

ARE WE "RIGHTEOUS TURKS"?

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By Ayşe Günaysu, Istanbul, 16 June 3013



Ayşe Günaysu is an Istanbul-based author, journalist and human rights worker. For years she has battled to spread the words about the veracity of the Genocide of Armenians to the Turkish and Kurdish public. She wrote the article specially for Keghart.com-Editor

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Denialism is not just about simply denying what happened. It's a whole atmosphere that individuals inhale, make their own, ensure that their entire organism adapts to it and functions accordingly. It's a way of living, a way of existence of not only individuals but of the society as a collective being.

I don't put the blame solely on a handful of ruling elite. The evil does not belong to a few people in power; it's absorbed by the masses who are the subject of that power. In other words, the ruler's version of truth is literally internalized by the ruled, because it is secure and safe to know what one is told to know and see what one is told to see. It's an instinct of survival.

Until mid-'90s we, the handful of people who are now called "righteous Turks" were part of that "evil"--the denialism. Yet what that few people (Yelda, the first person who publicly called the extermination of Armenians a "Genocide" on a TV channel in 1996 and Neşe Ozan who led the work for the establishment of a committee within the Istanbul Office of Human Rights Association of Turkey (IHD) to document the minority rights violations) used to say at that time in an effort to challenge the official history, failed to have any resonance until the early 2000s when the European

Union integration process started and "minority rights" became topical, with EU funds being distributed to projects dealing with "minorities".

The assassination of Hrant Dink stepped up the process and increased the number of NGOs and civil society initiatives engaged in the so-called Armenian "question". Another 10 years had to pass for the mainstream "pro-Armenian" initiatives to start using the "G" word. There is a gap of 17 years between Yelda's public use of the word and DurDe (Say Stop to Racism and Nationalism) initiative's using it for the first time in their 24th April Commemoration event in Taksim Square in 2013. In between the Human Rights Association, Turkey had started to publicly commemorate the Genocide on 2005 by using the word Genocide. But IHD's voice was not heard at all, as if there was a tacit consensus to overlook its efforts.

But is it meaningful to put the blame on individuals for the initial marginalization of Yelda and IHD by their own fellow strugglers and the long period of silence that followed across the leftist and other groups of dissent? It was the cultural, psychological, social, etc. dynamics of the Turkish post-genocide denialist environment that governed this process--and still is.

Many ask if these small number of people are able to change things in Turkey.

That depends on what we understand by the word "change" in this context. If we are talking of a change in Turkey's official denialist policies and of the Turkish people's mindset in general, no. These small groups of people cannot and will not even in the long term bring about change. But if we mean a change in individuals' hearts and minds, yes; the deeds of these people bring out a change every day.

Still others ask if these people, the so-called "righteous Turks" are being used by the Turkish state as fig leaves to cover the shame. The answer is both yes and no. No, because the challenge to the official thesis of denialism is a phenomenon in its own right which independently flourished. Yes, at the same time, because it helps Turkey which is in a desperate need to present itself as a democracy to the international community, not only in terms of reputation but also in terms of economic and financial interests. However, Turkish authorities cannot fail to see that the international community is not so naive as to forgive Turkey because of the deeds and words of a handful people... one in a thousand amid the large, overwhelming masses that make up Turkish society, along with that autocratic, anti-democratic, nationalist successive governments that have ruled Turkey since 1915.

This is the dialectics of life. Everything evolves into something new and within a given period of time one and the same phenomenon may serve the purposes of opposing forces. However, despite that dialectics, I believe that the state will be victorious at every stage, as long as the bulk of Turkish people continue to be what they are. I believe that nothing good will come out of Turkey given its genocidal historical heritage and its ongoing, uninterrupted continuation ever since, as generations after generations the mindset of people have been long molded and shaped through a well-

organized mechanisms of denialism. A crime which goes unpunished and a refusal to repent will always be an obstacle to a social enlightenment and to a process that leads to real justice.

Still, there is a meaning in individuals' efforts to tell the truth to Turks, Kurds, all other Sunni Muslim peoples about what really happened in 1915 and onwards. Freeing only one person of lies of the official thesis about Armenians and other Christian native peoples of the Asia Minor is a victory on a microcosmic level against denialism, because every individual is a potential agent of change no matter how far away that change may be.

