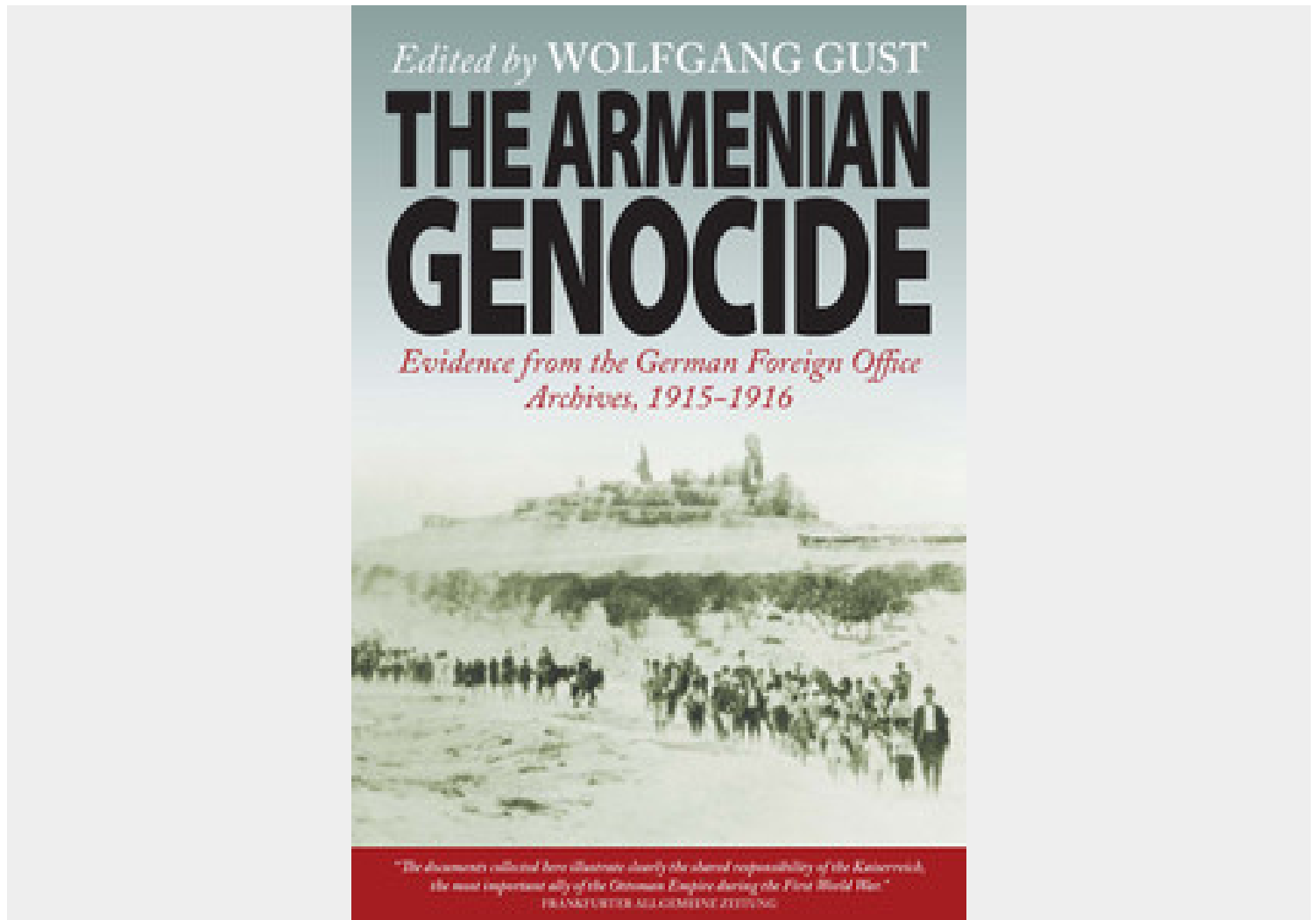


# TWO SOLITUDES, TWO NARRATIVES


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By Raffi Bedrosyan, Toronto, 9 January 2014

As we approach 2015, the 100th anniversary of the 1915 annihilation of Armenian presence from their historic homeland of four thousand years, we see diverging activities being planned by Turkey and Armenians. 

When Turkish acquaintances ask me what the Armenians, especially the 'evil Diaspora', are planning to do in 2015, I answer that they are planning programs to assert historical facts about the vanishing of Armenians from Anatolia in 1915. Then I turn around with a question of my own: 'What are the Turks doing?' Their short answer is that the Turks will continue to dismiss the "misinformation" that the Armenians are disseminating. Thus, the Armenians in Armenia and the Diaspora redouble their efforts to have genocide recognition more widespread worldwide, and the Turks continue pouring more money and resources to entrench the official genocide denialist policy within and outside Turkey.

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In an attempt to divert global attention from the 1915 Armenian genocide commemoration, Turkey has decided to promote the 100th anniversary of the First World War Gallipoli campaign, to be showcased as a historic event through government supported activities worldwide and hailed as the 'heroic resistance of the Turkish forces against the onslaught of the imperialistic powers at the Dardanelles Strait'.

One can easily deduce from these opposing strategies and efforts that the main stumbling block for Turkey and Armenia, as neighbors, in normalizing their relationship and the reconciliation of their respective civil societies, is the divergence of interpretation and understanding of their shared history. The result is an impasse. By this time next year, I doubt there will be much change and the impasse will go on. The issue will continue to be treated as a political match with points scored for

Turkey if Obama continues saying 'Medz Yeghern' (Great Calamity), or points for Armenia if he says 'Genocide'. There are geopolitical, military, and economic reasons for the status quo to continue. Armenia may not be influential enough to overcome any of these reasons at present. Be that as it may, I believe Armenians can be more effective if they re-channel their resources, which are extremely limited in comparison to Turkey, in this struggle.

I see two target areas for Armenians to make any headway on this issue, and in my humble opinion, neither one is addressed properly by Armenia and Armenians.

The first target in dealing with the genocide issue is the academic field. It is supposed to arrive at indisputable historic facts, after thorough and objective research of a multitude of state archives, documents, communication records, and oral history findings. The struggle in this field regarding the 1915 Genocide of Armenians can be best summarized as forces of truth versus money and power. On one side there is truth defended by almost all of the international academia, and on the other side, falsification of truth by a handful of scholars generously rewarded with funds provided by the Turkish state.

The second target in dealing with the genocide issue is the general population of Turkey, with the objective of conveying to them the historical truth of the 1915 events and all the consequences until today. This truth is best served when delivered to the people of Turkey, in Turkish, based on archival material and historic facts directly from Turkish sources and their allies, covering the period from the 1880s to 1922, as well as the factual consequences of the on-going state cover-up and denial.

Academically, the only organization which spearheads and organizes objective research by independent scholars on this topic is the Zoryan Institute with its subsidiary, the [International Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies](#). It has provided the highest standards of scholarship and objectivity in undertaking multi-disciplinary research and analysis. This includes documentation, lectures, conferences and publications in seven languages related to human rights and genocide studies. The publications [include some 41 books](#), some of which in several languages and two major periodicals, one dealing with genocide studies and the other with diaspora. In addition, the institute provides research assistance to scholars, writers, journalists, filmmakers, government agencies and other organizations. It is noteworthy that when Zoryan published the [Wolfgang Gust](#) book 'The Armenian Genocide 1915/16: Documents from the Diplomatic Archives of the German Office', in German, English and Turkish, prominent Turkish journalist Mehmet Ali Birand could only reflect: 'When you read and study these documents, even if this is your first venture into this subject, there is no way you will deny the genocide and disagree with the Armenians'.

Even though the Turkish state defines Zoryan as a 'propaganda centre', there have been several scholars from Turkey who have attended the Genocide and Human Rights University Program run by the Zoryan Institute at the University of Toronto, many of them becoming outspoken advocates of historic truth within Turkey and the rest of the world, regarding the 1915 Genocide of Armenians.

To best describe Zoryan's contribution to scholarship is to quote from 'A Plea from International Scholars of Genocide and Human Rights Studies' made last year in support of fundraising activities of the institute:

"For the past thirty years, the Institute has maintained an ambitious program to collect archival documentation, conduct original research, and publish books and periodicals. It also conducts university-level educational programs in the field of Genocide and Human Rights Studies, taking a comparative and interdisciplinary approach in its examination of the Jewish Holocaust, the Cambodian Genocide, and the Rwandan Genocide, among others, using the Armenian Genocide as a point of reference. In the process, using the highest academic standards, the Institute has strived to understand the phenomenon of genocide, establish the incontestable, historical truth of the Armenian Genocide, and raise awareness of it among academics and opinion-makers. In the face of the continuing problem of genocide in the twenty-first century, the Institute is to be commended for its service to the academic community and is recognized by scholars for providing leadership and a support structure in promoting the cause of universal human rights and the prevention of genocide."

Despite the herculean effort and outstanding results, Zoryan Institute receives no appreciable financial support or acknowledgment from major Armenian organizations, parties or the state. The institute is supported entirely by private donations. Against it, there exist the full power and unlimited funds of the Turkish state, and more recently the Azerbaijan state, which attempt to lure scholars to rewrite history according to their versions. As a result, the Turkish State Historic Society reduces the number of 1915 Armenian victims with every new publication; at last count, a few thousand Armenians died of illness and hunger, while the number of Turkish victims of 'genocide' perpetrated by the Armenians increases every year and is now more than two million. By the same strategy, the number of Azeri dead in the Khojalu 'genocide' keeps increasing with every publication.

Dialogue between two conflicting parties can be meaningful only after both parties become aware of the truth and the facts. Even though the Turkish state has not allowed the truth and the facts of 1915 to come out until recently, there are now clear signs that the taboos about 1915 are finally broken and that there is an emerging 'common body of knowledge' among the Turkish citizens and more importantly, among the opinion makers. Zoryan contributed immensely to the development of this 'common body of knowledge' through conferences, seminars, and the books it helped publish, by authors such as Yair Auron, Taner Akcam, Wolfgang Gust, Roger Smith, Vahakn Dadrian, Rifat Bali and many others.

Given all this, I submit that Armenians should support the Zoryan Institute so that it can continue its work developing the common body of knowledge to be shared by the Armenians and Turks. Hopefully, shared history will help these neighboring people reconcile with their pasts and such reconciliation will help secure a future for generations to come.

In the next issue I will elaborate on the second target of how to convey the truth to the general

population of Turkey, and its challenges.

