2015

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The Forgotten Genocide

Eric Jimerson

The 20th century was host to many atrocities against humanity like the Holocaust, Rwandan genocide, and the Cambodian genocide. There is one genocide that was the predecessor to all of these and is rarely talked about. The Armenian genocide happened at the start of the 20th century and is one of the most under discussed genocides that happened during the century. In this paper I will discuss what happened to the Armenians during the Armenian genocide, what impacts it had on other genocides, and what can be learned from the Armenian genocide.

The Armenian genocide as it is known in general talk but not in political speech just had a remembrance ceremony to remember the 100th anniversary of the event. During World War 1 in April of 1915 the Ottoman Empire attempted to eradicate the Arminian subjects in its empire. Prior to World War 1 the Armenians and the ottoman government had their issues including massacres and coups. The genocide started with the killing of able body men that could fight, followed by the forced deportation of women, children, and those that could not fight. The deportations were death marches as the ottomans forced to march through the Syrian Desert to concentration camps that were set up. (Akçam, 2012) During the death marches Armenian women were subjected to rape and being sold as sex slaves among the ottoman soldiers.(Akçam, 2012) The efforts of the Ottomans to cull the Armenians was more than just death marches, concentration camps, starvation, and violent rape. The Ottomans also implemented mass burnings, drownings and toxin/viruses.(Lifton, 1986) As for the Ottomans and subsequently current day turkey they tried to hide the events from historical view by removing the town that the concentration camps were in from the map.
The Armenian genocide had a major impact on the genocidal events of the 20th century either directly or indirectly. Since the Armenian genocide has been called the 1st genocide of the 20th century by scholars one can argue that the lack of discussion and recognition of the genocide created justification for future genocides. In the first few pages of Forgotten Fire by Adam Bagdasarian there is a quote by Adolf Hitler “Who, after all, speaks today of the extermination of the Armenians?”. This quote shows that Hitler’s plans for the extermination of the Jewish people from Europe was directly influenced by the Armenian Genocide and that the world failed to hold the Ottoman Empire responsible or even have them acknowledge that what they did was a crime against humanity. Hitler continued to follow the Ottoman examples that he had learned from their genocide with forced deportation and concentration camps. They learned from the Ottomans and enhanced the concentration camps and made the use of toxic gas more effective at mass killings with disposal. (Lifton, p. 493) The Cambodian genocide lead by Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge is indirectly influenced by the events of the Armenian Genocide. The main goal that the Khmer Rouge set out was to create one social class by purification. The purification of Cambodia that Pot seeked was the removal of the upper class. (History Place, 1999) This removal of the educated is reminiscent of what happened during the Armenian genocide. The Armenians at the time although a minority were the more educated community within the empire, while the Ottomans were typically more farmers, shop owners and did not have value on education. The Rwandan Genocide falls into the same class struggle theme that Armenia and Cambodia had. In Rwanda we again see the class that has the educated people is persecuted by the larger farming peoples. (History Place, 1999)

The main things that can be learned from the Armenian genocide are, that groups responsible for genocide need to be held accountable immediately and not decades after
the crime. In the beginning of this paper it is stated that the term genocide to describe what happened to the Armenians is a scholar and general term rather than a political term. Currently there are only a few countries that have acknowledged the massacres as genocide. In April of 2015 during the remembrance of the genocide the European parliament called upon the Turkish government to recognize the event as genocide. (Yeginsu, 2015) The reaction that the Turkish President had to the call of the EU parliament was that “Whatever decision the European Parliament takes on Armenian genocide claims, it will go in one ear and out the other.” (Yeginsu, 2015) He continued to deny that the Turkish people were capable to commit an atrocity such as Genocide. He continued to accuse the EU of “acting as prosecutor, judge & jury”, and “once again been successful in alienating Turkey & the Turkish people.” (Yeginsu, 2015) Unlike the Holocaust were a convention was held to describe what would be considered genocide, the events of the Armenian genocide were only handled internally and there was no global repercussion for the Ottomans. Since the Ottomans were not held accountable for their Crimes by the world until much to late the current Turkish government does not see the sins that their predecessors as their own and makes it harder for them to be held accountable.

The events that happened during the First World War are considered to be the first genocide of the 20th century. The techniques and lack of responsibility for the Armenian genocide were used as a direct justification for the eradication of the Jewish people by Adolf Hitler. Not immediately holding groups accountable for the crimes that they committed makes it much harder to have them recognize and hold their group accountable for the crimes that were committed.
References.


