FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE TURKISH AMBASSADOR

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(Public Service Announcement)

Editorial, 31 May 2013

Curator Julie Latimer and author of books on the WWI internments Marsha Skrypuch at the Kapuskasing (Ontario) Interment Cemetery.

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What was their crime?

They happened to be citizens of Ottoman Turkey, a country which was at war with the British Empire. The Dominion of Canada considered the Turks dangerous aliens.

Flipping the calendar 100 years forward… the long-forgotten story of the 100 Turks came to light in recent years. Soon after, the Turkish embassy in Canada, Ankara authorities, and the Turkish media got wind of the occurrence. How did these men—mostly bachelors and thousands of miles from their home—live in Canada's sub-Arctic internment camp? How were they treated? How many survived? The Turkish media eagerly reported on the internments. There was much hand-wringing in Ankara. A Turkish documentary was planned.

The Turkish Ambassador and his mignons began salivating at the opportunity to hit the Canadian government and to demonstrate Canada's cruelty to Turkish immigrants. The ambassador and his bosses in Ankara saw the long-shrouded incident as a slap at the face of Prime Minister Stephen Harper who, in 2006, recognized the Genocide of Armenians. What Canada did to these poor Turkish immigrants was no different from what Turkey did to the Armenians, according to Turks. Turkish "scholars" and canny propagandists concluded the internment episode was God-sent: they could now promote a moral equivalency between the internment of the 100 Turks in remote Kapuskasing and the deportation of 500,000 Armenians by Turkey in 1915. Turkey would also hijack the Genocide of Armenians' centenary commemorations by displaying its own victims. The Kapuskasing case would add unexpected sparkle to Ankara's global festival of denialist lies in 2015. We can't wait for the newsbreak.

But unfortunately for Turkey, there's a tiny fly in the ointment. Before Ankara starts spending vast sums to market the Kapuskasing story, we would like to send a public service announcement to its ambassador in Canada. Shortsighted Turkish authorities might think we are raining on their parade, but all we are doing is help Turkey save billions of liras as it foolishly engineers a full-court propaganda campaign about the Kapuskasing 100.

Ahem. Here we go: the Kapuskasing Turks were … not Turks!

Not T-u-r-k-s. They were Alevis, Arabs, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Greeks, Jews, Kurds…and Armenians. Their names say it all: Kevork, Elias, George, Alex, John, Albert, Thomas, Kiro Vasileff, Maic Yanos, Nick Yarowy, Kamil Rosa, Arakilian, Salaman, Marcus, Kuriakos, Kibicz, Manchur… and those with Arab/Muslim names (Khalil, Rachim…are Arabs, Kurds, and Alevis). They were members of ethnic and religious minorities who had fled Turkish oppression for freedom in a cold country thousands of miles away.

Indeed, the non-Armenians among the 100 "Turks" were close to the Brantford Armenians and many were boarders in Armenian-owned houses.

Because they had Turkish citizenship, Canadian immigration officers registered their identity as Turkish. For the same reason, to this day many in South America refer to Middle Eastern minorities as 'Turcos'.

The internment saga of the 100 immigrants is rich in multiple ironies: members of minorities persecuted by Turkey were imprisoned for being Turks; Turkey plans to exploit the imprisonment of people it chased out of Ottoman Turkey. That's gall.

But Turkey is an old hand at spouting brazen lies with a straight face. Ankara has squadrons of "scholars" whose sole task is fiddling with history, altering and creating turcophile facts: In 1915 Turkey transported Armenian civilians to Syria for their own protection; armed Armenian peasants were organizing to dismantle the Ottoman Empire; Armenians are not native to Asia Minor—they came from the Balkans. A few weeks ago Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu capitalized on

Ottoman casualties at Gallipoli, identifying them as Turks. Suddenly Ottoman Arab, Kurd and Armenian soldiers became Turkish. This year Turkey is building a 2.3-hectare (the size of 13 football fields) colossus called the Museum of Civilization which will appropriate the 10,000-year civilizations of the Anatolian Plateau as Turkic. And talking of chutzpah, let's not forget Turkey's financial demands from Western insurance companies for slain-by-Turks Armenians who had bought life insurance in the West prior to 1915.

Any day now Ankara "scholars" might reveal to the world that Noah's nick name was Grey Wolf… Noah was a Turkish patriarch! After that they will studiously address the question as to why Noah planted vine soon after disembarking from the Ark, when Muslims consider wine "harram" (forbidden)?

> ***Canada has established a $10 million endowment (Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund) to study and publicize all WWI internments. Because the big push for the endowment came from Ukrainian-Canadians, most of the council members overseeing the endowment are Ukrainian. But recently a Turkish-Canadian, from the Anatolian Heritage Foundation, joined the council, thanks to Ukrainian largesse. The move was probably a reprisal for Armenian lack of support for a Ukrainian pet project. Shame on the petty Ukrainian representatives who have embraced an organization which denies the Genocide of Armenians. In light of the revelations about the identity of the interned "Turkish immigrants" we wonder what will be Turk Ercan Kilic's function on the council.***

[*] Marsha Skrypuch is currently doing research for a novel about the Kapuskasing internees.