

CHETERIAN, Vicken – *Open Wounds: Armenians, Turks, and a Century of Genocide*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. 393

Open Wounds is an appropriate title for a book whose author set himself the task of describing and analyzing the centennial history of paralyzing denial and dysfunctional Turkish-Armenian relations. His narrative covers the period between the *Tanzimat* or reform era (1839-1876) and 2014 and includes events in the South Caucasus during the Tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet eras.

“I have often wondered why the fate of the Armenians has remained largely confined to and discussed by only the Armenians themselves”, complains Cheterian in the concluding chapter of his book (p. 299f.). One possible answer is that with rare exceptions the memoirs of Armenian survivors were translated into international languages only decades *post factum*, which excluded nearly all non-Armenian readers. More generally speaking, most genocide survivors are not at all in a situation to gain the attention of outsiders by publicly writing about the unspeakable and the unimaginable. Although the written word is central to the identity of Armenians and Jews, many members of the first two post-genocidal generations felt silenced, even among Armenians and Jews. Silence over sexual violence, compulsory prostitution, or prostitution to escape starvation is largely explained by the shameful character that these experiences have maintained within traditionally patriarchal Armenian society. Before physically destroying their victims, the Ottoman tormentors had frequently devastated their human dignity to a degree that until today *ermeni* (Armenian) is an epitome for the most contemptible in Turkish society. Against this background of outmost degradation it is usually the generation of grandchildren that finally succeeds to convey genocidal experience in biographical prose, ranging from faction to fiction, for purposes of documentation, protest or merely as a “mean of survival” (“Überlebensmittel”), as the Jewish-German survivor and author Edgar Hilsenrath has dubbed his own post-genocidal literary activity. In the large Armenian Diasporas of North America and France the third generation published since the 1980s an impressive wealth of biographies, basing on the sufferings and the survival of their ancestors. With the genocide’s centenary of 2015 drawing closer, these biographical narratives were complemented by monographic accounts whose Armenian authors tried to summarize their nation’s diversified experience of the twentieth century.

V. Cheterian interprets the memoirs of Armenian survivors as resistance against oblivion and denial, and offers summaries of the academic research of U.S. and French scholars Richard Hovannisian, Ronald Suny, Raymond Kévorkian, and, most of all, Vahakn N. Dadrian, whose “seminal work” Cheterian believes continued to influence students of genocide studies even today (p. 115). This high esteem he holds for such scholarship is reflected in the reference to Dadrian’s highly disputable monograph *German Responsibility in the Armenian Genocide* (1996), which in *Open Wounds* serves as the main source for Cheterian’s section of same title (pp. 115-199), despite the fact that Dadrian’s inconsistencies have been abundantly criticized by scholars.

Cheterian's account also relies on the Turkish contribution to the rediscovery and research of the Armenian genocide. His biographical portraits of the human rights defender and publisher Ragıp Zarakolu and the sociologist Taner Akçam dwell on their Marxist backgrounds. Arguably, leftist proclivities combined with anti-imperialist and anti-Western convictions prevented many Turkey-born intellectuals – including Armenians like the journalist and civic rights defender Hrant Dink – from taking interest into the crimes over earlier generations. Regrettably, Cheterian does not fully reveal what made Zarakolu and Akçam exceptional challengers of taboos and groundbreakers against all ideological and generational odds. Maybe the reason why is that there is a familial tradition of rescuing victims, as in the case of Zarakolu? Or, perhaps belonging to an ethnic minority that experienced state persecution before, as in the case of Akçam whose background was Meskhetian?

Despite the many events, phenomena, and personalities which are included into *Open Wounds*, Cheterian's account leaves his readers uncertain about the ambivalent results of Turkish-Armenian relations during the last centenary. On the one hand, the Turkish state has forever lost its monopoly on the interpretation of modern Turkish history. The traditional dichotomy of “Armenian” and “Turkish” views on the Ottoman genocide no longer exist. Since the mid-1990s, there are those who evaluate “the events of 1915” as genocide, and others, who continue to contest such evaluation. But Armenian and Turkish scholars regularly meet at international conferences, while Turkish- or Turkey-born scholars continue to contribute to academic studies of the Ottoman genocide(s). All three presidents of the Republic of Armenia were at least temporarily prepared to renounce genocide recognition in exchange for a normalization of Turkey's relations to Armenia. Yet at the same time taboo-breakers Akçam, Zarakolu, and a couple of other more or less prominent Turkey-born “recognizers” remain exiled, while Hrant Dink, who tried to trade formal recognition of the genocide for civic participation of Turkey's Armenian community, was assassinated in 2007. The legal and, particularly, the extra-legal prosecuting of this crime reveal a complex involvement of the *derin devlet*, or “deep (inner) state,” as the parallel existence of power structures are paraphrased in Turkish.

In Cheterian's view, the *derin devlet* goes back to the clandestine *Special Organization* (Teşkilat-I Mahsusa) that emerged as guerilla and intelligence organization of the CUP (Committee of Union and Progress, better known as the Young Turks), transforming into genocidal death squads around 1914. The author relies here on President Erdoğan's word of 2008 that since Ottoman times the *derin devlet* “had always been there” (p. 307). But can Erdoğan be trusted as witness for such continuity, or does he not, as an integral part of the problem, have good reason to distract from his own involvement? As a politician and statesman, Erdoğan underwent remarkable transformation from a “moderate Islamist” oppositional and potential reformer to an authoritarian ruler. The construct of an alleged *Ergenekon* conspiracy served him until the power struggle with the Kemalist CHP opposition, the Armed Forces, and some key ministries was decided. Afterwards, in the years 2014-2016 the *Ergenekon* suspects were set

free, including Dr. iur. Doğu Perinçek, whose successful legal case for the right to denounce the Armenian genocide as an “imperialist fib” Cheterian describes in the section “Freedom of Expression” (pp. 303-305).

This otherwise instructive and very readable monograph might have focused some of its attention on the opinion-building role of school education and media in Turkey. The foundation of the Turkish republic and the CUP’s genocide perpetrators are to this day commemorated with pride. Mosques, schools and kindergartens, boulevards and public squares in Turkey continue to bear the name of high ranking perpetrators. And Turkish school textbooks for history continue to distort or minimize the historic facts and depict Christian minorities in Turkey as hostile and unreliable.

At any rate, one cannot but agree with the author’s frustrating conclusions that the “Turkish Deep State and the denial of the Armenian Genocide are intimately linked” and that the rule of law and democracy therefore depend on Turkey’s readiness to face its recent past (p. 308). Cheterian is sure that this will happen, albeit not in near future.

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CHABOT, Joceline, Richard Godin, Stefanie Kappler, and Sylvia Kasparian, eds.
– *Mass Media and the Genocide of the Armenians: One Hundred Years of Uncertain Representation*. Palgrave Studies in the History of Genocide. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. Pp. 241.

The editors of this most useful volume lay out their theoretical framework in an enlightening introduction. Joceline Chabot (Université de Moncton), Richard Godin (Université Laval), Stefanie Kappler (Durham University), and Sylvia Kasparian (Université de Moncton) argue that “representation [...] is a social and political process that is never neutral,” (p. 6) For the most part the nine essays authored by a variety of scholars that comprise this volume attest to the veracity of that statement; at the least they test it.

Continuing the argument laid out in the introduction, Adam Muller (University of Manitoba) raises a significant question in Chapter 1: since representation inevitably involves some kind of aesthetic order, can an aesthetic order be established in the representation of genocide without distorting the essence of that genocide with all its consequences, especially when the pain of genocide has been described as ‘indescribable’?

Analyzing the case of “Ravished Armenia,” a 1919 film about the Genocide in chapter 2, Sévane Garibian (University of Geneva and University of Neuchâtel) maintains that with reproducibility, works of art acquire a political function with a corresponding loss of aura.