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RESISTING GENOCIDE

The Multiple Forms of Rescue

Editors

Jacques Semelin
Claire Andrieu
Sarah Gensburger

Translated by
Emma Bentley and Cynthia Schoch

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CONTENTS

PART II

THE STATE, ITS BORDERS AND THE CONDITIONS FOR AID

PART III

NETWORKS, MINORITES AND RESCUE

The translations of the French chapters have been written by:

Emma Bentley: Chapters 3, 11, 13, 14, 17, 21, 24, 26, 27, 29.
Cynthia Schoch: All introductions, chapters 1, 5, 7, 8, 15, 23, 25 and the conclusion.

2

IN SEARCH OF "THE RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE"

THE CASE OF THE ARMENIAN MASSACRES OF 1915

Fatma Müge Göçek

The "Righteous," as the word is used here, refers to those people who value the principles of humanity over all else, including their own lives, to help the victims of systematic and intentional organized aggression. The present contribution attempts to develop a socio-historical critique of the applicability of this concept to all the genocides and massacres throughout the world, past and present. In it, I first investigate the historical emergence of the concept and critique its close connection to the Judeo-Christian experience in Europe in general and the experience of the Holocaust in particular. I then turn to the empirical case of the systematic deportations and massacres of the Armenians by the Ottoman government in 1915 and focus specifically on the case of one "Righteous" person, Hüseyin Hatemi, who helped the Armenians at the cost of his own life. I employ this empirical case to articulate the problems that might arise with the employment of the historical experience of the Holocaust as a model through which to interpret other tragedies. From my empirical analysis, I conclude the article with two proposals in relation to the concept of "the Righteous people": (i) to expand the concept of "the Righteous people" to include the Muslim experience through the introduction into the scholarly discussion of the term "the just people," based on the Islamic notion of *'adala;* and (ii) to compose the community

that would decide upon who these just people ought to be, from an international body of scholars, but never representatives of states.

The emergence of the notion of "Righteous people"

Most scholars[1] have identified the European Enlightenment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as the period when all the social sciences still practiced today were established. Indeed, it was first with the European Renaissance and then with the Enlightenment that the world lost its sacred roots for the first time, as humans decided that it was the individual rather than God who gave shape to the way one lived. The subsequent systematic study of the social, political, economic and psychological rules and principles of human organization formed the bases of the various social science disciplines. At the same time, the scientific method based on rationality that united them all replaced the sacred, God-given order it had been predicated upon until then. The eventual mastery over the environment through technology and the subsequent accumulation of material resources created the Industrial Revolution; the search for new markets that followed brought about wars among the European powers and led to their imperialist expansion throughout the globe.

The concomitant debates around the distribution of these resources among the peoples generated the ideological revolution of democratization symbolized by the French Revolution and its motto of "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity," whereby the relationship between the ruler and his subjects was gradually transformed into a social contract symbolically signed between the state and the citizens. The concepts of "liberty" and "equality" helped minimize the divisions that existed among subjects along religious, ethnic and racial lines; the newly emerging citizen acquired rights and responsibilities directly in relation to the state. Indeed, the rights of citizens initially expanded to overcome existing ethnic and religious divides, until the concept of "fraternity" wrought havoc, for not only did "brotherhood" remain confined to men, but the imagined community

[1] Ira Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment: Political Knowledge after Total War, Totalitarianism and the Holocaust*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2003; Jeffery Alexander, "Modern, Anti, Post, and Neo: How Intellectuals Explain 'Our Time'," *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003.

of citizens it generated helped foster the ideology of nationalism.[2] The concept of "fraternity" quickly became exclusionist as it included certain social groups in the new political community at the expense of others.[3] Having no qualms about destroying the lives of those who were judged not to belong to this new imagined community, the concept also started to sacralize the interests of the state at the cost of human beings.

This destructive force of nationalism eventually reached such a degree that the wars of the twentieth century ended up being the bloodiest in human history. In Europe, the Jewish community suffered the most from these new social forces during World War II as 6.5 million Jews were destroyed by the Nazis. As the Jews had been mostly confined to urban centers throughout Europe as a minority community, they had initially benefited very much from the European Enlightenment and the ideas of liberty and equality to become full citizens of the newly formed republics. But whether they ever were a part of the "fraternity" was highly questionable, as was signaled by the Dreyfus Case in France before World War I and, of course, as indicated by the tragedy of the Holocaust in Germany during World War II. With the Holocaust, the idea of progress that had been the crowning glory of the Enlightenment and had motivated the Europeans to civilize the entire world after their own image suddenly became very problematic: the West lost its innocence and its unconditional belief and trust in science and technology, and in its ability to better itself and others.[4]

The lesson of the twentieth century in general and the Holocaust in particular was that even though humankind had mastered control over nature, it had not mastered control over people's capacity to destroy one another. How was it possible, the question remained, for the Western world that claimed to be the most civilized of the world during the past century to overcome this self-destructive streak? It was therefore no accident that with the advent of the twenty-first century the search for peace and reconciliation has become such a predominant aim in the West as

[2] Julia Adams, "The Rule of the Father: Patriarchy and Patrimonialism in Early Modern Europe," in Charles Camic *et al.* (ed.), *Max Weber's Economy and Society*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2005, pp. 245–6.

[3] John Dryzek, "Political Inclusion and the Dynamics of Democratization," *The American Political Science Review*, 90 (3), 1996, pp. 475–88.

[4] Ira Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment*, op. cit., and Jeffery Alexander, *The Meanings of Social Life*, op. cit.

leaders seek a new world order that could somehow leave behind the twentieth-century heritage marked by nation-states, two world wars, and the bloodiest century in human history.[5] Especially after the end of the Cold War, and since the last two decades of the twentieth century that very much reduced international tensions, peace has become the primary aspiration of the twenty-first century.

The theoretical framework of the narrative outlined above was developed by the Frankfurt School, which focused exclusively on identifying the societal elements and processes that produced the Holocaust. In so doing, the School identified the elements of the authoritarian personality and the dynamics of fascism, and generated from these the methodology of aggressive criticism.[6] It was through this methodology that Jürgen Habermas was able to challenge the value-neutrality of science and technology, as well as highlighting the connection between knowledge and human interests. Habermas has further contended that the knowledge generated by the scientific method does not naturally result in human salvation but, unless guided by moral and ethical considerations, can just as easily be manipulated to lead to human destruction.

Ironically, it seems that when Enlightenment science and rationality replaced the sacred, they underestimated the significance of religious ethics and morality in bringing order to society. The moral void created by the inability of science/reason/rule of law of the Enlightenment to fulfill the ethical functions of religion/belief/divine rule led individuals to abuse science and rule of law to destroy one another. The possibility that other holocausts could occur led the Frankfurt school to raise the question as to how to formulate the elements of a new secular ethical order of the Enlightenment. As the Frankfurt School and the critical theory it gener-

[5] I think the vision of the European Union is particularly significant in this context, for it aspires to define and relate to human beings in a way that surpasses the narrow confines of identity instilled in them by their nation-states and those states' naturalized nationalism. The European vision aims to highlight past and present human experience with the intimate belief that humankind will ultimately persevere as it first uncovers the good, the "Righteous" and the just in its own past and present and as it then reproduces these uncovered elements for its future. The United States unfortunately lacks such a vision at the moment.

[6] Bert Adams and Rosalind A. Sydie, "Critical Theory: the Frankfurt School and Habermas," *Contemporary Sociological Theory*, Thousand Oaks, Pine Forge, 2002, pp. 59–88.

ated had already revealed how powerful interests, especially those of the state, shaped knowledge, thinkers such as Michel de Certeau[7] and James C. Scott[8] and others proceeded further to identify the sites and peoples that had managed to resist such hegemonic forces against all odds and had held on to certain ethical beliefs.

The concept of "the Righteous people" ought first to be historically contextualized within the Enlightenment narrative outlined above. Within such a context, the code of ethics of "the Righteous people" is especially significant, for it attests to resistance against the German state forces of fascism and restores hope in the future of humanity. It remains ironic, however, that the secular thinkers of the Enlightenment could not find a term other than "Righteous," because the term originates in the Judeo-Christian religious tradition, where it refers to people who abided by a set of presumably "correct" religious principles that the Enlightenment project had tried so hard to replace with secular values. So my first criticism pertains to the religious origins of a term developed in connection with acts of violence that emerge as a consequence of modernity that is predicated on secularism. Until now, studies have tended to naturalize and therefore neglect the religious origin of the notion of "Righteous," because the secular framework in which it is used, as well as the promise it holds for all of humanity, leads to an assumption that its origin is also secular. Owing to the religious origin that nevertheless underlies the notion, the Muslim ends up being excluded from it, as Muslim tradition is different.

My second criticism of the concept of "the Righteous people" is related to the boundaries of the religion upon which it has been predicated. In this case, I derive my theoretical insights from Subaltern Studies that emerged in the Indian subcontinent at the end of the twentieth century with the aim of questioning and ultimately removing the ideological hegemony of the British over Indian history.[9] Even though India had

[7] Michel de Certeau, "On the Oppositional Practices of Everyday Life," *Social Text*, 3, Fall 1980, pp. 3–43, and *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988.

[8] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Hidden Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1990.

[9] Patomaki Heikki, "From East to West: Emergent Global Philosophies—Beginnings of the End of Western Dominance?" *Theory, Culture and Society*, 19 (3), 2002, pp. 89–111, and Guha Ranajit, *History at the Limit of World-History*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2002.

been decolonized, this school of thought holds, knowledge about India was still epistemologically colonized. Its scholars have argued that uncovering the power relations embedded within contemporaneous historical texts would eventually unravel this British hegemony. Dipesh Chakrabarty[10] then applied these insights to European history, stating that the history of Europe in general and the Enlightenment in particular had always narrated events by giving primacy to the role of Europe at the expense of the rest of the world, and this skewed narrative could only be corrected by "provincializing" the role of Europe as a social actor in world events.

When a Subaltern analysis is applied to the concept of "the Righteous people," the insight that emerges is that the term as it is defined at present privileges the European Judeo-Christian experience to the detriment of the experiences of the rest of the world. This is of course because the Armenian case involves, in addition to Christianity, another major monotheistic religion, that of Islam. Hence, my other argument is that the concept of "the Righteous people" has to be reformulated in a manner that also includes the Muslim experience. And such an analysis ought to commence with a discussion of what is/could/ought to be analogous to the "Righteous" person in the case of the Armenian deportations and massacres of 1915, and that is what I undertake next.

"The Righteous people" and the Armenian case

It is noteworthy that the massacres of the Armenians in 1915 were neither a part of the historical narrative of the European Enlightenment nor a part of its subsequent degeneration as witnessed by the Holocaust. The reasons for this exclusion of the Armenian case from European history were temporal, epistemological and ontological. First, temporally, what happened to the Armenians in 1915 obviously preceded the Holocaust by about two decades. Second, epistemologically, as Edward Said[11] so vividly demonstrated, the Ottoman Empire in general and the governing elite of Young Turks at the time of 1915 in particular were considered by Western Europe a part of the "uncivilized" East—as such, they could not abide, and were not thought able to abide, by the same "civilized" rules

[10] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998.

[11] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York, Pantheon, 1978.

and principles of European modernity. This was assumed to be the case by all the European powers, even though all the Western European leaders of the time were at least factually aware that not only were the perpetrators of the crimes against the Armenians, namely the high-ranking members of the Committee of the Union and Progress, among the most educated people of the Ottoman Empire, but they had received Western-style education. Almost all of them had had instruction in at least one Western language and had spent some years, often in exile prior to assuming power in 1908, in Paris, Berlin or London; in addition, of these leaders, the most notorious perpetrators such as Dr Nazım, Dr Bahaeddin Şakir, and Dr Mehmet Şahingiray were, as their titles indicate, trained as physicians presumably to save lives rather than to destroy them.

The violent actions of the members of the Committee of the Union and Progress against the Armenian subjects of their own empire were actually the first public display in human and European history of the dark underbelly of the Enlightenment, of what happened when the new secular Enlightenment principle of the sacredness of the state gained priority over the primacy of human life. The debate on the French Revolution and the Terror, implemented by the Jacobin revolution, prefigured the "dark side" of reason and showed that it was not negotiated to secure liberty for everyone. *Ethnos* had replaced *demos*, the "people" were replaced by ethnicity, and the liberty project became a nationalism project.[12] Yet Western Europe was not ready to include this first massacre of modernity in its historical narrative because it had epistemologically excluded the Ottoman Empire from the boundaries of its civilized world.

This epistemological exclusion also turned into an ontological one, as what occurred in the Ottoman Empire was interpreted as a "barbarous" act that was totally inexplicable according to the premises and principles of the civilized and enlightened Western world. I believe it was this shortsightedness of Western Europe in failing to see, recognize and identify what happened in the Ottoman Empire to the Armenians as the first instance of the dark side of the Enlightenment that ultimately led to their failure to prevent the occurrence of the Holocaust two decades later.

[12] Eric J. Hobsbawm "The Making of a 'Bourgeois' Revolution," *Social Research*, 56 (1), 1989, p. 8; Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005; Charles Tilly, *The Vendee*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1976.

When one turns from a general discussion of the concept of "the Righteous people" to the particular case of the Armenian massacres of 1915, two additional problems emerge that are not at all pertinent in the case of the Holocaust on which the concept is predicated. The first problem stems from the current political stand of the Turkish state in relation to the Armenian massacres, as opposed to that of the German state in relation to the Holocaust. Not only does the Turkish state deny that what happened to the Armenians in 1915 was a genocide, it does not even agree that they were uncalled-for massacres; the official Turkish stand on this issue constantly highlights that Turks were also massacred by the Armenians. The Turkish state attempts to marginalize what happened to the Armenians and employ everything in its power to push its viewpoint. Because of this particular stand of the Turkish state and the laws it has promulgated to support this stand, it is actually against the law in Turkey to argue that what occurred in 1915 was genocide. It therefore becomes very difficult and dangerous to collect oral histories about "Righteous people" who helped the Armenians and to identify the families of such individuals still living in Turkey today.

The second problem relates to identifying the social actors from within Turkey whose actions could be identified in ways that are analogous with those within the category of the "Righteous." There has been very little systematic research on this topic[13] except for the occasional mention of such names in the accounts by Armenian survivors or some Turkish memoirs.[14] My own analysis of the life stories of those who protected the Armenians has revealed almost all of them to be in opposition to the Committee of the Union and Progress (CUP) which was the most significant group in perpetrating the crimes against the Armenians in 1915. Even though the CUP was briefly out of power from 1918 to 1922, the

[13] I should note here that to date, there have only been, to my knowledge, two conference papers on "altruistic" Turks, the most recent one presented by Sarkis Seropyan at the 2005 Istanbul conference on the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire which was held at Bilgi University in September 2005, and the earlier one delivered by Richard Hovannisian at the 2003 Workshop on Armenian Turkish Scholarship at the University of Michigan, entitled "Intervention and Altruism during the Armenian Genocide."

[14] An example is the article by Hasan the Circassian, also known as "Hasan Amca," that appeared in the *Alemdar* newspaper (1919), where he mentions those Armenians he saved from the Syrian desert upon the orders of Cemal Pasha and against the machinations of Talat Pasha.

proto-nationalist ideology it advocated was ultimately sustained by the leaders of the Turkish Independence Struggle, who were predominantly former members of the CUP, as well as the Turkish Republic that these leaders subsequently founded.[15] Hence the CUP ideology that perpetrated the crimes against the Armenians—and that therefore prevented and often punished those who helped the Armenians rather than sanctioning their behavior as "Righteous"—has reproduced itself in Turkey to this day. As a consequence, not only have the actions of "the Righteous people" who opposed the CUP and protected the Armenians in 1915 remained unacknowledged and unrewarded in Turkey, but such people have actually been silenced either by death, imprisonment, exile or withdrawal from public life.

Actually, the official Turkish state instead devised its own category of "the Righteous people" in direct contrast to those who helped the Armenians: it rewarded those perpetrators of the massacres on the grounds that they had placed the interests of the state above the preservation of the lives of the Armenians. They did so by granting them significant positions within the elite cadres of the state or, if they had died, ordered the state to provide financially for their family members. This decision of the Turkish state underscores the significance of the composition of any reference group that actually determines "the Righteous": when it is the state that prioritizes its own political interests above all else in making that choice, the group of people who are identified are often not the ones defined in accordance with the humanitarian interests implied by the concept. It is for this reason that I strongly take issue with the presence on such a committee of representatives of any particular state.

I now want to further articulate how and why certain people took a stand against the CUP decision and what their subsequent fate was, through the empirical analysis of one such person, Hüseyin Nesimi, whom I came across while studying contemporaneous Turkish memoirs. Only through such an empirical endeavor can the actual search for such people, with principles that challenge loyalty to state commands, commence. I should also point out that the case also empirically articulates the two points I argue in this article: first, that the concept of "the Righteous people" has to be expanded to that of "the just" so as to include the

[15] Erik Zürcher, *The Unionist Factor: The Role of the Committee of Union and Progress in the Turkish National Movement, 1905–1926*, Leiden, Brill, 1984.

Muslim experience as well, and second, that the group deciding who "the just and the Righteous" are should not include any state representatives.

The case of Hüseyin Nesimi

Let me first briefly sketch the historical events of 1915. The nineteenth century witnessed the imperialist expansion of Europe at the expense of the Ottoman Empire, which was structurally unable to meet the challenges presented by the rising West. The most significant internal indication of this inability was the Empire's failure to reform in order to bring equality to all its subjects regardless of their religion. The Ottoman social structure had been based on Islamic legal principles that favored Muslims over non-Muslims, who had minority status as self-governing communities known as *millets*. Such an arrangement had been satisfactory for both the Muslims and the minorities until the seventeenth century. After the advent of Enlightenment ideas and the emergence of the concept of citizenship, however, all the subjects of empires started to aspire for equality regardless of their religion. Of the three non-Muslim minorities of Greeks, Armenians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire, those in the Balkans were eventually able to acquire their political rights with the establishment of first the Greek state and later the Serbian, Romanian and Bulgarian states. Jews started to think of Palestine as their homeland and purchase settlements there.

As for the Armenians, their homeland was much closer to the capital of the Ottoman Empire in Constantinople and they were more scattered throughout Anatolia in the eastern regions around Van and the southeastern regions around Cilicia. Their transformation from subjecthood to citizenship followed a more checkered path as most diligently worked with the Ottoman state to bring about the social, political and economic reforms that would benefit all the Ottomans, while some joined Armenian revolutionary parties that advocated more violent means of armed rebellion for independence by forcing Western intervention in the affairs of the Ottoman Empire. Even though the Ottoman Empire did indeed undertake a series of reforms and the Armenians participated in Ottoman government in the nineteenth century and officially until 1914, ultimately the attempts to improve the conditions of rural and small town Armenian subjects, or to erase their unequal status within the Ottoman state dominated by Muslim Turks, failed.

The eve of World War I witnessed polarization of the situation with the advent of the ideology of nationalism. The reform-minded officials of the Committee of Union and Progress first intervened in 1908 to replace the autocratic rule of the Sultan predicated on religion with constitutional rule predicated on law and reason. Yet it proved extremely difficult to get both the subjects as well as the officials themselves to abide by the newly established laws. As country after country declared war against the Ottoman Empire, CUP officials had to resort more and more to violence to maintain order. This polarization through war and violence led in 1913 to a coup as a radical fraction of military minded officials within the CUP assumed direct power, thereby creating a very dangerous political context.

It was this proto-nationalist group in power that first defined the preservation of its power and of the Ottoman state, at all costs, as their top priority and sacred duty. Such a definition led them to view all activities relating to the reform of the empire as major threats and treasonous acts. Not only were the Armenian political parties and leaders that had asked for intervention of the Great Powers to bring about these reforms viewed as threatening the well-being of the Ottoman Empire, but so were all Armenian civilians regardless of age or sex living peacefully throughout Anatolia. All were now perceived as "potential threats" that had to be removed, to be replaced by "safe" populations like Turkish Muslims, who themselves had recently been forcibly and violently removed through massacres during the Balkan wars, and who would not seek Western intervention (and the West would not have been interested in them anyway).

Hence the parameters of the conflict between the Armenians and the Turks as it appears today were delineated in the years 1915–1917 during World War I, when the Ottoman Turkish government orchestrated the deportation and massacre of an estimated one million Armenians from throughout Anatolia which had been their ancestral lands for thousands of years. The government justified its actions then as the removal of a perceived threat against the Ottoman state. On the basis of victims' testimonies, eyewitness accounts of foreigners, Western consular reports and other documentation, the world community of scholars eventually identified and termed what happened to the Armenians as genocide.

It is within this larger historical framework that I introduce the case of a "Righteous" person, Hüseyin Nesimi. Information about Hüseyin

Nesimi emerges through the memoir of his son Abidin Nesimi,[16] a critic of the CUP. The memoir first carefully traces the trail of violence that the Committee of the Union of Progress engaged in prior to the Armenian massacres. Nesimi notes in particular[17] that the Salonika faction within the Committee eliminated with brute force not only the spies of Sultan Abdülhamid II, but also its own political opponents such as the journalists Hasan Fehmi, Ahmet Samim and Zeki Bey, through assassinations planned and executed by a special secret organization within the CUP named the *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*.

This Special Organization was very instrumental in executing the murders of especially prominent Armenian intellectuals and political leaders. The Circassian Ahmed Bey, who was the most significant member of the Salonika faction, was responsible "for the murders of the Ottoman Armenian deputies Vartkes, Zohrab and Dikran Kelekyan in the vicinity of Bilecik."[18] Later, with the onset of World War I, this Special Organization was divided into internal and external branches; while the external branch continued its activities outside the empire, the internal one "secured safety and public order, directed local resistance movements on those Ottoman lands brought under enemy occupation, and conducted guerilla warfare."

Nesimi discusses one commander in this internal branch in particular who becomes pertinent to this case, Dr Reşit Şahingiray. He notes that:

> Şahingiray had taken on the responsibility of organizing Eastern Anatolia and Iraq [...] arranging as his strike force an itinerant Circassian gendarmerie. This trustworthy gendarmerie did not surpass twenty in number. The Circassians Harun, Davut (who worked during the advent of the Turkish War of Independence with Rauf Orbay who in turn was to later become the commander-in-chief of the Turkish military), and Ethem comprised Şahingiray's cadre [...]. Şahingiray had also formed a Kurdish militia organization and placed this militia under the

[16] Abidin Nesimî, *Yılların Içinden (From Inside the Years)*, Istanbul, Gözlem, 1977.

[17] Ibid., p. 34.

[18] Nesimî also recounts (ibid., p. 36) how the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa was eventually prevented from committing unsolved murders within the country and charged instead with collecting information and instigating rebellions in North Africa, Iran and India and within Russia. Their name was converted into the Directorate of Eastern Affairs (*Umur-u Şarkiye Müdürlügü*) and thus into an apparatus of the state connected to the General Chief of Staff (*Genelkurmay*).

> command of the gendarmerie. This militia served in the 1915 deportation of the Armenians [...] initially worked in Iraq for the Special Organization without a title and then became the governor of Diyarbekir and carried out the Armenian deportation business. Many unsolved murders occurred when Şahingiray occupied these posts. Among those murdered was, in addition to Basra governor Ferit, Müntefek district governor Bedii Nuri, the deputy kaymakam of Besiri, journalist Ismail Mestan, also the kaimakam of Lice, and Hüseyin Nesimi [who was the author's father].[19]

So Nesimi discloses not only that Şahingiray was active in deporting the Armenians especially through the use of his Circassian and Kurdish militias during which many unsolved murders occurred, but also that he assassinated some members of the Ottoman administrative cadre who were opposed to the massacres he was undertaking.

In short, Şahingiray, who was a member of both the CUP and the Special Organization, first carried out covert operations in Iraq and was then officially appointed governor of Diyarbekir by the Ottoman state. Once he was the governor, he employed two militia forces comprising Kurds and Circassians to engage in illegal activities. It was probably through these forces that he perpetrated massacres of Armenians while deporting them, and also murdered Ottoman administrators, including Hüseyin Nesimi, who opposed his illegal actions against the Armenians.

Nesimi then recounts in more detail how his father was murdered. He first notes, "My father's murder was closely associated with the Armenian deportations," and then proceeds to discuss how "the Armenians had connections with the Western imperialist countries in accordance with their denominations... [and that] the Armenian interests were not in breaking up the empire and establishing an Armenian state, but in transforming the empire into a social federal state or, to put more clearly, into an Ottoman social state based on human rights and freedom."[20] Hence, unlike the radical fragment of the CUP that polarized and demonized the Armenians, Nesimi presents a more nuanced description of the spectrum of ideas and opinions within the Armenian community. He then discusses the destructive role of the world powers in both the Armenian rebellions and the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, stating how neither the Ottoman Unionists nor the Dashnak Armenians (followers of the nation-

[19] Ibid., p. 37, p. 39.

[20] Ibid., pp. 40–6.

alist party Dashnaktsutiun) were aware of this reality.[21] In so doing, however, he also points out how the Dashnak Armenians were just as radicalized and destructive as the CUP, and that the inability to perceive this reality was probably due to the polarization that had already set in.

Nesimî then discusses the reasons for the Armenian deportations:

> it would have been meaningless for the Union and Progress central committee to attempt massacres under the pretense of deportations. This was also not in accordance with the *sharia*. According to the *sharia*, only the murder of those who have erred in their loyalty to a legal state (that is, under the condition of *nakz-ı ahd* and *nakz-ı vefa*) is religiously permissible. Accordingly, the Prophet Muhammed had put the Jewish Ben-i Kureysh tribe to sword, but not touched the children and the innocent. As the Ottoman state had been established in accordance with the principles of the *sharia* and therefore had to act in accordance with them, only those who had erred in their loyalty should have been murdered and others should not have been killed, but deported instead. This view was defended by those mentioned above [including his father] who were murdered themselves [by the band of Circassian Ahmed]. The Union and Progress central committee also shared the same view [...] and had considered as a precaution the murder of those who had erred in their loyalty and the deportation of the innocent Armenians. Yet the Kurdish militia organization established by Şahingiray and others who carried out the deportation turned it into a massacre. And the Union and Progress central committee partially turned a blind eye to this. There were times when they did not do so as well ... such as in the case of Vartkes, Kelekyan and others [...]. In short, while the decision of the central committee was deportation [of the Armenians], what the Kurdish militia and members of the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa did was mass massacre.

[21] Ibid., pp. 42–4. He states specifically, "The Unionists have caused the destruction of the Ottoman Empire and the Dashnaks the annihilation of the Armenian nation. It is only very natural that neither the entire Ottoman populace was on the side of the Unionists nor the Armenian nation on the side of the Dashnaks. Actually the majority of both the Ottoman populace was against the Unionists and the Armenian nation against the Dashnaks. Yet it was impossible to perceive this reality and act according to it in practice. Most of the Ottoman populace has been the victims of the Unionists and the Armenian nation of the Dashnaks [...]. Damat Ferit Pasha had argued exactly this point, [that the Unionists and Dashnaks be penalized] when he argued against the deportation of the Armenians and the punishment of the Ottomans at the Sèvres Treaty negotiations. The Western powers instead stated that the Ottoman populace had to be penalized not for what the Union and Progress did, but for not removing them from political rule."

This discussion is interesting in that it provides a religious reason why the Armenians should not have been massacred, based on the Qur'anic example of the *hadith* of the Jewish Ben-i Quraysh tribe who had rebelled against the Prophet. This instance of a religious argument against the massacre of Armenians during deportations is very significant in a number of ways. The CUP members in general were highly secular and did not adhere to any religious principles in any of their actions. They had actually replaced their belief in the divine by total veneration of the sacredness of the Ottoman state, and they therefore justified their actions through nationalism, not religion. The other use of Islam in the case of the Armenian deportations is the one advocated by Vahakn Dadrian who argues that the ignorant Muslim populace was often incited against the Armenians by language defining the latter as "infidels," the massacre of whom would actually get the Muslims to heaven. There were also other instances, however, of Muslims who refused to engage in such behavior because they either did not think there were grounds for such action or found the killing of another human being, regardless of who they were, to be "unjust."

This necessitates a discussion of the Islamic (and Ottoman) conception of justice, '*adala* in Arabic or *adalet* in Ottoman or Turkish. This concept differs from the Judeo-Christian concept of "righteousness." Governance of the Ottoman Empire and its entire judicial system were based on the Muslim notion of '*adala*, which constitutes the framework within which Muslims judge human conduct as "just" or "unjust." This was the frame of reference within which Ottoman subjects acted benevolently toward Armenians and resisted the destructive, "unjust" orders of the CUP. A difference from the Judeo-Christian notion of "righteous conduct" is that Muslims do not act in accordance with the principle of the supreme value of humanity but in accordance with the principles of Islam. They thus acted against CUP principles that placed preservation of the state above all else. It was by acting contrary to the principles of justice (*adalet*) and by instead practicing injustice (*zulm*), that Şahingiray delegitimated his actions and caused Hüseyin Nesimi to oppose him.[22] It is evident that this conception of justice was undergoing a transformation in 1915 as it

[22] Indeed, as scholars have often noted (Inalcık 1973), the only legitimate grounds for removal of Muslim rulers from power could occur if they were proven to have acted "unjustly" toward their subjects.

pitted Ottoman administrators against each other. While Nesimi was still abiding by the traditional conception of justice as advocated by the *sharia* and advertised by the CUP, what the Special Organization executed and the CUP seems to have covertly practiced was another conception that defined state interests as just. In this instance, state interests defined in nationalistic terms advocated the destruction of the Armenians.

Indeed, this subversion of the Islamic concept of justice becomes more evident when one analyzes the subsequent treatment of Dr Şahingiray in Turkish history. Şahingiray wrote his own memoir later, during the Armistice period, while hiding away from the Allied forces in Istanbul to escape arrest for the crimes he perpetrated against the Armenians. His memoir ends abruptly as he committed suicide when he realized he was about to be captured. He has been lauded by the Turkish state as a "true nationalist"; for instance, Hüsamettin Ertürk, a member of the Special Organization himself, who also wrote his own memoirs, refers to Dr Reşit Şahingiray as "having achieved martyrdom" by his act of suicide.[23] Ertürk probably best captures the nationalist sentiment that still persists in Turkey today in relation to Şahingiray by this reference to perpetrators of crimes against the Armenians: "many hangings followed one another and the nation's children died at the gallows. All these were the doings of the enemies of the Turks."[24] The sentiments of these "martyrs" are captured by one such person whom Ertürk recounts as shouting "The Turkish nation will live forever and Islam will never decline. May God not harm the nation and the country; individuals die, the nation lives on. God willing, the Turkish nation will live into eternity." Hence, the sacredness of the nation and the state overwhelms the conception of justice and sacrifices all for the state; this sentiment persists in Turkey to this day. Yet, recent scholarship in Turkey conducted by those who work in accordance with standards set by the world scholarly community can critically analyze these ideological stands to decipher and deconstruct the multiplicity of layers and sites of both the "just" and the "unjust" in Turkish society at large.

Can the notion of "Righteous" be made to include all those who honor the principle of humanity to the point of sacrificing their own lives, whatever their religion? Even if the notion seems to be secular in nature, it is

[23] Hüsamettin Ertürk, *Iki Devrin Perde Arkası (Two Eras in the Wings)*, Istanbul, Hilmi, 1957, p. 327.

[24] Ibid., p. 306.

rooted both in the Judeo-Christian tradition and in the experience of the Holocaust during World War II. The spatial and temporal boundaries of this event present a major challenge. If this notion were applied to the violence perpetrated against the Armenians and the Turks who came to their aid during the First World War, the limits of this transposition would appear instantly. The Turkish Ottoman conception of "just behavior" toward the Armenians follows from the concept of *'adala*, what Islam considers "just." It is not a secular notion, any more than is the notion of "Righteous," which is grounded in the Judeo-Christian tradition. But the relationship between religion and the state in Islam and in Christianity is not the same. In the case of Nesimî, it is because the deeds perpetrated by the Ottoman state violated the religious conception of "justice" that he opposed the massacre of the Armenians. To differentiate from the Western experience, I suggest Nesimî be referred to as a "just" man.

All religions can be said to teach men and women to respect humanity above all else, including their own lives. But one question remains: either humanity is united around a concept that is not grounded in the experience of any particular religion or society, or we are at least aware of the limits of the concept used. The notion of "Righteous people" needs to be tested in other contexts. Another difficulty resides in the choice of deciding institutions: who is to decide who is a "Righteous person" or a "just" man or woman? At Yad Vashem, the "Alley of the Righteous" honors those who helped the Jews during the Holocaust. But if the Turkish state were to honor someone today, it would not be Nesimî, but Dr Şahingiray, the governor who killed him. Even if he would have ended up hanged for his crimes, Turkish nationalists consider him a hero, the Turkish republic honors his memory and one of the first decisions of the Turkish Grand National Assembly was to proclaim him a martyr. Rather than the state, it should be the world community of scholars and those who in Turkey wish to base their judgment on historical fact that should define who are "just persons" or "Righteous persons."