COMING OUT OF THE FOG

Posted on January 22, 2010 by Keghart

Category: Opinions

Team Keghart Editorial, 20 January 2010

Described as “shell-shocked” during the First and Second World Wars, soldiers, who experienced severe emotional turbulence, are nowadays described as suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). But PTSD isn’t an experience confined to individuals—nations and civilizations can also suffer from it.

As a nation, Armenians are ideal candidates for PTSD.

Even a cursory look to our history demonstrates a nation which, for nearly three millennia, has been tested again and again. Our country has been a frequent battle ground for expansionist empires from near and far; it has been divided between Persia and Greece; split between Persia and Rome; sliced by Byzantium, Persia, and Arab “vosdigan” rule. Crusaders from half-a-dozen European countries have betrayed the welcoming Armenians and played havoc with Cilicia. Then it was the turn of nomadic Central Asian marauders, particularly the Turkish Seljuk and Ottoman tribes, to lay waste to Armenia. In the past 600 years the occupation of our country continued under the yoke of Persian and Turkish, and later Russian Empires. These depredations have been accompanied by the mass killings, slavery, and the abduction of countless Armenians and the repeated destruction of our homes, churches, schools…

Then came the 19th century persecutions of Armenians living under Ottoman rule. After several major ethnic cleansing campaigns, Turkey culminated its bloody plot against Armenians with the Genocide of 1915, and the deportation of nearly a million from our homeland. Those who stayed in their homeland were turkified forcibly to survive. Meanwhile, historic Armenia kept shrinking to its present postage-stamp size—about a tenth of historic Armenia.

And how can one forget the torment of Genocide survivors, the orphans and their descendents, scattered around the globe … trying to establish a modicum of "normal" life far away from Ararat, and often prone to the vagaries of local politics, discrimination, and even war?

Is it any wonder then that we feel like a punch-drunk boxer? How many hits can an individual—or a nation—absorb before throwing the towel? How many degrees are there between PTSD and catatonia?

As part of their healing process, victims of shell-shock or of PTSD find succor in the medical community’s and the public’s recognition of their illness. That their illness is validated by medical experts and not dismissed as cowardice (as was often the case during the First World War) helps the PTSD sufferer find closure and to start life anew.

Armenians are still waiting for the Great Powers, not to mention Turkey, to recognize the Genocide of Armenians as an uncontested fact. And as long as the Genocide of Armenians is cited in quotes or

is preceded by "so-called", "alleged", or" Armenians claim", our trauma persists.

This open wound, the hypocrisy of the Great Powers, Turkey's inane obduracy drives us—in street parlance—to the wall. We get impatient, short-tempered, petulant, combative, and even paranoid when the horrendous events of 1915 to 1922 are questioned or ignored.

But "coming from an angry place" is no way to present "Our Case" (Hye Tadd). We have been patient for millennia. Despite the overwhelming odds, despite the yataghans, despite the forced assimilation we have survived through patience, through love of our nation and through our pride in being Armenian.

Let's maintain our cool a bit longer. Let's rise above the struggle, and continue to fight in an intelligent manner—with circumspection, unity, and diplomacy. We have come a long way since 1375 (when our last king was deposed) and from 1915.

The Protocols have galvanized Armenians the way the 50th commemoration of the Genocide focused us on our priorities. Turkey is changing: optimists in Turkey and elsewhere believe the new generation in Turkey will eventually force Ankara to acknowledge the crimes of Abdul Hamid II, Tala'at and Co. The descendants of turkified Armenians are coming forth and demanding the opening of the books. Ankara realizes that it can't stonewall forever, without losing credibility and prestige. Diaspora Armenians are demanding that their political leaders present a new blueprint for our future as a nation. And just like Turkey, the government of Armenia should realize that authoritarian rule and "let's play pretend-democracy" won't do.

Qualified and committed groups are forming in at least four Armenian centers to give a big legal push for the recognition of the rights of Western Armenians. The desire for a new day is palpable. With our track record of perseverance, with our pride in our identity, with our conviction in the justice of our cause, we may soon come out of the fog—the fog of the world's longest-lasting post-traumatic stress disorder.