

YILLIK

Annual of Istanbul Studies

2022

4



İSTANBUL
RESEARCH
INSTITUTE

YILLIK: Annual of Istanbul Studies

4 (2022)

YILLIK is a peer-reviewed annual journal, published simultaneously in print and online (via Dergipark).

Editorial Board

Editor: K. Mehmet Kentel, *Istanbul Research Institute*

Emir Alışık, *Istanbul Research Institute*

Brigitte Pitarakis, *Centre national de la recherche scientifique; Istanbul Research Institute*

M. Baha Tanman, *Istanbul University (emeritus); Istanbul Research Institute*

Gülrü Tanman, *Istanbul Research Institute*

Advisory Board

Ashlan Akışık, *Bahçeşehir University*

Engin Akyürek, *Koç University*

Serpil Bağcı, *Hacettepe University*

Sarah Bassett, *Indiana University*

Cem Behar

Sibel Bozdoğan, *Boston University*

Ayfer Bartu Candan, *Boğaziçi University*

Zeynep Çelik, *New Jersey Institute of Technology*

Koray Durak, *Boğaziçi University*

Ayşe Ereğ, *Kadir Has University*

Ahmet Ersoy, *Boğaziçi University*

Walter Feldman, *New York University, Abu Dhabi*

Emine Fetvacı, *Boston University*

Murat Güvenç, *Kadir Has University*

Shirine Hamadeh, *Koç University*

Ivana Jevtić, *Koç University*

Cemal Kafadar, *Harvard University*

Çiğdem Kafescioğlu, *Boğaziçi University*

Leyla Kayhan Elbirlik, *Özyeğin University*

Selim S. Kuru, *University of Washington*

Tuna Kuyucu, *Boğaziçi University*

Gülru Necipoğlu, *Harvard University*

Nevra Necipoğlu, *Boğaziçi University*

Tarkan Okçuoğlu, *Istanbul University*

Rana Özbal, *Koç University*

Mehmet Özdoğan, *Istanbul University*

Christine Philliou, *University of California, Berkeley*

Ünver Rüstem, *Johns Hopkins University*

Turgut Saner, *Istanbul Technical University*

Uğur Tanyeli, *İstinye University*

Ceylan Tözeren, *Boğaziçi University*

Uşun Tükel, *Istanbul University*

Title history

2012–2018 | İstanbul Araştırmaları Yıllığı / Annual of Istanbul Studies, 1–7

2019– | YILLIK: Annual of Istanbul Studies

Mode of publication: Worldwide periodical, published annually every December

Note to contributors: *YILLIK: Annual of Istanbul Studies* accepts submissions in English and Turkish. Articles should conform to the usage of The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS), 17th edition, and to the style guides published on the journal's website. Articles in Turkish conform to a customized CMOS style available at the website. Research articles are subject to review by two anonymous reviewers and the editorial board. All other submissions are reviewed by the editorial board.

Istanbul Research Institute Publications 49

Periodicals 11

Istanbul, December 2022

ISSN: 2687-5012

Publisher: On behalf of the Suna and İnan Kıraç Foundation, Necmettin Tosun

Graphic Design: Volkan Şenozan

Typesetting: Elif Rifat Türkay

Copyediting: Emily Arauz, Miray Eroğlu

Assistants: Ahmet Can Karapınar, Elizabeth Concepcion

Contact: istanbulstudies@iae.org.tr

Color Separation and Print: A4 Ofset Matbaacılık San. ve Tic. A.Ş. (Certificate no: 44739)

Yeşilce Mahallesi, Donanma Sokak. No:16 D:1-2 Seyrantepe 34418 Kağıthane/İstanbul

© Suna and İnan Kıraç Foundation İstanbul Research Institute

Meşrutiyet Caddesi no. 47, 34430, Tepebaşı - Beyoğlu/İstanbul

www.iae.org.tr

Certificate no: 12482

The views expressed in the articles published in the journal are the authors' own for which the Istanbul Research Institute may not be held accountable. The online edition is open access. Publishing in *YILLIK* is free of charge. Authors of articles published remain the copyright holders and grant third parties the right to use, reproduce, and share the article according to Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported (CC BY 3.0), upon proper citation and acknowledgment.

Mourning Bliss: Remaining Armenian(s) in Occupied Constantinople

Lerna Ekmekcioglu

Given the previously unimaginable horrors Ottoman Armenians went through during World War I, “the post-Armistice Years” has had a very different meaning for Armenians than it has for any other group. One cannot understand the *mütareke yılları* without grasping the magnitude of the destruction that came right before it.

We now call it “genocide” but even this grave term—a bit static and legalized—does a poor job of communicating what the Great War brought upon Armenians.¹ Physical loss of life due to massacres, yes, but that had happened before, albeit on a different scale (Hamidian massacres of the 1890s, the Adana pogrom of 1909). Even more fundamentally, from 1915 on the established order of things was *unmade* for Armenians to previously unfathomable proportions. Children saw their mothers raped in front of their eyes. Parents sold some of their children to keep others alive. Girls had to marry their household’s long-time servants. Human bodies became undifferentiable from animals. People ate human bones and animal feces to survive.² The extent of this unspeakable *dis-order* was such that more than a century later, the descendants of those who experienced or witnessed it cannot but cling to those memories, feel them, and re-experience them when triggered.³ This is true even when they grow up learning *nothing* about it per se. The destruction was such that the survivors carried it in their bodies to the next generations even without words, without tales.⁴

This *dis-order* was man-made. The catastrophe was brought upon Armenians by their own government and by their own neighbors and by the end of 1918, Armenians knew it. Many of the grotesque details of the destruction were exposed in the military tribunals that the Istanbul government established in April 1919 for the wartime cabinet ministers and top Ittihadists. Turkish and Armenian press of the time covered these court martials, including the eye witness testimonies.⁵

The words by Vahan Shahrman from the January 1919 editorial of an Armenian weekly, including his flowery tone and metaphorical language, are emblematic of the overall perspective of Armenian politicians and intelligentsia during the first year after the signing of the Armistice:

1 For a discussion of the evolution of how Armenians have referred to the event over the years, see Vartan Matiossian, *The Politics of Naming the Armenian Genocide: Language, History and ‘Medz Yeghern’* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2021).

2 These experiences were common and well documented in eyewitness accounts and victim testimonies. For a sample of published works in English see, Aram Haigaz, *Four Years in the Mountains of Kurdistan, 1915-1919: An Armenian Boy’s Memoir of Survival* (New York: Maiden Lane Press, 2015) (original Armenian published in 1972); Karnig Panian, *Goodbye, Aintoura: A Memoir of the Armenian Genocide* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015) (original Armenian published in 1993); John Minassian, *Many Hills Yet to Climb: Memoirs of an Armenian Deportee* (Santa Barbara: J.Cook, 2009); Yervant Odian, *Accursed Years: My Exile and Return from Der Zor, 1914–1919* (London: Gomidas Institute, 2009); Grigoris Balakian, *Armenian Golgotha* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009); D.E. Miller and L. Touryan Miller, *Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). For original video recorded testimonies of survivors, see the Armenian Genocide Collection of the USC Shoah Foundation where 333 video recorded testimonies are fully indexed and searchable through their Visual History Archive, accessed October 27, 2022, <https://sfi.usc.edu/collections/armenian>.

3 Elyse Semerdjian, *Remnants: Embodied Archives of the Armenian Genocide* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, forthcoming in 2023).

4 Harry Harootunian, *The Unspoken as Heritage: The Armenian Genocide and Its Unaccounted Lives* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

5 For an early, authoritative discussion of these court martials see Vahakn N. Dadrian, “The Documentation of the World War I Armenian Massacres in the Proceedings of the Turkish Military Tribunal,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23 (1991): 549–576. See also Taner Akçam, “Coverage of the Trials by the Istanbul Turkish Press,” in *Judgment at Istanbul: The Armenian Genocide Trials*, ed. Vahakn N. Dadrian and Taner Akçam (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 200–250.

How can we recover?

Our whole country is devastated and awash in blood. A whole nation has been stricken, has been wounded. Its economy has been ruined; its back is bowed under the weight of its terrible distress.

Will we manage to recover? Will we manage to survive?

Not a single Armenian would answer in the negative.

Beginning in 1915, for four whole years, we lived through stormy, baneful, nightmarish days.

The gates of evil and darkness were thrown open before our eyes, wider than they ever had been. Mourning hovered everywhere, its wings spread wide, and the odor of clotted blood filled the air.

The Ittihadist government, the government that is civilization's badge of shame and humanity's curse, continued, with insatiable savagery, to perpetrate its unspeakable crimes, which grew greater by the day. It undoubtedly hoped that, as a result of its ruthless brutality, the Armenian nation had finally reached death's door, that it would topple head over heels into the abyss and, this time, meet its irrevocable end.

Yet, despite all those ominous suppositions and expectations, the Armenians continued to cling to the unshakeable belief that, after terrible jolts, the Armenian nation would undergo an unbelievably magnificent renaissance, with its indomitable, inexhaustible, endlessly renewed collective vitality.

In the midst of the diabolical storms unleashed against them, the Armenians, shuddering over the maddening echoes emanating from the depths of Cangırın, Ayaş, and Der-Zor, hoped, believed, insisted, swore that the Armenian race would prevail, would live on, would endure.⁶

The coexistence of mourning for lives lost and anger towards the perpetrators were mixed in with the determination to endure and continue to exist as Armenians. Even though Shahrman singles out the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in this quote, many other Armenians blamed either the whole Turkish nation or the ruling elite for the Armenian massacres. This is where Armenians differed from their Turkish peers. The many Turkish politicians and intellectuals who, in the early stages of the post-Armistice years, openly discussed the culpability of the Armenian massacres were willing only to blame the CUP for it. They were afraid that the whole Turkish nation was going to be held responsible and therefore remaining Ottoman lands partitioned at the Paris Peace Conference.⁷ The Turkish press was angry that Armenians were blaming the whole nation. In an article titled "How do we judge the Turks?" V. Zeytunyan responded to these criticisms: "not every member of the Turkish nation is responsible for the evil that has been committed and, in this regard, the Turkish press is correct. But the actions of those who speak *on behalf of their nation* are regarded as the actions of those nations since they are the ruling class."⁸

Shahrman, Zeytunyan, and others were able to express themselves in such terms only because the perpetrator government had lost the war and the Allies began their occupation, developments that Armenians naturally welcomed.⁹ The arrival of the Allies to the Ottoman capital as the new authority gave them hope that some sort of order was going to be re-established, that normalcy would resume, that justice might be served. Reconstruction, revival, reestablishment, recuperation, redemption, renaissance, recovery, and rebirth became codewords for that hope. This hope was organically tied to the hope of establishing a separate Armenia in Eastern Anatolia and connecting it with the Yerevan Republic which they considered to be their ancestral home. In an utterly unparalleled fashion, the Armenian Patriarchate cut its ties with the Ottoman government, assumed an accusatory stance

6 Vahan Shahrman[jian], "Havadkin Uzhe," *Arakadz* 1, no. 2 (February 1, 1919). Translation from Armenian by G.M. Goshgarian.

7 Vahakn N. Dadrian, "Military Defeat and the Victors' Drive for Punitive Justice," in *Judgment at Istanbul: The Armenian Genocide Trials*, ed. Vahakn N. Dadrian and Taner Akçam (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 19–77; Orhan Koloğlu, 1918: *Aydınlığımızın Bunalım Yılı: Zaferi Nihai'den Tam Teslimiyete* (Istanbul: Boyut Kitapları, 2000).

8 V. Zeytunyan, "Te Inchbes Ge Tadenk Turkere," *Hay Askharh* 1, no 3 (February 9, 1919). My emphasis. Ari Şekeryan, "The Armenians in the Ottoman Empire After the First World War (1918–1923)" (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2019).

9 Many Armenian memoirs depict the Allies' entrance to the city. For an example, see Yevpime Avedisyan (Anayis), *Hushers* (n.p., Paris, 1949), 243–246.

towards it, and officially supported the Armenian delegations in Paris pushing for Armenian separatist agendas. All of this—all of it—happened because of the genocide. Separatism was a tangential political stance among Armenians before 1915. After 1918, the desire for segregation became widespread and normal. The victims decided that they needed to have a home of their own to be secure from future violence.¹⁰ They also desperately needed to assure the continued survival of the survivors who began pouring into the capital after the armistice.

With the article 4 of the Mudros Armistice, the Ottoman government allowed for Armenian deportees to return to their places of origin and be collected in the capital even if it was not their place of origin.¹¹ Constantinopolitan Armenians (*Bolsahays*) had not been deported or massacred *en masse* during the war, excluding, of course, the April 24 arrests. Therefore, *Bolsahays* were the ones who ran to help the survivors who started entering the Ottoman capital immediately after the signing of the armistice. Western refugee aid organizations such as the British Lord Mayor's Fund and the Swiss-Armenian Society assisted them. The biggest source of support, however, was an American organization, the Near East Relief.

These survivors who are usually simply referred to as “refugees” in the English language scholarship had various names in Armenian such as *darakryal* (deportee), *khlyag* (wreck), *pegor* (fragment, crumb), and *mnatsortats* (remnants). They needed shelter, healthcare, clothing, cash, psychological support, and help connecting with surviving relatives and finding transportation.

Bolsahays organized for the care of the incoming survivors almost immediately. Beginning with the first wave of deportees who flooded the Galata Bridge in November 1918, the local Armenians rushed to the aid of these emaciated, demoralized remnants of their nation. In the next four years, 30–35 thousand of them entered the city, many with the hope of returning to their original hometowns, usually around the Marmara Sea.¹²

Of these survivors, one group received the most attention: orphans.

Orphans symbolized both the past and the future. They represented both death and war *and* life and revival. *Veraganknum* (recovery) as it is expressed in Vahan Shahriman's quote above was only going to be possible if orphans were taken care of. Their very existence meant that the destruction of the genocide could be overturned, at least a little. By taking good care of the orphans Constantinopolitan Armenians tried to put together the broken pieces of their nation. Through finding them, placing them in orphanages, feeding, clothing, and educating them, Armenians in Istanbul mourned the loss of these children's parents and their entire communities while welcoming the possibility that a new Armenia (literally and figuratively) was to be reborn via the tiny bodies of these wronged children.¹³

Some of those orphans had been forcibly Islamized and kept in Turkish households and orphanages in and around the capital. Like many other Armenian groups all over the Middle East, *Bolsahay* authorities tried every means to return as many of them as possible to rescue and rehabilitate them.¹⁴ Rescuing them was a way to undo the disaster, perhaps take revenge on perpetrators, affirm the vitality of the Armenians, to resume some sort of order.

10 Lerna Ekmekcioglu, “Chapter 1: The Rebirth of a Nation,” in *Recovering Armenia: The Limits of Belonging in Post-Genocide Turkey* (Stanford University Press, 2016), 21–52.

11 This was a liberal reading of the Armistice. The article 4 read: “All Allied prisoners of war and Armenian interned persons and prisoners to be collected in Constantinople and handed over unconditionally to the Allies.”

12 The Pathfinder Survey of Constantinople notes that according to the Armenian Patriarchate there were 118 thousand Armenians in Constantinople in 1919. Clarence Johnson, *Constantinople To-day or, the Pathfinder Survey of Constantinople. A Study in Oriental Social Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 18. There were 150 thousand Armenians in Constantinople in the fall of 1922 according to the statistics that the United Armenian Delegation sent to Lord Curzon on 16 November 1922, in preparation for the Lausanne Conference. See TNA, FO 371-7875 (p. 49). If the figures are correct, about 32,000 Armenians were added to the city's Armenian population between 1919 to 1922. The patriarch of the time, Archbishop Zaven Der Yeghiayan collaborates this estimate in his memoir where he notes that from the armistice until the evacuation of Cilicia in the fall of 1921 about 35,000 Armenians entered the Ottoman capital. See Zaven Der Yeghiayan, *My Patriarchal Memoirs* (Barrington, RI: Mayreni, 2002), 180.

13 For example, “Hink Kayler Vorpere Zhbetsnelu Hamar,” *Hay Gin* 1, no. 12 (April 16, 1920): 197.

14 Lerna Ekmekcioglu, “A Climate for Abduction, a Climate for Redemption: The Politics of Inclusion during and after the Armenian Genocide,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55, no. 3 (2013): 522–553.



Figure 1: The cover page of the Armenian National Relief Organization's book, *Azkayin Khnamadarutyun Enthanur Deghegaker, Arachin Vetsamsya*, detailing their activities. Cover image by Sarkis Katchadourian.

By January 1919, the highest echelons of the surviving Ottoman Armenian administration in the capital decided to centralize and standardize all the relief efforts. That is how the umbrella organization named Armenian National Relief Organization, *Azkayin Khnamadarutyun* was born on February 28, 1919. Their first report covering their activities from May 1, 1919, to October 31, 1919, is a 512-page book (fig. 1).¹⁵ It is a treasure trove for anyone trying to understand how Constantinople looked one year after the Armistice.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Azkayin Khnamadarutyun Enthanur Deghegaker, Arachin Vetsamsya*, 1919 May 1–31 Hoktemper 1919 (Istanbul: Hovagimyan, 1920).

¹⁶ Unfortunately, it has not been utilized by researchers of the era (most of whom seem to lack Armenian language skills).



Figure 2: Arnavutköy Orphanage (*Azkayin Khnamadarutyun Enthanur Deghegakir*, 1920).

From 1918 to 1922, the city was littered with makeshift Armenian orphanages. Bakırköy, Yedikule, Narlıkapı, Samatya, Kumkapı, Balat, Hasköy, Pera, Şişli, Pangaltı, Nişantaşı, Ortaköy, Beşiktaş, Arnavutköy, Boyacıköy, Kadıköy, Üsküdar... (fig. 2). They were located in churches, schools, hospital buildings, monasteries and they only sheltered genocide orphans.

The Relief Organization's book reported that as of October 31, 1919, twenty-five Armenian institutions in Istanbul housed 2,607 orphans.¹⁷ They provided information on each of these children with minute detail: where they were from, their Turkified names (if any), what they remembered from their past, and where they were currently located. Some of the orphans were staying with relatives who the Relief Organization managed to locate, some were adopted by local Armenians (a total of 111), some had escaped the orphanage, and some were transferred to hospitals. A total of seven orphans died during the six months due to illness.

This book is important both because of the textual information it provides and for the multiple photographs it contains. Paging through the book, one feels like it was a conscious choice on the part of the administrators to include as many photographs of the orphans as possible to affirm that they existed and that they were being taken care of. The same can be said for many other similar Armenian organizations that popped up in post-genocide, post-Armistice Constantinople. For example, the Armenian Red Cross's first report (1918–1920) included multiple pictures showcasing especially the sick children and the rescued women and girls being rehabilitated by the community's efforts (fig. 3–4).¹⁸ Mourning and celebration co-existed during the short couple of years after the end of World War I.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Azkayin Khnamadarutyun*, 105. The table on page 107 shows the distribution of orphans in different institutions.

¹⁸ *Yergamyä Deghegakir H. G. Khachi Getr. Varchoutyan, 1918 Noy. 18–1920 Teg. 31* (Istanbul: M. Hovagimian, 1921).

¹⁹ For an illuminating story of a photography studio that had to divert its efforts in the aftermath of the genocide to documenting the orphans and the ruined Armenian life, see Armen Tsołag Marsoobian, *Dildilian Brothers: Memories of*

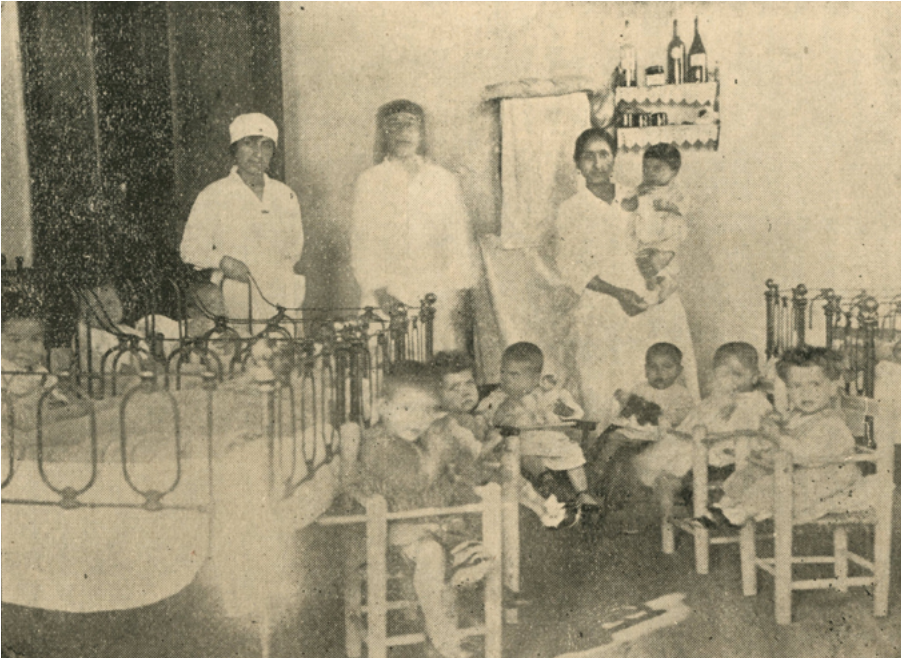


Figure 3: Armenian Red Cross Pera branch's childcare and polyclinic. The branch mostly served previously kidnapped and impregnated Armenian women and their children (*Yergamya Deghegkir*, 1921).



Figure 4: The Shelter of the Armenian Red Cross' Üsküdar Branch which housed rescued women and girls (*Yergamya Deghegkir*, 1921).

The situation changed sharply with the Kemalist victories in Cilicia against the French and in western Asia Minor against the Greeks. A new wave of massacres, displacements, and exodus befell on Armenians and their orphans. In the face of incoming *milli* armies (as Armenians referred to the Kemalist resistance movement) some of the orphanages from the interior haphazardly left for Constantinople while many in the capital escaped abroad. By the early fall of 1922, as Constantinople was becoming Istanbul again, the chapter that opened for Armenians with the signing of the Armistice closed. Many refugee aid organizations

closed their doors. Rescue operations stopped. Self-censorship returned. Newspapers first lowered their voices and then folded unless they fully endorsed the new regime. Orphans continued to be the “apple of the eye” of the community but the process that led to their orphanhood ceased to be voiced. Hushed voices of Armenians as they retreated from the public life of the city into the inner circles of their communal life only accentuated their laud efforts of self-help in those unique *Zinatari Dariner* (Armistice Years).