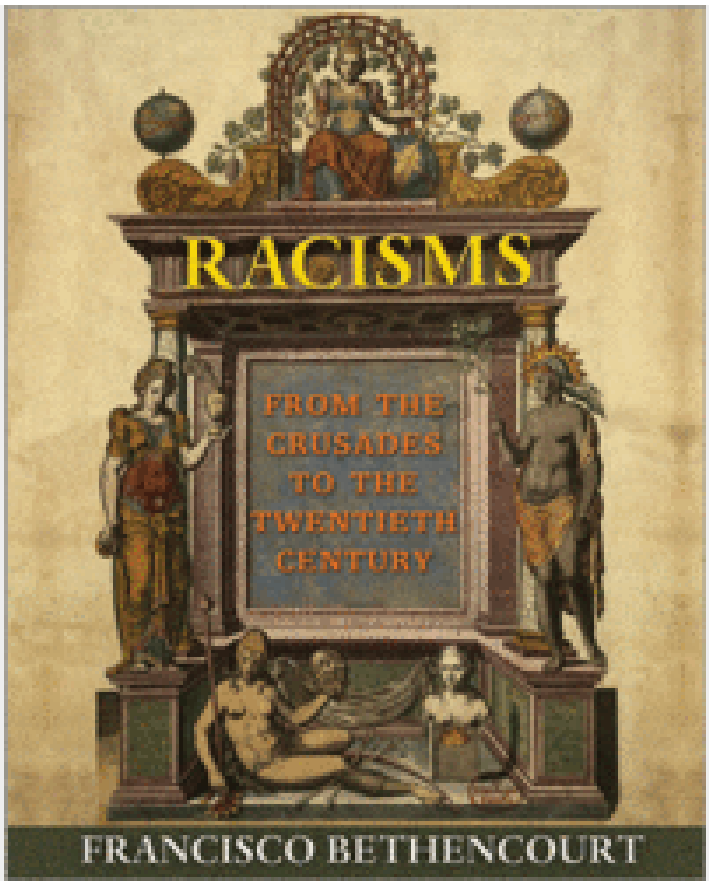
OTTOMAN/YOUNG TURK PERFIDY EXPOSED--AGAIN

Posted on April 24, 2014 by Keghart



Category: Opinions

Francisco Bethencourt

> *The below is an extract from "Racisms: From the Crusades to the 20th Century" by Francisco Bethencourt (Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford (2013). The 444-page book covers global genocides in the past millennium. Prof. Bethencourt teaches history at King's College, London.(17/4/2014)*

The Ottoman state, which had tried to reduce inequality among ethnicities during the period of reorganization (Tanzimat) of 1839-'76, obtained slightly better integration in the short term, but also increased rivalry. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, it ceased to protect its multiethnic and multireligious population of subjects who were differentiated by tax systems along with unequal access to professions and offices, accepting or even promoting ethnic persecution. In 1894-96, the massacres of the Christian Armenian populations reached 100,000 to 250,000 deaths—far higher than that of all the Russian pogroms against Jews up to that date.

Francisco Bethencourt

> *The below is an extract from "Racisms: From the Crusades to the 20th Century" by Francisco Bethencourt (Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford (2013). The 444-page book covers global genocides in the past millennium. Prof. Bethencourt teaches history at King's College, London.(17/4/2014)*

The Ottoman state, which had tried to reduce inequality among ethnicities during the period of reorganization (Tanzimat) of 1839-'76, obtained slightly better integration in the short term, but also increased rivalry. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, it ceased to protect its multiethnic and multireligious population of subjects who were differentiated by tax systems along with unequal access to professions and offices, accepting or even promoting ethnic persecution. In 1894-96, the massacres of the Christian Armenian populations reached 100,000 to 250,000 deaths—far higher than that of all the Russian pogroms against Jews up to that date.

Like other ethnicities, the Armenians created their own nationalist movements in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Some of them were armed for self-defense, since local communities had regularly been targeted by Muslim refugees and nomadic Kurdish tribes. The majority of the Armenians had traditionally lived in the southeastern and eastern provinces of Anatolia, close to the new borders with the Russian Empire, placing them under constant suspicion. It should be pointed out, though, that under the Russian Empire, the Armenians also had a strong presence in the Caucasus, where they competed with the Muslim populations. During a general movement of

nationalistic division, the Armenians' conflict of allegiances (and interests) between the two empires was constantly pointed out by their rivals.

The creation of the Turkish nationalist movement in 1889 represented a major shift in political perceptions and practices for the late Ottoman Empire. The Young Turks considered Anatolia (and Thrace) the territorial core of an Ottoman Empire based on Turkish nationality. Despite huge war losses and constant emigration, which peaked in the 1890s and 1900s, and mainly affected the Christian population, the Ottoman Empire then numbered 17.4 million people, according to the census of 1881-93; of those, 4.5 million were Christians, half of them Armenians, and nearly half were Greeks. The population concentrated precisely in the core territories, with the Greeks in the west and Armenians in the east, while Istanbul registered 56% Christians out of a population of 900,000. The major part of the Armenian population was rural and considered more "modern" than the dominant Muslim populations.

Like the Jews in the Russian Empire, the Armenians were not targeted to justify social hierarchy; the main persecutions came with better integration and liberal attempts at reform toward equal rights—again constituting a case of relative success and increasing competitiveness. Armenians were systematically accused of profiteering and usury, offering another parallel with the Jewish situation.

In the Ottoman Empire, nations were generally related to religion, but in the European atmosphere of the early twentieth century, nations were also interpreted as races. Although no program of ethnic cleansing was publicly defended, the vision of a homogenous Turkish nation-state defined the Armenians as an internal enemy that needed to be removed. They were considered a fifth column of Russian expansion and Russia's projects for the partition of Anatolia.

The process of transition from the Ottoman Empire to a Turkish state was complex, since the Young Turks preferred the modernization and liberalization of Ottoman society. The Young Turks engaged in dialogue with various Armenian organizations, and established regular channels of communication with them during the constitutional period (1908-1915), although this process was disrupted during the massacre of 25,000 Armenians in Cilicia in April 1909. This massacre coincided with an attempted conservative coup against the Young Turks, which during its temporary weakness did not oppose violence against the Armenians, thus defining its future position.

The participation of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War, in alliance with the Germans and Austro-Hungarians against the Russians, was the final blow to precarious relations between communities. Even though Armenians were engaged in military service and performed as well as the Turks, defeats transformed them into an ideal scapegoat, accused of desertion and spying on behalf of the Russians. Regular abuse and plunder of Armenian villages had not been controlled after 1909, and increased during the war. On July 16, 1914, the leaders of the social democratic Hunchakian Party were detained and accused of separatism (eleven would be hanged in May 1915).

Even so, the detention of hundreds of political and intellectual Armenian leaders in April 1915 in Istanbul, and immediate implementation of a vast program of deportation of the Armenian community, took the Armenian political elite by surprise. The very survival of the community was at stake, with total annihilation organized by the state and implemented by the Special Organization composed of tens of thousands of criminals specially liberated from the prisons, controlled by a top layer of military and political agents, and helped by the local structures of government.

The deportations included the plunder and systematic massacre of the involved populations deported from Cilicia and the western regions of Anatolia managed to arrive at their destination (Syria and Iraq). The Armenian parliamentarians and leaders who did not manage to escape were killed in cold blood. The agreed-on estimate of the Armenian death toll in 1915-16 is around a million people, which probably accounted for half the total population of Armenians still living in Anatolia. The other half managed to take refuge in the Russian Empire, from where some of them reemigrated, particularly to France and the United States. A tiny minority returned after the First World War, only to be targeted again during the war of 1919-22.

This was the first example of a programmed genocide committed against a specific national minority by a state. It was no longer a case of vulnerable communities let down by a state that could not (or as in the instance of Russia, would not) guarantee protection and security. The deportations were organized by state agencies responsible for the identification of people to be arrested, formation of convoys, and seizure of property. Local government was directly involved, particularly in the plunder and confiscation of property. Deportations were simply a pretext for mass murder, either directly conducted by the Special Organization or outsourced to Kurdish nomadic tribes invited to plunder the convoys. Women and children were the major victims of these massacres, adult males were at war or had already escaped, since the Turkish and Kurdish practice was first to disarm and execute the male population of a village since they might resist. Some Armenian women and children were violently converted to Islam and integrated into local communities. Although the Young Turks destroyed massive amounts of archival records in 1918, testimonies, local reports, and central orders for the murder of innocent civilians were nevertheless retrieved and presented at the (aborted) trials that followed in 1919.

This was a clear case of the creation of a scapegoat for the decline and defeat of the state to justify ethnic cleansing, mobilize the core population of Turks, and involve the Kurds in criminal action, since their leaders had been tempted by an alliance with the Armenians. It also served as a program for the Turkification of the Muslim populations. The extermination of the Armenians was meant to send a message to other non-Turkish communities, some of them under suspicion as well due to previous secession of Muslim Albanians. Kurdish nomadic tribes might be useful to perpetuate plunder and massacre on certain occasions, but they were also under threat, since settled Kurds had normal relations with the Armenians and in many situations helped them. Seven hundred thousand Kurds were deported after the removal of the Armenians, this time to be assimilated in small groups,

while Kurdish communal life came under pressure, mainly in 1923. The rules suddenly changed when Kemal's secular and republican policies precipitated conflict. In 1924, the rebellion of Alevi Kurds, followed the year after by the rebellion of the Kurd Sheik Said Piran against the abolition of the Caliphate and projected judicial reforms, particularly the replacement of Islamic courts by secular courts and the Sharia by a Western-inspired civil and penal code, marked the beginning of a long sequence of Turkish military engagement against the Kurds that continue to the present day.

The persecution of Christian communities in the final years of the Ottoman Empire did not exclusively target Armenians. Syriac Christians also suffered extensive persecution, including plunder and massacre, almost at the same level as the Armenians, although the case is less well known because of the smaller size of their community. The Greek community, extremely important in western Anatolia, was obviously also under suspicion, even though the fact that the Greek state existed meant the threat of reprisal and contributed to keeping the daily abuse at a low level—as Arnold Toynbee immediately observed. Still, it is estimated that 500,000 Greek in Pontus region were massacred at the end of the First World War….

The Armenian question, far from being erased, as Talat Pasha, leader of the Young Turks, and grand vizier between February 1917 and October 1918, predicted, was to surface in the collective memory and become a major issue of debate in the second half of the twentieth century. Talat Pasha could not have anticipated the tricks that history would play when he declared to Western ambassadors that the Armenians had been eradicated from Anatolia; allegedly he even boasted that had done more to 'solve' the Armenian question in three months than Sultan Abdul Hamid II had in thirty years. Henry Morgenthau, US ambassador in Istanbul in 1915 in 1915-16, reported his reaction to the first of three justifications (profiteering at the expense of the Turks, separatism, and collusion with a foreign power) that Talat Pasha gave for the deportations: "massacre as a means of destroying business competitors is certainly an original concept. The Young Turks in many ways set a precedent for Nazi Germany, based on the fusion of the concepts of nation and race, when they targeted for deportation and physical exclusion an entire ethnicity considered a rival nation that should not share the same territory…"