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The Armenian Genocide and Turkish Genocide-Denial: an exchange between Mick Hartley and Marko Attila Hoare

Editors: In his essay Turkey, *Islamaphobia, Genocide-Denial* in the November-December edition of Democratiya – a review of Taner Akcam’s *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide* – Marko Attila Hoare criticises demands that Turkey recognise its guilt in the matter of one of the last century’s great crimes against humanity, by questioning the motives of those making those demands, and denying their right to do so. He wrote:

While the efforts of Armenian lobbyists to achieve recognition of the historic crime committed against their people can only be viewed with sympathy, the motives of the various parliamentarians may not have been so sincere. For it is questionable why this particular instance of genocide should have been singled out for recognition, rather than other, more recent ones for which the predominantly Christian nations of Europe were themselves responsible.

This sets the tone for what follows: more reasons why, still, after 90 years, the Turks should be allowed to continue their history of denial. Yes, he does concede that a genocide took place, but as he goes on to refer to more recent genocides ‘for which the predominantly Christian nations of Europe were themselves responsible’, and which they have yet to recognise, it’s clear that the term ‘genocide’ is being applied in such a way as to dilute its meaning - so perhaps it’s not so much of a concession after all. And yes, he states his opinion that Turkey should recognise the genocide. But by qualifying that with the caveat that no pressure should be applied, he’s effectively depriving that opinion of any force.

Although the Bosnian genocide of the 1990s is universally recognised in the West (except by lunatic revisionist elements), the complicity of the British, French and Dutch governments has not been condemned by the European Parliament. The Dutch alone have had the decency to accept a measure of responsibility. And of course, the Christian nations of Europe have a long history of murderous crimes against other peoples - native Americans, Africans, Asians and other Europeans. It should be a matter of some pride

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to us in Britain that our current Prime Minister, shortly after taking power, apologised for Britain's role in the Irish Famine of the 1840s. Nevertheless, where the Armenian Genocide is concerned, European statesmen expect Turkey to engage in the kind of contrition that they have for the most part not sought from their own nations. In this way, the issue of the genocide has become a battleground between two rival sets of prejudices: Western European Islamaphobia and anti-immigrant racism on the one hand and Turkish genocide-denial on the other.

It's always going to be contentious comparing atrocities, but one major difference between the Bosnian Genocide and the Armenian Genocide is that in Bosnia the efforts of Milosevic and co. were stopped before their schemes could be fully implemented. Yes, thousands were killed. Yes, it was a crime against humanity. But this pales beside the efforts of the Turks in Anatolia, starting with the massacres of the 1890s under Abdul Hamid and reaching a climax in 1915 under the Young Turks, when close on a million were butchered in a centrally-planned extirpation from Anatolia of the entire Armenian Christian civilisation.

The other difference is that Milosevic is now standing trial in The Hague. That is to say, the Bosnian Genocide has been recognised as such. The Turks continue to deny the reality of the Armenian Genocide. And while Western European inaction in the early Nineties is assuredly not something to be proud of, it hardly ranks as a crime on the same level as the massive slaughter carried out in Turkey. The British, French and Dutch weren't cheering on the Serbs: they (foolishly) believed that intervention would only make matters worse, and (criminally) denied to the Bosnians the means to defend themselves. But Britain under Tony Blair was later instrumental in putting a stop to Serbian aggression, a point surely worth mentioning when trying to find a moral equivalence between Turkish behaviour towards its Christian minorities with Western European behaviour towards Europe's Muslim minorities.

True, the Christian nations of Europe have a long history of murderous crimes against other peoples. So do the Muslim nations of the Middle East, come to that. So what? Why this need to throw any and every instance of European crime into the frame before any consideration can be given to the fate of the Armenians?

The Irish Famine? Yes indeed, certainly not one of Britain's finest hours - but compare the disastrously incompetent and inhumane response to a natural disaster in Ireland with the Turkish situation. In scores of villages and towns across Eastern

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and Central Anatolia men were disposed of their belongings. The Turks broadcast demands for Armenian women and children to collect their belongings together so they could be taken to meet their men folk. They were then led out, told to strip (it being considered unclean by Muslims to remove items from the dead) and brutally hacked to death. Tony Blair has apologised for the Irish Famine, yet not only has there been no apology for the Armenian genocide, its very existence is denied, and all debate censored. And now we're told that to apply pressure on Turkey to acknowledge its past crime is to be guilty of Islamophobia.

There's more special pleading:

One of Akcam's most illuminating explanations for contemporary Turkish genocide-denial is that the victorious British and French statesmen, who pressed the issue, following their victory over the Ottomans in World War I, conflated it with anti-Turkish imperialist agendas. The Armenian Genocide had been the work of the nationalist 'Committee of Union and Progress' (CUP) – or 'Young Turks' – that ruled the Ottoman Empire during World War I. Following their defeat in the war, the next generation of Turkish nationalists under Mustafa Kemal – who actually included many of the same individuals – was initially ready to recognise the crimes against the Armenians and to prosecute some of those responsible, as the price for international approval. Yet as Akcam shows, the anti-Turkish vitriol of the British and French leaders; their determination to punish not merely the perpetrators of the genocide but the entire Turkish nation; and their attempts to dismember what was left of the Turkish state, caused a sea-change in Turkish attitudes. It is tempting to suggest that ninety years later, certain Western politicians are still manipulating the Armenian question for cynical anti-Turkish purposes.

So anti-Turkish vitriol was responsible – and perhaps continues to be responsible – for the failure of the Turks to admit their guilt. There seems to be something of a pattern here, in terms of who must accept responsibility for their malevolence, and who, by contrast, are merely victims of the cruel machinations of others; their failure to accept responsibility for past misdeeds being, in the circumstances, eminently understandable.

The review concludes:

Akcam argues that confronting the fact of the Armenian Genocide is a necessity if Turkey is finally to complete the transition 'from Empire to Republic'; i.e. the transition to a democratic state. He is undoubtedly right: Turkey should recognise the genocide. Yet the EU has no right to demand

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that it do so, so long as the Western European states themselves fail to recognise both their own historic crimes and the historic crimes committed against Europe's indigenous Muslims.

But this is to let Turkey off the hook. The current negotiations to join the EU provide a historic opportunity to apply pressure on the Turkish government to acknowledge what happened. It's unrealistic in the extreme to expect them to do this on their own. Yes, it would be nice, but after 90 years, and with an Islamist party in power, it's not going to happen. Hoare's argument amounts, effectively, to apologetics for continued Turkish denial. However much Western European states recognise the 'historic crimes committed against Europe's indigenous Muslims', one gets the feeling that it's never quite going to be enough. And in the meantime one of the greatest atrocities of the Twentieth Century – a Century, God knows, with more than its fair share of atrocities – will continue to remain unacknowledged.

We're all familiar with Hitler's remark, 'Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?' This was no idle aside: the Germans were allies of the Ottoman Empire during the First World War, and many German officers were stationed there, involved in training Turkish troops. They saw what happened to the Armenians – and saw that it worked. It was the first successful modern genocide. As such it's simply astonishing that the country responsible not only denies any culpability, but continues to prosecute those, like novelist Orhan Pamuk, who dare to mention it. It's also astonishing, and depressing, that so many, like Marko Attila Hoare, allow their voices to be added to the chorus which condemns any attempt to pressurise the Turkish government as self-serving and Islamophobic. It's not difficult to see how well this must play with militant Islamists, who thrive on the resentment fuelled by their narrative where Christians (and Jews) are always the aggressors and Muslims always the victims, and will be only too happy to have their prejudices confirmed by Western scholars.

Mick Hartley

<http://mickhartley.typepad.com/>

Marko Attila Hoare Replies to Mick Hartley

Mick Hartley appears entirely to have missed the point I was making, and either misrepresents my arguments or fails to respond to them. He claims I 'criticise demands that Turkey recognise its guilt in the matter of one of the last century's

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great crimes against humanity, by questioning the motives of those making those demands, and denying their right to do so.' Yet I categorically stated in my article that 'Turkey should recognise the genocide.' What I criticised, was the demands of various parliamentarians in EU countries for Turkey to recognise the genocide, while a) they do not similarly demand that Christian EU applicant-states recognise their historic genocidal crimes against Muslims, and b) they do not recognise their own historic crimes. Thus, my argument was that consistent principles should be applied, and that Turkey be treated by exactly the same standards as other EU applicants and members.

Hartley asks: 'Why this need to throw any and every instance of European crime into the frame before any consideration can be given to the fate of the Armenians?' As I explained in my article, it is not a question of 'any and every instance of European crime', but of European crimes that had a direct causal link with the Armenian genocide, and that were similar to it in scale and character: namely, the succession of genocidal crimes carried out by Russia and the Balkan Christian states against the Ottoman and Caucasian Muslims, culminating in the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, which involved Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and Montenegro conquering most of Ottoman Europe and killing or expelling much of the Muslim population in the process. According to the principal scholarly study, by Justin McCarthy (*Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821-1922*, Darwin Press, Princeton, 1996, p. 164), the Balkan Wars resulted in the death of 27 percent of the Muslim population of the Ottoman territories conquered by the Christian Balkan states – 632,408 people – a figure not so much less than Hartley's estimate of one million Armenian victims in 1915.

Furthermore, most historians of the subject recognise that the Balkan Wars marked a turning point in Turkey's road to the Armenian genocide, both in terms of the ideological shift of the Young Turks toward an exclusivist brand of Turkish nationalism, and in terms of Anatolian Muslim resentment of the Ottoman Christians. For example, an Armenian historian of the genocide, Vahakn N. Dadrian, writes of the 'migration involving the influx into Turkey of tens of thousands of Muslim refugees fleeing from the inferno of death and destruction that the military victories of the Greeks, Serbs and Bulgarians had wrecked in the Balkans. Their condition of destitution and misery was matched and even exceeded by their intense animosity to the sources of their suffering which they conveniently subsumed under a single category, namely, the Christians. This depiction of and focusing on the religious factor would later prove devastating for the Armenian

population of Turkey.' (Vahakn N. Dadrian, *Warrant for Genocide: Key Elements of Turko-Armenian Conflict*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick and London, 1999, p. 112).

Thus, the Christian nations' crimes against Ottoman Muslims, a mere couple of years before the Armenian genocide, were similar in scale to the latter, and a major catalyst to it. I therefore argue that it is a shocking double-standard for EU nations to allow Greece and Bulgaria into the EU without any recognition of their historic genocidal crimes, while applying entirely different criteria to the EU's first Muslim candidate country is concerned – a double standard of which the Turkish public is only too aware. Hartley fails to respond to this argument, preferring to dismiss the crimes against the Ottoman Muslims as of no consequence in comparison to those against the Christian Armenians. And ironically, while he has no trouble claiming that the Nazis were inspired by Turkish crimes against the Armenians, he is unwilling to recognise the possibility that the Young Turk perpetrators of the Armenian genocide might have been inspired by the Balkan Christian genocide against the European Ottoman Muslims – particularly given that the Young Turk leaders were themselves in large part natives of the Ottoman lands seized and ethnically cleansed by the Christian powers during the Balkan Wars.

Having failed to address my principal argument, Hartley quibbles over whether the other European crimes that I mentioned were actually equivalent in evil to the Armenian genocide. I did not – as Hartley seems to think – suggest that the Irish Famine of the 1840s was equivalent to the Armenian Genocide, but merely pointed out that the Irish Famine is one of the few historic crimes for which West European leaders have apologised – and it has taken us a century and a half to do so. As for the genocide in Bosnia, Hartley minimises it as merely a 'crime against humanity' in which 'thousands died'; in fact it was genocide, as recognised by the UN's war-crimes tribunal in The Hague, in which tens of thousands died. Furthermore, West European complicity was not limited to inaction combined with the arms embargo, as Hartley claims, but went much further: the British, French, Dutch and their allies rescued Serbia from defeat in Croatia in 1991; blocked Croatian efforts to relieve the city of Vukovar; negotiated the Yugoslav military's 'withdrawal' from Croatia into Bosnia; promoted 'peace plans' that encouraged the Serbo-Croat carve-up of Bosnia; helped murder the Bosnian deputy prime-minister in 1993; incited the Croats to attack the Muslims in 1993; incited civil war among the Muslims; waged a propaganda campaign to dampen popular outrage in the West at what was happening; repeatedly blocked US initiatives on behalf of Bosnia; and

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turned over the 'safe haven' of Srebrenica to the Serb murderers in 1995. And only the Dutch have recognised any degree of responsibility for these crimes.

Of course, one can argue that this is still a lesser scale of evil than that of the Turks who actually slaughtered the Armenians, but on the other hand, the Armenian genocide took place ninety years ago, and none of its organisers or perpetrators are left alive to be tried, whereas the British and French leaders complicit in the Bosnian genocide are very much alive and unpunished. Furthermore, French leaders were also directly complicit in the Rwandan genocide of the 1990s, which exacted a death toll similar in scale to that of the Armenian genocide. Yet the French, while unwilling to recognise their criminal complicity over Rwanda a mere decade ago, have led demands for the Turks to recognise the Armenian genocide carried out by their grandparents in 1915. Hartley may view this shameful hypocrisy in a positive light. I do not.

Finally, Hartley takes issue with the following argument of mine: 'Following their defeat in the war, the next generation of Turkish nationalists under Mustafa Kemal – who actually included many of the same individuals – was initially ready to recognise the crimes against the Armenians and to prosecute some of those responsible, as the price for international approval. Yet as Akcam shows, the anti-Turkish vitriol of the British and French leaders; their determination to punish not merely the perpetrators of the genocide but the entire Turkish nation; and their attempts to dismember what was left of the Turkish state, caused a sea-change in Turkish attitudes.' Hartley responds: 'So anti-Turkish vitriol was responsible – and perhaps continues to be responsible – for the failure of the Turks to admit their guilt. There seems to be something of a pattern here, in terms of who must accept responsibility for their malevolence, and who, by contrast, are merely victims of the cruel machinations of others, their failure to accept responsibility for past misdeeds being, in the circumstances, eminently understandable.'

Hartley appears here to be confusing historical facts with polemics: he responds to historical facts that Akcam produces and that I summarise, with a polemical argument. Akcam presented facts demonstrating that the Turkish nationalist leaders of the 1920s were initially amenable to recognising the crimes against the Armenians, and to prosecuting those responsible, but that their attitudes were changed by the behaviour of the British and French, who conflated the issue of punishment for the genocide with their desire to dismember Turkey territorially. This is either true or it is untrue. Since Hartley makes no attempt to challenge

Akcam's facts, or to present an alternative set of facts that might alter the picture, one can only assume that it is true, however much Hartley may dislike the implication. But for the record, as I made clear in my article, neither Akcam nor I claim that Turkish genocide-denial is solely the fault of outside powers rather than of the Turkish leaders themselves - on the contrary.

My position was and remains that in the issue of recognising historical crimes, Turkey should be treated exactly the same as other EU applicants. Hartley's position appears to be that Turkey should be singled out and treated differently. Readers may decide which of us is pandering to prejudice.

Marko Attila Hoare, Cambridge, England

Repression of Human Rights in Iran

Editors: I urge Democratiya readers to act now to save Mansour Osanlou, the Secretary of Tehran Bus Workers Syndicate.

On December 22, 2005, the Iranian authorities arrested the Secretary and the members of the executive committee of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran Bus Company-Vahed. Following a widespread protests and a one day strike on December 25, all the detainees except Mr Mansour Osanlou, the Secretary of the Syndicate, were released. Mr Osanlou has been accused of attempting to form an illegal organisation and organise strikes.

Mr Osanlou has been in solitary confinement since his arrest. According to various statements circulating it is believed that Mr Osanlou has been put under pressure to go on Television and confess to links to foreign powers and attempting to purchase weapons.

These latest developments point to a worrying conspiracy aimed at Mr Osanlou and the Bus Workers Syndicate. Mr Osanlou's life, and the continuation of the Tehran Bus Workers Syndicate activities, depends, apart from active support of the workers in Iran, on your urgent actions. We call on you to redouble your efforts and do whatever possible to put pressure on the Iranian government to release Mr Osanlou.

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Please send letters urging the immediate release of Mr Osanlou to the President of Iran, Mr Ahmadinejad, c/o the Iranian Embassy in London which can be contacted at info@iran-emabassy.org.uk

Rahman Hosseinzade, Worker-communist Party of Iran-Hekmatist

Anti-Semitism: an exchange between Michael Neumann and Jon Pike

Editors: Jon Pike (Honderich on Terrorism, *Democratiya 2*, November-December 2005,) while disparaging *Counterpunch*, calls me an apologist for anti-Semitism. He must 'base' his accusation on my 'What is Anti-Semitism?' piece that appeared on that website. (I use the word 'base' loosely.)

To judge the accuracy of Pike's assessment, consider the following passage, excerpted from my article without omission:

In other words there is a choice to be made. You can use 'anti-Semitism' to fit your political agenda, or you can use it as a term of condemnation, but you can't do both. If anti-Semitism is to stop coming out reasonable or moral, it has to be narrowly and unpolemically defined. It would be safe to confine anti-Semitism to explicitly racial hatred of Jews, to attacking people simply because they had been born Jewish. But it would be uselessly safe: even the Nazis did not claim to hate people simply because they had been born Jewish. They claimed to hate the Jews because they were out to dominate the Aryans. Clearly such a view should count as anti-Semitic, whether it belongs to the cynical racists who concocted it or to the fools who swallowed it. www.counterpunch.org/neumann0604.html

Pike can choose his definitions as he likes, but to call me an apologist for anti-Semitism is just foolish: the charge won't stick. It is too much, in political writing, to expect fairness or intellectual honesty, but one might at least hope for literacy. Pike lacks basic reading skills.

Michael Neumann

Jon Pike Replies to Michael Neumann

In his letter Michael Neumann affects outrage at my judgement that he acts as an apologist for anti-Semitism. Unwisely, he directs our attention back to his Counterpunch article in which he claims, 'I think we should almost never take anti-Semitism seriously, and maybe we should have some fun with it.' [1]

It is strange to be reading this, in a week when the head of an aspirant nuclear power denies the Holocaust and calls again for the extinction of Israel. I wonder if Neumann knows any good Ahmadinejad jokes, or any other ways in which to have some fun with Holocaust denial. It is strange, too that Neumann bridles so much at my charge when he responds to the vile, anti-Semitic, Jewish Tribal Review website by saying:

I know you're site and it's brilliantly done. Maybe I should say that I'm not quite sure whether you guys are anti-Semitic in the 'bad' sense or not: I'll bet, whatever you may say, you're not quite sure yourselves. As I recall, and I could be wrong about this, it would be theoretically possible to put up a site like yours and be anti-Semitic only in some unobjectionable way.' (sic JP)[2]

For Neumann, clearly, there is 'bad' anti-Semitism and unobjectionable anti-Semitism. I'm particularly struck by the scare quotes. Their general use is to ward off, to question, the standard meaning of a word, so here the scare quotes mean: 'anti-Semitism that is commonly called bad, but is not.' None of this is a matter of choosing definitions. I don't know exactly what Neumann means by 'bad' anti-Semitism, but he doesn't write about bad 'anti-Semitism.'

Of the notorious holocaust denier Israel Shamir, Neumann writes: 'Shamir make a pretty convincing case for Jewish dominance along much the same lines that you do.'

And Neumann says, to the anti-Semites of Jewish Tribal Review, that, 'I am very interested in truth, justice and understanding, but right now I have far more interest in helping the Palestinians. I would use anything, including lies, injustice and obfuscation, to do so. If an effective strategy means that some truths about the Jews don't come to light, I don't care. If an effective strategy means encouraging reasonable anti-Semitism, or reasonable hostility to Jews, I also don't care. If it means encouraging vicious racist anti-Semitism, or the destruction of the state of Israel, I still don't care.'

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These are just some choice examples. There's much more online, and readers of Democratiya can, if they wish, hold their noses and take a look. They can decide whether there is any sort of context that can exculpate these comments from the charge that they belittle, scoff at, and otherwise apologise for, anti-Semitism. They can make their judgements – here's mine. Michael Neumann is an apologist for anti-Semitism. Anyone who is opposed to racism, and anyone who supports the aspiration for a Palestinian state, should place some distance between themselves and his views.

Jon Pike

Notes

[1] <http://www.counterpunch.org/neumann0604.html>

[2] All following references are from published correspondence on the Jewish Tribal Review site which I'm reluctant to link to. Michael Neumann does not claim that these are forgeries, which would be his only reasonable line of defence.