THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE AND THE ARTS

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Category: Opinions

By Prof. Alan Whitehorn, Kingston ON, 28 January 2025

I would like to offer some introductory comments on my recently published article "Remembering and Understanding Genocide through the Arts: A Case Study of the Armenian Genocide", which appeared in the Yerevan State University journal, *Armenian Folia Anglistika,* December 2024 issue, which is available online.

The overview article on the Armenian Genocide and the Arts involved several difficult years in the making, including the Karabakh wars of 2020 and 2023, the global Covid pandemic and a recent personal bout of cancer. The paper went through a couple of iterations, including as a major lecture at the Armenian Genocide Museum Institute in 2019 and more recently a presentation at an international conference at Yerevan State University in 2024. The 25-page article was significantly influenced by the key pioneering work of several Armenian colleagues, including Richard Hovannisian, Richard Kloian, Rubina Peroomian and Verjine Svazlian. Three different perspectives were explored, including the journalistic, academic and literary accounts about the Armenian Genocide. Accordingly, the overview article could be a valuable multi-discipline overview for many readers wishing to know more about the Armenian Genocide.

The journal publication begins with a detailed content analysis of the words and phrases employed in the *New York Times* by reporters and witnesses "to describe the indescribable" during that fateful year of 1915. What is revealed is the depth and breadth of the shockingly horrific details available to readers of the leading international newspapers at that time. Even today many persons, including a substantial number of Armenians, are regrettably insufficiently aware of the in-depth accounts.

The concept of 'genocide' was created during World War II in the 1940s by Raphael Lemkin. Despite its judicial utility, the term is somewhat clinically legalistic. It does not adequately convey the magnitude of the series of repeatedly malicious choices made by the mass murderers. This is where the stages of genocide academic literature and my "Verbs of Genocide" poem remind us of the multitude of increasingly harmful choices made by the perpetrators. It is a grizzly and massively deadly road that they relentlessly pursued in their quest to exterminate a vulnerable nation.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wIl2_Rsha7Q

More than a million victims is an extremely difficult number to conceptualize, let alone visualize. For example, one can ask: How many weary, persecuted civilians perished on the seemingly unending, painful and hazardous caravans of death? How vast a distance would so many memorial khachkars extend into the distant and vanishing horizon? This is an almost numbing and, at times, incomprehensible image.

However, the personal and painful story of one adolescent genocide survivor girl, such as Aurora Mardiganian and her family, resonates in a powerful emotional connection. Such a portrayal is

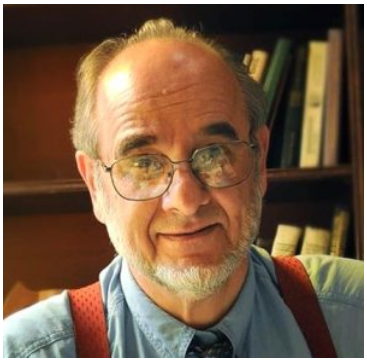
crucial in fostering empathy and understanding amongst the so many bystanders, both near and far.

The literary Arts thus can provide a significant doorway to open into a preciously vulnerable family home that was suddenly and forcefully abandoned in the middle of the night. The Young Turk despotic state had brutally declared an entire people an internal enemy and decreed that the Armenian inhabitants be violently removed once and for all. That fateful year of 1915 is now documented in history and etched in Armenian memory forever.

Tragically, the ongoing genocide of the Karabakh Armenians now in the 21st century reminds us that crimes of serial mass killing continue to brutally confront the Armenian people. Sadly, genocide remains a perilous prospect for the besieged Armenian nation.

We need to be resolute and sufficiently informed of the grave perils ahead. The mountains of the Caucasus do not constitute a sufficiently safe haven. And so, we pen painful accounts of our difficult existential odyssey. It is our sincere desire that amidst such adversity, we can still prevail against all odds.

You may click here to access the full YSU journal article.



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There are no comments yet.