KILLING ANOTHER ARMENIAN

Posted on November 17, 2009 by Keghart

TODAY'S ZAMAN

Category: Opinions

By Orhan Kemal Cengiz, Today's Zaman, Turkey, 13 November 2009

I was originally only planning to write an entertaining story, but then I came across a piece of news in Today's Zaman. I said to myself Turkey is like a family that has a psychopathic father who does extremely disturbing things whenever the children feel happy -- all just to kill their happiness.
Why I use this metaphor in which I portray psychopaths as the father figure and myself as a child needs to be analyzed separately.
Let's turn to this "disturbing story." As you read in yesterday's issue of Today's Zaman, Taraf columnist Sevan Nişanyan, a Turkish citizen and an ethnic Armenian, published in his column "letters from readers" sent to him in reaction to one of his previous columns in which he rewrote Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's "Address to Turkish Youth."

By Orhan Kemal Cengiz, Today's Zaman, Turkey, 13 November 2009

I was originally only planning to write an entertaining story, but then I came across a piece of news in Today's Zaman. I said to myself Turkey is like a family that has a psychopathic father who does extremely disturbing things whenever the children feel happy -- all just to kill their happiness.
Why I use this metaphor in which I portray psychopaths as the father figure and myself as a child needs to be analyzed separately.
Let's turn to this "disturbing story." As you read in yesterday's issue of Today's Zaman, Taraf columnist Sevan Nişanyan, a Turkish citizen and an ethnic Armenian, published in his column "letters from readers" sent to him in reaction to one of his previous columns in which he rewrote Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's "Address to Turkish Youth."

He changed Atatürk's sentence "Your first duty is to preserve and to defend Turkish independence and the Turkish Republic forever" into "Your first duty is to be a human being." He made other changes of this type to the original address. In reaction to his creative column, he received more than 400 e-mails from readers, threatening to kill him, swearing at him using extremely strong language, insulting him and so on. He quoted a dozen of these messages as examples to give readers a taste of the remaining messages. When you read these messages, the most "decent ones," already quoted in yesterday's Today's Zaman, clearly show that all attacks target his Armenian ethnicity. The messages are written in the purest form of racist mentality, which makes references to the killing of Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, to history and so on.
Reading these messages reminded me of something. In the summer of 2008, I attended a course on genocide in Toronto. A dinner was held for participants on the last night of the course. There were also people from the Zoryan Institute, which organized this course. An Armenian gentleman who was told I was from Turkey wanted to talk to me and sat right across from me at the table. His Turkish was perfect. He then told me his story. His family was originally from Van, a city by the biggest lake of the same name in southeast Anatolia. His grandfather was a wealthy man in Van.

There was a Kurdish clan leader in Van who used to invite rich and prominent Armenians to his home every year for a special dinner. That particular year, the Kurdish tribe leader, as usual, invited wealthy Armenians to his home for dinner again. During the dinner this Armenian gentleman's father was playing games with children in the yard of the house. Something unusual happened: The children were told to go to their homes and were also told that their fathers were going to join them later on. Later on, they learned that no Armenian who attended this dinner left alive; they were all killed that night. The year was 1915. This Kurdish tribe leader most probably became a very rich man after taking the possessions of the Armenians he killed.

Following this, the family formed a new life in İstanbul, and this gentleman received quite a good education there. When the time for military conscription came, he had to make a choice: He was either going to join the military or he was going to go abroad like many of his Armenian friends living in Turkey did. He chose to join the army, believing that a good life awaited him in Turkey after completing military service.

Since he had already completed his graduate degree at the time, he joined the military under the rank of second lieutenant. Apparently, for many racist Turks, having an ethnic Armenian commander over them was a very big insult. As soon as he stepped into the compound, they started to hassle him. Every night a group of soldiers spoke of killing him in front of the door to his room. There was no night he did not hear conversations about how he was going to be killed. As soon as he completed his military service, he sought asylum in Canada and has been living there ever since. What a trauma for him and what a loss for Turkey. He is a smart guy who received one of the best educations in Turkey. Turkey indeed lost a great individual, a man who was determined to live in this country despite everything. What a big loss for Turkey.

Nişanyan is one of this country's brightest minds, and we are very luck he did not leave Turkey. I am sure, like every other Armenian living in Turkey, that he must have endured all kinds of racist attacks of all types and forms during his life. But he did not leave Turkey; he continues to live here and continues to contribute to the democratization of this country.

Returning to the very beginning of this article, I used a metaphor in which I portrayed psychopaths attacking Nişanyan as father figures because I instinctively know that the deep state always has a hand in these kinds of organized attacks. In Turkey, these kinds of things happen in a much more organized way than people generally tend to think. When I read about this hatemongering campaign targeting Nişanyan, I could only think of JİTEM as the conspirator behind the scenes. JİTEM is the illegal unit of the gendarmerie responsible for many unsolved murders in southeast Turkey. I also believe they were the real perpetrators of the Dink assassination and the 2007 Malatya massacre.

If a country does not confront its past, it is doomed to repeat it. Unless we fully confront what happened to Armenians in 1915, we will not be able to get rid of these fascist elements in the state structure -- nor will we be able to change this racist mentality. Ergenekon and similar gangs should

be handled with the utmost care, and these cases should go wherever they can lead us. Finally, to prevent a second Dink case, threats and other messages targeting Nişanyan should be taken very seriously. To investigate these threats and to find the real perpetrators behind them is the utmost moral and legal obligation of this government. We should all keep a close eye on the steps taken.