on October 12. Sasuni writes that, in the message, the ARF leadership in the Ottoman Empire (he does not give specific names) observed that “too loud and too [effulgent] public demonstrations” were taking place in the Caucasus. They requested “the party leaders in the Caucasus to avoid *flamboyant* acts” and advised “secretive conduct.” Sasuni notes that the ARF leaders in Istanbul were not aware of the magnitude of the volunteer movement in the Caucasus, and they assumed that “it was possible to carry out the work with small and *fedayakan* [guerilla type] secret units.”<sup>154</sup> For them, “the full reality [of the movement]” remained “imponderable.”<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Sasuni, *Tachkahayastane Rusakan Tirapetutian Tak 1914-1918: Tachkahayots Gaghtasharzhe Ew Anonts Dere Hayastani Hanrapetutian Kazmutian Mej*, 26.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27.

After a long delay, Sasuni arrived in the Russian territories in early November and conveyed the message from Istanbul to the ARF leaders. He observed that “the wave of enthusiasm of Armenians of the Caucasus had reached to its climax” and all steps for the movement had already been taken. According to Sasuni, the only thing the party organization could do at that point was to “bring to the movement a more organized character.”<sup>156</sup>

Meanwhile, the CUP had grown ever more suspicious of the ARF. In fact, the status of the ARF leaders in Istanbul the capital was becoming comparable to that of hostages. Once the Ottoman-Russian war began, the ARF leaders were denied permission to leave the country. Even as the ARF in the Caucasus almost unanimously believed that their comrades in the Ottoman Empire would be the first victims of CUP aggression against Armenians, it did not tone down its public profile; on the contrary, it became bolder and more assertive.

In mid-November, *Horizon* began publishing a weekly supplement, which included war journals of volunteers, stories from ARF struggles in the Ottoman Empire and articles about the party’s “martyrs;” the magazine was primarily devoted to propaganda for the volunteer movement. As such, it displayed full-page photographs of the commanders of the four volunteer battalions, groups of volunteer fighters and leaders and memorable militants of the ARF, along with portraits of the Tsar and the Armenian Catholicos.

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 27.

The epitome of this boldness and imprudence of the Caucasus-based branch of the ARF was a picture of Armen Garo, an ex-MP in the Ottoman Parliament now in the Caucasus to help organize volunteers, posing with his kalpak (fur cap peculiar to the Caucasus) across the heads of two commanders of the battalions, Khecho and Dro, in front of priests and a crowded group of volunteer fighters.<sup>157</sup>

It was no secret that the CUP government was keeping a very close eye on the Caucasus, especially on the ARF activities in Tiflis; it had, after all, intelligence agents and supporter there. The *Horizon* editors must have surely realized that public exhibitions such as Armen Garo's image with the volunteer troops would not remain unknown "to the ears and perhaps to the hands" of the CUP government.<sup>158</sup> In 1916, in fact, in the main official text that the CUP government published, *Ermeni Komitelerinin Amal ve Harekat-ı İhtilaliyesi*<sup>159</sup> [The Armenian Aspirations and Revolutionary Movements], to justify its repressive measures against Ottoman-Armenians, made many references to Armenian — and particularly ARF — publications in the Caucasus during the first months of the war as evidence of Armenian betrayal and perfidy. The photograph of Armen Garo was reproduced as part of the CUP propaganda publication.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> *Horizon Supplement* n. 1, November 16, 1914, 5.

<sup>158</sup> Leo, *Antsyalits*, 292.

<sup>159</sup> Nezareti Dahiliye, *Ermeni Komitelerinin Amal Ve Harekat-ı İhtilaliyesi* (Istanbul: Matbaa-i Amire, 1916).

<sup>160</sup> The source of the photograph is cited as *Asbarez*, a pro-ARF periodical published in the USA. *Ermeni Âmâl Ve Harekât-I İhtilâliyyesi Tesâvir Ve Vesâik = Die Ziele Und Taten Armenischer Revolutionäre = the Armenian Aspirations and Revolutionary Movements = Aspirations Et Mouvements Révolutionnaires Arméniens*, (Ankara: Ankara Matbaacılar Ciltçiler ve Sanatkarlar Odası, 2001), Album 1, 49. This supplementary contained multiple photographic images initially published by the *Horizon* weekly supplement.

*Horizon's* circulation of Armen Garo's name and image in the context of the volunteer movement surprised and irked even Rostom, one of the most influential ARF chiefs. In his February 2, 1915, letter from London, Rostom reprimanded the party leaders who he thought did not pay attention to secrecy. He added, "[Is it that] there was a need to add A. G's [Armen Garo's]<sup>161</sup> name to the photograph of Dro's group [battalion]?" Obviously such extreme imprudence did not make much sense to Rostom as simple "carelessness;" therefore, he supposed that if *Horizon* published the photo, the editors "[should] have certain considerations."<sup>162</sup>

Indeed, after the Ottoman-Russian war began, there was not much room for "secrecy" anyway; in late October, volunteer troops and ARF militia in Northwestern Iran were already in battle with the Ottoman forces and their Kurdish tribal supporters. All was already entirely visible to the *enemy*. Therefore, a more important "consideration" for the ARF in the Caucasus was to reinforce and strengthen the volunteer battalions with the conviction that the volunteer movement would be the antidote to gloomy visions and the remedy of catastrophic incidents.

On October 26, in the early days of the Ottoman-Russian war, the *Horizon* editor suggested that the Ottoman government would, for the moment, hold off on Armenian massacres in order to not create chaos in the country. But he also predicted that they would start the carnage once they had to retreat before the Russian armies. The ARF columnist asked, "What should we do to protect Turkish Armenians from massacres in such situations?" On behalf of Russian-Armenians, he answered his own question and

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<sup>161</sup> Only the initials are used in the original letter.

<sup>162</sup> Rostom, *Rostom : Namakani, Mahuan Utsunamiakin Artiw*, 624.

left it to the Turkish Armenians to do what they need to do: “The only positive help that we can give to Turkish-Armenians is to increase the number of volunteers operating in the battlefield with new battalions.” This, he claimed, would “decrease the threat of the massacre of Turkish Armenians;” when the Russian army cannot help “the Armenian villages being ravaged,” it would be the duty of the Armenian Battalions to “move forward and chase the retreating Turkish troops in such a fast manner” that the latter would not have the time for “carnage and plunder,” as they would be concerned with saving themselves.<sup>163</sup> “In case of an [Armenian] uprising or resistance,” the editor believed, it would again be the Armenian Battalions who would rush to the rescue until Russian forces could reach them. The *Horizon* author concluded that the battalions would play a “great role” in the *self-defense* of Turkish-Armenians. For the ultimate *liberation* of Armenians and for the wartime wellbeing of the Turkish-Armenian, Russian-Armenians, especially the wealthy, should “provide means” to cover those troops’ “basic and humble” expenditures.<sup>164</sup>

In the various *Horizon* authors’ analyses I discussed above, the prospective disasters that the Ottoman-Armenians might possibly face were explicated as the usual pattern or natural attitude of the Ottoman state. That is, the Ottoman-Armenian victimization was portrayed as a historical norm and an inevitable consequence due to inherent qualities of Turkish *rule*. Ottoman-Russian wars have customarily been accompanied by Armenian massacres, as was the case in the 1828, 1855-56 and in 1877-78 Ottoman-Russian wars, because war provided the “Turkish army” and “Kurdish

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<sup>163</sup> *Horizon* n. 238, October 26, 1914, 2.

<sup>164</sup> *Horizon* n. 238, October 26, 1914, 2.

mobs” the opportunity and the excuse to loot, rape and massacre the Armenians. As evidenced by history, the Turk massacred whether he won or lost and retreated. For the ARF, the current war offered Armenians, for the first time, a chance to intervene, confront and perhaps help dismantle this vicious cycle of Armenian victimization in the Ottoman Empire. A Russian victory was without question, so the additional Armenian contribution to the war efforts would enable the latter to lay its claims more strongly. Thus, the volunteer movement could only have positive effects; what was the point of being pessimistic or wary at such a moment of opportunity?

The *Horizon's* November 23 editorial had the title, *The Pessimists*. The fact that the *Horizon* board felt the need to publish an editorial on pessimism, by and in itself, reflects the increasing unrest and complaints among intellectuals regarding what they deemed the reckless and harmful policies of the ARF and the National Bureau. The timing of the editorial also suggests that the performance of the Russian armies in the front — which were below the expectations of the most optimist antebellum predictions — combined with the news of assaults against Armenian civilians in the warzone and a growing refugee crisis in the Caucasus, were also decisive considerations for the author.

The editor identified pessimism as one of the two (the other being fanaticism) peculiarities of “provincial thinking.” He proudly remarked that “the decades-long struggle” — which had created an “estimable force” and a “conscious and respect-inspiring people” in “Turkish-Armenia” — was finally approaching the point of defeating the “tedious distrust” toward the “Armenian people’s own forces.” The columnist regretfully observed that “there are still pessimists concerning the *future* of the

Armenian people” and declared them as “*the worst and most harmful elements* [Emphasis added]”. The author argued that pessimism “is necessary for those people” who needed a justification for their passivity and dereliction of duty:<sup>165</sup>

These [pessimists] with their [ostensibly] experienced and knowledgeable tone and derisive smiles on their faces are wandering around the high-spirited Armenian people. These, in order to hide their cowardice and to show their intellectual superiority, are trying to poison [their] surroundings: “This is all in vain,” “Nothing comes out of this,” “Armenian people should not be deceived.”<sup>166</sup>

These *pessimists*, according to the *Horizon* author, aside from trying to cover up their “cowardice,” were also incapable of “understanding and appreciating the objective value of *the historic mass movement* and the harmonious expression of the *conscious individual’s and the people’s will*.” That is why, the columnist claimed, the *pessimists* were demanding that the public be governed by “precise mathematical truths.” He then began a discussion on why *pessimists* and *pessimism* mattered at the moment:

In public and political life, prospect is primarily given shape by the attitude of the collective and individual forces. Different attitudes toward the future might as well lead to different consequences and bring about a different outcome to your expectations. Likelihood of realizing our ideals depends on our subjective attitude and the impetus of [our] activities. Of course, it might happen that, regardless of the efforts spent by the individual and masses, *the upcoming day might be far from the expected*; yet, political and public life and science cannot provide us with mathematical data about the future and, principally, every restriction in our activities will decrease our chances and might even lead to worse consequences. [Emphasis added]<sup>167</sup>

It is particularly interesting that this ARF columnist moves the *historic role* of the volunteer movement – and therefore of the ARF, as the major actor behind it – from

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<sup>165</sup> *Horizon* n. 262, November 23, 1914, 1.

<sup>166</sup> *Horizon* n. 262, November 23, 1914, 1.

<sup>167</sup> *Horizon* n. 262, November 23, 1914, 1.

being a reflexive political reaction that sprang out of historical necessity to a more “conscious” and “subjective” attitude about the future, grounded in “individual and collective will.” Indeed, ARF authors in previous writings had claimed that the volunteer movement was a political “choice,” in the making of which the party had a leading “role;” they did so especially in their criticisms of intellectuals in the *Mshak* circle, who asserted that Armenian liberation would be an automatic, natural upshot of a Russian victory. However, the ARF authors placed their focus more on the factors necessitating the *choice*, such as the cultural, economic and social configurations of the Armenian people at the time. More importantly, they did not engage in a discussion of the discrepancy between the expected outcome and the actual effects of the war on the Armenian people.

Ironically, in his efforts to challenge *the pessimists*, the ARF columnist acknowledged the very possibility of an outcome less favorable than expected. Furthermore, having recognized that political action — specifically the volunteer movement — is an expression of a *subjective* vision of the future, the editorial linked actual events to subjective attitudes to remind the pessimists of the responsibility they would bear should the outcome be negative. In so doing, the ARF columnist effectively reversed the blame of an unfavorable outcome to the *pessimists*, because their propaganda created obstacles to the volunteer movement.

To do so, however, he made two fundamental remarks; first, that the volunteer movement was a political choice; second, he admitted that the outcome of the war efforts could not be predicted perfectly. These two remarks inevitably brought forth

issues of responsibility of “risk” and “cost,” in case of an imbalance between “subjective prospect” and actual outcome, which was not occupying the ARF public discourse until then.

Later in the article, the *Horizon* author reiterated the confidence of the National Bureau optimists that their activities (i.e., the volunteer movement) were grounded upon “the current international and political reality” and “real probabilities.” He also added that they were never delusional, either, because they were aware that “international conditions might always change.” The author interpreted the ARF’s perspective on an unexpected scenario:

We are uncovering the drowsy potential forces of the Armenian people. Every nation’s liberation is conditioned on the awakening of its hidden forces and their being positioned in an operational state. *Our sacrifices will not go in vain. We do not have anything to lose. The future cannot be worse than the present.* [Emphasis added]<sup>168</sup>

In his discussion and criticism of the *pessimist* stance, the author does not simply reiterate the usual National Bureau propaganda rhetoric but formulates a distinct position. First, he does not promise a positive outcome in and of itself. The *future* (i.e., post-war), unlike its usage in optimist rhetoric, is not unconditionally synonymous to *Armenian liberation* or victory. Rather, it is relative to the *present*, which maintains its typical signification as a political-temporal image that freezes the entirety of the Ottoman-Armenian past and inscribes all perceived frustrations of that history into the current moment. Therefore, against this excruciating and unbearable present, any *future*

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<sup>168</sup> *Horizon* n. 262, November 23, 1914, 1.

would be admissible and preferable, which maintains and assures optimism in the outcome.

The final paragraph of the editorial thus insidiously resolves the tensions around “risk,” “cost” and responsibility. In the author’s reasoning, the Ottoman-Armenian collective suffering placed the nation in such a depraved category of victimhood that “there is nothing that we can lose” — so there can be no “cost” or “risk,” either. Moreover, Ottoman-Armenians as a “conscious and respect-inspiring people” and an “estimable force” is capable of the “subjective will” of creating a free future, which is worth the efforts of the movement.

I have surveyed the major public positions among the Armenian elite in Tiflis vis-à-vis the war between August-November 1914. I did so in order to situate the ideological, psychological and political context of the ARF’s wartime decision-making in the Caucasus. So far in my discussion, I have located the responses of the Armenian political and community elite to the war around two major positions, *optimists - opportunists* and *pessimists – pacifists*. These are *ideal types*, because the optimists did not all have equally hopeful and idealized prospects of the war and post-war, and the same applies to the *pessimist* category. Furthermore, there was no absolutely pessimistic position, including that of the Armenian Patriarch Zaven in Istanbul. Moreover, even the foremost pessimists such as Kirkor Zohrab were not advocating complete passivity.

By the same token, extreme optimists such as Tumanian, Khatisian, Armen Garo and the Catholicos Kevork V. did not entirely ignore the detrimental consequences of the war on the Ottoman-Armenians, either, although they customarily disregarded how

their actions affected those consequences. Also, not all optimists advocated opportunist action; Muradian's minimalist position is a good example. Finally, there was no agreement among optimists who advocated action on what was the most effective way of utilizing the historic opportunity. H. Arakelian, for instance, diligently promoted active support for the Russian (and Entente) war campaign, but he disagreed with the National Bureau and the ARF *optimists* about the exact course and form of action. Therefore, these categories of optimism/pessimism and opportunism/pacifism can hold descriptive and explanatory value only if placed on a continuum.<sup>169</sup>

I have elaborated on the similarities and differences across and within these *ideal type* categories in terms of the speakers' depiction and historical reconstruction of Ottoman-Armenian collective suffering in their public statements. Consequently, I have also explored the ways in which these varying reconstructions of Ottoman-Armenian victimization were associated with the speakers' formulations of Armenian (or pan-Armenian) identity. Finally, I have surveyed diverse representations of Armenian agency, both as *victims* and *saviors*.

The editorial, *The Pessimists*, however, does not fit into the *categories* I summarized above. First of all, the editor of *The Pessimists* clearly departed from the *pessimist-pacifist* position as he fervently advocated for active Armenian participation in the war on the side of the Entente, with the volunteer battalions. Yet the author also diverged from the *optimists* on several grounds. The *optimist – opportunist* position as a

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<sup>169</sup> That is to say, *optimists* were more likely to call for (opportunist) action, but an optimist vision about the war was only commonly but not categorically accompanied by a call for action. The same applies to the pessimist and pacifist.

broad category (including non-National Bureau optimists) idealized, romanticized and celebrated the Ottoman-Russian war with the immutable faith in a trouble-free victory and favorable postwar consequences for the Ottoman-Armenians. The *optimist* position, in general, did not deem it meaningful to contemplate on an unfavorable post-war scenario. Speaking specifically about ARF (and/or the National Bureau)-type *optimist* – *opportunists*, moral and political responsibility was categorically not a problem because no additional or extraordinary calamities could result from their political agenda and course of action.<sup>170</sup> From the ARF's (and the National Bureau's) point of view, responsibility referred only to maximum effectiveness in the current historic moment.

In contrast, the author of *The Pessimists* referred to the outcome of the war as a variable impossible to precisely ascertain; whether “the national ideal” would be realized would be determined by factors both within and out of the reach of the Armenian forces. Consequently, the columnist, emphasizing agency (based on “subjective will” and not structural necessity) and shying away from promising *a very bright future*, inadvertently brought forth questions of responsibility.

I demarcate a third category for this peculiar group of positions and public discourses, which draw upon an ideological reasoning similar to that of the *Horizon* editor above and advocate a hardliner stance in favor of the volunteer movement.

Similar themes can be found in the statements of Jivelekian, Chalkhushian and many

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<sup>170</sup> The ARF print media did indeed publish statements about the deteriorating condition in the Ottoman Empire, but they did not frame it as a new, unprecedented phenomenon; rather, it was a part of the routine wartime treatment of the Armenians. Perhaps one exception to that was the reported extraordinary aggression of the CUP government against the ARF members and organization. Yet even this fell out of the realm of political and public responsibility, as it was deemed as self-sacrifice rather than an unintended consequence of *others'* actions.

*Horizon* columnists who blended their optimistic enthusiasm with a perception of sanctified war and sacrifice. Yet these writers never explicitly located Ottoman-Armenian suffering as a consequence of their political stance and action. Further, this new category is not populated necessarily by a separate group of intellectuals; indeed, this position itself was a mutated version of the National Bureau's pre-Ottoman-Russian War (September-October 1914) stance.

As I mentioned above, the first month of the war shook the extremely optimistic expectations of a smooth victory with little to no "cost." Under these circumstances, the extreme optimism of the antebellum ceased to be maintainable; as the war evolved and spread deeper into Northern Iran, Eastern Anatolia and Russian Caucasus, optimistic fervor continued to dissolve progressively. Armenian circles, especially the optimists in the Caucasus, began to re-evaluate and rectify their positions –a process which stretched without interruption until the 1920s.

This new formulation found one of its earliest and most unequivocal public expressions in a *Horizon* editorial in the early weeks of the Ottoman-Russian War. In the article, *The Aid Work Need to be Organized*, the author, pointing to the *Horizon* reports of the desperate conditions of the Armenian refugees fleeing to Russia, cautioned that their situation would only be aggravated in the upcoming days of the winter. "[This refugee] disaster," the author stated, was certainly not unexpected for the Armenians, but the Armenians in the Caucasus should be ready to assume "even more dreadful news" from the warzones "with all calmness." Turning to the general situation of the Ottoman-Armenians, he shared his gloomy prediction that "customary lootings, killings and

destruction, which have *continued systematically for decades in the Armenian provinces...* will perhaps take place with increased ferocity, as [our] exclusive news [that] specifically emphasize Turkish government's inimical stance toward Armenians [suggests]."<sup>171</sup>

Until the very end of the sentence, the author follows a depiction of Ottoman-Armenian suffering as natural and routine, which was somewhat canonical in Armenian nationalist discourses in the Caucasus. But the latter part of the sentence suggests that the situation might not be business as usual. The *Horizon* editor further elaborates on his prospects:

The severity [of the situation] will increasingly intensify, especially when the battles spread inside Turkey and also [when] *it becomes apparent for the Turks that the Armenian battalions, which have the aim of ensuring the liberation of Turkish-Armenians, operate alongside Russian forces.*<sup>172</sup>

Here, the author's position clearly breaks away from the National Bureau's typical optimist-opportunist public discourse of the time. The editorial ruled out the scenario of a painless Russian victory and Armenian liberation, and it also forecasted that the upcoming ordeal may not simply be another example of the *ordinary* Ottoman-Armenian wartime persecution, but rather something much worse. Jivelekian also made similar statements about *great sacrifice*; he suggested that the destruction would be unprecedented because of the German support for Ottoman forces.

What distinguishes the position in this editorial, however, is that the ARF columnist admitted that the volunteer troops' engagement would aggravate the ordeal of the Ottoman-Armenians during the war. In other words, the author placed the

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<sup>171</sup> *Horizon* n. 246, November 5, 1914, 1.

<sup>172</sup> *Horizon* n. 246, November 5, 1914, 1.

*responsibility* of the *extra-ordinary* part of the forthcoming Ottoman-Armenian suffering on the volunteer movement. He considers it crucial that “[a]ll this should be clear [parz]<sup>173</sup> to Armenian People,” who, he believed, would “deeply realize that a people’s liberty cannot be achieved without blood and misery.”<sup>174</sup>

The author wants to inform the public about the *extra-ordinary* “risk” and the *additional* “cost” to the Armenian people, which the ARF/National Bureau optimists had not deemed as matters to be considered or limited their consideration to only the *additional blood* of the volunteer soldiers.<sup>175</sup> The author also suggested that, for the *ideal* of liberty (as opposed to the *promise* of liberty) — that is, for the project of ending the historical collective victimization of Ottoman-Armenians — the “cost” and the “risk” become insignificant and admissible. The columnist plainly put:

*It is not the spilled blood that will cause grief to us, no, but rather that if we are indifferent to the needs of the trampled Turkish-Armenians and if we do not, as soon as possible, organize the matter of aid to those who cross to this side of the border.*<sup>176</sup>

This new “rhetorical” position was based upon a banalized version of Armenian victimization, in the sense of what Michel-Rolph Trouillot called formulas of banalization. The significance of suffering and destruction as an experience of victims within their own political, social and cultural relations is muted; instead, suffering is

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<sup>173</sup> The word *parz* might have multiple connotations in Eastern Armenian; it might mean clear, lucid and plain, as well as simple or easy, in reference to something being usual, ordinary or effortless to discern.

<sup>174</sup> *Horizon* n. 246, November 5, 1914, 1.

<sup>175</sup> See for instance the editorial at *Horizon* n. 220, October 5, 1914, 1.

<sup>176</sup> *Horizon* n. 246, November 5, 1914, 1.

taken out of its specific context and given categorical significance as *sacrifice* or martyrdom for a cause – here, as the price of liberty.<sup>177</sup>

This new “rhetorical” position was banal as the Arendtian concept of the *banality of evil* describes. The *spilled blood*, or the Armenian suffering, is not deemed *ordinary*. On the contrary, the author stated his recognition of the *extra-ordinary* character of the upcoming ordeal of Armenians– more and more so in the later days of the war as the unprecedented wave of massacres spread. The author also recognized his – as an ARF spokesperson and advocate of the volunteer movement – *responsibility*. Yet the author, with a shocking gesture, removed the attention from the prospective and ongoing massacres: “*It is not the spilled blood that will cause grief to us, no.*” He replaced the *responsibility* on providing aid to refugees. What the author evades in his writing –and asks his readers to do the same – is, in Judith Butler’s words, a “reflective mode of rationality,”<sup>178</sup> a move which allows him to support and maintain a political position that would play a role, albeit indirect, in an immense human tragedy. What is banal in this picture is the position of the author vis-à-vis Armenian victimization.

There is no doubt that the author never intended or conspired in – nor did the other members of the ARF or the National Bureau – the destruction of Ottoman-Armenians, especially alongside his own comrades who were *hostages* of the Ottoman government. When the ARF made the decision to support the Russian war effort and organize the volunteer troops in the early days of the European War, a large-scale

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<sup>177</sup> After the war Armen Garo 28.

<sup>178</sup> Judith Butler’s newspaper article “Hannah Arendt’s Challenge to Adolf Eichmann,” can be found at the URL: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/aug/29/hannah-arendt-adolf-eichmann-banality-of-evil>

massacre of Ottoman-Armenians was not deemed a likely scenario. The ARF optimist-opportunists in Tiflis did not bother to account for fatal consequences, or what in retrospect proved their own very carelessly designed war agenda. Their poor judgment of future became clear in a matter of months; after November 1914, it became clearer and clearer that the party's war strategy would have a high cost. Ironically the most celebrated "liberation" of Van in May 1915 would end with a historic tragedy in July 1915, turning it into a pyrrhic victory. As of July 1915 the entire war agenda had indeed crumbled. As the horror and calamity of the war and the genocide swept away the earlier naïve optimism, banalizing Armenian victimhood became an even stronger rhetorical position among the ARF hardliners.

The ARF optimist-opportunists in Tiflis did not bother to account for the possible fatal consequences of what in retrospect proved to be their own very carelessly designed war agenda. As it became evident, in a matter of months that the reality of the war did not and would not match the ARF's *calculus*; after November 1914, it became clearer and clearer that the party's war strategy would have a high *cost*. Ironically, the most celebrated "liberation" of Van in May 1915 was a Pyrrhic victory, ending with a historic tragedy in July 1915. After the catastrophic retreat from Van, the entire war agenda had crumbled, and, as the horror and calamity of the war and the genocide swept away the earlier naïve optimism, banalizing Armenian victimhood became an even stronger rhetorical position among the ARF hardliners.

After all, the ARF Eastern Bureau and some members of the Western Bureau, with their seemingly rational political choices, played an undeniable role in inciting

escalation between August and November 1914. They also created the Volunteer Battalions, one of the agents of violence and destruction, including sporadic massacres during the war.

The ARF (as well as the Catholicos Gevorg V) would come under stringent accusations and criticisms from Armenian communities for its extremely adventurist and irresponsible wartime tactics. It is a noteworthy irony, however, that such critical voices withered away after the Armenian public shifted to the genocide narrative as of 1965.

My analysis of the Armenian genocide highlights political agency; I discuss how the ARF became the major actor in Armenian politics and the processes by which the party made its decisions during the war – decisions which played a crucial role in the course of escalation. Genocides are unpredictable events. Perhaps even the ARF in Tiflis pursuing a different wartime agenda, some other development could have jumpstarted an escalation process. Nevertheless, that does not change the fact that the genocide was a political decision undertaken and carried out by the CUP leadership; its responsibility lies first and foremost with those who make decisions.

## 5. When Victims Become Rulers: The Armenian Regional Government in Van (May-August 1915)

Alexandra Tolstoy, the youngest daughter of the famous Russian writer Leo Tolstoy, served as a nurse for the Russian Army at the Caucasian front during the First World War. In June 1915, she was deployed briefly in Van, a major Ottoman city in eastern Anatolia. In her memoirs, Tolstoy relates her encounter with Muslim refugees, who had been left behind in the city after most other Muslims had fled:

In the three former school buildings that housed the American mission some fifteen hundred Kurds and Turks were dying of typhus and dysentery. Groans, cries for help, with filth and excrement all over the floor, no water either hot or cold. On the floors lay dirty bodies in rags, men and women, old and young, spots on their faces –what could that be? Smallpox? Their emaciated arms stretched out to us. The women wept, beseeching us, trying to explain, repeating “Khanum, Khanum!” [Ma’am, Ma’am!]. . . I turned to one woman sitting in a corner, her sleeves hanging in a strange, lifeless manner. Barely audibly, she was groaning. To my questioning look, my companion, Sam Yarrow, responded, “Her arms have been torn out of joint.”

“Who did that? Why?”

“The Armenians in the fighting.”

“The Armenians? But why mutilate a woman like that?”

I was astounded. “I have read in the papers that the Turks who acted like beasts and slaughtered the Armenians. I don’t understand.”

“Everything happened here –slaughter on both sides.”

. . . Here in Van we were in a position to observe the inhuman savagery of the Armenians. They had cut off women’s breasts, it was said, they had pulled limbs from their sockets, they had broken arms and legs. I myself saw the victims of such beastliness.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Alexandra Tolstoy, Katharine Strelsky, and Catherine A. Wolkonsky, *Out of the Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 37-38. The original Russian may be found in Alexandra Tolstoy, *Doch’, Vremia I Sud’by*; (Moskva: AO Kniga i biznes, 1992), 53-54.

This depiction of the ordeal of Muslims refugees in Van is shocking unique. From Rwanda to the Balkans, the Haitian revolution and the 1904 uprising of the Hereros of Namibia, we have evidence of members of victimized groups themselves committing terrible acts of violence.<sup>1</sup> This disturbing reality suggests just what a knotty process the story of mass violence can be. First of all, victims are not always passive spectators or simple targets of violence; assuming contradictory and shifting positions as architects, perpetrators, facilitators and intermediaries, they can themselves become they agents of violence and destruction. Second, the sufferings of a victim group are not always just inflicted by members of the perpetrator groups; seemingly unlikely other agents can also become mediators or executioners of aggression, oppression and carnage. Yet, in legal documents, in scholarship, in media and in commonsensical portrayals, genocide victims still, by and large, figure as passive, defenseless and morally superior non-actors.<sup>2</sup>

First of all, how should we make sense of such moments of subaltern violence? A major conceptual inspiration for this chapter is political scientist Mahmood Mamdani's study on the Rwandan catastrophe that from a historical perspective illustrates how Hutus as a subaltern group effectively transformed into brutal genocidaires and

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<sup>1</sup> For a great collection of articles on examples of collective violence and genocide by oppressed groups see Robins and Jones, *Genocides by the Oppressed : Subaltern Genocide in Theory and Practice*.

<sup>2</sup> Erica Bouris, *Complex Political Victims* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2007).

victimizers of Tutsis in the course of changing political circumstances.<sup>3</sup> The shift from victim to victimizer status is indeed a frequent occurrence, especially in ethnic conflicts.

In a more recent volume, genocide scholars Nicholas A. Robins and Adam Jones bring together articles addressing genocides by the oppressed. Covering cases of mass-killing by the subaltern between the 17<sup>th</sup> to late 20<sup>th</sup> centuries from Colonial Latin America to Cambodia, their study emphasizes the powerful point that, as the title of Jones' concluding chapter reads, "when the rabbit's got the gun," these populations have as great a capacity to carry out exterminationist or mass-killing campaigns as more powerful institutional actors or social groups.<sup>4</sup>

The colonized and enslaved, as the Latin American rebellions and the Haitian revolution show, women, as the Rwandan case illustrates, oppressed ethnic/tribal groups, as in Serbia and Rwanda, or marginalized rural and lower classes, as evidenced by the Cambodian genocide, can and do commit acts identified on "the genocidal continuum."<sup>5</sup> As powerful as the statement that the subaltern too has "genocidal capacity" is, it might be just as counterproductive to an analytical understanding of the notion of genocide unless we contextualize specific acts of subaltern violence.

Contributors to the volume admit that "millenarian and utopian ideologies," "humiliation," "envy" or an "inferiority complex," the most common motives for subaltern genocide, are not distinctively subaltern and are indeed common to genocides

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<sup>3</sup> Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers : Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*.

<sup>4</sup> Robins and Jones, *Genocides by the Oppressed : Subaltern Genocide in Theory and Practice*.

<sup>5</sup> Adam Jones, "'When the Rabbit's Got the Gun': Subaltern Genocide and the Genocidal Continuum " in *Genocides by the Oppressed : Subaltern Genocide in Theory and Practice*, ed. Nicholas A. Robins and Adam Jones (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

in general. This leaves us with little option in humanities and social science fields than to explain subaltern genocidal behavior, and the entire notion of genocide, according to inbuilt human qualities.

This chapter does not address a subaltern genocide, as there was none in Van; yet it requires understanding aggressive subaltern behavior specifically in political conflicts. Political scientist Roger D. Petersen's study on Lithuanian resistance movements challenging powerful occupying authorities (Nazi Germany and Soviet Union), provides analytical insights into, how and why ordinary people rebel and resist against the powerful regimes.<sup>6</sup>

Particularly relevant to the discussion here in Petersen's analysis is how occupiers' reordering social-political hierarchy in a multiethnic society triggers "the mechanism of resentment formation" among the members of the disfavored group. For instance after the Soviet occupation of the country in the summer of 1940, many Lithuanians began to see Jew, with whom they "had lived peaceably," for centuries as "traitorous enemies."<sup>7</sup> In the process of transforming resentment into action, Petersen notes, elites draw on historically-culturally specific symbolism.<sup>8</sup> It is not difficult to see how this strengthens ethnic boundaries and aggressively polarizes groups. In Van not only occupiers' but also various Ottoman governments' reshuffling of the ethnic hierarchy in the previous two decades before 1915, indeed had several times

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<sup>6</sup> Roger Dale Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion : Lessons from Eastern Europe*, Studies in Rationality and Social Change (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-36.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-40.

jumpstarted mechanisms of resentment formation and had grave implications on inter-group relations.

Petersen's suggestion that elites use historically-culturally specific symbolism for ethnic mobilization brings about a question of how those texts of resentment or discourses of victimhood are formulated and how they change vis-à-vis the agenda of actors. Yet, according to Petersen elite's capacity to imaginatively manipulate shared symbols is limited, because, he claims, "culture's malleability is lower than many suppose."<sup>9</sup> My discussion so far shows that victimhood discourses entail significant versatility; the previous two chapters showed how the Armenian elite continuously reframed symbolisms of historical suffering to the ends of specific political agendas.

Unlike Petersen, James Scott explores rather mundane strategies of resistance. His account offers valuable insights into the formation of (publically invisible) victimhood discourses, which he calls "hidden transcripts;" he provides a more dynamic picture of victimhood discourse formation vis-à-vis the possibilities that the nature of domination enables. James Scott makes a very pertinent observation connecting "hidden transcripts" to potential aggressive and violent outcomes, when finally such transcripts can find appearance in public:

When the first declaration of the hidden scripts succeeds, its mobilizing capacity is awesome. At the level of tactics and strategy, it is a powerful straw in the wind. It portends to possible turning of the tables. ... At the level of political beliefs, anger, and dreams it is a social explosion. That first declaration speaks for countless others, it shouts what has historically had to be whispered, controlled,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 38.

choked back, stifled, and suppressed. If the results seem like moments of madness, if the politics they engender is tumultuous, frenetic, delirious, and occasionally violent, that is perhaps the powerless are so rarely on the public stage and have so much to say and do when they finally arrive.<sup>10</sup>

The effect of the turn is not always as romantic as Scott portrays, yet his depiction of public explosion of “hidden transcripts” resonates much with what I will discuss in the following sections. A major problem with Scott’s formulation is that he treats resentment as an objective phenomenon and consequently he makes a clear dichotomous distinction between *hidden* and *public* transcripts. In the specific example of Van, Armenians were not objects of an absolute domination between 1908 and 1914. Along with objective conditions of suffering we also need to explore subjective interpretations of the suffering which find their way to public as discourses of victimhood.

Political scientist Donald Horowitz remarks a very crucial aspect of violent ethnic confrontations that, “remorse is virtually never encountered after the riot,” as participant share a belief that “victims deserve their faith.”<sup>11</sup> Horowitz also points out a tendency of ethnic rioters to interpret a precipitating incident within the framework of “targets’ prior conduct” rather than in its specific content.”<sup>12</sup> Historicized victimhood discourses bring these two together. As I show in this chapter, such discourses, on the one hand essentialize victim and perpetrator as subjects with fixed agendas out of specific temporal and political configurations; and on the other, they reinforce an image

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<sup>10</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance : Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 227.

<sup>11</sup> Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, 528.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 531.

of righteous yet disempowered collectivity which is justified to take any action for self-defense to undo the injustice.

My primary objective in this chapter is to explore a major contour of victimization, namely, what a victimized collectivity does with its victimization. Therefore the chapter will tackle the ordeal of Armenian victimhood in Van 1915 both empirically and symbolically. On the one hand my account documents and disentangles multiple sources and forms of collective suffering. On the other hand, it conducts an analysis of shifting discursive reconstructions of the suffering experience. Ultimately, this chapter inquires into the (re)production and politics of (collective) victimhood, its changing meanings and what defines it amid rapidly shifting power matrices and political agendas.

## 5.1 Why Van?

Few other episodes possess such symbolic weight in depictions of the Armenian genocide as the events of Van in 1915. From April to August 1915 the province saw the most tragic occurrences of its preceding four centuries, including the destruction of the ancient city of Van. Volumes of scholarly and popular histories have been devoted to what really happened in Van in the spring of 1915, in Armenian, Turkish, English, Russian and other languages. The drama of the province, which ironically some American missionary witnesses called “thrilling experiences in Van”<sup>13</sup> also became the

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<sup>13</sup> *The Missionary Review of the World*, March 1916, pp. 169-180

subject of numerous memoirs and fiction writings.<sup>14</sup> From the movie *Ararat* to life stories of Arshile Gorky<sup>15</sup> and scholarly accounts of the Armenian “self-defense” of the city, Van is a particular focal point in Armenian narratives of heroism, dignity, and victimization. By contrast, denialist and apologist accounts of the terror and destruction treat Van 1915 as proof of Armenian disloyalty and justification for the Young Turk government’s draconian policies. What these two otherwise opposed perspectives share is an emphasis on the period of Armenian uprising in April 1915. I will focus instead on the latter half of Van 1915, the formation and policies of the Armenian Regional Government –a period that reveals the complexities of the victimization of Van’s Armenians, which conventional approaches fail to account for.

The Armenian Genocide of 1915 had major spatial dynamics and variations that have often been overlooked. In fact, the province of Van in the spring and summer of 1915 offered a very distinct landscape for the catastrophe. This easternmost Ottoman province, bordering Iran, has always occupied a pivotal role in the history of the

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<sup>14</sup> To cite a selection of memoirs and (auto)biographies Terzibashian, *Andranik*; Egarian, *Husher*. Darbinian, *Hay Azatagrakan Sharzhman Oreren : Husher 1890en 1940*. Hambardzum Eramian, *Hushardzan : Van-Vasporakani*, vol. II (Aghesandria: Tpagrutuwn Aram Gasapian, 1929). Sirak Sarhadian, *Kiankis Husherits* (Tehran: Tparan "Nayiri", 1961). Souren Aprahamian, *From Van to Detroit : Surviving the Armenian Genocide* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Gomidas Institute, 1993). One can also add to memoirs histories written by eyewitnesses such as Onnik Mkhitarian, *Vani Herosamarte* (Sofia: Tpagr. P. Palegchian, 1930). In this same vein Kalipse Solakhyan, *Tezh Martere Vani Kaghakamijum : Masnaktsi Husherits* (Erevan: "Zangak-97", 2000). The most popular and also controversial fiction writing regarding the turbulent decade of the city is Gurgun Mahari, *Ayrvogh Aygestanner* (Erevan: "Hayastan", 1966). Also see for the English translation, Gurgun Mahari, *Burning Orchards* ([Cambridge, England]: Black Apollo Press, 2007). There several other fiction/memoirs such as Mariam Manoukian and Elize Manoukian, *On the Other Side of Mount Ararat : A Story of a Vanished City* (Glendale, Calif.: Abril Pub., 2005).

<sup>15</sup> See Nouritza Matossian, *Black Angel : The Life of Arshile Gorky* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 2000). Also see,

Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire since the 1870s.<sup>16</sup> But the precarious yet relatively calm situation in the province in the aftermath of the Balkan Wars was abruptly disrupted by the mobilization and compulsory recruitment for the Ottoman war, starting in late July 1914. This was followed by a dramatic and violent escalation of tension following the first Russian military expedition to the eastern districts of the province.

After the Russian retreat in late November and early December 1914, Christians, especially Armenian villagers, faced widespread persecution by Ottoman troops as well as attacks by Kurdish irregulars in the eastern districts such as Saray and Başkale. The newly appointed governor of Van, Cevdet Bey, had returned from the Iranian front infuriated by the Armenian-Russian military alliance and paranoid about a general Armenian uprising. Cevdet Bey helped moved policy from strict surveillance to one of seeking to decapitate the Armenian community by liquidating the Armenian

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<sup>16</sup> Van was a historical Armenian religious and cultural center, a hub of Armenian political movements and a stronghold for the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF). The province was one of the few locations in the empire that the Armenians could organize armed resistance against the 1894-96 pogroms. Until the district (sanjak) of Hakkari was merged into the province, the population of Van was closely divided between Muslims (predominantly Kurds) and Christians (overwhelmingly Armenian). The province also had a sizeable Assyrian (Nestorian and Chaldean) community and relatively smaller Yezidi, Gypsy and Jewish settlements. For the cultural demography of the province before the World War I, see A-Do, *Vani, Bitlisi Ew Erzurumi Vilayetnere : Usumnasirutian Me Pordz Ayd Yerkri Ashkharhagrakan, Vichakagrakan, Irawakan Ew Tntesakan Drutian*; Dasnabedian, *History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Dashnaksutiun, 1890-1924*. Government offices were predominantly, but not exclusively, controlled by Muslims, yet the province had a politically active Armenian clergy and class of notables who had considerable influence over the provincial administration. After the constitutional revolution, thanks to the cooperation between the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) and the ARF, the latter enjoyed political freedoms and increased its influence both within the community and in community-government relations. For detailed accounts of the political and social relations in the province see, Eramian, *Hushardzan : Van-Vasporakan*; Vasbouragan General Society of, *Hishatakaran Nuiruats 1896-I Ew 1915-I Vasporakan Herosamartnerun* (Tianeck, N.J.: Hama-Vasp. Hayrenaktsakan miutian); Richard Hovannisian and George Bournoutian, "Modern History - Armenian Van/Vasporakan," *Middle East Studies Association bulletin*. 35, no. 2 (2001). Chaliand and Ternon, *The Armenians, from Genocide to Resistance*; Egarian, *Husher*; Terzibashian, *Andranik*. For a recent yet controversial study on the political history of Van, see McCarthy, *The Armenian Rebellion at Van*.

Revolutionary Federation (ARF) leadership. Consequently, in late March 1915, what had been a nervous stalemate erupted into localized ethnic riots throughout the province.

The final and fatal blow to coexistence in Van –which had a long tradition under the Ottomans—came in the early days of April 1915. On April 3, Ishkhan, one of three ARF leaders in Van, was killed in a conspiracy organized by the Ottoman governor, Cevdet Bey. The following day another ARF leader and Van Deputy to the Ottoman Parliament, Arshag Vramian, was arrested, sent to Bitlis, and executed shortly after. Among the ARF triumvirate in the city, only Aram Manukian survived the conspiracy. Cevdet Bey publicly claiming responsibility for the killings and the arrest, ordered the Armenians to return 4,000 soldiers, guns and money to the government in order to avoid further prosecution. Armenian notables tried to mitigate the conflict by bargaining, but Cevdet Bey refused.

In deep fear and despair, a council of Armenian political and notables decided that armed resistance was the only way for the twenty thousand Armenians in the city to survive. The armed uprising began on April 5, when the newly established Armenian Military Committee -- which represented all groups and was led by Armenak Yegarian, a Ramkavar, liberal-leaning Armenian political party – ordered trenches dug around two major Armenian quarters, the Citadel district (Kaghakamej) and the Gardens (Aygestan). Clashes between some 1,000 Armenian militiamen and a combined 7,000 regular Ottoman soldiers and Kurdish irregulars began two days later.

Meanwhile, the tension had already very rapidly spread across the countryside; Armenian villagers became targets of severe government persecution and attacks by roving Kurdish bands. Tens of thousands of Armenians seeking refuge from the areas close to the city fled into *Aygestan*, the major Armenian neighborhood in the city. The standoff lasted twenty-eight days. On May 3, Cevdet Bey, having been informed about the Ottoman defeat against the Russian Army and Armenian battalions in Dilman (Iran) 100 miles east of Van, ordered the retreat of the entire Muslim population. On May 4 the symbol of the victory of the Armenian uprising, a red flag with a cross, flew above the Van castle;<sup>17</sup> the Armenian Military Committee now controlled the city. On May 5, the first regiment of Armenian Volunteer Battalions commanded by Khecho arrived in Van; Russian troops followed. Two days later, the Russian commander, General Nikolayev, appointed Aram Manukian as the governor of Van. An exclusively Armenian government was created, to function in coordination with the Russian military authority.

This first attempt of Armenian sovereignty in the province lasted more than two months, until July 18 when the Russian Commander abruptly ordered the retreat of Armenian inhabitants along with the Russian troops in the face of an Ottoman counterattack. Over 100,000 Armenians marched to the Southern Caucasus under

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<sup>17</sup> Arsen A. Keorkizian, *Vasporakani Herosamarte, 1915 April 7-1915 Mayis 7 : Hoys Ew Loys (Peyrut` : Hratarakutiwn Tekeyan Mshakutayin Miutian*, 1965), 267.

continuous attacks by Kurdish irregulars, suffering from typhus, dysentery and famine. About one third of them perished on the way.<sup>18</sup>

But there is something extremely strange in the way the story has normally been told in most accounts, especially Armenian, of this crucial period of Van history. The events of the thirty-five days from April 3 to May 8 that I summarized above have been minutely discussed in various historical writings. And, after a seventy-day gap, the standard narrative picks up again with the long march of the Armenian refugees as if nothing worth mentioning occurred during the rule of the Armenian Regional Government. This narrative structure is shared by both Armenian documentary histories and apologetic and denialist Turkish references, with the Armenian experience of statehood treated as of little importance in both accounts.

With the exception of several memoirs,<sup>19</sup> most chroniclers only document technical and bureaucratic details about the interregnum of Armenian rule in Van. A case in point is A-Do's otherwise invaluable account of the province's turbulent times, *Mets Depkere Vaspurakanum* [Great Events in Vaspurakan]. A-Do --who also authored another seminal ethnographic-statistical work<sup>20</sup> on the Vilayets of Van, Bitlis and Erzurum --arrived in Van in mid-June 1915.<sup>21</sup> Yet, ironically, he wrote the least about what he personally witnessed, namely the rule of the Armenian government. He devoted only twenty-eight pages to it in his 488-page tome. A-Do's account is concerned

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<sup>18</sup> For a succinct account of the events in Van in English see Ter Minassian, "Van 1915."

<sup>19</sup> Terzibashian, *Andranik*. Egarian, *Husher*.

<sup>20</sup> A-Do, *Vani, Bitlisi Ew Erzrumi Vilayetnere : Usumnasirutian Me Pordz Ayd Yerkri Ashkharhagrakan, Vichakagrakan, Irawakan Ew Tntesakan Drutian*.

<sup>21</sup> *Ashkhatank* n. 26-225, June 20, 1915, p. 4.

primarily with the technical and administrative aspects of the Armenian statehood experience, for example the budget and the names of various officials.<sup>22</sup>

Pro-ARF Armenian narratives followed a similar line. These works focus almost exclusively on the rebellion, praise the ARF leadership of the *self-defense* and celebrate the exemplary victory of the uprising; yet their reference to Armenian rule is brief and usually without any clues regarding the political and other complications of the experience.<sup>23</sup> A few critical yet anecdotal insights into the seventy days of Armenian governorship in the province appear in the memoirs of non-ARF authors almost all published before 1965; these Armenians raised criticisms of the predominantly ARF controlled administration's policies.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>A-Do's analysis puts great emphasis on the 'centuries old' Armenian victimhood. The difficulty of establishing a political system and governing for Armenians is addressed to Armenians' centuries long slavery' and their deprivation of a 'state-life' and having means to 'self-determine' their own destiny. Even though the author tacitly regrets the flaw of the Armenian governor being accountable to the Russian commander, still salutes and acknowledges the historical significance of the experience. The reader cannot get much insight about the politics of this government and its tensions. Yet A-Do, unlike most of the mainstream Armenian nationalist narratives, at least hints at them by citing and critiquing two controversial practices of the government: continuation of the Ottoman system of agricultural taxation, Oshur (and iltizam system), and the formation of a secret system. He further notes (but only notes) that there was discontent around some policies of the government but nevertheless, according to them, the shortcomings of the government stemmed not from intentional wrongdoing but inexperience, and overall the Armenian government created a democratic regime that accomplished considerable tasks. It is necessary to underscore also that A-Do published this volume briefly after the Great Bolshevik Revolution and in a very short epilogue underlines that the manuscript was written during the time of autocracy and therefore many ideas could not be expressed in the text. A-do, *Mets Depkere Vaspurakanum, 1914-1915 Twakannerin*

<sup>23</sup> M. G., *La Defense Heroique De Van* (Geneve: Droschak, 1916); Mkhitarian, *Vani Herosamarte*; Masnachiwgh) Hamavaspurakani Hayrenakatsakan Miutian (Los Anchelesi, *Ogekochum Van-Vaspurakani Herosamarti 75 Ameaki Artiw* ([Los Angeles]1990); Miut iwn Vaspurakani Hayrenakts`akan, *Van-Vaspurakani Aprilean Herosamarti Tasnewhingameakin Art`iw : 1915-1930* (Venetik: S. Ghazar, Mkhit`arean tparan, 1930). Also see the collection of articles in the special issue of Armenian monthly *Hayrenik'* for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the events *Hayrenik'* n. 18(7), May 1940, 1-109.

<sup>24</sup> Terzibashian, *Andranik*; Sarhadian, *Kiankis Husherits*; Egarian, *Husher*; Eramian, *Hushardzan : Van-Vaspurakani*; Aprahamian, *From Van to Detroit : Surviving the Armenian Genocide*; Darbinian, *Hay Azatagrakan Sharzhman Oreren : Husher 1890en 1940*.

In the scholarly accounts of the period too, the story of Armenian rule in Van is scantily addressed.<sup>25</sup> Even historian Anahide Ter Minassian's recent article, "Van 1915," is not an exception. Ter Minassian meticulously and extremely insightfully documents the outbreak and the phases of the twenty-eight day long uprising. Strikingly, in her almost thirty-six page account she allocates only five sentences to the seventy-four days of "Armenian sovereignty," effectively depicting this period as marginal in *Van 1915*.<sup>26</sup> Another volume written from an opposite perspective by Justin McCarthy et al., on the history of the Armenian nationalist-revolutionary movements in Van with a particular focus on the 1915 uprising, narrates the rebellion in detail using primarily Ottoman archival sources. But this book also devotes only a few sentences to Armenian rule.<sup>27</sup>

In Turkey, there has been significant renewed interest in the events of Van since the early 1990s. These works, such as the volume *Van'da Ermeni Devlet Denemesi* [Armenian State Formation Attempt in Van], indeed focus on the rebellion and activities of the "malicious Armenian Diaspora," and perhaps too much so; it falls short of offering an account of the *attempt* itself, that is the period of Armenian Governorship in the province.<sup>28</sup> Other Turkish language studies—apologetic, denialist and revisionist alike—while commonly addressing the rebellion as a significant event, almost entirely erase the extremely important experience of *Armenian sovereignty* or relegate it simply to a Russian military commander appointing an Armenian governor to the province under

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<sup>25</sup> M. V. Arzumanyan, *Hayastan, 1914-1917* (Erevan: Hayastan Hratarakchutyun, 1969). Terzibashian, *Nupar*. Terzibashian, *Andranik*; Minassian, *Birinci Dunya Savasi Oncesinde Ittihat Ve Terakki Cemiyeti Ile Ermeni Devrimci Federasyonu Arasindaki Iliskiler*; Yalçın, *Siyasal Anılar*.

<sup>26</sup> Ter Minassian, "Van 1915."

<sup>27</sup> McCarthy, *The Armenian Rebellion at Van*.

<sup>28</sup> Cemalettin Taşkiran, *Van'da Ermeni Devleti Denemesi* (Ankara: Platin, 2006).

occupation.<sup>29</sup> But why is there such an asymmetry of curiosity and interest? How can we explain this silence? And what might we learn from a closer look at those seventy-four days of Armenian rule in Van?

Before addressing these questions, I would like to briefly examine under what circumstances the story of the experience of Armenian rule becomes visible. Following the proclamation of the *Third Armenian Republic* in 1990, academic and popular interest in the works and activism of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century advocates of an independent Armenian homeland surged in Armenia. Since the independence, numerous historiographies, memoirs and biographies addressing the decade-long political struggles leading to the creation of the First Republic in 1918 have been published. It is within this state formation framework that two somewhat comprehensive accounts of the Armenian rule in the Van province were published.

The first is a biography of the Armenian governor Aram Manukian. The title *Aram Manukyan: life and activity; in the way of liberation movement and independent statehood reestablishment* [author's translation], indicates clearly enough the author's vantage point. This well researched study brings together available Armenian primary sources on the Armenian government in Van. The biography or eulogy of Aram Manukian, taking a radical nationalist perspective, praises and justifies even the most draconian of

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<sup>29</sup> Varandian, H.H. *Dashnaktsutian Patmutiwn*. Varandian, H.H. *Dashnaktsutian Patmutiwn*; Raffi, *Tachkahayk : Hayots Hartse*; Guenter Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey : A Disputed Genocide* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005); Akçam, *From Empire to Republic : Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide*.

the Armenian administrations' policies.<sup>30</sup> Another more recent study –indeed the only volume that exclusively focuses on the Armenian governorship— examines the organization and activities of the Armenian police force in Van.<sup>31</sup>

These two examples show that in Armenian historical writings, the experience of Armenian rule in Van becomes visible only once the subject is discursively distanced from the discussion of 1915 and resituated as part of Armenian nation state formation, specifically as a precursor to the *First Armenian Republic* (or as it is often called, *the Dashnak Republic*) in the Southern Caucasus in 1918. It is no surprise that the Armenian Governorship attracts interest from historians of the Armenian nation state, as many leaders of the Van administration took important posts in the First Armenian Republic (1918), such as Aram Manukian (who went from Governor of Van to Minister of the Interior), Sirakan Tigranian (Vice Governor of Van and Chief of Administrative Council to Minister of Foreign Affairs), Sargis Araratian (Deputy of the Financial/Budget Committee to Minister of Finance), to cite only a few. I contend that the structure of remembering and narrative focus reflects a desire to recall and give significance to Van 1915 only insofar as it can be indexed in the neatly cataloged *archives of communal victimization*.

The Armenian uprising in Van, and the subsequent ordeal of Van refugees fits Manichean historiographical imperatives. This material has been intensively exploited

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<sup>30</sup> Asryan, *Aram Manukyan : Kianke Ev Gortse ; Azatagrakan Sharzman Ev Ankakh Petakanutyun Verakangnman Ughinerum*.

<sup>31</sup> Ruben G. Sahakyan, *Haykakan Ostikanutyun Kazmakerpume Ev Gortsuniutyuwne Vani Nahangapetutian Srjanowm : (1915 Tvakani Mayisi 8 - Howlisi 17) : Pastatgteri Ew Nyuteri Zhogovatsu* (Erevan2008).

as a conventional interpretive frame for the broader landscape of 1915. The Armenian uprising and defense of Van in April 1915 serves as a rare episode where a community under existential threat amalgamated and intra-communal diversity blurred. In contrast, the experience of Armenian rule paints a complex picture, one which challenges the fetish of nations as actors, and renders subjects' multiple ideational and social positions, such as class status, political affiliation and allegiance to place, visible. This seventy-four day experience also challenges the binary of victim/perpetrator and illustrates the complexities of Van Armenian victimization. It is these very complexities that render the experience of Armenian governorship tangential or marginal to simplistic yet canonical victim-perpetrator frameworks.

## 5.2 The Great *Talan*<sup>32</sup> of Van

In his memoirs, Avetis Terzibashian<sup>33</sup> – a leading Armenian notable and businessman– suggests that as of May 4, when Armenian forces seized the control of the city, the non-partisan and broadly representative Military Committee was practically

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<sup>32</sup> Talan is a Turkish word of Farsi origin for looting or plunder which is also used in Kurdish and colloquial Armenian.

<sup>33</sup> Avedis Terzibashian (1873-1947), as the son of an aristocrat mother and a very wealthy father, was one of the most notable personalities in Van. Terzibashian was the president of the Commercial Union in Van. In 1908 he was elected as the mayor of one. Politically he was affiliated with the bourgeois-democratic Ramkavar [the word literally means democrat] Party. Terzibashian was also a member of the Armenian people's assembly in Van. That being said, it should also be noted that he was very well known and respected by the Muslim community. For instance, during the 1904 crises (following the Adranik's arrival at Van to take shelter there) through his intervention, the governor Tahsin Pasha was convinced to let Adranik and his fighters securely leave the city without facing attack or persecution. This prevented the eruption of an otherwise unavoidable riot and bloodshed in the city. He also served as a member of *İdare Meclisi* (Governance Council) in Van. During the escalation of tension following the beginning of WWI he played a crucial role as a negotiator between the Armenian political parties and the government. He also survived the Armenian resistance and the following Armenian regional government --where he was appointed as a member of the provincial administrative council. Therefore his memoirs published in Paris in 1947 are of crucial importance, not only because of his status, but for his very critical insight into the everyday lives of major actors and lay people in the course of the crucial days of Van. See, Eruand Ter Mkrtichian, *Gandzer Vaspurakani* (Post`on: Tparan "Paykar" Oraterti, 1966), 530-33.

non-existent, as the ARF militants, taking matters into their hands, *de facto* annulled it. Aram Manukian, the chief of the ARF in Van, had already been pushed forward as the only and unquestionable leader.<sup>34</sup> Terzibashian notes that, Aram Manukian's first order was to "burn the Turkish homes down before the Russian army reaches" the area, so that "the fleeing Turks would not consider returning ever again."<sup>35</sup> "If the Turks were to return," Terzibashian declared, contesting Manukian's logic of vengeance and retribution, this time they would settle in the homes of those who "had burned their homes down."<sup>36</sup>

Yet, for Terzashian, the second order was even more notable for its naked aggressiveness and insularity of outlook: "It is a right for each Armenian to loot Turkish homes before setting them on fire," he writes, granting the fighters [i.e. members of the Armenian militia force that defended the Armenian quarters in the month long armed resistance] the right to plunder.<sup>37</sup> "Through the words of Aram," Terzibashian recalled, "the mood of the rabble was transformed into an order."<sup>38</sup> He meticulously, albeit in a regretful and sarcastic tone, depicts the looting that followed Aram's order:

The scene was frightful; the crackle of the collapsing roofs, the cracking sound of the flames licking the walls, the suffocating smoke and heat and in the middle of

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<sup>34</sup> Terzibashian, *Andranik*, 206.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 207. Indeed the lootings were opposed and harshly criticized, especially by non-ARF notables of the city, including Terzipashian and Armenak Yegarian, the chief of the Ramkavar Party in Van and the military leader of the 28 days long resistance in Van. Egarian, *Husher*, 228-31. Interestingly, in the accounts written by pro-ARF writers the lootings are presented as a legitimate act of revenge or ridding the city of anything reminiscent of the "Turkish yoke," see Asryan, *Aram Manukyan : Kianke Ev Gortse ; Azatagrakan Sharzman Ev Ankakh Petakanutyun Verakanganman Ughinerum*, 117. Also see, Keorkizian, *Vaspurakani Herosamarte, 1915 April 7-1915 Mayis 7 : Hoys Ew Loys*, 196. Also see, Mkhitarian, *Vani Herosamarte*, 207-08.

it all, people were swept up in the fever of greediness whose frenzy to snatch more, to own one more thing and the subsequent hustle, zeal, fervor and screams recalled a scene from judgment day. Do not suppose that looting is an easy task; it too, has its own techniques, complications and difficulties, especially if the distance between the booty and the place to transfer it is not short and means of transportation is not abundant. That day, many would have wished to have four legs and many hands to be able to carry away more stuff.<sup>39</sup>

Yet, for certain ARF militiamen, there was nothing to regret. In a communiqué dated May 6, 1915 –written by Onnik Mkhitarian, an ARF militant—the victorious Military Committee celebrated the *talan* and destruction of the Muslim homes and government facilities. For the committee, the violence was an epic and altogether justified reversal of historical fortunes:

For three days the craze of victory has possessed us. We are standing intoxicated and with admiration in front of the beautiful panorama of burning garrisons and cracking noise of dens of all chief executioners. We are intoxicated and filled with divine craze, because it is those who for thousands of years have plundered and crucified us are fleeing in pieces today; and we are plundering, slaughtering and crucifying those who for thousands of years have plundered, pillaged and crucified us.<sup>40</sup>

The ARF-promoted *talan* marked the first fracturing of political elite solidarity and the emergence of the old party rivalries in a new setting.<sup>41</sup> Armenag Yegarian, the military leader of the uprising and the chief of the Ramkavar Party, criticized the manner in which the booty was distributed, and stated his concerns about the potential consequences of the chaos. He recounts expressing his disagreement to Aram in person:

- Aram, control your emotions and propositions; our situation is still unclear; and regarding the Russians we still do not know [where they are]. Suppose that the

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<sup>39</sup> Terzibashian, *Andranik*, 208.

<sup>40</sup> A-do, *Mets Depkere Vaspurakanum, 1914-1915 Twakannerin* 362. Onnik Mkhitarian notes that he was the author of this communiqué, see Mkhitarian, *Vani Herosamarte*, 209-10.

<sup>41</sup> Eramian, *Hushardzan : Van-Vaspurakani*, 338.

Turks launch a sudden attack in which case it will not be possible to maintain order.

- Give me a break for God's sake! This is the revenge of six hundred years that the people are taking; let them fulfill their emotions.
- But this booty is already in our hands, we ought to amass it somewhere. First we should give a share to the families of our martyred comrades.<sup>42</sup>

For Yegharian, the looting was not only an issue of revenge, or just Armenians plundering "the Turk"; he depicts a more complicated picture of the *talan*. According to Yegharian there were two *talans* and a hierarchical order of *talanji* [looter]. The first *talan* involved the plunder of the Muslim homes and government buildings by the people and the second, the "official" looting of the lay looters by the ARF militia –who indeed took away the precious pieces of the booty.<sup>43</sup>

Armenian merchants and shopkeepers –who hid their merchandise in Armenian homes in the Citadel area during the uprising— became the targets of the looters as well. In the report he submitted to Aram after a more than month-long investigation, the police chief of Van, Davit Papazian, states that in certain parts of the Citadel –where businesses were mostly located— "all (Armenian) shops have been looted by Armenians." He concluded that members of the Citadel Military Committee [mostly local ARF leaders] and their fighters were responsible for these lootings.<sup>44</sup> Finally, in the midst of the collective *talan* craze, thousands<sup>45</sup> of gold liras in the safe of the *Banque*

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<sup>42</sup> Egarian, *Husher*, 228.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>44</sup> See Davit Papazian's July 9, 1915 report Hayastani Azgayin Arkhiv [The National Archives of Armenia] NAA 242. 1. 56.1-2; *ibid.*, 228-29.

<sup>45</sup> Different sources give different estimates about the amount of money, see Asryan, *Aram Manukyan : Kianke Ev Gortse ; Azatagrakan Sharzman Ev Ankakh Petakanutyun Verakangnuman Ughinerum*, 133.

*Ottomane*, the most significant financial assets left behind by the Ottoman government, also vanished mysteriously. It was alleged, and not only by anti-ARF circles but also by Aram's own comrades, that the money was actually seized by individuals in the ARF chief's close circle with his knowledge and perhaps complicity.<sup>46</sup>

By and large, the great *talan* of the city Van, including the burning and destruction of the government buildings and Muslim neighborhoods, was completed very swiftly, before the Russian troops' arrival on May 5.<sup>47</sup> Once the plundering had ended, a number of Armenian residents of the city rushed to join the *talan* in the countryside.<sup>48</sup> Widespread looting continued in the countryside until much later.

The immediate result of the *talan* was to reveal and exacerbate internal conflict in the Armenian community. Looting and fights over the abandoned Muslim properties, which at times involved violence and even killings,<sup>49</sup> marked an abrupt return to everyday intramural conflict, following upon earlier solidarity and collective struggle

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<sup>46</sup> Yegarian writes that after Aram was appointed as the governor he ordered arrest some of his own friends for stealing the money. Yet, very soon those were released after paying him a "gift" of 700 gold liras, Egarian, *Husher*. Terzibashian, on the other hand, maintains that the money appropriated from the bank was claimed by the party (the ARF) as "victor's right." He also conveys that, Andranik, the commander of the Armenian Battalions and a leading ARF figure, was disturbed by the way Aram handled the situation as the money appropriated from the bank was not the property of the Ottoman state but "the British, our allies," see Terzibashian, *Andranik*, 228-29. Darbinian, who was a Ramkavar writes in his memoirs writes that, the money could have never been recovered and the members of *the Citadel Military Committee*, who, according to him, ordered and oversaw the lootings were among the prime suspects. He also cites the rumors that 7-8 ARF militants or certain ARF chiefs shared the unidentified amount of money looted from *the Banque Ottomane*. Yet, he rejects the idea that Aram could have gotten involved. Darbinian, *Hay Azatagrakan Sharzhman Orenen : Husher 1890en 1940*, 331.

<sup>47</sup> Mkhitarian, *Vani Herosamarte*, 207. In a telegram message to Russian Caucasian Armies Military Command, General Nikolayev wrote on May 10, 1915 that when they entered the city (on May 6) "the city was burned down [and] some Armenian neighborhoods and the Russian consulate have survived [the fire]." Cited in A-do, *Mets Depkere Vaspurakanum, 1914-1915 Twakannerin* 437.

<sup>48</sup> *Ashkhatank* n. 31(230), July 8, 1915, 4.

<sup>49</sup> Egarian, *Husher*, 229; Kitur Arsen, *Patmowtiwn S. D. Hnchakian Kusaktsutian*, 2 vols., vol. II, S (1963), 116-17; Arahamian, *From Van to Detroit : Surviving the Armenian Genocide*, 61-62.

for survival under the Ottoman-Kurdish siege. Another consequence was to generate a new kind of political fragmentation, not only along party lines but also within the most influential political party, the ARF.

Further, the *talan* tainted the image of the Armenian leadership, even before the governorship was formally proclaimed, by widespread accusations and rumors of greed and corruption. Finally, throughout the span of the Armenian rule, *talan* and *talanchi* [looter] turned into themes that communicated various tensions among rival political factions of the *Vanetsi* and between the *Vanetsi* and the outsiders, i.e., the Armenian Volunteer troops, Armenians from the Caucasus, and the Russian Army.

### **5.3 Aram's Government and its Malcontents**

Following the arrival of the vanguard forces of Khecho's Armenian Volunteer Battalion, on May 5 Russian Troops under the command of General Nikolayev entered Van. The Russian Army was saluted by artillery shots from the armory seized from the retreating Ottoman troops.<sup>50</sup> A-Do describes the greeting crowd of *Vanetsi* [natives of Van] as "unprecedented." Armenian clergy, notables and the fighters who defended the Armenian quarters of city also turned out to greet the Russians.<sup>51</sup> The key to Van castle was presented to Nikolayev as the crowd shouted "god bless the Tsar."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> A-do, *Mets Depkere Vaspurakanum, 1914-1915 Twakannerin* 437.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 436.

<sup>52</sup> See General Nikolayev's May 10, 1915 telegram cited in *ibid.*, 437.

Aram Manukian, a Russian expatriate, was officially appointed as the provisional governor of Van on May 7, 1915.<sup>53</sup> He was entitled to create a government composed *exclusively* of Armenians; enforcement of law and order would primarily rely on Armenian militiamen, called Armenian *defenders of the land* [Hay Yerkrpahner].<sup>54</sup> Yet, General Oganovsky also emphasized that “he [Aram] would be fully subject to the Russian military authorities.”<sup>55</sup> The orphanage of the French Dominican Sisters – evacuated and seized by the government after the war began – became the headquarters of the new administration. The building was decorated by banners, decrees, and maps in the Armenian language. In a statement on May 8, Aram publicly announced the formation of the new government, noting that many branches of the administration, including the police, courts, agricultural-emigration units, and municipal administration had already been organized. The governor suggested the situation as “the end of the slavery of centuries and political oppression,” and the time as “days of historical responsibility” when the Armenian People would have only one motto: “to unite with full ardor around the government.”<sup>56</sup>

In the making of the new administration, Aram indeed sought unity by co-opting various figures that would represent all political groups. A number of Ramkavars,

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 437.

<sup>54</sup> See General Oganovsky’s telegram (N. 5452) to General Nikolayev, the Russian commander in Van cited in A-do, *ibid.*, 438.

<sup>55</sup> See General Oganovsky’s telegram (N. 1709) to General Nikolayev, the Russian commander in Van cited in A-do, *ibid.*, 438.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 441.

Hinchaks and independents were designated in the new administration.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, the new rule was clearly ARF-dominated, both in number and in the executive and administrative significance of the posts that the party controlled. Aram's administration was not only an Armenian one, but indeed *pan-Armenian*; many important seats were reserved for the Russian Armenians, most of whom had arrived to the city as part of the Armenian Volunteer Battalions.<sup>58</sup> Although initially given an extremely warm and cheerful welcome, their significant presence in the administration soon provoked increased unrest among the local Armenians, who viewed them as outsiders.

ARF dominance in the new administration and the weighty influence of Russian Armenians was all the more controversial because the Armenian leadership, Aram included, justified Armenian sovereignty as a gain of the "glorious" resistance that had indeed been carried out by local forces and led by a Ramkavar, Armenag Yegarian. Immediately after the great exodus of the Van Armenians to the Southern Caucasus, Mikayel Minasian, one of the Ramkavar members of provincial administration council in Aram's government, commented on the Armenian rule:

The government of Van was in the hands of the provisional governor Mr. Aram. It was a personal or rather a partisan government. Mr. Aram would administer all governmental works with his few *Dashnaks'akan* [ARF member or supporter] Russian-Armenian, appointed or non-appointed, aides and consultants.<sup>59</sup>

Yegarian suggests that the attempts of the *Vanetsi* to create a local and representative government were disrupted by the arrival of the Volunteer Battalion in

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<sup>57</sup> Asryan, *Aram Manukyan : Kianke Ev Gortse ; Azatagrakan Sharzman Ev Ankakh Petakanutyun Verakangnuman Ughinerum*, 123.

<sup>58</sup> *Ashkhatank* n. 24(223), June 10, 1915, 3.

<sup>59</sup> *Van-Tosb* n. 4, December 20, 1915, 3.

the city, and instead a government dominated by foreign Armenians was created. He very bluntly stated his disapproval of the Russian-Armenians' newly prominent role:

The new government [council], which had just held several meetings and prepared an agenda of pressing issues [that], the volunteer battalions gradually arrived in Van; they deemed necessary –without asking the opinion of the locals– to dissolve the council, [and] declare Aram as the governor and designate a new administration composed entirely of Russian-Armenians and the volunteer militia. Of course these new-arrivers were much closer to the [Russian] General. ... and here, pursuant to a decree [of the Russian Commander], these gentlemen, unfamiliar to the land and to the people, became the “legitimate” government.<sup>60</sup>

Yegarian's suggestion that the Russian-Armenians had entirely taken over the government is an overstatement. Even so, his comments are noteworthy insofar as they reflect the typical phenomenon of local Armenian resentment towards the Russian Armenians.<sup>61</sup> The new Armenian solidarity did not hold across geographical, regional, or national lines. Gradually, in fact, the tensions between the *local* and pan-Armenian nationalists intensified; each side accused the other of egotism, greed, looting and other crimes. Yet, it should be noted that being *Vanetsi* did not necessarily mean being on the camps of the local nationalists. Also, the Volunteer Troops were mostly but not exclusively Russian Armenian. The commanders of all four battalions were ARF members. Hence they had the allegiance and the support of the majority of local ARF along with the *Vanetsi* intellectuals who shared their pan-Armenian nationalist ideals. *Local nationalist* elites, on the other hand were mostly among the Ramkavars, independents, and the Van bourgeoisie.

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<sup>60</sup> Egarian, *Husher*, 233-34.

<sup>61</sup> Aprahamian, *From Van to Detroit : Surviving the Armenian Genocide*.

A number of incidents in which volunteer militia members were accused of theft, looting and assaults against local Armenians further escalated the tensions between the locals and these volunteer fighters, at the same time staining the latter's altruistic image. Over time, many *Vanetsi* questioned the very idea that Russian Armenians joined these battalions with patriotic motives.<sup>62</sup> Certain Ramkavar writers argued that there was a fundamental difference in motive between the Russian and Ottoman Armenian youth who volunteered for these battalions; the former, according to Yegarian, answered the ARF's call to sign up for Armenian Volunteer Troops simply to avoid deployment in the "dreadful German front" over the much safer Turkish Caucasian front.<sup>63</sup> The lengthy stay of thousands of volunteers in a war-torn city and their increased burden on the locals brought about more friction:

The four commanders of the Volunteer Battalions were accommodated in the residences of the wealthy in Aygestan; their troops on the other hand were accommodated in people's homes. *Vanetsi* did whatever possible to please their guests and did not deny them beds or food. However it is sad that our volunteers were not adequately satisfied by these sacrifices. They were expecting too much from the locals, without considering their conditions. They were very disappointed, especially when they realized that no share from the plunder was left for them.<sup>64</sup>

He also complained that these volunteer fighters, instead of fighting the enemy, "submerged themselves in the cool outdoor cafés of Aygestan, and without doing any other work entertained themselves from morning to evening in an unruly manner."<sup>65</sup>

Another typical accusation against the Russian Armenians was profiteering. Both in the

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<sup>62</sup> Darbinian, *Hay Azatagrakan Sharzhman Oreren : Husher 1890en 1940*, 336-42. See also *Van-Tosp*.

<sup>63</sup> Egarian, *Husher*, 243.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

city and in the countryside there were widespread rumors and complaints about the Volunteer Militia who got involved in looting of the locals, theft and black marketing. In a public announcement on May 16, 1915, Aram banned purchase of articles from the Volunteer Militia and the [Russian] soldiers. He warned the public that since such articles [sold by the Militia and the soldiers] were stolen, they would be confiscated and the buyers punished.<sup>66</sup>

Perhaps the single most important political controversy between the locals and the commanders of pan-Armenian volunteer battalions surfaced around pressures on the *Vanetsi* to join the battalions themselves so as to defend the province and rescue the remaining parts of Turkish-Armenia.<sup>67</sup> The renowned Armenian commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Volunteer Battalion, Andranig, in his June 3, 1915 speech to the public of Van, avowed:

In order to protect our rear, when we [the militia and the Russian Troops] move toward Bitlis-Mush, I am requesting from you, the people of Van, 2,000 fighters. Until we conquer Bitlis and Mush, Van will never be safe. In this province, there are 10,000, regular or irregular armed-men. If you do not give me 2,000 fighters and if you do not fulfill your responsibilities, be aware that even though the Lake Van is small its waves are amply strong. They will come and cover your city, and you will all be drowned... Do not assume that because "Van is liberated, so let the *Bitlists* [Armenians of Bitlis] worry about Bitlis, the *Mushetsi* [Armenians of Mush] about Mush and the *Kharpertsi* [Armenians of Kharpert] about Kharpert." We need to cooperate and work together.<sup>68</sup>

Later, Andranig asked Aram for help recruiting and Aram read his message to an Armenian gathering in Van. However, not a single Van Armenian answered the call.

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<sup>66</sup> NAA 242.1. 39. 16.

<sup>67</sup> *Ashkhatank* June 20, 1915, n. 26(225), p. 1; *Ashkhatank* June 24, 1915, n. 27(226), p. 4.

<sup>68</sup> *Zoravar Andraniki Kovkasian Chakati Patmakan Oragrutiwne, 1914-1917 : Oragruats Zoravarin Tiknapah Zinwooren*, (Poston: Tparan "Paykar"i, 1924), 28. For a similar quote from the Commander Antranig see Terzibashian, *Andranik*, 237.

Furthermore, many *Vanetsi* soldiers in the battalions deserted; they went back to their homes as soon as their units entered the city.<sup>69</sup> It was even suggested that the major reason why Andranig refused to enter the city with his battalion was his worry that *Vanetsi* soldiers in his battalion too, would desert.<sup>70</sup> Attempting to prevent further desertions –upon the request of the Commanders of the Armenian Volunteer Battalions—Aram banned *Vanetsis* from hosting or sheltering any volunteer militiaman without permission papers from their commanders.<sup>71</sup> The pan-Armenian nationalists accused not only the *Vanetsi*, but also the government, of greed, opportunism and especially perfidy to the cause and to their saviors [i.e., the Volunteer Battalions].<sup>72</sup> Still, their *Vanetsi* allies, promoted youth recruitment to the battalions, indeed desperately. In an editorial in the ARF paper *Ashkhatank*, *Where is the Hero of Yesterday?*, the author expressed pessimism and disappointment regarding *Vanetsi* indifference to the suffering of fellow Armenians in the Ottoman Empire:

The fighting soldier, instead of joining the [Volunteer] Militia to retaliate for centuries of abuse and to chase the enemy more avidly, preferred to lay down his arms and joined the mob to burn down, destroy and loot the enemy's property. Henceforth, he has crossed out his name as a past hero, has become the same as the anonymous mob, has turned into the slave of the self and of the material. The moment he felt his life secure, the moment he saw his own skin saved, the moment he awakened his barbarian instinct with respect to the riches left by the enemy, the man of Van, once deemed the nest of intellectualism and revolutionary ideals, cared no more for combat; instead of thinking about the liberation of the entire homeland [Ottoman Armenia], he drowned in the idea of homeland [Van] which has inspired him for decades. Where is the hero of

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<sup>69</sup>Zoravar Andraniki Kovkasian Chakati Patmakan Oragrutiwne, 1914-1917 : Oragruats Zoravarin Tiknapah Zinwooren. Also see, Egarian, Husher.

<sup>70</sup> Egarian, Husher, 238.

<sup>71</sup> NAA 242. 1. 39. 25.

<sup>72</sup> *Ashkhatank* n. 25(224), June 17, 1915; Terzibashian, *Andranik*, 228-29.

yesterday? He no longer exists today. He has perished and perhaps, hereafter will not [re]appear.<sup>73</sup>

A few *Vanetsi* wrote a petition to Aram expressing their regret at *Vanetsi* refuse to join the battalions; it is also suggested that their [*Vanetsi*'s] "slackness and indifference leave a bad impression on the [Russian Armenian] volunteers." The petitioners proposed that the government create a battalion of 300 soldiers to fight along with the Volunteer Battalions.<sup>74</sup> Interestingly, Yegarian argues that 800 *Vanetsis* indeed did apply to the Armenian government. They requested rifles and stated that they would volunteer to fight wherever the government deployed them. However, Yegarian claims, Aram declined those requests and asked them to join the battalions instead. As Yegarian concluded, "for the ARF what mattered was not the salvation of the people, but rather who would enjoy that honor, the ARF or someone else?"<sup>75</sup>

The selection of new officials, controversial policies of the government, and corrupt practices created a wide spectrum of discontents among the *Vanetsi*. There were those who from the outset thought that Aram lacked the skills and the political and moral credentials necessary for such a position.<sup>76</sup> Others, particularly among the bourgeoisie –like T'iw't'iw'njian- were altogether averse to the idea of having a "revolutionary governor."<sup>77</sup> The single most important source of discontent was the apparent involvement of many leading ARF names in the government in corruption and

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<sup>73</sup> *Ashkhatank* n. 23(222), June 10, 1915, 1.

<sup>74</sup> NAA 242. 1. 3. 4.

<sup>75</sup> Egarian, *Husher*, 236-38. An editorial in *Ashkhatank* supports Yegarian's claim that some *Vanetsi* youth initially did apply to the Armenian authority to form a volunteer battalion. See *Ashkhatank* n. 26(225), June 22, 1915.

<sup>76</sup> Terzibashian, *Andranik*, 220; Egarian, *Husher*, 237.

<sup>77</sup> Terzibashian, *Andranik*, 217.

plunder during the *talan*. As if there were not already enough causes for discontent, even the government's attempts to fight *talan* and profiteering turned out to be controversial. The government conducted a widespread and lengthy investigation to recover the looted merchandise of the Armenian business owners. The police used extremely harsh and often violent methods in their search for hidden merchandise, occasionally resulting in serious injuries or killings. Further, at times the line between the investigation and the plundering and assaults of *talan* itself was very thin. For instance, it was reported that on July 11, Set Aslanian -- the chief of police of the Citadel district the main target of the *talan* investigation—along with eight or ten of his friends, broke into a shop where recovered booty was [officially] stored. *Ashkhatank'* claimed that the police had arrested the criminals [i.e., the police chief and his accomplices].<sup>78</sup> In another instance of searches in the same district, *Ashkhatank'* reported that inhabitants, including women, were badly beaten, causing serious injuries.<sup>79</sup>

Outside Van too, security forces and militia reportedly abused the inhabitants.

The following account from the village Lezk, located a few miles north of the city, offers a glimpse into resentments due to militia terror in the countryside:

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<sup>78</sup> According to *Ashkhatank's* account, when the residents of the neighborhood noticed that plundered merchandise was being carried away, they requested a share of the *talan*, and fighting then erupted between the two parties; the police chief used his gun. Eventually, other policemen arrived at the scene and unraveled the incident. See *Ashkhatank* n. 24(223), June 13, 1915, 4. In response to a letter by Set Aslanian sent to the newspaper to offer his account of events, *Ashkhatank* editors wrote, "In the explanation note that you have sent us, you prove to be not only somebody with the desire/intent of *Talan* but also a skillful looter and someone who exploits names of our martyrs; being such a person you deserve the harshest of punishments." *Ashkhatank* n. 26(225), June 20, 1915, 4.

<sup>79</sup> *Ashkhatank* n. 27(226), June 24, 1915, 4.

Late one afternoon, several weeks after the flight of the enemy, about six *militzias* rode up to our door and would have kicked it in if mother hadn't hastened to open it. They shoved her aside, broke the latch on the flour bin, and proceeded to fill up sack after sack with flour. ... When [my father] arrived, they had already emptied out our flour bins and were at the neighbor's door. Father recognized the leader of the *militzia*. He was from the Aghavnian family, our friends from Avantz. Addressing him, father said, "During all these years of tyranny, no Turk has ever done to my house that which you have done this afternoon. Why, even during the months of fighting [April-May 1915], Turkish gendarmes that occupied my home did not take anything without first asking permission from my wife. They knew I was in the city [Van]. You are Armenians; you are supposed to be our defenders. Instead you treat us as enemies." He had hardly finished when they all jumped in and started to whip him with their horsewhips. How dared he challenge their authority for doing what they had done? Father's face was all covered with blood; his shirt was in shreds. The beating continued. Neighbors stood by; no one cared or dared to intervene. I noticed Uncle Nishan in the crowd, but even he didn't come to my father's aid. It was Dickran's wife who finally jumped in and shielded father from further punishment. They tied father's hands and took him to Avantz for further punishment for resisting the *militzia*. I don't know how Mayor Terzibashian heard of what had happened to my father. He contacted Aram Manoogian and chastised him for still carrying this crusade against father. Aram claimed innocence and sent word to his underlings in Avantz to set father free. Father came home late that night, *a victim of our newly gained freedom* [Emphasis added].<sup>80</sup>

Officials in the new administration quite quickly gained an image as corrupt, despotic and self-absorbed. In an editorial article, *Mer Pashtonyanere* (Our Officials) in the ARF paper *Ashkhatank'*, the anonymous author, pointing to the widespread criticisms and accusations against the new officials in the Aram government, expressed his doubt that all of those were simply baseless slanders.<sup>81</sup> The paper also announced that it would open its pages to reader complaints about officials.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Aprahamian, *From Van to Detroit : Surviving the Armenian Genocide*, 61-62.

<sup>81</sup> *Ashkhatank* n. 23(222), June 10, 1915, 1.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

The *Ashkhatank'* indeed took a very paradoxical position regarding corruption; on the one hand, along some other local ARF circles,<sup>83</sup> the *Ashkhatank'* criticized the government's lengthy investigation for stolen merchandise of the Armenians merchants, which the paper called a "trivial matter," a diversion from more fundamental problems.<sup>84</sup> This criticism was part of the *Ashkhatank'* author's disapproval of the government's lenience toward bourgeois interests rather than prioritizing urgent common needs.<sup>85</sup> On the other hand, however, the newspaper also critiqued the government for failing to prevent *talan* and its degrading implications on the society in multiple editorial and news articles. The editor of the newspaper, Hm. Manukian gave a public lecture titled "*Talan* and its Psychology"; in it, he addressed "the destructive impacts of *talan* on society's state of mind."<sup>86</sup>

Corruption accusations against the newly appointed officials very frequently appeared in the paper. In some cases such allegations were investigated by the government, which at times resulted in the firing of officials. For instance, the July 8, 1915 issue of the *Ashkhatank'* published a detailed account of allegations of corruption against the governor of Arjesh, Nshan Shatjian.<sup>87</sup> In the next issue of the newspaper, it was announced that Nishan Shatjian had been removed from his post following a report

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<sup>83</sup> On June 22, 1915 ARF members from the Citadel district wrote a letter to the governor requesting him to stop the indiscriminate searches in the Citadel district, which they claimed, caused irritation among the "comrades and the people." NAA 242. 1. 3. 4. The fact that many of those accused of looting Armenian merchandise in the Citadel district were local ARF leaders, might be a reason also for the *Ashkhatank* to oppose continued investigations.

<sup>84</sup> *Ashkhatank* n. 28(227), June 27, 1915, 1.

<sup>85</sup> *Ashkhatank* n. 31(230), July 8, 1915, 1.

<sup>86</sup> *Ashkhatank* n. 27(226), June 24, 1915, 4.

<sup>87</sup> *Ashkhatank* n. 31(230), July 8, 1915, 4.

by the inspector, Hagop D. Hagopian.<sup>88</sup> Anonymous readers' [using aliases] letters from the countryside, addressing complaints against the new officials –at times in a sarcastic tone- were published in *Ashkhatank*.<sup>89</sup> In a May 27, 1915 letter from Mazekar village, So-Se wrote:

In my previous letter, I had expressed my exaltation about our *hayazgi* (of Armenian origin) Principal, Mr. Hagop. But it is sad to say that his work has not matched with the hopes of the villagers. It is said that Mr. Hagop is Protestant Christian. And we have realized that, having suffered 600 years under the Muslim yoke, we are destined to as much suffering under the Christian yoke.<sup>90</sup>

*Ashkhatank'* authors deemed conformism, elitism and old comrades' [new officials'] turning their backs on revolutionary ideals as the source of the problems. The editor of the *Ashkhatank'*, Hm. Manukian, argued that becoming an official was a new phenomenon for the Armenian revolutionary for which s/he did not have the experience and tradition. He traced the roots of the problem to the *ancien regime* and centuries long victimization of the Armenians:

The barbarous Turkish administration turned into a very bad model for us. One thinks that having grown up and lived through [that] repulsive environment, we have appropriated those bad habits, which were particular to the mentality of the dominating race. The Turkish official used to suppose and believe that he was rather from a special class in the community – that his blood was more noble than that of the craftsman-agriculturalist, that, in the end, he was born solely to govern with all pardonable or unpardonable means whereas the rest [were born] to obey like humble ox. ... Have we indeed not been inflicted by this pathetic mentality, which has until now simply remained disguised under our Armenian skins?<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> *Ashkhatank* n. 32(231), July 11, 1915, 4.

<sup>89</sup> *Ashkhatank* n. 28(227), June 27, 1915, 3.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ashkhatank* n. 24(223), June 13, 1915, 1.

The ARF paper's harsh criticisms against the government reflected the growing resentment among the people; it also indicated the split among the Armenian revolutionaries. The columnists' criticisms of state officials – that they had forgotten their revolutionary ideals, been involved in lootings, misused their authority, and terrorized the people --did not go unnoticed. The predominantly ARF-controlled new administration [also the Russian Military Authority] responded to *Ashkhatank'* with progressively harsher repression. On June 13, the newspaper announced, with the headline *Prohibition Against the Press*, that the editor had a government order prohibiting the use of any source other than the government record office for news articles regarding the activities of the government and the Russian military administration.<sup>92</sup> In the next issue, *Ashkhatank'* with the headline *Censorship on the Press*, published the instruction sent to the paper by the chief of police, Mr. Dawit', which read: "It is announced that pursuant to the special order of the governorship, henceforth every issue of your paper has to be first presented to the police department before being published."<sup>93</sup>

Yet, it was not only the government which sought to tighten the control over *Ashkhatank'*. In a June 14 circular the commander of Russian Troops in Van, General Nikolayev, declared, "I order the editor of the paper being published with my permission that he [should] send every copy of the paper, when it is ready for print, to the military headquarters for censorship inspection. I appoint engineer-technician

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<sup>92</sup> *Ashkhatank* n. 24(223), June 13, 1915, 4.

<sup>93</sup> *Ashkhatank* n. 24(223), June 17, 1915, 4.

Sarukhan Beg as the censor.”<sup>94</sup> After this announcement, the paper could reach its readers with censored, blank columns.<sup>95</sup>

The government from the outset declared a radical break from the *ancien régime*. Paradoxically, however, it kept many unpopular regulations and practices of the Ottoman system, including legal codes and procedures.<sup>96</sup> Most controversial was the government decision to levy the unpopular tithe (*öşür*)<sup>97</sup> and to auction the tax farming rights (*iltizam*).<sup>98</sup> This decision was ironic, to say the least, as Armenian revolutionaries had condemned the tithe and *iltizam* during the Ottoman period. Terzibashian, a member of the government budget committee, conveys the dialogue between him and Sargis Araratyan (later minister of finance in the Dashnak Republic): “That day on the agenda of the Budget Committee was establishment of the [new] taxes. In this regard, Sargis Araratyan wanted to learn from me which one among the revenue accumulating means [taxes] of the Turkish government most promptly brought money in to the treasury.”<sup>99</sup> Terzibashian answered, “it was the tithe,” adding that the ARF was critical of that tax [during the Ottoman rule], implying that the government would not be

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<sup>94</sup> *Ashkhatank* n. 26(225), June 20, 1915, 4.

<sup>95</sup> *Ashkhatank* n. 33(232), July 15, 1915.

<sup>96</sup> Sahakyan, Ruben, “Vani Hahangapetut’yan Dat’avirakan Hamakargi Dzevaforume Patmut’yanits’,” *Bulletin of Armenian Archives*, 2006, n. 1(107), 49.

<sup>97</sup> *Öşür* (also called *ashar* or *aşar*) was a tax in the Ottoman Empire on agricultural produce.

<sup>98</sup> A form of tax-farming that has been used in the Ottoman Empire since the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. The *iltizam* system was based upon the principle of auctioning the taxing rights to the high-bidder (*mültezim*). The ARF was one of the most adamant critiques of *iltizam*, which they claimed, was a means of exploitation of the peasantry, both Kurdish and Armenian, in Eastern Anatolia by the feudal chiefs.

<sup>99</sup> Terzibashian, *Andranik*, 234-35.

sympathetic to the idea; Sargisyan responded, “money is money, it does not matter where it comes from.”<sup>100</sup>

One major problem with the tithe was that those who won the auction for tax-farming rights had to make advance payment to the government. According to Terzibashian, when the *Vanetsi* members of the budget committee expressed concern about the uncertainty military situation and future of Van, Sargis Araratyan assured the committee that he had the information through reliable sources that the Tsar had ordered no retreat “from Van under any condition.”<sup>101</sup>

To pump up revenue, the Aram government not only auctioned the right to tax-farming, but almost anything that he could out of the abandoned properties of the fleeing Muslims, the houses, fields, orchards and even trees.<sup>102</sup> Those who won the right to collect tithe and could afford to buy the real estate were either the relatively wealthy or in the close corrupt circle of government officials, mostly ARF members. And contrary to Araratyan’s reliable “news” about the Tsar’s firmness of purpose, on July 18, 1915, the people of Van were ordered to evacuate the province along with the retreating Russian Armies. The order was extremely disappointing for the *Vanetsi*, yet it was additionally frustrating for those who invested in money in government sales:

On behalf of the government, “governor” Aram auctioned those [abandoned] houses, logs, [construction] stones, trees in [their] gardens and everything that can be sold. He was not thinking whether these places are going to remain ours – and at those days this was the [common] belief. .... In Igdir (the initial

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 235. The expression Sargisyan used “drame hot chuni” literally means “money does not smell.”

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid; Egarian, *Husher*, 238.

destination of the Great Exodus), Vanetsi ARF members requested from Aram that he return the amounts [of money] that were taken from them for various sales. It will take us too far to talk about the shameful events that took place. Eventually he was obliged to satisfy his comrades' demands.<sup>103</sup>

We can see now sum up the larger contours of the story of Van. The "liberation" of the city came after *Vanetsi's* month-long life and death struggle, which had united Armenians of all walks of society and saved them from imminent destruction. The formation of the Armenian government had raised the hopes of Van Armenians, who had long yearned for security of life, property and dignity.

Yet, during the days of Armenian sovereignty, the axis of conflict proved not so simple as "Turk" against Armenian. "Armenian" itself proved a far from unitary or singular category, as old political and factional rivalries re-emerged, and in turn, an entirely new set of conflict of interests surfaced. The short-lived Armenian government was created with limited economic and military resources by a political elite that lacked the experience of governance. And beyond all, it was a sovereignty limited by the Russian Authority. The new regime, in other words, created a new hierarchy of its own, and just who was and was not its victim did not follow any simple ethnic or political lines. Thus, ironically, *the new regime produced its own victims or indeed added tiers to their victimization*. Van 1915, then, is part of the unique landscape of the Armenian Genocide of 1915. It is a crucial episode providing us with a window in to the many layers of Van Armenians' victimization in 1915, which monolithic, Manichean, and historically lazy portrayals have too often rendered invisible.

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<sup>103</sup> Egarian, *Husher*, 238.

## 5.4 The Armenian Governorship and its Kurdish Question

The Armenian governorship was from the outset created as an exclusively Armenian entity. It excluded Kurds, Turks,<sup>104</sup> Assyrians, Yezidis, Gypsies and Jews from administrative positions. Nevertheless, the Armenian authority did not have a uniform strategy of exclusion of all non-Armenian communities. During the clashes –especially in the southern parts of the province such as Shatak— Armenian forces endeavored to rescue and provide shelter to Assyrian villagers.<sup>105</sup> The Armenian government also recruited a number of Assyrians as part of the new police force in the countryside.<sup>106</sup> Assyrian-Chaldean Bishop Jacques Manna, in a May 25, 1915 message to the governor in Van (written in French<sup>107</sup>), expressed his gratitude and respect to the Armenian authorities. Yet Bishop Manna, pointing to the unfavorable economic situation of Assyrians and also to the need to repair destroyed Assyrian Churches, requested the government’s support and “equal treatment” in his very diplomatically worded message: “would the *Christian* government—which does not discriminate among races— not consider *equally* relieving the dark misery of our Assyrians and redress the losses of

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<sup>104</sup> During Armenian rule there was no difference in the government’s treatment of the Muslim Turks and Muslim Kurds. Often “Turk”(ish) or “Kurd”(ish) were used refer to people from both groups. Yet the overwhelming majority of Muslims in Van were Kurdish. In this section, I do not have a separate discussion on the Turkish population.

<sup>105</sup> *Ashkhatank*, n. 27(226), June 24, 1915, 3.

<sup>106</sup> In a June 25, 1915 dated report sent to Aram by from Khrapadar village in Norduz district Gagik Bedrosian (governor of Norduz) states that a Assyrian Police named Gasreon was killed in the clashes with Kurdish forces, see NAA 242. 1. 243. 6-7.

<sup>107</sup> The internal correspondence of the governorship was done strictly in Armenian. Russian was used in communication with Russian authorities. The petitions to the government officials were, with the exception of petitions by American missionaries (in English) and this particular message (in French), all in Armenian. It is an interesting choice by the Bishop Manna to write the petition in French instead of using Assyrian or having it translated into Armenian. Meanwhile, the use of written (Ottoman) Turkish in official/public affairs simply disappeared.

their [Assyrians'] churches? [Emphasis added]"<sup>108</sup> The assumed religious affinity between the Armenians and the Assyrians set the discursive ground for solidarity and cooperation. However, as Bishop Jacques Manna probably understood it, "Christian" solidarity only went so far for the government.

Indeed, Yezidis were the only community that received political recognition by the Armenian government. During the clashes and the siege no aggression or clashes between the Armenians and the Yezidis is recorded. On the contrary, many Yezidis cooperated with Armenians, providing crucial assistance to those under siege in the city.<sup>109</sup> Unlike Muslim Kurds, when the Russian Armies occupied the province Yezidis continued to live in their villages. During the Armenian Governorship, some of those whose villages were destroyed during the turmoil of March-April were resettled in Armenian villages.<sup>110</sup> An autonomous Yezidi territory was created in the Yezidikhane region of Saray under the leadership of Cihangir Agha. Yezidi rule was subject to the Armenian governorship of Ardjak.<sup>111</sup>

Following looting and clashes between Cihangir Agha's forces and 200 Kurdish irregulars loyal to the famous Kurdish chief Abdulrezzak (Bedirkhan) accompanied by forty-six Cossacks, Cihangir Agha and three of his men were arrested by the order of the

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<sup>108</sup> NAA 242. 1. 14-I. 13.

<sup>109</sup> Aram writes in his memoirs that the person who carried the message about the siege and situation about the Armenians in Van to the Russian Army and Armenian Volunteers in northwestern Iran was a Yezidi. During the clashes unlike Christians, Yezidis could, without much trouble, travel through Muslim populated areas.

<sup>110</sup> For instance a number of Yezidis were resettled in the Armenian Hasp'shat village in Arjak district, *Ashkhatank* n. 33(232), July 15, 1915, 2.

<sup>111</sup> *Ashkhatank*, n. 26(225), June 20, 1915, 3.

Russian General F. Chernozubov. But, demonstrating their good will towards the Yezidis, the Armenian authorities protested, and the Russians released Cihangir Agha a few weeks later.<sup>112</sup> Overall the relations between the Armenian and Yezidi communities were relatively peaceful, and the Armenian political leadership, under Cihangir Agha's auspices, deemed Yezidis important allies.

Unfortunately, there is no mention of what happened to the Jews and Gypsies during the clashes in the period of Armenian rule. Kara Schemsi [Saffet Atabinen] alleges that 300 Jews of Hakkari (at the time administratively part of the Van province) were massacred by Armenian forces.<sup>113</sup> Justin McCarthy *et al*, reiterate this claim, pointing out that in the Turkish census in 1927 only twenty-seven Jews were recorded in Hakkari.<sup>114</sup> Armenian daily *Mshak*'s correspondent in Van wrote that Jews of Başkale district fled along with the Muslims inhabitants as the Russian troops advanced into the area.<sup>115</sup> Yet I have not come across any reliable records confirming the claim that the Jews of the province had been massacred by Armenian or Russian forces.

Among all the many groups in the areas, the Armenian authorities viewed reconciliation with the Kurds as impossible.<sup>116</sup> Clearly, this feeling grew from Kurds' history of aggression against Armenians. In the two decades leading up to 1915 the Kurdish-Armenian relations in the late Ottoman period followed a winding path vis-à-

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<sup>112</sup> Sahakyan, *Haykakan Ostikanutyun Kazmakerpume Ev Gortsuniutyuwni Vani Nahangapetutian Srjanowm : (1915 Tvakani Mayisi 8 - Howlisi 17) : Pastatgteri Ew Nyuteri Zhogovatsu*, 27-28.

<sup>113</sup> Kara Schemsi, *Turcs Et Armeniens Devant L'histoire* (1919), 63.

<sup>114</sup> McCarthy, *The Armenian Rebellion at Van*, 239-40.

<sup>115</sup> *Mshak* n. 143, July 3, 1915, 1.

<sup>116</sup> Interestingly, many Armenians and missionaries writing about the events used the categories of Turk and Kurd in a confusing manner. Indeed, the treatment of Muslim Turks was not different than of the Kurds.

vis the shifting preferences of political authorities in the region, which reshuffled the hierarchy of ethnic groups favoring one of the group over another and leading to resentment and violence. In this process, groups' perception of the other took twists as well.<sup>117</sup>

With regard to the Van province, widespread and collective ethnic violence erupted between the two groups in 1896, during the Hamidian massacres (1894-96) and following the first Russian military incursion into the province in November 1914. The latter, unlike the former, ignited a fire, which briefly dwindled in the first three months of 1915, only to blaze into a wholesale conflagration as of late March 1915, ending any possibility of co-existence in the province.

In the post-Balkan Wars period (after July 1913), at a time when the Eastern Anatolian Reform Plan was on the agenda of the great powers and as the Ottoman state became increasingly alarmed about the rapprochement between certain Kurdish tribal notables and Russia, Ottoman Armenian media and political leaders began to highlight –at times with chauvinist overtones– the perils of Kurdish banditry and unlawfulness.

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<sup>117</sup> Elsewhere I analyze shifting perceptions of the image of the Kurd among Armenian intellectuals vis-à-vis changing political and social contexts. In the course of the four decades preceding the genocide, attitudes among Armenian community leaders toward the Kurds took various twists and turns within a wide spectrum of policies, from attempts to set up alliance and patronizing proposals for nation-building recipes for the Kurds, to exclusionary visions calling for segregation and chastising the Kurdish groups. Likewise, it is impossible to boil Kurdish attitudes toward Armenians down simply to animosity and rivalry. Beyond all, the relations between the populations had always had significant spatial and temporal variations. Van province was not an exception to this generally complex picture.

The Kurds, it was suggested, threatened not only the peaceful peoples of the region – chiefly Armenians – but also the very security of the Ottoman state.<sup>118</sup>

This allegation brought the troubles of the region to the attention of the great powers (regarding security of Armenians) and, at the same time, positioned Armenian political actors as patriotic and legitimate Ottoman subjects. In Van, the ARF militia under the command of Aram even took part in the governor Tahsin Bey's military operations against Kurdish brigands. Yet until November 1914, there were rumors but no verified acts of widespread violence between the two communities.

In the course of the first attacks in November-December 1914<sup>119</sup> and the turmoil after March 1915, Muslim Kurds participated in officially tolerated or sponsored killings, lootings and persecution of Armenian villagers, even if they were not the only ones. During the siege of the Van Armenians, thousands of Kurdish irregulars fought on the side of Governor Cevdet's forces. Muslim Kurds, as the clashes in the city began, were treated almost categorically as an enemy.

As the Russian forces accompanied by the Armenian Volunteer Battalions advanced from Iran into Van province, most Kurdish inhabitants began to flee, either to highlands or away from Russian occupied territories. In those villages where inhabitants could not or did not choose to flee, men were slaughtered and some women and

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<sup>118</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>119</sup> For a brief list of major incidents of assaults against Armenians in the eastern parts of the province see, Kosoyan, Hayk, "Van-Kaghaki Aprilean Kriwnere," *Hayrenik* vol. VI, n. 10(70), August 1928, pp. 150-51. For more detailed accounts and eyewitness accounts see Virabyan, Avagyan, and Hayastani Azgayin, *Vshatapatum : Hayots` Mets Egherne Akanatesneri Ach`K`Erov*; *ibid*; A-do, *Mets Depkere Vaspurakanum, 1914-1915 Twakannerin*

children were taken away. Russian Colonel Feodor Yeliseyev's account of the tragedy is very striking:

We had just approached the village [Soğuk-Su] that around twenty Kurdish horsemen rapidly rode out [of the village] toward south. We immediately entered the village. It was understood that this was an Armenian village, and only women and children had remained behind. ... They were all crying grievously. ... one mile away at a creek side we came across around ten corpses. Then we understood why the women of the Armenian village were mourning so bitterly. ... All the corpses were still warm. Their arms had been tied up at their backs and throats slashed. They were all young boys. ... We had marched forward quite a while without coming upon the breath of any living being on our way. And suddenly, we heard dogs barking. A village appeared in front of us. Rapidly we entered the village, but we saw nobody. There were only corpses of slaughtered women and children. From this we comprehended that that was an Armenian village. The bodies had not yet decomposed, which suggested that the massacre had recently happened. Nobody, other than a few skinny dogs, had remained alive in the village.<sup>120</sup>

Yet the advance of the Russian Army did not put an end to the tragedy, but created another one. In his memoirs, Sebuhan, vice-commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armenian Volunteer Battalion, describes the slaughter of inhabitants of a Kurdish village on their way to Van:<sup>121</sup>

On March 20 [1915], we took off toward a Kurdish village down from Sanamerik, which had vastly abused Armenians—even during the time of peace—by sheltering brigands and plundering innocent villagers. These Kurds had actively fought in the battle of Duzdagi; therefore it was ordered that we subject them to punishment [*ekzekutsia*] for 24-hours. I should confess that unparalleled killings were carried out in this village both by the Cossacks and by the Armenian volunteers. Weeping and screams of the Kurdish women rose to the heavens. But who would care! News of unprecedented crimes was reaching us from Turks; it was not possible to suppress the rage of our soldiers. The [Russian] colonel was a

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<sup>120</sup> *Hayrenik* "Rus Gntapedi me Patmutiwne," August 1957, 23-5.

<sup>121</sup> This Kurdish village was located on the Iranian side of the border.

God-fearing and good Christian guy, and he revoked the 24-hour punishment order.<sup>122</sup>

In the areas under the control of Russian forces or the Armenian forces tied to the governorship, Kurdish villages were by and large ethnically cleansed.<sup>123</sup> The Kurdish presence in the area was limited mostly to an unknown number of women and children, *prisoners of war*.<sup>124</sup>

During the Armenian governorship, the question of Muslim Kurds was treated as an existential security issue for two reasons: first, although Muslim Kurds had evacuated their villages, they were still in the vicinity of the Russian/Armenian controlled areas; armed Kurds often penetrated into these territories to rescue their belongings, to monitor the situation of their abandoned estates, or simply to attack.<sup>125</sup> In the course of Armenian rule, sporadic clashes between Armenian and Kurdish gunmen continued, especially in the southern and western frontier areas of the countryside such as Shatakh, Norduz, Moks, and Karjkan.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Sapah-Giwlian, *Pataskhanatunere*, 180-81. Terrorizing attacks against Kurds, armed or unarmed, was the common practice. Dro's [the commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armenian Volunteer Battalion] soldiers were attacking at the withdrawing Turks and were putting to the sword scores of Turks and Kurds. Almost all of the Kurds fleeing toward the plain [OVA], were put to the sword by Zemlyak's [aka Artem Nanumyan, commander of cavalier troops] cavaliers. See, Hamlet Gevorgyan, *Dro* (Erevan: Lusakn, 2007), 89.

<sup>123</sup> Gevorgyan, *Dro*, 101.

<sup>124</sup> Feodor Yeliseyev, a Russian Colonel, who was deployed with the Russian forces in the Spring of 1915 in Van, recounts that "Turks and Kurds were not taking [Armenian] prisoners of war, but rather killing [him] immediately. Reciprocally, Armenians were doing the same to a seized Turk or Kurd. They were slaughtering each other mercilessly." V. V., *Hayrenik* "Րս Գնտաբեմի մե Քառուտիւնը," August 1957, p. 21.

<sup>125</sup> Armenian papers have reported numerous cases of sporadic attacks by Kurdish gunmen in the countryside. The correspondent of the *Mshak* wrote reported that in one of the bloodiest of such attacks twenty-seven villagers were killed in the Harbents' village of Karkar district, see *Mshak* n. 143, July 3, 1915, 1.

<sup>126</sup> *Ashkhatank* n. 26(225), June 20, 1915, p. 2; *Ashkhatank* n. 27(226), June 24, 1915, 2.

Second, for the Armenian leadership, the continued Kurdish presence posed a political challenge, as the Kurds, unlike other groups with relatively small populations, did present a major demographic and geopolitical threat to a viable long-term and exclusively Armenian political entity in the area. This concern was further accentuated as it became clearer to the Armenian leadership that the Russians sought alliance with Kurdish tribes both to reinforce their military position in the occupied areas and to keep the Kurdish card available as a counterbalance to Armenian nationalists.

With these concerns in mind, the Armenian government pursued a Kurdish policy which advocated keeping the province free of Muslim-Kurdish presence. The Armenian militia and the newly established village guards fenced the Kurds off from their villages and barred their attempts to return. Aram, in his report of the governorship's policies titled *Primary Issues of the [Armenian] Government's Policies*, argued that the proclamation of Armenian governorship already had the effect of scaring the Kurds away:

Already the creation of the Armenian government [in Van] and my appointment as governor had caused fear among them [the Kurds] and convinced them that they could never live comfortably among us, and they could not dare approaching [us even] to submit petitions collectively.<sup>127</sup>

Frequently, Kurdish villages were looted and then leveled in an effort to prevent Kurdish resettlement. For instance, one of the most pro-ARF leaning Armenian leaders, Dikran [alias], wrote:

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<sup>127</sup> NAA 242. 1. 39.35-36.

Some of the Kurdish villages were devastated during the clashes. It was necessary to destroy the rest as well, so that *these criminals, at least until the winter*,<sup>128</sup> [Emphasis added] would not keep hope of returning (back).<sup>129</sup>

There is incomplete data compiled by Armenian government regarding Armenian casualties, yet the Kurdish losses are almost undocumented. Some evidence suggests that after the province fell under Russian occupation and power relations flipped, Muslim Kurds suffered a much higher death toll than other groups. In a rare reference to the situation of Van Kurds, a report published in *Ashkhatank* on conditions in the R̄ushtineats' district, the author suggests that Kurdish losses in the area may have been four or more times those of the Armenians, adding that over 800 Kurdish corpses had already been discovered.<sup>130</sup>

Another reported attack, by local Armenian militia and the volunteer fighters against the Kurdish village Sogants (located between Shatakh and Moks, where the inhabitants refused to surrender their arms), was supposed to have left 250 Kurdish villagers dead, whereas Armenian forces suffered a total of five casualties. The new government certainly encouraged the seizure of property and the cultivation and harvesting of the fields abandoned by fleeing Kurds.<sup>131</sup>

In the countryside an unknown number of Kurds, mostly women and children, were left behind and imprisoned by the Armenian authorities. These seized and

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<sup>128</sup> As stated elsewhere by Aram, keeping the Kurds away "at least until winter" would literally mean decimation of the Kurdish population due to heat, starvation and diseases. Hence it was thought by certain Armenian leaders as a means of getting rid of "the trouble" for good.

<sup>129</sup> Dikran, "Shatakh Ink'napashtpanutiwne," *Hayrenik*, vol. IX, n. 11(107), September 1931, 142.

<sup>130</sup> *Ashkhatank* n. 23(222), June 10, 1915, 2.

<sup>131</sup> Asryan, Armen, "Aram Manukyani Teghakagire Vani Hahangapetut'yan Kařavarutyan Gortsuneghut'yan Masin," *Bulletin of Armenian Archives*, 2006, 2(108), 13.

abducted Kurds were categorized as “prisoners of war” (*Paterazmakan Geriner*) and were forcibly kept in Armenian homes in the villages, denied any rights.<sup>132</sup> In the city, too, several thousand Muslim women, children, and elderly Kurds and Turks were left behind after the governor ordered the city’s evacuation in early May 1915. Their number increased as more Muslim prisoners were brought in to the city from the countryside. These refugees were handed over to the American Mission. One of the American missionaries stationed in Van, Grace Knapp, suggested that “the Armenian soldiers, unlike Turks, were not making war on such [on the Muslim refugees]”<sup>133</sup> Yet Mrs. M. Reynolds, another American missionary in Van, offers a quite different picture:

The Tuesday morning after the firing on Turkish homes, just four weeks from the beginning, Aram sent a small group of Turkish women and children, whom they had found in some of the houses they were burning, here to be protected and cared for, and they continued coming until we had 1,000 or more. Now they occupy *sunim* and also the old boys school – no beds, no possibility of bathing and no possibility of giving more than one small piece of bread daily. Our greatest trouble was not from them but from Armenians who crowded in to *tamasha* [protest], insult them and declare, “We’ll massacre everyone tonight,” and awful things were said against the missionaries for receiving them. The most immoral element crowded around and into our walls, and two or three times Mr. Y[arrow] has had to get up in the night and go to rescue some woman who was being carried off for immoral purposes. Now we have a strong Russian guard for them. The Armenians seem perfectly debauched – plundering and revenge the only thought of the day, and we might as well talk to the wall. The Armenians have suffered awfully, and the massacring done so cruelly it is no wonder perhaps that they are swept away now that they have a chance to avenge themselves. I think too the thought of Armenians is to make this a purely

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<sup>132</sup> There is no statistical data on the number of Muslim *captives* / *Prisoners of war* kept among Armenians. Yet episodic references shed some light on the matter; a letter by the governor of Khoshap to Aram indirectly points to the fact of the presence of Kurdish women and children captives in Armenian villages and to their conditions, NAA 242. 1. 13.33-34. These *captives* / *Prisoners of war* were also deemed as a bargaining tool for exchange with captives held by the *other* party. For instance, the Armenian daily *Van-Tosp* wrote that in the Moks district Armenians and Kurds were holding seventy and a hundred captives respectively, cited in *Mshak* n. 145, June 7, 1915, 1.

<sup>133</sup> Grace H. Knapp, *The Mission at Van in Turkey in War Time* ([NY: Priv. Print. [Prospect Press], 1916), 27-28.

Armenian province. What in the world to do with this crowd [refugees] no one knows.<sup>134</sup>

Many Armenian authors praise the *Vanetsi* for their supposedly humane treatment of these refugees.<sup>135</sup> Others, especially non-ARF writers, painted a bleaker picture. Eramean, for instance, regrets the attitude against these “left behind” Muslims:

Among the few Turks<sup>136</sup> left behind –[those who were] not willing to surrender—are slaughtered. Agitated by the vengeance of centuries and irate because of the recent villainies, the Armenian rabble did not even show mercy to around 2,000 defenseless women and children, who were exterminated one way or another.<sup>137</sup>

Similar comments were made by Yegarian. He also suggested that it was the Ramkavar militants who saved and handed the refugees over to the missionaries for protection:

The Turks had left so abruptly that they could not even clean their dining tables. They had forgotten their kids in beds, who when woken up by our noise would ask, “Where is my mom?” Also there were the sick people who could not escape. Those unfortunates were picked up by our men [referring to Ramkavar militants] and handed over to the Americans [missionaries] to gradually die because of contagious diseases.<sup>138</sup>

Alexandra Tolstoy wrote that each day twenty Muslims perished due to diseases and lack of treatment; in some cases bodies were buried without properly checking if they were dead or alive.<sup>139</sup> These refugees were also treated as prisoners of war and initially were not allowed to leave the missionary facilities. Alexandra Tolstoy’s

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<sup>134</sup> See Mattie Reynold’s May 29, 1915 letter to G. C. Reynolds which can be found at *the Papers of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* (ABCFM) 16.9.7, unit 5, reel 715.

<sup>135</sup> Mkhitarian, *Vani Herosamarte*, 208; Sahakyan, *Haykakan Ostikanutyun Kazmakerpume Ev Gortsuniutyuwne Vani Nahangapetutian Srjanowm : (1915 Tvakani Mayisi 8 - Howlisi 17) : Pastatgteri Ew Nyuteri Zhogovatsu*, 30.

<sup>136</sup> Indeed these were not only Turks but rather a mixed group of Muslims. It is very common that missionaries and even Armenians used the term “Turk” to describe ethnically mixed groups of Muslims.

<sup>137</sup> Eramian, *Hushardzan : Van-Vasporakani*, 339-40.

<sup>138</sup> Egarian, *Husher*, 229.

<sup>139</sup> Tolstoy, Strelsky, and Wolkonsky, *Out of the Past*, 40-41.

humanitarian intervention temporarily improved their condition by providing them with some food and basic treatment; she donated 600 Rubles to American missionaries for the care of the refugees.<sup>140</sup>

Ms. Tolstoy also requested that the Russian Commander order their release and resettlement in villages. According to Tolstoy, this would not only save their lives, but would also stop the spread of diseases among the Russian troops.<sup>141</sup> Eventually, following the June 23 decree of General Nikolayev, survivors were allowed to resettle in their villages and the Armenian government was obligated to meet their basic needs and guarantee their safety.<sup>142</sup> Yet their condition actually worsened.<sup>143</sup> They were literally abandoned in the war-devastated countryside with nothing other than a very meager amount of bread that the Armenian rulers provided them with.<sup>144</sup> Meanwhile they became more vulnerable to another threat, one Alexandra Tolstoy does not name, namely the Cossacks. On July 9, 1915, a few days before the evacuation of Van by Armenians, the vice chief of police in Van, Ghevont [Khanjian], sent a note to the governor regarding “the problem of Turkish prisoners of war”:

Reports from our police divisions indicate that the situation of Turkish *geriner* [captives] is deteriorating day-by-day; since at present they are in ailing, swooning and starving condition, those who more or less can [still] walk are obliged to go out of their homes and find means of living or beg here and there.

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<sup>140</sup> See the copy of Mattie Reynold’s May 29, 1915 letter to G. C. Reynolds which can be found at the Papers of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) 16.9.7, unit 5, reel 715.

<sup>141</sup> Tolstoy, Strelsky, and Wolkonsky, *Out of the Past*, 41-42.

<sup>142</sup> *Mshak* n. 155, July 18, 1915, 1.

<sup>143</sup> They were released with the June 22, 1915 (N. 31) same decree of Nikolayev. See, *Ashkhatank* 28(227), June 27, 1915, 3.

<sup>144</sup> With a June 22, 1915 decree the Russian Commander Nikolayev permitted the return of Kurds to their villages and sanctioned the Armenian rule to procure their safety and well-being.

In doing so, they beget the spread of diseases and their transmission among the people. On top of all this, according to these reports, they have several times been subject to Cossacks' sexual assaults leading to terrible panic. Bringing the problem to your attention we assert that we cannot take any responsibility concerning this issue, because they have neither certain shelter nor means of living.<sup>145</sup>

We do not know how many of these refugees survived their ordeal. It is also impossible to say whether Alexandra Tolstoy's lobbying for their resettlement had any influence on General Nikolayev's changing attitude toward the Kurds. Yet clearly Russian attempts to accommodate the Kurds turned into a major point of conflict between the Armenian government and the Russian military authority up until the retreat order. On June 15, Nikolayev banned the expropriation and harvesting of abandoned Kurdish fields and orchards, which he declared Russian property. The general warned that those who disregarded this claim would be punished as plunderers.<sup>146</sup>

One week later, on June 22, General Nikolayev announced an alarming decision to the Russian military authorities: he decreed that the commander of the fourth Russian Caucasian corps should "permit those Kurds who declarer loyalty to Russian

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<sup>145</sup> Vice-chief of police Ghevont's [Khanjian] July 9, 1915 note to the governor Aram, NAA 242. 1. 62.74. Grace Knapp too, put the blame of mistreatment of these refugees on the Russian Cossacks, who "considered the Turkish women legitimate prey, and although the Russian general gave us a small guard, there was seldom a night the first two or three weeks in which Dr. Ussher and Mr. Yarrow did not have to drive off marauders who had climbed over the walls of the compound and eluded the guard." See, Knapp, *The Mission at Van in Turkey in War Time*, 27-28.

<sup>146</sup> NAA 242. 1. 10. 45. This order was extremely alarming for the Armenian government; on the one hand it would render a smooth appropriation and hence de-territorialization of the Kurds impossible; on the other hand it would considerably reduce the harvest at a time when cereal supply was of vital importance. After Aram's insistent requests, Russian authorities allowed the governor to lease abandoned fields and orchards to Armenians only to harvest the crops. See Asryan, *Aram Manukyan : Kianke Ev Gortse ; Azatagrakan Sharzman Ev Ankakh Petakanutyun Verakanganman Ughinerum*, 128.

authority<sup>147</sup> to return their areas of settlement.” In the same statement, it was also stipulated that it would be the duty of the Armenian government to secure the lives and property of the Kurds against attack.<sup>148</sup>

Aram Manukian, in a report written retrospectively (in August 1915 in Yerevan<sup>149</sup>), gave an account of his government’s policies. Under the subtitle of *the question of self-defense*, Aram offers a glimpse into the Armenian government’s perception of the Kurdish problem as an existential security concern. The governor is very clear about his exclusionist and exterminationist policies against the Kurds:

From the very first day of this government, this [self-defense] question has confronted us. The Kurds, who had retreated from all over the province, had gathered along our southern frontiers/borders (Nortuz, Shatakh, Moks, Mamrdank’, Sparkert, Khizan). Every day, they were threatening by either attacking with all their might to massacre and eradicate Armenian towns (*gavar*) or by ostensibly submitting to Russian authorities so that they could return and settle in their original places of settlement. Yet our national interests required that [either] they [Kurds] should not return, and in case of an attack they should be massacred, or at least that they be kept *until the end of September* in the south [south of the areas under the control of the governorship], where they would *perish due to famine and heat* [Emphasis added]. When we heard about that [the Russians’ decisions], we immediately appealed and decided that we would in no way implement that order. ... Instead, we used all means at our disposal to prevent the Kurds from returning and surrendering.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> A literal translation of this term from Armenian and Russian texts would be to adopt citizenship or to naturalize; however in this context the expression refers to recognizing territorial authority of Russians and expressing submission to it rather than becoming naturalized Russian citizens. Therefore I interpreted it as to submit themselves to Russian authority.

<sup>148</sup> Asryan, *Aram Manukyan : Kianke Ev Gortse ; Azatagrakan Sharzman Ev Ankakh Petakanutyayn Verakangnman Ughinerum*, 125-26.

<sup>149</sup> This handwritten report does not have a date and name on it. Yet, from the style, content and handwriting it is argued that the report had been scribed after the retreat (18/31 July) and before Russian re-occupation of Van in mid-August 1915 when Aram returned back to Van. See, Asryan, Armen, “Aram Manukyan Teghakagire Vani Hahangapetut’yan Karavarutyayn Gortsuneghut’yan Masin,” *Bulletin of Armenian Archives*, 2006, n. 2(108), p. 10.

<sup>150</sup> NAA 242. 1. 39. 32.

Clearly, the Armenian government perceived the Russian commander's order for the resettlement of the Kurds as an existential threat. In the same report, under the "Kurdish question" subsection, Aram wrote:

The Russian government, for reasons unknown to us, and without considering the forthcoming evils [of their order], decided to accept Kurds who declared loyalty [to Russian Authority]. When we were informed about that, we immediately appealed the decision and decided that we would in no way implement that order. ... On the contrary, we used all means at our disposal to prevent Kurds from returning and surrendering.<sup>151</sup>

Aside from mobilizing Armenian networks in Russian and in the Caucasus, Aram also appealed to the commander of the Russian Caucasian Armies, Oganovsky, and to the commander of the Beyazid Detachment, General Nikolayev, imploring them to revoke the order.<sup>152</sup> Especially illustrative of the Armenian government's vision of the "Kurdish Question" is the letter the Armenian governor wrote to General Nikolayev on June 26, 1915, where he objected to the Russian Commander's decision regarding the return of the Kurds on seven grounds: (1) Kurds, as a group of people entirely armed from the age of seventeen to 60, should categorically be treated either as an enemy force or lay criminals because of the crimes (murder, rape, abduction and looting) they committed against the Armenians in the region; in both cases, according to Aram, they should have been punished; (2) Kurds resettled behind the army lines would pose a major threat to the success of the Russian military; (3) it would be completely impossible to thwart the espionage activities of the Kurds on behalf of the Ottoman Army; (4) it would be impossible to prevent the retaliatory acts of Armenian victims' relatives

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<sup>151</sup> NAA 242. 1. 39.35-36.

<sup>152</sup> Asryan, Armen, *Bulletin of Armenian Archives*, 2007, n. 1-2(109-10), 31.

against the Kurds, hence their resettlement would threaten the peace and order in the province; (5) allowing the return of the Kurds in impunity would give the impression that it is permissible to loot and kill Armenians; (6) seeing that their perpetrators are not punished would create the impression among the Armenians that the Russian military forces treat their allies, the Armenians, and their enemies, the Kurds, in the same manner, which in turn would create desperation among the Armenians regarding the Russian armies; (7) such a decision would contradict the Allied Powers declaration of Spring 1915, when they announced that those who commit crimes against the Armenians would be held responsible for their acts.<sup>153</sup>

General Nikolayev, responded to Aram's letter on July 4, repeated the determination of the Russian Caucasian Command to enforce the June 22 order.<sup>154</sup> The only revision made by the Russian military authority, after widespread pressures and protests, was to declare that the Kurds who participated in Armenian massacres would bear criminal responsibility.<sup>155</sup>

The overall shape of the relation between the Armenians and the Russian Army had, in short, changed, growing full of tensions. After the Balkan Wars, Russians championed the Armenian cause on the one hand, and on the other sought alliances with major Kurdish tribal leaders and notables. As the war broke out, the Russian Officials welcomed and encouraged Armenian support for the military campaign

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<sup>153</sup> NAA 242. 1. 39. 42-47.

<sup>154</sup> NAA 242. 1. 5. 176.

<sup>155</sup> NAA 242. 1. 14. 32. Also see Sahakyan, *Haykakan Ostikanutyán Kazmakerpume Ev Gortsuniutyuwone Vani Nahangapetutian Srjanowm : (1915 Tvakani Mayisi 8 - Howlisi 17) : Pastatgteri Ew Nyuteri Zhogovatsu*, 33.

against the Ottoman Empire at the Caucasian Front. This was ostensibly a sign of her extending support to the cause; yet, once the Russian Armies began to control the areas where they promised to liberate Armenians, conflicts of political interest began to crystallize.

Many Armenian political leaders thought of the formation of Armenian Volunteer Battalions (or active support to Russia in general) as a key move toward creation of a permanent political entity in the area.<sup>156</sup> Yet, the order for Kurdish resettlement increased the suspicions that perhaps the Russians did not want to see an institutionalized and viable Armenian self-rule on the territories under her control. The governor of Khoshab and the former director of the pro-Ramkavar paper Van-Tosp Armenak Ter-Boghosian in his July 2, 1915 dispatch to Aram, complained that Russians' policy of encouraging the Kurds made it impossible to keep law and order in the district:

Currently, these criminals [Kurds] as fellow-citizens are being [re]settled in a number of villages in our district, without considering legal procedures. That Kurd, who already dares to despise the [Armenian] district administration, will do much more in the future.<sup>157</sup>

Therefore, he demurred that under such circumstances his presence as the governor would be useless and asks Aram whether he should continue his position.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Sasuni, *Tachkahayastane Rusakan Tirapetutian Tak 1914-1918: Tachkahayots Gaghtasharzhe Ew Anonts Dere Hayastani Hanrapetutian Kazmutian Mej*, 36-41; Karapetyan, *Haykakan Kamavorakan Khmbere Ev Azgayin Gumartaknere Kovkasyan Razmachakatum, 1914-1917 Tt.*

<sup>157</sup> NAA 242. 1. 13. 33-34.

<sup>158</sup> The incidents of K'ŗel erupted after three Kurdish Women and two children forcibly kept as "prisoners of war" in the village were taken away and released on June 21 by Russian soldiers. Pursuant to one of the women's testimony that Ohannes, an Armenian villager, confiscated her belongings, Russian soldiers let the woman enter Ohannes's home to search for and claim them. Consequently, Ohannes was arrested and jailed in Khoshap. In this particular case the governor of Khoshap, complains that the Kurds, encouraged by

In Van, indeed aloofness between the Armenian authorities and the Russian Commander started in the very early days of the Armenian rule. The authorities felt that Tsar's troops were claiming too much credit for the defeat of the "Turks" and the liberation of the province.<sup>159</sup> For their part, the Russians did not want the Armenians, whose nationalist endeavors they have always approached with suspicion, to have too much autonomy. The coldness between the two worsened as the Russian General began to criticize corruption and misconduct by the Armenian officials.<sup>160</sup>

Finally, the Russian authorities often made known to the Armenian leaders their irritation by the unruly and greedy attitude of the Armenian authorities.<sup>161</sup> Politically, the Russian decision to allow Kurds to resettle was a tactical move to counterbalance Armenian claims on the one hand, and an attempt to reinforce the security of the Russian Troops in the area on the other.

Nevertheless, not many Kurds appear to have taken up the Russian General on his order to accommodate their resettlement. Only few cases of Kurdish resettlement are

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the "benevolent" attitude of the Russian commander, were repeating their "customary shameless" attitude of false accusations against Armenians and also threatening security and order. He also implicitly criticizes the Russian commander for allowing the Kurds to enter Armenian villages to search for their pillaged belongings and animals. He argues that this attitude did not respect the legal norms because, according to Ter-Boghossian, when the Kurds were seized and their properties looted, "they did not have the right to enjoy the protection of law because they were simply prisoners of war (paterazmakan geriner)." He also protested that the Russians who were going in quest of the Kurds kept in Armenian villages whereas the Armenians' requests, including the situation of the abducted Armenians among the Kurds, "were remaining almost unheard." Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Terzibashian, *Andranik*, 220.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 221-22.

<sup>161</sup> McCarthy, *The Armenian Rebellion at Van*; Terzibashian, *Andranik*, 223. ADD

mentioned.<sup>162</sup> Yegarian, who was appointed as police inspector, stated in a July 13, 1915 report that in the eastern town of Khoshab a number of Kurds did apply, acknowledging their submission to the Russian Authority. But these Kurds, instead of resettling in their villages, ultimately returned to their mountain shelters. Yegarian writes that he visited the tent encampment of local Kurdish chiefs and had a lengthy conversation with them. He reported that these Kurds were reluctant to return until security and order was established in the area.<sup>163</sup>

In the southern and western areas, however, Kurds did not even apply for resettlement. In his account of events in the Shatakh district, Dikran [alias] claims that Abdurrezak (Bedirkhan) went to negotiate with the Kurdish militia in the region in order to convince them “either to surrender [to Russian/Armenian Authorities] or rebel against the Turkish government.” However, he returned without much success.<sup>164</sup> Abdulrezzak blamed Kurdish ringleaders, and added that, “If it was not the influence of these ringleaders, the Kurds would come, surrender with great pleasure and rebuild their homesteads. Those ringleaders too, would consent *if ever an Armenian government did not rule here* [emphasis in the original].”<sup>165</sup> Dikran interpreted Abdulrezzak’s words

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<sup>162</sup> *Ashkhatank* July 15, 1915, n. 33(232), p.2; Van-Tosp reporters claimed that some of those resettled, using the opportunity, were “carrying out their customary criminal acts,” against Armenians, cited in *Mshak* July 8, 1915, n. 146, p. 1.

<sup>163</sup> NAA 242. 1. 14 II. 123.

<sup>164</sup> *Ashkhatank* July 11, 1915, 32(331), p. 4.

<sup>165</sup> Dikran, “Shatakhi Ink’napashtpanutiwne,” *Hayrenik*, vol. IX, n. 11(107), September 1931, p. 142.

“Apparently that is where their pain was; perhaps Abdulrezak’s pain too, was there... He wanted to form his own rule instead of the Armenian rule.”<sup>166</sup>

## 5.5 Concluding Remarks

As I mentioned above, the history of the relations between the Armenians and Kurds in Van province the genocide was by no means exclusively one of conflict. Further, over the same time span, the inter-communal violence had multiple agents including armed Armenian revolutionaries. Nevertheless, in this time period the Armenian communities of Van had disproportionately suffered from attacks by the Kurds. During the months of March and April 1915, in many parts of the province Armenian villages came under widespread assault by Kurdish militia. Some villages fought back and survived, yet many others suffered total destruction.

After the region was occupied by Russian troops and the Armenian Volunteer Battalions, the balance of power was reversed. The Armenian Government imposed a new hierarchical order on the various groups in the province. More strikingly, the Armenian political leadership envisioned and partly carried out a policy of ethnic cleansing of the Muslims in the province; Muslim villages were destroyed, properties looted and the population subjected to violent persecution and carnage. However, the inter-communal violence was not mutual but rather sequential – in other words, a cycle of revenge that took on a life its own more than a preplanned campaign of extermination based on already existing hatreds.

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

Many Armenian political and military leaders (and later many scholars as well) advocated and justified their violence as a remedy to communal victimization, discursively assuming that “Turks” and “Kurds” had always intended to destroy them; unfortunately, such discourses and acts did not put an end to Armenian victimization but created more victims. Hence, Van 1915 does not fit unproblematized binary models of victim and perpetrator; nor does it suit apologetic or denialist “mutual-killing” theories, much less what might be called “chaos frameworks” that would explain away the mass death as the result of war’s entropic violence. But it requires us to rethink the intricacies of victimization as well as the potentially perilous implications of discourses of communal victimhood, which certain approaches to scholarship have too often reinforced.

I should underline that this is in no way to minimize the suffering of the Vanetsi that followed the collapse of Armenian rule in Van. As Ottoman troops advanced west of Lake Van, on July 17, 1915, the Russian Military Authorities abruptly ordered all Armenians to withdraw from Van. Armenians of Van once again united, this time against the Russian commander’s order to withdrawal. The decision to retreat has been interpreted as a suspicious move by the Armenian leaders. In his memoirs Darbinian quotes Aram on the retreat order:

The Russian Military Authorities want us to deport the people. According to what they say, the advancing Russian Troops came across stiff resistance around

Bitlis. But, I believe, this is a Russian scheme. They want to evacuate Van. Some among ours [Commanders of Volunteer Battalions] have the same opinion.<sup>167</sup>

Likewise, the commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armenian Battalion is reported to have defied a Russian general, claiming that this retreat was an “utter sham,” and that what the Russians wanted was for “Armenia to remain without Armenians.”<sup>168</sup> In response, it is claimed that the general threatened to send Andranik to court martial. The announcement was so sudden that there was not enough time for the people of Van to prepare; the insistence of the Armenian militia commanders (who commanded 8,000 fighters) on staying and defending the Armenians of Van after the retreat of the Russian troops was ignored by the Russian authorities.

Yegarian, a fervent opponent of withdrawal, pressured the ARF leaders and commanders not to comply with the Russian order; he claimed that it was the lack of will, courage and self-reliance of the ARF leadership and Battalion commanders that thwarted his efforts to resist and stay.<sup>169</sup> Nevertheless, in a matter of hours, the Armenians of Van began their tragic exodus -- tragic because it marked both the death of the historic city of Van and the end of the thousands of years of Armenian presence in the province. It was also catastrophic, as at least one third of over 100,000 refugees, who lacked adequate protection, food, and means of transportation perished during the

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<sup>167</sup> Darbinian, *Hay Azatagrakan Sharzhman Orenen : Husher 1890en 1940*, 332.

<sup>168</sup> "Vem," 194.

<sup>169</sup> Egarian, *Husher*, 246-47.

nearly 300 km long march due to attacks by Kurdish tribes and grave conditions, or in Etchmiadzin due to famine and contagious diseases.<sup>170</sup>

Ironically, it was only two weeks later that the Ottoman Vali, Cevdet Bey, reclaimed the city with a force of 50 horsemen, and in mid-August the Russian Armies retook the city without any significant resistance. The retreat order and the Armenian leadership's failure to revoke it remained a controversy among different political factions and within ARF ranks. But none of them has ever disputed that the *Vanetsi* became the victims of the way the retreat was forced upon them, if not of an organized conspiracy by the Tsarist Russia.

In the broader view, there was relatively little organized resistance to the deportation, mistreatment and abuse of Ottoman Armenians in the Armenian genocide of 1915. The story of Van 1915 – and the resistance and subsequent Armenian provisional government there – is thus a quite unique case within the bigger tragedy. As I hope to have shown, however, the experience of Van does not fit neatly in the simple frame of the “ideal” victim. First, because Armenians of Van were not simply passive subjects in the process of their own victimization, but rather had their own agendas and interests. Ideologically both the Armenian political elite and commoners (some were already committed to the “cause” and others were motivated by fear, anxiety and opportunism) advocated and supported exclusionary nationalist visions themselves.

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<sup>170</sup> Ter Minassian, "Van 1915," 242-43.

Second, the political leadership of the Armenians of Van were themselves pursuing a policy of ethnic cleansing against Muslim inhabitants of the province, many of whom were subjected to carnage, extreme violence, looting and captivity. Many members of the Armenian community of Van were actively engaged in such acts. Third, the suffering and victimization of Van Armenians were not caused only by the Ottoman government, its armed forces, or Kurdish/Muslim militias, but also by their own newly formed government, the Armenian Volunteer Militia Battalions, and the Russian army and Cossacks. Finally, an important portion of the Armenian casualties in Van resulted from the political and military tactics of a “friendly” power, the Tsarist Russian Caucasian Military Command, which hardly had the wellbeing and security of Ottoman Armenians as a concern on their agenda.

The silence around the experience of Armenian Governorship in Van, despite the overwhelming emphasis on the uprising and the exodus in historical representations, points to very common problem of stereotyping and idealizing collective victimization in the study of the Armenian Genocide of 1915. My endeavor in this chapter is to show, on the one hand, how models of exclusive and idealized victimhood models fail to account for the complexities and contradictions of the victims and, on the other, the ways in which such frameworks resign the myriad complexities of victimization to oblivion.

## 6. Conclusion

In 2001, Kurdish organizations initiated a global political campaign that they called “Statement of Identity” (*Kimlik Bildirimi Kampanyası*). This publicity offensive was part of the celebrations of the 23<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). In Turkey — including Eastern Anatolia — and all over Europe, hundreds of thousands of people gathered in demonstrations and events petitioning government agencies to simultaneously embrace their Kurdish identity and demand its recognition. A commentary on the campaign which appeared in the pro-PKK daily *Özgür Politika* described Kurds as “a people 23 years old.”<sup>1</sup>

The idea of resurgent ethnonationalist identity reflects these changing 21st times. We are living in a world which, with increasing force, connects and mixes people, images, political ideas, and capital from all over the globe. The landscape of disappearing (conventional) boundaries, flourishing hybrid forms and ephemerality is also the scene of unprecedented identity crisis. *Primordias* feel particularly threatened, and they more anxiously than ever strive to re-establish *self* through statements of *difference* and demand the recognition and confirmation of boundaries. No other claim to *difference*, however, invites (and even requires) as powerful, affirming and charitable recognition as that of victim status — a status characterized by inherent passivity and innocence and right to retribution. Continued ethnic/religious polarization almost

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<sup>1</sup> *Özgür Politika* November 27, 2001.

everywhere in the world, coupled especially with post-Cold War reconciliation culture, locates the seeking of redress in “truth” and “apology,” in what anthropologists Laura Jeffrey and Matei Candea called “victimhood work”<sup>2</sup> (i.e., victimization and *politics* of it). Ironically polarization and “competition for victimhood”<sup>3</sup> are central to identity politics.

There is much truth to the idea of the Kurds as “*a people 23 years old*,” insofar as vociferous Kurdish identity claims are a relatively recent phenomenon. Starting in the early 1980s the PKK, with great political entrepreneurship, united and mobilized the resentment of Kurds in Turkey — from different groups and lingual, religious and political backgrounds — around a master narrative of the Kurdish nation’s shared historical victimhood. This victimhood discourse has been and continues to be the cement of the Kurdish nation-building project; Kurds have indeed suffered (as well as sometime inflicted suffering on others). The problem is that “victimhood work” does not merely help create communities; it also opens *wounds* that can lead to antagonism, violence and under certain circumstances even genocide.

The four chapters in this dissertation examined iconic sites of historical controversy. My scope is admittedly limited, with a focus on Armenian “victimhood work” on the eve of the most catastrophic episode, the genocide of Ottoman-Armenians at the hands of the CUP government. Having gone through major traumatic ordeals in the two decades before the genocide, — including widespread pogroms between 1894-

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<sup>2</sup> Laura Jeffery and Matei Candea, “The Politics of Victimhood,” *History & Anthropology* 17, no. 4 (2006): 288.

<sup>3</sup> Bauman, “The Holocaust’s Life as a Ghost,” 25.

96 and the Adana massacre of 1909 — the Armenian people already considered themselves a victim group, and so did many outsiders. Methodologically these chapters harness historical reconstruction of victimization experiences with an ethnographic inquiry into the public and political narratives of victimhood. This manuscript offers important insights into how Armenian public and especially political circles mediated the group's collective suffering on the eve and at the time of the genocide.

The chapters show how victimhood discourses are dynamic and strongly linked to the political contexts in which they emerge and circulate. For instance, Chapter 2 demonstrates that, although there was not an overall, noticeable escalation of aggression and deterioration of security and living conditions in Armenian communities in the post-Balkan War period (June 1913 – July 1914), it was still a time when rumors and expectation of victimization circulated in everyday talks and in the writings of journalists and political figures. I show that, in the face of uncertainty about the survival of the Ottoman Empire, victimhood discourses retrieved memories of past massacres and assaults as expressions of vulnerability and anxiety.

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 illustrate how, as the war broke out, different political and geographic segments of Armenian society employed their representations of past victim experiences toward opposing wartime agendas. To the Patriarch in Istanbul, the majority of the Ottoman-Armenian political leaders in the country and a few intellectuals in the Russian Caucasus, the nightmarish memories of the massacres in the

previous two decades evidenced the necessity of cautious neutrality. On the contrary, the Catholicos in Echmiadzin, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) leadership in Tiflis and the overwhelming majority of Russian-Armenian intellectuals reconstructed the Armenian victimization as an imperative for active and militaristic intervention to bring those sufferings to an end once and for all. Particularly illustrative is how, as the ARF moved toward a stance of active involvement in the war, the party's formulations of Armenian collective victim experience progressively evolved into an extremely abstract image that has lost all spatial and temporal specificities, an archetypal Ottoman-Armenian victim "suffering under the Turkish/Muslim yoke for centuries." Chapter 4 also explores how a new thread of the victimhood script emerged within the ARF as the Russo-Turkish war began and earlier optimism about an easy victory dissipated. This new version banalized the Armenian victim experience: it rendered the (by then) expected and imminent calamities thinkable and acceptable, and it erased the significance of the Ottoman-Armenian ordeal in and of itself, relocating its meaning as *a price of liberty*.

Chapter 5 shows how a reinterpretation of Armenian history under Ottoman rule as a categorical and uninterrupted experience of victimization was utilized by the new ruling Armenian elite as an ideological means for exclusive political and territorial claims. In this context Armenian victimhood not only justified Armenian sovereignty but also explained and became a defense of the defects of the new government elite.

Finally, my discussion of the short-lived Armenian Governorship in Van highlights claims of “exclusive victimhood”<sup>4</sup> and the role they played in shaping the exterminationist policies of the Armenian authority against Muslims, particularly the Kurds. As I elaborate in the chapter, there were multiple perpetrators of Van Armenian victimization, contrary to the common and simplistic (re)construction pitting Armenians (or Christians) and Russians against the Ottoman State and Kurds (or Muslims). The fact that the Armenian suffering caused by Russian soldiers, Armenian militia and the new government itself rarely, if at all, appears in Armenian victimhood narratives is a striking example of power relations and ideological nature of “victimhood work.”

This dissertation is not about the actual events of the Armenian genocide, which I want to explore in future research; rather, the chapters exploring crucial episodes on the eve and in the early stages of the genocide engage in an evaluation of certain methodological and theoretical approaches in the study of the concept of genocide. My discussion of the post-Balkan War phase of the conflict interrogate a nearly unanimous drawback in the accounts of the period, *escalation bias* -- a tendency to focus on the factors that led the genocide over those that worked against it. This tendency toward a *teleology of genocide* renders alternative scenarios impossible and downplays political agency, reconstructing genocide as an inevitable outcome. I argue that, aside from the

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<sup>4</sup> Jeffery and Candea, "The Politics of Victimhood," 292.

ideological determinism that haunts the historiography of the period, *escalation bias* is also closely linked to a methodological fallacy in genocide studies. I suggest that two causes of this fallacy are, first, the very nature of the subject matter as an unthinkable and horrifyingly extreme form of violence, and, second, the underlying motive of prediction in genocide studies.

Chapters 4 and 5 investigate the impact of war on genocidal escalation. My analysis shows that the war became *the most direct structural context* of the Armenian genocide, undermining the political, economic and diplomatic constraints of the past. In this new enabling environment, political leaders reformulated their agendas and took unprecedented and unanticipated steps that were neither conditioned by nor expressions of their respective antebellum positions. Therefore, my analysis points to political agency as the foremost determinant of the escalation. I show that *the war did not simply magnify or radicalize an existing situation; rather, it created a new situation that escalated into a catastrophe primarily because of the wartime decisions of political actors.*

In the introduction to *A Dictionary of English Language* (1755), Samuel Johnson noted that “no dictionary of a living tongue can ever be perfect.” In writing the conclusion of my dissertation on the conflict in Eastern Anatolia, I now fully realize that no study of a living conflict can ever be perfect, either. The account I provide here is not only imperfect but also incomplete. Although short of being a comprehensive study of the conflict, it offers insights into the “victimhood work” of the Armenian political elite

on the eve of the most catastrophic victimization of Ottoman-Armenians. This manuscript is only a step in my longer project of the study of victimhood and conflict in the region, with their history and implications today.

The most immediate next step is to explore the making of the Turkish “victimhood work.” A crucial part of that study will be to explore the political agency of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in the escalation and genocidal processes (decision making and campaign). This will require a special focus on how the Young Turk leaders’ self image as victims reshaped their *rationality* and consciousness. Turkish/Muslim images of victimhood were at the center of radical formulations of exclusivist nationalist ideologies in the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I suggest that with respect to the evolution of the various brands of Turkish nationalisms (and state formation projects), the Armenian genocide was significant more as a site from which they were produced rather than as an effect of them.

The Armenian genocide marked a crucial break from the Ottoman past and a major point of inception that haunts the cultural and political outlook of Turkish governments in the country in general and in the terrain of Eastern Anatolia in particular. Ironically, the image of a victimized (Turkish) nation became more salient in Turkish nationalist rhetoric after the genocide. This image legitimized and guided draconian demographic policies and oppressive measures employed by the Kemalist elite, particularly after 1924. A major task is to explore the ways in which the Kemalist

“victimhood work” operated; that is, how the experience (both as memory and policy experiment) of the catastrophe in the region during the world war was employed toward nation-state formation.

One obvious gap in this dissertation is the absence of Kurds as subjects. In recent debates around the Armenian genocide, Kurdish role and complicity have become highly contested issues. This is a tricky question because it entails the Kurdish subject as *a priori*. The earliest political imaginations of Kurdish peoplehood (as a collectivity comprising of groups from distinct lingual and religious backgrounds and self identification) burgeoned in the course of the first three decades of the century, in the midst of momentous political, cultural and ideological upheavals and violent chaos in the region. At the time of the world war (1914-18), the Kurdish nation was still a phantom presence; that is –adopting what Jean Paul Sartre proposed for Jews in the entirely different setting of the history of anti-semitism in Europe – the Kurd was a person whom only others considered to be a Kurd. The idea of Kurd, in its current connotation, was only a nascent form in a handful of elite political imaginations.

This renders Kurdish “victimhood work” focal to the construction of the Kurdish national identity, which like the Armenian and Turkish versions also entailed a collective self image of unique victimhood at its center. This dissertation illustrates that public victimhood narratives are contextual and often (re)shaped to suit elite political agendas. I also show in this dissertation, especially in Chapter 5, that Kurds took on

multiple and contradictory roles during the world war as both victims and victimizers, bystanders and rescuers and (Ottoman/Russian) collaborators and rebels. Starting in the 1920s, however, the Kurdish nationalist discourse took shape as a simple binary narrative: the oppressed Kurds vs. the oppressor (Turkish) state. In the same period Kurdish and Armenian political leaders in the diaspora began to articulate a shared victim position at the hands of the Turk. Between 1924-38, brewing Kurdish insurgency and brutal state repression — which in the case of Dersim (1935-38) was genocidal — further reinforced the dichotomous (Turkish State vs. Kurd) victim narrative. Future research into the construction of Kurdish victimhood in the first three decades of the century need to focus particularly on how the trauma of the world war and especially the Armenian genocide was incorporated into evolving nationalist discourses as well as in popular (oral tradition) literature and songs.

Fortunately genocide, a deliberate attempt to exterminate a group, is a very rare event. It is even rarer that perpetrators achieve their objective and “successfully” kill all group members.<sup>5</sup> Feminist philosopher Claudia Card argued that what distinguishes genocides from other mass murders is *social death*, which occurs when group members are “no longer able to pass along and build upon the traditions, cultural developments

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<sup>5</sup> The only exception that I know is noted by Ben Kiernan, who remarks that no survivors out of the 2,000 Laos ethnic minority in the Cambodian genocide were recorded. Ben Kiernan, "The Cambodian Genocide -- 1975-1979 " in *Century of Genocide : Eyewitness Accounts and Critical Views*, ed. Samuel Totten, William S. Parsons, and Israel W. Charny (New York: Garland Pub., 1997), 342. It seems that the relatively small group size made such comprehensive destruction possible.

(including languages), and projects of earlier generations.”<sup>6</sup> There is much insight in her argument; ironically, however, genocides do not only kill people, cultures and social/political networks but also pave the way for the (re)creation of nations, states and ideologies.

It is impossible to imagine the formation of a Turkish state in the region without the extermination of Armenians. In the early days immediately after the war, the Kemalist received significant support from the Muslims living in areas such as Erzurum, Antep and Maras, where the genocide and consequent political upheavals polarized local populations. Turkish national identity bears deep cultural and psychological marks of the genocide;<sup>7</sup> for example, young scholars recently showed how the appropriation of Armenian property during and after the genocide helped jumpstart the Turkish national economy.<sup>8</sup>

Claudia Card’s notion of social death corresponds to the experience of Ottoman-Armenians. Although around two-thirds of the population survived the genocide (most of them uprooted from their native areas), Ottoman-Armenian (or, as a broader category, Western Armenian) identity, social/political networks and cultural traditions were destroyed. Yet, ironically an Armenian state in Southern Caucasus was created in 1918 in a context that was ideologically, politically and demographically linked to the

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<sup>6</sup> Claudia Card, "Genocide and Social Death," *Hypatia* 18, no. 1 (2003): 73.

<sup>7</sup> Taner Akçam, *Türk Ulusal Kimliği Ve Ermeni Sorunu* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> Ugur Umit Ungör and Mehmet Polatel, *Confiscation and Destruction : The Young Turk Seizure of Armenian Property* (London; New York: Continuum, 2011); Bedross Der Matossian, "The Taboo within the Taboo: The Fate of 'Armenian Capital' at the End of the Ottoman Empire," *European Journal of Turkish Studies* (2011).

genocide. Indeed, a new Armenian-ness *resurrected*, as many Armenian authors called it, in the following decades, especially in the diasporas: Survivors, then mostly refugees, built new lives, and the entire Armenian community constructed a new collective identity out of the decade-long traumas of the genocide and succeeding events.

In addition to the genocide itself, the emergence of the very concept of genocide in the international arena (re)created Armenian identity and politics anew. 1965, the fiftieth anniversary of the genocide, was a watershed. That year, for the first time, the Soviet Union allowed Armenians to commemorate the genocide as an historic event. In the diasporas, too, Armenians mobilized in demonstrations both to commemorate the catastrophe and to demand its recognition as a genocide.

The genocide paradigm drastically reframed and also homogenized how the catastrophe is remembered. The campaign for genocide entitlement inevitably involved tailoring representations of the massacres and the historical background to match archetypical genocide criteria, evident especially in the focus on the specific and premeditated intent to destroy Ottoman-Armenians. As a direct consequence of the genocide paradigm, what used to be significant variations across threads of historical writing became progressively more indistinct. The outcome was a new, cohesive narrative of pure Armenian innocence and exclusive victimhood. Another crucial corollary of the genocide paradigm was the making of Turkish denial. Although the Turkish official and nationalist narratives at times (especially between 1918-1922) did

not contradict the fact that massacres occurred, they never acknowledged “Turkish” or official responsibility for them; yet, until the genocide paradigm, there was *nothing* to deny.

The controversy surrounding Armenian genocide, combined with the influence of anti-colonial liberation movements, led to the emergence of radical armed Armenian groups, which, in the 1970s and 1980s, launched attacks against Turkish targets in various parts of the world, including the US, France, Australia and Turkey. The Turkish response was further resolute denial, increased intimidation of the dwindling Armenian community in Turkey (mostly concentrated in Istanbul), and the use of its intelligence service and ultra-right militants to assassinate members of radical Armenian organizations and attack symbols of genocide, including a memorial erected in Marseilles, France. A new page opened in the 1990s, marked by the emergence of an independent Armenian state in the Caucasus neighboring Turkey and growing Kurdish activism orchestrated by the PKK and post-Kemalist Turkey. The conflict is still brewing, full of uncertainties. As part of future research, it is imperative to trace the changing narratives of innocence, guilt and blame among the three groups to accomplish the goals of the broader project.

Genocide is a concept laden with controversy, challenges and contradictions. One of the challenges — perhaps the most fundamental aspect of genocide — is the description of victims. The UN Convention limits genocide victims to “a national,

ethnic, racial or religious group.” This seemingly straightforward and commonsensical description encounters major challenges in practice, as establishing group identity is often an overwhelming task because commonly presumed stability and cohesion of categories is rarely if ever possible. A major drawback of such a strict method of identifying victims is that it can legalistically leave out groups which cannot fulfill those identity criteria. In Rwanda, for instance, the victim group was identified as a tribe, which forced the Rwanda tribunal (ICTR) to reformulate the definition of victim collectivity as “any stable and permanent group.”<sup>9</sup> This strategy does not eliminate the problem, however, because not all victim groups are, as the study of forensic anthropologist Debra Komar on Darfur shows, “stable and permanent.” What makes things even more complicated is that, as Komar observed, “victim and perpetrator identity in Darfur are not mutually exclusive.”<sup>10</sup> However, the legal definitions and popular perceptions of genocide create “victim” and “perpetrator” as categories easily identifiable through group affiliation.

My contest regarding the legal, scholarly and popular characterizations of the victim group is this impact on the post-genocide identity formation of *socially dead* groups. As this dissertation argues, the categorical coupling of national, ethnic, religious and racial identity with a perception of exclusive victimhood, beyond being factually inappropriate, is also a powerful propellant of aggressive identity politics. Genocide is

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<sup>9</sup> Adam Jones, *Genocide : A Comprehensive Introduction* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), 13.

<sup>10</sup> Komar Debra, "Is Victim Identity in Genocide a Question of Science or Law? The Scientific Perspective, with Special Reference to Darfur," *Science & Justice* 48, no. 3 (2008): 151.

an identity-centered concept and, as a legally recognizable and punishable act, often perceived as the epitome of suffering and destruction of the innocent. This conceptualization, in a way, runs the danger of being counterproductive to the very idea of fighting against genocide and its causes, as such clear-cut exclusivity help reconstruct aggressive categories of collective identity. However, I should note that group identity and the identity of victims often overlap with unmistakable accuracy. It seems like this paradoxical dilemma is extremely difficult to avoid if at all possible.

My broader project explores the making of victimhood narratives among Turks, Kurds and Armenian around the Eastern Anatolian question. Hence, this dissertation is a study on victimhood, more specifically the victimhood of Armenians--a group which had already suffered the massacres of the preceding two decades --on the eve of the Armenian Genocide of 1915-16, their most catastrophic victimization. Such an effort inevitably involves high political, moral and scholarly stakes. Some analysts correctly highlight methodological and conceptual stakes. Iris Jean-Klein and Annelise Riles remark that, in the ethnographic research of "open political conflicts and ongoing violations" of human rights and "'still open wounds" during the aftermaths of conflicts," some anthropologists focus on "diverse expressions of violence, victimization, and victimhood" and "adopt a posture" they call "co-construction." These anthropologists, Jean-Klein and Riles observe:

set out to express both moral and analytical empathy with subaltern subjects in the field of study. Analytical engagement becomes the medium through which

moral and social or political support is administered.<sup>11</sup>

Likewise, Martin Shaw, following historian Dirk Moses, asserts that “a critical perspective is necessary that ultimately transcends that of victims, as well as of perpetrators and their descendants,” because “different victim groups make incommensurable, indeed competing claims, and group traumas contribute to blocking conceptual development.”<sup>12</sup>

Anthropologists Paul Antze and Michael Lambek remind us of the weighty moral risks of revisiting victimization and raise this challenging question: “To what extent can perpetration itself be reproduced either by drawing a line between victims and perpetrators, or by blurring the two?”<sup>13</sup> Social anthropologist Hadas Yaron emphasizes the potential political promises of a critical approach to victimization and offers a powerful answer:

In reply, I wish to suggest that although the process of blurring categories and historical settings could serve manipulative political agendas or enable the reproduction of “self” and “other”, it could also be a humanist attempt to portray humans as operating within complex and extreme situations, and therefore as being complex themselves, thus breaking down the boundary between self and other.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Iris Jean-Klein and Annelise Riles, "Introducing Discipline," *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 28, no. 2 (2005).

<sup>12</sup> Shaw, *What Is Genocide?*, 109.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Antze and Michael Lambek, *Tense Past : Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1996). Cited in Hadas Yaron, "The Short Story Contains Them All: Victims and Perpetrators, Past and Present, in Post-Holocaust and Post-Colonial Israel," *History & Anthropology* 17, no. 4 (2006): 386.

<sup>14</sup> Yaron, "The Short Story Contains Them All: Victims and Perpetrators, Past and Present, in Post-Holocaust and Post-Colonial Israel," 386.

My position echoes and draws on these critical approaches; first, it problematizes parochial appropriations of and claims for exclusive victim status. This is not to repeat a “color-blind” neo-liberal argument. My effort is, on the one hand, to set the record straight in reconstructing the contested past by not basing it on a claim of truism, but by endowing it with the nuance it deserves.

On the other, I take Arendt’s statement that systematic violence that target a group in the form of mass-killing or genocide is a “crime against humanity, perpetrated upon the body” of a specific group.<sup>15</sup> Insistence on such a humanist perspective is a powerful vantage point from which to transcend both methodological nationalism and the boundaries between self and other, which are not only the effects of trauma but also, at the same time, the causes.

Second, my analysis concurs with Shaw and Moses regarding the necessity of a critical perspective in order to go beyond *co-construction*, so as to open up broader spaces for sophisticated analytical understanding of collective violence and genocide. Perhaps this will not enable us to predict and prevent genocides, but at the very least it will not counterproductively replicate simplified visions of victimhood.

Finally, I find Antze and Lambek’s reminder extremely important: there are moments when “transcending boundaries” or “blurring lines,” above and beyond the question of their conceptual or methodological relevance, is violent and meaningless. To

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<sup>15</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem : A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Penguin Classics (New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books, 2006), 269.

question alternative scenarios or expect some other behavior from an individual or group when they (by the virtue of assumed affiliation with a group) are encountering genocidal terror — as Arendt describes in a similar context — is “silly and cruel.”<sup>16</sup> Further research can and should be done into the suffering of Ottoman-Armenians that, most obviously, hard-line Turkish nationalism has so stubbornly tried to deny. But, if we want both to understand the events of 1914-5 and their continuing repercussions, we must also examine Turkish and Kurdish as well as Armenian “victimhood work.” and their costs for contemporary interethnic relations and for our understanding of the violence in Eastern Anatolia.

Philosopher Philip Hallie spelled out the most appropriate final words for this dissertation almost three decades ago: cruelty “is an evil because it separates us into victims, victimizers, and spectators. It isolates us from each other. The alternative to that evil cannot be adversarial”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Catherine Lu, “Human Wrongs and the Tragedy of Victimhood,” *Ethics & International Affairs* 16, no. 2 (2002): 117.

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## **Biography**

Yektan Turkyilmaz was born on August 17, 1972 in Ankara, Turkey. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Boğaziçi University in 1997. He was enrolled in the Department of Cultural Anthropology in 2000. He received a Master of Arts degree in cultural anthropology in 2003. Fellowships and awards received include: The American Research Institute in Turkey - The National Endowment for Humanities Postdoctoral Fellowship, The Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation Dissertation Award, Katherine A. Stern Dissertation Award, John Hope Franklin Center Fellowship, Duke University Graduate School Frankel Award, Social Science Research Council International Dissertation Field Research Fellowship, Council of Library and Information Resources Mellon Dissertation Fieldwork Award.