

A TRULY GLOBAL CRIME? AFRICA AND THE CAMPAIGN FOR “ARMENIAN GENOCIDE” RECOGNITION

(GERÇEK KÜRESEL BİR SUÇ? AFRİKA VE
“ERMENİ SOYKIRIMINI” TANITMA KAMPANYASI)

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Abstract: *The campaign to gain legislative and other resolutions labelling the events of 1915 as genocide is highly politicized. This is a campaign that demands the world recognize that the forced migration of Armenians occurring during World War I constituted the “Armenian Genocide”. Utilizing a comparative analytical approach, this article looks at the actors, issues, and successes of the campaign, thus highlighting an underexplored issue: the inability or unwillingness of its proponents to actually engage the entire world on the issue. Instead, the data indicates that the campaign focuses on certain continents and states, ignoring both Asia and Africa. By examining the case of Africa, in particular, this article asks and attempts to answer four related questions: 1) What drives the Armenian campaign to engage certain parts of the world and ignore others? 2) What explains the campaign’s level of success?; 3) What are the implications of avoiding and ignoring Africa?; and 4) And what does this reveal about the campaign? This article hypothesizes that the Armenian campaign’s scrupulous avoidance of and non-engagement with Africa and Africans is a reflection less of logistics and more demonstrative of the politicized focus that drives the campaign. Additionally, it reflects the nineteenth century racist foundations of a Western-centric, anti-Turkish and anti-Muslim campaign. In short, in this campaign, certain states and people are prioritized over others. These findings call into question the stated goals of the campaign and relatedly demonstrate that entities choosing to recognize the “Armenian Genocide” have done so not to selectively honor the victims of internecine war, but to legislate a politicized reality informed by racist and flawed readings of history.*

Keywords: *genocide, non-state actors, Orientalism, political economy, racism, lobbying*

Öz: 1915 olaylarını yasama kararları ve diğer kararlarla soykırım olarak nitelendirilmesi için yürütülen kampanya çok siyasileştirilmiş bir niteliğe sahiptir. Bu kampanya, dünyanın Birinci Dünya Savaşı sırasında gerçekleşen Ermenilerin zorla göçünü “Ermeni Soykırımı” olarak tanımasını talep etmektedir. Karşılaştırmalı inceleme yaklaşımını kullanan bu makale, bu kampanyadaki aktörlere ve konulara ve bu kampanyanın başarılarına göz atmakta ve böylece yeteri kadar araştırılmamış bir konuya vurgu yapmaktadır: bu kampanyanın destekçilerinin “soykırım” meselesi konusunda gerçekten tüm dünyada girişimlerde bulunmak konusundaki yetersizlikleri ve isteksizlikleri. Tam tersine, mevcut veriler bu kampanyanın belli kıtalara ve ülkelere odaklandığını ve hem Asya hem de Afrika’yı göz ardı ettiğini belirtmektedir. Afrika örneğini irdeleyen bu makale, özellikle şu dört bağlantılı soruyu sormakta ve bu sorulara cevap vermeye çalışmaktadır: 1) Ermenilerin yürüttüğü bu kampanyayı dünyanın bazı yerlerinde girişimlerde bulunmaya ancak diğer yerleri göz ardı etmeye iten şey nedir?; 2) Bu kampanyanın başarı seviyesini açıklayan şey nedir?; 3) Afrika’dan kaçınmanın ve onu göz ardı etmenin çıkarımları nelerdir?; 4) Ve bu, bu kampanya hakkında neleri ortaya çıkarmaktadır? Bu makale, Ermenilerin yürüttüğü bu kampanyanın Afrika ve Afrikalılardan dikkatli bir şekilde kaçınmasının ve oraya ve onlara yönelik girişimlerde bulunmamasının lojistik bir gereksinimden ziyade, bu durumun daha çok kampanyanın siyasileştirilmiş odağının bir göstergesi olduğu hipotezini ortaya koymaktadır. Buna ek olarak, bu durum, Batı-merkezli, Türk-karşıtı ve Müslüman-karşıtı bir kampanyanın on dokuzuncu yüzyıl ırkçı temellerini yansıtmaktadır. Bu bulgular kampanyanın beyan ettiği hedeflerin sorgulanmasına sebep olmaktadır. Bununla bağlantılı olarak bu bulgular, “Ermeni Soykırımı” taniyan varlıkların bunu iki taraf için de ölümlerle sonuçlanan bir savaşın mağdurlarını seçici bir şekilde anmaktan ziyade, bunu ırkçı ve çarpık okumalara dayalı bir tarih anlayışından esinlenmiş, siyasileştirilmiş bir gerçekliği yaşamak için yaptığını göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: soykırım, devlet-dışı aktörler, Oryantalizm, politik ekonomi, ırkçılık, lobcilik

Introduction

The Armenian campaign to gain recognition that the events of 1915 constituted the “Armenian Genocide” is striking for a number of reasons, including its lack of nuance. This would be unsurprising if it self-identified itself as a political campaign, which tend to be characterized by emotive soundbites and hyperbole. Yet, the drivers and supporters of the Armenian campaign view themselves and, indeed, bill the campaign as being apolitical and concerned with closure and dignity.¹ However, the campaign’s explicit and highly political accusation is that Armenians suffered the twentieth century’s first instance of genocide, which, if true, would mean this was a global crime with global implications. Though this claim is misleading and willfully ignorant, and has been critically questioned,² this article looks at an under-explored aspect of the campaign: the inability or unwillingness of its proponents to engage the entire world on the issue. Rather, the campaign focuses on certain continents and states and ignores others such as Africa and Asia.

Part I of this article provides a primer of the relevant actors and issues involved in the Armenian campaign. Part II provides an overview of the current campaign in order to lend understanding and context to Part III; the Armenian campaign’s explicit avoidance of Africa and Africans. Part IV explores potential reasons and the rationale behind the campaign’s circumvention of the African continent. Part V highlights and analyzes the implications of such choices with relevant conclusions drawn therefrom.

I. The Actors and the Issues

The Armenian diaspora and, to a lesser extent, the Republic of Armenia are involved in a protracted, extra-legal campaign to force Turkey to recognize the events of 1915 as a genocide. To do so, it utilizes lobbies, particularly in North and South America, Europe and the Antipodes, to gain the support of politicians, civil society groups, and organizations for *ad hoc* legislation or other types of official commemorations. The campaign’s strategy is to gain as

1 R. Falk, “Healing Wounds: Seeking Closure for the 1915 Armenian Massacres”, *Foreign Policy Journal*, 14 January 2012, <http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2012/01/14/healing-wounds-seeking-closure-for-the-1915-armenian-massacres/>

2 See M.H. Yavuz, “Contours of Scholarship on Armenian-Turkish Relations”, *Middle East Critique*, 2011, 20(3), p. 231-251. See also E. J. Erickson, “Armenian Massacres: New Records Undercut Old Blame”, *Middle East Quarterly*, 2006 (Summer), p. 67-75. See also J. McCarthy, *Death and exile: the ethnic cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821-1922* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1995), p. 291-292.

many resolutions and forms of legislative or governmental recognition as possible. It is hoped that the sheer accretion of states and municipalities recognizing the events of 1915 as the “Armenian Genocide” will force some sort of recognition from Turkey.

The United States has thus far refused to officially recognize the events of 1915 as genocide. As such, an exploration of the actors and issues at play in the US proves instructive vis-à-vis the wider aims, tactics, and strategies of an ongoing Armenian campaign.

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The two main lobbying organizations in the US are the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), the American arm of the Armenian National Committee (ANC), and the Armenian Assembly of America (the Assembly). While both the ANCA and the Assembly maintain their national headquarters in Washington, D.C., the ANCA’s structure can be characterized as the more diffuse and international.³ In the United States, the ANCA maintains well over 50 offices. The Communications Director at the Washington, D.C. offices of the ANC stated that power equals people for the ANCA, hence the large

number of offices and an international presence.⁴ These ANCA activists are generally politically active, committed to causes such as recognition of the genocide claims, and depend on the ANCA to provide them with sources of information and strategies that inform their actions.

In contrast, the Assembly maintains its national headquarters in Washington, D.C. and one regional office in Beverly Hills, California. Besides these offices, which handle lobbying efforts, policy issues, relations with the Armenian government, and membership, the Assembly has an office in New York City that liaises with the United Nations.⁵

The ANC outwardly maintains cordial relations with the Assembly and other Armenian diaspora interest groups and they do share at least two overarching

3 The ANC maintains offices in France, the United Kingdom, Italy, and a European Union office in Brussels. It also has offices in Yerevan and Stepanakert, the capital of the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region.

4 Brendon J. Cannon, *Legislating Reality and Politicizing History: Contextualizing Armenian Claims of Genocide* (Offenbach am Main: Manzara Verlag, 2016, ISBN 978-3-939795-67-4), p. 244.

5 Cannon, *Legislating Reality...*, p. 244.

goals: the longevity and survival of the Republic of Armenia and, most importantly, gaining recognition globally that the events of 1915 constituted the “Armenian Genocide”. Both the ANCA and the Assembly call for “increasing US aid levels to Armenia to promote economic and democratic development... ensuring the appropriate commemoration of the Armenian Genocide; and encouraging Turkey and Azerbaijan to lift their blockades and adhere to the international standards for human rights and humanitarian practices.”⁶ Yet there are two main differences. “The [the Assembly] clearly mentions U.S. interests, while the ANCA focuses only on Armenia and Armenians; ANCA’s goals are more political and reflect harsher positions. Indeed, when the [the Assembly] focuses on dialogue, information, consensus, democracy etc., the ANCA insists on a ‘free, united, and independent Armenia’”⁷ These positions are a reflection of the Armenian Revolutionary Foundation (ARF), an Armenian nationalist organization that dates back to the waning days of the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, as Zarifian aptly notes, the position of the ANCA equals nothing less than the dismemberment of Turkey through the creation of a greater or “Wilsonian” Armenia.⁸

II. The Current Campaign

As of 2016, the Armenian lobby had succeeded in persuading at least 26 UN member states to recognize the events of 1915 as the “Armenian Genocide”.⁹ Also, currently over 40 US states have been persuaded in one form or another to recognize these events as genocide.¹⁰ The ANCA’s parent organization, the ANC, has also pressured governments in Europe and, to a lesser extent, Central and South America. Indeed, the ANC-France lobby was the driving force behind the French Senate’s recognition of the events of 1915 as genocide in 2000 and of the French National Assembly’s attempted criminalization of the “denial of the Armenian Genocide” in 2006 (this move was later on annulled by the Constitutional Council of France for its violation of the French constitution).¹¹ The Italian parliament, pressured by the Italian ANC chapter,

6 “About the ANCA”, *Armenian National Committee of America*, <http://www.anca.org/ancaprofile.php>

7 J. Zarifian, “The Armenian-American lobby and its impact on US foreign policy”, *Society*, 2014, 51(5), 503-512, p. 507.

8 Zarifian, “The Armenian-American lobby...”, p. 507. See also *Legislating Reality...*, p. 267-68.

9 “Countries that Recognize the Armenian Genocide”, *Armenian National Institute*, http://www.armenian-genocide.org/recognition_countries.html

10 Zarifian, “The Armenian-American lobby...”, p. 509.

11 See ANCA, “French Senate approves Armenian Genocide Recognition,” *Armenian National Committee of America*, 08 November 2000, <https://anca.org/press-release/french-senate-approves-armenian-genocide-resolution/>. See also Thomas Crampton, “French Pass Bill that Punishes Denial of Armenian Genocide”, *The New York Times*, 12 October 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/13/world/europe/13turkey.html>

adopted a resolution in 2000 that overwhelmingly supported recognizing the massacres of 1915 as genocide, calling on Turkey to do the same. “*The success of this effort, in the face of intense pressure from the Turkish government, represents a real tribute to the devotion of the Italian government and people to fairness, human rights, and justice,*” explained ANC of Italy representative Alecco Bezikian.¹² A June 2016 vote by Germany’s Bundestag to recognize the events of 1915 as genocide was encouraged by and heavily lobbied for by such organizations as the International Armenian National Committee and the European Armenian Federation for Justice and Democracy.¹³ These are obvious and very public successes. But, beyond the power of the purse and the galvanization by the emotive nature of Armenian identity, what may explain the fecundity and successes of the campaign? In essence, why does the campaign resonate – at least in the West?

A partial answer indicates that efforts at genocide recognition are greatly assisted by many in the West, particularly Europeans, who are often subject to bouts of historical guilt.¹⁴ The historian Joanna Bourke has argued that the emergence of an undifferentiated “victim” culture has arisen precisely because of the pervasive use of trauma discourse in Western societies, and the accompanying abandonment of individual and political accountability.¹⁵ This has informed “*the recent expansion of a culture of apology [and] the unpredictable emergence of pacified ‘Sorry States.’*”¹⁶ While this framework may be welcome on some fronts, and many are keen to make amends for the European excesses – colonialism, genocide, ethnic cleansing, two world wars- that characterized most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, “*appeals for state apology or demands for collective responsibility can also function as an institutional facade for individual irresponsibility.*”¹⁷ In essence, many in the West suffer from what the Germans term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or the struggle to overcome the (negative) past. Yet saying sorry -particularly for past events with which

12 ANCA, “Italian Parliament Calls on Turkey to End Armenian Genocide Denial”, *Armenian National Committee of America*, 17 November 2000,

<https://anca.org/press-release/italian-parliament-calls-on-turkeyto-end-armenian-genocide-denial/>

13 “German Bundestag Recognizes Armenian Genocide”, *Asbarez*, 2 June 2016, <http://asbarez.com/151201/german-bundestag-recognizes-armenian-genocide/>

14 Peter Frost, “The Origins of Northwest European Guilt Culture”, *The UNZ Review*, 7 December 2013, <http://www.unz.com/pfrost/the-origins-of-northwest-european-guilt/>. See also Brendon J. Cannon, “History, cynicism and guilt: A critique of the Armenian campaign”, *Daily Sabah*, 30 September 2016, <http://www.dailysabah.com/op-ed/2016/10/01/history-cynicism-and-guilt-a-critique-of-the-armenian-campaign>

15 Joanna Bourke, “When Torture Becomes Humdrum”, *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 10 February 2006.

16 O. Savić, “European Guilt: The Rhetoric of Apology”, *Belgrade Journal of Media and Communications*, 2013 (4), 129-146, p. 129.

17 Savić, “European Guilt: The Rhetoric of Apology”, p. 129.

individuals may possess only a peripheral knowledge and connection- may simply assuage one’s guilt while allowing individuals and collective politics the ability to avoid dealing substantively with the actual effects of these excesses. Yet given the ease and comfort, symbolic acts such as the passage of legislation or official pronouncements about the “Armenian Genocide”, for example, are viewed favorably and unquestioningly supported by some.

In North America, US liberals and their Canadian counterparts tend to offer their support for recognition of the events of 1915 as the “Armenian Genocide”. Similar to many Europeans, they do so because it is felt to be the “right” thing to do. The logic of their actions is also informed by the idea that recognition of the “Armenian Genocide” is a magnanimous gesture and one that partially assuages the guilty conscience of many in the West for its centuries-long catalogue of murder, slavery and pillage on that side of the Atlantic. In both Europe and North America, the Armenian diaspora has skillfully relied on exploiting what Vamik Volkan termed “chosen traumas” and “entitlement ideologies.” The first refers to a shared mental representation of an event or series of events in which a large group is victimized

For the diaspora, the campaign reifies the chosen trauma of 1915 and informs an entitlement ideology that demands Turkey recognize a genocide that never occurred. But as unsuccessful as the campaign may be in regards to Turkey, it finds willing allies in the West, engendered by their own ideology of entitlement and privilege that allows them the illusion of being able to right past wrongs through acts of recognition or yearly commemorations which tend to be beguilingly cheap and easy. This is especially true when all that is required is a piece of legislation or some official proclamation by a politician that the events of 1915 constituted genocide.

by another group, thus causing it to experience feelings of helplessness and weakness through significant loss and death.¹⁸ An entitlement ideology “provides a shared belief system for the members of a large group in that they have a right to possess whatever they desire.”¹⁹ For the diaspora, the campaign reifies the chosen trauma of 1915 and informs an entitlement ideology that demands Turkey recognize a genocide that never occurred. But as unsuccessful as the campaign may be in regards to Turkey, it finds willing allies in the West, engendered by their own ideology of entitlement and privilege that allows them the illusion of being able to right past wrongs through acts of recognition or yearly commemorations which tend to be beguilingly cheap and easy. This is

18 Vamik D. Volkan, “Large group identity and chosen trauma”, *Psyche. Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse und ihre Anwendungen*, 2000 (9-10), 931-953, p. 939-940.

19 H. Brunning and M. Perini (Eds.), *Psychoanalytic perspectives on a turbulent world* (Karnac Books, 2010), p. 53.

especially true when all that is required is a piece of legislation or some official proclamation by a politician that the events of 1915 constituted genocide. These *ad hoc* acts are thought, often with the best of (uninformed) intentions, to assist in honoring Armenian victims and survivors of 1915. Yet they also avoid the rather more difficult, expensive, and politically sensitive demands of reparations and rights of return, issues that inherently require addressing in any acts deemed to be genocide by a proper court of law.

The accusations leveled in today's Armenian campaign bear little resemblance to historical realities. But because the campaign attempts to re-fight and re-frame yesteryear's battles, it falls into the trap of resurrecting and perpetuating images of the "terrible Turk," which "otherize" Turks and form the bedrock of Armenian diaspora identity.²⁰ These stereotypes and images also may explain some of the campaign's success in gaining willing supporters. For in their depictions of Muslims and Turks, diaspora Armenians are certainly not alone and find sympathetic adherents in Russia and much of the West. Indeed, Orientalist depictions of the "terrible Turk" -rapacious, backwards, the Sick Man of Europe- have never disappeared from what can be termed an overarching pan-Western psyche,²¹ appearing regularly in popular fiction, which unquestioningly presents Turks as sadistic torturers, pederasts, lechers, and corrupt.²² Those ruled by the Muslim Ottoman Turks -Bulgarians, Armenians, Greeks, and others- have long been presented in popular imagination as sacrificial victims living under an Ottoman, Muslim "yoke." Similarly, those who avoided such a "yoke" (Austrians, Germans, and Poles) as well as those who eventually threw off the "Turkish yoke" (Greeks and Hungarians, for example), are popularly held to have constituted a European and Christian bulwark against Islam and Asia.²³ The implications of this othering of Turks and Islam is as clear now as it would have been in 1683: Christians are organically European; Muslims are not.²⁴

20 Cannon, *Legislating Reality*..., p. 49, 109, 346.

21 I am referring less to a geographic conceptualization of the West here and more to an ephemeral self-versus-other conceptualization of states and individuals that define itself/themselves by what they are not. That is, as being part of the West (whatever that may mean); i.e. not the East. In regards to Orientalist conceptualizations and depictions of Eastern militaries and war, see P. Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War through Western Eyes* (London: Hurst, 2009). Regarding slow adaptation and innovation in the military of the Ottoman Empire, see B. Kadercan, "Strong armies, slow adaptation: civil-military relations and the diffusion of military power", *International Security*, 2014, 38(3), 117-152.

22 For a popular fiction depiction of Turks, see A. Furst, *Night Soldiers: A Novel* (Random House, 2008), p. 25-26.

23 Furst, *Night Soldiers*, p. 373.

24 This narrative categorically ignores the lengthy history of Muslims in Europe, particularly the Balkans and the Black Sea littoral. Constituting the majority of the population in certain regions, these "European" Muslims were systematically cleansed from the Crimea and the new nation-states of Balkans throughout the nineteenth century. See J. McCarthy, *The Ottoman peoples and the end of empire* (Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 38-62.

This bleeds into what some of have termed a larger Islamophobia and pervasive anti-Turkish sentiment in much of the West that are part of an Orientalist discourse that casts “... *Easterners as inferiors: emotive, tribal, irrational, and sensuous, inclined to extremism and violence.*”²⁵ Given the pervasiveness of such views, some have argued that the timing of Armenian genocide legislations in states such as Germany or Italy were specifically supported in order to punish or humiliate Turkey, thus cementing its status as Europe’s “other.”²⁶ If this is indeed the case, it is further evidence of the appeal to Western politicians of the Armenian campaign with its unique mix of human-rights, justice and closure-speak as well as its baldly anti-Turkish, anti-Muslim rhetoric.

As alluded to previously, there are inconsistencies at work vis-à-vis the Armenian campaign and the fact that entire continents and peoples such as those in Africa and Asia have either been strategically or tactically ignored. This article will focus on the former given this author’s area studies expertise, as well as limitations of space and time. By doing so, it is assessed that the implications and conclusions drawn from contextualizing and deconstructing the campaign and its modus operandi vis-à-vis Africa will be reliable, valid, and generalizable.

III. The Armenian Campaign and Africa

A crucial but suspect claim of the current campaign states that what it terms the “Armenian Genocide” must be recognized universally, particularly by Turkey, in order to protect others from a similar fate. There is an unequivocal and inherent understanding in the Armenian diaspora that genocide must not be allowed to occur again, to anyone. As such, Armenian diaspora lobbies and interest groups, to include grassroots civil society groups, work to prevent atrocities that may or may not constitute the crime of genocide, regardless of location or form.²⁷

Given the clear, all-consuming focus of Armenian diaspora lobbies and interest groups in gaining recognition that the events of 1915 constitute the “Armenian Genocide” and preventing genocide, the absence of the Armenian narrative of history and its campaign in Africa, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, is not only

25 Porter, *Military Orientalism*, p. 25. See also E. W. Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage, 1979).

26 Damir Marusic, “Germany to Erdogan: We Will Recognize Armenian Genocide”, *The American Interest*, 2016, <http://www.the-american-interest.com/2016/05/17/germany-to-erdogan-we-will-recognize-armenian-genocide/>

27 Cannon. *Legislating Reality...*, p. 337.

striking but arguably inexplicable. After all, Africa is the earth's second largest continent, covering 11.7 million square miles and covering six percent of its landmass. It also has the second largest population of any continent, with 1.1 billion people as of 2013. That figure is fast-growing and contains the world's youngest median population. Africa's growing importance economically, strategically, and politically is now considered *sine qua non*.²⁸ Yet, it is in relation to the Armenian campaign that Africa's potential importance becomes most prescient. This is because Africa is one of the most vibrant continents in terms of languages, cultures, religions, social systems, and histories, but it has

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also experienced all of the most traumatic events in the human catalogue. This is particularly the case in sub-Saharan Africa, the vast, varied land mass south of the Sahara Desert and the focus of this paper. The curse of slavery on both the east and west coasts of Africa afflicted populations from present-day Senegal to Ghana to Angola to Kenya for centuries. It was the European and, to a lesser extent, Arab and Ottoman demand for slaves that categorically destroyed social, economic, and political systems across the continent for the five centuries prior to 1900. The burden of European imperialism and colonialism were added shortly after the suppression of slavery in East Africa by the British in 1873, as European powers in Berlin divided up the African "cake" for themselves. Over fifty years of colonial domination and resource extraction followed, further destroying

what were, in some cases, centuries-old systems of governance, trade, and social interaction. Informed by Darwinian notions of racial and intellectual superiority, European powers proceeded to destroy any forms of resistance to their colonial rule, with instances of ethnic cleansing and massacre replete from German Southwest Africa (1903) to German East Africa (1905-07) to British East Africa (1952-60), and French Algeria (1954-62).

Independence for African states came in the generations stretching from 1957 to the early 1980s. Yet, the effects of previous traumas were compounded by the effects of the maintenance of colonially-drawn borders,²⁹ arguably

28 J. Stevenson, "Africa's growing strategic resonance", *Survival*, 2003, 45(4), 153-172. See also T. Deytch and A. Zhukov, *Africa's Growing Role in World Politics* (MeaBooks Inc., 2016).

29 J. Herbst, *States and power in Africa: Comparative lessons in authority and control* (Princeton University Press, 2014).

neocolonial (if local) leadership,³⁰ patrimonialism,³¹ rentier economies,³² corruption,³³ and the subsequent reification of tribal affiliations as the main marker of self and other.³⁴ This article cannot possibly recount the detriments of all of the above nor can it explain why Africa has experienced its share of post-colonial ethnic cleansing and, indeed, one case of legally-recognized genocide in Rwanda. Suffice to say that Africa is still shaped as much internally as externally, particularly in pre-conceived notions and conceptualizations of the continent in the imaginations and writings of non-Africans.³⁵ Yet, the perceived place of Africa in the world by many non-Africans as well as the listing of historical tragedies is instructive for the purposes of this paper. That is, the litany of grievances should arguably make Africans sympathetic, potential converts to the message encapsulated in the Armenian campaign; an end to genocide, honor for innocent victims of state violence, and an acknowledgement of ostensibly covered-up “historical truths.” However, the exact opposite has occurred. Africa, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, has been entirely ignored by the campaign.

IV. Why Africa is Ignored

Contextualizing and deconstructing the reasons for ignoring and avoiding Africa vis-a-vis the Armenian diaspora’s campaign for genocide recognition highlights at least five possibilities involving motivations and logistical contingencies.

Perceived lack of clout: In the post-independence period, Africa as a continent has consistently punched below its weight when compared with its landmass, resources, population, and strategic location.³⁶ The states of Africa, particularly those of sub-Saharan Africa, are perceived by those in the Global North, rightly or wrongly, as having little economic or political clout when compared to the

30 D. Koter, “King makers: Local leaders and ethnic politics in Africa”, *World Politics*, 2013, 65(02), 187-232.

31 D. C., Bach and M. Gazibo (Eds.), *Neopatrimonialism in Africa and beyond* (Vol. 1) (Routledge, 2013).

32 N. van de Walle, *African economies and the politics of permanent crisis, 1979–1999* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

33 R.H. Bates, *When things fell apart: State failure in late-century Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

34 J. F. McCauley, “The Political Mobilization of Ethnic and Religious Identities in Africa”, *American Political Science Review*, 2014, 108(04), 801-816.

35 See M. Keita (Ed.), *Conceptualizing/Re-Conceptualizing Africa: The Construction of African Historical Identity* (Brill, 2002).

36 D.A. Bräutigam and S. Knack, “Foreign aid, institutions, and governance in sub Saharan Africa”, *Economic development and cultural change*, 2004, 52(2), 255-285.

states of Europe, North America, and East Asia. This narrative, while empirically solid on certain levels, is also arguably informed by latent nineteenth century Darwinian-inspired racialism and colonialism. In short, Africa and more particularly Africans do not matter in the court or world opinion. This commonly-held misconception may also be said to inform - consciously or unconsciously- the strategies and tactics employed by the Armenian campaign. That is, the primary aim of the campaign is to force Turkey's hand in recognizing formally that the events of 1915 constituted the "Armenian Genocide". In doing so, Armenian lobby and interest groups search for powerful allies, allies who possess political, cultural, and economic clout vis-à-vis Turkey. Thus, the states of Europe and North America are prime targets and those in Africa are not.

However, the situation may be changing. Though likely unbeknownst to the Armenian campaign, Turkey is currently enjoying the fruits of its diplomatic and economic charm offensive across the African continent and, in the process, has discovered mutually interested partners in Nairobi and Mogadishu.³⁷ Yet, it is difficult to imagine a time in the near future when either Kenya or Somalia will have the type of political clout in Ankara possessed by Washington or Berlin.

Lack of natural allies: While many Africans possess a litany of remembered traumas, from colonialism to slavery, these generally involve Western European states. Importantly, states in sub-Saharan Africa do not possess traumas -real or imagined- involving Turks and Turkey. Furthermore, African states have generally welcomed Turkey's recent forays into Africa.³⁸ Turkey, while not viewed perhaps as a natural partner, is viewed as different from more traditional East/West partners such as China and the US. Given its relatively small size geographically and demographically, Turkey's economic and geopolitical strengths are rather less of a threat to African states than say those of China or India. As such, states such as Kenya have explored the terrain of this nascent relationship and found it favorable in multiple arenas, from diplomatic solidarity vis-à-vis mutual refugee crises to economic empowerment.³⁹

37 See M. Özkan, "Turkey's rising role in Africa", *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 2010, 9(4), 93-105. See also Brendon J. Cannon, "Deconstructing Turkey's Efforts in Somalia", *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*, 2016, 16(14).

38 See Mary Harper, "Türkiye ve Somali'nin alışılmadık aşkı", *BBC*, 16 December 2014, http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2014/12/141215_somali_turkiye. See also G. Bacik and I. Afacan, "Turkey Discovers Sub-Saharan Africa: The Critical Role of Agents in the Construction of Turkish Foreign-Policy Discourse", *Turkish Studies*, 2013, 14(3), 483-502.

39 Brendon J. Cannon, "Turkey in Kenya and Kenya in Turkey: Alternatives in Diplomacy, Trade and Education to China and the West", *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, May 2016, 10(5)

None of this bodes well for the Armenian campaign – should it choose to engage Africa. That is, while individual Africans may ultimately be sympathetic to Armenian campaign claims -should they one day hear them- sub-Saharan African states possess no strategic or material rationale to “hurt” Turkey by passing *ad hoc* resolutions claiming the events of 1915 constituted the “Armenian Genocide” in the way states in Europe do. As such, given the generally favorable reception of Turkey in Africa since 2000, Armenians will fail to find natural allies in Africa.

Racism: The Armenian campaign in its current conception relies on Orientalist images and articles demonizing the “terrible Turk.” These images and conceptualizations -part of scientific racism- were particularly popular at the turn of the last century but were largely discredited following World War II. Indeed, they were part of a concerted propaganda campaign on the part of the Triple Entente powers (Great Britain, France, and Russia) to demonize their Central Powers opponents (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire). Germans and those fighting for Austria-Hungary were portrayed as murderous “Huns” bent on rapine and the massacre of innocents. Ottoman Turks were portrayed even worse, as an animalistic race of Muslim *and* Asiatic deviants; the opposite of all that was considered Christian *and* European. According to Yavuz, “*These depictions of Turkey—the de facto term for the Ottoman Empire in most of Europe—and Islam were not new in 1914, but actually had been current since the mid-nineteenth century, and people assumed them to be authoritative because they were used by respected statesmen...*”⁴⁰ These included British Prime Minister William Gladstone and, during and after World War I, John Bryce in Britain, and former US ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau. These images were revived and reified in the period after 1915 when the Ottomans made the decision to put into effect a forced migration of all Ottoman Armenians residing on the Ottoman/Russian front lines in eastern Anatolia in 1915 to other parts of the Empire, away from the Ottoman-Russian clashes.

None of this bodes well for the Armenian campaign – should it choose to engage Africa. That is, while individual Africans may ultimately be sympathetic to Armenian campaign claims - should they one day hear them- sub-Saharan African states possess no strategic or material rationale to “hurt” Turkey by passing ad hoc resolutions claiming the events of 1915 constituted the “Armenian Genocide” in the way states in Europe do. As such, given the generally favorable reception of Turkey in Africa since 2000, Armenians will fail to find natural allies in Africa.

40 M.H. Yavuz, “Orientalism, the ‘Terrible Turk’ and Genocide”, *Middle East Critique*, 2014, 23(2), 111-126, p. 112.

During this forced migration, many Armenians experienced starvation and epidemics, and hundreds of thousands of them lost their lives, which led to *post-facto* accusations of genocide, accusations that have gained traction in recent decades on account of the Armenian campaign.

It would be folly to describe or depict individual Armenians as racists. Yet, by relying on spurious and antiquated nineteenth century depictions of the world and its peoples as informed by scientific racism, the campaign and the people driving it -wittingly or unwittingly- fall prey to a world view wherein certain regions, races, and religions matter more than others and therefore the opinions and worth of certain humans are superior to others. In this early world view, Europe and Europeans are racially and politically superior now because they had convinced themselves they were in 1915.⁴¹ States colonized by Europe and Europeans – many of which offered a home to Armenians before and after 1915 – are equally important. As such, the campaign has focused on Europe, Russia, North and South America, as well as Australia and New Zealand.

Given the lengthy history of racism and racial exploitation of Africa and Africans, a subject too broad and well-known to warrant coverage here, the campaign's patent ignorance of the continent can be understood in light of the Orientalist and racist imagery on which it is reliant. In this sense, ignoring Africa and Africans is natural today because the continent and its peoples did not matter politically in 1915. Of course, Africa's perceived status as a political non-entity was reified on account of European colonial subjugation, itself justified on stock, racial images of inferior Africans and their inferior civilizations. Indeed, the vocal support of major statesmen for the creation of an independent Armenia and the disappearance of Ottoman Turkey after World War I was inspired and justified by their racism against Turks. Their dismissal of Africans as non-entities or sub-human was even more pronounced. These included Prime Minister David Lloyd George of Great Britain and President Woodrow Wilson of the United States.⁴²

41 See E. W. Said, *Orientalism: Western conceptions of the Orient* (Penguin UK, 2001). See also W. R. Thompson, "The military superiority thesis and the ascendancy of Western Eurasia in the world system", *Journal of World History*, 1999, 10(1), 143-178.

42 See Perin Gürel. "Turkey and the United States after World War I: National Memory, Local Categories, and Provincializing the Transnational", *American Quarterly*, 2015, 67(2), 353-376. See also Justin Fantauzzo. "Ending Ottoman Misrule: British Soldiers, Liberal Imperialism, and the First World War in Palestine", *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 2015, 6(1), 17-32. See also Jeffrey L. Lauck, "Lost Cause in the Oval Office: Woodrow Wilson's Racist Policies and White-Washed Memory of the Civil War", *The Gettysburg Compiler: On the Front Lines of History*, Paper, 2015 (136). See also Eric Arnesen, "Racism in the Nation's Service: Government Workers and the Color Line in Woodrow Wilson's America", *The Journal of Southern History*, 2015, 80(4), p. 1006.

Armenians in Africa: Neither before nor after 1915 did Armenians settle in any significant numbers to sub-Saharan Africa, though a minority established themselves in Ottoman Egypt and Sudan.⁴³ There appears to be evidence that the then future emperor of Ethiopia, Hailie Selassie, when visiting Jerusalem in 1923, took 40 Armenians with him to Addis Ababa on account of their musical skills.⁴⁴ However, most of the small Armenian community in Ethiopia fled the country after the overthrow of Hailie Selassie in 1974 by the Marxist Derg.⁴⁵ As such, diaspora Armenians in North America, the Middle East, and Europe possess almost no blood or kinship ties on the African continent. This obviously makes their campaign to recognize the events of 1915 as the “Armenian Genocide” more difficult, but not impossible. Indeed, the successes of the Armenian campaign have rested largely on continuous lobbying efforts of numerically smaller diaspora Armenians who have curried the favor and support of non-Armenians, particularly politicians, academicians, and elements of civil society. As such, numerical superiority is certainly not necessary to prosecute campaign aims Africa. Rather, the campaign’s scrupulous avoidance of the continent seems informed less by the lack of a sympathetic Armenian diaspora and natural allies, and more by latent identity traits and the antiquated, racist, and Orientalist-inspired campaign it has spawned.

Resource constraints: Information is scarce on exactly how much the various Armenian diaspora lobbies in France, the U.S., and elsewhere raise and spend annually. Indeed, the literature on the subject is understandably silent on the issue given the lack of publicly-available figures beyond what that declared as part of legal requirements, for example.⁴⁶ While they have been less successful in the US with their genocide campaign, the Armenian diaspora in France, Mexico, Argentina, and elsewhere is a formidable political force – even given their small numbers -and can raise large sums of money for causes which they cherish such as the campaign for “Armenian Genocide” recognition. For example, in the US, “*Although there were fewer than 1,000 Armenian-Americans in Kentucky, Armenian-Americans raised nearly US\$200,000 for Senator Mitch McConnell and the Republican Party in Kentucky.*”⁴⁷ Individual

43 C. Issawi, *An economic history of the Middle East and North Africa* (Routledge, 2013), p. 77.

44 C. T. Kimberlin, “Diverse Connections as a Model for the 21st Century Yared School of Music 1”, 1185-1198, In *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Trondheim July 2007*, Svein Ege, Harald Aspen, Birhanu Teferra and Shiferaw Bekele (Eds.) (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), p. 1187-1188.

45 B. Adjemian, “Immigrants and Kings”, *African Diaspora*, 2015, 8(1), 15-33, p. 16.

46 Zarifian, “The Armenian-American lobby...”. See also M.M. Gunter, “Politicizing History”, In *Armenian History and the Question of Genocide*, 75-97 (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2011).

47 D. King and M. Pomper, “The US Congress and the Contingent Influence of Diaspora Lobbies: Lessons from US Policy toward Armenia and Azerbaijan”, *Journal of Armenian Studies*, 2004, 8(1), 72-98, p. 87.

Armenians in the US also give huge sums of money to the cause. For example, over US\$10 million was pledged by two individual Armenian-Americans, Anoush Mathevosian and Gerard L. Cafesjian, or their family foundations, for the building of a permanent “Armenian genocide” museum in Washington, D.C.⁴⁸

The campaign’s highly politicized message may simply not resonate with Africans. This is because of the campaign’s strategy of reliance on the reification and resurrection of imagined traumas and racist caricatures of the “terrible Turk.” These may resonate with Greeks, Hungarians, Armenians, and Serbs, but they possess little emotive and certainly no mobilizing power with Kenyans, Congolese, and Ivoirians. Second, while Africans undoubtedly possess a multitude of their own historical traumas they surely do not involve Turkey. In other words, Africans have no proverbial axe to grind with Turkey and African leaders, in particular, may ask uncomfortable questions and justifiably wonder what the campaign offers Africans.

The conclusion is that Armenian lobbies, individuals and groups can raise large sums of money and sustain a lengthy and concerted campaign in multiple locations, from Ottawa to Berlin to Buenos Aires. As such, the campaign’s avoidance of Africa on account of resource constraints should be taken into account but also questioned.

V. Implications

Explicit in the claims of the Armenian campaign is that Armenians suffered the world’s first genocide or, at the very least, the first genocide of the twentieth century. In making this allegation, the campaign is stating that Armenians suffered the most heinous crime known to humankind.

This accusation necessarily has global implications and therefore one would not be mistaken in assuming a global campaign is in order. Yet this is not the case.

While resource constraints and the lack of a significant Armenian diaspora play their part in inhibiting a fully global campaign, the evidence seems to suggest that the racist and Orientalist imagery and world view inherent in the campaign –one that continues to rely on images of swarthy Turks versus white Armenians– prevent it from fully engaging Africa and Africans. Accordingly, one may infer from the campaign’s absence in Africa that Africans simply do not meet the

⁴⁸ All these donations became the source of a court case pitting Cafesjian against the Armenian Assembly of America. THE ARMENIAN ASSEMBLY OF AMERICA, INC., et al., Plaintiffs/Counter-Defendants, v. GERARD L. CAFESJIAN, et al., Defendants/Counter-Plaintiffs. Civil Action Nos. 07-1259, 08-255, 08-1254 (CKK), MEMORANDUM OPINION. (May 9, 2011) UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

(racial) mark when it comes to the aims of the campaign. Additionally, Africans are viewed by the Armenian diaspora and its supporters as potentially unreliable allies for a number of reasons. First, the campaign’s highly politicized message may simply not resonate with Africans. This is because of the campaign’s strategy of reliance on the reification and resurrection of imagined traumas and racist caricatures of the “terrible Turk.” These may resonate with Greeks, Hungarians, Armenians, and Serbs,⁴⁹ but they possess little emotive and certainly no mobilizing power with Kenyans, Congolese, and Ivoirians. Second, while Africans undoubtedly possess a multitude of their own historical traumas they surely do not involve Turkey. In other words, Africans have no proverbial axe to grind with Turkey and African leaders, in particular, may ask uncomfortable questions and justifiably wonder what the campaign offers Africans. This then leads to a third point. There are few Armenians in Africa, as noted, so the domestic political benefits and efficacy of such moves would remain obscure to Africa’s elected officials and leaders. In short, there is no political capital to be gained and therefore Africans may legitimately question the efficacy of recognizing century-old events as something termed the “Armenian Genocide” through the passage of politicized and humiliating (for Turkey) legislation. Furthermore, there is a good possibility that some may see the Armenian campaign -reportedly about closure and recognition- for what it really is: an attempt to legislate reality and politicize history in order to dismember Turkey.

Lastly, for a campaign that reportedly aims to gain global recognition for the Armenian Genocide, its absence in Africa necessarily makes it a parochial, regional campaign. This demonstrates that it is, at heart, a campaign aimed at Western, particularly European audiences for blatantly political and politicized reasons. The recognition of the events of 1915 as the “Armenian Genocide” by Europeans -to include their progeny in North and South America- is more important than the recognition by Africans or other non-Europeans. This is natural on one level - or rather this may have seemed natural one century ago. The events of 1915 were the result of a European war (with Turkey very much included in Europe), born out of European grudges and alliances based on a Darwinian-inspired, radical nationalism – no matter how many Asians and Africans fought and died during its duration.

49 See B. Tafrađjiski, D. Radoeva, & D. Minev, “The Ethnic Conflict in Bulgaria: History and Current Problems”, 209-230, In *Ethnicity and Conflict in a Post-Communist World: The Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China*, Kumar Rupesinghe, Peter King, Olga Vorkunova (Eds.) (1992). See also S. Spyrou, “Education, ideology, and the national self: the social practice of identity construction in the classroom”, *The Cyprus Review*, 2000, 12(1), 61-81. See also Volkan, “Large group identity...”, p. 939-940.

Conclusion

It is hoped that the preceding discussion and analysis add to the increasingly abundant literature contextualizing and deconstructing the Armenian campaign, thereby illustrating just how little the campaign is about recognition and closure. It also further exposes the racist foundations of the campaign, a campaign attempting to reconfigure and reinterpret the results of an early twentieth century war with dated, jingoistic propaganda tools culled from the yellow press that remain strangely acceptable, even popular, in certain circles today. Given this active (if unspoken) world view, the Armenian campaign sees Africa through antiquated, racialized lenses and therefore eschews engagement with the continent. This is not necessarily a net negative vis-à-vis the campaign. For, as the discussion has demonstrated, it may find a chilly reception and little success in Africa.

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