

POETIC JUSTICE IN HONDURAN GRAFFITO

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By Dr. Pablo R. Bedrossian, San Pedro Sula, Honduras, 23 December 2009

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Dr. Bedrossian explains:

Recently walking through the downtown area of my hometown of San Pedro Sula, in Honduras, I found the following protest graffiti:

 For most Armenians, the phrase "turcocracia es pobreza" (Turkocracy is poverty) would perhaps be considered a gesture of support and solidarity. One might even speculate that perhaps it is related to the recent Protocols signed between Armenia and Turkey, and that it's a protest against the false claims of the government in Ankara.

However, this interpretation would be misleading. Actually, the adjective "Turkish" is applied to Arabs in general, and Arab Christians from Palestine in particular, who mostly migrated from Bethlehem and its neighboring Beit Jala to Central America in the early 20th century. Because at the time Palestine was ruled by the Ottomans, the Palestinians arrived with Turkish passports and travel documents.

As in Argentina, where Syrians and the Lebanese were known collectively as "los turcos" (the Turks), the Palestinians of Central America were also identified by the misleading Turkish tag.

Overwhelmingly Christian, Palestinians settled in Honduras and in El Salvador usually as peasants. They later became involved in trading. Today, although many of them are Catholic and Protestant, an important Arab Orthodox Church exists in San Pedro Sula.

A few years after their arrival, the former Palestinian peasants began selling threads and buttons in carry-on baskets, eventually making huge fortunes. Today the descendents of those early Palestinians dominate large sectors of Honduran industry and commerce.

During the recent political crisis, which some called a "coup d'état" and others described as "constitutional succession", the "resistance"--a group that supported former President Zelaya--accused Palestinian businessmen of assisting in the toppling of the President. Thus the origin of "turkocracy is poverty".

Unfortunately, Central Americans know very little about Armenians or the Genocide perpetrated by the Turkish government in 1915. Here the Diaspora is very small, and few of us identify ourselves as Armenians. My work to promote the Armenian Cause has been based on giving away books about the genocide, writing letters to newspapers and publishing articles dealing with the Armenian communities of Central America, mostly through the Internet. I have found some receptive journalists. One of them even made an explicit reference, in his articles, to the genocide. However, people are mostly uninterested in distant Armenia's history.

We are responsible for this state of ignorance. We can't pretend that in another continent, thousands of miles away from Armenia, and after a century following the tragedy, nations struggling with their own problems, might know what happened in Turkey in 1915. However, we have a great opportunity: the story we have to tell is a lesson for all the nations. We can't recover our martyrs, but we can help prevent tragic history from repeating itself.

Nearly a hundred years after April 24, 1915, while Turkey denies its heinous deeds against our people, and continues to intimidate and persecute religious and ethnic minorities, the graffito "turkocracy is poverty" is an accurate statement. It's what the English call "poetic justice".

Being Armenian means being rich in civilization and having a proud history. We have proven that with faith and respect for human values, we can rise above ruin perpetrated by barbarians. We can build a richness of spirit through culture and innovation and be a blessing wherever we live. We do not encourage hatred, but we work for justice and peace.

