INTRODUCTION

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The problems of the Middle East today are in many ways a legacy of the events and the aftermath of World War I, which raged a century ago. The lasting memory of that war in Europe is the brutality and butchery on the Western Front, with its networks of muddy trenches adorned with razor wire; the war in the Middle East is not remembered for its pitched battles, but rather for the unrelenting atrocity that left in its wake the destruction of entire communities and peoples, including the genocide of the ethnic Armenian citizens of the Ottoman state.

Karnig Panian's memoir draws us into the landscape of inhumanity that was the war in the Middle East. It unfolds against the deportation of his family as part of a campaign by the Ottoman state to destroy the community of Ottoman Armenians using the exigent circumstance of the war. This included the forced internal displacement of Panian and most of his family to an ill-supplied concentration camp just outside the city of Hama as Greater Syria (today's Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and Israel) itself was beset by a famine. Though blamed on successive waves of swarming locusts, that famine was created instead by the state's war effort and a lack of concern for civilian welfare. Just like the Great Leap Forward in China, it wasn't created by a natural disaster. Using the cover of the war, the Ottoman state took Panian and sought to annihilate his identity while it killed his

family. And though the Ottoman state lost the war, the successor state, the ultranationalist Republic of Turkey, prevented him from returning home or certainly achieving any justice for what he had lost.

Although the role of World War I in shaping European culture and society has been the subject of scholarship for many years, only recently has the war's impact on the social history of the Middle East attracted much attention. This important turn toward the social history of the war—telling the story of children like Karnig Panian—has been the result of better access to archives and new historical techniques drawn from the study of gender, ethnicity, and the environment, but also of a commitment among younger scholars to bring the memoirs, art, music, journalism, and literature created by the Ottoman state's minorities—Greeks, Jews, Armenians, and Kurds—into the story of the war, which has been dominated by a focus on the nationalist narratives of the dominant Arab and Turkish communities.

This new approach has given us a much richer vision of the history of World War I in the Middle East, but also a deeper understanding of the enormity of the human cost of the conflict. It tells us that as the Ottoman state sought to regain its position in the Middle East and push back the armies of the British, French, and Russian empires, it embraced ideologies, policies, and systemic and structural violence that brought immense harm to its civilian populations, primarily those seen as possible impediments to the unity of the state and the dominance of the Turkish-speaking Sunni Muslim elite.

The genocide of the Ottoman Armenians (1915–1922), the first of the twentieth century's many genocides, took place in this crucible of wartime ideology and violence. Armenians were concentrated in several Eastern Anatolian provinces, where many worked farms or lived in villages and small cities. Still, they constituted a significant religious and linguistic minority throughout the Ottoman state and were woven into the fabric of Ottoman society as bureaucrats, intellectuals, artists, and businessmen. During the genocide entire villages, cities, and regions were emptied of

their Armenian inhabitants: the women and children were internally displaced, often to concentration camps; the men were either killed at the outset or conscripted into forced labor battalions and executed sometime later. Many of the displaced were sent to the deserts of Syria, where they were subjected, by plan, to plunder, starvation, kidnapping, enslavement, rape, and murder.

During the war, the Ottoman state's military junta of modernizing nationalists—known in the West as the Young Turks—sought to reduce the percentage of ethnic Armenians in several provinces of the Ottoman Empire where they were the majority or plurality. The Young Turks reasoned that if the Armenian population in those particular provinces was reduced or eliminated altogether, calls for Armenian autonomy would be a non-issue after the war. And the integrity of the Ottoman state would no longer be threatened by the possibility of international intervention on the behalf of Armenians. Other motives included the destruction of a relatively successful Armenian middle class to make way for a national Turkish middle class: the confiscation of Armenian land and wealth benefitted the Ottoman state and Turkish merchants, bankers, and landowners. Likewise, the forced displacement and dispossession of Armenians provided opportunities to resettle the vast numbers of Turkic and Muslim refugees fleeing the Russian Empire and the Balkans. The fact that Armenians were a vulnerable religious minority in the empire played a role; however, questions of “race” and identity did not have the prominence they would have in the Holocaust.

An important exception to that conclusion first came to light as the forces of the Ottoman Empire retreated from Greater Syria in the autumn of 1918, when word that the state orphanage in the Lebanese town of Antoura had been abandoned by its Ottoman administrators reached the Beirut committee of the American Red Cross.

After traveling by automobile up the coast road, committee members, many of whom were affiliated with the Syrian Protestant College (later the American University of Beirut), were greeted with a remarkable sight. Nearly a thousand Armenian and four hundred Kurdish boys and few girls had been left without adult caregivers and were trying to run the orphanage

themselves. The children were starving, and appeared to have been malnourished for a long time.

The Americans also learned that Antoura had been much more than a simple state orphanage. Rather, it was the site of an insidious social experiment inextricably linked to the Ottoman state's attempt to exterminate its Armenian population through genocide. The young people explained to the Americans that the administrators of the orphanage, some benign and some cruel, had sought to transform them by compelling them to convert to Islam, circumcising the boys, changing their Armenian names to Muslim names, forcing them to speak Turkish, and exposing them to nationalist indoctrination.

The orphanage at Antoura had been the brainchild of Jemal Pasha (1872–1922), one-third of the Ottoman Empire's ruling Young Turk junta and the military governor of Greater Syria, and Halide Edip (1884–1964). Halide Edip Adıvar was the leading Turkish feminist of her day. She had been the product of the American missionary educational project in the Ottoman state and had herself become deeply involved in wartime relief work through her professional association with the Ottoman Red Crescent Society and personal associations with the Young Turks.

Jemal Pasha had ordered that Armenian and Kurdish children be brought to the orphanage from throughout the region, usually from orphanages run by foreign missionaries. He had appointed the American-educated Halide Edip inspector for schools in Beirut, Damascus, and Aleppo. In that capacity she also administered the orphanage over a six-month period in 1916–1917, using it as a venue to implement new educational ideas drawn from her understanding of Montessori and the role of civic education to promote Turkish nationalism, which she planned to expand to the rest of the Ottoman state after the war.

What Halide Edip and Jemal Pasha had planned to achieve at Antoura was similar to what nineteenth- and early twentieth-century social reformers in the United States and Canada sought to accomplish with American Indian boarding schools, where Native Americans were forced to give up their cultural identity and assimilate with the dominate culture in the name

of civilization and being “improved.” In this case, Armenians, other Christian minorities such as Assyrians, and non-Turkish Muslim children (primarily Kurds) were supposed to be acculturated into the dominant group and become *Turks*; and indeed there was a great deal of support for the work at Antoura from the upper echelons of Ottoman society, who perceived it as merciful, charitable, and modernizing. Clearly, Halide Edip saw her role at the orphanage as a manifestation of an Ottoman “civilizing mission.” The children in that orphanage were to emerge as modern *Turkish* citizens who, freed of what she considered their inferior Armenian and Kurdish identities, would join the national community and support the Ottoman state.

Motives aside, what Halide Edip did at Antoura constitutes genocide. Article 2, section E. of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide reads: “Genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: . . . Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.” The framers of the convention had in mind precisely the kind of organized and systematic efforts employed at the orphanage when they included this final element in the definition of the crime.* It is important to recognize that a standard element of late-Ottoman social policy had been to convert orphans regardless of origin in the state’s care to Sunni Islam, the religion of the empire. However, during the genocide, the scope and policies of this orphanage and other Ottoman state orphanages expanded to such an extent that they must be distinguished from prewar state orphanages or those run by Christian missionaries, and certainly from those administered by international humanitarian organizations after the war.

Of course, the most distinctive feature of these wartime orphanages was that the Ottoman state itself was responsible for making the Armenian children orphans by killing their parents. In addition to Turkification at state orphanages, the genocide of the Ottoman Armenians witnessed a whole range of other techniques to transfer children: children were sold, bought,

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* See my “‘Are There Any Children for Sale?': Genocide and the Transfer of Armenian Children (1915–1922),” *Journal of Human Rights* 12:3 (2013): 283–95.

and stolen during episodes of mass killing and forced migration; they faced organized foster placement and loss of property and inheritance rights.

The turning over of the Antoura orphanage to the care of American relief officials as Ottoman authority melted away sheds light on the least understood part of this element of the crime of genocide: children's resistance to transfer and the loss of identity. As Bayard Dodge, a member of the faculty of the Syrian Protestant College and later president of the American University of Beirut, explained in a report at the end of the war, as soon as the management of the institution was placed in the hands of the American Red Cross in Beirut, "Immediately the Armenian children *asserted their rights*. They refused to use their Turkish names and they brought out Armenian books, which they had hidden away in secret places during the Turkish régime."^{*} It is both remarkable and telling of the nature of identity that the young orphans, even subjected to the harsh discipline of Antoura, managed to save a part of themselves, the memory of their origins, and to safeguard and protect forbidden objects that connected them to their murdered parents and the communities from which they had been torn. The new American and Armenian caregivers of the orphanage immediately began to reconnect the young people to the Armenian community, fostering family reunification and organizing those who were orphaned into makeshift families of blended older and younger children, often overseen by a late-teenaged Armenian girl.

The process of reconnection—called in Armenian, *Vorpahavak*, "the gathering of orphans"—begun at Antoura was reproduced throughout much of the Ottoman state that was under foreign occupation at the end of the war. The Armenian General Benevolent Union, the League of Nations, and American Near East Relief—as well as individual Armenian families—worked to recover young people who had been transferred during the genocide. Sometimes this was accomplished by the repurchase of the children; at times, particularly in the Syrian desert, armed soldiers were

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^{*} Archives, American University of Beirut (1919), "Report from Bayard Dodge (Beirut) to C. H. Dodge (New York City) concerning the relief work in Syria during the period of the war," Folder AA: 2.3.2.28.3, Howard Bliss Collection 1902–1920, p. 13 (emphasis added).

called upon to intervene; in other cases young people rescued themselves as it were, making harrowing journeys across the desert to reach the relative safety of one of the League of Nations' several Rescue Homes that had been established to receive and rehabilitate the trafficked. The intake records of the Rescue Home in Aleppo, by far the largest, have been preserved by the United Nations. Those records include a short narrative of the young people from the time of the genocide until they entered the facility and document the kinds of violence and loss described by Panian in his memoir with unremitting consistency.*

In the Ottoman capital of Istanbul, the process of recovery was centered at an institution called the Neutral House.[†] It was a joint project of the League of Nations, the Ottoman Red Crescent, Armenian organizations, and ecclesiastical leadership. At the house, children whose identity was in dispute were observed by a team of representatives of the Armenian and Greek communities—either secular political officials or delegates of the respective patriarchates—a representative from the Ottoman Red Crescent Society, and advisors from the British government. Upon the determination of their status, they were returned to their community. Decisions about the fate of the children were made on the basis of the observations by these community representatives, who voted on each child. The children often arrived without documentation and the observers encouraged them to recall nursery rhymes and folk songs from their past to determine their origin. Very few, if any, of the disputed children were ever determined to be Muslim.

In the early 1920s the League of Nations dispatched investigators to better understand the facility's operations and decide whether similar houses could be established in the rest of the Ottoman state. In the course of their work, the investigators gained access to registries of Ottoman state orphan-

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* Archives of the League of Nations, United Nations Organization, Geneva, Records of the Nansen International Refugee Office, 1920–1947, “Registers of inmates of the Armenian Orphanage in Aleppo,” 1922–1930, 4 volumes.

† This discussion of the Neutral House is drawn in part from my “The League of Nations’ Rescue of Armenian Genocide Survivors and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism, 1920–1927,” *American Historical Review* 115:5 (December 2010): 1315–39.

ages, in which they noted that the names of Christian children had been overwritten with Muslim names.

They concluded that about half of all orphans in Istanbul, around five thousand children, were Armenian in origin, with another six thousand in other parts of Allied-occupied Anatolia. Moreover, the commissioners accepted as reliable a figure of 60,000 provided by the Armenian Patriarchate as the number of Armenian children still held in Ottoman orphanages and Muslim homes.

The Neutral House's program elicited strong resentment among Istanbul's elite, including Halide Edip, who had left Syria when Jemal Pasha resigned as military governor in 1917. Both had returned to Istanbul. Jemal Pasha fled the capital for Germany at the time of the Ottoman surrender. Tried in absentia for war crimes in Syria, he was killed in 1922 by Armenian operatives for his role in the genocide. Halide Edip took a leadership position in the Ottoman Red Crescent society, became active in Turkish nationalist politics, and later penned her memoirs.

Halide Edip's concerns about the Neutral House were the apparent illicit transformation of Muslim children into Armenians—the inversion of what she had done at Antoura. Indeed, it is in her writings about the situation of children in the postwar empire that Edip's hatred and distrust of Armenians is most pronounced; her writing has a texture similar to contemporary anti-Semitism in the way it casts Armenians as a mythical and existential enemy of the Ottomans, even to the point of borrowing tropes from blood libel and child cannibalism in describing a conspiracy to turn Turkish children into Armenians, thus also turning the accusations leveled against her for her work at Antoura back toward the Armenians themselves. Hence she complains, “when the children were brought in large numbers from orphanages of Anatolia they were sent to the Armenian church in Koum Kapou [Kumkapı], a hot-pot which boiled the Turkish children and dished them out as Armenians,” and she concludes that “the children who were brought to the [Neutral House] were left in the care of the Armenian women, and these Armenian women either through persuasion or threats or *hypnotism*, forced the Turkish children to learn by heart the name of an

Armenian woman for their mother and the name of an Armenian man for their father.”* As a motive, she provides no reason beyond fanaticism (“so far even the Christian missionaries could not go in their zeal”) and dismisses the assertion of the “Armenians”—and implicitly the League’s representatives—to the contrary because “the Moslem Turks do not have the missionary instincts of the Christians of the West.”†

This rhetorical strategy of inversion—depicting the perpetrators of genocide as the real victim—is a constant trope of genocide denial. Moreover, her attitude takes on additional meaning in the face of a conclusion drawn in the report of League’s observers that Halide Edip, in addition to her work at the Antoura orphanage and in conjunction with the Red Crescent Society, had been involved in a program to place large numbers of trafficked Armenian children from southeastern Anatolia and the province of Aleppo with elite and middle-class Ottoman Muslim families in Istanbul.

Modernizing Turkey and defending its Muslim elite against Western criticism are key elements of Halide Edip’s life’s work, but her reluctance to protect Armenian children or even voice empathy for them as victims of genocide shows a basic lack of human compassion. For Halide Edip questions of social distinction and religion placed limits upon the asserted universal nature of humanity; for her, genocide had not been too high a price to pay for Turkish progress, modernity, and nationalism.

Karnig Panian, who was *held* at the Antoura orphanage during the last years of the war, wrote the memoir that follows.‡ We are extremely fortunate that it has now been translated into English and can be shared with a

* Halidé Edib [Halide Edip], *The Turkish Ordeal: Being the Further Memoirs of Halidé Edib* (New York: Century, 1928), 17 (emphasis added).

† Ibid., 16.

‡ Garnik Banean, *Husher mankut'ean ew orbut'ean* (Antelias, Lebanon: Kat'oghikosut'iwn Hayots' Metsi Tann Kilikioy, 1992) or *Memories of Childhood and Orphanhood*, is one of two extant autobiographical accounts of orphan life at Antoura, the other being the oral history of Harutyun Alboyajian collected by Verjine Svazlian, *The Armenian Genocide: Testimonies of the Eyewitness Survivors* (Yerevan: Gitutyun Publishing House, 2000).

broad audience of those interested not just in the Armenian Genocide, but all genocides and the history of children and childhood during war. It is a critical rejoinder to the elite and self-aggrandizing account of the orphanage written by the perpetrator Halide Edip in her 1926 English-language memoir. She justified the inherent inhumanity of that institution and others like it as merely wartime expediency. Unlike her writings, in which the victims are forced to stand silent, Panian's is a detailed and full-throated story of loss, resistance, and survival that is told without bitterness or overt sentimentality. His is a story as well of how even young children recognize injustice and can organize against it and form a sense of identity and belonging that they will fight to maintain. Even though he was a child at the time the events he describes in the memoir took place, he paints a painfully rich, accurate, and detailed picture of the lives and agency of Armenian orphans during the genocide. It is a remarkable contribution to the global literature of witness, as well a unique source for understanding the bitter years of the war and its aftermath through the eyes of one of its youngest and most vulnerable participants. From the perspective of modern Middle East history, the memoir is critical to understanding wartime civilian suffering and Armenian trauma and survival during and after the genocide; it is a unique tool to help the historian recover children survivors as discrete historical actors.

Panian's memoir also belongs to the emerging body of Armenian literature of human rights witness in English. It should become part of the broader global conversation about the nature of suffering and humanity. His look back to a childhood he was denied embodies the whole truth of the larger loss of humanity, or rather its theft, which makes genocide the crime of crimes. He recalls throughout his work moments that are reminiscent of passages in Primo Levi's reflections on his survival in the Auschwitz concentration camp during the Holocaust, *The Drowned and the Saved*, in the way he demands of his readers an unflinching look at the fragility of humanity in the face of deprivation, cruelty, and immense indifference.

In retrospect, Turkification was perhaps the least of the atrocities visited upon the young people at Antoura. Panian's survival and life after Antoura assures us that humanity, once denied, can be reclaimed.

GOODBYE, ANTOURA

Karnig Panian's Journey