

WHO STILL TALKED ABOUT THE EXTERMINATION OF THE ARMENIANS? IMPERIAL GERMANY AND THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

SECOND GERALD D. FELDMAN MEMORIAL LECTURE
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When I told my husband that my next project was going to be on the Armenian genocide, his eyes opened wide. “Don’t think it’s going to be like studying the Holocaust,” he warned. “There’s a big difference between the German-led genocide of the Jews and the Turkish genocide of the Armenians.” “Oh yeah?” said I, “and what’s that?” (I was expecting to get a History 101 lecture on “The Uniqueness of Each Historical Event.”) His answer brought me up short: “The Turks won *their* war.”

Think about it. Imagine, he said, that Germany had prevailed in World War II, or at least (and this is actually closer to the Turkish case) had fought the Allies to a stalemate. What would the study of the Holocaust look like now? Imagine that those (literally) tons of Nazi documents had not been captured and microfilmed for libraries around the world. Imagine that access to Germany’s archives was controlled by second- and third-generation successors of the Nazi state; that German schoolchildren were taught that Germany’s Jews had fought for Russia and that “deporting” them was an act of self-defense. Imagine that it was a crime in Germany to say in print that their leaders had been *genocidaires*, and that as recently as 2007 someone who did say it had been assassinated by nationalist fanatics.

And I did think about it. I remembered a conversation with my Berkeley colleague, Gerald Feldman, shortly after he returned, in 1997, from a colloquium he had given at Istanbul’s Koc University, on the Deutsche Bank and the Baghdad Railway. He had mentioned the “nightmare” the Armenian genocide had posed for Bank officials during the war. After the talk, one of his hosts – dean? department chair? he wasn’t sure – came up to him with a warning: “Do not speak of the killing of Armenians if you ever wish to lecture here again.” Norma Feldman still remembers the chill that comment cast over the subsequent *Festessen*.

Academic freedom has made considerable progress in Turkey since 1997. True, in 2005 a conference of Istanbul historians on “Armenians

in the Late Ottoman Empire” had to be canceled after the Justice Minister denounced its organizers on the floor of parliament for “stabbing Turkey in the back” and police told university officials that they could not guarantee the participants’ safety. But the conference did eventually take place – four months later. Turkish translations of work published abroad on the genocide have appeared.¹ And at least one historian teaching at a Turkish university has published an article that uses the g-word to describe what happened to Armenians in 1915 – admittedly, in an American journal.²

Still, the defenders of Turkey’s official narrative have not ceased to police the boundaries of their political correctness, repeatedly impugning data that are non-controversial among most historians outside the country. Take Hitler’s jeering query, flung out at the meeting of his commanders at Obersalzberg, on the eve of the German invasion of Poland: “Who still talks nowadays about the extermination of the Armenians?” Princeton’s Atatürk Professor of Ottoman and Modern Turkish Studies, Heath Lowry, has challenged the authenticity of this remark, arguing that the text of Hitler’s August 22, 1939, peroration, in which the line appears, was unknown before 1942, when it was quoted in a book written by a mere “newspaperman,” the A.P.’s Berlin Bureau Chief, Louis Lochner.³ Claiming to be the first to disclose Lochner’s role as conduit, Lowry also asserts that the document’s “provenance ... has never been disclosed, investigated ... much less established.” In fact, Winfried Baumgart’s painstaking detective work, published almost two decades before Lowry’s attack, established the document’s congruence with the notes scribbled on the spot by Admiral Wilhelm Canaris – of all the sources for Hitler’s August 22 remarks, the most trustworthy and superior to those (privileged by Lowry) written that evening from memory by Admiral Hermann Boehm and General Franz Halder.⁴ The Lochner text had been entrusted to him by an emissary from what would come to be known as resistance circles. He immediately turned it over to the British embassy, and within three days of the Obersalzberg conclave it had been translated and sent to Whitehall.⁵

- 1 Most prominently, Taner Akçam, *Ermeni Meselesi Hallolunmuştur: Osmanlı belgelerine göre savaş yıllarında Ermeniler’e yönelik politikalar* (İletişim, 2008).
- 2 Selim Deringil, “The Armenian Question Is Finally Closed’: Mass Conversions of Armenians in Anatolia during the Hamidian Massacres of 1895-1897;” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51.2 (2009): 344-371, 344.
- 3 Heath Lowry, “The U.S. Congress and Adolf Hitler on the Armenians,” *Political Communication and Persuasion* 3.2 (1985): 111-40. The article was written before Lowry attained the Princeton post, during his employment at the Institute of Turkish Studies, housed at, but not a part of, Georgetown University. Lowry’s case against Lochner makes much of the reservations of the “noted historian,” William L. Shirer – another newspaperman.
- 4 “Zur Ansprache Hitlers vor den Führern der Wehrmacht am 22. August 1939. Eine quellenkritische Untersuchung,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte (VfZ)* 16 (1968): 120-49. Hitler’s remarks, taken together, must have lasted at least four hours, and the fact that only one of these brief reconstructions mentions the Armenians is no evidence that Hitler didn’t say it; the word “Schweinehund” also doesn’t appear in all of them. Adm. Boehm’s subsequent, self-serving challenge (unrelated to the remark about Armenians) was rebutted by Baumgart with evidence from the diary of Lt. Col. Hellmut Groscurch in *VfZ* 19 (1971): 294-304.

5 The ribbon copy, with the circumstances of its transmission, is in the National Archives at Kew: Ambassador Neville Henderson’s papers, FO 800/270 ff.

288-91. It was published in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, ed. E. L. Woodward and R. Butler, 3rd ser., vol. 7 (London, 1954), docs. 257-260, and

in *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik*, Serie D, vol. 7 (Baden-Baden, 1956), Nr. 193, p. 171-72n1. I thank Gerhard Weinberg for this information.

This lecture will not go into the evidence for whether or not it was Hitler who included the famous query about the Armenians in his Obersalzberg monologue, for both attack and defense of the text obscure a greater reality. Suppose it could be *proven* that the text had been enhanced by Hitler's opponents, as Lowry suggests, "for propaganda purposes," to make the Führer appear "in an extremely negative light" to allies and others. Such an enhancement would only underscore the iconic status of the Armenian genocide as the apex of horrors conceivable in 1939.

My lecture aims at supplying the empirical basis for what is implicit in that sarcastic query, regardless of who posed it: that the Armenians and their extermination *had* once excited considerable "talk." Secondly, I shall raise the question, without resolving it, of whether talk has consequences. The question implies an audience that thought so; otherwise, why the sneer about talk's transience, aimed at reassuring those about to embark, perhaps reluctantly, upon exterminations of their own? Finally, a demonstration of the ubiquity of talk about the extermination is evidence, *prima facie*, that an extermination occurred.

Talk about the extermination of Ottoman Armenians began in the mid-1890s, when Abdul Hamid II's massacres, with an estimated 100,000 victims, provoked an international outcry. In England, the House of Commons demanded that the Royal Navy force the Dardanelles and remove the sultan. The normally so fractious French united – from Dreyfusards to the monarchist Right – in pro-Armenian activism. In Russia, intellectuals from Chekhov to the philosopher Solov'ev raised nearly 30,000 rubles for Armenian relief, while little Switzerland collected a million francs (that's more than 10 million in today's purchasing power) and more signatures on an Armenophil petition than any petition in Swiss history. Americans held "Armenian Sundays," when participants fasted to send the money saved to "starving Armenians." By 1925, forty-nine countries were sharing these rituals of symbolic sacrifice.

Germany was slow to start, but by late 1896 young Johannes Lepsius had spearheaded a movement supporting Armenians, making him briefly (in the words of a supporter) "the most famous man in Germany." Lepsius came from a family of distinguished academics and intellectuals. His father was the founder of German Egyptology; his grandfather, a friend of Goethe and the Grimms; his great-grandfather, the Enlightenment publisher Nicolai. (His nephew, by

the way, is the Bundesrepublik's most famous living sociologist.) But Lepsius himself was a rural pastor – soon made unemployed by Church authorities who disapproved of his activism. (I'll come back to him.) With the new century, massacres became fewer, closer to pogroms, until 1909, when 20,000 more Armenians were slain in Adana province, reviving anew talk about the extermination of Armenians.⁶

We must distinguish, of course, between noise in the public square and the intense but discreet exchanges in the corridors of power. To merge these two conversations was vital for Armenophiles; to keep them apart, the goal of statesmen of all countries. For sooner or later “talk” meant pressure, and the last thing policy-makers wanted was the kind of moralizing speech that might limit their own freedom of action. Any restraints on Ottoman sovereignty, they feared, would compromise the Ottoman Empire's survival – and risk unleashing a war of all against all, in Anatolia, certainly, and perhaps in Europe. Thus, in the poker game of Great Power politics, as the historian Marion Kent has noted, “The Ottoman Empire held one trump card. This was the general desire of the European Powers for it to survive as a political entity.”⁷ The Ottomans could play that card just as easily against Western humanitarianism as against Western imperialism. Thus the louder the outcry over the Armenians' plight, the more Europe's foreign offices cooperated in their studied efforts at silence.

Yet behind closed doors, talk continued, as stacks of diplomatic files make clear. Discussions grew more heated with the Balkan Wars of 1912-13, when the Ottoman Empire lost more than 20 percent of its population and almost all of its European territory. Europe's “sick man” appeared to be breathing his last. The collapse of Ottoman authority in the Balkans was expected to spread to Asia Minor, where whole new crops of separatists were emerging, from Beirut to the Persian frontier.

Would Armenian nationalists join the fray? Or would the returning Ottoman army, bitter over its Balkan losses, take out their anger on Armenian villagers? At the prospect of ethnic conflict that might spill across the Caucasus, Russia began threatening to occupy Eastern Anatolia if credible protections for Armenians were not implemented immediately. Suddenly, preventing a massacre of Armenians became the task of every statesman committed to peace. For violence in Asia Minor, if it triggered Russian intervention, would surely be met by Austrian counteraction in the Balkans – with the risk of a general

6 Sources for these two paragraphs are in my article “Down in Turkey, Far Away” Human Rights, the Armenian Massacres, and Orientalism in Wilhelmine Germany,” *Journal of Modern History* 79.1 (March 2007): 80-113.

7 Marion Kent, “Introduction,” in idem, ed., *The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire* (London, 1996), 1-4, 1.

war. As Russia pressed and Turkey dithered, Germany deployed, with British approval, four cruisers to Turkish waters. And talk got louder.⁸ Led by demonstrations in London, Paris, Sofia, and Cairo, Armenians and their supporters petitioned the president of France; sent appeals to the Hague Court and to Britain from India, Burma, Japan, and Southeast Asia; and sent pleas to Germany, from Constantinople, Yokohama, Manchester, Frankfurt, and Potsdam.

At least one German diplomat recognized a crisis when he saw one. Ambassador Baron Hans von Wangenheim urged Berlin to instruct its representatives in Turkey to intervene to stop the abuses of Armenians and even, in emergencies, to act as their “really effective protectors.” It was time, he thought, to grasp the nettle of Armenian Reforms. Wangenheim’s proposal required scuttling a sacred diplomatic convention: to hear no evil, see no evil, and speak no evil of a friendly state’s domestic “arrangements” – the very convention that had kept the Kaiser’s government on a non-interventionist path during the massacres of the 1890s.

Wangenheim’s bosses in Berlin disagreed.⁹ With the outcome of the Balkan wars still so uncertain, “rolling out the Armenian question,” the new foreign secretary, Gottlieb von Jagow, sighed, was the last thing he wanted. But talk about imperiled Armenians could no longer be hushed. The London *Times* ran 88 items on them over the course of 1913. In Paris, *Pro Arménia*, a journal defunct since 1908, resumed publication. Speeches and queries in the British, Italian, and German parliaments reflected and contributed to the disquiet. Jagow was forced to concede that the situation in the Orient had become “the most pressing of all political questions.”¹⁰ Whether he and his counterparts liked it or not, they had to talk about the Armenians.

The consequence? The workload of Europe’s exhausted diplomats, already crushing thanks to the ongoing Balkan crisis, increased dramatically. In June 1913 alone, over 75 missives on the Armenian matter crossed the transoms of the Wilhelmstrasse. In Therapia, Baron Wangenheim was chained to his desk, his longed-for family holiday repeatedly postponed. Uncertain whether the future lay with the Armenians or the Turks, German diplomats began to work both sides of the street at what today is termed, euphemistically, the “peace process.” With London’s cooperation, Germany labored to square the circle: to secure protections for the Armenian minority that would not undermine Ottoman sovereignty – and thus obviate Russian intervention and all that might follow.

8 Sir E. Grey to Amb. Sir G. Lowther, June 19, 1913, in *British Documents on the Origins of the War 1898-1914*, ed. by G. P. Gooch and H. Temperley (London, 1936), vol. 10, pt. 1: 460, doc. 516. On the confusion over where to send warships, see *Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette, 1871-1914. Sammlung der diplomatischen Akten des Auswärtigen Amtes* (Berlin, 1922-24) (hereafter: *GP*), vol 38: 17, 18-19, 20n, 28-29, 32-33, 32-33n.

9 Wangenheim to Bethmann Hollweg (hereafter BH), Feb. 24, 1913, Nr. 38; on the rejection of Wangenheim’s proposal, see A. Zimmermann, minute of Mar. 5, and G. Jagow to Wangenheim, Apr. 22. Nr. 369, *GP*, vol. 38: 10-15; 30-31 and 30n.

10 Jagow to Wangenheim, June 10, 1913, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (hereafter: PAA), Nachlass (NL) Wangenheim; J to C. J. G. Eisendecker, July 24, 1913, PAA, NL Eisendecker 3/5.

At the same time, through former pastor Lepsius, Jagow opened relations with Armenian leaders to win them for a compromise – and to insure their goodwill should compromise fail. Although not the dramatic course correction that Baron Wangenheim had wanted, Jagow’s expenditure of diplomatic capital on behalf of an Ottoman-Russian-Armenian accord demonstrated how acute the danger in Eastern Anatolia was felt to be: to its populations, to the Turkish Empire’s survival, to European peace.

On February 8, 1914, Germany succeeded in brokering such an accord. Turkey ceded some of its sovereignty in Eastern Anatolia (to a Dutchman and a Norwegian, commissioners representing the “international community”), and Russia stopped threatening to occupy it.¹¹ Would these “Armenian Reforms” stabilize Ottoman rule? Or would they, as some hoped and many feared, deliver it the coup de grâce? Whatever the answer, the reforms did not quiet talk about the Armenians. And nowhere, perhaps, was that talk louder than in Germany.

In June 1914, a German-Armenian Society, aimed at fostering warmer relations between the two peoples, held its inaugural gala in Berlin. The very existence of such an organization betrayed the Foreign Office’s tilt. Only the sun of official favor could explain how an outfit with a board composed of Lepsius, another pastor, a journalist, and six unknowns from the tiny Armenian colony in Berlin, had managed to collect the dazzling names, ninety-six in all, that graced the German-Armenian Society’s appeal for members: four generals; the leaders of the Reichstag’s two liberal parties; the Conservative president of Prussian Chamber of Deputies; and important representatives of business, church (for example, the court preacher, Ernst Dryander), and academia – including the historians Hans Delbrück and Rudolf Oncken.

Yet the desire to be in the government’s good graces cannot explain the support of such glitterati as Germany’s most celebrated painter, Max Liebermann; the social theorist Georg Simmel; the winner of the 1908 Nobel Prize for Literature, Rudolf Eucken; and the young novelist Thomas Mann, who would capture the same honor in 1929. These men must already have been talking about the Armenians. And the editors of three of Germany’s most influential dailies on the list of sponsors seemed to promise that from now on, talk on *behalf* of the Armenians would reach an ever widening public.¹²

11 R. H. Davison, “The Armenian Crisis, 1912-14,” *American Historical Review* 53.3 (April 1948): 481-505; W. J. van der Dussen, “The Question of Armenian Reforms in 1913-1914,” *Armenian Review* 39 (Spring 1986): 11-28.

12 Sponsors: NL C. H. Becker, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz (GStA PK) I. HA Rep. 92, and Hermann Goltz, “Die ‘armenischen Reformen’ im Osmanischen Reich, Johannes Lepsius und die Gründung der Deutsch-Armenischen Gesellschaft,” *75 Jahre Deutsch-Armenische Gesellschaft. Festschrift* (Mainz, 1989), 4-76, 46.

It was not to be. Within weeks, Europe was at war. On August 2, Germany signed a secret alliance with the Ottoman Empire. The German-Armenian Society suddenly became a political embarrassment. Its rival, the German-Turkish Union, now had a mission. The latter's managing director, Ernst Jäckh, was put on the government payroll, running a one-man development office for the new alliance. Behind the scenes, "Jäckh-the-Turk," as he was called, spied on prominent Armenophiles. Openly, his job was public education; its real aim: to sell Turkey to his countrymen.

It was not a difficult task. By the time the Ottoman Empire actually entered the war - on October 31, 1914 - the German public was reeling from three months of the deadliest combat of the entire conflict. With losses of 265,000 men - killed, wounded, and missing in action - in the first month alone, Germans hardly needed incentives to embrace the Turks as saviors.

The alliance proved a Full Employment Act for anyone with a colorable claim to expertise on the Ottoman Empire. German orientalists, long marginal in the academic pecking-order, rejoiced in their newfound prestige. Overnight the anemic enrollments in C. H. Becker's course on Turkey soared. Even language classes boomed. "Everyone," Professor Becker crowed, "wants to learn Turkish now!" His Göttingen counterpart, Enno Littmann, was amazed by the Turcomania. "Everything possible is appearing about the Orient and Islam," he marveled. Among the things now "possible" was a publication entitled "The Evolution of Turkey into a *Rechtsstaat*" - this, in 1915.¹³

Even as Ernst Jäckh and company were marketing the Ottoman Empire as the land of tolerance, Turkey's ruling cadre, a hard-line subset of the Young Turks' Committee of Union and Progress (CUP; henceforth, Unionist), were driving Armenians to their deaths. By late April 1915, Germans in Turkey had begun to witness expulsions of Armenians from their villages. In May, deportations, accompanied by pillage, rape, and mass murder, snowballed. In July, the Italian consul in Trapezunt suffered a nervous breakdown under the weight of these sights.¹⁴

But those who wanted the world to know what was going down in Eastern Anatolia faced formidable obstacles. In May 1915, not just Armenians but all Western teachers, doctors, and missionaries were barred from using the mails. Then their telephones and telegraphs were confiscated.¹⁵ Envoys of neutral powers were forbidden to en-

13 Becker to Dr. Hafner, Mar. 20, 1916, NL Becker fol. 788. Littmann to B, Mar. 26, 1915, *ibid.* fol. 4579; L. Freiherr von Mackay, "Die Entwicklung der Türkei zum Rechtsstaat," *Deutschland und der Orient* (Berlin, 1915), 33-41.

14 Heinrich Bergfeld, Consul at Trapezunt, to BH, July 9, 1915, PAA Türkei 183 vol. 37. The Auswärtiges Amt's vast archive on the genocide is now being published online, along with English translations, thanks to the long work of Wolfgang and Sigrid Gust, to whom all of us are enormously indebted. The Gusts list documents according to date, followed by the suffix DE and then a number for each document posted on the same date. In the above case, it is 1915-07-09-DE-002. Hereafter, whenever a document has been posted on their web site, I shall cite that (www.armenocide.net) in preference to a PAA citation.

15 Dr. Ruth Parmelee, Harpoot, diary entry, June 8, 1915, Parmelee Papers, Box 1, Hoover Archives.

crypt their telegrams, and their letters were opened. Only the German embassy's diplomatic pouch remained a secure conduit for candid information on these gruesome events. Would it be willing to forward such explosive information? When, that April, a German consul tried to forward to Germany an account of a pogrom from a teacher at a German orphanage by including it in his bag, Ambassador Wangenheim refused to accept it until he had extracted a promise that the material would be released "neither through the press nor any other way." Even then, it took two months, and repeated requests, before the teacher's superiors in Frankfurt were allowed to receive the report, and then only in an oral, sanitized redaction.¹⁶

Turkey's leaders usually denied their purpose – to rid Anatolia of its Armenians – even when they conceded that massacres were taking place. Thus it was that Baron Wangenheim, who had protested sporadic brutalities against Armenians in the winter of 1914, at first accepted the Turkish story the following spring that the deportations were a military necessity, aimed at removing actual and potential fifth columns from the path of Russian invaders. As for the massacres that befell the deportees as they trudged away? They were regrettable failures of military discipline, which could happen in any wartime situation.

But the deception could not last long. Wangenheim has had a very bad press, thanks to the American ambassador, Henry Morgenthau. Writing *after* the United States entered the war against Germany in a book that has become standard reading for those interested in the Armenian genocide, Morgenthau villainized Germany's ambassador as an arrogant Teuton, satisfied to see Armenians go to their ruin so long as it furthered "pan-German" goals.¹⁷ But, in fact, much as he *wanted* to believe the Young Turk story, the German ambassador never sacrificed his critical judgment on the altar of the alliance. In this respect, Wangenheim compares favorably to his British counterpart in St. Petersburg, Sir George Buchanan. In answer to London's anxious queries about reports of the Russian army's mass expulsions of the tsar's Jewish subjects along its border, Buchanan answered that he had not "the slightest doubt" that Jewish treason necessitated such harsh measures, assurances echoed uncritically by other Brits on the spot – soldiers, journalists, and even scholars.¹⁸ Unlike Buchanan, Wangenheim, although already a dying man, could still summon the energy to catch the Turkish government in fictions.

And by mid-June, he had concluded "that the banishment of the Armenians is not motivated by military considerations alone is clear

16 Wangenheim to BH, May 27, 1915, encl. 1 W. Rössler, Aleppo, to BH; encl. 2 K. Blank, Marash, to Fr. Schuchardt of the German Aid Federation for Christian Charity in the Orient in Frankfurt, Apr. 14, 1915, www.armenocide.net, 1915-05-27-DE-001; K. von Neurath to S, June 29, 1915, *ibid.* 1915-06-29-DE-001. Schuchardt, Frankfurt, to AA, Aug. 20, 1915, encl. 1, K. Blank, Marash, to S, Apr. 6, 1915; also encl. 3, B. von Dobbeler, Adana, to Schuchardt, July 12, 1915: *ibid.* 1915-08-20-DE-001.

17 Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story* (Garden City, NY, 1918), *passim*.

18 Mark Levene, *War, Jews, and the New Europe: The Diplomacy of Lucien Wolf, 1914-1919* (Oxford, 1992), 51, 54.

as day.” Indeed, shortly before that, the Minister of the Interior, Talât Bey, had stated frankly to an embassy official “that the Porte wanted to use the war to thoroughly clean out its domestic enemies – the native Christians – without being disturbed by diplomatic intervention from abroad ...” On July 7, Wangenheim informed Germany’s chancellor, Bethmann Hollweg, that the extension of the deportations to provinces not threatened with invasion, as well as the manner in which they were carried out, convinced him that their ally was “in fact pursuing the aim of destroying the Armenian race in the Turkish empire.”¹⁹

The ambassador based his conclusion not only on Talât’s comments, but also on an array of German witnesses: teachers, medical personnel, church people, civil engineers, soldiers – and reports from his own consular staff, which were detailed and compelling. Germany’s consul in Aleppo would eventually earn a mild reprimand for his passionate protests against the treatment of the Armenians. Germany’s man in Mosul was so moved by the famished creatures straggling by that he fed them himself. If the Foreign Office was unwilling to foot the bill for the £300, well then, he declared, he’d pay it back to them out of his own salary, in monthly installments.²⁰

Then there was Lieutenant Max Erwin von Scheubner-Richter, who had been seconded to Eastern Anatolia to organize Muslim guerrillas behind Russian lines. Arriving in Erzerum, the heart of historic Armenia, Scheubner found himself pressed into service to run the vice-consulate there. Soon he was privy to the same grisly sights. Unionist hardliners bluntly informed him that their goal was the “complete extermination” of the Armenians. “After the war, we will ‘have no more Armenians in Turkey,’ is the verbatim pronouncement of an authoritative personage,” the young soldier reported. In August 1915, Scheubner informed Wangenheim’s stand-in that this grim goal had been attained – throughout the entire territory of his consulate.

Scheubner did not deny that there had been Armenian insurgents here and there. What could be more “natural” for a people so badly treated? But, in his view “any proof whatsoever” of a “general, intentional, and premeditated uprising by the Armenians is lacking.” The very extent of the extermination proved the absurdity of Turkish claims: “... that tens of thousands of Armenians let themselves be butchered, without resisting, by a handful of Kurds and irregulars as happened here is surely proof of how very little taste this people has for fighting and revolution.”²¹

19 Passage specially marked by the Auswärtiges Amt’s pencil. Wangenheim to Bethmann Hollweg, June 17 and July 7, 1915. My translations differ somewhat from that of www.armenocide.net, 1915-06-17-DE-003 and 1915-07-07-DE-001.

20 Reprimand to Aleppo Konsul: Zimmermann to Acting Amb. Hohenlohe, Aug. 18, 1915, PAA Türkei No. 183 Vol. 38; Holstein to embassy, July 21, 1915, www.armenocide.net, 1915-07-21-DE-012.

21 Scheubner-Richter to Wangenheim, July 28; to Hohenlohe, Aug. 5, 1915, *ibid.* 1915-07-28-DE-015 and 1915-08-05-DE-002. My translation differs slightly from the Gusts’.

Were people inside Germany also talking about the extermination of the Armenians? War means censorship – and the censor’s strictures on what might be written about the Ottoman Empire exceeded in length even such awkward topics as “Belgium” and “U-Boat Warfare.” The principle was simple: “All remarks that could in any way diminish the reputation of our Turkish allies or be wounding to them must be avoided.” Any mention of the Armenians had to be submitted to pre-censorship. In fact, the *Zensurbuch* made plain, it wanted no mention of the Armenian question at all.²²

The press got the message. Although the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Germany’s most prestigious daily, had a veteran correspondent in Constantinople, he devoted his insider status to securing interviews with Unionist leaders and to disseminating their tale of Armenian treachery. Others did the same. During the genocide year of 1915, Armenians were mentioned in the *Berliner Tageblatt* just five times: two were reprints of rebuttals of Entente atrocity “propaganda” issued by the Ottoman press agency. The other three? Casual asides in interviews held by the Grand Vizier, by Talât Bey, and by the War Minister Enver Pasha. And with more than 3 million of their own sons at the front, with pundits like Friedrich Naumann telling them that “everything turns on the Dardanelles,” can anyone wonder that ordinary Germans let their ally’s story of Armenian fifth columns go unchallenged?²³

And yet: numbers alone – on censorship guidelines, news items, German soldiers mobilized – cannot close the question of what Germans knew and said about the extermination of the Armenians. Unlike in the Third Reich, where the disclosure of genocide was a capital offense, penalties in Imperial Germany for circumventing censorship were light. Moreover, in Berlin, and probably in other large cities, Dutch, French, English, and even Russian newspapers remained on sale. Those unskilled in foreign languages could learn the news from the Swiss press.²⁴ An information barrier so omnipresent yet so porous meant that Turkey’s boosters faced the task of rebutting Entente atrocity reports that they could never be sure anyone had actually read.

The result was a mass of contradictions. Germans were told by their press that Armenians were being subjected to a just and necessary response to their treasonous aid to the Russian army. But they could also read that the Armenian Reforms of February 1914 had “proven themselves absolutely,” that a “friendly relationship”

22 Oberzensurstelle, Kommunikationsüberwachende Vorschriften des Jahres 1917 in H.-D. Fischer, ed., *Pressekonzentration & Zensurpraxis im Ersten Weltkrieg. Texte und Quellen* (Berlin, 1973), 194-275; quotes: 266.

23 Elizabeth Khorikian examined every issue of the *Berliner Tageblatt* in “Die Behandlung des Völkermordes an den Armeniern 1915 in der Deutschen Literatur und Presse von 1915 bis 1925” (Magisterarbeit, Free University, Berlin, 1989). Naumann, “Kriegschronik,” *Die Hilfe*, March 11, 1915, 150.

24 Access to foreign press: Lothar Persius, Nov. 16, 1914, and Eduard Bernstein, Jan. 18 and 19, 1915: Hoover Archive, Heinrich Kanner Papers (hereafter KP) Box 2, vol. 2; Becker to Hellmut Ritter, Aug. 30, 1915, NL Becker fol. 3521. Erzberger’s NL includes French newspaper reports on the genocide. File 1097, vol. 3, Bundesarchiv Koblenz [hereafter BAK].

existed between Armenians and their government, based on “firm, constitutional granite”; that the Armenian elite and German-Turkish circles were “very close.” Contradictions multiplied when *on the very same page* another author blamed the terrible Armenian massacres (here assumed to be common knowledge) on unruly Kurds, whom the Turkish government, burdened with a bureaucracy from the previous regime, could not control.²⁵ (So much for the effectiveness of those Armenian Reforms....) Competing apologies fueled suspicion of mayhem and murder.

So, who knew? If we look not at the hard-pressed German-in-the-street, but at the elites, the close-knit world of movers, shakers, and opinion-makers, then the answer is clear: everyone. And if we ask, what did they know? The answer, with equal certitude, is: enough.

Orientalists learned about it early on from colleagues in neutral countries and from students serving as interpreters in Turkey. Some, like Professor Littmann, were inclined to dismiss an American document on the Armenian fate. The future translator of *Arabian Nights* knew a good tale when he saw one; and anyway, Russia’s expulsion of Poles and Lithuanians was no less harsh and its persecution of its Jews, as well as London’s anti-German mobs, were worse. But details from former students became so copious that eventually, as his colleague, C. H. Becker, assured him, “the madness...” was “not to be doubted.” By October 1915, reports of massacres, Becker noted in an essay whose publication was quashed, “now fill the entire world.”²⁶

Another source was Armin Wegner. Returning to Berlin after serving as a medic in Turkey, the aspiring writer used readings of his new work to notify dovish intellectuals, like the art collector Count Harry Kessler and the journalist Hellmut von Gerlach. Gerlach took the news to the Federation for a New Fatherland (Bund Neues Vaterland), whose eclectic clientele stretched from Albert Einstein and the novelist Stefan Zweig, through the usual liberal, socialist, and feminist suspects (Eduard Bernstein, Clara Zetkin, Ernst Reuter), all the way up to liberal members of the government. But in his more influential capacity as the political editor of *Die Welt am Montag* (circulation 150,000), Gerlach kept faith with his government’s precept: what happens in Anatolia stays in Anatolia.

Nor was Maximilian Harden, publisher of the fashionable *Zukunft*, any profile in courage. Inform the Empress! he advised Wegner. Emphasize the religious angle, since the Armenians are a Christian

25 E.g., L. Freiherr von Mackay, “Der Weltkrieg und das armenische Problem,” *Die Hilfe*, Sept. 9, 1915, 579-81; Max Roloff, “Türken und Armenier,” *ibid.*, 581-82.

26 Littmann to Becker, Oct. 26 [?] and Oct. 29; Becker to Littmann, Oct. 27, and Nov. 9, 1915. NL Becker fol. 4579; “entire world,” from C. H. Becker, “Armenier, Türken und Wir” typescript, *ibid.* fol. 7836.

people! He himself, he was sorry to say, could do nothing. “The censor closed our mouths,” Gerlach later explained.²⁷ But how do we assess the censor’s power, when self-censors were so obliging?

Talk about the “extermination of the Armenians” was not confined to professors and lefties, as we know from Gerald Feldman’s magisterial study of the mighty Deutsche Bank in World War I. The bank owned controlling shares of the Anatolian Railway, and its Constantinople office was full of what Feldman described as “hair-raising accounts” of the Turkish government’s determination (as the deputy director reported to his chief in Berlin, Arthur von Gwinner) “to eradicate” the Armenians – “the entire line: root and branch.” A quarter of the population of roughly 2 million, he estimated, had already perished. Eastern Anatolia was “*armenierrein*.” “The Jewish pogroms in Russia, which I know,” he stressed, “are comparative child’s play.”²⁸

What did the Deutsche Bank *do* with this knowledge? Gwinner’s man protested to the Turks and reported in detail to his own Foreign Office. The Railway saved as many Armenians as it could, hiring even the unqualified for construction and office work. Its “lifeboat” bears comparison to Oskar Schindler’s, and on a much larger scale. Gwinner himself designated £1,000 for immediate Armenian relief – secretly. But he did nothing publicly, nor did he resign as chairman of Jäckh-the-Turk’s German-Turkish Union, whose goals he continued to legitimate with his name.²⁹

Other key figures in business – Walther Rathenau, Hugo Stinnes, August Thyssen – must also have known. Wartime Constantinople was never off-limits to men with influence (“Every train from the Balkans brings Germans who want to monkey around with the Turks,” a later German ambassador complained).³⁰ Stinnes and Thyssen arrived in the winter of 1916 and talked with Germans who talked about the extermination of the Armenians. Among the “flood” of Germans on fact-finding missions was Gustav Stresemann, a rising star of the National Liberals, who met with newsmen, soldiers, expats, diplomats – and Enver Pasha. Stresemann’s diary leaves no doubt that he learned exactly what was happening. On day 4 he wrote: “Armenian reduction 1-1 ½ million.”

Back in Germany, the future chancellor of the Weimar Republic made his influence felt. To the public, Stresemann’s speeches reflected the sunny face of the alliance, eulogizing the “*tapferen Türken*” to receptive audiences. To insiders, however, his picture was grim: on the

27 Hellmut von Gerlach, *Die Grosse Zeit der Lüge* (Bremen [1926], 1994), 116-17; Martin Tamcke, *Armin T. Wegner und die Armenier: Anspruch und Wirklichkeit eines Augenzeugen*, 2nd ed. (Hamburg 1996), 161-71, 239; Uwe Feigel, *Das Evangelische Deutschland und Armenien: die Armenierhilfe deutscher evangelischer Christen seit dem Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts im Kontext der deutsch-türkischen Beziehungen* (Göttingen, 1989), 227.

28 F. J. Günther to Gwinner, Aug. 17, 1915, quoted in G. D. Feldman, “Die Deutsche Bank vom Ersten Weltkrieg bis zur Weltwirtschaftskrise 1914-1933,” in *Die Deutsche Bank, 1870-1995*, ed. L. Gall et al. (Munich, 1995), 138-314, 153.

29 “Lifeboat” is Hilmar Kaiser’s description in his “The Baghdad Railway and the Armenian Genocide,” in *Remembrance and Denial*, ed. R. G. Hovannisian (Detroit, 1998), 67-112.

30 J. H. von Bernstorff to Chancellor G. von Hertling, Apr. 6, 1918, NL Erzberger 1097, vol. 14.

Ottoman economy, on relations between German and Turkish officers, on growing xenophobia there. On the Armenian question, however, Stresemann reversed targets, aiming his guns not at Germany's Ottoman ally but at Wangenheim's replacement, Count Paul von Wolff-Metternich, for antagonizing the Turks by repeatedly lecturing them on the Armenian question. Was "Herr von Metternich ambassador of the German empire," Enver Pasha had sneered, "or ambassador of the Armenians?" The future Nobel peace laureate endorsed Enver's demand that Germany recall its outspoken ambassador.³¹

Stresemann's traveling companion, Matthias Erzberger, the leader of the Catholic Left and by 1916 the most powerful man in the Reichstag, was already well-informed. As director of war propaganda for neutral countries, Erzberger was kept supplied by the Foreign Office with the extenuations with which it armed its diplomatic personnel to rebut challenges about atrocity allegations. But Erzberger also had independent sources on what he called "this newest burning question"; most credibly, Catholic clergy on the spot. From "two absolutely reliable" men, Erzberger learned that murdered Christians numbered 1.5 million – the same figure as Stresemann's. "The Armenian nation," one of them confided, "is supposed to be pretty much exterminated."³²

Erzberger had several fish to fry when he arrived in the Ottoman capital in early 1916. Not least, he wanted to persuade the Turkish government to turn over any Christian sites in Jerusalem that had been "vacated" by the Armenian Apostolic Church to his own, Roman Catholic, church. Still, in interviews with Enver and Talât, Erzberger did speak up for the Armenians, and back in Berlin he wrote to the Cardinal Archbishop of Cologne about their plight. He also sought out the Turkish ambassador and went to the Foreign Office to defend Ambassador Metternich against his critics.³³ Alarmed by all this negative talk about Turkey, Jäckh, at a board meeting of his German-Turkish Union, denounced the "rumors" spread by Erzberger and Stresemann as completely baseless – which testifies to their impact.³⁴ In public, however, the normally so voluble Erzberger did not break the silence.

And, as a member of parliament, he might have. The arm of the censor stopped at the Reichstag door. Only the noise of his fellows (or the president's call to order) could silence a member. But noise and calls to order were precisely what occurred in January 1916, when Karl

31 Gustav Stresemann, *Balkan Tagebuch*, entries on Jan. 29, 31, Feb. 1, Feb. 4, Feb. 5, 1916; "Eine Balkanreise im Weltkrieg. Nach einem Vortrage des Reichstagsabg. Dr. Stresemann," *Annaberger Wochenblatt*, June 21, 1916; [Memorandum] Mar. 9, 1916, all in PAA, NL Stresemann, vol. 158.

32 Quote: P[ater] Paschalis to Erzberger, Jan. 10, 1916. J. Froberger to Erzberger, Oct. 15, 1915; Erzberger to E. Saunier, Oct. 21, 1915. BAK, NL Erzberger 1097, vol. 3.

33 Erzberger to Auswärtiges Amt, Feb. 25, 1916; memo Mar. 3, 1916; to BH, May 27, 1916: all at the respective dates on www.armenocide.net.

34 Minutes, Vorstandssitzung, May 16, 1915. NL Becker fol. 1913.

Liebkecht, a radical Social Democrat, demanded to know whether the government was aware that its allies had annihilated “100s of thousands” of Armenians, and that “Professor [sic] Lepsius” was calling it “flat-out extermination”?³⁵ Two days later Liebkecht was expelled from his party.

But murder will out. By 1918, when a Center backbencher returned from Turkey with news of fresh massacres, Germany’s last ambassador there threw up his hands. “So much has been spoken and written about the Armenian atrocities that it seems idle to express oneself on these questions.”³⁶ His exasperation is revealing. It seems that Germans could not *stop* talking about the extermination of the Armenians.

The Protestant clergy, recipients of constant streams of information from their own and international networks, talked most. They forwarded eyewitness accounts to the government, protested the press’s complicity in Turkey’s alibis, and badgered the Foreign Office “to put a stop immediately to the murders by our...allies.” In July 1915, the monthly publication of a prominent Protestant charity for the Near East (circulation 25,000) was among the first, in Germany or anywhere, to publish details of the genocide – which soon spread internationally. Reports like these were terrible for allied relations. But, groaned the chargé d’affaires in Constantinople, Konstantin von Neurath, an outright “repression of Germany’s pro-Armenian associations” was “naturally out of the question.”³⁷

Nevertheless, the constant government pressure against negative publicity took its toll. Yes, the genocide remained on people’s lips; otherwise that same German Charity could not have collected so much money for Armenian relief during the war. But in the public square where talk might have mattered, the Church’s speech remained muffled. Belief requires not only hearing talk from a credible source. It requires subjecting that talk to public debate. Precisely such a debate was forbidden.

In recent years, a number of historians have reiterated the Entente’s charge that Germany was co-responsible for the Armenian genocide – a charge Armenians themselves have long believed. Others have countered that in the deadly game of Ottoman minority policy, Germany held few cards. As our once-skeptical Professor Littman put it: “In any case, would Turkey let us have a voice in a domestic matter?”³⁸ He knew the answer: not if it could help it.

35 Reichstag exchange: www.armenocide.net, 1916-01-11-DE-001.

36 Bernstorff to Hertling, Apr. 6, 1918. NL Erzberger 1097, Bd. 14.

37 Neurath to BH, Oct. 26, 1915 www.armenocide.net 1915-10-26-DE-001. Clergy protests: E. v. Dryander to Zimmermann, Sept. 27, 1915, *ibid.*, 1915-09-27-DE-001; F. Schuchardt to BH, Aug. 21, 1915, *ibid.*, 1915-08-21-001; and Feigel, *Das evangelische Deutschland*, 230ff.

38 Littmann to Becker, Oct. 26 ?, 1915, NL Becker fol. 4579.

The Entente's implicit demand that Germany ditch its allies was a cheap shot – certainly during their Gallipoli invasion, which overlapped almost precisely with the first genocidal push, and even later, when Turks were tying down a million Entente troops. But there is something that all of us can demand of a society, even during a desperately fought war: that it not lie to itself.

“Living in the truth:” Václav Havel's famous line identifies truth itself as a kind of power, available to men and women who have nothing else. Once someone steps out of the lie, Havel found, “he has shattered the world of appearances, the fundamental pillar of the system ... He has enabled everyone to peer behind the curtain. Living within the lie can constitute the system only if it is universal.” An alternative threatens its very existence. Truth then becomes “the power of the powerless.”³⁹

That power was grasped by Johannes Lepsius. The veteran champion of the Armenians had already stepped out of the lie on October 5, 1915, when he invited the German Press Association, which met weekly in the Reichstag building for government briefings, to hear what Enver Pasha and Talât Bey had told *him* about their Armenian policy.

It was an offer journalists could not refuse. News of Lepsius's chilling conversations in August 1915 with Constantinople's strongmen had already spread by word-of-mouth. Those who remembered how Lepsius's 1896 reports from the killing fields were soon published in translations abroad also knew that this was a man who knew how to get the world's attention. Articles circulating in the Swiss press on the extermination of more than a million Armenians suggested that Lepsius had already begun.

The next day Under Secretary of State Arthur Zimmermann summoned together the same reporters. While offering lip service to the Turks' claim that it was the *Armenians* who were massacring the Turks, Zimmermann's main point was that, since nothing could be done for them anyway, Armenians were not worth the loss of an important ally.

Lepsius kept pushing. He spoke to the Wednesday Society, a group of intellectuals around Hans Delbrück and Adolf von Harnack.⁴⁰ And he organized an array of Protestant Church leaders (men with reliable sources of their own), proposing they circulate a mass petition

39 Václav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” in *Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965-1990*, ed. Paul Wilson (New York, 1991), 125-214; esp. 144-45.

40 Ulrich Trupener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire, 1914-1918* ([1968] Delmar NY, 1989), 220-25.

to the chancellor that explicitly reproved the government's disinformation policy: "It oppresses our conscience that the German press praises the nobility and tolerance of our Mohammedan allies, while Mohammedans are shedding rivers of innocent Christian blood." The petition predicted a "crippling impact on the morale of German Christians when they have to look on while their allies destroy an entire Christian people ... without our side doing whatever is possible to save them."⁴¹

Yet precisely such visions of crippled morale raised anxieties within the petitioners' own ranks. Alarmed by their own courage, they wilted under pressure from Church authorities to scrap a mass signature drive. Their petition would remain confidential, its signers limited to men in leadership roles. Even so, within a few days, 49 of the most distinguished figures in German Protestantism had been persuaded to sign - an unprecedented step in a Church known for its expansive interpretation of "Render unto Caesar." At Lepsius's urging, Erzberger got a committee of the Catholic Lay Congress [*Katholikentag*] to issue a similar, although more anodyne, statement. Nothing remotely like this effort - a movement opposing the policies of a wartime ally, for example, in Britain to protect Russia's Jews - occurred in any of the other belligerent powers. Chancellor Bethmann took notice. Referring to "mounting ... commotion in Germany," he instructed his ambassador to inform Turkey's leaders of the two petitions "at every opportunity, and emphatically."⁴²

But Germany's "mounting commotion" remained private. By December 1915, the Foreign Office had managed to convince most Church leaders that public talk would be counterproductive for Armenians (and for Germans). Thus, debate within the Establishment was aborted before wider circles could learn of it. Outside the columns of a few religious publications (which usually employed Aesopian language), there was no public "talk" about the extermination of the Armenians.

Yet Germany's Daniel Ellsberg (or Julian Assange?) kept on. The pandemonium that broke out in the Reichstag in January 1916 when Liebknecht referred to Lepsius's findings was a telling sign that Lepsius's very name had become a synecdoche for the embarrassing genocide. Now Lepsius worked feverishly to put a comprehensive picture of the genocide into the hands of "every Protestant pastor" in Germany. The board of his own German Orient Mission, unnerved by rumors that Lepsius intended to finger Turkey's government as

41 BH to Neurath, Nov. 10, 1915, encl. 1, Oct. 15, 1915, www.armenocide.net, 915-11-10-DE-011.

42 BH to Neurath, Nov. 10, 1915, enclosing Protestant petition, Oct. 15, 1915; and Catholic committee to BH, Oct. 29, 1915; armenocide.net 1915-11-10-011.

responsible for the horrors, stepped back. Couldn't Lepsius leave that part out? (He could not.) Misgivings grew: What if there were reprisals against the mission's schools, orphanages, and clinics? After initially agreeing to foot the bill for Lepsius's "comprehensive picture," the board decided to withdraw its support.

But let's be real: How would living in the truth in *Germany* halt a *Turkish* killing machine? The lack of a convincing answer helps explain, I think, why Lepsius found himself working so alone.

In July 1916, Lepsius finished his *Report on the Situation of the Armenian People in Turkey* [Bericht über die Lage des armenischen Volkes in der Türkei], printing 20,000 copies for "every" Protestant parsonage, plus an additional 500 to send to public figures, the press, and members of parliament. Lest so many identical parcels mailed in one place attract attention, his eleven children were conscripted to fan out over Potsdam, distributing them among corner mailboxes.

How successful were Lepsius's efforts? It's hard to tell. In August, the authorities impounded 191 copies meant for Germany's elected representatives. A month later, the Turkish ambassador got wind of the *Report* and protested to the military authorities, who ordered the seizure of any remaining copies. But some of these *Reports* surely reached their destinations because by late September, Lepsius had received an astonishing 24,000 Marks for Armenian relief in response to the appeal inserted in each copy. We can also see Lepsius's efforts reflected in the sharp criticism of the government's handling of the Armenian issue in the Reichstag's budget committee that September,⁴³ as well as in the complaints of a hypernationalist, speaking that month before a crowd of thousands in Munich, about propaganda in Germany on behalf of the Armenians.

Lepsius's *Report* offers some puzzles worth pondering. Given exploding paper costs, where did an unbeneficed parson with eleven children get the money to publish and mail more than 20,000 copies of a 300-page book? Stamps alone would have cost 4,000 marks. Lepsius merely cites "friends of the good cause." Given rationing, where did he obtain the *paper*? Another mystery is Lepsius's continued freedom of movement. While Entente powers were quick to incarcerate their critics, Lepsius was threatened only with three days of jail and a 30 Mark fine – and then only in 1917.

Such forbearance suggests ambivalence. Even the policeman charged with executing the seizure order in September 1916 proceeded with a

⁴³ Goltz, "Armenische Reformen," 76-77n115; Lepsius, Preface, *Der Todesgang*, xxv, xxvii; R. Schäfer, *Geschichte der Deutschen Orient-Mission* (Potsdam, 1932), 90-94; Vahakn Dadrian, *German Responsibility* 194n165; Government spokesman to Budget Committee, Sept. 29, 1916: W. Gust, ed., *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern 1915-16. Dokumente aus dem Politischen Archiv des deutschen Auswärtigen Amtes* (Springe, 2005), 551-55.

minimum of force and fanfare – and, it appears, commitment. Finding no one in Lepsius’s office, he simply left a penciled slip on the desk, announcing the impoundment.⁴⁴ Apparently, German confiscations, like German censorship, were expected to be self-enforcing.

The grapevine that informed Germans of the genocide reminds us of that old riddle: What’s the definition of a secret? Answer: something told to only one person at a time. With the peace, however, official secrets of all kinds burst into the open as authors scurried to “update” their rosy accounts of wartime Turkey.

Openness begat controversy. What had befallen the Armenians continued to be entwined with politics, most obviously, the politics of peace-making, as a defeated Germany found itself in the dock, accused not only of starting the war, but of atrocities in waging it: in Belgium; on the high seas; in Anatolia against the Armenians. Yet even at that point not everyone at the Wilhelmstrasse was alive to how deeply the Ottoman alliance had compromised their country. Thus, Germany’s delegation to Paris initially included not only their heroic vice-consul of Mosul, who had succored Armenians, but also their embassy’s naval attaché, Hans Humann, a pal of Enver’s who had worked throughout the war as Enver’s mouthpiece. Word that Ambassador Morgenthau’s memoirs had connected Humann to the genocide led to the captain’s hasty removal, as an embarrassed Foreign Office, scrambling for damage control, responded with a *Flucht nach vorn*: it commissioned the troublemaker Lepsius (!) to publish its files on the genocide.

Widely reviewed, Lepsius’s *Deutschland und Armenien, 1914-1918: Sammlung diplomatischer Aktenstücke* told anyone still in the dark that a genocide had taken place – with the knowledge of Germany’s own leaders. (Lepsius also re-published his 1916 *Report*. Now entitled *The Death March of the Armenian People [Der Todesgang des Armenischen Volkes]*, its fourth printing reached 28,000 copies.)

Inevitably, the genocide also became part of *Weimar* politics. Those convinced their leaders had lied to them throughout the war squared off against those convinced their undefeated army had been stabbed in the back – a legend guaranteed to produce natural supporters for the Young Turks’ own alibi of Armenian betrayal. A chain of Armenian revenge assassinations in Berlin kept the issue alive, most famously in 1921, when Soghomon Tehlirian gunned Talât down in broad daylight on the Hardenbergstrasse. Eulogies by prominent Germans at Talât’s

44 Lepsius, *Der Todesgang*, xxiii–vi; Steinhauer, Kriminalpolizei Potsdam, Apr. 1, 1917, GStPK I Rep. 191 Nr. 3664.

graveside praised him as the “Turkish Bismarck.”⁴⁵ Lepsius, on the other hand, testified on behalf of Talât’s assassin, whom a Berlin jury acquitted – to international approval, but to vilification in Hugo Stinnes’s *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, whose editor, the former naval attaché Hans Humann, continued the war against the Armenians by other means. In attacking and defending Armenians and Turks, Germans were attacking and defending each other.

The Armenian catastrophe thus meant different things to different Germans. For some, it meant mourning, and shame. There was standing room only at St. Hedwig’s Cathedral, in the heart of Berlin, for a memorial service for the Armenian people. The invitation, from the German-Armenian Society, acknowledged that the genocide had *always* been an open secret. “As is well known,” it said, “during the World War more than a million Armenians, on orders of the Turkish government, were massacred or deported to the desert ...” Although they knew that their countrymen did not feel directly responsible, the sponsors stated flatly that, because of its Turkish alliance, Germany’s share in this wrong was greater than that of any other people.⁴⁶

Most Germans, however, weighed down by their own sorrows, assimilated the genocide into a developing master narrative of German battles nobly fought, if nobly lost – as we can see in a 1938 biography of Lt. Scheubner-Richter, consul of Erzerum in 1915, written by his adoring adjutant. In a work published five years after Hitler’s seizure of power, we might expect a testosterone-poisoned paean to the healthy ruthlessness of the Young Turks. Instead, the author lingered over his hero’s vigorous efforts to save Armenians. His preface proudly recalled his young commander in 1919 presenting him with Lepsius’s newly-minted *Deutschland und Armenien*, Scheubner inscribing it to the “memory of common struggles for the honor of Germany’s escutcheon....”⁴⁷

Other Germans drew different lessons. To Hitler, the genocide served as a warning of the doom that awaited weaker peoples. In 1922, he cited the fate of the Armenians as what lay in store for Germans – if no rational solution were found to the Jewish problem.⁴⁸ Eight years later, Hitler was complaining of the German press portraying “over and over, far and wide, the ‘Armenian atrocities.’”⁴⁹

45 Jäckh, “Talaat,” *Deutsche Politik* 14: 315; “Zum Andenken Talaat Pa-

schas,” eulogy by Count Bernstorff, Germany’s last wartime ambassador to

Constantinople, in *Das demokratische Deutschland* 12: 265.

46 Hermann Goltz, ed., *Internationales Dr. Johannes-Lepsius-Symposium* (Halle/Saale, 1986), 276; idem., “Sophies Erzählung vom Tode Hadschi Murats und Lev Tolstojs kritische Kulturtheorie der Wiesendistel,” in *Myslashchii svobod’no imen’i nra-vom’: zu Ehren von Dietrich Freydank*, ed. Svetlana Mengel (Münster, 2000), 57-82, 61.

47 Paul Leverkuehn, *Posten auf ewiger Wache. Aus dem abenteuerreichen Leben des Max von Scheubner-Richter* (Essen, 1938), 9.

48 Hitler, *Sämtliche Aufzeichnung 1905-1924*, ed. E. Jäckel with A. Kuhn (Stuttgart, 1980), 775. Also: “Eradication of Armenia,” *Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten*, 1931, interview with Hitler; K.D. Bardakjian, *Hitler and the Armenian Genocide* (Cambridge, MA, 1985), 27-28, citing É. Calic, ed., *Ohne Maske: Hitler-Breitung Geheimgespräche, 1931* (Frankfurt, 1968), 101 (translated as *Unmasked: Two Confidential Interviews with Hitler in 1931* (New York, 1971).

49 “Politik der Woche,” *Illustrierter Beobachter*, May 24, 1930, in Hitler, *Reden, Schriften, Anordnungen. February 1925 bis January 1933. Vol. 3.*, ed. C. Hartmann et al. (Munich, 1995), doc. 49: 202-206. Thanks are due to Peter Black of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum for this information.

What is the significance of our story of Germany and the Armenian genocide? It's important, I think, because it highlights for us the enduring tensions between national interests, felt to be vital, and our obligations to humanity. (As our own Secretary of State Henry Kissinger opined in 1973, recorded on the Nixon tapes: "...if they put Jews into gas chambers in the Soviet Union, it is not an American concern. Maybe a humanitarian concern."⁵⁰) And it reminds us of the moral complexities we face in judging what Kant called "the crooked timber of humanity."

Let me close with two examples: The 40-year-old career diplomat Count Friedrich-Werner von Schulenburg became consul at Erzerum in 1916, arriving after the region had been cleansed of its Armenians. He had heard that there had been massacres, but he wasn't having any of it. Such stories, he was sure, were "99/100 % lies, the result of the colossal cowardice of these people and of the Orientals' addiction to exaggeration. Naturally," he then conceded, "quite a lot have been beaten to death and even more died on the way."⁵¹ But it was clear that the new consul thought this was nothing for Germans to get upset about. The man Schulenburg had replaced as consul was 31-year-old Lt. Scheubner-Richter, who had protested, intervened, and aided every Armenian he could, and was finally removed because the Turks refused to have any more dealings with him.

Both men met violent ends. The hard-hearted Schulenburg died a hero's death at Plötzensee in November 1944 for his role in the plot to assassinate Hitler. Scheubner-Richter met his death eleven years earlier, in Munich, shot down at Hitler's side in the unsuccessful Beer Hall Putsch of November 9, 1923. He was the Führer's right-hand man.

Even as the war generation aged, the memory of the genocide remained green. In December 1932, Franz Werfel traveled across Germany giving readings from *Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, his epic novel of Armenian resistance, to capacity audiences. Professor Becker clipped a review of Werfel's chapter depicting Lepsius's verbal "duel" with Enver Pasha in Constantinople in August 1915.⁵² Both antagonists were now dead; the empires for which each had fought, also gone. Yet before other victims claimed the world's attention, the events in Anatolia in 1915 set the international standard for horror. Germans were still talking about the extermination of the Armenians.

50 "In Tapes, Nixon Rails about Jews and Blacks," *New York Times*, Dec. 11, 2010.

51 armenocide.net 1916-04-16-DE-001.

52 W. G. H., "Vorlesung von Franz Werfel in der Akademie," *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, Dec. 9, 1932; NL Becker fol. 7399.

Much of this lecture is taken from my article “Who Still Talked about the Extermination of the Armenians? German Talk and German Silence,” in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Göçek, and Norman M. Naimark (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), which provides more documentation. I thank Oxford University Press for permission to republish.

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