

GENOCIDE

1915
800,000 ARMENIANS

1919-39
20 MILLION SOVIETS

1933-45
6 MILLION JEWS

1962-72
120,000 HUTU

1966-7
1 MILLION IBO

1971
3 MILLION BANGLADESHIS

The above adds up to an appalling total of horror, but it is by no means an exhaustive list of massacres in the twentieth century.

Bearing in mind that there are other potentially genocidal situations today, this Pelican Original sets out to examine in a detached and scientific way why certain political, social, economic and religious events result in happenings that seem to defy belief.

Clear and direct, *Genocide* focuses our attention on atrocities we prefer not to think about, and provides an excellent basis for intelligent discussion.

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The cover photograph (by Don McCullin) shows the bodies of two Khmer Rouge soldiers lying in makeshift graves, Phnom Penh, 1975. (Sunday Times)

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GENOCIDE

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345
1842
ITS POLITICAL USE
IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

LEO KUPER

mass slaughter, there seems to be almost invariably the additional gratuitous atrocity of torture, perpetrated with incredible brutality, and, as appears from many accounts, with hilarious and joyful abandon. Sexual torments and mutilations are common enough. They are certain to be inflicted where the genocidal conflict is between the circumcised and the uncircumcised. Perhaps they are an invariable element, outside of the remote technological annihilations. But accounts often draw a veil over this aspect, as one which cannot be put into words, or as unprintable or unspeakable or indescribable.

It would seem that the élite are by no means immune to the fascination of these forms of torture. In a chilling passage, Desjardins describes how both sides in the Lebanese conflict had tortured, emasculated, torn women apart, with the same hatred, the same savagery. 'Priests tortured, as did devout Muslims. Young girls of the best Christian society, petty bourgeois costumed at Pierre Cardin or Courrèges, admirers of Brassens and Bob Dylan, castrated prisoners; university faculty, advocates of coexistence between the communities, embodying the wisdom of Islam and of Christianity, gouged out eyes and disembowelled women.'³ If the contending parties are of different religion, even if religious values do not seem to be salient in the conflict, one may expect special torment to be visited upon spiritual leaders, and the desecration of holy places and sacraments, and the 'abomination', to use a Biblical word, of forced participation in sacrilege, as in the enforced eating of the sacred cow.

Ideological dehumanization of the victims is a constant feature, the mass slaughter itself being the denial of a common humanity. It is expressed too in the handling of the victims, in the disposal of their bodies, and in the obscene mutilation of corpses. There are often 'rituals of degradation' which deliberately reject, with brutal contempt, the most deeply held human values, and the deepest sentiments of human attachment. Thus men are tortured before their wives and children, women are repeatedly raped in the presence of their families, children are killed in the arms of their mothers, and prospective victims are forced to slaughter their fellow victims by the most fearful means.

Euphemisms are commonly used by those in authority to describe the genocidal process. Solzhenitsyn⁴ refers to the Soviet phrase 'special settlers' for the exiled nations; elsewhere he mentions the versatile category of 'social prophylaxis'. In Nazi Germany, we had such euphemisms

as 'the resettlement of alien elements', 'evacuation', 'special treatment', 'cleaning-up operation', 'securing the army's rear', 'executive measure', 'liquidation', 'final solution'.⁵ For exterminations in warfare, there is the convenient euphemism of military necessity.

However, the regularities I have described are very tenuous and very limited. They hardly touch on the process of massacre. Robert Payne⁶ presents a 'schema of massacre', but it is derived from the genocide in Bangladesh and limited to rather specific conditions. In my book *The Pity of It All*,⁷ I traced the process of violent polarization between racial and ethnic groups in Algeria, Rwanda, Burundi and Zanzibar, but this also referred to specific conditions. For the most part, I do not think it is possible to write in general terms about the genocidal process. The only valid approach would be to set up a typology of genocides. Dadrian⁸ lists the following forms: (1) cultural; (2) violent-latent (that is, genocide as a by-product of other operations); (3) retributive (either punitive or admonitory); (4) utilitarian (I think this overlaps with others of his categories); and (5) optimal (massive, relatively indiscriminate, sustained and aiming at total obliteration). Using some such typology, one might analyse the genocidal process in each type, and under specified conditions. This is a major task, which I could not undertake. Instead, I am limiting myself to some aspects of the genocidal process in two of the major genocides of our era, the Turkish against the Armenians, and the German against the Jews. They share in common centralized planning and bureaucratic organization.



The Armenian genocide is the 'forgotten genocide' of the twentieth century, remembered mainly by Armenians. Yet it was the precursor of the coldly calculated bureaucratic genocide, and particularly horrifying for the orgy of cruelty by which hundreds of thousands, perhaps as many as 800,000 or more, were done to death in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War. And contemporary indifference is in sharp contrast to the deep international concern at the time.

There had been a long, if intermittent and convoluted, involvement of outside powers in the treatment of Armenians and other Christians

5. For discussions of euphemisms, see Hilberg, 1961:216; Dicks, 1972:58, 89; Kelman, 1973:48; and Poliakov, 1968.

6. Payne, 1973: Ch. 6.

7. Kuper, 1977.

8. Dadrian, 1974-5:100-102.

3. Desjardins, 1976:39.

4. Solzhenitsyn, 1974-8: Vol. III, 386.

under Turkish rule. The Treaty of Paris (1856), at the conclusion of the Crimean War, had incorporated guarantees for internal reforms in the Ottoman Empire. A generation later, following the Russian-Turkish War, the occupation of many settled Armenian areas by the Russians, and representations by the Armenian Patriarchate for protection of Ottoman Armenians, the Treaty of San Stefano (1878) imposed on the Sublime Porte the obligation 'to carry out, without further delay, the ameliorations and reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces inhabited by the Armenians, and to guarantee their security against the Kurds and Circassians'. When this treaty was revised by the Treaty of Berlin, the reforms previously guaranteed to Russia alone were guaranteed to the European nations (Great Britain, Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Italy and Russia), with power to supersede their application.⁹

These provisions proved ineffective. In 1894 there was the massacre of Sassun, an old-style massacre of Armenian men, women and children by regular Turkish units and the irregular *Hamidiye* (Kurdish) cavalry, in reprisal for the refusal to pay a tribute to Kurdish chieftains and for rebellious resistance. Under pressure from European powers following riotous and bloody disturbances attendant on an Armenian demonstration in Constantinople, the Sultan signed a Programme of Reforms, which also proved illusory. 'Even before the promulgation of the reform act of October 1895, massacres had begun in Trebizond. In the following months, the Armenian Plateau met with the same fate. Abdul Hamid's actual response to European meddling was the extirpation of between one and two hundred thousand Armenians during 1895-1896.'¹⁰ And the same writer records the disillusionment as 'once again, the nations of Europe, now involved in the struggle for empire, turned away from the tragedy to which they had contributed'. It was not until some five years after the Adana massacres of 1909 that the European powers finally imposed on the Ottoman government an agreement for reforms, and for procedures to ensure their implementation, which seemed to promise relief. But these were set aside with Turkey's participation in the First World War. And the way was now cleared for the final solution of genocide.

Whether the genocide be traced back to the decree in February 1915 for the disarming of Armenians, or to the first deportations on 8 April,¹¹

9. Nalbandian, 1963:27-8.

10. Hovannisian, 1967:28.

11. See Toynbee, 1916:638. Lepsius (1919:10-11) gives the end of March 1915 as

the ensuing massacres became almost immediately known to the outside world. Already on 24 May 1915, the Entente nations (Britain, France, Russia) charged the Ottoman government with massacres of Armenians over a wide area, and declared that they would hold all the members of the Turkish government personally responsible as well as those officials who had participated in the massacres.¹² Morgenthau, American Ambassador in Constantinople, reports that in April 1915 he was suddenly deprived of the privilege of using cipher for communicating with American consuls, and that the most rigorous censorship was also applied to letters.

Such measures could mean only that things were happening in Asia Minor which the authorities were determined to conceal. But they did not succeed. Though all sorts of impediments were placed on travelling, certain Americans, chiefly missionaries, succeeded in getting through. For hours they would sit in my office and, with tears streaming down their faces, they would tell me of the horrors through which they had passed. Many of these, both men and women, were almost broken in health from the scenes which they had witnessed. In many cases they brought me letters from American consuls, confirming the most dreadful of their narrations and adding many unprintable details.¹³

Morgenthau made repeated, but unsuccessful, representations to leading members of the Turkish government. Dr Johannes Lepsius, a most nobly dedicated and courageous man, whom Morgenthau describes as a highminded Christian gentleman, representative of German missionary interests, had investigated the earlier massacres of 1895-6 and published his account of them. He now arrived in Constantinople, in July 1915, to carry out further investigations.

Back in Germany, he bore witness to the new waves of massacres, and the following year he published his report, a highly confidential report, since he did not wish to embarrass his government in its relations with its Turkish ally. It seems, however, to have been widely disseminated before the German censors formally prohibited the printing and distribution of further copies.¹⁴ In England, in July 1916, Viscount Bryce submitted to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs massive

the date for commencement of the deportations, and December 1914 as the date for the calling in of arms in Zeitun, Cilicia.

12. Hovannisian, op. cit., 51-2.

13. Morgenthau, 1918:327-8.

14. See the preface by Pinon to Lepsius, 1918, and Trumpener, 1968: 227, 240.

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documentation of the massacres. These documents, edited by Arnold Toynbee, and consisting largely of eye-witness accounts from neutral witnesses, from consular representatives, missionaries, nurses in the Red Cross, German subjects, and survivors, were published later in the year as a government Blue Paper, with a preface by Viscount Bryce and a historical account by Toynbee. And quite apart from the many diplomatic dispatches, and parliamentary debates, and the wide concern in missionary circles, there was the agitation in the European and American press.

These early documents convey some of the horror of this overwhelming catastrophe. They relate the events with an immediacy, and with an emotional involvement, drained from later, scholarly writings. And in presenting this brief description, I shall rely appreciably on these accounts.

The first step in the genocidal process was the emasculation of the Armenian population. It was initiated by the disarming of the many soldiers serving in the Turkish army, followed by the disarming of the civilian population. Morgenthau describes this process.¹⁵ In the early part of 1915, the Armenian soldiers, mostly combatants, were stripped of their arms and transformed into road labourers, and into pack animals, stumbling under the burden of their loads, and driven by the whips and bayonets of the Turks into the mountains of the Caucasus. They were given only scraps of food; if they fell sick, they were left where they had fallen. In many cases, they were dealt with in even more summary fashion, 'for it now became almost the general practice to shoot them in cold blood'. As for the disarming of the civilians, the Armenians understood what their fate would be, if they were left defenceless. Many surrendered their arms, and this was taken as evidence that a revolution was planned, and the bearers were thrown into prison on charges of treason. The punishment of those suspected of concealing arms, or discovered to be concealing arms, was even more dreadful than the massacres of unarmed soldiers.

Morgenthau writes that most of us believe that torture has long ceased to be an administrative and judicial measure, yet he did not believe that the darkest ages ever presented scenes more horrible than those which now took place all over Turkey. 'Nothing was sacred to the Turkish gendarmes; under the plea of searching for hidden arms, they ransacked churches, treated the altars and sacred utensils with the

15. Morgenthau, *op. cit.*, 302-5.

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utmost indignity, and even held mock ceremonies in imitation of the Christian sacraments. They would beat the priests into insensibility, under the pretense that they were the centres of sedition.' (There follow descriptions of atrocities perpetrated.)

The emasculation of the Armenian population was completed by the culling of Armenian leaders. Throughout the country, the government arrested and deported the élite, the educated, the deputies, the publicists, the writers, the poets, the jurists, the advocates, the notaries, the civil servants, the doctors, the merchants, the bankers and generally all those with substantial means and influence. This measure was presumably designed to deprive Armenians of leadership and representation so that the deportations might be completed without public clamour and without resistance.¹⁶ The effect was to leave the Armenian population a defenceless and easy prey for the next stage, that of deportation.

The deportations were countrywide. Smyrna and Aleppo were spared the mass deportations of Armenians, as was Constantinople (in which Lepsius reports some 10,000 deportations). The deportations were carefully timed, moving from one region to another. There was variation in their pattern. Some latitude was allowed local authorities, and there were a few officials who resisted the deportations, but they were mostly removed from office, or rendered ineffective by the activities of the local branches of the ruling party. Toynbee reports¹⁷ that in areas of strategic significance, because of proximity to the advancing Russians, the military authority, with the help of the local Kurds, carried out an extermination of the civilian populations. But there were also exterminations of civilian populations in regions removed from the battlefield. In some areas, the movement of civilians bore more nearly the semblance of a genuine deportation; and the men would be spared. There were areas in which the women might be bullied into conversion to Islam; in others, conversion might be disallowed; or the women might be massacred like the men. And there were differences in the use of torture and in the disposal of Armenian property.¹⁸

Toynbee describes what was a common pattern of deportation.¹⁹ It would start with a call from the public crier that male Armenians forthwith present themselves at the Government Building. This was the usual procedure, though in some cases the warning was given by the soldiers or gendarmes slaughtering every male Armenian they encoun-

16. Lepsius, 1919:29.

18. *ibid.*, 653.

17. Toynbee, 1916:640.

19. *ibid.*, 640-41.

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tered in the streets. When the men arrived, 'they were thrown without explanation into prison, kept there a day or two, and then marched out of the town in batches, roped man to man ... They had not long to ponder over their plight, for they were halted and massacred at the first lonely place on the road ... The women and children were not disposed of by straightforward massacre like the men. Their destiny under the Government scheme was not massacre but slavery or deportation.' Usually after a few days, the women and children, and the remnant of men who, through sickness, infirmity or age, had escaped the general fate of their sex, were ordered to prepare themselves for deportation. For the women, the alternative of conversion to Islam (if available) could only be ratified by immediate marriage to a Muslim, and the surrender of children to be brought up as true Muslims. 'Deportation was the alternative adopted by, or imposed upon, the great majority.'

The former Italian Consul-General at Trebizond gives this agonized account of his suffering as a helpless spectator of the deportation from that town.

It was a real extermination and slaughter of the innocents, an unheard-of thing, a black page stained with the flagrant violation of the most sacred rights of humanity, of Christianity, of nationality. The Armenian Catholics, too, who in the past had always been respected and excepted from the massacres and persecutions, were this time treated worse than any - again by the orders of the Central Government. There were about 14,000 Armenians at Trebizond - Gregorians, Catholics, and Protestants. They had never caused disorders or given occasion for collective measures of police. When I left Trebizond, not a hundred of them remained.

From the 24th June, the date of the publication of the infamous decree, until the 23rd July, the date of my own departure from Trebizond, I no longer slept or ate; I was given over to nerves and nausea, so terrible was the torment of having to look on at the wholesale execution of these defenceless, innocent creatures.

The passing of the gangs of Armenian exiles beneath the windows and before the door of the Consulate; their prayers for help, when neither I nor any other could do anything to answer them; the city in a state of siege, guarded at every point by 15,000 troops in complete war equipment, by thousands of police agents, by bands of volunteers and by the members of the 'Committee of Union and Progress'; the lamentations, the tears, the abandonments, the imprecations, the many suicides, the instantaneous deaths from sheer terror, the sudden unhingeing of men's reason, the conflagrations, the shooting of victims in the city, the ruthless searches through the houses

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and in the countryside; the hundreds of corpses found every day along the exile road; the young women converted by force to Islam or exiled like the rest; the children torn away from their families or from the Christian schools, and handed over by force to Muslim families, or else placed by hundreds on board ship in nothing but their shirts, and then capsized and drowned in the Black Sea and the River Deyirmen Deré - these are my last ineffaceable memories of Trebizond, memories which still, at a month's distance, torment my soul and almost drive me frantic.²⁰

The next stage in the genocide was the journey to the final destination, the dreary, desolate waste of the Syrian desert and the Mesopotamian valley. The convoys of the exiles were little more than death caravans. The long journey on foot inflicted terrible physical sufferings. 'Yet,' Toynebee writes, 'these were the least part of their torture; far worse were the atrocities of violence wantonly inflicted upon them by fellow human beings.' And he describes the mobbing by Muslim peasants with the connivance of the gendarmes assigned to the convoys; the outrages against the women; the massacres of the old men and the boys, and of women too by Kurds and 'chettis' (brigands recruited from the public prisons) and gendarmes.

It depended on the whim of the moment whether a Kurd cut a woman down or carried her away into the hills. When they were carried away their babies were left on the ground or dashed against the stones. But while the convoy dwindled, the remnant had always to march on. The cruelty of the gendarmes towards the victims grew greater as their physical sufferings grew more intense; the gendarmes seemed impatient to make a hasty end of their task. Women who lagged behind were bayoneted on the road, or pushed over precipices, or over bridges. The passage of rivers, and especially of the Euphrates, was always an occasion of wholesale murder ... The lust and covetousness of their tormentors had no limit. The last survivors often staggered into Aleppo naked; every shred of their clothing had been torn from them on the way. Witnesses who saw their arrival remark that there was not one young or pretty face to be seen among them, and there was assuredly none surviving that was truly old ...

As for those who were transported by rail from the metropolitan districts and the railway zone, 'the sum of their suffering can hardly have been less'. They were packed in cattle trucks; they were turned out into the open to wait for days or even weeks for rolling-stock; in breaks in the railway line, they were forced across the mountains on

foot; they died by the thousands of hunger, exposure and epidemics 'in the vast and incredibly foul concentration camps' which grew up along the route. 'The portion of them that finally reached Aleppo were in as deplorable a condition as those that had made the journey on foot from beginning to end.' And they were finally marooned with the other exiles in the worst, and most remote, districts at the disposal of the government, 'with neither food, nor shelter, nor clothing and with no able-bodied men among them to supply these deficiencies by their labour and resource'.²¹

Here in the desolate wastelands, the poor surviving remnant were subjected to the final torment of slow death by exposure and starvation.²² The deportations were merely a cloak for genocide. How can one question Morgenthau's conclusion that if the Turks had undertaken such a deportation in good faith, it would have represented the height of cruelty and injustice, but that in fact they never had the slightest intention of re-establishing the Armenians in this new country. And Morgenthau adds that they knew that the great majority would never reach their destination, and that those who did would either die of thirst and starvation, or be murdered by 'the wild Mohammedan desert tribes'. The deportations really represented a new method of massacre. 'When the Turkish authorities gave the orders for these deportations, they were merely giving the death warrant to a whole race; they understood this well, and in their conversations with me, they made no particular attempt to conceal the fact.'²³

The concern of the Great Powers seemed more sincere, and the commitment to the Armenian cause more serious, than in the past. The Treaty of Sèvres (August 1920) provided for the recognition of Armenia as a free and independent state. It imposed on Turkey the obligation to ensure equality of treatment for racial, religious or linguistic minorities, and to facilitate to the greatest extent possible the return to their homes, and the re-establishment in their businesses, of the Turkish subjects of non-Turkish race, who had been forcibly driven out after January 1914 by fear of massacre or other pressure. There were Turkish trials of some of those involved in the massacres and the Ittihadist triumvirate of the First World War were put on trial and sentenced to death in

21. *ibid.*, 642-5.

22. See, for example, the report by an American eye-witness, quoted in Lepsius, 1919.

23. Morgenthau, *op. cit.*, 308-9.

absentia.²⁴ Carzou, in *Un Génocide exemplaire: Arménie 1915*, reprints the judgments of the courts relating to murder and massacre in three areas, and these are entirely consistent with the eye-witness accounts.²⁵

But this is where the retribution and restitution ended. The trials were of little significance save as confirmation of observers' accounts. And as to the provisions of the Treaty of Sèvres, they were swept aside in the predatory rivalries of the victors, in their unwillingness to assume a mandate over Turkish Armenia, in the Turkish-Armenian war, in the aftermath of the Russian revolution, in the Turkish-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and the Turkish-Greek war, in further massacres of Armenians, in the growth of Turkish nationalism and the resurgence of its military power. In the result, the Treaty of Lausanne in July 1923 makes provision for the rights of minorities to equality of treatment, but for the rest, it ignores the earlier commitments to the Armenians.

Thus ends the Armenian presence in Turkey, reduced from a population of perhaps 1,800,000 to some 32,500 at the present time.

Genocide is pre-eminently a government crime and governments can hardly be expected to plead guilty. The German case is unusual, with its radical change of government, and its acceptance of responsibility for genocide in a massive and continuing programme of reparations. The more usual, perhaps invariable response, particularly if the same government continues in power, is to deny responsibility, first on the ground that there was in fact no genocide, and second by the contention that the victims were themselves the guilty parties and responsible for the loss of life they sustained.

The denial of genocide in the Armenian case includes in part a battle of statistics, based on Turkish estimates of the Armenian population at the time as not more than 1,300,000, thereby greatly reducing the number of those who perished. This is in contrast to the estimate of the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief of a pre-war Armenian population of 1,800,000, or the estimate of Arlen, who wrote in his recent review of the genocide²⁶ that 'it is possible to say, not precisely but with a general respect for accuracy and plausibility, that in the course of the 1915-1916 massacres and deportations close to one million Armenians - more than half the Armenian population of Turkey - disappeared; which is to say, were killed outright by police or soldiers,

24. Hovannisian, 1971: 419-20.

25. Carzou, 1975: 233-46.

26. Arlen, 1975: 240.

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or by roadside massacres, or by forced marches, or by starvation, or by sickness, or by conditions in the concentration camps'. Hovannisian, in an early work,²⁷ had given an estimate of between 1,500,000 and 2,000,000 Armenians in Turkey at the time of the massacres. But he told me, in a recent discussion, that he thought the population numbers were understated, and that an estimate of over 2,000,000 Armenians was by no means an exaggeration, with 1,000,000 or more victims in the course of, and in the immediate aftermath of, the massacres and deportations.

But the magnitude of the crime of genocide is hardly reduced if the number of victims is, say, 200,000. The statistical argument must therefore be complemented by such assertions as that the deaths were the result 'not only of the transportation but also of the same conditions of famine, disease, and war action that carried away some 2 million Muslims at the same time', and that the army had been given orders to care for the protection and needs of the Armenians during their march and in their new war-time settlements.²⁸

As for the second theme, that of the victims as their own executioners, there is the attempted justification that the deportations were a war-time measure, rendered necessary, so the argument runs, by the disloyalty of the Armenians, who were accused of supporting the country's enemies.²⁹ Now the Armenians were divided between Russian and Turkish territory and Russian Armenians served in the Russian army as Turkish Armenians served in the Turkish. There were also volunteer Armenian units assisting the Russians, the English and the French, and there would seem to be no doubt of the sympathies of the Turkish Armenians for the European Powers to whom they had turned in the past for protection against Turkish rule. But there is substantial evidence, advanced by both Toynbee and Lepsius, against the thesis of Turkish-Armenian disloyalty. And even if this had been true, it would have been argument for the disarming of Armenian soldiers and their conversion into labour battalions, or their internment with other able-bodied Armenians, but no argument for massacres of the men, nor for deportation of the women and children, the aged and infirm, by long and incredibly arduous forced marches, nor for the choice of desolate

27. Hovannisian, 1967: 34-7.

28. Shaw and Shaw, 1977: Vol. II, 315-16.

29. An extreme version of the Turkish case will be found in Shaw and Shaw, *op. cit.*, Vol. II. See also the critique of this version by Hovannisian, August 1978, and the Shaws' response, August 1978.

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wastes as the destination of the survivors of the death caravans. The whole plan of the deportations, and the testimony of eye-witnesses, are overwhelming evidence of an exterminatory intention to so reduce the Turkish-Armenian population as to dispose of the Armenian Question once and for all. There is as little credibility in this line of Turkish defence as in the defence of the Burundi government that in its slaughter of Hutu (variously estimated as between 100,000 and 200,000), it was punishing, though admittedly with some understandable excesses, only those guilty of massacres and planned genocide against the Tutsi.³⁰

The twentieth century is sometimes viewed as initiating a new process in genocide. Toynbee writes³¹ that its distinguishing marks 'are that it is committed in cold-blood by the deliberate fiat of holders of despotic political power, and that the perpetrators of genocide employ all the resources of present-day technology and organization to make their planned massacres systematic and complete'. He describes the massacres at the instigation of the Sultan Abdul-Hamid II at the end of the nineteenth century as amateurish and ineffective compared with the largely successful attempt to exterminate the Ottoman Armenians during the First World War, and the latter in turn as less effective than the German genocide of the European Jews, 'since the general level of technological and organizational efficiency in Germany during the dozen years of the Nazi regime was considerably higher than it had been in Turkey during the ten years of the C.U.P. regime'. Arlen writes³² to similar effect that the entire production of the Armenian genocide (of 1915) was based on the imperfectly utilized but definitely perceived capacities of the modern state for politically restructuring itself, which were made possible by the engines of technology. In due course, 'Hitler's Germany was to perfect the process of railway deportation and to develop the gas chamber and the crematoria, and Lenin's and Stalin's Russia was to evolve further the institutions of the concentration camp and secret surveillance ... But in virtually every modern instance of mass murder, beginning, it appears, with the Armenians, the key element - ... which has raised the numerical and psychic levels of the deed above the classic terms of massacre - has been the alliance of technology and communications.'

The Sultan Abdul-Hamid's massacres do not appear to have been all that amateurish and ineffective. They had limited objectives, being

30. See Kuper, 1977: Ch. V.

31. Toynbee, 1969: 241-2.

32. Arlen, *op. cit.*, 243-4.

designed as a sort of ambassadorial note to the European powers to refrain from intervention in the domestic affairs of Turkey, and a most bloody warning to the Armenians themselves against seeking the intercession of these powers on their behalf or aspiring to autonomy. They also took a somewhat different form from the later genocide in the sense that they were perpetrated on the spot without resort to such devices as the death caravans of the deportation. Lepsius, in *Armenia and Europe*, in which he reports his investigations in 1896, describes how massacres were announced by a bugle call or other signal and called off at an appointed time (though there was variability in this), and he shows the concentrated nature of the massacres, particularly evident in the tabular statement of occurrences in Asia Minor in 1895, prepared by the Committee of Delegates from the six embassies, and included by Lepsius in an appendix.³³ But whether or not the Sultan's massacres were relatively ineffective, and however much they differed in the immediacy and concentrated nature of their occurrence, they employed many of the same elements as the 1915 genocide, serving somewhat as a pilot project for the later genocide. The organizational base was found in the provincial and local administration, with its officials, its military and its police.

There was similar use made of social forces, generated from the plural structure of the society, and hostile to the Armenians, so that the slaughter had some appearance of spontaneous action by mobs of Turkish peasants and townsmen, and by plundering and massacring bands of Kurds and Circassians. Religious hatreds played their part, with terrible atrocities against priests, the desecration and destruction of churches, and forced conversions. Even the actions of the European nations described by Lepsius as 'a fine piece of moral scene-painting behind which political intrigue wished to hide',³⁴ resemble the later abandonment of the Armenians to the disastrous consequences of Great Power involvement in their affairs.

The extreme vulnerability of the Armenian minority, and its selection as a target for genocide by the Turkish rulers as they became involved in the cataclysmic conflicts of the First World War, rested on the superimposition of differences in structure and culture, and of issues of conflict with considerable historical depth. The system of administration had served to maintain, perhaps even to enhance, the ethnic and cultural

33. See Lepsius, 1897:280-331. A summary by Lepsius of his analysis of the organization and course of the massacres is given in *ibid.*, 58-61 and 76-85.

34. *ibid.*, 92.

distinctiveness of the Armenians. The *millet* was a unit of Turkish administration for the more effective control of subject populations. It conferred, on the basis of religious affiliation, appreciable autonomy in spiritual matters, in the maintenance of religious seminaries and, later, of other schools, and in the exercise of certain limited judicial functions. The effect in the case of the Armenian subjects of the Ottoman Empire was a convergence of political, ethnic, religious and cultural differentiation, too deep-rooted to be effaced by such reforms as were introduced.

To these differences must be added occupational differentiation. It is quite often referred to in the literature, sometimes in the pejorative characterization of Armenians as a 'mercantile race', whatever this may mean. It is the same characterization as is applied to Jews, or to Chinese in South-east Asia, or to Indians in East Africa, or to Lebanese in West Africa, and seems to be used as a justification for murder, as if this quality in the victim transmuted massacre to justifiable homicide. In the case of the Armenians, it is true that they were active in commerce, a not unusual reaction where subjects are largely denied advancement to positions of leadership in government and warfare. Lepsius writes³⁵ that the Armenians controlled 60 per cent of imports, 40 per cent of exports, and at least 80 per cent of the commerce in the interior. But some 80 per cent were peasants, and the remainder were not only merchants, but members of the liberal professions and artisans, to the extent that the American Consul at Aleppo reported³⁶ that in the areas evacuated there was no longer, with some exceptions, a single mason, smith, carpenter, potter, tentmaker, weaver, shoemaker, jeweller, pharmacist, doctor, advocate, not a single person belonging to the liberal professions or engaged in some craft. Yet there was sufficient involvement of Armenians in commerce for this to serve as a source of grievance and as an issue for manipulation.

The administrative framework for the mosaic of peoples who composed the Turkish Empire also served to maintain the distinctiveness of other groups. In the eastern provinces, nomadic Kurdish tribesmen maintained a state of feud with the settled Armenian communities which they periodically ransacked.³⁷ Abdul-Hamid had used the Kurds as an irregular force of cavalry against the Armenians in the 1895-6 massacres. In the turbulent history of these areas, there had been many

35. Lepsius, 1918:328, 277-9.

36. *ibid.*, 280.

37. Arlen, *op. cit.*, 172.

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forced movements of population, following the vicissitudes of war, and these had left their bitter residue of antagonistic memories. Of special significance were the many Muslim refugees from previous upheavals (the Shaws cite a figure of over 1,000,000 for the period 1878-97³⁸), and more immediately from the Balkan wars and the new Christian regimes of Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece. All these divisions offered a base for the mobilization of social forces murderously hostile to the Armenians.

The divisions and conflicts between subject groups operated within the wider context of the overriding conflicts in Turkish-Armenian relations. It is difficult to estimate the power of the major cleavage of religion. There were areas, as we have seen, in which the Muslim inhabitants or the officials were quite opposed to the deportations, and the Turkish leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress were not themselves religious fanatics. But nevertheless, their declaration that the country was engaged in a holy war in the defence of Islam was deliberately designed to inflame religious passion; and the participation of the Turks themselves in the deportations and the pillage and the massacres, the desecration of churches, the atrocities against priests, the forced conversions, all point to the persistence of ancient religious hatreds. The long history of the intervention of foreign nations on behalf of the Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire arose out of, and was superimposed on, this fundamental religious cleavage. But this concern of the outside powers was anything but purely benevolent. It was associated with, and no doubt appreciably motivated by, predatory interests in the dismemberment of the Turkish Empire, already far advanced. Engaged in a highly destructive conflict, initiated by disastrous campaigns, the Turkish rulers were now driven from the high hopes with which they had entered the war, to the desperate defence of their borders and dissolving empire. Under these circumstances, anxiety lest the Armenians revolt became the conviction that they were disloyal, and warrant for their genocide.

The provincial and local administrations provided, as we have seen, the organizational base for the genocide. The presence of local branches of the Committee of Union and Progress, the 'many-headed hydra' of the Young Turk Clubs, greatly enhanced the effectiveness of this administrative structure. These branches became the catalysts of genocide, exerting pressure where necessary on reluctant officials, inflaming the hatreds of the populace with tales of Armenian treachery and atrocity,

38. Shaw and Shaw, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, 238-9.

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and in general activating the genocidal process. There was some variability by reason of the dependence on local initiative and the variation in such conditions as proximity to the Russian front; and there was some appearance of spontaneity, given a great reliance on the action of mobs and predatory bands. But the country-wide distribution of the destruction of Armenian communities, the timing, the general pattern were the product of a central administrative plan. It proceeded, however, appreciably by indirection, that is to say not by massacres from the centre, but by setting in motion the genocidal process, as a low-cost operation with extensive reliance on local social forces.