

**"THE ARMENIANS IN MODERN TURKEY:
POST-GENOCIDE SOCIETY, POLITICS AND HISTORY"**

**"ÇAĞDAŞ TÜRKİYE'DEKİ ERMENİLER:
SOYKIRIM-SONRASI TOPLUM, SİYASET VE TARİH"**

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Talin Suciyan's book *The Armenians in Modern Turkey: Post-Genocide Society, Politics and History*, published by I.B. Tauris in 2016, is another contribution to the ever-growing academic literature examining various facets of the Armenian issue. This book is divided into four chapters, viz. "Social Conditions of Armenians Remaining in Istanbul and in the Provinces," "The Legal Context," "State Surveillance and Anti-Armenian Campaigns" and "The Patriarchal Election Crisis: 1944-50." The book is primarily based on the periodicals and publications of the Armenian community in Turkey, in addition to interviews and limited use of archival documents.

This book primarily seeks to analyze interactions between Armenians and the Turkish state in a paradoxical "post-genocide" Turkey in which the genocide "has not come to an end; on the contrary, the catastrophe of genocide is endless and irreversible" (p. 22). To establish this method of analysis, Suciyan seeks to demonstrate that the Armenians of republican Turkey were little more than a mass of victims without agency and whose "testimonies were silenced and denied – as the perfection of the crime proves, memoirs and testimonies were inverted" (p. 1).

This argument is heavily indebted to a narrative of one-sided victimhood. Suciyan asks why the Armenians so easily "become targets for victims of various physical or verbal attacks? The answer lies in the historical context

that has constituted the ‘social’ environment for the majority in Turkey, the post-genocide habitus of denial” (p. 198). Here, not only is the agency of Armenians denied, but Suciyan overlooks the role of Armenian revolutionary committees in the deterioration of relations between Armenians and Muslims during the last years of the Ottoman Empire and how this consequently also shaped relations between the two communities in the republic. To substantiate this point, Suciyan further seeks to demonstrate that one of the most “intransigent characteristics of Kemalism,” was the “institutionalized denial of the events in 1915/16-23” (p. 89). What Suciyan refers to as “institutionalized denial” can only be fully understood when analyzed within a framework that also evaluates how and why the Kemalists also refrained from instrumentalizing the traumatic experiences of Ottoman Muslims for political purposes.

In establishing the narrative of one-sided victimhood, it is noteworthy that Suciyan’s study almost entirely disregards those Armenians who engaged in public life in republican Turkey. In the case of Armenian Member of the Turkish Parliament Berç Türker (Keresteciyan), Suciyan castigates him as merely representing a “good showcase” for the republican elite (p. 118). Yet Keresteciyan was not alone. Other Armenians were elected to parliament, and others such as Agop Dilaçar served in prominent positions in important bodies such as the Turkish Language Association. Despite this, Suciyan continues by arguing that the “anti-Armenianess of Kemalism was all-inclusive” and that not only were “Armenians living in Turkey unwanted, but also Armenian survivors all over the world were regarded as enemies of Turkey” (p. 141). Herein lies an important contradiction. Suciyan argues that genocide continued in republican Turkey, yet refrains from explaining the paradoxical nature of this argument given the prominence of some Armenians in public life.

Unfortunately, this is not the only major inconsistency in the book. Suciyan seeks to substantiate the above argument by arguing that the ruling Republican People’s Party (CHP) had an affinity with both Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Suciyan opines that both state representative’s praise of fascist leaders, and the CHP’s “encouragement of racist ideas among the intellectuals and scientific circles highlighted Turkey’s position on the *wrong* side by the end of the war,” and that this process led to the İnönü government working to distance “Kemalist nationalism from the fascist and racist elements that were widespread and continuous from the Young Turk to the Republican elites” (p. 14). Here Suciyan makes a crucial mistake by not drawing a line of demarcation between intellectuals and the state. Indeed, many of the racist intellectuals on the fringes of social life in Turkey were also opposed to the

CHP such as Hüseyin Nihâl Atsız and many of those with latent fascist sympathies within the party were driven to the margins.

This lack of nuance is also apparent in Suciyan's arguments relating to the "Citizen, Speak Turkish!" movement as an example of intermittent campaigns "to prevent non-Muslims from speaking their own language in public" (p. 69). Suciyan argues that the campaign, "rather than a campaign to speak in Turkish" was a campaign "to silence, to make people invisible in the public realm" (p. 72) which when combined with other campaigns "coalesced to create, over the span of several decades, a normalized social habitus with an intrinsic history of racism and denialism" (p. 90). Suciyan disregards the support afforded to the campaign of Turkification by prominent non-Muslims such as Moiz Kohen (Tekinalp) and Avram Galanti (Bodrumlu) and this again demonstrates the paradoxical nature of her argument.

It is important to juxtapose Suciyan's argument relating to what she terms the racist nature of Kemalism with her revisionist approach to the activity of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation – Dashnaktsutyun. Suciyan's work displays a lack of critical engagement with the sources on this matter. Suciyan quotes a letter from the head of the ARF London Bureau rejecting claims of Nazi collaboration and additionally refers to the ARF's "anti-Nazi" views (pp. 154-156). What is most striking here is that Suciyan mentions the friction between the ARF and the Armenian Church in the US in 1933 – but neglects to mention the foundation of the ARF's youth wing, the Armenian Youth Federation, in Massachusetts the same year. The AYF was founded under the auspices of Karekin Nezhdeh, a senior ARF activist who along with another senior ARF member, Dro Kanayan, engaged in active military cooperation with Nazi Germany. Other senior ARF figures such as Vahan Papazian were involved in the collaborationist Armenian National Council. Similarly, ARF publications such as the *Hairenik Weekly* had been churning out anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi articles by the mid-1930s. Not only that, the ARF had even proposed sending armed units to fight alongside Fascist Italy in Abyssinia. This blatant attempt at revisionism regarding ARF collaboration with the Nazis is startling given that the author's doctoral dissertation undertaken at the University of Munich constitutes the core of this book.

Another major deficit of the book is the emphasis that the author places on normative arguments. This is a common theme in works on the Armenian issue, and serves to cloud the potential for informed scholarly debate, and instead distorts the discussion into one focused on ideology. Suciyan argues that the "denialist habitus of Turkey" has turned the "concept of 'diaspora' into a smear, thus dehumanizing and demonizing the victims, the survivors and their

offspring” (p. 31). This line of argument is further underpinned by non-scholarly terms such as the “deep evil within society,” (p. 61) and the claim that the “dehumanization of the diaspora” resulted from “Kemalist constructs” (p. 32). Turkey’s difficulty with the diaspora arises primarily because of the political activity undertaken against Turkey’s interests. This includes the efforts of the ARF to assassinate senior Turkish statesmen including Kemal Atatürk and İsmet İnönü, and the ARF’s role in collaborating with Kurdish nationalists in an effort to ferment rebellion within Turkey in the 1930s. More recently, the present Turkish view of the Armenian diaspora was formed under the shadow of the terrorism directed against Turkey starting in 1975 – primarily by the ARF’s Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide (JCAG) and the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA).

On the whole, the role of Armenian revolutionary committees and their campaign of violence is absent in this work. Suciyan discusses the narrative that Armenians had “stabbed the empire in the back,” as having been established based primarily on “photographs in which Armenians appeared armed with many weapons. Correspondence and statements of prominent Armenian leaders were selectively presented, the content of the education in Armenian schools was problematized, literary pieces were ‘translated’ as evidence and theoretical background for the hostility of Armenians against the Ottoman Empire” (p. 83). Here, Suciyan again neglects to ascribe agency to Armenians, and disregards the campaign of violence pursued by Armenian revolutionaries as irrelevant to the wider questions relating to what led to the relocation of Armenians in 1915 and the situation afterwards.

Similarly, Suciyan mentions the “policies against the remaining non-Muslim communities in Turkey, with peaks like the 6-7 September 1955 pogroms, the Wealth Tax of 1942, the expulsion of Greek nationals in 1964, the mass murder and genocidal politics in Dersim in 1938 and the expulsion of Jews from Thrace in 1934, constitute areas in which Turkish academic literature has become increasingly substantial in the past two decades” (p. 11). There is no effort on the part of the author to establish the relationship between events and to demarcate whether they were organized by the state or the result of mob activity. Suciyan instead elects to present a broken chain of events in which non-Muslims are invariably the victims, and Turks the victim makers. In doing so, she once again refrains from ascribing agency to non-Muslims and refrains from attributing importance to ‘push and pull’ factors when explaining emigration. This is further demonstrated by Suciyan’s claim that the “Rum population of Asia Minor was expelled” in 1923 (p. 47), rather than addressing events in their proper context, i.e. the relocation of populations between Turkey and Greece as a result of an international agreement.

While Suciyan's work is novel in many regards, both the author's highly ideological and often paradoxical approach and the issues raised above unfortunately serve to undermine the positive aspects of the book. The book's final chapter entitled 'Patriarchal Election Crisis: 1944-50' has illuminated what was a blackspot in the academic literature. However, despite the author's claim that this book encompasses the history of Armenians in "post-genocide" Turkey until 1950, there are major gaps in the narrative, such as the role of prominent Armenians in public life and the social life of Armenians in general. Other issues such as the ARF's cooperation with the Kurdish nationalist Hoybun organization, and the activities of the ARF in general aimed at fermenting difficulties within the borders of Turkey have also been neglected.