

BOOK REVIEWS

REVIEW ESSAY: THE ARMENIAN QUESTION*

Ermeni Meselesi Hallolunmuştur: Osmanlı Belgelerine Göre Savaş Yıllarında Ermenilere Yönelik Politikalar [The Armenian Question Resolved: Policies Toward the Armenians in the War Years according to Ottoman Documents]¹ By Taner Akçam. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2008, 3rd printing. 339 pages.

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The main argument of this book is that the Armenian deportations of 1915-16 under the Ottoman Empire were not a temporary military solution necessitated by the circumstances, of World War I but an attempt to solve the Armenian question by radical means. According to Taner Akçam, this was part of a general population policy on the part of Ottoman leaders that aimed at deporting and exterminating the empire's Christian minorities and assimilating its non-Turkish Muslim minorities. Moreover, Akçam argues, Ottoman archival materials support these contentions (pp. 11-12). With some justice, Taner Akçam is highly critical of conventional Turkish interpretations of the Armenian massacres during WWI. In this sense, the book is a welcome source of differing views. Nevertheless, while the entrenched nationalist interpretations of the catastrophic events of 1915-16 are admittedly inadequate for understanding and explaining the tragedy that took place, the logical consequence of this state of affairs should not lead one to conclude that *any* alternative to this simplistic approach would necessarily be accurate and honest.

The book contains an introduction, seven chapters, and a conclusion. The first chapter discusses relevant Ottoman archival sources and other materials. The second attempts to describe "the plan to homogenize Anatolia." The third and fourth chapters talk about Ottoman policies toward the empire's Greek population before and during World War I. The fifth, sixth and seventh chapters deal with the Armenian deportations and the massacres during the war. The contents of some chapters are quite similar to those of Akçam's earlier works. However, in this book Akçam attempts to substantiate his arguments by also using Ottoman archival materials.

According to Akçam, after the Balkan Wars of 1912-13, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), the ruling faction in the Ottoman government, devised plans to homogenize Anatolia on an ethno-religious basis. With this goal in mind, they conducted several studies of the population structure, dealing with various groups' ethnic, social and economic characteristics. By 1913, they began to implement these policies through "a dual mechanism" whereby the government could ostensibly remain within a legal framework while, in fact, resorting to violent activities through secret channels (p. 37). The studies to which Akçam refers include the preparation of ethnicity-based census data, maps and information about the economic situation of the Christian minorities (pp. 39-45).

*To access the endnotes for this essay, please visit the Middle East Policy Council website at <http://www.mepc.org>.

Akçam's argument about war-time population engineering is worthy of serious consideration; however, his insistence that these policies were already mapped out before the war remains problematic on a number of levels. Here, he relies too much on hindsight and fails to establish any concrete link between these studies and subsequent implemented policies. He reads backwards from subsequent to earlier events. In addition, some of the studies (or inquiries) to which he refers were actually made during the war. Therefore, it is questionable to interpret all of this data as evidence for the existence of a pre-war "plan" to homogenize Anatolia.

According to Akçam, economic dimensions in particular held an important place in these population policies. In order to realize homogenization, the CUP-controlled Ottoman government instructed local authorities to conduct inquiries and keep records on the property of non-Muslim minorities. In 1914, the government sent telegrams to various provinces demanding detailed information on Greek assets and properties (p. 45). Akçam's argument, however, is marred by inconsistency; he subsequently notes that these inquiries were made parallel to the negotiations conducted for the proposed exchange of populations between Greece and the Ottoman Empire following the Balkan Wars (p. 47). Indeed, in July 1914, the Ottoman and Greek delegations met in İzmir with the aim of negotiating the exchange of populations. The settlement of the property-and-assets claims was also part of the negotiations.² As far as the Armenians are concerned, Akçam is able to provide only one such inquiry. However, since the date of this inquiry is November 1915 (p. 47, fn. 29), it does not provide any support for the existence of a pre-war plan for homogenization.

On the basis of his interpretation of settlement regulations, Akçam argues that the relocated Armenians were to be only between 5 and 10 percent of the *total* Muslim population in the areas designated for the settlement of the Armenian deportees (pp. 56-62). To obtain a clearer picture of the implications of this regulation, Akçam attempts to determine the total number of Armenians subjected to relocation and the total population of the Muslims living in settlement areas in "Syria and Iraq." Akçam estimates the total Muslim population in the areas designated for the settlement of Armenians to be 1,680,721. Using the figure of 924,158 (provided by Turkish journalist Murat Bardakçı from Talat Pasha's "Black Book") as a basis, and making several adjustments for the missing districts and provinces, Akçam estimates the total number of Armenians subjected to deportation at over one million (pp. 66-67). He notes that even though the regulations envisaged the settlement of approximately 168,000 Armenians (10 percent of the Muslim population in the region), the number of Armenians deported was above one million. Akçam ends his discussion by asking, "How can more than one million Armenians be reduced to the 10 percent of a Muslim population numbering 1,680,721?" (p. 67).

Akçam implies that the discrepancy can be explained by extermination, since he believes the existence of this regulation "by itself" is sufficient to demonstrate that "the policies adopted against the Armenians were aiming at their annihilation" (p. 62). Others, however, dispute such an assertion, arguing that the relocated Armenians were not to exceed 10 percent of the local population only in the Muslim villages into which they would be settled, and not of the entire population of these provinces. In addition to these villages, it is suggested, there were also "Armenian areas that would be newly established" for the settlement of the Armenians.³ More important, the figure provided by the journalist Bardakçı not only represents the number of Armenians sent to "Syria and Iraq," but also includes those Armenians sent to other resettlement areas within Anatolia itself. Therefore, rendering this figure as the number of Armenians sent to "Syria and Iraq" alone is also questionable.⁴

In the third chapter, Akçam deals with the persecutions of the Greek population in Thrace and western Anatolia after the Balkan wars. According to him, these persecutions were instigated by the Ottoman authorities, who aimed at intimidating the Greek population in order to cleanse them from these regions. Akçam quotes several inconsistent figures on the number of Greeks who had fled the Ottoman Empire, some of which are grossly exaggerated. Basing his claims on a book by Cemal

Kutay, Akçam quotes Eşref Kuşçubaşı, a prominent Special Organization (SO) agent, as stating that “in 1914 alone” the number of the deported “Greek-Armenian population in the Aegean region, concentrated and settled especially in the coastal areas,” was 1,150,000 (p. 100). However, there is no other source that could verify and corroborate a population movement on such a grand scale “in 1914 alone.” In his footnote, Akçam further asserts that “Celal Bayar, who presents detailed passages from Kuşçubaşı’s memoirs, gives separate figures for specific cities. The total of these is the same as the figure above 1,150,000” (p. 100, fn. 77). However, the total given in Bayar’s memoirs is not 1,150,000, but 760,000.⁵ In addition, the figures provided in Bayar’s work have no relation whatsoever to the number of deportees but indicate the number of people living in specific regions. More critically, according to a different work by Cemal Kutay, the figures in question were actually taken from a book prepared by Athens University and were inflated.⁶

At the end of the third chapter, Akçam discusses the relationship between the persecution of Greeks and the deportations of Armenians in a section titled “Was the Greek Relocation of 1913-1914 a Prelude to the Armenian Cleansing of 1915-1917?” (pp. 104-107). His contention is that there was a connection between the two cases in terms of both the “organization” and the “cadres” that implemented them. However, Akçam is able to identify only “three persons” who, according to him, were involved in both cases. Even when one takes it at face value, his thesis is still not fully convincing and would require more empirical research than he offers. More important, of the three names that he provided in support of his thesis, two are problematic. One of these is Şükrü (Kaya) Bey, who later headed the Ottoman “Directorate for the Settlement of Tribes and Refugees” and was involved in the relocation of Armenians. Akçam produces no evidence demonstrating that he was involved in either the persecution or the migration of Greeks, focusing instead on the fact that Şükrü Bey had been a member of the Ottoman delegation that conducted negotiations with Greece in the summer of 1914 concerning the proposed exchange of minorities (p. 105). However, when World War I broke out, this project had not been realized.

Akçam’s other example is “Pertev (Demirhan) Pasha,” who, he asserts, was involved in the deportation of Greeks in western Anatolia and would later take part “in the deportation and the murder of Armenians” in the Sivas region (p. 106). Here Akçam confuses Major General Pertev (Demirhan) Pasha, the commander of the 4th Army Corps, with Lieutenant Colonel Pertev Bey, the deputy commander of the 10th Army Corps in Sivas. When Colonel Pertev Bey was in Sivas,⁷ Pertev (Demirhan) Pasha was actually in Buca, İzmir.⁸ While the latter had never served in Sivas,⁹ Akçam produces no evidence showing that the former was involved “in the deportation and the murder of the Armenians” in Sivas either. To support his claim of Pertev Bey’s involvement in the deportation and murder of Armenians in Sivas, Akçam refers to an article by the Armenian scholar Vahakn N. Dadrian, purportedly describing “the mission” of Pertev Bey (p. 106 fn. 98). Although Dadrian’s article confirms that Colonel Pertev Bey served in Sivas, it contains no evidence about “the mission” or, Pertev Bey’s involvement “in the deportation and the murder of Armenians.”¹⁰ Thus, the author’s argument that there was a connection between the two cases remains unconvincing.

The fifth, sixth and seventh chapters, which constitute the longest part of the book as well as its main subject, are devoted to the relocation of Armenians. Akçam’s main argument is that the policies adopted against the Armenians were aimed at their annihilation and that the documentary evidence from the Ottoman archives confirms this. However, these contentions are not adequately supported.

In his introduction to the fifth chapter, Akçam gives special attention to Talat Pasha’s memorandum of May 26, 1915, which outlined the stated reasons for the Armenian relocation and was submitted to Grand Vizier Said Halim Pasha. Akçam argues that the document had never been rendered in modern Turkish in its entirety (p. 134). However, this is not true; the entire text of the document in modern Turkish is actually found in a document collection on the issue.¹¹

Akçam notes that the Ottoman authorities' main goal was to remove the possibility of the establishment of an independent Armenian state within the boundaries of the empire. Few would dispute this assertion. In order to support it, Akçam approvingly quotes from Talat Pasha's telegram of August 29, 1915, sent to various provinces and *sanjaks* (pp. 136-137). Yet, when discussing a different matter some 130 pages later, he changes his mind about the reliability of this document and dismisses the very same telegram as part of "a great deception" (pp. 266, 267 fn. 229). Akçam makes no effort to address the question of why a document that he approvingly quoted in one instance should be dismissed as unreliable in another.

Akçam argues that the relocation of the Armenians went beyond being a temporary security measure and was aimed at "terminally solving the Eastern Question" through the extermination of the Armenians. He argues this can be deduced from a letter by the influential CUP member Bahaettin Şakir Bey, quoted by the Turkish journalist Ahmet Emin Yalman (p. 138). Stretching the point further, Akçam observes important "similarities" between this alleged "letter" and two letters attributed to Bahaettin Şakir by Aram Andonian (p. 138 fn. 10). However, Yalman was not quoting "from a letter of Bahaettin Şakir," as Akçam contends, but was conveying a rumor.¹² Furthermore, Bahaettin Şakir could not have sent the letter dated March 3, 1915,¹³ which is published in Andonian's work and regarded by many as a forgery,¹⁴ since Bahaettin Şakir was not actually in İstanbul when it was sent, but in Erzurum, where he remained until March 13, 1915.¹⁵

According to Akçam, the CUP's Central Committee arrived at the decision to annihilate the Armenian population in March 1915 (pp. 150-151). However, the memoirs of Arif Cemil Denker (to be discussed later), which Akçam uses as his source, do not support such an assertion, but only mention that the "relocation" of Armenians was decided without implying any destructive designs. Akçam further maintains that some officials who opposed the government's policy in this regard were removed from office. He notes, for instance, that Reşit Pasha, the governor of Kastamonu province, was removed because he opposed the deportations within his province (p. 161). However, it is noteworthy that, even after the removal of Governor Reşit Pasha, the Interior Ministry in several communiqués dispatched to the province still instructed the local authorities to not deport the Armenians in Kastamonu.¹⁶ For instance, on September 28, 1915, Interior Minister Talat dispatched a telegram to Kastamonu, apparently in response to an inquiry made by the local authorities, stating that "[a] handful of Armenians there cannot disrupt the public order within the province.... At present, the Armenians there will not be relocated."¹⁷

Akçam argues that the governors who were removed from office later testified before the "Commission on the Investigation of Evil Acts," as well as the post-war military tribunals, that they were removed because of their opposition to the deportations. As an example, Akçam cites how "Mazhar Bey," the former governor of Ankara, explained his case (p. 161). However, the pronouncement quoted by Akçam was not made by Mazhar himself, neither to the mentioned commission nor to the post-war tribunals, but was instead attributed to Mazhar Bey by a person named Mehmet Radi.¹⁸

Akçam contends that, along with the CUP's responsible secretaries, CUP member Bahaettin Şakir himself also "traveled around the eastern provinces and met with the governors, sub-governors and other persons" and "informed them of the [genocide] decision of the CUP's Central Committee" (p. 162). Unfortunately, this is one of the many instances in the book where facts are confused by Akçam's gloss. The memoir of Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın, which Akçam cites as his source, does not mention any decision by the CUP Central Committee at all, but relates that Bahaettin Şakir seemed to "have traveled around the eastern provinces and met with the governors, sub-governors and other persons, and, by exceeding the limits of his authority, *presented his personal thoughts* as if they were the decision and the wish of the CUP and the Central Committee"¹⁹ (italics added).

Akçam also cites passages from several sources in order to demonstrate the direct responsibility of state officials in the killings, but these are used selectively. He leaves out information in the

sources that does not coincide with his thesis. For instance, he quotes from a speech made by Mehmet Emin Bey, the deputy for Trabzon, during the discussions in the Ottoman Parliament in which Mehmet Emin states that he personally witnessed that the prefect of Ordu “loaded a boat with the Armenians on the pretext of sending them to Samsun, and then had them tipped into the sea” (p. 165). Akçam then goes on to quote Mehmet Emin Bey’s subsequent remarks but omits a relevant part: “As soon as I arrived here [Istanbul] I told what I witnessed to the minister of the interior [Talat Pasha]. Thereafter, they sent an inspector and dismissed the prefect [of Ordu]. They put him on trial.”²⁰

Akçam asserts that the Ottoman Interior Ministry remained unmoved by the news of the Armenian massacres (p. 199) and considers the telegrams ordering the protection of Armenians unreliable. He further believes that these were written merely to placate foreign ambassadors. Akçam’s arguments are not always convincing, however. For example, upon receiving the news that a convoy of 500 Armenians who had departed from Erzurum was attacked and massacred, Talat Pasha dispatched a telegram, dated June 14, 1915, stating that every measure should be taken “to protect the Armenians against the assault of the tribes and villagers, and to punish those who dare to kill and abduct them.” After quoting this text from the telegram, Akçam dismisses it as a “sham” and argues that “there is enough evidence” to show that “Talat wrote the telegram in question under the pressure of the German Embassy” (pp. 200-201, fn. 43). Akçam produces no such curious “evidence,” however. Instead he refers to a lengthy essay that actually contradicts his thesis. According to this essay, the Erzurum German consul’s telegram, which informed his embassy of the massacre, was sent on June 16, 1915²¹ — two days after Talat had already sent his telegram.

The lack of critical footnotes also weakens Akçam’s arguments. For instance, he claims that two Armenian deputies of the Ottoman Parliament, Krikor Zohrab and Vartkes Serengülyan, were killed on the order of Cemal Pasha, the commander of the 4th Army, but fails to cite a source (p. 248). More important, several other sources cited by Akçam such as Falih Rıfkı Atay’s account, attest to the contrary: that Cemal Pasha had actually tried to protect the two Armenian deputies.²²

Akçam also discusses the relocation of Catholic and Protestant Armenians. According to the author, the government deported them using a two-track communication system whereby the official orders, ostensibly sparing Catholics and Protestants from deportation, were followed by subsequent coded telegraphic instructions ordering their deportations and sending special inspectors to the regions to enforce them. On the basis of a report by the German Adana consul, Akçam argues that Talat Pasha sent Ali Münif Bey as a special inspector to Adana in order to enforce the relocation of Catholics and Protestants. Indeed, Akçam asserts, “in his memoirs Ali Münif confesses that he himself prepared the list of the Armenians to be deported from Adana” (pp. 267-268). However, Ali Münif makes no such confession. There is also no indication in his memoirs that he had been sent to the region as an inspector to enforce any mission. Ali Münif says that on his way to take up a new post in Lebanon, he stayed for a few days at his hometown, Adana, where he also came into contact with the three local CUP members (İsmail Safa, Muhtar Fikri and Kibarzade), who “bitterly” complained about the Armenian activities and “even prepared and gave” him a list of alleged ringleaders who should be deported. Upon “seeing the critical situation” in the region that might have “resulted in bloodshed at any moment,” Ali Münif goes on to say, “I have sent a telegram to the interior minister, Talat, requesting the immediate inclusion of Adana into the relocation zone and telling him that if this is not done, I will not set foot on mount Lebanon. In addition, I have sent a list [to Talat].”²³ Apparently, Ali Münif identified the list he sent as “prepared” and “given” to him by the three locals. This becomes even more apparent in subsequent sections of the memoirs, especially since the list in question is described as being in the handwriting of Muhtar Fikri, one of the three who prepared and gave him the list.²⁴

Akçam further believes that the Ottoman documents corroborate his thesis on the Catholic and Protestant Armenians and that the telegrams sent from various regions in September 1915 state

that all Armenians, including Catholics and Protestants, were deported and that none had remained in the concerned provinces (p. 268). However, of the four telegrams cited by Akçam, two actually contradict his statements. The telegram sent from the sanjak of Niğde, for example, actually states that “an Armenian population of 221 persons, consisting of Catholics and Protestants,” remained within the sanjak,²⁵ while the telegram sent from the sanjak of Eskişehir states that “the number of Armenians required to be removed [from the sanjak] amounted to 7,000” and that all of these were dispatched.²⁶ This does not mean that all Armenians had been deported and that none remained. While Eskişehir’s Armenian population was over 7,000,²⁷ the anti-Unionist author Ahmet Refik (Altınay), who at the time was in Eskişehir, also wrote that the Catholic Armenians as well as the families of the Armenian soldiers serving in the Ottoman Army remained in Eskişehir.²⁸ Moreover, another telegram, dated September 18, 1915, and sent from the sanjak of Kayseri, also mentions 4,911 Armenians, consisting of soldiers’ families and, to a lesser extent, “of Catholics and Protestants, who remained within the Sanjak [of Kayseri].”²⁹ Curiously enough, this telegram, quoted earlier in the book by Akçam (p. 59), appears to have escaped his attention in this instance.

At times, Akçam brings unrelated events together and leaves his readers with a rather misleading impression regarding the context of certain statements. For instance, he quotes from a report that mentions an official named Hüseyin Kazım Bey, who expresses his dissatisfaction with the authorities’ conduct toward the Armenians (p.307). Immediately after quoting this report, Akçam writes, “Later ... Hüseyin Kazım wrote in his memoirs that in Lebanon alone, the number of the poor who fell victim to the evil designs of the government was 200,000” (p. 308). However, Hüseyin Kazım’s remark had nothing to do with the Ottoman Armenians but was made in connection with the prevalent corruption of the provincial authorities, which was aggravated during the war:

There was a disgrace of silk corruption that no one can manage to describe properly. The bales of silks, each of which amounted to 600 Lira (gold) in Germany and Switzerland, had been bought at 300 Lira from their owners by [exerting] all sorts of threats, pressures, swearwords and insults. ... To benefit from the misery of the people, to be full through the hunger of the poor, and to find life through their death has become a custom in the country. And those who first broke this ground had been the high officials of the government. It was, then, seen that thousands of innocent men, women and children died everywhere in the most terrible manner. In the unfortunate Lebanon alone, the number of those poor who fell victim to the evil designs of the government reaches to 150-200 thousand.³⁰

The book is riddled with errors, some quite significant, an indication of poor editing. Nonetheless, it has been reprinted three times without correction of these mistakes. Moreover, despite being a new publication, a significant portion of the book is a repetition of Akçam’s statements from his earlier works, often with citation mistakes, spelling errors and incoherent expressions repeated verbatim.

DISTORTED SOURCES

The most egregious problems in the book are Akçam’s disregard for the context of statements or expressions contained in his sources and his tendency to misrepresent them in support of his claims.

Nusret Bey’s Testimony

In discussing the implementation of the Armenian relocation, Akçam argues that Nusret Bey, the former prefect of Bayburt, confessed, in his testimony before the court-martial, to having received secret telegrams from Istanbul ordering the annihilation of the Armenians:

There were also instances in which the order of annihilation had to be sent by telegram. For instance, the verdict of the Bayburt trial repeats that the decision to annihilate was made by the Central Committee [of the CUP] and was sent to the regions via special couriers. ... [The verdict] includes the

testimony of Nusret, who had been sentenced to death and executed as a result of this trial. In his testimony, Nusret stated that he had received a secret order from İstanbul [instructing him] not to leave any Armenian alive and that anyone standing in the way of this order would be executed (p. 163).³¹

The verdict of the Bayburt trial, however, does not support the assertion that there was an order “from İstanbul” instructing “not to leave any Armenian alive,” but instead refers to a “supposed” order instructing “not to leave any Armenian” behind (i.e., expulsion). The specific reference to this supposed “order” concerns the suicide of Ovakim Efendi, the fiscal director of Bayburt district. As is well known, the Ottoman Government’s relocation of the Armenians resulted in enormous suffering and tragedy. One such tragedy engulfed Ovakim Efendi and his family. Fearing relocation and its consequences, he committed suicide with his family members in Bayburt. In the post-war Bayburt trial conducted in İstanbul, the court held the former prefect Nusret Bey responsible, but he denied having any role in the suicide:

As I stated, the relocation of the fiscal director [Ovakim Efendi], who committed suicide along with his family, had been initially postponed in order [for him] to turn over [the fiscal directorate?], and even though I had no other fault than transmitting, some time later, to the Gendarme Office, Mahmut Kamil Pasha’s order of expulsion, threatening the administrative officials with execution, he [Ovakim Efendi] committed suicide after the mentioned order has been presented to him by the Gendarmerie office....³²

The episode was also covered by the newspapers of the time, which summarized the trial proceedings. In the press, Nusret Bey is recorded as making the following statements:

The fiscal director Ovakim Efendi was not murdered but committed suicide. This is confirmed by the police report as well. Back then, I was busy with the dispatch of the soldiers, [and] the military commander was Mahmut Kâmil Pasha. **We had been receiving quite serious orders from the military commanders.** And Ovakim Efendi committed suicide 12 days after the relocation [started].... I did not dispatch him for relocation. One day, I received an order for the immediate dispatch of all the Armenians who were not relocated [previously] for any reason whatsoever. And those who did not obey this order would be executed.³³

However, in the verdict, the court did not accept Nusret Bey’s defense, and Mahmut Kamil Pasha’s “order of expulsion” (to which Nusret referred in his defense) found expression as follows:

Even though, Nusret Bey claims that he subjected the fiscal director Ovakim Efendi to relocation, supposedly upon an order received after the relocation [started], instructing [him] not to leave any Armenian, and which compelled and threatened [Nusret] with execution in case any [Armenian] had been left, and that therefore he [Nusret] had no involvement in the aforementioned suicide affair...³⁴

In other words, what the verdict referred to as “an order... instructing not to leave any Armenian” was the “expulsion” order of Mahmut Kâmil Pasha, the commander of the 3rd Army stationed at Erzurum. A perusal of the trial verdict and Nusret Bey’s defense, as well as the press coverage of the trial, leaves no doubt on this point. Akçam, however, uses the expression “not to leave any Armenian” with one particular difference, minor in wording, yet major in meaning: “not to leave any Armenian *alive*” (he added the word “alive”). Akçam thereby misrepresents an expulsion order as an “annihilation order,” while placing the direct responsibility on the government in İstanbul by identifying it as the author of the order, when there was no mention of İstanbul at all. According to Nusret’s testimony, this order was sent by Mahmut Kâmil Pasha, who was in Erzurum.

March 1915: A Decision for Genocide?

As noted, Akçam argues that the CUP Central Committee arrived at a decision to exterminate the empire's Armenian population in the internal deliberations that took place toward the end of March 1915. The author quotes a crucial source in support of his thesis:

It is a very high probability that the essential decisions concerning the annihilation of Armenians were taken in the deliberations that took place in İstanbul toward the end of March [1915]. As a result of these deliberations, "it was decided that Bahaettin Şakir Bey should concentrate on the country's internal enemies by abandoning the Special Organization's affairs related to foreign enemies." In other words, Bahaettin Şakir was now being put in charge of dealing only with "the Armenians inside" (pp. 150-151).³⁵

The text comes from the memoirs of Arif Cemil (Denker), who served during the war in the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa (Special Organization, SO). However, the quote appears rather differently in the original source; it does not mention any "deliberations" in which "it was decided that Bahaettin Şakir should concentrate on... internal enemies." Instead, this is mentioned as an individual act on the part of Bahaettin Şakir himself and is limited to his stay in İstanbul:

In İstanbul, *Dr. Bahaettin Şakir Bey has now decided to concentrate on the country's internal enemies by abandoning the Special Organization's affairs related to foreign enemies.*

This was because Dr. Bahaettin Şakir Bey has witnessed many facts during the period of four-five months he has spent in Erzurum and at different points of the Caucasian front. The attitude the Armenians have taken against Turkey and the assistance they provided to the Russian army have convinced him [Bahaettin Şakir] that it was necessary to fear the internal enemies as much as the external ones. By forming bands, *the Armenians inside* were threatening the rear of our army and were trying to cut our lines of retreat³⁶ (*italics added*).

The author has altered the original sentence and misrepresented an individual act as a collective decision. In the same vein, Akçam's statement that "Bahaettin Şakir was now being put in charge of dealing only with 'the Armenians inside'" has no basis in the original source, and the phrase "the Armenians inside" is used completely out of context. In the original source, the only reference to "the Armenians inside" is made in connection with their formation of bands and the threat posed to the army. And there is simply no information suggesting that Bahaettin Şakir was put in charge of anything by anyone.

On Hüseyin and Abidin Nesimi

According to Akçam, in some cases the government officials who resisted obeying "orders of annihilation" were killed. He cites the son of a prefect as evidence:

In addition to those who were relieved of their posts, there were also those murdered among the prefects who did not implement, and resisted the orders [of annihilation]. The prefect of Lice [Hüseyin Nesimi] did not obey the order to massacre the Armenians. He demanded that the order be given in written form. Thereafter, the prefect was dismissed, recalled to Diyarbakır, and murdered on the way. In his memoirs, Abidin Nesimi, the son of the prefect Hüseyin Nesimi, related that the elimination of government officials was ordered by Dr. Reşit, the governor of Diyarbakır, and gave other names: "Ferit, the governor-general of Basra, Bedi Nuri, the lieutenant-governor of Muntefak, ...Sabit, the deputy prefect of Besiri, İsmail Mestan, the journalist" were among the killed. The reason for these murders was clear: "The elimination of the [administrative] staff who would oppose" the annihilation of the Armenians "was inevitable" (p. 162).³⁷

Unfortunately it is not Abidin Nesimi, but Taner Akçam who wrote that the government officials in question were eliminated on the orders of Dr. Reşit, the governor of Diyarbakır. What Abidin Nesimi wrote was that during Reşit's governorship some murders with unknown perpetrators had taken place:

When Dr. Reşit was in Iraq and later during his governorship of Diyarbakır, many crimes were committed whose perpetrators could not be found. Most important among these were the murders of Ferit, the governor-general of Basra, Bedi Nuri, the lieutenant-governor of Muntefak, my father Hüseyin Nesimi, the prefect of Lice, and Sabit, the deputy prefect of Besiri and the journalist İsmail Mestan.... It was impossible to carry out the relocation of Armenians with the Circassian gendarme units and with the members of the tribes of Bedirhani, Milli, Karakeçili who were actually the Kurdish militia. For this group was a cadre of pillage and plunder. Therefore, this group could not carry out the relocation and turned it into a massacre. And the elimination of the [administrative] staff who would *oppose the pillage and plunder* was inevitable.³⁸

In regard to Dr Reşit's³⁹ complicity in the murder of his father, Abidin Nesimi wrote the following:

Did Dr. Reşit give any order for the murder of my father? Or did this event occur without his knowledge? We can find the answers of these questions in Reşit's memoirs.... In these memoirs Dr. Reşit writes that he was extremely respectful towards my father and that my father had possessed the quality of rendering great services to the nation and that it was impossible for him to give any order for the murder of my father. Quite naturally I cannot be expected to have sympathy for Dr. Reşit, as my father was killed by a mobile gendarme regiment that was recalled by this name. I have done research on Dr. Reşit. I have inquired about Dr. Reşit from his friends who had been in exile in Tripoli, where he was also in exile, and from other persons, especially from the governor of Tripoli, Celal Bey, from Crete. Both the deceased Cami Baykurt and Celal Bey had given testimony in his favor. I am of the opinion that Dr. Reşit was a well-intentioned, yet narrow-minded, person.⁴⁰

There are several significant problems with the way Akçam has used this account:

- Akçam claims that Bedii Nuri and Ferit (who was not the governor-general but the division commander of Basra), were killed for refusing to exterminate Armenians, but they were actually murdered on June 20, 1913, about two years before the Armenian deportations started.⁴¹ Their murders were undertaken on the orders of Seyyit Talib, the deputy for Basra, whose opposition to the CUP was well known.⁴² At the time, Dr. Reşit was not the governor of Diyarbakır but was serving as the lieutenant governor of the northeast Ottoman Sanjak of Rize, some 400 hundred miles to the north of Diyarbakır.⁴³ In a book claiming to be based on Ottoman documents, this mistake is not insignificant. There is reference to the two men as "martyrs" in the Ottoman documents well before the Armenian deportations were an issue. For instance, on March 31, 1914, the Interior Ministry suggested extending financial aid to the sick child of "Bedii Nuri Bey, the lieutenant governor of Müntefik, who had been murdered and martyred in the vicinity of Basra in the beginning of last June [1913], along with Basra division commander Colonel Ferid Bey."⁴⁴
- Perhaps a more serious problem involves the way Akçam has altered the original sentence. The original reads "the elimination of the [administrative] staff who would oppose the *pillage and plunder* was inevitable." In Akçam's book it reads: "the elimination of the [administrative] staff who would oppose *the annihilation of the Armenians* was inevitable." Akçam thereby invented support to buttress his thesis.

- Notwithstanding Akçam's claims to the contrary, Abidin Nesimi nowhere writes that the elimination of the mentioned individuals and his father was done on the orders of Dr. Reşit. He identifies the perpetrators as local forces and tribesmen, motivated by pillage and plunder. In discussing the question of whether Dr. Reşit had given orders for the murder, Nesimi points to a source that, according to him, answers this question. The source, however, indicates views contradictory to Akçam's.

On Yusuf Rıza Bey's Testimony

Akçam contends that, after being confronted with some highly incriminating documents during his interrogation at the main trial, Yusuf Rıza Bey, a member of the CUP Central Committee, admitted that the committee and the SO had played an important role in the crimes against the Armenians:

At the 7th session [the main trial], upon being read incriminating testimonies and documents about the involvement of the SO in the committed crimes, Yusuf Rıza made the following statement: "Unfortunately, today the circumstances bring [this] to such a position that the SO had become an instrument for the execution of all crimes under the orders of the Central Committee [of the CUP]. I am myself unable to find and give an answer to this, Your Excellency." Confronted with the weight of the documents, Yusuf Rıza was admitting the role of the Central Committee of the CUP and the S.O. in the committed crimes (p. 171-172).⁴⁵

Even though Akçam specifically stresses that Yusuf Rıza Bey made the statement in question upon being "confronted" with "incriminating documents" during the 7th session of the trial, the fact remains that during his interrogation at the 7th session, not a single document was read into the record. It was, therefore, impossible for Rıza to make a statement upon being "confronted with the weight of the documents."⁴⁶ More important, Rıza Bey was not making a confession, as is claimed above, but rather was complaining that despite all the efforts that he made to serve the country, his involvement in the SO during the war was being portrayed differently than what he intended:

My presence in the SO along with Dr. Nazım Bey, was a patriotic service, Your Excellency. We believed that there was a war going on, and that all of us should serve this state, this nation, this homeland as much as we were able to cope with... Unfortunately, today the circumstances bring [this] to such a position that the SO had become an instrument for the execution of all crimes under the orders of the Central Committee. I am myself unable to find and give an answer to this, Your Excellency.⁴⁷

Akçam, thus, took the relevant statement out of its real context and invented another one to make plausible his claim that Rıza Bey was confessing the role played by the SO and the Central Committee.⁴⁸ Moreover, Rıza's subsequent statements, made in the same session, also deserve attention. The presiding judge insisted on the role played by the Central Committee members in the relocation, but Rıza Bey rejected any connection:

Rıza Bey: I swear to God, in any form you may wish, that no one from here [the Central Committee] intervened. The Central Committee has nothing to do with these affairs. Please investigate [this]. Please be assured that there is none.⁴⁹

Only two questions after making the statement on which Akçam bases the claim that Yusuf Rıza Bey "confessed" the role the Central Committee played in the crimes associated with the Armenian relocation, Yusuf Rıza Bey explicitly denies that the Central Committee played any role whatsoever.

On Talat Pasha's Telegram

The title of the book is taken from a telegram, dated August 29, 1915, and dispatched by Talat Pasha to Ankara Province. According to Akçam, this document clearly demonstrates that “the policies adopted against the Armenians were aiming at their annihilation”:

The cipher telegram contains exactly the following words: “The Armenian issue pertaining to the Eastern Provinces has been resolved. [Therefore], there is no need to harm the reputation of our nation and government by conducting unnecessary cruelties.” The statement is so clear as not to require any further comment. Talat has been frankly saying that the murders were being committed until August 1915. However, since he [Talat] considered the Armenian Question to be resolved by the end of August, he had been regarding further crimes as unnecessary. It would not be wrong to claim that this document will, to a significant extent, put an end to some unnecessary debates surrounding this subject (p. 182).⁵⁰

Though Akçam claims that the statement is clear enough not to require any comment, he cannot help making some. However, it may be better to see the telegram in its entirety to form an opinion:

The Armenian issue pertaining to the Eastern Provinces has been resolved. Therefore, there is no need to harm the reputation of our nation and government by conducting unnecessary cruelties. Particularly the recent attack conducted on the Armenians at a place close to Ankara has caused great regret of the Ministry, considering its way of occurring, the obvious incompetence of the officials charged with supervising the transfer of Armenians, and audacity on part of the gendarmes and the local people who acted on their bestial instincts to rape and rob the Armenians. The transfer of Armenians, which is desired to be carried out in an orderly and prudent manner, should henceforth never be left to the individuals having fanatical feelings of enmity, and that the Armenians, whether or not they are subject to relocation, will be definitely protected against any assault and attack. At the places where such a protection could not be provided, the transfer of Armenians should be postponed. From now on, all of the officials in charge shall be held responsible with respect to their ranks for any attack, which may occur and shall be brought before the military courts. It is necessary to give very strict orders to the relevant personnel in this regard.⁵¹

Whether this is a telegram “demonstrating that the policies adopted against the Armenians were aiming at their annihilation” and, for that matter, whether it will put an end to “some unnecessary debates surrounding this subject” are questions left to the judgment of the reader.

On Talat Pasha's Telegram of July 22, 1915

In a section of his book dealing with the relocation and massacres in Diyarbakir province, Akçam argues that, in a telegram to the provincial governor Dr. Reşit, Interior Minister Talat Pasha stated that the policy of extermination should be applied only to the Armenians:

Ten days later, on 22 July 1915, Talat addressed a second telegram to Dr. Reşit, which had been marked “secret, to be decoded personally,” and stated in quite frank terms that the policy of extermination should be carried out only against the Armenians and that it should not be extended to the other Christians: “Despite repeated instructions, the treatment accorded to the Armenians and indiscriminately against the Christians within the province has been repeatedly the subject of complaints. It's understood that this situation affects the neighboring provinces as well. The persistence of this situation, which will put the Government in a difficult position in the future.... is absolutely not permissible” (p. 187).⁵²

However, neither in the texts quoted by Akçam nor in the entire text of the telegram is there any indication supporting Akçam's assertion that the telegram ordered “a policy of extermination” to be carried out against the Armenians. More important, the subsequent parts of the telegram include instructions that would seem to contradict Akçam's position:

It has been reported by the prefecture of Nusaybin that since the roads are blocked, no travelers and small group of soldiers should be dispatched until further notice. It has been [also] reported from the Sanjak of Zor that due to the pillage and destruction on the border of Resul-Ayn, the ammunition which is urgently required to be dispatched to Mardin and Mosul could not be delivered. Despite repeated instructions, the treatment accorded to the Armenians and indiscriminately against the Christians within the province has repeatedly been the subject of complaints. It's understood that this situation affects the neighboring provinces as well. The persistence of this situation, which will put the Government in a difficult position in the future and will render the tribes and gendarmeries — who would be accustomed to pillage and massacre — useless, is absolutely not permissible. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to enforce the public security in a firm manner on the border of the province, and especially on the route of the Armenian convoys, and to avoid any delay in the military transportation and dispatch. The results of the measures which would be taken should be reported.⁵³

Notwithstanding Akçam's contentions, there is no indication, let alone a statement "in quite frank terms," in the entire text of the telegram that would justify the assertion that "a policy of extermination" was to be carried out against the Armenians. To the contrary, in the subsequent parts omitted by Akçam, the telegram orders the enforcement of public security in a "firm" manner, "especially on the route of the Armenian convoys."

The Murder of Dr. Rupen Çilingiryan

The author also devotes eight pages to the murder of Dr. Rupen Çilingiryan. Arrested on April 24, 1915, Dr. Çilingiryan was one of the prominent Armenians of İstanbul who had been sent to Çankırı for internment (p. 192). Akçam dwells upon the murder at such length to demonstrate not only that the government in İstanbul fully knew about the crimes but also attempted to acquit the killers: "If the killers were arrested on very rare occasions with the personal initiative of some well-intentioned local authorities, [the government] was making special efforts to secure the release of these killers as well" (p. 192).

As Akçam relates the story, Dr. Çilingiryan and his four friends departed from Çankırı and were subsequently murdered by a Kurdish band at a place close to Ankara in late August 1915 (p. 192). On August 31, 1915, Interior Minister Talat Pasha sent a telegram to Kastamonu province, which inquired, "within which province Rupen Çilingiryan and his four companions, who are understood to have been murdered by the son of Hacı Ali and his eleven associates, have been attacked." In the same telegram, Talat Pasha also ordered that "the villains" responsible for the murder "should be immediately pursued and arrested" (p. 193). Akçam identifies the murderer as a certain Kurd Ali, and claims that he and his associates were caught and then sentenced to eight years in prison, although there is some ambiguity as to how the events concluded (p. 193). Akçam then proceeds to discuss in some detail the post-war trials that dealt with this murder and the people who are said to be associated with it. Though the murderer seems to have been identified as "Kurd Alo" according to the press coverage of these post-war trials, Akçam insists on referring to him as Kurd "Ali" (pp. 193-196).

Akçam brings all of these details and discussions together to establish his main thesis: notwithstanding the fact that the person responsible for the murder of Dr. Çilingiryan (who, according to Akçam, was named Kurd Ali and committed the act at the instigation of the CUP) had been arrested and put on trial on the initiative of some well-intentioned local authorities, the Ottoman interior minister, Talat Pasha, intervened at the trial and tried to get the murderer and his friends out of jail. In support of these points, Akçam quotes a telegram dated May 13, 1916, dispatched by Talat Pasha to the Ankara province. This telegram reminded the provincial authorities of the earlier regulations with respect to the prisoners or arrested persons who wished to serve in the army during the war.⁵⁴ It also instructed local officials to contact the Ministry of Justice for the release of the people

who had been arrested by the Ankara Court Martial, with a view to induct them into the army (pp. 196-197). Akçam further asserts that the other documents at his disposal demonstrate that the people in question were in fact “Kurd Ali” and his associates (who murdered Dr Çilingiryan and his four other companions), and that Talat Pasha was, thus, trying to obtain a special amnesty for these people. To further the point, Akçam quotes yet another telegram from Talat Pasha to Ankara province, sent on June 5, 1916, urging the local authorities to accelerate the procedure to release a certain “Mehmet Ali from Nallıhan,” an inmate of the Ankara prison, in accordance with previous telegraphed instructions. Akçam then calls attention to the fact “that one of the murderers of Dr Çilingiryan had been named Ali was both recorded in Talat Pasha’s telegram [of August 31, 1915] which has been quoted earlier,” as well as “in the verdicts” of different post-war military tribunals dealing with this murder (p. 197). In effect Akçam assumes that the names “Hacı Ali,” “Kurd Ali,” and “Mehmet Ali from Nallıhan” stand for the same person. Thus Akçam concludes that “Mehmet Ali from Nallıhan” was the same person as “Kurd Ali,” who murdered Dr. Rupen Çilingiryan and his friends, and that Talat was taking great pains to secure the release of the murderer and his associates. Akçam attaches the utmost importance to these documents. According to him, they demonstrate the real intention behind the government’s policies toward the Armenians and the lengths to which Talat was prepared to go to release the murderers of the Armenians (p. 199).

Such conclusions, however, do not withstand scrutiny. Akçam arrives at them on the basis of several assumptions which, for reasons that will be clarified, are rather shaky. For instance, Akçam’s argument that Talat Pasha’s telegram (of August 31, 1915) identified one of the killers as “Ali” is not supported by the text itself, since the actual name of the perpetrator was not disclosed in the telegram. Rather the murderer was mentioned by a reference to his father: “the son of Hacı Ali.” (In the absence of surnames, it was a tradition to identify people by a reference to their fathers and hometowns). Hence, the aforementioned “Ali” was not himself the murderer; it was his father. Additionally, the verdicts in the post-war military tribunals (printed in the dailies of the time), which constitute Akçam’s other point of support, do not identify the perpetrator as “Kurd Ali” but instead as “Kurd Alo.” The only exception is the daily *Alemdar*’s February 9, 1920, issue, which (incorrectly) refers to the assassin as “Kurd Ali.” However, this should have been considered a typo, in view of the consistency shown by other dailies (and an Armenian memoir) in referring to the murderer as “Kurd Alo,” not to mention the fact that the same newspaper, *Alemdar* itself, in an earlier issue, had also printed the name as “Kurd Alo” (pp. 197-198, n. 39). Moreover, the author’s description of events is teemed with inconsistency and contradiction. On the one hand, Akçam insists that the criminals were arrested on the initiative of some well-intentioned local authorities and against the wishes of the central government. On the other hand he himself quotes the interior minister as ordering the criminals to “be immediately pursued and arrested” (p. 193). On page 196, Akçam refers to people whose crimes “were established even by a court decision.” However, only two pages later, he himself implies and quotes a document that states that the court had not yet arrived at a decision (p. 198). Yet, on the next page, he goes on to speak of people “whose crimes were established by a court decision” (p. 199).

Nevertheless, even with these reservations in mind, the possibility exists that these three men may in fact be the same person, and that Talat Pasha was taking a great deal of trouble to release the murderer. But more has to be known about the identity of the murderer before one can arrive at a decisive conclusion. The ambiguity of the murderer’s identification can be dispelled by consulting another document, which also bears key evidence in relation to the murder of Rupen Çilingiryan. The document consists of several pieces of official correspondence concerning the investigations of the murder, including a document composed by the deputy governor of Ankara in February 1916, which gives a more detailed description and identification of the perpetrators and their victims. If Dr. Çilingiryan’s murderer, “Kurd Alo” (Akçam’s Kurd Ali), was indeed from the town

of Nallıhan, one can lend credibility to Akçam's contention that Kurd Alo and "Mehmet Ali from Nallıhan" are in fact one and the same person.

This is, however, not the case, according to the document in question, which provides the following names for the Armenian murder victims: "Doctor Rupen Çilingiryan and Vahan Kahyayan and Artin Bogosyan and Danyel Çubukyan and Onnik Mağazacıyan." **The document then proceeds to name the criminals who committed these murders, among whom one name stands out for its relevance to the issue at hand: "Hacı Ali's son, fugitive Kurd Alo from the Böhrenk[?] village of Kalecik."**⁵⁵ In other words, the murderer was neither named "Ali" nor was he from the town "Nallıhan". He was "Kurd Alo" from the town of "Kalecik." Also, there was no person by the name of "Mehmet Ali from Nallıhan" among the other criminals listed in the document. Thus "Mehmet Ali from Nallıhan," on whose behalf Talat intervened and on whom Akçam has built his whole theory, was an irrelevant person and one on whom no further information exists. It should be further noted that, while several of the criminals had indeed been caught and arrested, the document refers to "Kurd Alo" as still being a "fugitive." Therefore, it would be impossible to "release" someone from a "prison" who, it appears, could not have been caught and arrested to begin with. Akçam's lengthy, yet careless description of events is, therefore, based upon questionable assumptions and a patchy set of links among disparate events and irrelevant individuals, while a document of key importance has been ignored. In sum, the author's account leaves the reader with quite an unbalanced and insubstantial picture with regard to the role and the responsibility of the Ottoman government in the case of the murder of Dr. Çilingiryan.

CONCLUSION

The examples in this review, which could be expounded upon even further, are not just minor errors attributable to carelessness. These are substantive matters that raise serious concern as to the author's theses, which appear to be based on a selective and distorted presentation of Ottoman archival materials and other sources. Needless to say, such errors seriously undermine the author's and the book's credibility as a point of reference. As Akçam himself stated elsewhere, "The belief that the research before us is unbiased and accurately presented... and not based upon the intentional distortion of sources is an indispensable precondition for scholarly inquiry and debate."⁵⁶ Unfortunately, Akçam's own book fails to fulfill this "indispensable precondition" of scholarly inquiry. Accordingly, serious researchers and readers should be cautioned against accepting his claims at face value. To conclude, it must be stated that while Akçam, with some justice, is critical of certain Turkish scholars who have dealt with this tragic and sensitive issue, the alternative he offers is no more plausible and no less problematic.