ONE-AND-HALF MILLION

Posted on January 1, 2012 by Keghart

Category: Opinions

Politics, Prose and Poetry: One Person's View

Alan Whitehorn, October 29 – November 6, 2011

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I try to imagine that many dead
from the genocide.
It is so difficult to conceive.
Yet, the terrible slaughter occurred.
How to conceptualize the magnitude?

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The khachkar is a sacred Armenian cross-stone.
It is a marker for the dead.
It is usually about one meter in width
and less than two meters high.
I try to envision a field with one khachkar,
one for each genocide victim,
each respectfully in one square meter.
If there were only 15 dead in a village,
the cluster of cross-stones
could form a sacred square,
four meters by four meters,
with one spare corner
for a special collective memorial marker perhaps.
But now how to imagine 1.5 million khachkars for the dead?
A 1,000 meters of khachkars
would be the distance of one kilometre.

But a square one kilometre by one kilometre
would not be large enough.
Instead the memorial field
would need to be larger,
It would need to be 1.22 kilometers
by 1.22 kilometers.
It would be a huge field of khachkars,
with almost endless rows of cross stones.
The size of the memorial zone
would be almost overwhelming.
One and half million is a number.
But each number
represents a child,
a mother, a father,
a brother, a sister,
an aunt, an uncle,
a grandfather, a grandmother,
one extended family
that was exterminated,
except for our ability
to conceptualize one and a half million.
It is a profoundly difficult challenge.
But we must try to visualize the immensity
of the vast zone of death.
Our painful journey
begins with one khachkar,
but it is only the beginning of a very long journey.