

BOOK REVIEWS

(KİTAP TAHLİLLERİ)

Şakire FURTUN

Undergraduate Student
Department of Political Science and Public Administration,
Bilkent University,
sakire.furtun@ug.bilkent.edu.tr

“DÉTRUIRE LES ARMÉNIENS”

(“ERMENİLERİ YOK ETMEK”)

Author: Mikaël Nichanian, *Détruire les Arméniens* (Paris: Presse Universitaires de France, 2015), 273 pages.

D*étruire les Arméniens* (*Destroy Armenians*), a book written by Mikaël Nichanian, provides information regarding the rise of the Armenian Question under the rule of Abdülhamid II, the events of 1915, and the post-World War I period in Turkey. In this book, the Armenian Question and the historical debate related to it is scrutinized in five chapters. However, it appears that almost all of the information provided in this book is based on data that lacks solid evidence or reference.

Mikaël Nichanian’s main argument in the book focuses on the claim regarding the leading role that the Ottoman Empire and the Young Turks played during the –what the author refers to as the- destruction of the Armenian population living in the Ottoman Empire. By referring to the Young Turks and their supposedly aggressive attitudes towards minorities, Nichanian aims to emphasize the idea of “nationalism” imposed by this group. This idea is acknowledged as the main cause of the annihilation attempts towards other ethnic groups. The unionist and nationalist approaches of this period are reflected in the book in such a way that the reader might think of them as historic factors that favored a genocidal program.

While such information and interpretations are demonstrated in this book, it can be seen that the author makes these conclusions without providing solid facts or reference. It is important to emphasize that without giving any such reference regarding the historical arguments and claims, it is not possible for this book to serve an academic or scientific purpose.

It should be highlighted that this book is far from being able to provide an objective examination regarding the events of 1915. The author puts forward the views of only Armenian academics and academics who support the claim that the events of 1915 can be classified as an act of genocide. In the absence of solid facts or reference in the book, it can be construed that the author's approach to the events of 1915 has been influenced by his social upbringing. It is not hard to imagine that the author, who is of Armenian descent, most probably grew up as part of an Armenian community, constantly being told the Armenian side of a story that completely overlooks the Turkish side. This narrative is still very much an issue of debate in the academic sphere.

Indeed, it is a significant fact that while there are historians supporting claims of genocide, there are a significant number of well-known academics who refuse to label the events in question as genocide such as Bernard Lewis, Stanford Shaw, and Heath Lowry. Bernard Lewis of Princeton University, a very well-known scholar of the Middle East, is known to have refused these claims numerous times stating that "the issue is not whether the massacres happened or not, but rather if these massacres were as a result of a deliberate preconceived decision of the Turkish government," adding that "there is no evidence for such a decision."¹ In addition to that, Heath Lowry -who served as a Professor at Harvard, Georgetown, and Princeton- has concluded that the book *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*, which is the primary source of the Armenian Genocide claims is full of "half-truths" and "falsehoods".² Lowry's conclusions have also been supported by Guenter Lewy, who has taught at Columbia University and the University of Massachusetts and is renowned for his work regarding the term genocide. Therefore, as it can be seen, there remains a serious debate surrounding this issue to this day, and any study that fails to provide a solid argument with strong references will be far from being able to qualify as scholarly work.

Furthermore, this book refrains from sharing sources while referring to and analyzing statistical data. Indeed, although some statistics are shared, these are not sufficient to make an argument towards a definitive conclusion on a topic which is argued on academic, social, and political platforms on an international level. An author covering an issue such as the Armenian Question has access to a great amount of research that put forth arguments for both sides of the dispute. It has certainly been a popular topic of research over the last few

1 Michael Getler, "Documenting and Debating a 'Genocide'" http://www.pbs.org/ombudsman/2006/04/documenting_and_debating_a_genocide.html

2 J.M Winter, *America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 302.

decades. Considering the availability of such a wide range of resources, the author should have no excuse to have such a fairly poor bibliography.

In the below paragraphs, there are some examples of information given without reference;

“Between 1894 and 1896, Abdülhamid II pursued terror policy notably in Eastern Anatolia involving massacre organization, ethnical purifying, destructions and removals to reinforce his dominance. Furthermore, this led to more than 200,000 victims.”³

“The immigrations lasted over fifteen years towards Russia, Balkans and America, and 100,000 Armenians emigrated from eastern parts of Ottoman Empire.”⁴

Another serious shortcoming of this book is the fact that the author does not even mention the deaths of Turks at the hands of Armenians. In this respect, the author fails to mention the activities of the Dashnaks aiding the Russian armies which were advancing in eastern Turkey during WWI. The author fails to mention that there was even a point in time during WWI that armed Armenian forces established autonomy around the eastern Turkish city of Van. Nichanian reflects past events in question simply as innocent Armenians dying at the hands of Turks, with no mentioning of the crimes committed against Turks by Armenians.

The analysis of the book provided above shows that the author holds the assumption that the readers know everything regarding the issue at hand. Nichanian does not delve into the sources or make an effort to prove what is being put forth.

To conclude, as it can be seen, this book is far from having the characteristics of an academic study, because it lacks the very basic elements of research and analysis. As it has almost no statistical data provided by reliable and respected sources, it fails to achieve an analytic argument and a sound conclusion. Almost every line written in the book reflects the feelings of the author regarding the Armenian Question, rather than the facts related to what happened in the past. Such a study only deepens the prejudices between the Turks and Armenians. Furthermore, such a study complicates any opportunity towards the normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia that are located in a part of the world where stability is desperately needed.

3 Mikaël Nichanian, *Détruire les Arméniens* (Paris: Presse Universitaires de France, 2015), p. 40.

4 Nichanian, *Détruire les Arméniens*, p.40.