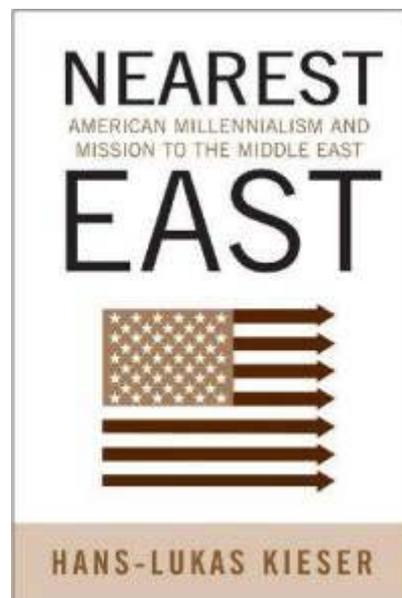


Gunaysu: Denial Is a Hate Crime and Denialist Discourse Is Hate Speech

By: [Ayse Gunaysu](#)

<http://www.armenianweekly.com/2011/08/11/gunaysu-denial/comment-page-1/>

“It is as if a general orphan-like spirit floats over the [Muslim] quarter. Laziness, an apathetic attitude toward life is the character that appears among the Muslims. In contrast, if you enter the quarter of the Christians, your heart feels happiness; you find superbly constructed houses, which testify to the proprietors’ interested in life, and to their beautiful disposition, and clean and broad streets. In contrast to the immobility of the Muslims, the Christians are always on the move. In this respect, they enjoy the good things of life much more... The difference is even more obvious in regard to education. Whereas the Christian citizens generally know how to read and write, more or less, the Muslims are very much behind.”¹



The jacket of Kieser's 'Nearest East'

Ahmet Serif—an Ittihadist intellectual, journalist, traveler, and Ottoman government official—wrote these words after he visited Marsovan (today’s Merzifon in the Black Sea region of Turkey); his travel notes were published in *Tanin*, a paper close to the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). The year was 1911—four years before the world’s first “modern” genocide was set into motion with a carefully designed plan.

And how did Ahmet Serif feel about the picture he vividly illustrated? “From the faces of the schoolgirls and schoolboys, life and vitality burst forth. Let us not lie: I did not feel admiration for this, but jealousy. I did not want to see this. Men were coming from America and I don’t know where, and creating in the most remote villages of Turkey models of civilization. Sad and ashamed as an Ottoman, I left,” he wrote after his visit to the American school in the town of Hajin in Adana.² There was a significant Armenian population in Hajin, and the school was established by American Protestant missionaries like many others in old Armenia.

I am thankful to Hans-Lukas Kieser for bringing these quotations to light, for showing an Ittihadist intellectual's outrageously blatant, audaciously straightforward, and unreservedly heartfelt confession of hate for everything good that did not belong to the Ottoman Muslims.

In his 2010 book *Nearest East*, Kieser quotes Serif to show how Muslim intellectuals and members of Ittihadist circles felt humiliated, excluded, and threatened by the American Protestant missionaries' export of renaissance to the eastern *vilayets* of the Ottoman Empire, where Armenian communities were ready to absorb and learn for social, intellectual, emotional, religious, and historical reasons. What struck me the most, however, was that unreserved expression of jealousy that, as we know, paved the way to hatred: "I did not feel admiration for this, but jealousy. I did not want to see this."

It was hate, stemming not only from religious or ethnic reasons, but for social and economic reasons, that played a great part both in the genocidal will among large parts of the establishment and of the local population.

Although I have just started reading Ugur Umit Ungor and Mehmet Polatel's groundbreaking book *Confiscation and Destruction*, which deals with the plunder of Armenian property during and after the genocide, I have already come across several references to such expressed envy. Ungor and Polatel quote Joseph Pomiankowski (1866-1929), the Habsburg military attaché who served in the Ottoman Empire during World War I. "He noticed—with irony—that after the Young Turks ascertained that Armenians 'enriched' themselves, their discourse led to 'a violent displacement of the Greeks and Armenians from all professions, which offered a possibility of acquisition and enrichment (*Bereicherung*),'” they wrote. "Pomiankowski had seen very clearly 'that the Turks looked to the flourishing settlements of the Armenians in eastern Anatolia and Cilicia with envy and anger (*Neid und Wut*), in comparison with which, the Moslem homes almost everywhere constitute a picture of poverty and misery.”³

At the cost of deviating from the main line, I can't help but remember how the Turkish left has always preached that imperialism was responsible for Turkey's economic and social backwardness. This is a premise shared by nearly all sectors of Turkish society, from socialists to nationalists and advocates of Turk-Islam synthesis. The majority of the Turkish intelligentsia and left, however, never established any link between Turkey's underdevelopment and the destruction of a newly flourishing commercial bourgeoisie which would have eventually been transformed into an industrial bourgeoisie and generated the accumulation of capital to lay the groundwork for a more or less healthy capitalist development, overcoming the pre-capitalist obstacles to development. Blaming others instead of oneself is always more convenient, relieving, and harmless.

Ungor and Polatel mention the extent of the Armenians' economic destruction as follows: "In this process of persecution, the ethnically heterogeneous Ottoman economic universe was subjected to comprehensive and violent forms of ethnic homogenization. The distribution of Armenian wealth was a central part of this process. The genocide ripped and tore apart the fabric of urban, provincial, and national economies, destroying market relationships and maiming economic patterns that had endured for many centuries in the Empire.”⁴

Just to give a few statistics to remind the readers what the extermination of Christian trade and business people meant for the national economy of the Ottoman Empire, I will once more quote from *Confiscation and Destruction*: "Commerce in the interior was heavily Armenian

in the east (and Greek in the west), even though Turks were also involved in domestic trade. For example, in 1884, of the 110 merchants in the north-eastern provincial capital Trabzon, for domestic and international trade a vital port city, 40 were Armenian and 42, Pontic Greek. According to a 1913 study on Anatolia by the Armenian parliamentarian and writer Krikor Zohrab, of the 166 importers, 141 were Armenians and 13, Turks. Of the 9,800 shopowners and craftsmen, 6,800 were Armenians and 2,550, Turks; of the 150 exporters, 127 were Armenians and 23 Turks; of the 153 industrialists, 130 were Armenians and 20 were Turks; and finally, of the 37 bankers, 32 were Armenians. In the six eastern provinces, 32 Armenian moneylenders plied their trade versus only 5 Turkish ones. On the eve of the genocide, in early 1915, of the 264 Ottoman industrial establishments, only 42 belonged to Muslims and 172 to non-Muslims.”⁵

These figures alone indicate the extent of economic destruction willfully carried out by the Ottoman government, which put the country’s development back a century—a fact overlooked by the heated antagonists of imperialism in Turkey who are, of course, against nationalism but are unable to look and see beyond the horizon of Turkish nationalism.

Now, returning to Marsovan, only four years after Ahmet Serif confessed his jealousy of Armenian life there, the Armenians of Marsovan were wiped out and their wealth plundered. Nothing was left for Ahmet Serif to be jealous of. Islam reigned everywhere.

The extermination of the Armenians of Marsovan—half of the total population of 25,000 in 1915—began in early May with searches of arms, accompanied by arrests and tortures. “On Saturday 26th June, about 1 p.m., the gendarmes went through the town gathering up all the Armenian men they could find—old and young, rich and poor, sick and well. In some cases houses were broken into, and sick men dragged from their beds. They were imprisoned in the barracks, and during the next few days were sent off towards Amasia in batches of from thirty to one hundred and fifty. They were sent on foot and many were robbed of shoes and other articles of clothing. Some were in chains.”⁶ On July 3 or 4, the women and children of the town were ordered to get ready to leave on the following Wednesday. But it started even earlier. On Tuesday, at about 3:30 a.m., people were ordered to start moving at once. “Some were dragged from their beds without even sufficient clothing.” The deportation continued at intervals for about two weeks. It was estimated that only a few hundred Armenians were left out of some 12,000. Even the Armenian girl students, teachers, and officials of the American College were sent away. The bulk of the deportees were massacred on their way to Amasya shortly after their departure.

What Ahmet Serif admired and hated at the same time was destroyed, with property changing hands, as well. The much-envied was theirs at last. “In Merzifon the houses of Armenian deportees were occupied by Ottoman government officials. The furniture was often stolen to furnish private homes as well as government buildings. In as much as the Abandoned Properties Commission could function properly, it stored unlooted furniture in the Armenian church. The more common things are thrown into an empty square and auctioned or sold for a song.”⁷

Yes, we don’t need any formal legal framework to acknowledge that denial is a hate crime and that denialist discourse is hate speech, but let’s nevertheless remember what the European Union—at whose door Turkey has been knocking for years, furious at the hosts’ lack of hospitality when the door is not opened wide—has laid down about hate speech and hate crime. In 2009, the Council of Europe published the “Manual on Hate Speech” by Anne

Weber. The aim of the manual was “to clarify the concept of hate speech and guide policy makers, experts, and society as a whole on the criteria followed by the European Court of Human Rights in its case law relating to the right to freedom of expression,” and to single out what should not be considered within the boundaries of the right to freedom of expression. In doing that, the manual refers to Recommendation No.7 released by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), covering recommendations for the national legislation of European Council Member States (which includes Turkey) to combat racist expression. “Public expression, with a racist aim, of a racist ideology, or the public denial, with a racist aim, of crimes of genocide or crimes against humanity or war crimes should also be penalized by law,” read Recommendation No. 7. Reference is made in the manual to Article 4 of the proposal for a council framework decision on combating racism and xenophobia, where the intentional committed acts are listed as punishable criminal offense. One such offense reads as the “public condoning for a racist or xenophobic purpose of crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes as defined in Articles 6, 7 and 8 of the Statute of the International Criminal Court.”⁸

Now, such a punishable criminal offense occurs in one’s every-day life in Turkey—at schools, in the street, on mainstream TV channels and dailies, by reputable professors, well-known journalists, historians, politicians, and even parliament members. Giving examples would be another topic to be dealt with in another article.

Genocide is not only killing, is not only plunder, is not only rape; it is the condemnation to death under unimaginably inhuman conditions, and being made to witness that condemnation. Here is an account of an eye-witness in Aleppo, one of the destinations designated for the deportees: “One sees them in Aleppo on pieces of waste ground, in old buildings, courtyards and alleyways, and their condition is simply indescribable. They are totally without food and are dying of starvation. If one looks into these places where they are living one simply sees a huddled mass of dying and dead, all mixed up with discarded, ragged clothing, refuse and human excrement, and it is impossible to pick out any one portion and describe it as being a living person. A number of open carts used to parade the streets, looking out for corpses, and it was a common sight to see one of these carts pass containing anything up to ten or twelve human bodies, all terribly emaciated.”⁹

These people were the ones Ahmet Serif had admired, envied, and hated—for their faces from which “life and vitality burst forth,” and for their capacity to enjoy “the good things of life much more.”

Denial of what happened to them is a hate crime, and every word that serves to demean the crime is hate speech.

1. Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Nearest East—American Millennialism and Mission to the Middle East*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, Pa., 2010, p. 77. The quotation is from Tanin, July 27, 1911; transliterated ed., Ahmet Şerif, Tanin, ed. Mehmed Ç. Börekçi (Ankara, Turkey: TTK, 1999), vol. 1, 257-58, “A Turkish Correspondent’s Views” in the Orient (April 27, 1910).

2. Kieser, *Nearest East*, pp. 76-77. Serif, Tanin, vol. 1, 186-87.

3. Ugur Umit Ungor and Mehmet Polatel, *Confiscation and Destruction: The Young Turk Seizure of Armenian Property*, Continuum International Publishing Group, London, New York, 2011, p.26.
4. *ibid.*, preface, p. X.
5. *ibid.*, pp. 18-19.
6. Toynbee and Bryce, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-1916*, ed., Ara Sarafian, Gomidas Institute, 2005. "Marsovan: Narrative of the Principal of the College at Marsovan," communicated by the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, p. 354.
7. Ungor and Polatel, p. 26.
8. See <http://book.coe.int/ftp/3342.pdf>.
9. Toynbee and Bryce, p. 559.

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Ayse Gunaysu

Ayse Gunaysu is a professional translator, human rights advocate, and feminist. She has been a member of the Committee Against Racism and Discrimination of the Human Rights Association of Turkey (Istanbul branch) since 1995, and was a columnist in a pro-Kurdish daily from 2005–07. Since 2008, she writes a bi-weekly column, titled "Letters from Istanbul," for the Armenian Weekly.

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-  Boyajian

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Ms. Gunaysu, you remain committed to the spirit of truth, and for that we Armenians thank you. I completely agree with your suggestion that denial is a form of hate speech and hope the EU sees this as well. Until Turkey stops teaching lies in its schools and fundamentally transforms the anti-Armenian racism in its society, it is demonstrating contempt for ECRI Recommendation 7 and for general principles of equality accepted by democratic, peace-loving nations.

-  Diran

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Once again and as only she can do, Ayse Gunaysu has bored through all the accumulated mists of time and the labyrinthine distortions of the denialists to deliver us to the plain truth of ground zero. Thank you.

- gayane

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You are an absolute brilliant writer.. Thank you for standing up for what is right and what is just.. Your article brought shivers on my spine.. Your description of what is hate and hate speech is what every nation who rejects what happened to Armenians as Genocide should read...

Those denialist that deny the facts, should take your article and study it over and over..

Thank you .. Thank you.. Thank you

Gayane

-  David

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A very insightful article. Having studied the American influence in the Near East for over a decade, the article is factually spot on! Ayse has presented the history so accurately.