

Beyond national narratives? : centenary histories, the First World War and the Armenian Genocide

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Jo Laycock

BEYOND NATIONAL NARRATIVES? CENTENARY HISTORIES, THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

Abstract

In April 2015 the centenary of the Armenian Genocide was commemorated. Just like the First World War centenary, this anniversary has provoked a flurry of academic and public interest in what remains a highly contested history. This article assesses the state of the current historiography on the fate of the Ottoman Armenians. It focuses on the possibilities for moving beyond the national narratives which continue to dominate the field, in particular through connecting the case of the Armenian Genocide to what has been termed a 'transnational turn' in the writing of the history of the First World War.

Introduction

Referring to the fate of the Ottoman Armenians as a 'forgotten genocide' no longer feels appropriate. Whilst the Turkish government continues to pursue an active policy of denial, international public, political and academic awareness of the decimation of the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire has increased significantly. This has been particularly evident in 2015, as the centenary of the Armenian Genocide has been commemorated in Yerevan (the capital of the Republic of Armenia) and Istanbul, as well as in Armenian diaspora communities around the globe.¹ The commemorations have attracted unprecedented international media attention, due in no small part to the interventions of two rather different figures. The significance of Pope Francis' statement has been widely recognised.² Kim Kardashian's visit to the Republic of Armenia has, on the contrary, been easy to trivialise, but the role of celebrity culture and social media in generating public interest in this contested issue is a reality surely deserving of further analysis.³

Commemorations have been accompanied by a wave of academic conferences and landmark publications. Ronald Grigor Suny's *They Can Live in the Desert and Nowhere Else*, for example, provided insightful new syntheses of the causes of the Genocide. Others, notably Fatma Müge Göçek's *Denial of Violence* and Thomas de Waal's *Great Catastrophe*, have addressed aftermaths, remembrance and denial.⁴ These publications build upon groundbreaking research conducted in Turkish and international archives by historians including Raymond Kevorkian, Taner Akçam and Uğur

¹ The Genocide is usually commemorated on 24th April, the date of the arrest and deportation of leading members of the Istanbul Armenian community. On the Istanbul commemorations and diaspora participation see the Project 2015 website (accessed 2 September 2015) <http://www.armenianproject2015.org>; INTERNET.

² 'Full Text: Pope Francis' message to the Armenians'. Catholic Herald, Monday 13th April 2015 (accessed 5 June 2015) <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2015/04/13/full-text-pope-franciss-message-to-armenians/>; INTERNET.

³ On 25th April The Guardian reported on Kardashian's call for President Obama to use the word 'genocide'. Jana Kasperkevic, 'Kim Kardashian Urges Obama to Call Armenian Massacre a Genocide' The Guardian (accessed 5 June 2015) <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/25/kim-kardashian-obama-armenian-genocide>; INTERNET.

⁴ Suny, *They can Live in the Desert*, Göçek, *Denial of Violence* and De Waal, *Great Catastrophe*. Other publications in the centenary year are Vicken Cheterian's *Open Wounds* and Robertson, *An Inconvenient Genocide*.

Ümit Üngör.⁵ Their research has demonstrated how the deportations and massacres were centrally orchestrated and has shed light on the local specificities and the wider international contexts which shaped the fate of the Armenians. Akçam and Üngör in particular have situated the Genocide in a spectrum of ‘demographic engineering’ in the late-Ottoman Empire in which Kurds, Greeks, Assyrians and other minorities, as well as Armenians, were targeted. As a whole, this scholarship demonstrates two trends in the historiography of the Genocide over the last fifteen years. Firstly, a shift away from finding ‘evidence’ that the treatment of the Armenians constituted Genocide under the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide to more nuanced, theoretically informed approaches to cause, experience and aftermath.⁶ Secondly, a gradual destabilising of the two distinct Armenian and Turkish narratives which dominate the historiography and which, at first sight, ‘appear to defy reconciliation’.⁷

In *Denial of Violence* Göçek demonstrates how a ‘mythicised’ national historiography was constructed in the Turkish Republic which ‘valorised Turkish achievements, whitewashed the crimes, blamed especially the minorities and the west for all past defeats and silenced the violence committed against others.’⁸ Denial of genocidal violence against the Armenians was a key feature of this narrative of national history. The Armenian counter-narrative has been shaped by this context of denial which, according to Sebouh Aslanian, has ‘created a hypertrophied or bloated historical memory for most Armenians’.⁹ An essentialist and defensive national narrative of national history has emerged which focuses on suffering and survival. This narrative has been little integrated into broader historiographies as the ‘unresolved trauma of the genocide’ has encouraged parochial insulation from the larger world.’ Aslanian’s own response to this predicament has been a call for a new approach to the Armenian past which ‘is interactive and framed within the larger context of world/global history’.¹⁰

This article reflects on recent trends in the historiography in the light of the call for a more ‘interactive’ history. It considers the insights that a shift beyond dominant national frameworks has already offered and the pitfalls and possibilities of further developing transnational approaches to this contested past.¹¹ Transnational history, Patricia Clavin suggests, is ‘more about performance than structure. It does not have a unique methodology, but is motivated by the desire to highlight the importance of connections and transfers across boundaries at the sub- or supra-state level, the compo-

⁵ Akçam, *The Young Turks’ Crime Against Humanity*. Kevorkian’s *The Armenian Genocide* provides a detailed region by region narrative, Uğur Ümit Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, on the Diyarbakir region. See also the essays collected in *A Question of Genocide*, for example Arkun, ‘Zeytun and the Commencement of the Armenian Genocide’. Michael Reynolds claims that Akçam’s research alone ‘dynamites the claim that the Ottoman Archives exculpate the Ottoman state.’ Reynolds, ‘Review Forum’, 473.

⁶ This shift is explained in Suny, ‘Truth in Telling’.

⁷ Suny, ‘Truth in Telling’, 931.

⁸ Göçek, ‘Reading Genocide’, 42. In *Denial of Violence* Göçek connects denial of the ‘foundational violence’ of the Armenian Genocide to continuing violence against minority and opposition groups within the Turkish Republic.

⁹ Aslanian, ‘The Marble of Armenian History’, 133-4.

¹⁰ Aslanian, ‘The Marble of Armenian History’, 133-4, 130. World/global history is not the same as transnational history but shares the desire to go beyond the nation state as the primary or only unit of analysis and consider broader processes of exchange and circulation and the importance of networks and border crossings of various kinds.

¹¹ A shift is evident in the approach of the UCLA Armenian History centenary conference entitled, ‘Genocide and Global History: A Conference on the 100th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide’ organised by the Richard Hovannisian Endowed Chair in Modern Armenian History at UCLA, April 2015

sition of categories, and the character and exploitation of boundaries.’¹² A transnational approach does not imply disregarding the nation state as a category of analysis, but it does demand paying attention to interactions between local, nation and international events and processes. Nor does it preclude paying attention to conflict. Whilst transnational approaches may have frequently emphasised ‘movements, flows and circulations’ in a manner suggestive of growing co-operation or integration, the case of Armenia demonstrates that transnational approaches also offer insights into the causes and consequences of violence and displacement.¹³

Transnational encounters, practices and approaches have shaped innovative academic engagements with the Genocide and its aftermaths in recent years. Cross-border encounters and projects have brought together scholars, artists, journalists and activists and shifts in the public and intellectual climate within Turkey have allowed groundbreaking Turkish scholars drawing on hitherto neglected archival sources to challenge the official line.¹⁴ This climate, coupled with the fall of the Soviet Union has also encouraged dialogue between scholars from Turkey, the diaspora and the Armenian Republic.¹⁵ The ‘subversive friendships’ forged through these processes have created space for new analyses of both causes and consequences of violence against the Armenians and, more broadly, an opportunity to re-think relations between Armenians, Turks and the other peoples of the former Ottoman Empire past and present.¹⁶

The aim of this article is not to provide a comprehensive review of the causes and implementation of the Genocide. Rather, this article looks outwards, focusing on the ways in which interpretations of the Armenian Genocide have been developed or challenged by methods and approaches which connect the treatment of the Armenians to transnational contexts and processes.¹⁷ I focus particularly on the place of the Armenian Genocide in the history of the First World War. Jay Winter has suggested that the current ‘generation’ of scholarship on the First World War is characterised by its transnational approach.¹⁸ However, the fate of the Armenians still remains largely isolated from the historiography of this conflict. Integrating these historiographies is not simply a matter of considering the First World War as a cause of the Genocide, it also means considering how the fate of the

¹² Patricia Clavin, ‘Time, Manner, Place’, 625. Some central debates are addressed here: C. A. Bayley, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyer, Wendy Kozol, and Patricia Seed, ‘AHR Conversation: On Transnational History’.

¹³ Hofmeyer, ‘AHR Conversation: On Transnational History’, 1444.

¹⁴ On changing Turkish society and politics see Öktem, *Angry Nation*. Speaking To One Another is one such dialogue project. Some outcomes are available on the project website (accessed 11 July 2015) <http://www.dvv-international.ge/region/speaking-to-one-another.html>; INTERNET.

¹⁵ The Workshop in Armenian Turkish Studies (WATS) project was initiated by Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Göçek and Jirair Libaridian.

¹⁶ I borrow the term ‘Subversive friendships’ from Kerem Öktem and Sossie Kasbarian. Both were involved in the London based Project of Armenian and Turkish Studies. Öktem and Kasbarian, ‘Subversive friendships’, 121 - 146.

¹⁷ My focus in this article is largely on the anglophone scholarship. Most of the key contemporary debates have developed in diaspora and international scholarship rather than from within the Soviet/post-Soviet Republic of Armenia. On the divergence between historical scholarship in the Armenian Republic and the diaspora and conflicts over the conceptualisation of national identity, see Sebouh Aslanian, ‘The Treason of the Intellectuals’. In the Republic of Armenia the centenary has led to several commemorative publications but few new research based monographs/articles or syntheses. Important recent contributions to the scholarship from the Republic of Armenia include a collection of eyewitness testimonies by Verjine Svazlian, *The Armenian Genocide and Harutyun Marutyan, Iconography of Armenian Identity*, which addresses the neglected subject of how the memory of the genocide has shaped ongoing conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

¹⁸ Jay M. Winter ‘General Introduction’ 6.

Armenians challenges and deepens current understandings of the nature, conduct and consequences of this conflict. At first sight it seems that the centenaries of the First World War and the Armenian Genocide provide an ideal platform for the development of such integrated histories. I consider to what extent this has been the case.

National Narratives

Whilst the Turkish Republic established in 1923 endures, the post-war Armenian attempt at national independence proved short-lived. In May 1918, in the vacuum left by revolution and the collapse of the Tsarist Empire an Armenian Republic was created in the South Caucasus. By December 1920, facing an advance by Turkish nationalists, the Republic's leaders had accepted Sovietisation as the 'lesser of two evils'. This new Soviet Republic provided a home for around 300,000 Armenian refugees as well as the established local Armenian population.¹⁹ Thousands of other surviving Armenians meanwhile made new lives in diaspora communities in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean. Others embarked on more prolonged trajectories of displacement and resettlement. Smaller numbers survived in the Turkish Republic where some, who had converted to Islam during and after the Genocide, forcibly or otherwise, concealed their Armenian identities.²⁰

These circumstances of dispersion, insecurity and hardship meant that in the inter-war period no single, state-sponsored Armenian account of the Genocide emerged. Aside from the publication of several key memoirs and accounts, remembrance occurred privately, in family contexts. Whilst the inter-war years were a critical period of identity formation in diaspora communities, perhaps because of this relative paucity of public, centralised commemorative practices there has been little research addressing the specific ways in which the memory of the Genocide was shaped or shared in different communities during these years.²¹ In the case of the Soviet Republic of Armenia, in contrast, it has become commonplace to assume that memories of Genocide were actively suppressed by the authorities. The reality was rather more complex. Soviet nationalities policies fluctuated over time but frequently meant the (re)construction rather than suppression of national categories and identities. This entailed both the construction of official, state-sanctioned national histories and attempts to shape collective memory to suit Soviet political and social ends.²² Thus to assume Genocide was 'forgotten' in Soviet Armenia is too simplistic. The fiftieth anniversary of the Genocide was met with unprecedented protests that led to the construction of a memorial to the Genocide

¹⁹ Literature on Soviet Armenia remains limited. Matossian, *Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia* is a classic text. Razmik Panossian connects the histories of the Soviet Republic and the diaspora in *The Armenians*.

²⁰ The publication of Fethiye Çetin's *My Grandmother* awakened public curiosity and scholarly interest in these 'hidden Armenians'.

²¹ On diaspora communities during this period see, for example, Mandel, *In the Aftermath of Genocide and Migliorino, (Re)Constructing Armenia*. Memorial practices such as the production of memory books recalling life in the Ottoman Empire before the genocide did occur. See Mihran Minassian, 'Tracking down the past: The memory book (houshamadyan) genre - A Preliminary Bibliography' (accessed 15 July 2015) available from <http://www.houshamadyan.org/en/themes/bibliography.html>; INTERNET. Oral histories of the genocide have addressed these issues to some extent, for example, Donald E. Miller & Lorna Touryan Miller, *Survivors*. A few scholars have addressed the specific structures and practices through which the genocide has been remembered. See for example Nefissa Naguib's analysis of family photographs and memory 'Storytelling'.

²² Suny examines nationalities policy in Soviet Armenia in *Looking Toward Ararat*.

in Yerevan. These events suggested that the Soviet state's policies on the Genocide were not set in stone nor all-encompassing.²³

Whilst the treatment of the Armenians was well known to the Allies during the First World War, following the Treaty of Lausanne and the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1924 it rapidly faded from political and public consciousness. International 'forgetting' was driven by geopolitical imperatives, initially the desire to maintain good relations with the Turkish Republic and later Cold War politics.²⁴ This international process of forgetting thus worked in tandem with the Turkish narrative. In the aftermath of the Second World War Raphael Lemkin's articulation of the legal category of genocide, as enshrined in the 1948 Convention, provided a new vocabulary through which Armenians could articulate their experiences and seek justice or redress. It transformed the way in which Armenian communities engaged with their own pasts.²⁵ Talar Chahinian explains that, 'Armenians of the diaspora, now out of refugee camps and economically more stable, see the international response to the Holocaust and recognise their own right to appeal to international law. This sense of awakened political consciousness becomes a unified, transnational collective voice in 1965, when Armenian communities around the world commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the genocide. Subsequently, the call for recognition, demanded from both the communities' host countries and from Turkey, becomes the marker of Armenian identity in the diaspora.'²⁶ These shifts had a more troubling side. Between 1973 and 1985 two Armenian terrorist groups ASALA (Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia) and the JCOAG (Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide) assassinated Turkish diplomats and bombed public spaces.²⁷ Their attacks polarised diaspora communities and fostered the development of a more aggressive denial narrative in Turkey.²⁸

Against this turbulent backdrop Armenian scholars pioneered the academic study of the Genocide.²⁹ The climate of intensified denial and increasing claims for recognition shaped this early research. Whilst important steps forward were made, too much of this work was predicated on the assumption of endemic conflict between Armenians and Turks or shaped by essentialist notions of Turkish (or Islamic) barbarity and Armenian passivity and victimhood.³⁰ The tendency to treat the writing of Armenian history as the recovery and preservation of an endangered national identity and culture also resulted in a dearth of critical, theoretically informed approaches. Complexities were masked as these narratives tended to present Armenians simply as victims rather than as agents in their own

²³ On 1965 and the Armenian protests: Maike Lehman, 'Apricot Socialism'. Lehmann argues that the building of the genocide memorial was not a matter of opposition to socialism but was part of a 'hybrid continuum between the national and socialist', 29.

²⁴ See Bloxham, *Great Game of Genocide*, part III From Response to Recognition.

²⁵ Contemporary observers of course did not have the term 'genocide' at their disposal, but they referred to the massacres and deportations as an attempt to 'exterminate' a nation. Laycock, *Imagining Armenia*, 115-116.

²⁶ Talar Chahinian. 'The Paris Attempt', 12.

²⁷ These episodes are not well integrated into the historiography but see the chapter 'Assailing Turkey' in de Waal's *Great Catastrophe*.

²⁸ Göçek, *Denial of Violence*, 452.

²⁹ Richard Hovannisian was at the forefront of this research. Yves Ternon, *Les Arméniens* was the first major work by an international scholar.

³⁰ For example Dadrian's work posited an enduring conflict between Turks and Armenians, relying on orientalist ethnic and religious stereotypes. Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide*. Elements of his approach, especially his argument for a genocidal agenda stretching back into the nineteenth century has been widely critiqued.

right.³¹ In response the Turkish state and a few international historians articulated more elaborate denial narratives.³² That Armenians had perished was not generally disputed. Rather, the numbers of Armenian deaths were minimised, or the massacres were said to be the result of a ‘civil war’ in which both Armenians and Turks perished. Alternatively, in what Robert Melson has termed the ‘provocation thesis’, it was argued that disloyal Armenian nationalists who were likely to side with the Russians in the war posed a genuine threat to the Empire and the deportations were thus a rational and proportional defensive measure.³³ Scholars outside this debate meanwhile tended not to engage with a subject which, if not unknown, appeared to be fraught with difficulties. Thus by the end of the twentieth century two polarised narratives had hardened, and there still appeared to be limited scope for moving beyond them.

Beyond National Narratives: Comparisons to Contexts

The centenary of the Genocide was formally commemorated in Armenia at the Genocide Memorial at Tsitsernakaberd, Yerevan on April 24 2015. In his address the President of Armenia connected the fate of the Armenians to genocides in Europe, Rwanda and Cambodia and to ongoing violence in the Middle East.³⁴ The tendency to connect the fate of the Armenians to other episodes of mass killing in the twentieth century and to link remembrance and recognition to the prevention of further crimes of this nature came to the fore with the development of comparative genocide studies in the 1990s. The rapid expansion of this field was borne out of a desire to understand the tragedies which had unfolded in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. Comparative approaches also had earlier origins in analyses of the relationship between the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust. Some groundbreaking research emerged from this approach.³⁵ However, a preoccupation with measuring the Armenian case against the Holocaust sometimes detracted from the particularities of the Armenian case, risked creating a deterministic narrative of the development of genocidal violence from the First to the Second World Wars and generated a disproportionate focus on the question of German involvement.

As comparisons broadened the case of Armenia was frequently included in comparative volumes as an illustration of an ‘early’ instance of modern genocide.³⁶ Whilst such scholarship went some way to counter images of the Armenian genocide as a consequence of a unique path of national history or ancient enmities between Armenians and Turks, it posed problems of its own. The emphasis on

³¹ Genocide and recognition at this time began to dominate many diaspora communities, leading to articulations of Armenian identity which some found limiting. This is explored in Meline Toumani’s memoir *There as and there was not*. The backlash that Toumani’s approach provoked in some sectors of the Armenian press reflects the continued power of these kinds of nationalist discourses in Armenian communities. See for example Garen Yeghparian, ‘Soul Searching or Self-Serving’ *Armenian Weekly*, 18th December 2015 (accessed 16 July/2015) <http://armenianweekly.com/2014/12/18/soul-searching-or-self-serving/>; INTERNET

³² On denial and international scholars, Suny, ‘Truth in Telling’ esp., 932-935. The Middle Eastern Studies series published by Utah University Press provided one forum for denialist accounts in the United States.

³³ Robert Melson, *Revolution and Genocide*.

³⁴ ‘Statement by Serzh Sargsyan, the President of the Republic of Armenia’ 24 April 2015 (accessed 3 September 2015) available from the website of the President of Armenia, <http://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2015/04/24/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-Genocide-April-24/>; INTERNET

³⁵ For example, Melson, *Revolution and Genocide* and contributions to Hans Lukas Kieser and Dominik J. Schaller, eds. *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern und die Shoah*.

³⁶ Important contributions to the comparative perspective included Weitz, *A Century of Genocide*, Gellately and Kiernan, eds. *The Spectre of Genocide and Naimark, Fires of Hatred*.

creating typologies and a ‘preoccupation with the definition and applicability of the term genocide’ ultimately limited its effectiveness.³⁷ In particular, in emphasising patterns and templates this scholarship tended to de-historicise or de-contextualise particular cases. In the words of Mark Levene inadvertently or otherwise, it created the impression that ‘genocides occur in situations radically outside, or at least at the margins of normative existence.’³⁸ In the Armenian case, this meant that finding the origins of features of later incidences of mass killing overrode considerations of historical context and contingency.

More fruitful for the Armenian case has been interpretations which relate mass killing to tensions generated by the decline of empires and the rise of modern nation states. Levene, for example, has demonstrated how modern genocidal practices emerged in the regions where the ‘complex, plural, non-essentialist rimland society’ of the European continental empires came into contact with the emerging modernizing nation-state system of western Europe. His perspective is particularly salient to the Armenian case, bringing to the fore the importance of Armenia’s geographical location without resorting to clichés regarding the ‘barbarism’ or inherent instability of Europe’s borderlands.³⁹ In general, historians of the Armenian Genocide now situate its causes within this framework of imperial collapse and the rise of nation states premised on ethnic homogeneity. There are a number of different inflections in the scholarship but virtually all acknowledge the centrality of entwined processes of ‘decline and modernisation’ in the late Ottoman Empire in determining the fate of the Armenians.⁴⁰

The image of the late nineteenth century Ottoman Empire as the ‘sick man of Europe’ is well established. The rise of nationalism amongst minority populations was central to the problems facing the Empire. By the end of the nineteenth century it had already lost significant territories in the Balkans. In addition to the loss of land, revenue and prestige, territorial losses also had serious social consequences. For example, during the second half of the nineteenth century, the resettlement of Muslim refugees (muhacirs) from the Caucasus and the Balkans in Eastern Anatolia created pressure on land and resources, increasing existing tensions between the Armenians, Kurds and other ethnic groups which populated these regions.⁴¹ The Ottoman state was not passive in the face of these problems. Rather it embarked on various processes of ‘defensive’ modernisation and reform. Reforms were partial and affected the minorities in an uneven manner. According to Bedross der Matossian their effects ranged ‘from changes in the dynamics of power within the communities, their relations toward the state, center-periphery relations and interethnic relations, to the metamorphosis of overlapping, vague identities.’⁴²

³⁷ Bloxham and Moses, ‘Introduction’, 7.

³⁸ Levene, *The Crisis of Genocide* Vol. 1, preface.

³⁹ Levene, *Crisis of Genocide*, 99.

⁴⁰ Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, 25.

⁴¹ Longer-term patterns of deportation and resettlement is an emerging but still under-explored theme. See Chatty, *Displacement and Dispossession*, chapters 3 and 4.

⁴² Bedross der Matossian, *Shattered Dreams of Revolution*, 21.

New scholarship on minorities in the late Ottoman Empire shown how these changes destabilised established social and ethnic relations, creating new sources of conflict.⁴³ It has also however demonstrated the complexities of late-Ottoman social identities and the limitations of analyses based on assumptions of fixed ethnic difference and division. For example, in her analysis of the memoir of an Armenian shoemaker from Marash Nora Lessersohn argues that ‘We must exercise the patience to consider more than one lived reality and conceptualise lives lived in more than one register ... a late Ottoman (Armenian) subject could feel both ownership and alienation, brotherhood and fear.’⁴⁴ The path from an imperial system which accommodated difference, which was predicated on inequality but allowed for inter-communal interaction and fluid identities, to an exclusive vision of Turkish nationalism which excluded minorities, was complex and contested. The ‘Hamidian’ massacres of the Armenians in the 1890s were not a first step on a predetermined path to Genocide but rather an attempt of the embattled Sultan to ‘maintain the old order’.⁴⁵ Even after the Young Turk revolution and coming to power of the CUP in 1908 the dominance of exclusionary ethnic Turkish nationalist ideologies was by not means assured. The CUP incorporated a broad range of modernizing and reforming perspectives and a wide range of visions of the Empire’s future emerged.⁴⁶

The Balkan wars of 1912-13 transformed Ottoman attitudes to the Armenians. According to Ungor their consequences were ‘nothing short of apocalyptic’.⁴⁷ In this context Armenian nationalism, however limited its reach in reality, appeared more of a danger than ever.⁴⁸ Whilst Balkan nationalisms had led to the loss of the Empire’s peripheries, Armenian nationalism, it was thought, posed a threat to the Ottoman heartland, and thus to the very existence of the Empire. Suny has stressed that Ottoman fears of Armenian nationalism should be taken seriously if we are to understand the causes of the Genocide, arguing that from the nineteenth century a negative and fearful ‘affective disposition’ towards the Armenians began to develop. Following the catastrophic losses of the Balkan wars in 1912-13, as refugees arrived in Anatolia with accounts of violence perpetrated by Christians this was intensified, creating the conditions in which genocide became possible.⁴⁹

Nationalism has long been identified as a cause of the Genocide, but its significance has been interpreted in a number of different ways. Bernard Lewis’ argument that the fate of the Armenians as a result of a deadly competition between ‘two nations’ has been widely criticised, not least for overestimating the power of Armenian nationalist movements and underestimating the highly unequal context.⁵⁰ Whilst the Genocide undoubtedly occurred in the context of the rise of the nation state,

⁴³ There is a substantial literature on the experience of different ethnic and social groups during this period, which goes beyond the scope of this article. See for example Matossian, *Shattered Dreams of Revolution*, Klein, *The Margins of Empire*, Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties*.

⁴⁴ Lessersohn, “Provincial Cosmopolitanism”

⁴⁵ Hovanissian, *The Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire*, 226.

⁴⁶ On shifts within the CUP see, for example, Üngör, *Making of Modern Turkey*, 30-33.

⁴⁷ Ungor, *Making of Modern Turkey*, 43.

⁴⁸ On Armenian nationalism see, for example Dikran Kaligian, *Armenian Organisation and Ideology*.

⁴⁹ Suny, *They Can Live in the Desert*. How this ‘affective disposition’ operated in particular local contexts, warrants further investigation. Many scholars have noted that several Young Turk leaders had origins in the former Ottoman territories in Greece and the Balkans. On atrocity and violence in the Balkan wars see Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction*, 132-140.

⁵⁰ Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 356.

important questions remain regarding the role of nationalism in driving genocidal policies. Michael Reynolds has demonstrated that the destruction of the Armenians arose as much in a context of conflict between two imperial states, the Russian and Ottoman Empires as it did from a surge of nationalist feeling: ‘interstate competition, and not nationalism, provides the key to understanding the course of history in the Ottoman-Russian borderlands in the early twentieth century.’⁵¹ Suny meanwhile makes a careful distinction between the desire to preserve or re-invigorate a struggling empire which conditioned the Young Turks’ genocidal policies and the post-war, Kemalist project of building a modern Turkish nation-state.⁵²

Üngör and Akcam meanwhile identify the Armenian Genocide as part of emerging practices of ‘demographic engineering’ in the Ottoman Empire, practices that were informed by but not reducible to nationalist ideologies.⁵³ These practices had its roots in the longstanding, if ad hoc, resettlement policies of the Ottoman authorities. Akcam explains how, in the aftermath of the Balkan wars resettlement came to be managed in a more ‘systematic’ fashion geared towards the ethnic ‘homogenization’ of Anatolia.⁵⁴ Armenians were not the only minority to be targeted. As Üngör demonstrates, such processes continued to be a feature of the Turkish Republic, which would also subject the Kurds to deportation and violence.⁵⁵ Emphasising this context connects the Ottoman treatment of the Armenians to the rise of specifically modern forms of ‘population politics’. It identifies the targeting of minorities not as a product of Ottoman ‘backwardness’ but a function of the transnational emergence of states that viewed the re-shaping of their populations to conform to particular ideals as a desirable or necessary process.⁵⁶

Alongside these reconsideration of the internal dynamics of late Ottoman politics and society new scholarship on the fate of the Armenians has also emphasised the importance of external factors. Donald Bloxham’s *Great Game of Genocide* demonstrated how internal developments in the Ottoman Empire intersected with the geopolitics of the Eastern Question and an international context of competition between modernising empires. By the 1890s the Armenians had effectively become pawns in the geopolitical political ‘games’ of the Eastern Question. Acknowledging the ways that ‘great power’ politics contributed to the fate of the Armenians has sometimes resulted in a reductive narrative which simply blames the powers for ‘abandoning’ the Armenians to their fate. However, more recent analyses have demonstrated in a nuanced manner how transnational advocacy networks, however well-meaning, inadvertently increased Ottoman hostility to the Armenians and fuelled the fires of Armenian nationalists without providing them with any concrete support. Understanding these processes requires going beyond the realm of ‘high politics’. The Armenian question

⁵¹ Reynolds, *Shattering Empires*. Reynolds argues that the two empires should be treated as ‘state actors rather than as manifestations of proto-nationalist ideologies or holding tanks for nationalist movements’, 6.

⁵² Suny, *They Can Live in the Desert*,

⁵³ Üngör, ‘Turkey for the Turks’ see also Dündar. *Crime of Numbers*.

⁵⁴ Akcam, *The Young Turks’ Crime Against Humanity*, 29

⁵⁵ Üngör, *Making of Modern Turkey*, Chapter 3: Deportations of Kurds.

⁵⁶ The classic argument regarding the relationship modernity to Genocide is of course Bauman’s, *Modernity and the Holocaust* which emphasises the espousal of ‘rational’ or ‘scientific’ techniques by modern states for shaping their populations. Some of the latter scholarship differs in inflection but draws on his approach. For the twentieth century European context see Amir Weiner, ‘introduction’ in *Landscaping the Human Garden*. The essays in this volume demonstrate that these practices spanned the communist and capitalist world alike.

drew in a variety non-state actors who sought to advocate for the Armenian cause. The interventions of the missionaries, clergymen, scholars, journalists who constituted western Europe's Armenophile networks were not simply a sideshow. Their actions influenced the fate of the Armenians, by bringing them to the attention of the wider world, forging a wider public understanding of the 'Armenian question' which would ultimately shape international responses to Genocide.⁵⁷

Genocide and the boundaries of the First World War

There is a growing acceptance amongst historians of the Armenian Genocide that the outbreak of the First World War played a decisive role in determining the fate of the Ottoman Armenian population. A generalised acknowledgement that the war provided a 'cover' for Genocide has been replaced by more in-depth analyses of the particular ways in which the early stages of the war transformed the attitudes of the Young Turks and lead them to view the Armenians as an unacceptable threat to the Empire. The early stages of the war in the Ottoman Empire featured both sporadic violence against minorities and state-led deportations. Even the war had begun Greeks living in coastal regions had been subject to forced resettlement as a prophylactic measure, part of the 'demographic engineering' which followed the Balkan Wars.⁵⁸ However the fate of the Armenians would be qualitatively different to these early measures. In late April 1915, on the eve of the Gallipoli landings, the targeting of Armenians evolved into a systematic process of deportation and massacre designed to remove the Armenian population in its entirety from the Ottoman Empire.

The shift towards Genocide followed the devastating defeat of the Ottoman army by the Russians at Sarikamish in early 1915 and Armenian resistance in the Eastern Anatolian city of Van. These events generated a very real fear amongst the Young Turks that Armenian nationalists would side with their compatriots across the border in the Caucasus and thus pose a threat to the security of the already-vulnerable Empire. Bloxham has characterised these development in terms of the 'cumulative radicalization' of the Young Turk leadership, in doing so demonstrating that the Genocide was a contingent and evolving process rather than the outcome of a pre-existing 'blueprint'.⁵⁹ His perspective may be connected to an acknowledgement across the wider field of genocide studies that genocidal processes frequently occur as part of a broader continuum of violence. In the words of Norman Naimark, 'genocide has a dynamic of its own. It is not an 'event' in and of itself, but a process ... Many cases of genocide begin with programs of forced deportation or ethnic cleansing that evolve sometimes seamlessly into mass murder.'⁶⁰

Despite the growing importance accorded to the War by scholars of the Genocide, the deportation and massacre of the Ottoman Armenians remain peripheral to histories of the First World War, barely connected to the trench warfare of the Western front which dominates both the historiography and popular conceptions of this conflict. If, as Winter has suggested, a 'transnational turn' is

⁵⁷ Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, Anderson, 'A responsibility to protest?', Tusan, *Smyrna's Ashes*: and Laycock, *Imagining Armenia*.

⁵⁸ Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime Against Humanity*, Chapter 3: *The Aftermath of the Balkan Wars*.

⁵⁹ See Bloxham, 'The Armenian Genocide of 1915–1916'. On total war and genocide see Jay Winter, 'Under cover of war'.

⁶⁰ Naimark, 'Preface' in *A Question of Genocide*, xvii

underway in First World War studies, there is potential to better integrate these two histories.⁶¹ Mark Levene has suggested that our existing ‘myopia’ regarding the war beyond the western front, ‘most particularly in the rimland Balkans, Anatolia and Caucasus as well as the larger Eastern Front, can have the effect of distorting our understanding of the nature of the Great War elsewhere.’⁶² If this is the case then better integrating the fate of the Armenians would help to redress the balance, and enhancing understandings of the nature and experience of the War in general.

Over the last decade the work of historians has reached beyond the battlefields of north-western Europe, engaging with events on other fronts and the experiences of populations beyond Europe.⁶³ These developments have not always filtered through to the public sphere. A British Council report, *Remember the World as Well as the War*, prepared on the eve of the centenary, highlighted the limits of public knowledge and understanding of the global dimensions of the conflict: ‘The centenary provides an opportunity to enhance trust and understanding between the UK and countries around the world. As well as remembering the events of the Western Front, it needs to include the contributions, experiences and trauma of many more countries.’⁶⁴ Still, many of the flagship events commemorating the War’s centenary, in the UK at least, have either had a distinctly ‘national’ tone or reinforced the emphasis on the trench warfare of the Western Front.⁶⁵ The commemorative installation ‘Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red’, which opened at the Tower of London in 2014 to public acclaim, consisted of thousands of ceramic poppies, each representing one British or colonial life lost in the war. Inadvertently or otherwise this reproduced the iconography of the Western Front and the European ‘lost generation’.⁶⁶

Reviews of First World War historiography prompted by the centenary have concluded that even in the academic sphere the ‘transnational turn’ remains partial and uneven. Alan Kramer, suggests that, ‘the main spotlight remains on the west European theatre and Germany while the Eastern and Southern theatres, not to mention the global aspects are left largely in the dark.’⁶⁷ The regions inhabited by the Armenians are still not in the spotlight. Indeed the Ottoman and Russian Empires as a whole have, in relative terms, been neglected in the historiography of the First World War.⁶⁸ As Joshua Sanborn has pointed out, whilst the names of the battlefields of Western Europe are generally familiar to educated Europeans and Americans, few have heard of the sites of violence and con-

⁶¹ Alan Kramer points out that the claim of writing transnational histories is often ‘unfulfilled’ Kramer, ‘Recent Historiography’, 5.

⁶² Levene, *Crisis of Genocide*, 38

⁶³ Some of the important developments are brought together in Robert Gerwarth and Erez Manela’s *Empires at War*. For their articulation of why the First World War must be addressed from a global perspective see Gerwarth and Manela, ‘The Great War as Global War’. 1914-18 Online: International Encyclopedia of the First World War (accessed: 2/09/2015). available at <http://www.1914-1918-online.net>; INTERNET is notable for its global scope and transnational approach.

⁶⁴ Botanic and Dubber, *Remember the World as well as the War*, 3.

⁶⁵ John Horne observed that in contrast to the Second World War the commemoration of the First World War is ‘a national affair shaped by subsequent national histories.’ ‘The Great War at its Centenary’, 622.

⁶⁶ Background information on the installation (accessed 30 July 2015) is available here

<http://www.hrp.org.uk/TowerOfLondon/poppies>; INTERNET. It is important to note that other projects, for example the Imperial War Museum’s commemorative events program, engaging with both local and global international dimensions of the conflict. See the ‘First World War Centenary’ website, (accessed 30 July 2015). <http://www.1914.org>.

⁶⁷ Kramer, ‘Recent Historiography’, 9.

⁶⁸ Kramer also highlights the lack of research on the Austro-Hungarian Empire, ‘Recent Historiography’, 19.

flict on the Eastern front.⁶⁹ The same may be said of the Ottoman Empire, with the notable exception of the Gallipoli campaign, and this impinges on popular international understandings of the war largely as an exceptional, highly mythologised account of bravery and defeat for British and AN-ZAC troops.⁷⁰ This lack of knowledge of the war in these two vast continental empires is not simply a matter of (western) euro-centric bias. It has also been shaped by the post-war trajectories of these territories and the ways that they have shaped local patterns of remembrance and forgetting. For whilst the First World War may have led to a ‘memory boom’ in Western Europe, the same cannot be said of the former Ottoman and Russian Empires.⁷¹

The First World War has been conspicuous by its absence from Ottoman and Turkish historiography, overshadowed by the War of Independence and the foundation of the Turkish Republic. In 2010 Eric Jan Zürcher suggested that ‘with the single exception of the issue of the Armenian genocide it [the First World War] remains the most understudied period in twentieth century Turkish history.’⁷² The historiography, according to the Mustafa Aksakal, has been shaped by the desire to establish a ‘clean break’ with Ottoman past.⁷³ The First World War in the Russian Empire, has similarly been eclipsed by the Russian Revolution and subsequent civil wars. Karen Petrone’s research has demonstrated that whilst in Soviet Russia no ‘overarching, mythic narrative’ of the conflict emerged, limited but diverse spaces remained in which the war was remembered and losses mourned.⁷⁴ Referring to the construction of the Genocide memorial in Yerevan in the mid-1960s, Petrone makes a brief but important case for the need to look beyond Russia in order to understand the history and memory of the war in the Russian Empire.⁷⁵

Despite these circumstances, in recent years research on the War in both the Ottoman and Russian Empires has broadened and diversified. The perspectives which have emerged from this research, provide a framework for a proper contextualisation of fate of the Armenians as part of the wartime experience of the Ottoman/Russian borderlands. It has long been commonplace to observe that the fate of the Armenians was a result of their borderland position, the liminal location of their ‘homeland’ on the edge of two competing empires. However, explanations which rely on the notion of borderlands as sites of endemic violence, as Peter Holquist has explained, tend to ‘reify historical conditions as near-permeant, quasi geological features’ or rely on ‘one dimensional explanations -

⁶⁹ Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse*, 1.

⁷⁰ There is a large academic and popular literature on the Gallipoli landings and their aftermaths. McLeod’s Gallipoli approaches the battle and its legacies from a multi-national perspective.

⁷¹ Winter describes the creation of ‘war memorials in every French commune and in almost every British village’. *Remembering War*, 25-6.

⁷² Erik Jan Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy*, 153. Zürcher highlights that a lack of written sources addressing the experience of the war, a product of low literacy levels amongst the army, has been one reason for this. 167.

⁷³ Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914*, 13. If the war was addressed, it was addressed as a prelude to the War of Independence - see Yücel Yanıkdağ’s comments on Republican interpretations of Gallipoli in ‘Ottoman Empire/Middle East’. 1914-1918 (accessed 7 August 2015) Available at Online International Encyclopedia of the First World War http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/ottoman_empiremiddle_east; INTERNET. This article provides a good introduction to the War in the Middle East and a bibliography of key texts.

⁷⁴ Petrone, *The Great War in Russian Memory*.

⁷⁵ Petrone, *Great War in Russian Memory*, 289. Aaron Cohen’s research on Russian emigres has similarly highlighted how the scale of displacement in the Russian Empire has meant that the remembrance of the conflict has often taken on a transnational structure and character. Cohen, ‘Our Russian Passport’ 650-51. On displacement in the Russian Empire during the First World War see Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking*.

‘the clash of civilizations’, for instance.’⁷⁶ However new research on the conduct of war in the Ottoman/Russian borderlands and the wider wartime practices of the Ottoman and Russian Empires now offers a powerful means of challenging these ‘one dimensional’ explanations and relating the deportation and massacre of the Armenians to regional and transnational patterns of violence and displacement.

Most pertinent to the case of the Armenian Genocide is the literature on the targeting of civilian populations as part of wartime mobilisation as well as in the conduct of warfare. In the context of total war the boundaries between civilians and combatants became blurred. According to Alan Kramer, ‘for all sides in the war, enemy civilians and other non-combatants came to be regarded to a greater or lesser degree as targets of war policy, even as legitimate objects of violence.’⁷⁷ For many years, as Heather Jones and Laurence Van Ypersele have pointed out, the civilian experience was neglected in the historiography, ‘With the exception of the Belgians, the millions of civilians who fled the fighting or were forcibly deported from their homes, exiled, starved or slaughtered were largely written out of the western historical narrative of the war.’⁷⁸ However the social and cultural histories which now dominate scholarship on the First World War have now addressed in some depth the civilian experience. As well as examining how populations were mobilised for war this research has also addressed how populations were rendered vulnerable, examining war atrocities and gendered violence, internment, forced migration and the treatment of Prisoners Of War.⁷⁹ Even so, Jones and Van Ypersele note that ‘the Armenian, Greek, Slav, Turkish and Jewish civilian victims of the war still seem to ‘count for less in the war’s commemorative hierarchy than the soldiery of Western Europe.’⁸⁰

The social and cultural history of the Ottoman Empire during the First World War, is not well developed although emerging scholarship in the field is beginning to change this.⁸¹ Research on the Russian Empire has however provided insights which help to situate the fate of the Armenians in broader patterns of wartime violence and displacement. The work of Peter Gatrell and Eric Lohr has demonstrated that violence against civilians was not simply perpetrated by invading forces or a product of the ‘chaos’ of war. Rather, anxieties over the security of border regions, and a preoccupation with the loyalty or otherwise of border populations rendered minority populations the targets of state or military directed deportations and expropriations in the Russian as well as the Ottoman Empire.⁸² Whilst these techniques were not inherently violent, they frequently descended into attacks on civilians. Peter Holquist’s analysis of Russian occupation and violence in the Caucasus and

⁷⁶ Holquist, ‘Forms of Violence during the Russian Occupation’, 335.

⁷⁷ Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction*, 3.

⁷⁸ Jones and Van Ypersele ‘Introduction: Populations at Risk’, 184.

⁷⁹ On shifts in the historiography towards a social and cultural approach, Winter and Prost, *The Great War in History*, 6-33 The classic work on atrocity in WWI is Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, 1914. On vulnerable populations see, for example, Stibbe, ed., *Captivity, Forced Labour and Forced Migration*, Jones, *Violence Against Prisoners of War*,

⁸⁰ Jones and Van Ypersele, ‘Populations at Risk’, 185.

⁸¹ For examples of emerging histories of social life and civilian experience see Tanielian, ‘Politics of Wartime Relief in Ottoman Beirut’ and Üngör, ‘Orphans, Converts, and Prostitutes’. See also Yiğit Akin’s podcast on his research on the home front, ‘World War I and the Ottoman Home Front’ for Ottoman History Podcast Website (accessed 3 September 2015) available at <http://www.ottomanhistorypodcast.com/2013/08/world-war-i-ottoman-empire.html>; INTERNET

⁸² Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking*, Lohr, *Nationalising the Russian Empire*.

in Galicia meanwhile demonstrates how violence against civilian populations was not necessarily ‘purposeful’ or pre-ordained but highly contingent, with a dynamic of its own. In drawing out the factors which limited Russian violence in the region and showing why, unlike the Ottomans, Russia did not ultimately espouse a policy of mass expulsions Holquist reminds us of the dangers of making generalisations regarding inevitable wartime ‘radicalisation’ and leads us to consider why the factors which tempered radical acts of violence and deportation in other empires were absent in the Ottoman case.⁸³

In *Great Catastrophe* Thomas De Waal’s argues that the story [of the Armenian Genocide], ‘comes out differently depending on whether you regard the events in the Caucasus and in Eastern Anatolia as being closely related or two separate zones of conflict’.⁸⁴ It is frequently assumed that the experiences of Armenians in the Ottoman and Russian Empires during the First World War and the Genocide were entirely distinct, with the Russian Armenians escaping much of the suffering experienced by their counterparts in the Ottoman territories.⁸⁵ Whilst it is certainly true that it was the Ottoman Armenians who experienced at first hand deportation and mass killing, to imagine the wartime experiences of the two regions as distinct is problematic. Connecting histories of the experience of War in the Ottoman and Russian Empires has generated important insights. For example, in their comparative study of expropriations Üngör and Lohr demonstrate how in both the Russian and Ottoman cases ‘maintaining and increasing power of upward social mobility shaped the patterns of recruitment for and participation in violence’, whilst at the same time drawing out the particularities which meant that the Armenian case escalated towards genocide.⁸⁶ Michael Reynolds’ *Shattering Empires*, has meanwhile demonstrated that in wartime borders between the two ‘zones’ inhabited by Armenians - Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus - were porous and shifting, characterised by cross border movements of civilian populations, patterns of violence and claims on territory and resources.

Broadening the geographical scope to encompass the Caucasus creates a more complex picture of the Genocide and its consequences, not least because civilians of all ethnic backgrounds in these regions became the target of state and military led deportations in this region. Sporadic acts of violence and atrocity were perpetrated by civilians and combatants alike. Muslims in the provinces of Kars and Batumi were deported as the Russians advanced.⁸⁷ Armenians also committed acts of violence, including attacks by Armenian militias on the Muslim populations of Artvin and the Chorokhi Valley.⁸⁸ Further violence against the Muslim inhabitants of the South Caucasus (at the time usually referred to as ‘Tatars’) unfolded following the Mudros armistice and the establishment of the First Armenian Republic. These episodes of violence do not fit easily with the historiographical narratives predicated on a clear dividing line between perpetrators and victims which have emerged in the context of denial. However, if the complex, cyclical patterns of inter-ethnic violence

⁸³ Peter Holquist, ‘The Role of Personality’ and ‘Politics and Practice of the Russian Occupation of Armenia’ 161.

⁸⁴ De Waal, *Great Catastrophe*, 21.

⁸⁵ The aftermaths of the Genocide in the Caucasus, particularly the refugee crisis which followed the war have also been neglected in the existing scholarship.

⁸⁶ Üngör and Lohr, ‘Economic Nationalism, Confiscation and Genocide’, 519.

⁸⁷ Lohr, *Nationalising the Russian Empire*, 151-2.

⁸⁸ Reynolds, *Shattering Empires*, 144.

that war and genocide generated in this region, are to be fully understood, there is a need for further empirical research.⁸⁹

Whilst it is clear to see how Ottoman and Russian aims and actions during the war shaped the fate of the Armenians, making connections between the Genocide and the ostensibly very different context of the war in Europe has proved more difficult. The concept of ‘war cultures’ (in the words of Jay Winter, ‘the discursive forms through which contemporaries understood the world at war in which they were living’) provides one way of doing so. It provides a framework for understanding how populations could be mobilised for war and how individuals made sense of their experiences.⁹⁰ More importantly for this case, it also offers a way of thinking about how wartime populations conceived of their enemies and made sense of violence. Something akin to this focus on ‘war cultures’ appears to be emerging in recent scholarship on the Armenian Genocide. Suny’s emphasis on the ‘affective disposition’ of the Young Turks is suggestive of a new critical concern with the mentalities and cultures that shaped the ways Armenians were constructed as an enemy ‘other’ as well as the social, political and economic realities which lead to genocide.⁹¹ Similarly, the analysis of the memoirs of individuals who witnessed or were perpetrators of violence against the Armenians in Göçek’s *Denial of Violence* captures the ways that a pre-war culture of fear, resentment and eventual hatred of the Armenians, in the context of wartime crisis, made the Armenians appear the legitimate targets of genocidal processes.

Examining to what extent the attitudes which shaped violence against the Ottoman Armenians can be connected to a broader European ‘war culture’ would demand further research on the Ottoman case. Alan Kramer’s *Dynamic of Destruction* which traces a transnational process of radicalisation which fostered cultural destruction and mass killing during the First World War begins to make connections between the Armenian Genocide and atrocities, mass violence and cultural destruction in Eastern and Western Europe. Contemporary observers certainly understood the treatment of the Armenians as an extreme within a larger category of ‘war atrocities’ which transgressed the norms of civilised warfare.⁹² Thus German atrocities in Belgium, the destruction of the Cathedral at Louvain and the mass-killing of Armenians could be interpreted as points on a spectrum of destructive, transgressive violence. Kramer argues that in the First World War, ‘the enemy was not merely the enemy army, but the enemy nation and the culture through which it defined itself.’⁹³ This desire to destroy an entire culture was certainly evident in the Armenian Genocide which encompassed not just the removal of the Armenian population the attempt to destroy all traces of their existence. Not

⁸⁹ This is especially important because the memory of these events has become entangled with current conflicts between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in the region. The entanglement of past and present conflicts is best illustrated in the films *Memories Without Borders* created by the peacebuilding organisation Conciliation resources (accessed 1 September 2015) available at <http://www.c-r.org/resources/memories-without-borders-english-version>; INTERNET.

⁹⁰ Winter and Prost, *Great War in History*, 159.

⁹¹ Suny, *They Can Live in the Desert*.

⁹² Laycock, *Imagining Armenia*, chapter 3 addresses the place of the Armenian genocide in European atrocity narratives.

⁹³ Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction*, 31.

only was Armenian property expropriated but cultural heritage, especially religious architecture, was destroyed across the Empire.⁹⁴

Yet the scope and intent of the Ottoman treatment of the Armenians differentiates it from other acts of violence against civilians. The ‘culture of destruction’ did not result in genocide in any other regions during the First World War and understanding why this was the case is as important as identifying transnational patterns and structural similarities. Kramer tentatively suggests that it was a combination of internal instability, the vulnerability of the Young Turks, external threat and the presence of ethnic minorities that differentiated the Ottoman Empire from other wartime states, but a more in-depth consideration of the Ottoman case is necessary if this line of enquiry is to be pursued.⁹⁵ Situating the Armenians within this framework of wartime radicalisation which normalised violence against civilians without reverting to overly-deterministic arguments about modern warfare, brutalisation or the First World War as the origin of ‘industrial killing’ is not straightforward. As Kramer points out, the relationship between total war and genocide is complex: ‘total war, which tends towards annihilation, bears within it the potential for genocide. Yet genocide was not an inevitable consequence of total war, nor, as we now know from the experience of Rwanda in the 1990s was total war even a necessary precondition for genocide.’⁹⁶

New Boundaries, New Voices, New Directions

As the centenary of the Armenian Genocide is commemorated it becoming is clear that the national narratives that have long dominated histories of the Armenian Genocide are, at least in part, giving way to a more complex picture of the conflict and coexistence of Armenians and Turks at the end of the Ottoman Empire. This is in part due to insights uncovered through new archival research. It is equally a product of the increased engagement of scholars in the field with both wider historiographies and a greater variety of methodologies and theoretical perspectives. These developments are, gradually, producing the kind of ‘interactive’ histories, ‘framed within the larger context of world/global history’ that Aslanian calls for.⁹⁷ Developments in academic scholarship cannot be separated from those in the public sphere. Some of the most innovative scholarship of recent years has been produced by scholars for whom the writing of history has gone hand in hand with cross-border activism, advocacy and dialogue.

Through quite separate developments the fate of the Armenians has increasingly come to the attention of historians of genocide, of displacement and diasporas, the modern Middle East, and of the First World War. In the case of the First World War this is part of the gradual stretching of the imagined chronological and geographical boundaries of the conflict over the last decade or more. However, simply adding geographical ‘case studies’ - the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire - to existing histories is not in itself enough. As Jay Winter reminds us, ‘transnational history does not start with one state and move on to others, but takes multiple levels of historical experience as

⁹⁴ Üngör, Uğur Ümit and Mehmet Polatel, *Confiscation and Destruction. The Young Turk Seizure of Armenian Property*. London: Continuum, 2013.

⁹⁵ Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction*, 158.

⁹⁶ Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction*, 334

⁹⁷ Aslanian, ‘The Marble of Armenian History’, 130.

given, levels which are both below and above the national level.’⁹⁸ There is still a need for further research which addresses experiences of war in this region, from ‘below’ the national level, from both civilian and combatant perspectives. In the case of the Armenian Genocide the question of history ‘from below’ remains difficult. ‘Hearing’ the voices of the displaced is rarely straightforward, but the context of denial means that there are particular challenges in the interpretation of survivor testimonies.⁹⁹ Nonetheless, a growth of ethnographic and oral history research, especially amongst post-genocide communities in Turkey promises to generate new insights, in particular by re-framing Armenians as individuals and historical actors rather than simply as undifferentiated passive victims.

‘War cultures’ may have generated immense destruction but they also encompassed visions of reconstruction; just as they shaped images of the enemy and legitimated violence, they also defined victims, allies and populations that were deserving of concern, care or material aid. The Ottoman treatment of the Armenians had highly visible transnational consequences. Until at least the mid-1920s thousands were caught in cycles of displacement, moving between the ports of the eastern Mediterranean, the mandate states of the Middle East and the Soviet Republic of Armenia.¹⁰⁰ The fate of these refugees and subsequent attempts to reconstruct the nation through the care of orphans, rescue of women and rehabilitation of refugees are a focus of emerging research.¹⁰¹ The international response to the Armenian refugee crisis has been identified as a defining moment in the growing field of humanitarian history, but these histories are also very much a part of the social and cultural history of the First World War.¹⁰² Displacement was central to the experience of war for Armenians, as it was for populations in the Balkans, the Russian Empire and beyond. For civilians meanwhile, the image of Armenian suffering and the provision of aid to ‘starving Armenians’ was a way of making meaning from the conflict. For hundreds of others the defining experience of the war was providing material relief or medical care on the ground’ in the Middle East or the Caucasus.

Thus the kinds of transnational perspective that Winter refers to are developing in new research which makes connections between the ‘war cultures’ of the Ottoman and Russian Empires and Western European nations, identifies transnational trends in the treatment of minorities. It is equally evident in research which traces the experience of populations displaced across national boundaries and those that came to their aid. These perspectives help to situate the Armenian Genocide within the context of wartime targeting of civilians on a global scale. They suggest that the Genocide should not be treated as a deviation from ‘ordinary’ forms of wartime violence. Indeed Heather Jones has suggested that by engaging with the fate of the Armenians historians have begun to develop ‘new understandings of the true scale and innovative nature of war violence against civil-

⁹⁸ Winter, ‘General Introduction’ 6. However the tendency of edited collections such as the Cambridge History and Horne, ed., *A Companion to World War I* to be structured, at least in part, around different imperial or regional settings may inadvertently reinforce the tendency to neglect the entangled nature of these different elements of the conflict.

⁹⁹ Nichanian, *Historiographic Perversion*.

¹⁰⁰ For an overview of the context see Gatrell, *Making of the Modern Refugee*, Chapters 1 and 2.

¹⁰¹ For example, Ekmekcioglu, ‘A Climate for Abduction’.

¹⁰² Watenpaugh stresses the centrality of the Armenian relief effort in the emergence of modern humanitarianism in *Bread from Stones*. On the First World War and humanitarianism in general, Special issue of *First World War Studies*, ‘Humanitarianism and the First World War’ and Cabanes, *The Great War*.

ians'.¹⁰³ Thus neglect the fate of the Armenians and its aftermaths may be to misunderstand the nature of the war itself.

In April 2015 Armenians were able to commemorate the centenary of the Genocide in Istanbul, in conjunction with local Turkish as well as Armenian activists and academics, as well as in Yerevan. Yet challenges to writing a more integrated and nuanced history of Armenians and Turks at the fall of the Ottoman Empire remain. Meline Toumani's recent memoir, for example, provided a telling account of the continued power of national narratives, 'A century after those events, Armenians and Turks - in Turkey, in Armenia, and especially in the widespread diasporas of both countries - believe in two radically different accounts of what happened. 'Believe.' It is not a matter of faith, yet it might as well be for the power that these clashing narratives hold.'¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, as Kasbarian and Öktem have described, 'taboo breaking academic conferences ... civil society encounters and commemorative events' are still 'overshadowed by deep-seated prejudice, security and fear of the Other, as well as by an overbearing Turkish nation-state.'¹⁰⁵

In January 2007 the Turkish-Armenian journalist and activist Hrant Dink was assassinated in Istanbul. His funeral prompted thousands to march through the city bearing placards proclaiming 'We are all Hrant Dink. We are all Armenian.' These events simultaneously demonstrated the progress that had been made in and the enormous distance left to travel. A further reminder of just how contested this history remains in Turkey came with the approach of the centenary commemorations. This year the Turkish authorities announced that the commemorations of the Gallipoli landings, which would be attended by a range of world leaders, would be held on the 24th of April rather than the 25th, the date on which the anniversary is usually marked.¹⁰⁶ This was widely interpreted as an attempt to distract international attention from the commemoration of the centenary of the Genocide, on the 24th April.

This 'competitive' commemoration was of course a product of the particularities of Turkish/Armenian relations and the policies of the current Turkish government. It also reflects a problem of centenary-driven history more broadly. Commemorations have a tendency to mythologise and romanticise. They can smooth over contested pasts in order to construct national identities and sometimes to promote nationalist or political agendas. They can create hierarchies of suffering, where some the victims of some acts of violence are invested with deep symbolic value and others are neglected. The Turkish choices about the Gallipoli commemorations are a particularly telling example of how anniversary-driven histories frequently reinforce national and sometimes exclusionary narratives, generating fragmented rather than interconnected understandings of the past. How to broaden the picture, to illustrate the connections between the global, the national and the

¹⁰³ Jones, 'As the Centenary Approaches', 874

¹⁰⁴ Toumani, *There was and there was not*, 6.

¹⁰⁵ Kasbarian and Öktem, 'Armenians, Turks and Kurds beyond denial', 115.

¹⁰⁶ For example see Constanze Letsch, 'Turkey eclipses centenary of Armenian massacre by moving Gallipoli memorial' *The Guardian*, 16th April 2015 (accessed 10 August 2015) available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/16/turkey-armenia-1915-centenary-gallipoli-massacre-genocide>; INTERNET,

local - 'Remembering the World as well as the War' - without succumbing to charges of 'tokenism' remains a challenge, both for academics and those addressing wider public audiences.

Scholarly analyses of the Genocide have now moved beyond a quest for proof that the term is applicable to the Armenian case. Donald Bloxham and Hans-Lucas Kieser have emphasised that, 'genocide' is a social scientific as well as a legal term.¹⁰⁷ It is this, the concept's explanatory function which has gradually come to be most important for scholars of the Armenian case. Nonetheless, the symbolic value of the concept in particular Armenian communities is still worthy of further consideration. One hundred years after 1915 what does recognition of the Genocide really mean? Is international legal recognition, an apology from Turkey or the reconciliation of individuals and communities more important? For those approaching Armenian history from the outside, it often appears that the question of Genocide dominates the Armenian diaspora. In *Great Catastrophe* Thomas De Waal states that Genocide is 'not an organising principle of identity for citizens in the Republic of Armenia'.¹⁰⁸ This is an important reminder that the Genocide and its recognition is not the sum total of the Armenian experience past or present. Writing histories of Armenians and Turks which acknowledge both the causes of conflict and the possibilities of coexistence, while acknowledging that identities and experiences cannot always be neatly contained within clear boundaries or expressed in purely national terms, is the real challenge for future scholarship.

10,780 words.

¹⁰⁷ Bloxham and Kieser, 'Genocide,' 586.

¹⁰⁸ De Waal, *Great Catastrophe*, 3.

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