

The Compromise of my People and I

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The days pass on relentlessly -- I seem to be losing count of how many days it's been since I first began the journey. The dragging of the feet of the tens of thousand deportees that I stand beside warps me into a trance in which time is incomprehensible: only days ago I used to be able to determine some semblance of time by the constant swishing of sand beneath us and the constant coughs of the sickly and parched. However, now, the swishing of the grains of sand gets slower, and the coughs become more constant -- and all semblance of time is lost. Two, three, four days ago, I'm not sure, I was alone in my village, willing myself to survive. Several days before this, I had gone to fetch water, only to come back to an empty village. My village, my family -- or what was left of it, I should say, had been deserted by Turkish officers under the Provisional Deportation Law (of which "justifies" the stripping of my people, the Armenians, from their homes), and I was left alone to prosper in my own village. Those officers, gruesome as they are, hadn't even given my family time to gather food, water, or me, to begin the long trek to the concentration camps in the Syrian desert with.

Although I was not besieged by the Turkish officials the day my family was, I find myself immersed in the same fate -- for I was found. I tried, alone in my village, to survive. I went outside only when it was necessary, and despite the precautions I took I was caught by a Turkish soldier retreating from his encampment nearby. That's right, not only do the soldiers of the Ottoman Empire make it their goal to decimate the external enemy-- the Allies in The Great War -- but the internal enemy -- the Armenians. Driven by his lust to rid of my kind, this lone soldier searched my village for any remaining signs of Armenian life -- and I was found and thrown into another battalion of deportees passing by. Thank goodness for the band of deportees

passing by -- for if they hadn't been walking by, I am confident that I would have been murdered by the ruthlessness of the soldier.

Which brings me to where I am now. Day three, four? of the march. Thirsty, hungry, and without family. Marge, an elderly lady that I walk beside, says that stories like mine are common -- in which such little time is given to the Armenians to prepare for the journey ahead. In fact, today she told me of an instance where several women were at a wash tub in Deben when ordered to deport immediately -- so that they weren't even given time to put on clothes or shoes.

I often find myself asking, why? Why such the hurry? Why is it so necessary for the Armenian population to die?

Oh, yes, I am aware that these marches are none but a path to death -- I have found that death is inevitable. I've seen it in the papers: "A policy of extermination put in effect against a helpless people."¹

But why? Why the hatred against my people?

December 6, 1915

Today, I found myself pondering this question: Why do this Turks, fellow citizens of the Ottoman Empire, wish to exterminate the Armenians? I decided to ask Marge. She told me:

Ever since the Ottoman conquering of the Armenian community, the Muslim Turkish peoples had withheld a majority of the power in the empire; while the Armenian Christians succumbed to the minority. The Turks had utilized their power and prestige to lead the empire through an age of flourishing in the sixteenth century, while in the meantime, the Armenian

¹ Michael Gonchar. *Tell of Horrors Done in Armenia. Tell of Horrors Done in Armenia*, The New York Times, 1915, learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/04/16/teaching-the-armenian-genocide-with-primary-sources-from-the-new-york-times/.

population remained at the bottom of the social ladder. Without a voice in the government, the Armenians had to pay taxes and were not justly treated as citizens of the empire. Though, in the late nineteenth century upon the empire's decline (after the land lost to the Ottoman failure in the Russo-Turkish war), a shift of power between the two ethnicities was apparent. Amidst the declining economy, the Armenians appeared to flourish as businessmen. Amidst the government that was threatened by the loss of land, our people rose and were able to gain power in the government. Through these roles, they fought to institute more just protocol for themselves. The population grew afraid of the roles of greater prestige that the Armenians had attained in the government, and whether or not the Armenians had begun associating themselves with outside European powers (due to their economic success). In the late 19th century, the sultan began issuing massacres to suppress the success of our people -- planting the seed of Armenian persecution.

Meanwhile, revolution was spurring within the empire, and the Young Turks rose in 1908. During their reign, the persecution of our people was further emphasized: as exemplified in a quote she remembered from a book that she read in her village: "The Young Turks wanted a renewal of the Ottoman Empire, and they saw the empire as a Turkish place. They wanted to reduce the economic influence of Europe and to develop a Muslim middle class. They perceived the Armenians as being directly in the way of these aims."² The seed that the sultan planted continued to grow in popularity.

² "The Armenian Genocide Begins: April 24, 1915." *Global Events: Milestone Events Throughout History*, edited by Jennifer Stock, vol. 5: Middle East, Gale, 2014. *Student Resources in Context*, <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/GSPKHA871987479/SUIC?u=occon89156&xid=bc11c72e>. Accessed 8 Jan. 2018.

Later, in 1913, our current government rose (Three Pashas) and soon in their reign allied with the fighting force of the Central Powers in The Great War. The decline of our nation continued. It was in 1914 that the Three Pashas had harvested the oppressional intents that had originated from the sultan and fed these ideologies to the public; for after further tensions were caused by a rumor of Armenian assistance to the Allies -- the extermination of our people began on April 24, 1915.

Here is what I understand:

Social tensions of hundreds of years soon evolved into conflict once the Armenians withheld power, and the Turks were at a loss of it. Afraid of the power we withheld, of our mysterious prospering in a declining nation, the Turkish people decided to compromise my people, hoping that it would restore the Ottoman empire.

And now, here I am, months later, suffering from the repercussions of the compromise.

January 1, 1915

Today has been a rather solemn day, as Marge revealed to me a rather tragic fact.

She told me that she was not always alone on this horrid journey -- that once her grandson stood beside her; but he does no longer, for he was slayed by the wrath of an officer's sword. A sword that killed multiple in our battalion before I arrived.

Since then, all I've been able to think about has been my father. He, too was slayed. Slayed, just like all of the other older men in the village to eliminate the threat of rebellion once the deportation of the women and children began.

Thereforth, my brother came to mind -- a soldier in The Great War. I can only hope that he, voluntarily fighting external forces, is being treated better than the rest of my family is. My

brother, a strong-willed soul, left to fight in the forces only weeks before my father was murdered -- and thank goodness he did, for I am confident that he would otherwise have been subjected to the same fate as my father.

At least now he has a chance to survive.

Soon, my mind swam with dizzied thoughts of my family, my sister, my mother. Where could they be?

Wherever they are, whatever they are being forced to do -- they are somehow suffering from the repercussions of this horrid compromise.

January 11, 1915

Shouting, crying, chaos.

These words pretty much sum of the events of today -- I can barely proceed to write.

Early in the morning, a handful of women and teenagers were stripped from our battalion to serve as slaves in Turkish households -- thank goodness I look younger than I actually am. Marge said that they'd be sold for around 2 mejidias, and that some would even be forced to convert. Who knows what would become of them?

Not long after, our group was attacked by forces of the Special Organization (part of our government). They came, parading through the desert with maniacal and inhumane expressions on their faces, they were crazy and obsessed with the idea of our destruction. "They were once prisoners," Marge had said to me.

Prisoners, actual convicts of society, were being sent out to destroy Armenian innocents by order of the Special Organization?

I am tired, hungry, and barely have the strength to keep going.

January 18, 1915

After today, I now feel fortunate for the condition I am in.

Although I am weak, at least I am not hopeless. As we walked past a pair of train tracks today -- I saw exactly this: hopelessness, Armenians lying on the side, and some on the tracks, awaiting transportation whose arrival had been promised to them weeks before. Soon after this, I had seen the greatest thing ever -- several of their spirits lift as headlights in the distance shone upon them. I grew delighted as I saw this, as I saw hope erected from hopeless soles -- however soon this hope, and my delight was killed.

The train plummeted in, so fast that the weak bodies of the Armenians on the tracks were not given enough time to roll off, and were squashed. You may be thinking that this was a mere accident, however the comment from the driver of the train that followed the incident contradicts this, for he said: "Did you see how I smashed about of these Armenian swine?"³

How cruel of a compromise can the Turks enforce? Why will our death better the empire?

January 30, 1916

The Ottoman Empire is involved in two wars -- external and internal. The Great War, the war to end all wars, and the extermination of our people.

I would have thought that among the broad spectrum winning The Great War would be of greater importance -- for with every day the war goes on, our men are dying, our limited

³ Morgenthau. "Report of an Inhabitant of Athlit, Mount Carmel, Syria." *Armenian National Institute*, Armenian National Institute, 1998 Nov. 1916, www.armenian-genocide.org/br-11-27-16-text.html.

resources depleting; our empire rapidly declining; while my people are sitting here helpless, posing anything but a threat to the well-being of our nation. Today, I found myself contradicted. The officers announced that any Armenian in the military will be stripped of all weapons and discarded into labor battalions, or murdered, if lethargicity has plagued them. In order to rid of my people faster, they will strip them from the forces of The Great War and subject our nation to greater vulnerability?

I was outright dumbfounded, and immediately thought of my brother, who enlisted in the military because he believed in our nation, in the righteousness that we have the potential to withhold. He believed in our empire, even in the midst of our oppression -- but now, they do not believe in him.

They find it more important to compromise our people than win The Great War.

February 21, 1916

When I started, I knew that death was inevitable, that the will of the Turks to destroy my people was strong. But something inside me, a little strand of hope, thought that maybe something would be at the end of this journey -- something other than death; I thought that my will was stronger. I thought that if I made it to the concentration camp, if I made it that far, I would have a chance to live. But I am not so sure that I will be able to make it there. And even if I did, why would it matter? The conditions there are as horrid as they are on the road: I will be famished, hot, thirsty. What would be of it? Why do I keep going?

It seems that Marge has made this realization today as well. She is withered, weak, and worn from this journey. While normally I see a look of menace in her eyes, today all I see is sadness. It seems like today she has given up, for all that she's said to me is this:

“Why do I keep refusing to die, when death is summoning me? I seem to be already dead, but somehow, I am not. Why do I keep going if I have nothing to live for: my grandson is dead; the rest of my family has perished. Why do I continue to burn in death’s darkness?”

April 18, 1950

Marge’s flame did indeed go out a few days after this. However, mine did not. I did make it to the concentration camp, although circumstances there were not much better.

As the days went on, I became weaker: my legs became twigs uprooted from the ground only by the wrath of the officer’s whip. I became parched -- and suffered from severe starvation. Marge’s comment was relentlessly repeating through my head more and more often: Why am I fighting death? Although this thought became more repetitive, I was never able to answer it, though never able to let go. Few moments I found myself in great despair: such as when a train arrived one day, one whose arrival we had been waiting for what seemed like forever. As our desperate, pleading souls surrounded the the train, the officers turned the nozzle, and let the water run right in front of our eyes, but not into our mouths. That day, an invitation for death was sent to me. But never, not even when the water that I longed for was drained from my grasp -- did I let go.

And boy, am I glad -- for I lived. I outlasted the Turkish compromise -- it failed, for a handful of Armenians still remain.

Despite our slight victory, the relentless suffering of my people did not end immediately, for history goes as follows:

We survived the genocidal intentions of the Three Pashas, which ended upon their fleeing after The Great War (the genocide was often “covered-up” as a resettlement program for the

helpless people of The Great War, and once this disguise was stripped, they fled). Their situations were tried, along with 400 suspected perpetrators of the Armenian genocide, and the Three Pashas were sentenced to death. Although the Three Pashas had fled, my people were still below the Turks in society -- were still rats eyed with disgust.

Soon, the Republic of Turkey arose, and under the Treaty of Lausanne (to recognize a new beginning), outside countries dismissed what had been the genocide, the compromise, of the Armenians. I hope that in the future that this statement is challenged.

May 5, 2015

I came across an article about the Armenian genocide in the Santa Ana today. It read:

“The Turkish government has consistently denied the events of 100 years ago were a genocide, saying that the killings were simply a result of The Great War. Documents, newspaper, and testimony of the time tell a different tale -- one of targeted elimination of the Armenian people.”⁴

There is no denying it that it was a genocide, for “On the eve of World War I, there were two million Armenians in the declining Ottoman Empire. By 1922, there were fewer than 400,000. The others -- some 1.5 million -- were killed in what historians consider a genocide.”⁵ In fact, other countries who had previously failed to recognize the suffering of my people have

⁴ Winslow, Jonathan. “100 Years of Denial: the Armenian Genocide.” *Santa Ana Orange County Register*, 5 May 2015, access.newspaperarchive.com/us/california/santa-ana/santa-ana-orange-county-register/2015/05-05/page-33?tag=armenian+genocide&rtserp=tags/armenian-genocide?psb=relevance.

⁵ Kifner, John. “Armenian Genocide of 1915: An Overview.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 7 Dec. 2007, www.nytimes.com/ref/timestopics/topics_armeniangenocide.html.

recognized it, acknowledged it. But the Turks haven't. Why is it so hard to accept what they did to us, the atrocities they inflicted upon us?

I am a testimony, I am one who fought, and I did not fight to be forgotten.

Although my flame is close to burning out, this horrid compromise of my people, initiated by years of conflict, shall never be forgotten.

Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources

Million Armenians Killed or in Exile. Million Armenians Killed or in Exile, The New York Times, 1915,
learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/04/16/teaching-the-armenian-genocide-with-primary-sources-from-the-new-york-times/.

This primary source -- an announcement published by the New York Times during the genocide (around the time in which the deportations began), showed me public observation of the horrors of the Armenian genocide. It furthered my understanding of how severe this oppression was. I used this source to help me format a journal that portrayed this severe oppression.

Morgenthau. "Report of an Inhabitant of Athlit, Mount Carmel, Syria." *Armenian National Institute*, Armenian National Institute, 1998 Nov. 1916,
www.armenian-genocide.org/br-11-27-16-text.html.

This summarization of a journal from a Syrian observer provided me with specific examples/more detail of the genocidal cruelties from a firsthand account, as well as with new information regarding deportations by train. It helped me understand the extreme measures that officers went to in order to kill off the Armenians. I referenced several stories that were observed by the Syrian citizen from this primary source.

Morgenthau. "Report on the Deportations of Armenians from Zeitun." Received by Robert Lansing, *Armenian National Institute*, Armenian National Institute, 21 July 1998, www.armenian-genocide.org/us-7-21-15-text.html.

Issued by the American Consul General at Beirut (who observed the situations of the deportations in the empire and interpreted the current situation), this primary source provided me with information about the little time that the Armenians were given to prepare for the deportation. This source also helped me understand the emotional toll of the deportation. I used a story that was summarized in this report in my journal to encompass further cruelties of the compromise.

Morgenthau. "Report That Ottoman Turkey Is Seeking to Exterminate the Armenian Nation." Received by Robert Lansing, *Armenian National Institute*, 16 July 1915, www.armenian-genocide.org/us-7-16-15-text.html.

This firsthand account of the U.S. Ambassador in the Ottoman Empire made me more aware of the determination of the Turks to destroy the Armenian race. I learned and further understood the severity of the genocide.

Tell of Horrors Done in Armenia. Tell of Horrors Done in Armenia, The New York Times, 1915, learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/04/16/teaching-the-armenian-genocide-with-primary-sources-from-the-new-york-times/.

This primary source -- an announcement on the Armenian genocide by the New York Times (around the time of the deportations), helped me comprehend the public observation (outside of the Ottoman Empire) of the Armenian genocide --

proving that the genocide was not exaggerated by somewhat biased sources. I quoted this announcement in my journal to show the extremities through an outside perspective and provide context.

Secondary Sources

Adalian, Rouben Paul. *Armenian Genocide*, Armenian National Institute,
www.armenian-genocide.org/genocide.html

This website is a secondary source helped me gain a broad understanding of the Armenian genocide: specifically on the atrocities committed against them. I utilized this source to help form a potential environment that an Armenian child could've lived in during the genocide in which I placed my character into.

Beecroft, Rachel Hall. "Genocide of the Armenians." *World Without Genocide* , World Without Genocide, 6 Aug. 2013,
worldwithoutgenocide.org/genocides-and-conflicts/armenian-genocide.

This website is a secondary source that explained in great detail the conflict that lead up to the Armenian genocide, and how this conflict motivated the Turks to perpetrate the compromise. It was important to my paper because it provided further information on the connection between the conflict and compromise which I used to clarify and add to similar information I'd found from other sources.

Kifner, John. "Armenian Genocide of 1915: An Overview." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 7 Dec. 2007,
www.nytimes.com/ref/timestopics/topics_armeniangenocide.html.

This website is a secondary source that provided me with statistics and helped me understand the specificities of government/law during the Armenian genocide. It also helped me to further investigate and clarify previous knowledge. I utilized a quote to emphasize the amount of Armenians that had perished after the brutality of this compromise.

"The Armenian Genocide Begins: April 24, 1915." *Global Events: Milestone Events Throughout History*, edited by Jennifer Stock, vol. 5: Middle East, Gale, 2014.

Student Resources in Context,

<http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/GSPKHA871987479/SUIC?u=oon89156&xid=b0c11c72e>. Accessed 8 Jan. 2018.

This website is a secondary source that was imperative to my understanding of the overall topic and how all of the events within the genocide connected and lead to one another. It specifically helped me understand the conflict that lead up to the event, and how these tensions burst into the compromise of the Armenian people. I utilized this source to help explain the preceding of the compromise in the journal as well as the events that occurred in the Ottoman Empire after the end of WWI.

Winslow, Jonathan. "100 Years of Denial: the Armenian Genocide." *Santa Ana Orange County Register*, 5 May 2015,

access.newspaperarchive.com/us/california/santa-ana/santa-ana-orange-county-register/2015/05-05/page-33?tag=armenian+genocide&rtserp=tags/armenian-genocide?psb=relevance.

This secondary source (a newspaper found online) made me aware of Turkey's refusal to accept that they perpetrated the Armenian genocide (despite being 100 years since the genocide) and of the consensus among today's historians about this event. I used a quote regarding this matter to emphasize how the horrible compromise of the Armenian people must not be forgotten.