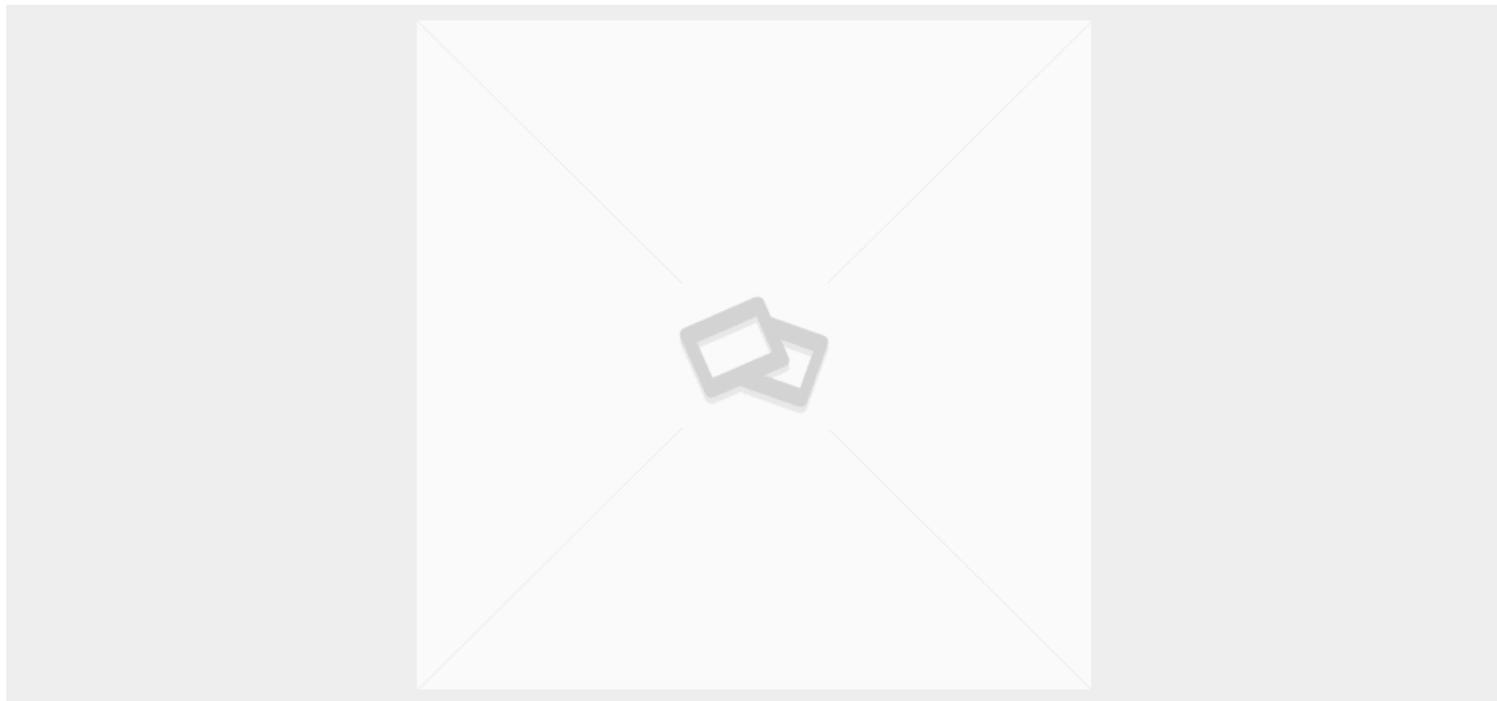


THE RECENT CONVICTIONS OF SERKIS SEROPYAN AND ARAT DINK

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The pattern I observe in the recent Turkish court decision convicting Serkis Seropyan and Arat Dink, the owners of the Agos newspaper, to one year imprisonment in accordance with the infamous Penal Code 301, for publishing an interview with Hrant Dink where he discussed the Armenian Genocide, is one of blatant discrimination based on prejudice.

Just as it had been in the previous lawsuit and subsequent sentencing against Hrant Dink. I think this lawsuit has been brought against Seropyan and Arat Dink and they have been subsequently sentenced -- just as the lawsuit previously brought against Hrant Dink leading to his sentencing -- because they are Armenians. That is, because they are minorities in Turkey.

Why do I think so? Because the interview that Hrant Dink had given and Agos printed, the one that formed the legal grounds of the decision against Seropyan and Arat Dink, was also printed in all other Turkish media outlets. Yet those outlets were not targeted by either Turkish public prosecutors or by Turkish courts. As a consequence, those other Turkish newspapers and journalists will therefore not be targeted or gagged the way Seropyan and Arat Dink now are and will be in the future.

Previously, in the Hrant Dink case, while there had been many of us who had been talking critically about the Turkish past in general and 1915 in particular, only he from among us was singled out and targeted by the Turkish public prosecutor and then by the Turkish court because he was an Armenian. He was a minority member in Turkey. We did not go through that entire legal process culminating in the delivery of a sentence. I think we did not because we were ethnic Turks, and educated white Turks to boot. While some of us stood there watching, while some of us tried to help Hrant Dink by conducting signature campaigns aimed at Turkish state officials foolishly thinking it would make a difference, he went through a grueling trial process, was found guilty, and sentenced.

Hrant Dink was sentenced on what I consider to be trumped-up charges, after an intentional, willful misreading and misinterpretation of what he had written. I would contend that not only had Hrant Dink not 'insulted Turkishness' in what he had written, but that anybody holding a college degree ought to have had the knowledge, intelligence or capacity to have recognized that. Hence, in my opinion, it was a travesty of justice that a group who had the alacrity to call themselves 'deliverers of justice' reached what I view as a shameful, illegal decision based on untruth and prejudice. In my mind's eye, I shall always continue to see that group as 'deliverers of death' because I think it was as a consequence of the process they set in motion, the process they sanctified with their legal decision that Hrant Dink was assassinated.

Until that decision to sentence Dink was reached in Turkey, I had thought legal systems were instituted to protect individuals. Yet the Hrant Dink decision taught me that the Turkish legal system can also set individuals, especially minority members, up for destruction by placing them as offers upon the altar of ethnic nationalism: it would then quietly withdraw and watch some people gather 'in the name of the majority.' These would chant ignorant songs of unity, thus feeling superior against the unprotected. And they certainly did. Yes, some also stood against them and protested, but they were so few in comparison...

Now, today, when there had been many Turkish newspapers that had also published or referred to the interview Hrant Dink had given, once again it was only the Agos newspaper among them that was singled out and targeted by the Turkish

public prosecutor and then by the Turkish court in exactly the same manner as Hrant Dink had once been because, once again, the people involved were Armenians. The rest were not because they were ethnic Turks. And, once again, all the other newspapers were all owned by white Turks. Once again, Seropyan and Arat Dink are minority members in Turkey and I think that is why they alone have been convicted.

What are we going to do now? Are we going to stand and watch? Or are we going to conduct media and signature campaigns that will lead us who knows where?

At this point, I am certain of only one thing: I am sickened at the possibility of the pattern of death repeating itself. I am also sickened by the timing of the Turkish court decision regarding Seropyan and Arat Dink, given the Genocide Bill that has just passed in the U.S. and given how the Turkish media, society and state are now reacting to it -- as always, emotionally and, due to lack of knowledge about the past, with vengeance. I personally think this conviction date was intentionally chosen by the Turkish court to intersect with the U.S. Bill to further foster and justify Turkish ethnic nationalism, and that intentionality further sickens me.

What to do? I look back at those signature campaigns we conducted for Hrant Dink thinking it would make a difference, thinking it would protect him... After all, all of us who signed those pleas of protection -- at least I personally -- believed that there was a state in Turkey that somehow, somewhat upheld the delivery of justice and the protection of the rights of all of its citizens among its fundamental principles, that is, it at least aspired toward such principles, even if it could not reach them. What on earth was I thinking, given how the Hrant Dink trial is going at the moment, given how all attempts of Hrant Dink's lawyers to investigate and uncover the real instigators and culprits behind his assassination that reach deep into the Turkish state and the military are being stonewalled! How could I have been so delusional! There is only one thing I can think of doing at this moment: if those Turkish officials who once received our signatures and pleas about protecting Hrant Dink did nothing back then, if they just put them aside, did not act upon or investigate them, I now condemn each and every one of those Turkish officials. For in collecting those signatures, we might have deluded ourselves in relation to what the Turkish state might have been capable of, but at least our intentions were good. Yet those Turkish officials who, in relation to the assassination of Hrant Dink, did not uphold the delivery of justice and the protection of all of its citizens as the fundamental principles of the Turkish state back then and who still do not uphold them today by enabling a full, open and transparent investigation fully, I condemn each and every one of them. I do so because I find their intentions foul, and their behavior complicitous; I think those particular officials uphold and foster an alternate vision of the Turkish state that is no different, in my view, from the state that once condemned hundreds of thousands of its subjects to death by deportation.

I also condemn the naturalized prejudice and the subsequent discrimination that still perseveres in Turkish society today, as it has ultimately led to the targeting of minorities in this manner. And I also condemn the falsified Turkish Republican history taught in school textbooks that has erased all the violence the Turkish state once committed in the past. Not only has that violence created the category of minorities in our society to start with, thereby fostering all this prejudice and discrimination against them, but it has also been exploited by the same Turkish state and especially by segments of the Turkish military to create an ethnic Turkish identity, an identity which was then periodically mobilized against the minorities both to replenish that hallowed ethnic unity and also to sustain the political status quo.

As I see the same pattern that eventually led to Hrant Dink's assassination unfolding right in front of my eyes in this case, that is, in the case of Serkis Seropyan who happens to be a very dear friend of mine and of Arat Dink who I regard as a very precious gift entrusted to us all for safekeeping by his slain father whom we obviously were not able to protect, I end up with a final condemnation. I condemn and curse myself for my own present state of helplessness.

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