

A CENTURY OF SILENCE Terror and the Armenian Genocide

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This paper addresses how crimes of genocide go beyond a need for naked power, economic aggrandizement, or territorial conquest. Such crimes involve psychogenic and psychodynamic underpinnings that can be terrifying to contemplate. Yet their psychological study is essential. The Armenian genocide has been taken as a point of reference. Because the Armenian genocide has resulted in nearly a century-long effort of perpetrator denial, it can provide an important case study of how long-standing trauma and denial reinforce each other and illuminate each other. As a result, this genocide has aptly been called the “secret genocide,” the “unremembered genocide,” and a “crime without a name.” The author holds that genocidal trauma (and trauma in general) is contagious and the contagion is likely to be insidious. All who come in contact with it can come away marked, including victim, victim families and progeny, observers, advocates, researchers, and yes, perpetrators.

KEY WORDS: genocide; denial; conspiracy of silence; terror; contagion.

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PROLOGUE

An eight-year-old boy hears a terrifying wail emanating from a female visitor in another room having coffee with the boy's parents and grandparents. The wail is followed by prolonged sobbing, which then is followed by an equally prolonged silence. The woman is a victim-survivor of the Armenian genocide and a participant in the Death March, arriving in this country as only the shell of her former self. She is thoroughly trapped in the dangerous and potentially lethal world between terror and nothingness, despite seemingly involved in an innocuous social situation. Without awareness, the boy is also trapped between hearing and not-hearing, between knowing and not-knowing. Despite belonging to a close-knit family, the eight-year-old does not enter the coffee room to seek explanation or reassurance from his

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family. And neither the boy nor his parents ever bring up the experience again.

We witness here the wound of genocide in victim and victim-advocates, in all its terror and in all its frightening silence. My purpose in contributing to the literature on genocide has not been to add further historical detail but to engage in a psychodynamic effort to confront the ominous silence of terror, or expressed otherwise, to give voice to a pain with no name. Some have called the intergenerational transmission of trauma a process of encryption. The terror is “encrypted” in one’s vital center, bypassing words, thoughts, communication, voice or emotional rendering. Through such a wordless process, memory is fractured and derealization ensues.

What is probably most frightening about the traumatic example I have cited is the profound muteness it engenders in both victim and victim-advocate, survivor and bystander. All parties are left with varying levels of distancing, disconnecting, disavowing, derealizing, dissociation and possible denial. Ultimately the self is left painfully alone.

Healing begins when the “conspiracy of silence” is broken. In turn, the silence itself can only be broken when another human being can become an intimate witness to the terror lying behind the re-enactment and to the repetitive repercussions of that terror. To a trauma victim, the reinstatement of memory depends vitally on the presence of a protective other.

By now, the reader may have surmised that the eight-year-old unknowingly participating in the re-enactment was the writer. As treating psychoanalysts, the most propitious access we can gain to such trauma-related enactments is also the most dynamically challenging: the analyst’s capacity to subjectively immerse in the patient’s terror without losing boundaries or the treatment frame. The subjectivity of terror can call up all manner of counter-transference in the analyst or dynamic therapist. At times, survival will trump treatment. And yet the capacity to immerse in terror is crucial to the treatment of victims and, equally so, in the treatment of victimizers (Prince, 2010). When immersion is achieved, traumatized patients can sense the “oneness” of the intersubjective experience unfolding with the protective other. A deep human presence, which Horney called wholeheartedness, confronts the encryption at its own visceral level. It is the victimizer’s attempt to reverse responsibility and to induce the malignant belief that no one would ever believe the terror, no one would ever understand it, or if they could understand, no one would ever not be repulsed by the victims.

THE DYNAMICS OF GENOCIDE

If rape, torture, sex slavery, massacre, and ethnic cleansing are on a continuum of major human rights violations, then genocidal impulse occupies

the extreme pole of that continuum. Crimes of genocide go beyond a need for naked power, economic aggrandizement, or territorial conquest. They involve psychogenic and psychodynamic underpinnings that can be terrifying to contemplate. Yet, their psychological study is essential.

As Smith (2006) has pointed out, world-wide, state-sponsored murder in the past century has already consumed 60 million lives. Although knowledge about genocide has been accumulating, pure knowledge is not the same as understanding. Those witnesses who have progressed beyond knowledge to psychological awareness are at increased risk themselves of acute symptoms and disabling states. At the extreme, I have in mind the Armenian classical composer Komitas (Kuyumjian, 2001) who after the 1915 Armenian genocide spent 20 years in virtual silence, and the UN peacekeeper in Rwanda Canadian Major General Romeo Dallaire (Power, 2002) who continued to suffer self-destructive post-traumatic stress symptoms years after his command ended.

Trauma is contagious and the contagion is likely to be insidious. All who come in contact with it can come away marked, including victim, victim families and progeny, observers, bystander witnesses, advocates, researchers, and yes, perpetrators. The wound of genocide in the human psyche exists in the fluctuating, chaotic and often dangerous world between memory and forgetting, between knowing and not-knowing, between seeing and not-seeing, between terror and nothingness. Traumatologists have come to recognize this process in victims as the "conspiracy of silence." It exists in both the conscious and unconscious layers of memory and has been identified as "the most prevalent affective mechanism for the transmission of trauma" (Danieli, 1998, p. 678).

Genocide perpetrators seek the physical annihilation of their victims but they seek more. Relying on people's instincts to distance themselves from horror, fear, and dehumanization, perpetrators seek to destroy memory in both survivors and those advocating for survivors. One purposeful method to achieve this destruction of memory is to reverse responsibility. Through accumulative violent exploitation of a victim, the victim begins to take on the shameful responsibility of the perpetrator. ("No human could be this bad; it must be that I am a much worse person than I think and that, without knowing it, I am responsible for bringing out the worst in this other person.") Perpetrators then see themselves as victim and victims as perpetrators.

Nor does the tragic removal of responsibility end with the victim. It is almost a *sine qua non* of the psychology of perpetrators that they will engage in massive denial of responsibility even in the face of irrefutable evidence. Terror and denial are handmaidens to a process of malignant derealization of the truth; furthermore the process continues as long as it is allowed. It is a process which, as Charney (2001) points out, is "intended to desensitize

and make possible the emergence of new forms of genocidal violence to peoples in the future" (paragraph 57). As I have mentioned, a long line of survivors, families, bystander witnesses, and journalists are subject in varying degrees to this derealization and its attendant desensitization.

There are other painful dimensions to genocidal acts. At the deepest level, the perpetrator acts both to re-experience and re-enact his own pathological dynamics. These acts can be seen as attempts to externalize humiliating personal, cultural or other national feelings of unacceptable weakness and helplessness and to do so by repeatedly and ritualistically recreating these feelings in the victim population. Hence the motives for genocidal crimes will not be just for the temporary aphrodisiac of sexual or physical subjugation but for the ultimate power to permanently victimize the living. Its common goal for the indefinite future is to create an incredible "lifelong bond of silence" with victim populations. Thus victims pay homage to the power of the genocidal criminal through the creation and re-creation of self-imposed, ostensibly autonomous, cycles of re-victimization. Central to the maintenance of a lifelong bond with the genocidal victim is, as I have suggested, the perpetrator's power to force the victim to vindicate the victimizer. The violations of genocide traumatically fix the victim in a psychologically shattering time and place, and as such, at this fundamentally fragile sensory level, promote a nightmarish connection to the perpetrator. Generations of survivor families and their advocates are left to wonder if the genocide ever happened or to believe somehow it is being remembered wrong or to believe that the Turks are somehow being maliciously misrepresented. The unending goal is to create a deep psychological alteration to induce a permanent silence.

THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

As the first state-sponsored mass killing of the 20th century, the Armenian genocide can be instructive. In keeping with the idea that terror (in this case state terror) and denial are handmaidens, Smith *et al.* (1995) summarize the Turkish denial as follows:

Despite the vast amount of evidence that points to the historical reality of the Armenian genocide—eyewitness accounts, official archives, photographic evidence, the report of diplomats, and the testimony of survivors—denial of the Armenian genocide by successive regimes in Turkey has gone on from 1915 to the present. (p. 3)

Of course, tactics have shifted with the political winds. First there was an attempt to demonize observers, then to apply diplomatic and political pressure, and then attempts, often successful, to disrupt academic

conferences. In the article cited above, Smith *et al.*, write on professional ethics and denial of genocide and report on the following attempt at academic disruption:

A notable example [is] the attempt by Turkish officials to force cancellation of a conference in Tel Aviv in 1982 if the Armenian genocide were to be discussed, demands backed up with threats to the safety of Jews in Turkey. The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council reported similar threats over plans to include references to the Armenian genocide within the interpretative framework of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. (p. 4)

The Armenian genocide decimated a generally accepted figure of up to 1,500,000 indigenous Armenians who had established a 3000-year continuous history in their ancestral homeland in Anatolia. Sixty percent of the civilian Armenian population was massacred, some 80% or more of them being village peasants in the mountains of Anatolia living off the soil (Dadrian, 1995; Künzler, 2007). When this point was raised to a principal organizer of the genocide, Talaat Pasha, by the American Ambassador to Turkey at the time (Morgenthau, 2008/1918), Talaat responded by saying “those who were innocent today might be guilty tomorrow” (p. 231). I don’t think his response needs any elaboration.

In a review of Peter Balakian’s *Black Dog of Fate* (1997), Kurkjian (*Boston Globe*, June 9, 1997) points out that Armenian writers are only now beginning to uncover their shared past. We return again to the psychological point of how trauma can render anyone (or any group of people) mute for generations. Of course, this is what has happened to Armenians. In the face of fierce denial by Turkish governments of events in the Ottoman Empire, and in the face of moral collusion on the issue by the US government and other major powers, Armenians step by step had lapsed into grievous silence. Is it appropriate, even delicately, to ask why as a people it has taken Armenians so long to tell their story? Tragically, as we have seen, the question begs the issue. Denial is indeed the handmaiden of terror. The prolonged Armenian silence was not a silence of procrastination, indifference or insularity. Rather, it was a silence of paralyzing loss. The magnitude of the silence was perpetuated by wave upon wave of international denial, each denial inevitably reenacting the trauma. And as also has been described, trauma is contagious; virulent denial and opportunistic quasi-denial of the Armenian genocide have had serious effects on generations of this ancient tribe of people. Many Armenians are still too frightened to read their own history or to talk about it in public. Precisely because the Armenian genocide has resulted in nearly a century-long effort of Turkish denial, it has been an important case-study of how trauma and denial can reinforce each other, thereby perpetuating renewed cycles of victimization.

There are further aspects of the Armenian genocide that can also be instructive in penetrating the pathological dynamics of genocidal crimes. The Ottoman Turks often referred to their Armenian minority as their “faithful community” and their “favored millet.” The 20th century Turkish nationalist writer Ahmed Emin (1930) wrote of unusually favorable attitudes Turks had toward Armenians. Toward them the Turks had marked feelings of confidence and attachment. They frequently spoke of them in the press as our “faithful brothers,” and “our faithful Armenian subjects” (p. 214). Ismael Enver, War Minister during World War I, told Ambassador Morgenthau (2008/1918) that he had the “greatest admiration for the intelligence and industry” (p. 236) {of the Armenians but that} “a few hundred bright, educated Armenians ... could overturn the Government” (p. 238). Peroomian points out (2008) that “Armenian women were always coveted but unreachable for Turkish and Kurdish men.” Morgenthau (1918) was convinced that “those Armenian girls represent a high type of womanhood and the Young Turks, in their crude intuitive way, recognized that the mingling of their blood with the Turkish population would exert an eugenic influence on the whole” (quoted in Kloian, 1985, p. 246).

Rather rapidly, these Turkish expressions of admiration and envy gave way to wanton sexual atrocities and torture. The evolution of the emotions from admiration to envy to supreme contempt offers a fertile ground for the further study of the etiology of crimes of genocide. The clinical implications of such an evolution during genocide are yet to be adequately studied.

Yet another sequela to the Armenian genocide offers promise of deepening our understanding of the genocidal process. Some 70,000 Armenians remain in Turkey today (Peroomian, 2008, p. 33), remnants of the genocide. The study of these indigenous people, living in the midst of an unrepentant majority and in the midst of a government still committed to feverish denial, invites study. In her path-breaking investigation about the descendants of a massacred people, titled *And Those Who Continued Living in Turkey after 1915*, Peroomian (2008) chronicles the life and times of survivors. State censorship of any visible display of Armenian culture or language still is fully enforced. The censorship is not merely state-sponsored. It is accepted by the public in the demeaning language used to describe categories of Armenians. During the World War II ethnic Armenians in the Turkish military were called “gavur-askerleri” (infidel soldiers). They were kept separate from the regular military, made to wear different colored uniforms and, without the benefit of appropriate training, were conscripted into forced labor (Yalçın, 2007, p. 271). Children of Islamicized Christians were called “infidel ants” (Yalçın, 2007, p. 330) or “convert’s spawn” (Çetin, 2008, p. 79). Adult survivors were called “mutedi” meaning a late convert (Çetin, 2008, p. 80; Peroomian, 2008, p. 140). The term led to personal belittlement and to

discrimination in society and government employment as well (Yalçın, 2007). Government jobs go to people who can demonstrate that they do not have a converted Christian as an ancestor (Peroomian, 2008, p. 140), although by some estimates there exist 2 million citizens in Turkey with an Armenian forbear (Çetin, 2008).

The most humiliating and ominous of all such references was a term used to describe the remaining survivors as “rejects of the sword” (Margosyan, 1999, 2005; quoted by Peroomian, 2008, p. 127). Still used to this day, the term is “a loaded phrase that carries the history of a nation, the state of mind and psychological disposition of the survivors of a great catastrophe, and the manner in which these remnants are perceived by perpetrators of that catastrophe” (Peroomian, 2008, pp. 126–127). It becomes difficult to escape the message that such Armenians have survived only because they were not worthy of the noble Turkish sword. A Kurdish poet and novelist, Mehmed Uzun (2003), quoted by Peroomian (2008), captures the meaning eloquently:

You, a “reject of the sword” is the being who henceforth no longer even knows why he is living, whose face is turned towards the dead and the past and not towards the future, who can tell no one what he has lived through, who doesn’t even know how it could be told and who because of that feels an immense shame, who feels guilty vis-à-vis the dead for being alive! ... who constantly hears the sound of clanging swords ... from the tips of which ... fall drops of blood (p. 127)

These surviving Armenian families in Turkey are walking a tightrope between “memory and forgetting” some one hundred years after the annihilation of their ancestors. Psychological study of such people will deepen our understanding of how insidious mechanisms to dehumanize survivors can reinforce terror in those survivors.

The timing of the sudden assassination of the Turkish Armenian editor and writer, Hrant Dink (January 19, 2007), painfully demonstrates the mechanisms by which genocide denialists can re-instill terror in survivors. Hrant Dink, the editor of a bi-lingual paper in Turkey and a prominent journalist, was gunned down in broad daylight on the streets of Istanbul. A man of unusual courage, he felt he could walk the fine line being a respected Turkish citizen and yet not forget the fate of his ancestors, respecting the pain of his people and yet having a large cadre of close Turkish friends (Peroomian, 2008, pp. 25–26). The fine line proved treacherous. And nearly five years after the crime, progress has been fitful and inconclusive, except for the arrest of a 17-year-old who according to an immediate communiqué from the head of the Istanbul security forces “had no ties to any group” (*New York Times*, 1/23/07). It should be pointed out that the assassination

of this prominent Armenian in Turkey created major world-wide consternation and that within Turkey 100,000 mourners attended his funeral.

A possible link to the murder has recently been made to Turkey's notorious "deep state" which has in turn been linked to a shadowy ultra-nationalistic group called "Ergenekon." Ergenekon is said to be made up of security officials, intelligence officials, elements of the judiciary, retired generals, and business tycoons and according to this news account, Ergenekon is "the name of a mythical homeland from which Turkic tribes were led by a she-wolf" (*Economist*, 7/19/08, p. 34). Yet another report on this linkage has been filed by Jason Nottle of the *Boston Metro* citing his interview with Jenny White, a Brandeis anthropology professor. Professor White identifies the "deep state" as a legacy of secret NATO armies set up during the Cold War, but still active.

It is so extensive that it is hard to even fathom ... Assassinations of intellectuals looking into this stuff—they kind of had a very high death rate. There was the killing recently of Hrant Dink, the Armenian journalist, whose trial is still on-going. It's clear that the police knew about it before it happened. The files are lost [and] the video of it has gone missing. (2/7/08)

The fear and terror such linkages can bring to an already traumatized people is obvious. Not only has there been a silence forced from without but a silence forced from within, as mentioned above. It was with great difficulty that Kemal Yalçın (2007) got Armenian interviewees to speak to a hugely sympathetic Turkish chronicler like himself. He describes a conscious or unconscious drive among Armenian survivors to hide their past, above all in any contact with a Turk. It remains a state policy that talking about the Armenian genocide constitutes evidence in a court of "insulting Turkishness." From combinations of terror and humiliation, behaviorally manifesting as extreme caution, timidity or self-censorship, the survivors bury their secret. To stand out in any way with a display of intelligence, talent, appearance or strength recalls for survivors their complete vulnerability to a dangerous exposure. Historic memory tells them that those who stood out in any way were the first to be selected for torture and liquidation.

A foreboding of being dangerously exposed can be seen in the following exchange. An Armenian writer from the diaspora visiting Istanbul in 1963 is excited to find a gathering of Armenian intellectuals on the street, especially one in particular whom he had always wanted to meet. Far from being pleased, the intellectual being addressed "muttered words that no one could hear ... a female writer jumped in with a scolding tone. 'Sir, if you will speak loud, speak Turkish. If you have to speak Armenian, then speak in a low voice. This is Turkey, do you understand?'" (Perroomian, 2008, pp. 11–12 quoting Toranian, 1997, p. 22).

Turkish dynamics: Post-genocide versus pre-genocide

The psychodynamics of the Armenian genocide and its long-lasting sequelae provide a rich medium in which to study the undercurrents of genocide. On the other hand, precursors to this genocide will also be of scholarly interest to trauma specialists. These precursors stretch back to 600 years of history between Turks and Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.

The *millet* system in the Ottoman Empire defined semi-autonomous minority groups: Greek, Armenian, and Jewish communities. As “unbelievers,” Christians were called *rayas* (cattle) and their testimony in court was not considered legally valid. Armenians in the *millet* system were required to “wear a bonnet of red, black, and yellow, with violet boots and slippers” (Chalabian, 2002, p. 358 quoting Douglas, 1992, p. 257). A Turkish historian Taner Akçam (2006), in his powerful work *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Responsibility*, describes how minorities of the *millet* were subject to humiliating practices.

They were forbidden from conducting their religious observance in way that would disturb Muslims. The ringing of church bells and construction of churches and synagogues were forbidden. [They] were prohibited from riding horses or bearing arms and were obliged to step aside for approaching Muslims when traveling on foot. The color of [their] clothing and shoes and the quality of the fabrics had to be distinct from that of the Muslims ... [they] were prohibited from wearing collared caftans, valuable materials (silk in particular), fine muslin, furs and turbans. Other edicts dictated the colors to be worn; Armenian shoes and headgear, for example, were to be red, while the Greeks wore black and Jews turquoise. They were forbidden to wear clogs and had to attach small bells to the covering worn in the bathhouses ... [Their] debasement included a prohibition on building their houses higher than those of Muslims, as a reflection of their inferiority ... Breaching these restrictions was punished by fine or imprisonment, or even, during the harsher reigns, with death. (p. 24)

As long as minorities knew their station, they were tolerated. But the station demanded acceptance of an inferior standing to the Turkish majority. The examples I have provided of pre-genocidal treatment of Armenians can only be described as evidence of institutionalized, internalized, and uninterrupted Turkish chauvinism. A particularly stark additional example is in the context of the issue of the numerous monuments and eulogies in current-day Turkey idealizing a prime architect of the Armenian genocide, Talaat Pasha. Talaat had escaped to Berlin under an assumed name but was assassinated there by a young Armenian survivor, Soghomon Tehlirian. Talaat’s remains were removed from Berlin in 1943 amid much fanfare and reburied in Istanbul with formal ceremonies as a national hero in the presence of the German Ambassador, Franz von Papen; thereafter,

a boulevard in Ankara and a school in Istanbul were named after him (Alexander, 1991, p. 203).

I have already mentioned the description by Turks of post-genocidal Armenian survivors as “rejects of the sword.” The term is further evidence of post-genocide chauvinism now including also an actual threat to the “rejects.” Post-genocide chauvinism in Turkey compared to the pre-genocide in the Ottoman Empire had grown from a slave mentality toward minorities to an unbridled murderous rage toward them. An imperfect analogy would be to slaves in the United States who were abused in every way as slaves but who faced mass lynching only after slavery was abolished. Traumatologists may see in the Turkish patterns described a systemic connection between pre-genocidal, genocidal, and post-genocidal behavior spanning some 700 years.

Witness accounts of the Armenian genocide

Foreign representatives both in official and in unofficial government capacities were common in the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the century resulting in numerous accounts of the Armenian genocide. The US media gave extensive coverage to the events of 1915–1922, the *New York Times* alone carrying nearly 200 articles of increasingly anguished coverage (Kloian, 1985). Foremost among the prominent reports have been accounts by Henry Morgenthau (2008), *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*; Viscount Bryce (1916), *The Treatment of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915–1916*; Leslie Davis (1989), *The Slaughterhouse Province: An American Diplomat's Report on the Armenian Genocide, 1915–1917*; and Jacob Künzler (2007), *In the Land of Blood and Tears: Experiences in Mesopotamia during the World War, 1914–1918*.

As graphic as they are, these eyewitness accounts withhold acts considered too repugnant for publication. For example, Morgenthau (2008/1918) wrote “I have by no means told the most terrible details, for a complete narration of the sadistic orgies of which the Armenian men and women were the victims can never be printed in an American publication” (p. 221). In a 12/8/15 issue of the *Outlook* in a piece called “The Man from Constantinople,” William Ellis reports that despite horrific details, “I am glad that the Man from Constantinople did not attempt to harrow my soul with tales of individual atrocities” (quoted in Kloian, 1985, p. 118). In November 1916, *The Atlantic Monthly* published “The Calvary of a Nation: A Personal Narrative” stating “the full story of the deportation will never be written for the reason that it deals so largely with suffering that is indescribable, heartlessness that is incredible” (quoted in Kloian, 1985, p. 190). (All *Atlantic Monthly* and *New York Times* references are quoted in Kloian, 1985.)

Despite these caveats, eyewitness accounts were undeniably gruesome. The *Atlantic Monthly* continued to report that “the old Turk ... kept the cow alive that he might continually milk her. Not so with the Young Turk {perpetrators of the 1915 genocide} ... eyes were gouged from their sockets ... nails torn out by the roots and ... hair and mustache plucked out slowly hair by hair” (quoted by Kloian, 1985, p. 191). In a *New York Times* communiqué filed on 11/12/16, the German Counsel at Mossul “had in many places seen such quantities of chopped-off hands of little children that the streets might have been paved with them” (quoted in Kloian, 1985, p. 196). Armenians “had their eyebrows plucked out, their breasts cut off, their nails torn off; their torturers hew off their feet or else hammer nails into them just as they do in shoeing horses” (Lord Bryce report, 1916, quoted in Kloian, 1985, pp. 179–180). Citing a witness Samuel Bartlett of Toronto, the *New York Times* continued “the Turks also took all the babies in the town and threw them into the river until it overflowed its banks. They let out the priests, put red-hot iron shoes on their feet, tied them to wagons and forced them to walk long distances” (quoted in Kloian, 1985, p. 299). Summarizing the execution plan of the genocide, Colonel Hawker (*New York Times*, 6/7/19) states “The Turkish plan was to take all the able-bodied men from the community and tie them up. Then they would torture them by cutting their flesh and burning their wounds. Finally, they would cut off their heads in the presence of the wives and children of the victims. The old men, women and children were [then] herded together and driven from place to place” (quoted in Kloian, 1985, p. 299). Ambassador Morgenthau (2008/1918) reflects on the perpetrator psychology behind these atrocities that “the basic fact underlying the Turkish mentality is its utter contempt for all other races (p. 191) ... [There is] a total disregard for human life and an intense delight in inflicting physical suffering” (p. 194). Morgenthau concludes soberly that a “fairly insane pride is the element that largely explains [this behavior]” (p. 191).

In its genocide of the Ottoman Armenians, dynamic explanations of the Turkish behavior we have described must include motives that go well beyond territorial ethnic cleansing. From multiple eyewitness accounts, an immensely personalized type of degradation seems to have been the *modus operandi* of the perpetrators. After reviewing thousands of pages of accounts, five characteristics of the Armenian genocide stand out:

1. Sexual atrocities and bodily mutilation were integral to the genocidal process.
2. Turks competed with pride to develop the most diabolical methods of torture (i.e., horseshoeing men; mutilation of ear, nose, and eyes; women’s severed breasts and nipples collected for display; stuffing steel

wool up a man's anus and into his penis; progressive dismemberment of victim limbs).

3. Intimate tortures and prolonged deaths were the preferred approach.
4. Family members were, wherever possible, required to witness atrocities.
5. Methods of degradation were, wherever possible, designed to maximize perpetrator amusement.

The psychodynamics of unrelenting perpetrator humiliation of victims inevitably implicates issues of intrapsychic involvement, especially issues of disowned feelings. It can be noted that demonstrable Turkish contempt for their victims seemed to increase as the genocide unfolded (Morgenthau, 2008/1918 cited in Kloian, 1985, p. 256). Turks ridiculed the victims for lining up submissively for slaughter like "sheep" (Ali Vehbi Bey, Abdul Hamit, pp. 12 and 31, cited by Akçam, 2006, p. 43; Fa'iz El-Ghusein, 1916 cited by Kloian, 1985, pp. 154–167; Dadrian, 2007, pp. XLVII–LXII). Dynamically, this points again to the inversion of the role of perpetrator and victim. Having terrorized the victims by all methods possible, the perpetrator now finds justification for his contempt at his victim's inability to fight back. The victim is perceived as justifying his own victimhood.¹ The analogy to "sheep" is also revealing. The Turkish people have long identified themselves with wolves. In a mystical pre-history in Central Asia, they believe as noted earlier that their ancestors were suckled by a she-wolf. Yet their self-image stands in direct contrast to the picture Ambassador Morgenthau (2008/1918) drew of the Turks he knew so well. He described them as "obsequious," even "cringing" and "nerveless," and as servile to authority (pp. 191–192). Was this underlying dynamic of shameful obsequiousness and servility to authority the hidden "sheep" in the Turkish psyche? Evidently for Turks, wolves and sheep, victor and vanquished, were mutually exclusive experiences and could not be reconciled. One deserves an extreme measure of glory, the other an extreme measure of degradation.

Victim-survivor accounts of the Armenian genocide

Since virtually all able-bodied men from age 15–60 years were marched off, tortured and killed, accounts of this ordeal came from foreign observers. But with the next genocidal step of deportation of women, children, and old men, the courageous testimonies of the rare survivors have been a crucial source.² In the category of survivor accounts three representative testimonies stand out. These are Margaret Ajemian Ahnert's *The Knock at the Door: A Journey through the Darkness of the Armenian Genocide*

(2007), Fethiye Çetin's *My Grandmother: A Memoir* (2008) and Shahan Derderian's *Death March: An Armenian Survivor's Memoir of the Genocide of 1915* (2008). All three bear immediate witness to the deportation. I apologize to the reader for the unspeakable abuses reviewed. But clinical experience has demonstrated that before survivors can begin to heal there must be a process of unlocking memories of hidden terror within those survivors. These are raw trauma survivor accounts and they carry unmistakable psychic wounds of deep pain. All are descriptions of events which silence has not been able to silence. It is not possible to understand the psychodynamics of genocide without witnessing the witness, and most critically without witnessing the victims.³

Ahnert describes her mother Ester, a survivor of the deportations, in the following passages:

[She] stared blankly ahead and continued her chanting, "There is no one left. They are all dead ... I cannot forget! They killed them all" (p. 8). [Ester] ran home "Grandmom, Grandmom, I saw a hanging in the street." Grandmom pulled me into the house and shut the door ... "Tell no one what you saw." "But I did see." Grandmom smacked me hard. "You did not see and you did not hear" (p. 71). In the morning we saw the body of a young bride we knew from Amasia ... I saw here pregnant stomach sliced open and her unborn baby stuck on a sword that was shoved in the dirt near her head (p. 91). Every so often, the leader of the Turkish soldiers would bend down from his horse, take hold of a small child by the arm and twist the body in the air. Then he'd smash the body to the ground. He shouted loudly to all listening, "Don't think that I have killed an innocent child. Even these newborn babies are criminals because they carry the seeds of vengeance. Kill the children, too." I heard the soldiers say, "Kill the children too. Kill them all" (p. 94). One evening, Yousouf Bey, who was a retired officer in the Turkish Army, had some military guests for dinner ... One told the story of a young couple he had captured in one of his convoys ... "Oh, please do not separate me from my sister. She is sick and needs my help." "All right, Janum, I'll take you both," I said. After I raped the one, I reached for the other and realized I had a boy instead. So I cut off his genitals with my sword. "There, now you are a girl, how do you like it?" Then my men and I propped the boy against a wall so he could watch us take turns sodomizing the girl ... Laughter and applause filled the air. (Ahnert, 2007, pp. 113–114)

Fethiye Çetin, a Turkish human-rights lawyer, with a surprising heritage, has written a deeply moving narrative of how her beloved grandmother very late in life revealed with great reluctance "her deep secret" to the author; she was an Armenian.

We formed a special and very secret alliance. I sensed her longing to rid herself of the burden she had been carrying all these years—to open the curtains that hid her secret, to tell this story she had never shared with a soul—but I

think she also knew that, having gone through life knowing none of it, I would find it deeply upsetting. She was protecting me (p. 62). After crossing the bridge at Maden—at Havler—my grandmother [i.e., the grandmother of the victim-survivor] threw two of her grandchildren into the water [Euphrates]. These were my uncle's daughters ... One of the children sank right away but the other child's head bobbed up in the water. My grandmother—my father's mother—pushed her head back under water ... Then she threw herself into the madly rushing water and disappeared from sight ... In the coming years, she would refer to this incident many times, and each time the story would end with a deep silence. (Çetin, 2008, p. 64)

Shahen Derderian is one of the very few victim survivors of the carnage of the deportation who was able to record his own terrifying story. He was not murdered before the deportation because he was just eight years old. His account follows:

I also saw a couple of policemen savage an Armenian priest. One of them pulled the clergyman's beard while the other beat him with a whip. The priest collapsed to the ground. The gendarmes then dragged him away from the caravan and nailed horseshoes into his soles (p. 43). Having received their orders from the Turkish government itself, these men proceeded to pick out Armenian teenage boys from the caravan and slit their throats on the spot (p. 63). They ordered the woman to dance. She refused. They untied her hands and, threatening her with their rifles, repeated the command ... The civilian told his minions to make the "infidel shrew" dance at all cost ... It didn't work ... He gave the order for torturing her. As the men held her by the arms, a gendarme dropped a kitten into her underwear. They then tied her hands behind her back. As the kitten began scratching her flesh, the woman jumped up and down and ran left and right, screaming. The men were overjoyed. The woman fell to the ground. She was rolling and twisting in pain. She got up again, ran to and fro. Her tormentors elicited exclamations of amusement. A gendarme walked up to her and whipped the kitten in her underwear. With the panicked cat scratching her relentlessly, the poor woman was driven to madness ... At last the civilian ordered the men to finish her off. She was taken away. Minutes later, we heard a shot (pp. 46–47). What a privilege it is to die a natural death. (Derderian, 2008, p. 18)

The reader will note the publication year of these three accounts, 2007, 2008 and 2008. The reader will also note that two accounts are by Armenians and one is an account in Turkey by a Turkish and Armenian human-rights lawyer. Perhaps after nearly a century of grim silence both from without and from within, the wall is beginning to crumble. And it seems to be manifesting itself simultaneously among all elements of the silence: diaspora Armenians, Turkish-Armenian survivors and a select group of human-rights experts. Simply stated, it is not possible to move beyond genocide until the crime is named. In doing so, perhaps it will help to

identify some predictable and unpredictable accounts by perpetrators themselves.

Derderian (2008) notes that a governor, after ordering his policemen to disperse Armenian “infidels” pleading for mercy, roars at them “If I knew that there is mercy in even one strand of my hair, I would pluck it out!” (p. 6). Along these lines Dadrian (1995) quotes a prominent perpetrator, Nail Bey, as vowing that “where it within my powers, I would recreate the Armenians so that I may exterminate them anew” (p. 407).

Fà'iz El-Ghusein, a Bedouin Arab schooled in Turkey and previously cited, submitted a detailed report on “Martyred Armenia” (September 1916, quoted by Kloian (1985)). The report contains a perpetrator’s deeds and his unexpected remorse.

Whilst we were on the way, I saw an Armenian girl whom I know, and who was very pretty. I called her by name and said, “Come, I will save you, and you shall marry a young man of your country, a Turk or a Kurd.” She refused, and said “If you wish to do me a kindness, I will ask one thing which you may do for me.” “I told her I would do whatever she wished, and she said: “I have a brother younger than myself, here amongst these people. I pray you to kill him before you kill me, so that in dying I may not be anxious in my mind about him” ... I must obey my orders, so I struck him one blow with an axe, split his skull, and he fell dead. Then she said: “I thank you with all my heart, and shall ask you one more favor”; she put her hands over her eyes and said: “Strike as you struck my brother, one blow, and do not torture me.” So I struck one blow and killed her, and to this day I grieve over her beauty and youth, and her wonderful courage. (Kloian, 1985, p. 165)

Margaret Ajemian Ahnert (2007), one of three victim-survivor accounts (dictated by her mother) I have presented, reports the views of a prospective perpetrator. The Turkish individual describes a virtually incomprehensible juxtaposition of good intentions and willful violence:

The Turkish husband said to his Armenian neighbor, “Don’t worry, your family and mine have been friends for years. Your children and mine are playmates. Your wife and my wife are best friends. I will not let any of you suffer. I will hone and sharpen my knives every day so that when the order comes, I will slit all of your throats swiftly and cleanly. You and your family will not experience any pain or suffering. This I vow to you as a friend.” The author’s mother, Ester, was in shock saying, “My mouth dropped open. I could not believe my ears” (p. 57).

These perpetrator accounts demonstrate that all who came into contact with the trauma of genocide—including perpetrators—cannot help but be affected by it.⁴

Many perpetrators will choose malignant denial, others will argue they were only doing their job, and a very few will consciously feel legitimate remorse.

Having surveyed witness accounts and victim-survivor accounts, let me move to the possible reactions of bystanders, journalists, politicians, and academicians. I see three options for them. By choosing the first option, they may take the easy route of turning a deaf ear to human rights. In the second option one becomes a detached spectator taking an "objective view." Or they may choose the third, more difficult course, of speaking for those who cannot speak, in effect of choosing memory over forgetting. The legacy of the first option is a susceptibility to tie oneself to a victimizing position which, as occurs with perpetrators, can create irrational rage toward victims or prospective victims. The second option leaves one open to a diminished capacity to process right from wrong and therefore creates a moral vacuum. Israel Charney (2001) extensively documents sad accounts of "scholars who become so involved in the pedantics of definitions of genocide and obsessive concern with details to a point where the very facts that are analyzed are lost" (paragraph 45). Only the third option can, in the face of terror, transcend the genocidal experience and thereby re-establish one's sense of human values, one's sense of humanity, and one's sense of the human spirit.

For all the reasons I have cited, the Armenian genocide has aptly been called the "secret genocide," the "unremembered genocide," "race murder," a "crime against humanity," and a "crime without a name." All the descriptions apply. Among other losses a larger truth about the genocidal impulse has been obscured: that every genocide is connected to every other genocide. This insight is critical to a psychodynamic understanding of the inner workings of the genocidal process. Prospective perpetrators "probe the conscience, solidarity and resolve of the rest of the world" (Dadrian, 1995, p. 400). Thus each genocide is a dress-rehearsal for each succeeding genocide awaiting only a calculation of evidence of any counter-pressures which can be brought to bear on the perpetrators. Each genocide "requires the presence of a genocidal frame of mind" (Dadrian, 1995, p. 407).

With the case of the Armenians, genocidal activity began in earnest as early as 1895 under Sultan Hamid. Two hundred thousand civilians were massacred (Morgenthau, 2008/1918; Dadrian, 1995). As we have seen, traumatologists are learning that perpetrators assess the success of their genocidal activity in terms of the risks involved in prior attempts by them (or by other perpetrators). Psychologically the perpetrator, enamored of his perverse zealotry, misinterprets external unresponsiveness as either passive weakness or as actual approval of his activity. The genocidal impulse can thereby be reinforced by a grandiose imagery of secret admiration by the world which then fuels the next attempt. With the Armenians, dress-rehearsals occurred in 1895, 1909 and 1912 before the final liquidation of the population in 1915–1918.⁵

In terms of reinforcement of genocidal impulses through the success of attempts by other parties, there is evidence of Hitler's shrewd assessment of the Armenian genocide as a factor in his decision of a "final solution" to the Jewish minorities in Europe. Germany was a close World War ally of Turkey and Hitler was a young man in the German Army when Turks initiated their program of mass extermination. One of Hitler's closest collaborators in the National Socialist Movement was Dr. Max Erwin von Scheubner Richter, who was "Germany's former counsel at Erzurum [Turkey] whose awful reports on the massacre of the Armenians are preserved" (Dadrian, 1995, p. 411). Hitler made significant references to the Armenian genocide: "Everywhere people are awaiting a new world order ... Think of the biblical deportation and the massacres of the Middle Ages ... and remember the extermination of the Armenians" (p. 408). And Hitler issued his famous declaration, "who after all is today speaking of the destruction of the Armenians" (Bardakjian, 1985, p. 17; Dadrian, 1995, p. 403). Bardakjian also quotes Hitler's underlings equating Armenians and Jews as "people of the wastes" (p. 30). Of course the Armenian genocide became instructive to the Nazis only because of the near-total lack of international resolve, which in turn fueled what we have noted as an escalating crescendo of Turkish denial.

Because of the dynamics of the genocidal process, genocide has not ended with the Armenian genocide or with the Jewish Holocaust. Genocides in Cambodia, Kurdistan, Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, the Congo, and others have followed. In her award-winning work, *A Problem from Hell* (2002), Samantha Power documents how perpetrators

kept an eye on Washington and other western Capitals as they decided how to proceed. Talaat Pasha frequently observed that no one prevented Sultan Hamid from murdering Armenians. Hitler was emboldened by the fact that absolutely nobody "remembered the Armenians." (Power, 2002, p. 506)

The process has been similar with Saddam Hussein against the Kurds, Hutu against the Tutsi, and genocides in Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Congo. Power uses the term "plausible denial" (p. 506) to describe the position of the United States and Western powers. In confirming the interconnection of all genocide, she observes how the genocidal impulse becomes "insatiable" (p. 513).

Finally, there is a specific phenomenon around genocide perhaps best called ping-pong denial: over and over the public does not get properly alerted by its government, and the government then proceeds to cite a lack of public support for action. In the case of the United States, Power describes this ping-pong denial as a "deliberate" circular relationship between political leaders and public opinion (p. 509). In a prophetic quote from Arthur

Koestler about World War II, Power reiterates “You can convince [protestors] for an hour [or until] their mental self-defense begins to work and in a week the shrug of incredulity has returned like a reflex ...” (p. 513). In truth, this is a description of derealization in the dangerous space between “knowing and not knowing.” Cumulative spells of derealization can lead to a disempowering estrangement of feelings not only toward others but toward oneself. The message is clear. In learning about a genocide, not even a bystander can escape its consequences.

NOTES

1. Hitler early in his career alluded to the Armenians as victims of their lack of courage for combativeness. The “solution of the Jewish question” he added, requires therefore a “bloody clash.” Otherwise “the German people will end up becoming just like the Armenians” (Dadrian, 1995, p. 402).
2. In a sensitive and beautifully written reflection on an Armenian woman’s personal therapy related to growing up in a survivor family, see Topalian (2000).
3. Increasingly in Armenian families in the diaspora, the act of witnessing takes place intergenerationally and exists on an ongoing basis. Moral witnessing offers psychological validation to the victim; at the same time the act itself deepens and cleanses those who undertake to witness. As a teenager in 1915, my father-in-law was exposed to crimes of mind-altering cruelty in his ancestral village of Keghi, Kharpert. Among other crimes, he was forced to watch Turks killing the son of an Armenian villager, cutting out the boy’s organs, and making the father eat his son’s liver. The forced complicity of being made to watch the unwatchable caused my father-in-law to re-live this particularly horrifying scene for his entire life, the hidden terror episodically erupting in nightmares and visual memories.
4. In the *Unknown Black Book*, a study of the Holocaust in German-occupied Soviet territories, Rubenstein (2008) reports that “faced with the trauma of their own men, German commanders decided to find a way of murdering women and children that spared the soldiers emotional suffering” (p. 10).
5. Paying homage to the burning deserts of Der Zor where deported Armenian women and children perished *en masse*, Balakian is stunned to find in the area piles of human bones (Bones, *New York Times Magazine*, 12/7/08).

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