

POPULAR DISCOURSE AND GENOCIDE
 RECOGNITION:
 THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE IN THE
 AMERICAN PRESS DURING WWI

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INTRODUCTION

At nine years old, Kerop Bedoukian sensed disaster he could barely comprehend when the Ottoman government arrested his father, a prominent Armenian businessman, in 1915. Several days after the arrest, Bedoukian and his mother would join other displaced, scared Armenians on a sixty day march through the Syrian Desert. On the journey, Bedoukian watched a group of Turkish boys molest a young girl and then throw rocks at her when they finished. The Ottoman gendarmes supervising the march and ostensibly guarding the Armenians, did nothing. Even after the nameless girl drowned herself in the Euphrates River, no one stopped the boys from continuing to hurl stones at her dead body.¹ In adulthood Bedoukian came to understand that he witnessed and survived the Armenian Genocide, the systematic attempt to rid the collapsing

1 Kerop Bedoukian, *Some of us Survived*, (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1978), 49-50.

Ottoman Empire of its Armenian population through deportation and massacre.

The brutality of the Armenian Genocide featured prominently in the American Press during its commission, from approximately 1915 to 1923. The widespread publication of atrocities reveals important information about political and cultural themes that resonated with a largely isolationist American public. The popular conversation about the Armenian Genocide focused on diplomatic pressure that emphasized humanitarian values rather than Wilsonian internationalist politics, the kinship between American and Armenian identity, and the role of gendered violence in communicating the unique horror of the massacres.

American historiography covering the Armenian genocide focuses largely on high politics and the diplomatic relationship between the United States and Turkey. A related body of literature examines the role of international politics and critiques Western countries for condoning and/or enabling the genocide when it suited their political advantages.² This article builds on that scholarship by exploring the tenor of the U.S. national conversation about the Armenian Genocide using articles, journals, and books on the subject published during World War I, culminating in coordinated opposition to relations with the newly formed Turkish republic in 1926. Historian Peter Balakian records that *The New York Times* published 145 articles on the Armenian killing and deportation in 1915 alone, highlighting the Armenian Genocide as America's first introduction to the horror of killing on such a massive scale.³ A collection of American news

2 For two examples of such literature, look for Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2003) and Donald Bloxam, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

3 Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2003), 282, 286.

articles monitoring the events as they occurred, *The Armenian Genocide: News Accounts from the American Press: 1915-1922* contains copies of these articles that invite historical analysis about the way the larger American society received information about the Armenian Genocide. Of the 194 *New York Times* articles in Kloian's compilation, 70% appeared in the first four pages of the paper, 26% in the first two, and 10% on the front page. Kloian presents duplicates of the articles exactly as they appeared, instructing readers to perceive them as incontrovertible evidence of the Armenian Genocide.⁴

In the early twentieth century, *The New York Times* enjoyed increased readership under the leadership of Adolf S. Ochs, who rescued the struggling publication from the verge of bankruptcy by advertising a focus on more factual reporting contrasted with the sensationalism associated with William Randolph Hearst. In addition to reducing the price of the paper by two-thirds, Ochs also introduced different typeface, a new Sunday illustrated magazine, and a Saturday book review.⁵ During World War I, its reputation as a balanced view of current events and the new changes resulted in increased circulation from 250,000 to 390,000, representing a relatively large reader base for the time.⁶ Furthermore, *The New York Times* stood at the center of America's relief effort for the Armenians as the most prolific source of information about the Armenians. News of the Armenians travelled so successfully that President Herbert Hoover reminisced that "Armenia was in the front of the American mind...known to the American schoolchild only a little less than England."⁷

4 Richard Kloian (ed.), *The Armenian Genocide: News Accounts from the American Press: 1915-1922*, (Berkeley: Anto Printing, 1988), ix-x.

5 Alex S. Jones and Susan E. Tift, "Adolph S. Ochs," in *Editor & Publisher* Volume 132, Number 44, October 30, 1999, 14-15.

6 Elmer Holmes Davis, *History of the New York Times, 1851-1921*, (New York: J.J. Little & Ives, 1921), 331.

7 Balakian, 282.

The themes of Armenian Genocide coverage suggest that the target audience likely consisted of middle to upper-class white men with sufficient funds to purchase newspapers and respond to fundraising pleas, sufficient knowledge to find international politics interesting, and personal interest in defending “helpless” women and children. Analyzing the content of influential *New York Times* articles helps historians understand the public relationship to the Armenian Genocide as it happened, revealing the aspects that made recognizing the atrocities and helping the Armenians so crucial to Americans during and immediately after World War I.

THE GENOCIDE

A brief introduction to the genocide the articles depict provides necessary context for analyzing their content. The most widely accepted definition of genocide among scholars in the field is the one articulated in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 9, 1948. According to that definition, genocide involves the commission of at least one of five different acts against a particular “national, ethnic, racial, or religious group: 1) killing members of the group; 2) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; 3) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; 4) imposing measures to prevent births within the group; 5) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”⁸ From 1915 to 1922, the Ottoman government deported and/or executed Armenian government officials, religious and political leaders, and average men, women, and children. By the end of World War I, approximately one million civilians perished as a result

8 Richard G. Hovannisian (ed), *The Armenian Genocide in Perspective*, (Piscataway: Transaction Publishers, 1986), 44.

of starvation, abuse, and the brutal conditions of concentration camps along the forced march from Anatolia to the Syrian Desert.⁹ Moreover, Raphael Lemkin, a Polish-Jewish lawyer who originally coined the term “genocide” in 1943, referenced the Armenian case as a particular influence.¹⁰

With the Armenian Deportations, the Ottoman government committed all five of the crimes that legally constitute genocide. The Ottoman Minister of the Interior Talat Pasha organized and planned the deportations under the law known as the Provisional Act on the Evacuation of Suspect Persons, enacted on May 27, 1915.¹¹ The government deported the Armenian women and children from their homes on foot to the Syrian desert of DeirZor. Concentration camps along the route housed Armenians journeying from all over the empire, from Erzerum near the Russian Border to Zeitun, a town in what is now northwestern Turkey. The Ottoman government defended the deportations as a security measure against subversive Armenian nationalist groups; however, the indiscriminate nature of the deportations, the government sanctioned massacre of the civilian refugee population, and the deliberately brutal conditions the Armenians suffered resulted in one of the first genocides of the twentieth century.

Many of the women, children, and elderly walking the sixty day journey died of starvation and exhaustion. Ephraim K. Jernazian, an Armenian working as an Ottoman government translator in Urfa during the genocide, confirms the indiscriminate nature of the deportations. He recounts witnessing town leaders imprisoned, tortured, and murdered before

9 Historians continue to debate the exact number of casualties; estimates range from one hundred thousand to as high as three million. One million represents the current scholastic consensus.

10 Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 210.

11 Permanent Peoples' Tribunal, *A Crime of Silence: The Armenian Genocide*, Preface by Pierre Vidal-Naquet, (London: Zed Books, 1985), 72.

deportations began in his town.¹² Henry Morgenthau, United States Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, likewise recognized the comprehensive slaughter intended in the deportations and recorded his observation in his memoirs: “when the...authorities gave the orders for these deportations, they were merely giving the death warrant to a whole race; they understood this well, and, in their conversations with me, they made no particular attempt to conceal the fact.”¹³ Some gendarmes would purposely extend their march by making the Armenians walk in circles so that they would grow weaker and thus more likely to die. Eyewitnesses describe murders of Armenians taking place frequently during deportations by Kurdish and Turkish brigands attacking the caravans of people, stealing their valuables, and raping women. A government branch known as the Special Organization even released gangs of violent prisoners and sent them after the traveling Armenians.¹⁴ Due to the evidence of systematic, state-sanctioned brutality and murder, the majority of scholars argue that the Ottoman deportations and concurrent massacre of the Ottoman-Armenian population qualify as genocide.¹⁵

DIPLOMACY AS HUMANITARIANISM: POLITICS IN GENOCIDE COVERAGE

Although the concept of “genocide” did not yet exist, the officials drawing attention to the Armenian plight emphasized the uniquely terrible nature of the crime to galvanize relief efforts. Americans reading *The New York Times* and popular journals

12 Ephraim K. Jernazian, *Judgment Unto Truth: Witnessing the Armenian Genocide*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 64, 101.

13 Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*, (New York: Doubleday, Page, & Company, 1919), 309.

14 Deborah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, *Holocaust: A History*, (New York: W.W. Norton Company, Inc., 2003), 38.

15 For an overview of Armenian Genocide scholarship, reference Richard Hovannisian's *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999).

learned about the genocide through articles describing the vivid, personal agony of Armenian victims accompanied by calls for American intervention. Revelations about the treatment of the Armenians at the hands of the Ottoman government, a German ally, occurred simultaneously with increasingly tense strains on American neutrality in World War I. After the Germans bombed the British ocean liner *Lusitania*, whose passengers included 128 American citizens, in 1915 and later the unarmed French channel steamer *Sussex* in 1916, President Wilson's rhetoric began to shift subtly from strict isolationism to one of America as an international force for morality and humane values. In 1915, Wilson stated that "any nation that does violence to the principle of just international understanding is doing violence to the ideals of the United States...."¹⁶ In October 1916, Wilson declared that America would feel shame if it did not rally "in the interests of those who suffer, in the interests of those who are wronged... seeing to it that no man is put upon if we can prevent it, and that all men are confirmed in their home of a day of justice and liberty to come for them."¹⁷ Despite Wilson's suggestion of an American responsibility to prevent injustice where possible, his emphasis on neutrality in the war led to his successful reelection in 1916.¹⁸ The US entered the war in 1917 despite strenuous objections from isolationists and returned to an isolationist foreign policy after 1918. The press coverage of the Armenian genocide reflects the careful balance between asserting the importance of the United States as an international defender of morality while avoiding military entanglements. In 1915 and 1916, intervention meant fundraising assistance from the American public to aid Armenian deportation victims as well as diplomatic pressure on the Ottoman government, though calls for diplomatic pressure stay noticeably

16 Jason C. Flanagan, *Imagining the Enemy: American Presidential War Rhetoric from Woodrow Wilson to Geroge W. Bush*, (Claremont: Regina Books, 2009), 10.

17 Flanagan, 20.

18 Flanagan, 19.

vague about what that might entail.

Viscount James Bryce, the British Ambassador to the United States from 1907-1913, appears in the news frequently as one of the most vocal proponents of American intervention. Americans already knew Bryce for his 1889 book *The American Commonwealth*, hailed as “the most important work on American culture by a non-American since Tocqueville.”¹⁹ As a member of the House of Lords during World War I, Bryce often spoke against the Armenian Genocide and called on America to assist the victims. One article in *The New York Times* described Bryce’s account of the “heart-piercing” massacres that moved the House of Lords: “The House of Lords is a very unemotional assembly, but it was thrilled in every fibre at the story of the horrors compared to which even the atrocities of Abdul Hamid pale. As Lord Bryce truly said, there is not a case in history...where a crime so hideous and on so gigantic a scale has been recorded.”²⁰ Nine days later, *The New York Times* reported Bryce repeating his assertion during a proposal to condemn the atrocities, stating “The horrors of the massacre exceeded anything in the history of persecutions.”²¹ A respected figure denouncing the Armenian Genocide in such colorful terms demonstrates the caliber of the discussion appearing in the American press. The description of the august and impersonal House of Lords shaken to its core by the horrors described reinforces the unique devastation of the Armenian Genocide. The repetition of this sentiment appearing just over one week later suggests the publishers anticipated interest from their readers.

Stories about the atrocities often included pleas for

19 Balakian, 118.

20 “800,000 Armenians Counted Destroyed,” *The New York Times*, October 7, 1915, 3 in Richard D. Kloian (ed), *The Armenian Genocide: News Accounts from the American Press, 1915-1922* (Berkeley: Anto Printing, 1988), 60.

21 “Bryce Says Only Germany Can Save Armenians,” *The New York Times*, October 16, 1915, 8 in Kloian, 77.

American intervention based on a moral obligation to those suffering. Henry Morgenthau and James Bryce campaigned heavily in the public, and the American Committee on Armenian Atrocities joined the public relations efforts, with spokespeople frequently appearing in *The New York Times*. On September 21, 1915, Bryce foreshadowed Wilson's rhetoric in his appeal for more American aid, asserting that "[t]he civilized world, especially America, ought to know what horrors are passing in Asiatic Turkey during the past few months, for if anything can stop the destroying hand of the Turkish government it will be an expression of the opinion of neutral nations, chiefly the judgment of humane America."²² In his 1916 book, Bryce published a letter to the U.S. Consul at Tiflis in which the Rev. Robert S. Stapleton requested that Ambassador Morgenthau "intercede in the name of humanity against the wholesale slaughter..."²³ In addition to calls for diplomatic intervention, Morgenthau proposed raising a fund from one to five million dollars to "defray the expense of transporting thousands of Armenians to America to save them from slaughter at the hands of the Turks."²⁴ The calls for American involvement reflect the tension in American politics during 1915 and 1916, as those lobbying for intervention in the Armenian cause focus on diplomatic pressure as an effective tool to stop the massacres and fundraising to help transport the Armenians away from harm. Those lobbying for the Armenian cause echo Wilson's rhetoric of America as an international moral force, and likewise echo his caution - none of the appeals for aid published in *The New York Times* mention the idea of military intervention.

22 "Bryce Asks US to Aid Armenia," *The New York Times*, September 21, 1915, 3 in Kloian, 34.

23 "Zrzeroum: Letter, Dated 21st March, 1916, from the Rev. Robert S. Stapleton to the Hon. F. Willoughby Smith, U.S. Consul at Tiflis; Communicated by the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief" in James Bryce (ed.), *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-1916: Documents presented to Viscount Grey of Fallodon, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs by Viscount Bryce*. Preface by Viscount Bryce. (London: Sir Joseph Causton and Sons, Limited, 1916), 589.

24 "Admires Morgenthau Plan," *The New York Times*, September 15, 1915, 31 in Kloian, 31.

ARMENIANS AND AMERICANS: AN ETHICAL KINSHIP

Articles in *The New York Times* and popular journals emphasized the United States' moral responsibility to the Armenians not only based on the increasing rhetoric of America as an international force, but also because of kinship between the Americans and Armenians. In the early twentieth century, the ideal American citizen had a strong Christian (Protestant) faith, an indefatigable work ethic, and a stable family life (also, implicitly, white skin). In his memoirs, Morgenthau discussed the nature of Americans with a suspicious Ottoman diplomat, explaining that Christian schools established in Ottoman territories represent "the fine altruistic spirit" of the American people and recounted rags-to-riches stories of the Vanderbilt and Rockefeller families as well as a story of a man who "arrived in New York, a penniless and ragged boy," and ended his life a millionaire.²⁵ While a more detailed discussion of the nuances of American citizenship and its permutations is beyond the scope of this article, the aforementioned themes recur in press articles emphasizing the similarities between American and Armenian people.

Even before the genocide began, the narrative of the dangerous and depraved Islamic Turk oppressing the innocent Christian appeared frequently in the American press. Americans' prejudices against Turkish people originated from having little access to information about Islam or the Ottoman Empire; as a new country, upper-class Americans familiar with the Ottoman Empire knew only that it was not a democracy and responded to tales of Islam's hostility to Christianity. Cotton Mather, the influential seventeenth century Puritan minister, used "Turk" as a negative reference, such as calling for family prayer time by admonishing good Christians to be at least as good as the Turks or insulting the British by comparing their barbarity

to that of the Turks.²⁶ Missionary publications had a history of depicting the Turk in essentialist terms, characterizing the entire race as incapable of self-governance, naturally violent, and unproductive.²⁷ By 1914, the stereotype had proliferated in American culture and infused the discussion about Christians and Turks in the Ottoman Empire. In 1914, *The New York Times* ran a series of columns warning about Christian massacres, depicting the danger innocent Christian populations faced at the hands of Ottoman Turks. On November 12, 1914, an article entitled “Report Christians in Peril in Turkey,” described “brigandage, murder, and atrocities” against Armenians but also warning that “all Christians and foreigners” face “great danger.”²⁸ The next month, two additional articles close to the beginning of the paper lamented atrocities against Christians, one describing Turkish people spitting on Armenian “corpses suspended in the street” and forcing “Christians to do the same,” and another article on the same page with the headline “Turks Hang Christians in the Street.”²⁹ The graphic descriptions of disrespect to the dead and appalling Turkish behavior continue unabated in subsequent articles and publications, painting a dichotomy between the Armenian and Turkish people designed to garner sympathy for the Armenian cause.

In the pre-war period, the American press learned much of its information about the Ottoman Empire from the American Christian missionaries stationed there, bolstering association between Christianity, Armenians, and Americans based on their reports. One *New York Times* article contained a statement

26 Justin McCarthy, *The Turk in America: The Creation of an Enduring Prejudice*, (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2010), 9-10.

27 McCarthy, 155-157.

28 “Report Christians in Peril in Turkey,” *The New York Times*, November 12, 1914, 3 in Kloian, 2.

29 “Turkish Women Revolt” and “Turks Hang Christians in the Street,” December 14, 1914, 2 3 in Kloian, 2.

from Rev. Dr. James L. Barton, foreign secretary of the Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions, lamenting the fate of Christians in Turkey, including American missionaries: “Probably in all history, two hundred missionaries have never been called on to pass through more terrible experiences than have our missionaries in Turkey during the last nine or ten months and the end is not yet.”³⁰ Barton’s testimony adds a relatable dimension of American suffering for readers, depicting missionaries suffering with the pain of witnessing the seemingly unprecedented scale of atrocities and experiencing maltreatment themselves.

The testimony of American missionary Grace Higley Knapp illustrates the way accounts of the genocide lacked nuance and portrayed Christians as innocent victims of savage Muslims, emphasizing the flawless character of American Christians in her story. Knapp was stationed in the city of Van during brutal fighting between Armenian and Ottoman forces and published an account of her experience there, which Bryce included in *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-1916*. Knapp described anticipating the Turkish arrival, listening to artillery volleys while understanding that soon “hell would let loose in the crowded city and our crowded compound” in the form of “unspeakable atrocities perpetrated on the persons of those we loved,” expecting they would “probably suffer them in our own persons.”³¹ Knapp’s testimony echoes that of Dr. Barton, implying a relationship between the Americans and Armenians, both political and social outsiders in the majority Islamic Ottoman Empire because of their Christianity. Later in her testimony, Knapp declared, “The effect on its followers of the religion of

30 “Americans’ Death Laid to the Turks,” *The New York Times*, November 3, 1915, 9 in Kloian, 107.

31 “The American Mission at Van: Narrative Printed Privately in the United States by Miss Grace Higley Knapp (1915)” in James Bryce (ed.), *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-1916: Documents presented to Viscount Grey of Fallodon, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* by Viscount Bryce. Preface by Viscount Bryce. (London: Sir Joseph Causton and Sons, Limited, 1916), 39.

Islam was never more strongly contrasted with Christianity. While the Armenian refugees had been mutually helpful and self-sacrificing, these Moslems showed themselves absolutely selfish, callous and indifferent to each other's suffering." Likely unaware that it undermined her overall narrative, earlier in the same testimony she mentioned that remaining Armenians declined to help the American missionaries care for the Turkish elderly, women, and children left behind after the skirmish in Van.³² As a Christian missionary, Knapp's predictable denunciation of Islam as a pernicious influence on its followers is hardly surprising; however, her rhetoric reflects that of mainstream articles published in the popular American press before and after her story entered the public. This suggests that Knapp may have absorbed the anti-Islamic rhetoric already present in American culture and filtered her experiences in the Ottoman Empire through that lens. As part of Bryce's book, her testimony both reflects and perpetuates American-Armenian kinship and anti-Islamic stereotypes.

A separate narrative of the events at Van included in Bryce's work reinforces the friendly relationship between Americans and Armenians from the Armenian perspective. Readers of the Armenian-American journal *Gotchnag* in New York encountered a serial description of the conflict in Van from an Armenian identified as Mr. Y.K. Roushdi, and Bryce's work introduced the account to readers of his 1916 publication. Roushdi states that "Even the American missionaries confessed that they could not conceive how a Government could display such meanness and treachery towards citizens who had been so faithful in their duties. It is important to mention that the sympathies of the American missionaries had been with the Armenians at all times."³³ To an American audience, the characterization of Armenians as

32 Bryce, 41.

33 "Van: Narrative by Mr. Y.K. Rushdouni, Published serially in the Armenian Journal 'Gotchnag,' New York" in Bryce, 64.

faithful citizens contrasted with the “treacherous Turk” suggests parallels between the Armenians and the ideal of a hard working, dutiful American citizen. An article in *The Literary Digest* entitled “How Your Gift is Saving the Armenians” emphasizes the qualities of American international aid which correspond with the achievement ideas of the American Dream. The American Committee on Armenian Atrocities emphasized that its relief efforts would go to work programs rather than direct handouts, distributing labor assignments to Armenian men capable of working “with an eye to the future of the people,” and with exceptions “in the case of children and helpless women.”³⁴ These descriptions of Armenians using relief to work hard resemble the stories of industrious Americans building their success out of humble backgrounds that Morgenthau recounted to the Ottoman official.

Morgenthau returned to this theme of Armenians as hard-working, praiseworthy people in his pleas for fundraising aid. On September 14, 1915, *The New York Times* prominently featured Morgenthau’s plea for public aid to the Armenian cause. Morgenthau describes their plight and calls for coordinated political action: “Since May, 350,000 Armenians have been slaughtered or died of starvation. There are 550,000 Armenians who could be sent to America, and we need help to save them.” Morgenthau articulates a particularly American goal for the aid he requests, calling on “each of the Western States raise a fund to equip a ship to bring the number of settlers it wants. The Armenians are a moral, hard working [*sic.*] race, and would make good citizens to settle the less thickly populated parts of the Western States.”³⁵ Morgenthau characterizes Armenians as a

34 “How Your Gift is Saving the Armenians,” *The Literary Digest*, March 9, 1918, New York: Frank & Wagnalls Company in Richard D. Kloian(ed), *The Armenian Genocide: News Accounts from the American Press, 1915-1922* (Berkeley: Antio Printing, 1988), 223.

35 “Would send here 550,000 Armenians,” *The New York Times*, September 14, 1915, 2 in Kloian, 30.

desirable race that connects well with American values; he repeats the description of their upstanding citizenship (interestingly ignoring the revolutionary groups that, however small, did actually exist in the Ottoman Empire). He also praises their work ethic as a particularly useful trait for further settling the American West. The descriptions of the Armenian people in the American press reflect the values of American hard work and ingenuity.

The financial successes of relief organizations and Morgenthau's political actions in response to a public outcry demonstrate the efficacy of the campaign linking Armenians to Americans. Along with other prominent American missionary leaders, Dr. Barton would go on to found the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief (ASCAR), which collected \$89,970,293.06 in relief, the equivalent of over \$3 billion dollars today.³⁶ The success of the fundraising efforts reveals that appeals to Christian sympathies for the Armenian people successfully elicited donations. On May 15, 1915, *The New York Times* reported Ambassador Morgenthau's efforts to intercede on behalf of the Armenians after "a flood of communications from various parts of the country urging that steps be taken to protect native Christians in Armenia and in regions under Turkish control."³⁷ Morgenthau specifically states the public pressure came from a desire to protect Christians, indicating that publications about the suffering Armenians resulted in enough public pressure to motivate diplomatic action. Such a public outcry corresponded with Morgenthau's own goals of diplomatic intervention as an outspoken advocate of America's political importance in relieving the suffering in the region.

THE PLIGHT OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN

36 McCarthy, 165.

37 "Morgenthau Pleas for Armenians," *The New York Times*, May 10, 1915, 9 in Kloian, 13.

In addition to the emphasis on Christian suffering, depictions of the atrocities in the American press often included a gendered component, representing innocent Christian women and children as helpless victims of depraved Muslim Turks. Mentions of atrocities typically always included “outrages” against women and children, often in graphic detail. Depictions of helpless women that required urgent American aid and assistance came during a time in the United States when gender roles were in flux. Between 1914 and 1917, American women entered public life in unprecedented numbers as volunteers for the Red Cross, as organizers for peace, as integral workers in the US preparation for World War I, and, critically, as supporters of women’s suffrage. Gendered language in preparedness propaganda during 1915 and 1916 split along class lines, with portrayals of military discipline as important for masculinity and patriotic women as mothers protecting the nation as they would their own children prevalent among the upper class and activists among Socialists and working-class using gender to emphasize the importance of peace.³⁸ Appealing to politically engaged, largely upper-class readers, accounts of the Armenian genocide appealed to the sympathies of American men by recasting women in traditional roles of mothers and vulnerable, delicate ladies in need of rescue.

Depictions of women suffering often included intentionally shocking detail to underscore their desolation and vulnerability. In Bryce’s 1916 compilation of atrocities committed against the Armenian people, Bryce reprinted an interview with an Armenian refugee identified as Mrs. Gazarian that first appeared in the *Pioneer Press* in Minnesota, which included the following testimony: “I saw Turks bury Armenian victims with the dogs, divide the women among them as wives and throw babies in

38 Elizabeth McKillen, “Pacifist Brawn and Silk-Stocking Militarism: Labor, Gender, and Anti-War Politics, 1914-1918,” *Peace & Change* July 2008, Vol. 33 Issue 3: 393, 397-398.

the lake.”³⁹ Infant drowning recurs frequently in the published reports of atrocities in Turkey, either by Turkish cruelty or women at their wits’ end desiring to end the suffering of their children. For example, *The New York Times* ran an article entitled “Great Exodus of Christians,” chronicling Armenians attempting to flee Azerbaijan and the difficulties they faced. The article contains a description of “maddened women” throwing their own children into a river “or into pools in order to end their sufferings from cold and hunger.” It ends on a disheartening note, concluding “People died unheeded and unmourned. In fact, those who died seemed to be envied by the living.”⁴⁰ This article fuses appeals for Christian sympathy with gendered language to emphasize the great extent of their suffering.

Bryce often emphasized the suffering of women and children to illustrate the importance of his cause in his appeals for aid, echoing themes of Christian kinship as well as the importance of diplomacy. In his direct plea to Americans for assistance with stopping the atrocities, Bryce accuses the Turkish government of “extirpating Christianity by killing off Christians of the Armenian race” and emphasizes that “accounts from different sources agree that over the whole of...Asia Minor and Armenia the Christian populations are being deliberately exterminated, the men of military age being killed and the younger women seized for Turkish harems, compelled to become Mohammedans, and kept, with the children, in virtual slavery.”⁴¹ The danger of sexual exploitation emphasized in these accounts foreshadows the wartime propaganda that insisted on the necessity of American men adopting military service to safeguard American womanhood.⁴² Repetition also indicates the types of stories

39 “Van: Interview with a Refugee, Mrs. Gazarian, published in the *Pioneer Press* of St. Paul, Minnesota, USA” in Bryce, 76.

40 “Great Exodus of Christians,” *The New York Times*, April 26, 1915, 3 in Kloian 9.

41 “Bryce Asks US to Aid Armenia,” *The New York Times*, September 21, 1915, 3 in Kloian, 34.

42 McKillen, 411.

publishers believed resonated with the public, and their frequent repetition of similar stories suggests the success of this particular angle. Eight days after Bryce's call for Armenian aid, *The New York Times* features a story by Professor Samuel T. Dutton, Secretary of the Committee on Armenian Atrocities, relaying testimony from a refugee who escaped Turkey. She "told of the fate of the 100 [Armenian] girls who were attending a mission school in Turkey. These girls...were divided into groups, and those that were the best looking in the opinion of the Turkish officers were taken over by those officers. Those considered not quite so good-looking were given over to the soldiers, while those still less attractive were put up for sale to the highest bidders."⁴³ The crimes described against girls and women emphasize the cruelty of Turkish officials, whose barbarism often appears linked with their religion. The appeals for interference featured in *The New York Times* rely on images that correspond to traditional American visions of womanhood as passive and delicate, reaffirming traditional gender roles to male readers that may have found the developments of women entering the public sphere uncomfortable. In their use of gendered imagery to convey the seriousness of the genocide, published accounts emphasize both the Christian identity of the women in question and their helpless condition to convince Americans of the crucial need to aid the Armenians. Combined with other rhetoric extolling America's unique moral standing in the international community as a humanitarian rather than military actor, accounts of the genocide before World War I reflect broader political and social trends in the United States at the time.

THE TREATY OF LAUSANNE

The public denunciations of Ottoman atrocities, the demonization of the Turkish race, and advocacy on behalf of

43 "Armenian Women Put Up at Auction," *The New York Times*, September 29, 1915, 3 in Kloian, 47.

the Armenian people recurred in opposition literature to the American-Turkish Treaty of Lausanne. In 1923, the United States sent delegates to Lausanne, Switzerland to advise negotiations between the newly established Turkish republic and allied powers to formally end the fighting between them. Since the United States never declared war on the Ottoman Empire, the government did not participate directly in the main treaty negotiations. They did, however, begin separate negotiations with Turkey to re-establish diplomatic and economic ties that had been severed in 1917 when the United States declared war on Germany. Several years of debate about the resumption of warm diplomatic relations and economic cooperation followed, with supporters arguing that the secular, modernizing platform of Kemal Ataturk, the leader of the Turkish Republic, signaled an advantageous opportunity for cooperation and opponents revisiting language of Armenian victimization and American moral responsibility.⁴⁴

The themes present in the opposition literature mirror those calling attention to the Armenian plight before World War I. The American Committee Opposed to the Lausanne Treaty, formed in 1923 by influential missionary groups and Armenian advocates, published a series of statements and opinions by prominent public figures all arguing against ratification, a significant number of which appealed to American's Christian solidarity with the Armenians as sufficient reason to reject closer relations with the newly formed Turkish state. The first section of the publication presents "Authoritative Opinions on the Lausanne Treaty and the Turks by 56 Americans," including Morgenthau who emphatically declares, "I am unalterably opposed to the Treaty."⁴⁵ Morgenthau's opinion comes shortly after that of Charles W. Eliot, who

44 Robert L. Daniel, "The Armenian Question and American-Turkish Relations, 1914-1927," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, September 1959, Volume 46, Number 2: 267. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1891527> Accessed April 25, 2012.

45 Cardashian, Vahan. *The Lausanne Treaty, Turkey and Armenia*, (New York: American Committee Opposed to the Lausanne Treaty, 1926), 18.

emphasizes the importance of Christianity in the opposition: “How strange it is that nobody gives the real reason why we should have nothing to do with the Turks! The present Turks are the descendants and heirs of those Turks who for centuries have harassed and butchered the Christian population within their borders, and are themselves continuing the same practices to an even more revolting degree.”⁴⁶ Statements by church groups, pastors, and missionaries repeat Eliot’s reasoning. A vivid example come from Fred Perry Powers, a missionary born to missionary parents, who asked, “...are we going to grasp the bloody hand of the Turk, who is as unspeakable as he was in Gladstone’s day, and let bygones be bygones for the sake of what money we can make by trading with him?”⁴⁷ Just as Armenians appeared as unequivocally innocent victims in American publications, Turks appear as equally violent and deranged, with only rare mentions of kindness towards Armenians in a select few of the American publications addressing the genocide. The depictions of innocent Armenians and violent Turks imply the immutable nature of such characteristics, repeating earlier appeals to America’s international moral responsibilities based on kinship with the Armenians through their seemingly American attributes of loyalty, piety, and hard work as well as through their Christian identification.

The congressional rejection of the treaty in 1927 indicates the success of opposition campaigns, but the rejection did not impact American-Turkish relations in the long run. Significant economic interests, specifically involving the Chester Oil Company and its interest in access to Turkish resources, and political interest in moving forward from the conflicts of the war resulted in resumption of relations one month after the rejection of the treaty via an official exchange of notes. Objections came only from groups like The American Committee Opposed to the

46 Cardashian, 17.

47 Cardashian, 99.

Laussane Treaty, and the Armenian question began to recede from public memory.⁴⁸

CONCLUSION

The popular conversation surrounding the Armenian genocide involved themes important to American politics and social identity. In 1915 and 1916, advocates for intervention and aid in the Armenian cause adopted President Woodrow Wilson's rhetoric of America's moral responsibility towards oppressed peoples without alienating an isolationist public wary of the "European war." Descriptions of the moral quality of Armenians linked them with prevalent notions of ideal American citizenship, notably ideas of devout Christianity, industry, and hard work. Publications about Armenian victimhood underscored their plight using gendered imagery that depicted Armenian women according to traditional ideas of masculine strength and feminine delicacy in a time of transitioning gender roles in the United States.

The reflection of the Armenian genocide through issues resonant with the American political and social landscape suggests an interesting starting point for future genocide recognition. The question of Armenian Genocide recognition recurs in American politics to this day, complicated by the U.S. reliance on strategic military and political alliances with Turkey to advance foreign policy objectives. As the Armenian Genocide fades from recent historical memory and approaches its centennial, the global significance of American and Turkish relations makes studying the popular influences on genocide recognition and denial a crucial part of breaking the relative silence.