



## Special Edition Newsletter: Commemorating the Armenian Genocide



The Armenian Genocide is considered by scholars to be the first genocide of the 20th century, pre-dating the Holocaust by over 20 years. The term “genocide” was coined by Rafael Lemkin, Polish attorney and Holocaust survivor and was created to describe the systematic extermination of the

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Armenian people. Yet many people have never heard of the Armenian Genocide.

The definition of genocide has since expanded to include other forms of human rights violations such as rape as a tool of war, cultural erasure, and ethnic cleansing. Lemkin’s genocide refers to violent crimes committed against groups with the *intent to destroy* the existence of a particular ethnic or social group. Over the course of seven years, between 1915–1922, the Ottoman government attempted to eliminate the Armenian people, murdering nearly 1.5 million people and forcibly deporting millions of others. Conflict between the Muslim Turks and the Christian Armenians goes back hundreds of years, to the foundation of the the two nations, which has culminated in the first of what has resulted in nearly a dozen genocides in the past 100 years. Despite overwhelming evidence and reports of genocide, Turkey refuses to acknowledge their role as perpetrators of genocide.

April 24th, 1915 is recognized around the world as the start of the Armenian Genocide. On this day, several hundred Armenian intellectuals were sent on a death march through the desert without food or water, killing hundreds. Over the course of the next seven years, the Ottoman government was responsible for the murder of 1.5 million people. Killing squads were assembled to drown and burn Armenians alive, throw them off cliffs, and slaughter them in other horrific ways. This year, we commemorate this 102nd anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

# Genocide and Deportation: Facts and Figures



Armenian woman kneeling beside dead child in field "within sight of help and safety at Aleppo"  
Courtesy of the US Library of Congress

## Precursors to a Genocide

Armenian populations had lived in the southern Caucasus of the Ottoman Empire since the 7th century BCE, making it the first state to declare Christianity as the state religion in the 4th century setting it against the powerful rise of Islamic states in the region. The roots of conflict may be traced back to religious identity. However, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire created dangerous instability among nationalist ethnic groups in the region—primarily Muslim Turks and Christian Armenians.

On the eve of World War I, over 2 million Armenian citizens lived within the borders of the Ottoman Empire (now Turkey). Labelled as an “internal threat to the empire” Armenians were blamed for the failures of the Ottoman Empire and considered traitors and enemies to the land. Muslim Turkish military officials began a genocidal campaign against Christian Armenians in an attempt to ethnically cleanse and eliminate the entire Armenian population living in the Ottoman Empire. Historians argue that between 1915-1923, 800,000 to 1.5 million Armenians, approximately half the Armenian population living in the Ottoman Empire, were deported and sent on “death marches,” killed in brutal massacres, and mass starvation. By 1922, there were fewer than 400,000 that survived the genocidal campaign.

As David Fromkin put it in his widely praised history of World War I and its aftermath, “A Peace to End All Peace”: “Rape and beating were commonplace. Those who were not killed at once were driven through mountains and deserts without food, drink or shelter. Hundreds of thousands of Armenians eventually succumbed or were killed.”

In the wake of the eradication of the Armenian population, Muslim Turks took ownership of property and everything left behind. The Turks demolished any remnants of Armenian cultural heritage. To this day, Turkish officials denounce any mention of genocide against the Armenian population, claiming that any violence which took place was during the time of a civil war.

## Timeline of Deportations and Genocide

**1913:** Coup brings the ultranationalist Young Turks to power in Constantinople (Istanbul). Armenians considered *internal enemies*; genocidal campaign begins

**24 April 1915:** Official start of genocidal campaign. Ottoman authorities rounded up, arrested, and deported 235 to 270 Armenian intellectuals and community leaders whom were eventually murdered.

**30 July -14 September 1915:** Battle of Musa Dagh, battle between Turks and Armenians. 4,000 Armenian survivors assisted by English and French soldiers

**January 1917:** Bolshevik control of Russia, led by Lenin. Russia abandons positions in western Armenia, Turkish take advantage of lack of Russian presence begin campaign to sieze Eastern Armenia also.

**1922:** Formal end of Armenian Genocide following the crumble of the Ottoman Empire

**1 August 1914:** Start of the first World War, Armenia joins Germany-Austria-Hungary and Italy. Turkey declares “holy war” on all non-Muslims (except allies)

**May-June 1915:** Mass deportations, Sultan’s decree, law on deportation enforced, making mass deportations legal, death of 24,000 Armenians over the course of three days

**August-September 1915:** firsthand accounts of the extermination of Armenians by westerners. Ambassador Henry Morgenthau speaks out.

**January 1917-May 1918:** Ethnic cleansing campaign continues on a large scale including, looting, rape, deportations, burning of villages, and murders. From 1915, over 1.5 million Armenians slaughtered.



Corpses of Armenian Children , courtesy of Armjanski Vestnik newspaper

## Armenia:

### The First Genocide of the 20th Century

Though the world watched in horror as over 1.5 million Armenians were deported and killed in a brutal genocidal campaign, since 1915, countless genocides have taken place around the world.

Here is a short list:

- ◆ **The Holocaust: (1933-1945)** claimed the lives of over 6 million Jews and over 5 million others including Roma, LGBT members, mentally and physically disabled, and more.
- ◆ **Cambodia: (1975-1979)** When the Khmer Rouge took control over Cambodia in 1975, their “re-education” campaign targeting political dissidents claiming the lives of almost 2 million in death camps known as the “Killing Fields.”
- ◆ **Bosnia: (1991-1995)** Beginning in 1991, Yugoslavia began to break up along ethnic lines. Serbs began to target Bosniak Muslims and Croatian civilians in a brutal genocidal campaign which employed rape as a tool of ethnic cleansing. Over 100,000 were killed, over 2 million displaced.
- ◆ **Rwanda: (1994)** The civil war which broke out in Rwanda in 1994, exacerbated racial tensions between the Hutu majority and Tutsi minority groups. Following the assassination of President Juvenal Habyarimana, genocide against Tutsi's began, known as the most effective killing spree in history, massacring over 800,000 Tutsi's in 100 days.
- ◆ **Darfur: (2005)** Over a decade ago, the Government of Sudan led by President Omar Al-Bashir began to carry out a genocide against Darfuri citizens, slaughtering over 300,000 and displacing over 2 million.



Armenian civilians are marched to a nearby prison in Mezireh by armed Ottoman soldiers. Kharpert, Ottoman Empire, April 1915. Photo courtesy of the American Red Cross

The debate over many of the genocides since 1915 is a complicated one, as the international community struggles to define genocide versus mass atrocity and ethnic cleansing. The argument over terminology has been taken advantage of by the perpetrators and supporters of some of our last century's worst atrocities. In reality, only close to a dozen conflicts have been internationally recognized as *genocide*, however, countless other cases of conflicts around the world should be called genocide.

And the perpetrators be brought to justice.

Genocides are still occurring today, as the world turns a blind eye. In the Nuba Mountains of Sudan, Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir has been indicted by the International Criminal Court on 10 charges, including war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. In an attempt to rid Sudan of its non-arab population, he has ordered bombings of civilian areas, and barred entry of humanitarian aid.

In Members of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, aka ISIS) are killing thousands of religious minorities (Yazidis), raping and holding women as sex slaves in Iraq and Syria. The international community, especially the United States, must hold accountable all perpetrators of genocide, and do all they can to bring justice to those who have been victims of genocidal acts. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights compels us to act.

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“It is sadly true what a cynic said: that we learn from history that we do not learn from history. “And yet it is possible that if the world had been conscious of the genocide that had been committed by the Ottoman Turks against the Armenians, the first genocide of the twentieth century, then perhaps humanity might have been more alert to the warning signs that were being given before Hitler's madness was unleashed on an unbelieving world.”

-Archbishop Desmond Tutu

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# The Promise:

## 102 Years in the Making

Hollywood's first major film about the Armenian Genocide, *The Promise*, is set to release on April 21st across the country. The film is written and directed by Terry George (director of *Hotel Rwanda* and *In the Name of the Father*) and stars Oscar Isaac, Christian Bale and Charlotte Le Bon. The Mgrublian Center for Human Rights will be hosting a public screening on April 21st at 7pm at the Laemmle Theater in Claremont. The following is the synopsis from the movie's [website](#):

It is 1914. As the Great War looms, the vast Ottoman Empire is crumbling. Constantinople (Istanbul), ITS once vibrant, multicultural capital is about to be consumed by chaos.

Michael Boghosian (Oscar Isaac), arrives in the cosmopolitan hub as a medical student determined to bring modern medicine back to Siroun, his ancestral village in Southern Turkey where Turkish Muslims and Armenian Christians have lived side by side for centuries.

Photo-journalist Chris Myers (Christian Bale), has come here only partly to cover geo-politics. He is mesmerized by his love for Ana (Charlotte le Bon), an Armenian artist he has accompanied from Paris after the sudden death of her father.

When Michael meets Ana, their shared Armenian heritage sparks an attraction that explodes into a romantic rivalry between the two men even as Michael hangs on to a promise from his past. After the Turks join the war on the German side, the Empire turns violently against its own ethnic minorities. Despite their conflicts, everyone must find a way to survive — even as monumental events envelope their lives.



Charlotte Le Bon and Christian Bale star in *The Promise*

“The Armenian genocide represents the first case of genocide committed in a modern modality - which is to distinguish it from pre-modern genocide, which is as old as history. But in this case, we have an example of a government using its bureaucracy, its military, its advanced communication and technology and an extreme nationalist ideology an Turkism. And that defines a landmark moment in the practice of genocidal mass killings.”

- Peter Balakian,  
Pulitzer Prize winner poet and author, Professor of  
Humanities, Colgate University

Oscar Isaac stars as medical student Michael Boghosian



# Student Voices



**Anoush Baghdassarian '17:**

## **A Personal Connection**

How many times has historical fiction been a gateway for you to learning about a moment in history? Have you seen *Hotel Rwanda* and learned about one man's efforts in the Rwandan Genocide? How about *The Good Lie* and been offered an entrance to learning more about the Lost Boys in Sudan? What about *Schindler's List*, or *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, which allowed you to feel just the smallest fraction of the intangible pain that victims of the Holocaust were forced to suffer?

Movies play an incredibly important role in the way we learn about history, and while watching a movie is not enough to know about a conflict (because films are pieces of art and fiction

not meant to teach people about every fact of each event) they present stories that people can connect with, and bring to one's reality a world that might otherwise seem so far away. By bringing this foreign conflict, or unknown people, to an audience in their seats, movies have the power to evoke empathy in a person and allow them entry into a world where aggregate statistics become humanized and perspectives expand. The added benefit of movies like this is that by raising awareness across the globe of different conflicts, they help reverse the adage that is: "history repeats itself." This is most tragic when it comes true in the cases of genocide and crimes against humanity, but with increased knowledge across the globe of conflicts like this, we have a better shot at recognizing patterns and speaking up as a global community to stop such acts before they evolve into what we know they can. *The Promise* will be a movie that helps with just this. It's been almost 102 years since the start of the Armenian Genocide, and finally, a piece of the story can be told publicly and globally in a way that hasn't been done before for this case, and that isn't because no one has tried...on the contrary, we have...

In 1934, Franz Werfel's novel, the *Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, was to be adapted into a film by MGM studios. However, Turkey's ambassador to the UN at the time voiced his strong opposition to the film due to the fact that it would present a "distorted version of the alleged massacres." The state-department attempted to ameliorate the situation and the scriptwriters composed several versions in an attempt to mollify the Turkish government. They still did not budge, and so MGM decided to go through with the production anyway. This is when the ambassador, speaking to an MGM official, threatened that "If the movie is made, Turkey will launch a worldwide campaign against it. It rekindles the Armenian Question. The Armenian Question is settled."

And so, for the past 83 years, Turkey's threats have worked. The "Armenian question" remained silenced and although many successful efforts have been made by Armenians and non-Armenians to raise awareness of one of the first genocides of the 20th century, the effects and reactions that come from a Hollywood film are unique. While there are many critiques of Hollywood movies typically joined with cries of support for independent films and documentaries, for this movie regarding "the Armenian question" to have reached this level, is a huge success in itself for the Armenian community, and the world. I am so eager for this movie to come out to the world, not because it will be a history lesson of what happened during the Armenian Genocide, since no 2 hour fictional story can do that for any conflict, but because it will be A story, A representation, A voice, that has been silenced for *SO* long that finally has a stage to stand on, a microphone to speak through, and an audience who is eager to listen.

# “I Can Still Hear Their Screams”: A Reflection

By Anoush Baghdassarian '17

I can still hear the screaming souls that reverberated from the mountains of Zeitun (a town in Historic Armenia, currently, Eastern Turkey) when I returned last summer. Although my family has been removed from that soil for 100 years, I felt a compelling connection while there. When people ask me about my heritage, I say I am Uruguayan, Argentinian, Greek, Egyptian, and American, but *really*, I am Armenian. This often merits an explanation and thus I embark upon my rehearsed narrative in which I describe how my ancestors survived the Armenian Genocide, sought refuge and started new lives for themselves in these foreign countries. My ancestral history is one of persecution and displacement, yet somehow the Armenian traditions, culture, religion, and sense of pride still live within me. It seems as though this displacement uprooted people and changed the communities they called home, but it did not change the home they found in their communities.

The Armenian Diaspora community is a group with which I strongly identify and one in which I feel a great amount of comfort. I have met Armenians from New York, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Philadelphia, California, Florida, Canada, Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, and modern day Armenia, and without fail, every Armenian I have met has made me feel like family. I think this is a common pattern in diaspora communities that have faced some sort of collective tragedy; in the struggle to preserve whatever elements one can of the fragmented past, people build connections with those will fortify their sense of identity. Human connection could be argued to be the closest one can get to recreating their homeland, and in the case of the Armenians, recreating their Armenia. William Saroyan, an Armenian poet, once embodied this sentiment so accurately in a poem he wrote that is as follows:

**“I should like to see any power of the world destroy this race, this small tribe of unimportant people, whose wars have all been fought and lost, whose structures have crumbled, literature is unread, music is unheard, and prayers are no more answered. Go ahead, destroy Armenia. See if you can do it. Send them into the desert without bread or water. Burn their homes and churches. Then see if they will not laugh, sing and pray again. For when two of them meet anywhere in the world, see if they will not create a New Armenia.”**

This “New Armenia” is something I've felt with every Armenian I've met. Whether it was on the airplane from NY to LA, in a Costco in Claremont, or on the streets of Buenos Aires, each Armenian I have met has welcomed me into their home, and has told me to call them if I ever needed anything. I have not yet been to present-day Armenia, yet my number one identifier is being Armenian and I feel the laughter, prayer, and song of our New Armenia in each interaction I have.

Armenia is not the only nation that has gone through this type of displacement and that has had to go through a subsequent “new nation” or “new community” building. Members of many nations who have faced adversity have grown strong because they had to. Many of them connected because it was the only way they could survive. They have built elaborate communities filled with places of worship, youth centers, sports complexes and have members running for local government. When we see diaspora nations 'thriving' like this, it is easy to think that the past is behind them and that there is no longer an urgent need to remember it, and further, that there is a need to 'move on.' At times I've surely questioned this myself and I've spoken with others who have wondered “Why do we need to remember the past? Yes, my family, and many others suffered tragedies, but why can't we just lament and move on? Why can't we be angry at the injustice of the past but let it be what it is: history, and move on? We have our New Armenia, so what's the importance of remembering the old one?”

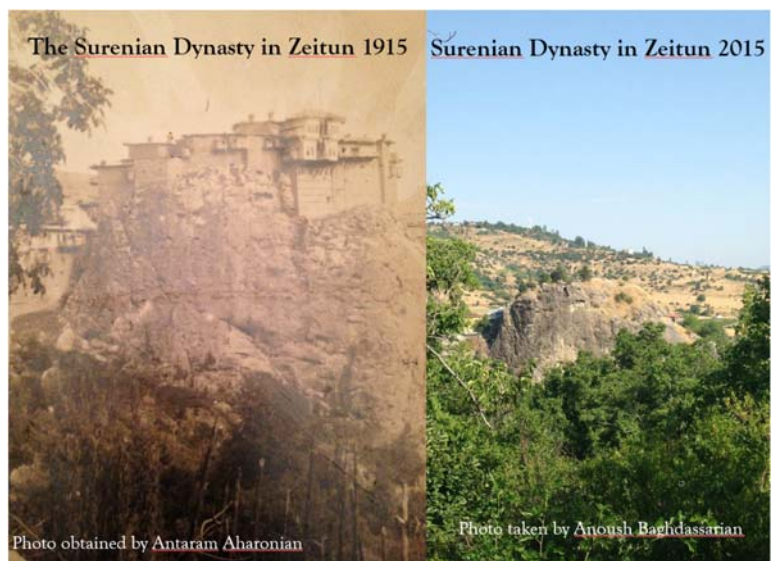
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Now there are many ways to answer these types of questions, including the common: "we need to remember the past so that these things don't happen again since history repeats itself" response. However, this scripted answer can only get one so far and I don't think I truly felt the scope of the importance of remembering the past until I stepped foot on the lands where my ancestors were killed or from which they were forced to move.

When I returned to Historic Armenia I strongly felt something I couldn't feel in our New Armenia and I had a new answer to the question of "why should we remember history and our ancestors' pasts?" 102 years after the Armenian Genocide I can say that we must remember the past "because their souls are *still screaming* and on those lands, in their towns, you can feel it. You can feel their suffering, and the pain they went through, and you realize that it's not yet over." In the case of the Armenians, the Turkish flag flies proudly over the Urartu dynasty in Van and they scream at that. Their churches are being converted into Mosques and they scream at that. Their sacred island of Aghtamar is filled with guards that don't let their holy songs be sung – they scream at that. Their churches are being converted into Mosques and they scream at that. Their sacred mountain – Ararat – is claimed by Turkey as their own and they scream at that. But worst of all, they scream at the fact that slowly, as the first diaspora generation and the last survivors pass away, the souls and stories are being forgotten – unburied and forgotten. Their screams try to reach beyond their lands but cannot. So there is an added component to being a member of this "New Armenia." It is not just being a part of the diaspora community and appreciating the collective identity that has been created, but also being the medium through which these screaming souls can communicate.

There is an enormously rich history in our Historic Armenia that we try to incorporate in our New Armenia, but we can only do so to an extent since it is scarred by devastation and darkness. It is a complicated history that feels heavy and when you walk on those lands, you can feel that weight—the weight of destruction and despair. But, the smallest bit of hope *does* exist, and that's within us. The hope that all the suffering was not in vain. The hope that the rich and vibrant culture that once existed will live on, and the hope that the ones we loved who walked these lands will live in us as we leave these lands behind and build our New Armenia. As long as we have the power of communication we must share with the world our history and the stories of our ancestors, no matter how far in the past they are, because, although it might mean nothing to the world, it means the world to those screaming souls we've left behind.



## The 5 C's Commemorate the Armenian Genocide

Thursday, April 13th: Pomona College

In collaboration with Harvey Mudd College, Pomona is commemorating the Armenian Genocide by inviting Dr. Khatchig Mouradian to campus in a discussion entitled: *The Long Shadow of Mass Violence: from the Armenian Genocide to the Syrian Refugee Crisis*. Dr. Mouradian is the Nikit and Eleanora Ordjanian Visiting Professor at Columbia University, and the coordinator of the Place and Memory Project at the Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights at Rutgers University. Dr. Mouradian explores a century of genocide and mass violence from the decline of the Ottoman Empire and creation of the modern Middle East to the Arab Spring and the rise of ISIS. The event was sponsored by the Pomona Student Union, Armenian Students' Association, Pomona Sociology Department, Harvey Mudd Office of Institutional Diversity, and Arabic for Life.

"It seems that humanity is incapable of putting a halt to the shedding of innocent blood, It seems that the human family has refused to learn from its mistakes caused by the law of terror, so that today, too, there are those who attempt to eliminate others with the help of a few, and with the complicit silence of others who simply stand by."

Pope Francis , In recognition of the Armenian Genocide

Thursday, April 20th: Claremont McKenna College:

On April 20, Mr. Chris Bohjalian will deliver the Mgrublian Center for Human Rights' Third Annual Lecture on Armenian Studies at the Marian Miner Cook Athenaeum at CMC. His talk, *The Young Turks to the Young Nazis: The Genocides that Scar Us Still*, will explore the history of the first genocide of the 20th century, why the international community still will not acknowledge the genocide, and the implications of genocide denial today. Bohjalian is a New York Times best-selling author of 19 books and his work has been translated into over 30 languages and has been made into movies three times. His fictional novel, *The Sandcastle Girls* is a tale set during the Armenian Genocide. Bohjalian's books have been chosen as Best Books of the Year by The Washington Post, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the Hartford Courant, the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, Publishers Weekly, Library Journal, Kirkus Reviews, Bookpage and Salon. Among dozens of awards, Bohjalian has received the ANCA Freedom Award for his work educating Americans about the Armenian Genocide; the ANCA Arts and Letters Award for *The Sandcastle Girls*, as well as the Saint Mesrob Mashdots Medal, among many others. Mr. Bohjalian's talk is sponsored by the Mgrublian Center for Human Rights and the Marian Miner Cook Athenaeum at CMC.



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