

Turkish Daily News, April 24, 2006

Playing religion card, Armenian-financed propaganda documentary defames Turks

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Turks, in particular diaspora Turks living abroad, are used to propaganda assaults from Armenians in an attempt to portray themselves as victims of “genocide” committed by Ottoman Turks in 1915-1918. Relentless as the propaganda has been, messages demonizing Turks came in bits and pieces: “scholarly” books, one-sided “academic” conferences, ethnic-pandering politicians acting as proxies, propaganda-tainted textbooks interjected into school curricula, hundreds of Armenian websites peddling the “genocide” myth on the Internet, stage productions such as “The Beast on the Moon,” screen productions such as “Ararat,” etc.

The ‘big bang’

However, these efforts evidently did not satisfy the thirst of Armenian propagandists. What they wanted was a “big bang”: an all-out public-relations assault that delivered a shock effect to a gullible audience. They got what they wanted in a recently produced screen production, “Armenian Genocide”: a hatred-filled propaganda movie that pours a pile of dirt and slime on Turks. The film was premiered by some affiliates of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), a national TV network in America, on April 17. That was just one week before the April 24 Armenians’ “remembrance” and President Bush’s “commemoration.”

The film starts with a chilling warning: “Viewer discretion advised” -- meaning ghastly scenes may follow. Indeed, follow they did, including a macabre image depicting a pyramid of human skulls, which is a Russian painting but which the Armenian propagandists would want to pass as a testimony to Turkish barbarity.

The film was bankrolled by more than 30 largely Armenian foundations in America and was directed by Andrew Goldberg, whose sympathies for Armenian causes are well known, e.g., his 2001 production “The Armenians, A Story of Survival.”

Mockery of history

“Armenian Genocide” is supposed to be a documentary, but its historical distortions make a mockery of history. A pervasive diatribe against Turks and Turkey is all too evident. Speaker after speaker -- 12 of them -- bring home the allegation that the defenseless Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire fell victim to Turkish brutality, “a massacre of epic proportions,” with “more than a million, perhaps 1.5 million” innocent Armenians losing their lives during relocation ordered by the (Young Turks) Ottoman administration in 1915. Four of the speakers have Turkish names, including Professor Taner Akcam, the once-fanatically anti-American ex-convict-turned-PKK-friend-turned-scholar.

A brief reference is made to the Armenian uprisings (called “agitations for equal rights”) in the 1890s, whereby a Turkish soldier is quoted in his letters to boast: “My mother, we killed 1,200 Armenians as food for the dogs,” and “My brother, we made war against Armenian unbelievers. God is Great.”

Professor Peter Balakian, one of the genocide proponents in the film, states that although the 1915 deportation order came from the top, it was a “disorganized event,” with ordinary Turks and Kurds taking part in the mayhem and the Euphrates River “turning red with blood.”

We are told that deportation itself was not the intended result. Professor Tessa Hofmann, with a grimace on her face, explains that in reality deportation was intended to be a “death march” meant to exterminate Armenians. That is, Armenians were targeted because they were Armenians.

Balakian tells us that as a prelude to “genocide,” the Ottoman Turks arrested and deported Armenian intellectuals and cultural leaders in “Constantinople” in the spring of 1915, many of which were later tortured and killed. With more arrests “all over the empire,” the “intellectual head” of the Armenian culture was cut off. A “whole generation” of Armenian intellectuals was eradicated, adds Balakian.

Why the intellectuals? Hofmann, feigning profound sagacity, elaborates: “In genocide, if you insulate the intellectual elite of a victim group, you can more easily extinguish the rest.” Thus, we learn that Armenian intellectuals were arrested and “wiped off” to make genocide easier.

Why were the Armenians targeted?

Here the genocide proponents walk over each other to make sense. One version tells us that Armenians were targeted because they strove for social change and wanted rights equal to those of Turks. The Turks wouldn't allow such reforms.

According to another version, the driving force was the onset of nationalism triggered by defeat of the Ottomans in the Balkans. The defeat inflamed nationalism among Turks, for whom a “Turks only” homeland in Anatolia became a top priority. Professor Ron Suny expands the nationalistic theme: After defeat in the Balkans, the Ottoman Turks were gripped by a dream to conquer the Caucasus and Central Asia and unite Turkic peoples under a “Grand Turkic Empire.” The Armenians (as well as the Russians), we are led to conclude, simply stood in the way.

Nevertheless, a third version, propounded extensively in the film and woven artfully into the overall theme, deserves the top prize in sophistry. Here we witness a ploy of a clever tactic that the Armenian propagandists have used successfully before: **The religion card.** The film is sprinkled with frequent references to Armenians being Christians -- surrounded by a hostile Muslim world -- seen as “infidels” and treated as second-class citizens in a Muslim society.

The background to this version is provided by Professor Elizabeth Frierson. According to her, horror stories by returning Muslim refugees from the “largely Christian” Balkans spurred the

popular notion in the empire that Christians were out to get the Muslims. “This helps us explain the move from state massacres to genocide because genocide can’t be perpetrated without public support,” exhorts Frierson to her audience, suggesting that anti-Christian Islamic fervor led to genocide.

We then hear a deep voice echoing in the background, “Revenge, revenge, revenge; there is no other word,” adding a chilling theatrical effect and alluding to what the Muslims had set their minds to do: wipe out the Christian infidels.

Christians, especially the clerics, in the empire were hated, Christians were persecuted, starving Christians were sent more than \$1 million in aid (fittingly clarified as \$1.3 billion in today’s money) by an American missionary organization, etc., we are told.

The Armenian propagandists know well that such tactics, designed to exploit viewer sensitivity and draw sympathies from a Christian-dominated audience, could deliver big-time propaganda, especially in post-9/11 America. However, such contemptible tactics obviously do not bother these purveyors of deceit.

The film uses another disgraceful ploy by invoking the Jewish Holocaust. Balakian, for example, makes the odious comparison between Armenians being deported by railroad and German and Polish Jews being herded away in boxcars by the Nazis. Any honest scholar worth a penny would know that a comparison between the 1915 events and the Holocaust is grotesque and an insult to the memory of Holocaust victims.

We also witness in the film “admissions” extracted from villagers who recount, on interview, what their parents and grandparents had told them about atrocities committed against Armenians. We are told that these villagers are Turks and Kurds. However, whoever they are, they are not Turks, because the language they speak is remotely Turkish. The unsuspecting audience, of course, would not know.

Did the Ottoman Armenians do anything wrong?

Well, not quite. They were law-abiding subjects, we are led to believe, except that a “small number” of them defected and joined a contingent of Russian-Armenian conscripts in the Russian army when that army advanced westward after defeating Enver Pasha’s forces in Sarikamis in December 1914. Armenians also “fought back” in Van and in three villages, and some had committed “episodic” crimes, taking over a bank by force and killing “close to 100 officials” in the 1890s, when they were fighting for equal rights, we are told.

In a comical pretense to strike balance and give representation to the Turkish side (after all, this was supposed to be a historical documentary), Goldberg inserted a few short sentences from Professor Yusuf Halacoglu and ex-diplomat Gunduz Aktan. However, these two commentators were in no position to provide balance considering the 12 genocide proponents that were allowed to dominate the film.

The film should be faulted for not only what or how it was said but also for what it left out. The story told was an egregious distortion of history by omission, telling only part of history.

Nothing is said in the film about the Ottoman Turks' centuries-old tolerance for various ethnic and religious groups, the high positions many Armenians held in the administration, the secret meetings by Armenian revolutionaries in Istanbul and elsewhere, Armenian armed bands terrorizing Muslim villages, slaughtering civilians and joining the ranks of the enemy in large numbers on the eastern and southern front, Armenians being duped by the Entente powers, Armenian leader Boghos Nubar Pasha's admission at the Paris Peace Conference (1919), the Malta Tribunals (1919-21), etc.

According to Halacoglu, over 530,000 Muslims were massacred by the Armenians. While gruesome images depicting civilian Armenian casualties are frequently splashed on the screen, no images of civilian Muslim victims who succumbed to Armenian terror are included. (Footage of despairing refugees returning from the Balkans is shown.) Nor do we hear the heartbreaking stories of the descendants of civilian Muslims who fell victim to Armenian violence.

Although the genocide thesis in the film is seemingly bolstered by reports from U.S. Ambassador Henry Morgenthau and U.S. consuls of the time, reports, writings and sworn testimonials by many other contemporaries, e.g., Adm. Mark Bristol (the U.S. high commissioner in Turkey 1919-1927), Professor John Dewey, American missionary Cyrus Hamlin and Rabbi Albert J. Amateau are completely ignored.

Likewise, while ample coverage is given in the film to Holocaust survivor Raphael Lemkin (a jurist who coined the term "genocide"), not a word is said about another Holocaust survivor, history Professor Guenther Lewy, who rejects the genocide thesis and whom the genocide proponents do their utmost to avoid.

Footage of the U.N. General Assembly adopting the Convention on Genocide in 1948 would give an uninformed viewer the impression that the United Nations had accepted the 1915 events as genocide. This, of course, is not the case.

No mention is made in the film of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's call last year (rebuffed by Armenia) to have a joint commission of Turkish and Armenian scholars to study the 1915-1918 events. If the genocide proponents wanted to prove their thesis, what better opportunity could there have been?

Toward the end of the film, we hear professors Halil Berktaý and Israel Charny excoriate Turkey for "denying" genocide. Berktaý, who openly expresses his "disgust" at such denial, claims that the young Turkish Republic formed in 1923 "manipulated" the national memory on "genocide."

He also angrily denounces Turkish scholars who reject the genocide thesis by following the "state line." The professor, who has a safe, cushy position at a Turkish university, somehow cannot accept that other Turkish scholars disagree with him and denigrates them instead. He thinks he and others like him have a monopoly on history, and he seems oblivious to the

censorship exercised unofficially in America against Turkish views refuting Armenian allegations.

What did “Armenian Genocide” accomplish?

Serious, impartial historians will probably relegate it to the dustbin, and ordinary, objective viewers may recoil at its vituperative tone and repulsive images. The film may have gained some sympathizers to the genocide camp from a gullible audience, and that may give the propagandists perverse pleasure. The film may well share the fate of “Ararat” in being a box-office flop. Just like “Ararat,” it should be seen in Turkey. It should be seen in every office, on every campus, and in every household in Turkey.

Nevertheless, with its distortions of truth, sickening anti-Turkish content and venomous undertones, the film deepened the chasm between Turks and Armenians abroad. It may have awakened the usually sleepy, easy-going diaspora Turks and given them cause to fight back at their Armenian counterparts. Prospects of accommodation between Turkey and Armenia no doubt also received a serious blow.

The greatest disappointment with “Armenian Genocide” is that it failed to provide a balanced account of a tragic episode in history. No sane-minded Turk would deny that Armenians suffered greatly during that episode; however, shouldn't the Turks, who suffered at least as much, if not more, during the same episode be given the same recognition? Should history be rewritten to please an ethnic group?

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