CONCERNS OCCASIONED BY A PROGRAM

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Category: Opinions

By Nartuhi Gheridian

Published below is a letter of protest sent from Florida regarding a program that took place there. From a unique point of view, the author presents a phenomenon that disturbs concerned Armenians.

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It was very enjoyable to see women of various ages dancing gracefully to the sounds of our Armenian peasant and folk music. We certainly would have spent an enjoyable evening if the atmosphere hadn't changed, with the musicians offering us Turkish songs. As if that weren't enough, Aznavour's song "Mama" was sung in Turkish. The following words of the great singer came to my mind: "Every time there's an earthquake in Turkey, it is the bones of our martyrs that are shaking…." "Mama" reminded me of the heart-rending demise of the grandmother of a girlfriend of mine, when the Turks slit her belly open with a curved dagger and, putting the baby on the end of a sword, waved it in the air while laughing cynically and boisterously. Behind the bar facing the stage was the photograph of our great composer Komitas. I said to myself, "My poor Komitas, you'll go insane once again, take note. With Siamanto, awaken this crowd 96 years later." Incidentally, we had silenced this group in Cambridge, Massachusetts thirty years ago.

It is understandable that our elderly generation grew up and lived in a Turkish cultural environment. However, now that they are no longer with us, isn't it high time that we dispense with customs that smack of Turkism?

Let us recall Siamanto's "The Dance," in which young Armenian brides, stripped naked, were forced to dance in the public square; then kerosene was sprinkled on them and they were set on fire. This was followed by the monstrous, inhuman act of shutting the church doors tight and immolating the

people. We were given derisive names; our fathers were slaughtered; the bellies of our pregnant mothers were slit open; our innocent orphans were tossed into the river like rags…the list of atrocities is too long to enumerate. Now, here we are, making the sign of the cross on Sunday morning and dancing to Turkish songs the same evening. Shame on us if we forget our martyrs! Never, ever should we dance to Turkish music and forget our sacred oath. Yes, by all means, let's dance and sing to the rich sounds of Armenian music. Let's pay utmost respect to our martyrs, instead of just stepping in place, unfortunately, on the level of a stagnated crowd.

If we must dance,
Let's dance the Kochari
And dance in such a way
That the stamping of our feet
Reaches the Turk's deafened ears…

I left the hall feeling that outrage and cried all the way home, as my dignity had been offended doubly, by the Turks as well as the Armenians.

I wish to note parenthetically that I don't find fault with our Turkish-speaking compatriots, who heroically kept their language and culture despite the heavy pressure exerted on them to the contrary in Turkey, and have now joined us to become reenergized. They deserve our respect.

At the present time, in practically all countries throughout the world, there isn't any persecution, any obstacle as regards our language or culture. So why should we weaken and give them up? Just this past February, the United Nations proclaimed February 24 as National Language Day. Therefore, on behalf of the spiritual-cultural legacy of the Armenian people, let us say "No, not at all" to behaviors that are ugly and unbecoming to us. On the contrary, let us be guided by and advance with the wise and instructive dictum of Vahan Tekeyan:

Partsratsir, partsratsur
Rise, help others rise

I hope that our churches and organizations will decide judiciously to put an end to these Turkish-style programs of Onnig Dinkjian and others like him, thereby setting an example for many others.

The original Armenian text of this letter of protest, translated here by Aris G. Sevag, was published in the March 11, 2011 issue of ***Hairenik weekly*** *and the March 17, 2011 issue of* ***Nor Gyank weekly****.*

THE DANCE

In the town of Bardez where Armenians
were still dying,
a German woman, trying not to cry
told me the horror she witnessed:

"This thing I'm telling you about,
I saw with my own eyes.
Behind my window of hell
I clenched my teeth
and watched with my pitiless eyes:
the town of Bardez turned
into a heap of ashes.
Corpses piled high as trees.
From the waters, from the springs,
from the streams and the road,
the stubborn murmur of your blood
still revenges my ear.

Don't be afraid. I must tell you what I saw,
so people will understand
the crimes men do to men.
For two days, by the road to the graveyard…
Let the hearts of the whole world understand.
It was Sunday morning,
the first useless Sunday dawning on the corpses.
From dusk to dawn in my room,
with a stabbed woman,
my tears wetting her death.
Suddenly I heard from afar
a dark crowd standing in a vineyard
lashing twenty brides
and singing dirty songs.

Leaving the half-dead girl on the straw mattress,
I went to the balcony on my window
and the crowd seemed to thicken like a clump of trees.
An animal of a man shouted, "you must dance,
dance when our drum beats."
With fury whips cracked
on the flesh of these women.
Hand in hand the brides began their circle dance.
Now, I envied my wounded neighbor
because with a calm snore
she cursed the universe
and gave her soul up to the stars…

In vain I shook my fists at the crowd.
'Dance,' they raved,
'dance till you die, infidel beauties.
With your flapping tits, dance!
Smile for us.
You're abandoned now, you're naked slaves,
so dance like a bunch of fuckin' sluts.
We're hot for you all.'
Twenty graceful brides collapsed.
'Get up,' the crowd roared,
brandishing their swords.
Then someone brought a jug of kerosene.
Human justice, I spit in your face.
The brides were anointed.
'Dance,' they thundered –
here's a fragrance you can't get in Arabia.'
With a torch, they set
the naked bodies on fire.
And the charred bodies rolled
and tumbled to their deaths…
I slammed the shutters
of my windows,
and went over to the dead girl
and asked: 'How can I dig out my eyes?'

This poem was translated by Peter Balakian and Nevart Yaghlian.